

LETTERS FROM BERMUDA.

LETTER XXIII.

HAMILTON, March, 18—

DEAR — I have given you many strong reasons for Home Rule, proving from the highest authorities that it should be granted to Ireland. I will now show you that England owes a heavy debt to Ireland—an immense reparation for centuries of misgovernment, oppressions, cruelties, and laws which would have disgraced the administration of a Nero or a Caligula. England could never make sufficient atonement, but Ireland only asks the tardy justice that at last she should be free and independent, as each and all of the States in America are, to make her own laws and enforce them. I will endeavour to prove why I have declared that England owes a great atonement to Ireland and Irish Catholics especially.

It has pleased the English people to ignore the facts of Irish history, at least from 1172, and it has been the practice of English historians in general to falsify the records of Irish history. The English have been graciously pleased to forgive themselves all these crimes! And the Irish people would forgive them these crimes of their ancestors, if it were not that much of the spirit of the bigotry and persecution of former days still exists. For 400 years England warred with an inoffensive country simply to gain control of it. When Queen Elizabeth reigned in 1558 she introduced means most horrible to conquer the country, treachery, wholesale massacre, and deliberately created famine, for the crops as they grew were every year destroyed. The Protestant historian Morrison says: "No spectacle was more frequent in the ditches of the towns, in wasted countries, than to see multitudes of these poor people dead of hunger with their mouths all coloured green by eating nettles, docks, and all things they could find above ground. They were dead in multitudes and none to bury them." During these 440 years of internal war, famine, rapine and massacre, during which time the Irish were known as "Irish enemies," another source of discord had arisen—the so-called "Reformation." The native Irish universally and the natives of English descent generally rejected the new religion established by law.

"A Reformation I would have
As for our griefs a sovereign salve:
That is a cleansing of each wheel
Of state that yet some rust doth feel."

But not this Reformation so
That to reform were to overthrow;
Like watches, by unskilful men,
Dejoined and set ill again."

When Queen Elizabeth, daughter of Henry VIII. by Anne Boleyn, ascended the throne of England in 1558, she renewed the Act of Supremacy enacted by Henry VIII., the royal bluebeard making himself head of the Church because the Pope refused to grant him a divorce from his lawful wife, Catharine of Arragon.

Elizabeth began her reign with a systematic, bloody persecution of her Catholic subjects, emulating the cruelties of the Pagan Emperors of Rome against the early Christian martyrs. This was continued relentlessly to the end of her life, bringing scores of noble families to ruin and destroying thousands of valuable lives for refusing to abandon the faith of their forefathers. In 1562 the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England were drawn up in their present form and forced upon the English people, and the other subjects of *Good Queen Bess*. Cardinal Newman, in his lecture on "The present position of Catholics in England," states that England did not apostatize—she was robbed of her faith. The Cardinal thus describes the process.

"Protestantism was established by law in the widest sense of the word;

it was forced upon all persons in station or office under sanction of an oath. Catholics were put under crushing laws. Priests for saying Mass were imprisoned for life; if a foreign priest the penalty was death, and to all who harbored or assisted them the same, torture and death. No Catholic could inherit property or purchase land or keep school, or even send their children abroad to be educated under penalty of loss of life or liberty and property. Catholics could not vote at elections. If a son said he was a Protestant he could take all the property from the family. The father and her great men and her preachers killed and drove away all the Catholics they could; knocked down the remainder; and then at their leisure proved unanswerably and triumphantly the absurdity of Popery, and the heavenly beauty and perfection of Protestantism. Protestantism being taught everywhere, Protestant principles were taught with it, which are necessarily the very reverse of Catholic principles."

By means of these persecutions—cruel, bloody and persistent—Protestantism at last became the religion of England. In Scotland Presbyterianism was established by law, but all attempts to deprive Ireland of her ancient faith resulted in signal failures.

"True religion, sprang from God above,
Is like her fountain full of charity,
Embracing all things with a tender love,
Full of true justice and sure verity."

James I. ascended the throne of England in 1603. He soon began to enforce rigorously the penal laws enacted by Elizabeth—one of which was a fine of £60 sterling a month for not attending Protestant worship. In a short time, by this and other penalties, more than 6,000 gentlemen and ladies were reduced to a state of beggary. One of the heaviest sufferers was Robert Gatesby, a gentleman of Northampton. Driven to desperation, half maddened, he formed the desperate design of blowing up the Parliament House with gunpowder. He secured about a dozen accomplices, Guy Fawkes being the principal. This atrocious plot was got up by a few desperate men only. The Catholics as a body publicly disavowed it and proved their innocence fully. Yet it was made the pretence for enacting new and severe penal laws against them. This is what is popularly known as the *Gunpowder Plot*.

Here are some of the Penal laws made by the English Government to force the new religion on the English and Irish. Some of them are still on the Statute Books, though a dead letter:

1. No Catholic could settle a jointure on his wife unless she was a Protestant.

2. If the wife of a Catholic declared herself a Protestant by the law, she could force her husband to give her a separate maintenance and also the custody of her children.

3. If a son of a Catholic at any age declared himself a Protestant he became absolutely entitled to the ownership of the estate—peculiar Christianity when the wife and sons are encouraged to rebel against the husband and father—Laws framed by

That canting crew,
So smooth, so golly—yet so devilish too.
Who, armed at once with prayer-books and
with whips,
Blood on their hands and scripture on their
lips,
Tyrants by creed and torturers by text,
Make this life Hell in honor of the next."
—MOORE.

No Catholic could vote or hold any office or even attain remunerative work.

I will quote Spenser again, as the poet belonged to the age of penal laws:

"What war so cruel, what siege so sore
As that which strong temptation doth apply
Against the Fort of reason evermore,
To bring the soul into captivity."

It is easy to point out, looking backwards, the reason why so many Irish

Catholic names are at the present day owned by ultra Protestants. The voice of the serpent and the 80 pieces of silver have done their work well amongst the O'Briens, O'Reillys and McCarthys, &c.

4. Any four Justices of the Peace could without further trial banish a man for life if he refused to attend the Protestant service.

5. Any two Justices of the Peace could call any man over 16 years old before them, and if he listened to the voice of his conscience, "that oracle of God," and refused to abjure the Catholic religion, they could bestow his property on the next of kin, if a Protestant.

"The conscience, that sole monarchy in man
Owing allegiance to no earthly prince;
Made by the edicts of creation free;
An individual sovereignty, that none
Created might unpunished bind or touch.
Unbound, save by the Eternal laws of God,
And unamenable to all below."

Adieu. PEACHTER.

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