

A LETTER ADDRESSED TO THE RIGHT HON. LORD JOHN RUSSELL, ON THE PAPAL AGGRESSION, BY THE REV. HEBER PLAYFAIR, D.D.

My Lord—Many years have elapsed since I had the honor to address you. You were then pleased to favor me with no inconsiderable notice. Whether a similar honor awaits me, I know not; but this I know, that in thus publicly addressing you, I do no more than an act of duty.

My lord, we are told that "the recent divisions of England into various districts, made by Papal authority, is subversive of the rights of Churchmen, and that in entering upon their sees, the Roman Catholic Bishops have acted in opposition to the Church of England." There is a magic power in every measure that emanates from Rome, for it awakens effectually the energies of Protestants, who look upon it as an aggression upon their spiritual franchise. I am not, therefore, surprised that the establishment of the Papal Hierarchy should have excited the passions of those whose promotion in the Church is not unfrequently commensurate with their hostility to Popery. But that you, my lord, with the memory of your illustrious ancestors fresh upon you—that you, the unwearied advocate of civil and religious liberty, who aided in the glorious work which threw open the portals of the constitution to a proscribed race—that you should have thus acted unrestrained alike by the responsibility of your station and the feelings of millions is a proceeding as much above all comprehensions as it is degrading to the character of a British statesman. If, however, there is no elevation of mind, there is, doubtless, much political tact in your lordship's conduct. You labor, unsolicited, as the champion of the Church of England, to preserve her from the encroachments of an ancient foe, and under this ingenious device you endeavor to support your waning popularity. The Church of England, my lord, requires no such subterfuge, and, as one of her Ministers, I disclaim all connection between her wants and your political tactics. Already will your lordship have anticipated my theme—the establishment of the Roman Catholic Hierarchy in England. Since the Emancipation Act there has been no subject so little understood, or productive of so much polemic virulence. The obloquy and threats that have emanated from it, remind us of the dark era that preceded our enactments against the Roman Catholics. If misrepresentation and persecution be characteristic of the followers of Christ, most unquestionably we cannot deny it to the Roman Catholic Church. In every age, in every country, she has excited the worst passions of the worst men. Intrigue, treachery, and anarchy have alternately been imputed to her. My lord, I presume not to constitute myself her apologist. I am unequal to the task. Moreover, she requires it not. The nations she has raised from the savage state—the fetters she has struck from the slave, rusted by the tears of ages—the myriads she has enlisted with the fire of religion—the uniform tenor of a benevolent policy, as exalted for wisdom as it was profound in judgment—display to the world an assemblage of learning, and religion, and benevolence to which no institution under heaven can afford a parallel. This, my lord, is the evidence of impartial history, and it affords a supreme refutation to the bigotry and intolerance that disgrace our country.

My lord, in your memorable letter to the Bishop of Durham, you declare that "no foreign Prince or Potentate will be permitted to fasten his fetters upon a nation which so long, and so nobly, vindicated its right to freedom of opinion—civil, political, and religious;" "that the liberty of Protestantism has been enjoyed too long in England to allow of any successful attempt to impose a foreign yoke upon our minds and consciences;" and that the religious practices of the Catholic Church are "superstitious mummeries." Let us, my lord, calmly look into these assertions; and first, that the Pope shall not fasten his fetters upon us. My lord, I for one do not dread the attempt. I know of no one individual—lay or clerical, learned or unlearned, noble or ignoble—that does dread it. I have not even heard of one. Do you yourself, my lord, really dread it? In other words, do you really believe in what you have written to the Bishop of Durham? Will you forgive me if I say it is the wretched subterfuge of a more wretched fear of losing office? No one fears that the Pope will attempt to fasten his fetters upon this country. The act would be worse than madness. The Pope has no temporal power in England; no, not one iota. And you know it, my lord. Were he to attempt to assume it, the Catholics would rush to arms, and drive him from our shores. This is their avowed and acknowledged doctrine. And, my lord, you know it. I pass by the cruel and withering doctrines which the perusal of this portion of your missive suggests. It would not become me to dwell upon the fiendish Vandalism you have provoked, nor the wretched distinction you have acquired by the sacrifice of political principle. Turn we then, my lord, to your assurance that "the liberty of Protestantism has been enjoyed too long in England to allow any successful attempt to impose a foreign yoke upon our minds and consciences." It were truly an exercise of charity to believe that you were profoundly ignorant of the meaning of what you have written, for a knowledge to the contrary could not fail to attribute to you the most discreditable motives. The government of the Catholic Church is essentially Episcopal. Her Bishops are to-day, in England, precisely what they were seven years since—with this simple distinction, that now their titles are derived from the towns in which they reside—recently they were derived from places which probably they had never seen. Until lately they were termed Vicars-Apostolic—now they are termed Bishops in Ordinary. By the late system they were removable at the will of the Pope—by the establishment of the present system he has resigned

that authority. No Roman Catholic Vicar-Apostolic ever assumed to officiate in this country, until he had first been authorized by the Pope; but every Vicar-Apostolic up to the present time has been authorized by the Pope; therefore, according to your lordship's doctrine, they were aggressors. Many have been appointed within my remembrance. Yet had there come forth no Prime Minister to parade his fanatical rhodomontade before the public—no starving Curates and hungry adventurers to vituperate their unmeasured invectives. The Papal Hierarchy is purely a spiritual government. It does not, because it cannot, affect the government of our most gracious Queen. The Catholic Bishops are as far removed from all interference with the secular government of our Queen, as our Protestant Bishop at Jerusalem—our Protestant Bishop in France—nay our Protestant Bishop in Italy itself, are removed from interference with the government of those respective countries. In name, then, only is the difference between their Hierarchical and Vicars-Apostolic form of government.

What, then means your threat, my lord, that on this subject "the law shall be examined?" In one breath you boast that "England vindicates the right to freedom of religious opinion;" in the next declare that because of its exercise, the establishment of a Roman Catholic Hierarchy, "the law shall be examined?" By what process of reason are we to reconcile these contradictions? My lord, it is neither wise nor prudent to talk of "examining the law" in reference to the Roman Catholics. They are composed of matter equally inflammable with ourselves; and desperate must be the man that would fling the sparks of a fearful ignition amongst them. Conjointly with us they pay the same taxes, obey the same laws, live under the same constitution, and fight the same battles for its preservation. If France were to invade our shores, would you talk of examining the law in reference to Roman Catholics? Shall they who man our fleets and fill our armies, whose bravery and fidelity have never been surpassed—shall they whose Bishop, at the solicitation of our English Government, went to Newfoundland and preserved his people from a general disaffection to the mother country, and for which our Government awarded him a palace and an income—shall they, who furnish the best magistrates and most peaceful citizens, be thus wantonly and ignorantly insulted? My lord, I know of no crime so black, no villany so atrocious, as the work of religious persecution. Beware, I beseech you, how you fulfill the prophecies of those who confound the inspirations of a merciful Deity with the sectarianism of a base sophistry; who trade upon the credulity of the flocks "committed to their charges," and convert the principles of the decalogue into a nefarious commerce. Beware how you give signal success to the rampant bigotry of our Irish Clergy, who gangrene society to its depth and its extremities with the poison of their vulgar prejudices. Beware how you extend the panoply of obsolete Acts of Parliament over that living mass of vice and corruption—the impassioned followers of wild fanaticism. Beware, my lord, I conjure you, lest you disinter the ashes of the worst characters of human nature—lest you infuse a fiendish ferocity into their resuscitated spirit—lest Smithfield should again blaze out in fires of persecution, and our best citizens and most learned men be immolated upon the altars of our Protestant prejudices. Already has your letter disturbed the framework of our social condition, and the absorbing topic of the day, the Hierarchy and penal enactments, has deprived us, as a nation, of the character of religious freedom. It will be well for yourself, my lord, if you are able to restore tranquillity to the country. Your conduct is the experimentalism of a wretched policy, aggravated by the positive worthlessness of your political career. How keenly do we now feel the great loss sustained in the death of Sir R. Peel. Never was contrast so glorious to one statesman—so humiliating to the other. It is more than Ihus by the side of Æneas.

My lord, at the conclusion of your letter, you think proper to designate the religious practices of the Roman Catholic Church a "superstitious mummery." Unfeignedly, my lord, am I sorry that you have done so. On the subject of the practices and doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church the greatest and best men have differed. With reverence, and judgment, and learning, have these points been examined. Still was there difficulty—there was still disagreement. But with you, my lord, it is otherwise. You seem to experience no difficulty in determining the practices of the Roman Catholic Church to be a "superstitious mummery." Give me leave to ask, by what authority do you sit in judgment upon so momentous a subject? What power has constituted you a tribunal of appeal? What are your lordship's qualifications for the office? An aptitude for the employment of political stratagems that libel the religion of the largest body of Christians in the universe—an aptitude which concentrates into a common focus the incarnate bigotry of the country, and the mindless warfare of your favorite Scotch Presbyterian. But your qualifications end not here. In the dramatic world you are known for the signal failures of labored bombast, and in the political world for the discomfiture of a "finality" policy. In the one not even your name and position could command success—whilst in the other, you are tolerated by the satellites that revolve around you for place and emolument. There is scarcely an index in the political thermometer at which you have not arrived, from the burning heat of reducing the number of our Bishops to the frigid policy of "Bibles and claymores." Yet you are the man, my lord, who presumes to judge the religion of two hundred millions—that has in hostility arrayed class against class—that has termed the religious practices of our Jeromes and Austins, of Charlemagne and sainted Edward, of the heroes of Poitiers and Cressy, "a superstitious mummery." My lord, Protestant though I be, and sincerely attached to my Church, I hesitate not to

avow that you have grievously injured her. The intolerant spirit evoked—the angry feelings aroused—the persecuting power and assumed infallibility of our Church, which are the direct consequences of your letter, will lead to greater defection from the Church of England than the writing of the Tractarians, or the preaching of Rome could ever effect. How have you, my lord, strengthened the argument of the infidel, who believes the differences of Christian Churches to be the inherent weakness of their religion! How have you encouraged that latitudinarian policy which inundated France at the close of the last century! It is true, my lord, that infidelity is nobly combatted, and that the results are evident in the progress of Christianity. It is no less true that the honor of the struggle belongs not exclusively to us. If the practical results of infidelity be no longer visible amongst us—if we no longer behold the results of that system of ethics which, superseding the evidences of revealed truth, compiled from the rocks, and floods, and fields, its standard of moral rectitude, we must thank the Roman Catholic Church equally with our own. If that edifice of every unclean passion, of learning without religion, and genius without principle, be razed to the ground—if the name of its architect, the greatest genius of modern philosophy, revive the remembrance of the conflict of Christianity with the infidel school of Voltaire, D'Alembert, and Diderot, we must thank the Roman Catholic Church equally with our own. An undivided glory is not ours; but be ours the moral courage to acknowledge it.

How is it, my lord, that for years and years, from boyhood to manhood from the tracts published by religious fanaticism, to the volumes written by hiring defamations, our minds have been filled with the stratagems and horrors of the Papacy? The human mind was said to be enslaved by it, and the freedom of the Gospel to have shrunk at its approach. And, even now, in the middle of the nineteenth century—in the full blaze of science and literature—these monstrous calumnies are believed, and even amongst those who know better the instances of a generous defence are exceedingly rare. And, notwithstanding all this, the Papacy is on the increase. From her persecutions and her blood Missionaries have sprung up, carrying her doctrines, *per ignes et hostes*, over the whole earth. And how is it so? This is a question, my lord, which, as Churchmen, we should propose to ourselves, but which neither misrepresentation, nor bigotry, nor intolerance can answer. However painful may be the acknowledgment, it is only an homage due to truth to declare that the Priesthood of the Papacy has long since shamed the general conduct of our Clergy. Be their religious practices "superstitious mummeries" or not, they wield, for the most benevolent purposes, the greatest engine ever wielded by human power. Their regularity of life, their abnegation of self, their general development of the most refined humanity, their attendance in the sick chamber, undismayed by the most fatal disease, where they frequently inhale the incipency of their own death, the instructive resignation under which they fall victims of the sublimest charity, entitle them, in a supreme degree, to the sanctifying virtues of religion, and illustrate their excellent conservatism of peace and order. I do not, therefore, marvel at the hostility arrayed against a movement that presents, in prominent relief, the unquestionable superiority of the Papal Priesthood over the Clergy of the Established Church. My lord, although I am firmly attached to the principles of the Church of England, I cannot deny my testimony of respect and veneration to the virtue and excellence of the Roman Catholic Church. I do not understand the prevalent doctrine which attributes exclusive excellence to its own little community. If I correctly understand my own Church, this is not the character of her teaching.

My lord, I am no friend to the Pope of Rome, beyond the admiration of an enlarged humanity and heroic benevolence. Deep penetration, profound judgment, and gigantic grasp of intellect, will not be denied to Pius IX. by the most superficial observer of the age. A man of this stamp will always command respect; and I would presume upon your lordship's concurrence in pitying the stunted intellect that is unable to appreciate him. If the Pope has acted in strange departure from these great guides—if he has usurped the authority of our Church—surely his Bishops are amenable to the law, who are already found obeying his behests. They are within reach, with Cardinal Wiseman at their head; and if they have violated constitutional rights, why not arrest them? Arrest them, my lord, by all means. But they will cheerfully endure it! Enact new laws, impregnated with the spirit of judicial murder, and try these spiritual aggressors by them. This, also, they will endure. Pack a jury, secure a verdict, and let a religious Lord Jeffreys pronounce the sentence. Good, my lord; but stop not here. Strike down the power of a free press, choke the channels of justice throughout the country, convert England into an Acedama, and let the atrocities of the French Revolution grow pale in the contrast of Protestant extermination of Christianity. Nay, my lord, hesitate not, but let the work be accomplished, and the spirit of the rabble and the pickpockets of the country be gratified. Let the greatest conservatism of peace and order be prostrated to the ground, and the Moloch of infidelity triumph in its ruins. But, my lord, these men will not falter. They will endure all you can conceive, and your myrmidons inflict. With the example of their martyred ancestors before them, they will resign themselves without a murmur to the sacrifice. It may, however, be prudent to pause even at the threshold of the act. My lord, this is not the age for persecution. We are an intelligent people, and are sensitively alive to all injustice. To attempt persecution on account of religion may gratify a party, but the gratification may be purchased by the stability of the empire. Measures of this character stamp the

country where they are perpetrated with eternal infamy. They are the materials with which history builds her great edifice. Pause, then, my lord, I beseech you before you prove to the world that in England the freedom of religious opinion is checked—that the liberty of conscience is penal, and that her Church is sustained by the elements of *fulmen brutum*. Let us not forget our dignity as a nation, and a Church, by any act unworthy of one or the other. If the Papacy be instituted by human wisdom, she will fall; within her own bosom she will bear the seeds of dissolution and decay. If our Church is of God and truth, what can we have to fear from such an establishment?

Really, my lord, the idea is so absurd that it would indicate an absence of respect were I to attempt to refute it. The law benches are Protestant—the Parliament is Protestant—the army is Protestant—the navy is Protestant—all England is Protestant—and yet our Prime Minister states that, because a handful of Bishops have taken their titles from their places of residence, "the law shall be examined." Is this madness or meanness, or what is it? My lord, I am bold, but I cannot help it. The cause more than justifies me. See you not that your threat will strengthen the Church of the Papacy; that, notwithstanding the wealth of the country, the influence of our Church, and the power of the State, the Papacy is progressing so rapidly, that you find it is necessary to enact laws to arrest her progress? My lord, the Church of England is not in danger; and if the ark of truth were to totter, it should not be sustained by the unholy hand that has written, it may be, the prescription for millions. O! how have you fallen from your high state! O! the narrow dimensions to which a wretched fanaticism has reduced you! You have done what neither Fox nor Pitt would have dared to do; what the eloquence of Burke would have clothed with awful responsibility; what the judgment of Canning would have shunned, and the genius of Peel would have spurned as a mindless ambition. Supported by an active bigotry, and the refined ingenuity of Episcopal malice, you thus stand isolated from everything that dignifies the character of a British statesman. The base minds that cheer you, and the speculating sycophants that do your beck, will die with the cause that produced them. But with you, my lord, it is not so. An unenviable distinction is yours. Already has history claimed you for her own, and she will transmit you to posterity as the man who entered the temple of the constitution, and dared to snatch from her hallowed altar the fire of "civil and religious liberty."

I have the honor to be, my lord, your lordship's obedient and humble servant,

HEBER PLAYFAIR.

Tivrington, near Durham, Dec., 1850.

THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY.

The progress made by the Catholic University Committee is more rapid, and of a more stable character than even the most sanguine friends of the project could have anticipated. At the monthly meeting held on Wednesday and which was presided over by his Grace the Lord Primate, no less than £1,600 was handed to the treasurer. This sum, large in itself, is still more valuable as an indication of the energy and enthusiasm with which the project has been taken up by the country. As yet, it may be almost said that there is no organization save the central organization, which, from the nature of the duties it had to discharge, could—as far as subscription were concerned—be little more than the passing recipient of the voluntary contributions of those zealous in the cause of free education. The sums already handed in to the committee are the fruits, not of preconcerted action or of combined effort; they are the results of isolated efforts made by men not bound together by any common organization, nor in anywise acting in concert, save only in so far as they are acting for a common end. When we find such results flowing from isolated exertions, what may we not expect when the country will be organized—when every parish in Ireland will begin to send in its contributions?

As an illustration of what may be expected from parochial collections, we may state, that among the sums handed in on Wednesday were the subscriptions raised in several parishes, some of which amount to the munificent sums of £130, £150, and even higher. In one parish, that presided over by the Rev. Mr. Maher, a penny subscription was set on foot, and the first result has been a contribution of £100. We believe we will not be accounted over sanguine when we affirm that this test of the efficacy of multitudinous small subscriptions must be considered decisive as to the success of the University fund.

At the meeting on Wednesday it was resolved that simultaneous meetings should be held throughout the parishes of Ireland on Patrick's Day next, for the purpose of collecting funds for this noble institution. We have no doubt but the result will prove satisfactory as the friends of education could wish, and that the Irish people will on that day make an effort to give to their country an institution worthy of her ancient literary fame, and to which her sons hereafter, in whatever quarter of the globe they may be scattered, may point with pride as the work of their own hands. It is the intention of the committee to send missionary collectors immediately to England, and to prepare an address to the clergy and to the people on the subject. In that address we feel confident, from the efficient manner in which the committee has already discharged its arduous duties, that the basis of the appeal for support will be put in a broad and comprehensive manner, such as cannot fail to convince all classes who take an interest in the advancement of the country, that if true liberty, social progress, and national elevation are ever to belong, as of right, to this kingdom, they must be achieved and protected