

From the Christian Observer.

A CATHOLIC TURNED PROTESTANT.

A little pamphlet has recently been produced in France, by an obscure and imperfectly educated mechanic, which has attracted more attention, and is likely to produce more effect in the conversion of Catholics to the Protestant faith, than many of those elaborate and learned dissertations in which it was the fashion of former times to engage. A saddler, of the name of Bayssiere, is its author; a member of the Romish Church by birth, who had received no religious education, and continued till his 22nd year in profession a Catholic, but in reality a Deist. Still he attended the Catholic services; and though he would not communicate, he once consented to make confession, as a necessary preliminary to being married; and he looked upon the Protestants as heretics: but he neither read nor believed the Bible. At this time his wife died; and partly from a desire to show honour to her memory, partly from a suspicion that the prayers of the church might alleviate the sufferings of the dead, he determined to procure nine masses to be said for the repose of her soul. The priest to whom he applied, promised, but failed to perform them. Month after month he repeated his application, but in vain, the priest complaining that he had not time; and his tenderness for his wife made him very indignant at this supposed protraction of her sufferings in purgatory. At length it was suggested to him, that if he paid the priest in advance he would probably be more successful: he tried the experiment, and it succeeded; the money was accepted, and the masses were said; nay, the good priest, who had no time to perform three, now benevolently wished to perform six, rather than return the change out of a six franc piece, which the poor man had presented.

Such an instance of cupidity startled Bayssiere, and led him to enquire whence the lucrative doctrine of purgatory was derived. He was not himself a believer in the Bible; but as he knew that the priests asserted that all their doctrines and ceremonies were founded on that book, he felt a curiosity to know what the Bible said upon the subject. While these reflections were passing in his mind, he suddenly recollected that he possessed a copy of the New Testament, in which he had learned to read, but which he had never opened after he was ten years of age. He eagerly seized it; and with that vigour and warmth of temperament of which his book furnishes several examples, never stopped, he says, till he had read it from the beginning to the end. His only business was with the doctrine of purgatory; and he disregarded every thing which did not bear upon that single point. He gives with much artless simplicity, the result of his studies: he found nothing which made for, but much which made against that doctrine; and he arose convinced, that if the Bible was to be the standard of appeal, there was nothing to be found in it in favour of that fabled intermediate state of departed souls.

It then occurred to him that the pope must have invented this lucrative doctrine; and he in consequence felt resolved to know who the pope was. He had heard that he was the successor of St. Peter; that St. Peter was the head of the church; and that consequently the rights and prerogatives of St. Peter had devolved upon succeeding pontiffs. This he had heard in conversation, and from the pulpit; but he was now desirous of understanding what the Scriptures said on the subject. With the same ardour, therefore, and the same singleness of purpose as before, he sat down to the perusal of the New Testament; and reading, without intermission, from the first page to the last, he discovered that St. Peter had never preached at Rome; and had never, during his life time, been recognised as the head of the church; in short, that the system was an artful fiction, invented and maintained to procure gain or power to its authors.

"Thus," he says, "I discovered that these two primary doctrines of the Romish Church, namely purgatory, and the supremacy of St. Peter and his successors, had not at any rate been inculcated by the writers of the gospel. Although, previous to this discovery, I had, not been very zealous in the belief of these two points, yet I cannot tell you what interest I felt in the new ideas I had acquired. The New Testament, which I was still far from regarding as a Divine revelation, appeared to me a

collection of precious documents, in whose authority I then began to feel some degree of confidence. Though I found this study novel and difficult to a poor uneducated artisan, like myself, it was at the same time so attractive to me that I was induced to continue my researches," pp. 23, 26.

His next inquiries were directed to the doctrine of the real presence. His mind had always revolted at that essential article of Catholic belief: of all the tenets of Popery, this had tended the most to alienate him from the Christian religion, of which he had been taught to consider it an inseparable part, and to force him into infidelity. Occupied exclusively with this subject, he again read through the New Testament. For some time he saw nothing that seemed to countenance the doctrine: but at length meeting with the passage in St. John, chap. vi, on which the Catholics lay so much stress; "Verily, verily, I say unto you, except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you;" he thought the proof decisive, and was on the point of abandoning, with disgust the record in which so palpable an absurdity seemed to be promulgated. Further search, however threw light upon the passage; and in the 63d verse, he discovered what he called the key of the chapter. He saw that the expressions eat and drinking were used figuratively; and that they really signified nothing but "knowing Christ, coming to him, and believing in him."

Convinced of the being of a God, a sense of his own unworthiness and sinfulness now affected him deeply; and these were followed by resolutions of amendment. But here it seems he was embarrassed; he endeavoured to recollect whatever rules of virtue, and maxims of wisdom he had heard; at length the thought occurred to him, that he might find something to the purpose in the New Testament; and for the fourth time he commenced its perusal. The following is his own animated language on the occasion:—

"I wish it were in my power to recount to you, my dear children, all the effects that the eternal word of God produced upon my heart, for from that time I recognised it to be the revelation of Sovereign Wisdom; in the genuine expression of the Divine will, the message of a tender and compassionate Father, addressed to his ungrateful and rebellious children, soliciting them to return and find happiness in him. I wish I could retrance the impressions that this Divine message produced on my mind, the vivid emotion I experienced, and the thoughts and feelings (never, I trust, to be forgotten) excited by that reading.

"I was like a man born blind, and suddenly recovering his sight in a magnificent room, lighted up by a splendid lustre, and by a number of bright lamps hung around. My feelings at least corresponded with those of a man under such circumstances, were they possible. *How glorious was the light of the gospel to me!* I sought for morality, and I found there the most simple, clear, complete and perfect system of morality, that could be conceived for conduct, and there I found precepts suited to every circumstance that could present itself in life, as a son, a brother, a father, a friend, a subject, a servant, a labourer, a man, a reasonable creature. My duty in every relation of life I there found inculcated in the most admirable manner. I could not imagine one moral duty for which I did not there find a precept: not one precept unaccompanied by a motive; and no motive that did not appear to me to be either dictated by reason, or enforced by an authority against which I felt conscious that I had nothing to object," pp. 42-44.

Penetrated with this deep sense of the perfect morality of the gospel, he was led by that Divine Teacher, who we cannot doubt secretly guided his mind, to ascend to another question:—"Was that code of moral doctrine dictated and inspired of God?" "Who," said he, in the workings of his vigorous mind, "were the writers of this book?" "And when," adds he, "I reflected that they were poor, uneducated mechanics, like myself, the question immediately presented itself, How could fishermen, tax-gatherers, and tent-makers, acquire such extraordinary sagacity, penetration, wisdom, and knowledge. Ah, I exclaimed, this is indeed a problem which can only be solved by admitting their own assertion, that the Spirit of God directed their pens, and that as they were inspired, so they wrote."

From the inspired morality of the Scriptures, he proceeded to reason onward to the inspiration of the doctrines.

"If God inspired the apostles, and enabled them to give to the world the purest and most perfect system of morality that can be conceived, is it to be supposed that in the remainder of their writings he would leave them to their unassisted reason, and permit imposture to be confounded with truth? No: from the same source cannot proceed sweet waters and bitter. As the moral precepts of the gospel are Divinely inspired, so likewise must be its doctrines," pp. 45, 46.

Thus ends the process by which this simple mechanic, under the unseen influences of that Divine Enlightener, who has promised to instruct every sincere inquirer, was conducted to the full conviction that the whole contents of the New Testament were dictated by the Spirit of truth.

But, after all, mere knowledge is not religion; nor would it have been of much spiritual value to this poor man that he had rejected a few errors of Popery, if he had gained nothing better in their place.—But to the illumination of his understanding it pleased God to add the conversion of his heart. By the Bible, and the Bible alone, he became—not merely a nominal Protestant, but a Christian. He felt, he says, "the suitability between the wants of his soul, sinful and destitute of all peace and comfort, and the work which the Saviour had accomplished by his death upon the cross;" he viewed the promises of God as suited to his own case; he regarded Jesus Christ as a sacrifice offered for his sins; he trusted in him by faith for the expiation of them, and for reconciliation with God; and thus simply depending upon his Saviour he obtained peace of soul, a peace which was able to support and strengthen him amidst all the afflictions of life. He thus feelingly sums up the dealings of God with him:—

"In this manner you see how, a sinner and a prodigal as I was, my heavenly Father met me, and received me to the arms of his mercy! how he made known to me his free grace and heavenly gift, of which I was utterly unworthy. It is his grace which has accomplished all in me! He it was who began, who carried on, and who, I trust, will perfect this work of salvation. Without his Spirit operating on my heart, it never could have experienced a real conversion," p. 47.

Bayssiere now began to feel desirous of intercourse with persons entertaining the same views and feelings with himself—with those whom he calls "Gospel Christians;" but where to find them was the difficulty. The thought glanced across his mind, that the Protestants might be the people of whom he was in search. "But instantly," he says, "I repelled an idea which early prejudice had rendered revolting to me. I had been brought up in the conviction that the term Protestant was synonymous with heretic, blasphemer, and reprobate." Soon, however, the thought returned, and reflecting on the declaration of St. Paul, "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution,"—possibly, said he, these Protestants may be calumniated, because their religion is in accordance with the gospel, and he resolved to clear up his doubts upon this point; but there were no Protestants in the neighbourhood.

"I waited patiently," he says, "for some time, and applied myself diligently to reading and meditating on the word of God, which had become like necessary food to my soul. In all my prayers I entreated the Lord that he would condescend to direct me to those true Christians of whom his church was composed, and permit me to become one of their number: I felt a confidence, from all that I had experienced, that my Divine Benefactor would grant my request whenever he saw it good for me: this confidence quieted me, but could not remove my desire to ascertain what the protestant religion really was."

It happened, however, that his wife in early life had known something of Protestants, and those whom she had known evidently appear to have been persons of elevated piety.

"In her description of the Protestant worship, imperfect as it was, he thought he could recognise those traits of simplicity that characterized the worship of the primitive Christians; and when she had finished, he said to himself, 'This is indeed'