

RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION.

A SUBJECT OF GREAT IMPORTANCE.

A Favorite Topic With Anti-Catholic Preachers—Leo the Great, St. Augustin, Gregory the Great, the Composition of the Fourth Council of Lateran—A Direct and Unanswerable Retutation of the Church's Accusers.

The only Religious Daily of this city is never tired of harping on the religious persecuting spirit of Catholics and the Catholic church. That organ of intolerance and bigotry has stopped at nothing to inflame the worst passions of its readers against the "Mother of Churches" and her children. The Witness would fain see Montreal another Toronto or Belfast. But, thank God, the Christian influence of the Catholic Church and the numerical strength of her members are the best guarantee for religious freedom and the entire absence of that persecuting spirit which permeates the atmosphere of every city and country where the doctrine of Luther, Calvin and Knox are in the ascendancy. Dean Swift said: "I never wonder to see men wicked, but I often wonder to see them not ashamed." The language of the Dean is justly applicable to the Witness, as will be seen. The subject of Religious Persecution is of the utmost importance in itself, and is spoken of by a late Bishop of London and other evangelicals in the following terms: "They, the Romish Church, zealously maintain their claim of punishing whom they please to call heretics, with penalties, imprisonment, tortures, death." (See Bishop of London, p. 71.) Another writer, (DeCoetlogan, p. 13, Seasonable Caution,) says that this Church "breathes the very spirit of cruelty and murder." Indeed, most Protestant controvertists, including representatives of the various conflicting sects—even the the sanctimonious Witness—seem to vie with each other, in the vehemence and bitterness of the terms, by which they endeavor to affix this most odious charge of cruelty and murder on the Catholic Church. This is the favorite topic of preachers to excite the hatred of their hearers against their fellow-Christians, this is the last resource of baffled hypocrites. The Commandment, "Love thy neighbour," &c., is nothing more than a mockery to those sham parsons and evangelical Popery haters. Before the granting of Catholic Emancipation—which also effected the emancipation of those servile Dissenters, the bitterest enemies of O'Connell and his religion, to whom they owe their present religious status: The cry was: "If you admit the Papists to equal rights, these wretches must and certainly will murder you as soon as they can: the Fourth Lateran Council has established the principle, and the bloody Queen Mary has acted upon it."

To proceed regularly in this matter, we begin with expressly denying the Bishop of London's charge; viz., that the Catholic Church "maintains a claim of punishing heretics with penalties, imprisonment, tortures, and death;" and we assert, on the contrary, that she disclaims the power of so doing. Pope Leo the Great, who flourished in the fourth century, writing about the Manichean heretics, who, as he asserted, laid all modesty aside, prohibiting the matrimonial connection, and subverting all law, human and divine, says that "the ecclesiastical lenity was content, even in this case, with the sacerdotal judgment, and avoided all sanguinary punishments, however the secular Emperors might inflict them for reasons of state. (Epist. ad Turib.) In the same century, two Spanish Bishops, Ithacius and Idacius, having interfered in the capital punishment of certain Priscillian heretics, both St. Ambrose and St. Martin refused to hold communion with them, even to gratify an Emperor, whose clemency they were soliciting in behalf of certain clients. Long before their time, Tertullian had taught that, "it does not belong to religion to force religion." (Ad Scapul.) And a considerable time after, when St. Augustin and his companions, the envoys of Pope Gregory the Great, had converted one king—Ethelbert—to the Christian faith, they particularly inculcated on him not to use forcible means to induce any of his subjects to follow his example. (Bede,

Eccles. Hist. I., c. 26.) But what need of more authorities on this head, since our Canon law, as it stood in ancient times, and as it still stands, renders all those who have actively concurred to the death or mutilation of any human being, whether Catholic or heretic, Jew or pagan, or even in a just war, or by exercising the art of surgery, or by judicial proceedings, irregular; that is to say, such persons cannot be promoted to Holy Orders, or to exercise those orders if they have actually received them. Nay, when an ecclesiastical judge or tribunal has, after due examination, pronounced that any person accused of obstinate heresy, is actually guilty of it, he is required by the Church, expressly to declare in her name that her power extends no further than such decision; and, in case the obstinate heretic is liable, by the laws of the State to suffer death or mutilation, the judge is required to pray for his pardon. Even the Council of Constance, in condemning John Huss of heresy, declared that its power extended no further. (Sess. XV. See Labbe's Concil. tom. XII., p. 129.)

But, whereas many heresies are subversive of the established governments, the public peace, and natural morality, it does not belong to the Church to prevent princes and states from exercising their just authority in repressing and punishing them, when this is judged to be the case; nor would any clergyman incur irregularity by exhorting princes and magistrates to provide for those important objects, and the safety of the Church itself, by repressing its disturbers—provided he did not concur in the death or mutilation of any particular disturber. Thus it appears that, though there have been persecuting laws in many Catholic states, the Church itself, so far from claiming, actually disclaims the power of persecuting.

But Dr. Porteous, Bishop of London, signifies (Charge, p. 47) that the Church itself has claimed this power in the third Canon of the Fourth Lateran Council, A.D. 1215, by the tenor of which temporal lords and magistrates were required to exterminate all heretics from their respective territories, under pain of these being confiscated to their sovereign prince, if they were laymen, and to their several churches in case they were clergymen. From this Canon it has been, a hundred times over, argued against Catholics, of late years, not only that their Church claims a right to exterminate heretics, but also requires those of her communion to aid and assist in this work of destruction, at all times and in all places. But first must be observed the composition of this Council, and by whose authority these decrees, of a temporal nature, were passed. There were then present, besides the Pope and the Bishops, either in person or by their ambassadors, the Greek and the Latin Emperors; the Kings of England, France, Hungary, the Sicilies, Arragon, Cyprus, and Jerusalem; and the representatives of many other Principalities and States; so that, in fact, this Council was a Congress of Christendom, temporal as well as spiritual. We must, in the next place, remark the principal business which drew them together. It was the common cause of Christianity and human nature—namely the extirpation of the Manichean heresy, which taught that there were two first Principles, or Deities: one of them, the creator of devils, of animal flesh, of wine, of the Old Testament, &c.;—the other, the author of good spirits, of the New Testament, &c.; that unnatural lusts were lawful, but not the propagation of the human species; that perjury was permitted to them, &c. &c. (See the Protestant historian Mosheim's account of the shocking violation of decency, and other crimes, of which the Albigenses, Brethern of the True Spirit, &c., were guilty in the 13th century. Vol. III. p. 184.) This detestable heresy, which had caused so much wickedness and bloodshed in the preceding centuries, broke out with fresh fury, in the twelfth century, throughout different parts of Europe, more particularly in the neighborhood of Albi, in Languedoc, where they were supported by the powerful Courts of Thoulouse, Cumminges, Foix, and other feudatory princes; as also by numerous bodies of banditti, called Rotaru, whom they hired for this purpose. Thus strengthened, they set their sovereigns at defiance, carrying fire and sword through their dominions, murdering their subjects, particularly the clergy, burning the churches and monasteries; in short, waging open war with them, and, at the

same time, with Christianity, morality, and human nature itself; casting the Bible into the jakes, profaning the altar-plate, and practising their detestable rites for the extinction of the human species. It was to put an end to these that the Great Lateran Council was held in the year 1215, when the heresy itself was condemned by the proper authority of the Church, and the lands of the feudatory lords, who protected it, were declared to be forfeited to the sovereign princes, of whom they were held, by an authority derived from those sovereign princes. The decree of the Council regarded only the prevailing heretics of that time, who, "though wearing different faces," being indifferently called Albigenses, Cathari, Poplicole, Paterini, Bulgari, Bogomillu, Beguini, Beguardi, and Brethern of the Free Spirit, &c., were "all tied together by the tails," as the Council expressed it, like Samson's foxes, in the same band of Manicheanism. (For a succinct, yet clear account of Manicheanism, see Bossuet's Variations, Book XII; also, for many additional circumstances relating to it, see Letters to a Prebendary, Letter IV. by Dr. Milner.) Nor was this exterminating Canon ever put in force, against any other heretics, except the Albigenses, or even against them, except in the case of the above named counts. It was never so much as published, or talked of, in the British Islands; so little have Protestants to fear from their Catholic fellow-subjects, by reason of the third Canon of the Council of Lateran. (For a full and faithful account of the rebellious and anti-social doctrine and practices of the Wickliffites and Hussites, see Dr. Milner, Letters to a Prebendary, Letter IV.; also, his celebrated Hist. Winch., vol. I., p. 298.)

But they are chiefly the Smithfield fires of Queen Mary's reign, which furnish matter for the inexhaustible declamation of Protestant controvertists, writers of the Witness school, and the unconquerable prejudices of the Protestant populace against the Catholic religion; as breathing "the very spirit of cruelty and murder," according to the expression of one of the above quoted orators. (Vide Letters to a Prebendary, No. IV., on Persecution; also, Hist. of Winch., vol. I. p. 354, &c. See in the former, p. 149, &c., proofs of the famous Protestant martyrologist, lying John Fox, and the great abatements which are to be made in his account of Protestant sufferers.) Now, it has been universally demonstrated in the works just quoted that, "if Queen Mary was a persecutor, it was not in virtue of the tenets of her religion that she persecuted." For the first two years of her reign no Protestant was molested on account of his religion; in the instructions the Pope sent her for her conduct on the throne there is not a word to recommend persecution; nor is there in the Synod, which the Pope's Legate, Cardinal Pole, held at that time, one word, as Burnet remarks, in favor of persecution. This representative of his Holiness even opposed the persecution project, with all his influence, as did King Philip's chaplain also, who even preached against it, and de-

clared the advocates of it to produce an authority from Scripture in its favor. In a word, we have the arguments, made use of in the Queen's Council, by those advocates for persecution, Gardiner, Bonner, &c., by whose advice it was adopted; yet none of them pretended that the doctrine of the Catholic Church required such a measure. On the contrary, all their arguments are grounded on motives of state policy. At the same time, it cannot be denied that the first Protestants in Britain, as in other countries, were possessed of and actuated by a spirit of violence and rebellion. Lady Jane was set up and supported in opposition to the daughters of King Henry, by all the chief men of the party, both churchmen and laymen, as I have already observed. Mary had hardly forgiven this rebellion, when a fresh one was raised against her by the Duke of Suffolk, Sir Thomas Wyatt, and all the leading Protestants. In the meantime her life was attempted by some of them, and her death was publicly prayed for by others; while Knox and Goodman, on the other side of the Tweed were publishing books *Against the Monstrous Regimen of Women*, and exciting the people of England, as well as Scotland, to put their Jezebel to death. Still, we grant, persecution was not the way to diminish either the number or the violence of the enthusiastic insurgents. With toleration and prudence on the part of the governors, the paroxysm of the governed would quickly have subsided.

Finally, whatever may be said of the intolerance of Mary, we trust that this charge will not be brought against the next Catholic Sovereign, James II. Dr. Milner has conclusively shown in his *History of Winchester*, vol. I. p. 437; *Letters to a Prebendary*, p. 376, that, when Duke of York, he used his best endeavors to get the Act *De Heretico Comburendo* repealed, and to afford an asylum to the Protestant exiles, who flocked to England from France, on the Revocation of the Edict of Nantz, and, in short, when King, he lost his crown in the cause of toleration: his Declaration of Liberty of Conscience having been the determining cause of his deposition.

But what need of words to disprove the odious calumny, that Catholics "breathe the spirit of cruelty and murder," and are obliged, by their religion, to be persecutors, when every one who has made the tour of France, Italy, Germany, and all Catholic countries, has experienced the contrary, and has been as cordially received by the Popa himself, in his See of Rome, in the character of Protestant, as if he were known to be the most zealous Catholic! Still, there are many Protestants—I will not say the well-meaning, the educated, or enlightened, who cling fast to this charge against Catholics, of persecution, as the last resource for their own intolerance; and, it being true, that Catholics have, in some times and places, unsheathed the sword against the heterodox, these persons insist upon it, that it is an essential part of the Catholic religion to persecute. On the other hand, many Protestants, either from ignorance or policy, now-a-days, claim for themselves, exclusively, the credit of toleration. As an instance of this the Bishop of Lincoln writes: "I consider toleration as a mark of the true Church, and as a principle recommended by the most eminent of our Reformers and Divines." (Charge in 1812.)

In these circumstances we know but one argument to stop the mouths of such disputants, which is, to prove to them that persecution has not only been more generally practised by Protestants than by Catholics, but also, that it has been more warmly defended and supported by the most eminent "Reformers and Divines" of the Protestant faith than by their opponents. On these grounds we hope to open the eyes of many good Protestants to the intolerance, bigotry, and would-be persecuting spirit of the Witness.

(To be continued.)

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