

# The Catholic.

Quod semper; quod ubique; quod ab omnibus

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*The Peculiar Claims which the Society for promoting Christian Knowledge has on the Liberality of Churchmen, preached at the Church of Aylesbury. By the Rev. C. J. Bloomfield, M. A. 8vo. Rivington, 1815.*

We live in the age of societies. We have missionary societies, and cow-pock societies, a society for the propagation of the gospel, and a society for the diffusion of gas-lights, a prayer book and homily society, a society for the suppression of vice, a society for promoting Christian knowledge, and a general British and foreign Bible society, with its auxiliary societies without number. Among these there are two, the society for promoting Christian knowledge, and the general bible society which at the present moment fix the attention and divide the opinions of churchmen. The former is certainly the more ancient: it is of orthodox origin: and has always been recognized as the legitimate offspring of the establishment. It professes to promote Christian knowledge: but by Christian knowledge it has always understood the creed of the Church of England in union with the prejudices of its professors. With prayer-books and bibles it is careful to distribute religious tracts, which may be divided into two classes; books which regard the improvement of morals, and others which refute, or pretend to refute, the doctrines of Catholics and dissenters. Against the latter it circulates pamphlets which paint in lively colours the sin of heresy and schism as if this were not the original sin of the reformation, the primary offence of the parents of the Church of England. Against the former it has reprinted the calumnies and misrepresentations engendered in an age of ceremonious controversy, and distributed them in almost every hovel in the kingdom. The Catholics have viewed its efforts with forbearance and silence, satisfied with that declaration of their heavenly teacher: *Blessed are ye when men shall say every manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven.* Matt. v. 11. But the dissenters have turned its own weapons against itself. They have raised in opposition a rival society, on a more liberal and enlarged scale. It is not confined to any particular sect; its members may profess any religion they please.—All that is necessary, is, that they believe the bible to be the word of God, or at least a book containing good moral instruction. They have denominated themselves the British and foreign Bible Society, and distribute without note or comment, leaving it, as Protestants should do, to the readers to discover, if they can, what are the doctrines which it teaches.

It must be confessed that there is something alluring in the apparent liberality of this institution. It holds out a mean of union to Protestants of all denominations: whether they believe Christ to be the true God, or a mere man; whether they hold episcopacy to have been established by the Saviour, or "invented by the devil;" whatever may be their opinions on religious matters, they can all range themselves round the bible. It becomes to them a common centre of unity. It will, indeed, like the camelion, assume different hue to different beholders, teach different doctrines according to the different prejudices of those who read it: but men are generally led by appearances, not by realities: and as long as the same book lies before them, however variously they may interpret it, no subscriber can refuse the aid of his neighbour in the distribution of that which he fancies to be the foundation of his peculiar belief. Hence the new society has met with numerous admirers. It reckons among its patrons distinguished names both in church and state; it has pushed its ramifications into every corner of the island, and its success has been "so rapid and almost miraculous," as to induce a most respectable prelate to exclaim: "but few years since it was merely a cloud, little bigger than a man's hand; now it is spread over the whole earth, enriching with its fertilizing rains the barren regions of the dreary wilderness." (*Abstract of the Proceedings of the Bible Society held at St. Andrew's Hall, Norwich, Sept. 29th.*) If, however, the Bishop of Norwich, the Deans of Carlisle and St. Asaph, and other Churchmen, have stepped forward to advocate its cause, it has been viewed with jealousy and distrust by the friends of the more ancient society: the majority of the episcopal bench is said to be hostile to it. The bishops of Lincoln and Chester have warned their flocks against it; and many clergymen have undertaken to prove it pregnant with danger to the establishment.

To a Catholic it must excite surprise that any Protestant should object to the distribution of the bible without note or comment. "The bible, the bible," says Chillingworth, "is the religion of the Protestant." It is to the bible the reformed churches are indebted for their liberation from the despotism of Popery: to it they owe that beautiful variety of religious opinions, which now adorns every country that has separated from the communion of the Church of Rome. Why should they not throw this apple of discord to other nations? Why not enable all the people of the universe to reap from the same seed the same blessed fruits? But his surprise will be increased when he attends to the

arguments by which the new institution is attacked. He will think he is reading the Catholic controversies of former days: he will be told that the Scriptures are full of passages hard to be understood that it is dangerous to put them into the hands of the common people without comments; that the reading of the scriptures by the prejudiced and the ignorant leads to schisms and heresy; that men should recollect the saying of the apostle St. Paul: *If any preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed* (Gal. i. 9.): and that those who thus corporate with the dissenters, should ponder well the words of St. John: *If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house. neither bid him God speed.* 2 John i. 10. Certainly it must occur to the writers who employ this kind of reasoning, that they in reality condemn the conduct of the authors of the reformation, and overturn the very foundation on which their own church was erected.

From the greater popularity of the Bible society, the stream of wealth, it seems, has flowed towards that establishment. The small work now before us may be considered as a charity sermon preached in favor of its rival. In it Mr. Bloomfield undertakes to shew the peculiar claims which the society for promoting Christian knowledge has on the liberality of churchmen: and we must confess that those who admit his premises, can have little reason to dissent from his conclusion. To us it is amusing to observe the guarded language in which he speaks of the use and abuse of the Scriptures.—To maintain on the one hand that the Scriptures are the sole rule of Christian faith, and on the other that they cannot be generally understood without assistance, is no very easy task.

"It is certain," he observes, "that the scriptures may be read with more or less profit by different persons, according to the different mode in which their studies are pursued. It is also certain, that all parts of Scripture are not equally important, nor all equally clear; and that all men are not equally qualified to determine which those parts are. 'The same spirit,' we know, bestows 'diversities of gifts, and divideth to every man severally as he will.'—It is true, indeed, that those passages of Holy Writ which set forth our duties, and God's glory, which teach us all that is necessary to regulate our conduct and satisfy our hopes, are so plain and easy, that it requires only common sense and a sincere spirit, to understand them. But there are also many parts which have a local and a particular meaning, by the misapplication of which we may be led into great and dangerous mistakes, and may fancy our-