



# CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

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## TRACTS FOR THE MILLION.

### THE CHURCH THE GUARDIAN OF SCRIPTURE; OR HOW DOES THE BIBLE COME TO US?

(Concluded.)

Scarcely had the age of persecution passed, when a season of ruin and desolation followed, not to be equalled in the history of the world. At the time of our Lord's coming, the empire of pagan Rome, extending over almost the whole earth, was at the very highest point of its power. But it soon began to tend downwards, and in the course of a few hundred years fell utterly; its ruin having been prepared long ago by its own inward and continually increasing corruption, and being brought about at last by one invasion after another of fierce barbarians, who poured down in hordes from their northern forests, carrying devastation wherever they went, and overran in turn all the provinces of the Western Empire. Of these were our own forefathers, the Anglo-Saxons, who conquered England; another tribe, the Franks, made themselves masters of Gaul, now called from them, France; another rushed into Spain, and others poured down into the fair lands of Italy, and seized on the very capital of the empire, the city of Rome itself. Six times was that city besieged, taken, and plundered; three times regularly sacked, and on one of these occasions the pillage lasted for fourteen days. Numbers of the people were slaughtered—numbers were made slaves and shipped off to other countries, and pestilence and famine swept away thousands who had escaped the sword. All public and private buildings were ransacked again and again for gold or silver, and then for the most part wantonly burnt or pulled down, till nothing remained of the "Queen of Nations" but a mass of melancholy ruins. One can scarcely imagine any thing more dreadful than for a people like the Romans, who were as polished and luxurious as we ourselves are at the present day, to fall suddenly into the hands of barbarians utterly ignorant of arts and letters, and all that belonged to civilized life, and thirsting only for war and plunder. And wherever they went, through all the countries of Europe, they swept away every thing that opposed their progress; so that, in the language of the prophet, "the land was as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness."

How came it, that amidst this universal wreck, the holy Scriptures escaped destruction? The Bible, as we have said before, is but a book, and books are made of materials peculiarly destructible, especially by fire; and these barbarians were altogether ignorant of their value, and little likely to take any pains to spare them. If they set fire without remorse to beautiful buildings, and allowed pictures and statues to perish in flame and ruin, it is scarcely to be supposed that they would have any scruple in leaving scrolls of parchment to their fate. What, then, saved the holy Scriptures? The Catholic Church.

Yes, it was to the Catholic Church, and to her only, that we owe their preservation, as a little thought and examination will make manifest. In the first place, she alone preserved the Latin language, the only one in which the Scriptures were understood in western Europe, and into which, therefore, they had been translated from the very times of the Apostles. For very soon after the barbarians had become masters of Italy, this ceased to exist as the spoken language of the people, and gradually mixed itself up with the tongues of the different conquering nations, so that it would have been lost altogether in a short time, if the Church had not made it her own by using it in her sacred offices. Then, again, that there were any who could use a pen at all so as to be able to make copies of holy Scripture, and any who could read the copies so made, was her work only.—When the thickest ignorance covered the whole world, she always in her priesthood kept up a succession of persons who must necessarily have received a considerable amount of education. There never was a time, even in the very depths of all these miseries, when the arts of reading and writing were lost; and that they were not lost was entirely owing to the Church.

However, this night of ignorance did not last very long; gleams began to appear here and there, and, by degrees, a new literature, new arts, a new and better civilization sprung up out of the ruins of the old. And by whose means was this revival brought about? Again, it was the Catholic Church; she converted one by one, those fierce nations who were then masters of the world; and as she converted, she also civilized them. Wherever her empire extended, and it was wider than even the empire of pagan Rome had been, of which she took the place, there arose, as ages went on, not only churches and cathedrals, which are the admiration and wonder of the present day for their beauty and vastness, but schools, also and universities; while music, poetry, and painting,

sprang up as flowers under her feet. Now what was the centre, so to speak, of all this wide circle of civilization? What was the point round which turned all these manifold studies and pursuits? It was no other than holy Scripture. Was music cultivated? it was for the chanting of psalms. Was poetry cherished? its chief themes were the mysteries recorded in Holy Writ. Was painting in repute? its subjects were taken principally from the Bible.—At that time it was manifestly impossible that the Bible should be in the hands of individuals, or even of private families. A Protestant writer calculates that a copy made by hand of the English Protestant Bible, "paid for at the rate at which law-stationers pay their writers for common fair copy, on paper, would cost between sixty and seventy pounds for the writing only; and the scribe must be both expert and industrious to perform the task in less than ten months." This being the case, instruction could not then be conveyed to the multitude in the way in which we now try to do it, by making them read for themselves; they could only be taught by word of mouth: and what help pictures give to such teaching, all know who have any experience. Accordingly, on the walls of church or convent were traced representations of the Gospel mysteries, or the events of the Old Testament symbolical of these; and the painter, often himself a monk, was used to prepare himself for his work by prayer and profound meditation on holy Scripture.

Indeed, meditation on holy Scripture was the great business of the Catholic monks. "I have been in this monastery," says the venerable Bede, a Saint of England, "ever since I was seven years old; and during all that time I have given my mind to meditation on the holy Scriptures." And St. Gregory the Great, the Pope to whom England owes her Christianity, found time, in the midst of all his many labors, to study and write commentaries on several books of holy Scripture. In fact, no one could be a monk or a priest without being necessarily familiar with many parts of the Bible.—The Gospels, the Psalms, formed in turn a part of their regular daily devotion; indeed, the Psalms were always on their lips, whether in the quiet of their own churches and cloisters, or while journeying along the road.

Thus we read of an English bishop in those days, who, when travelling with his clergy, required that they should be continually reciting psalms; and it is told of a holy monk, St. Bernard, that while engaged in this pious exercise, his mind was so absorbed in it that he walked along the shores of the most beautiful lake in Switzerland, without seeing any thing, or being conscious of where he was.

Holy Scripture was read aloud in convents during meals; and it is told even of private individuals that they followed the same practice in their own families. In every university too of Europe there was, as a matter of course, a professor whose business it was to lecture on holy Scripture. In short, the more we try to penetrate into the spirit of those times, the more we see that the Word of God was truly "a light to the feet, and a lamp to the paths."

All this, however, you may say, bears but indirectly on our present subject. To sing psalms, to paint holy pictures, to write sacred poems, even to write commentaries, was not the same thing as preserving the sacred text, and handing it down to us "pure and undefiled;" and no one says that the Catholic Church hates every thing that is in Scripture, but only that she hates the Bible, as a whole.

This brings us back to our first question: Who, then, preserved the Bible, the sacred text itself, through all these long ages? And to this question but one answer can be given, the Catholic Church: the chief means by which she preserved and perpetuated it was the pious toil of her monks; of those, whom Protestants mark with an especial brand, as the builders-up, beyond all others, of corrupt superstitions, and consequently as the inveterate enemies of the Gospel. Yes, if you will take the trouble to study a little the history of these ages, you will see that Bibles, costly as they were, and laborious as was the task of transcribing them, were to be found in every church or monastery which could by any means procure them; and to be without them was considered either a disgrace or a misfortune. "A monastery without a library," writes a monk of the twelfth century to another monk, "is like a castle without an armory; our library is our armory, whence we bring forth the sentences of the Divine law, like sharp arrows, to attack the enemy. See to it, therefore, that in your armory of defence, that which is the great defence of all the other defences is not wanting. I mean the holy Bible, wherein is contained the right rule of life and manners;" and by and by he concludes with these words: "Farewell, and take care that the Bible, which no monastery should be without, is bought." We read too, of the abbot of a small monastery in Italy, about the middle of the eleventh

century, who paid ten pounds (equal to at least five times the same sum now,) for a Bible for the use of his monks, at a time when they were scarcely able to afford themselves even the necessaries of life; and when not even the abbot himself had two suits of clothes. We are told, too, of an English bishop in the eight century going down to Dover to watch the unloading of some French ships, and choosing from all their stores a great Bible, which he bought for his church. So, too, we hear of a party of Normans pillaging a French convent, and carrying off many captives, who afterwards contrived to escape while the robbers were quarrelling among themselves. They could not, however, recover and carry away with them all the spoil that had been taken; only one made a bold attempt to recover what they cared about most, a great Bible, which he bore with some difficulty back to the convent. In a word, not to multiply instances, the number of manuscript copies of the Bible now existing, taken together with the number of whose loss and destruction in different ways accounts have come down to us, are the astonishment of all who examine the subject; and show a diligence and perseverance, as well as a value for the sacred word, which it would be difficult to match. If we none of us could possess a Bible without copying out every word of it ourselves, or paying sixty or seventy pounds to some one to do it for us, I think the possessors of Bibles would be soon counted. And that was really the state of things in the ages of which we are speaking; and transcribing Bibles was one of the regular employments of the monks. Thus we read of an abbot who had twelve of his monks trained to be very excellent writers, and committed to them the task of copying the holy Scriptures. And this is only a sample of what was going on in all the monasteries, on a larger or smaller scale, according to the number of their members. Nuns, too, spent their lives sometimes in the same occupation. One nun alone, copied out with her own hand, two whole Bibles; and besides this, made six copies of several large portions of the Gospels and Epistles. It is recorded of some bishops and abbots too, that they wrote out, with their own hands, the whole both of the Old and New Testaments, for the use of their churches and monasteries. In fact, one may say with truth, that scarcely a day, or even an hour, passed during those hundreds of years, in which some pious hand of Catholic monk or priest, or somebody employed by them, was not engaged in transcribing the Word of God.

How is it, then, you will say, that if the church was indeed so active in multiplying copies of holy Scripture, while it had to be done by hand, she set herself so vigorously against the same thing, when the art of printing was discovered? How is it that even the glorious Reformer Luther (himself a monk) was ignorant of the very existence of such a book as the Bible, until he one day accidentally found it? How is it, indeed! It is so difficult to explain how it is, that one is led to recollect the story with which this tract began; and so, to go a little further, and ask whether it is at all; I mean, whether the fact is so. And the least examination shows us what falsehoods have been imposed upon our good countrymen on this subject. Will it be believed that before Luther was born, there were at least twenty different editions of the whole Bible printed in Germany alone; that is, in Luther's own country? Yet such is literally the fact. At Naples also, at Florence, at Venice, (where eleven editions had been published,) and at Rome, under the especial patronage of the Pope, the same work was going on. These are facts which no one who has studied the matter attempts to deny; and yet, in the very teeth of these, Protestant historians have dared to assert that Luther grew up to manhood, and that in a monastery, without knowing of the existence of a Bible!

Perhaps you will say that though the facts we have mentioned disprove the ridiculous story about Luther, which scarcely needs disproving, yet that they do not altogether clear the character of the Catholic Church in the matter of holy Scripture; inasmuch as all these copies of the Bible were no doubt in Latin; and therefore as effectually shut up from the public at large as if they did not exist.

Now, the question of translation of the Bible belongs rather to another branch of our subject which we shall take in hand on another occasion; our present purpose is only to prove that the Church has preserved to us the text of holy Scripture. We may just mention, however, that at the time when the Scriptures were first translated into Latin, Latin was the spoken language of almost the whole of western Europe; and therefore it was in order that the Scriptures might be understood by the people, not that they might be hidden from them, that such translation was made. When, as we have seen, the Latin died away from common use, and the languages of the conquering barbarians began to take form, translations

of the whole or parts of Scripture were made in them from time to time. The venerable Bede, a Catholic monk in England, whom we have before mentioned, died in the very act of dictating the last sentence of his translation into Anglo-Saxon of the Gospel of St. John. The Catholic Church has translated the Bible into Syriac, into Ethiopic, into Arabic, into French, German, Italian, Belgic, English; in short, into almost every language of the world. Some of these translations were made in the very earliest ages, and most of them before the "glorious Reformation" was dreamt of, or the "glorious Reformers" were yet even in their cradles.

Let every honest Protestant, then, indignantly throw back the falsehoods which are so shamelessly palmed upon him; and acknowledge that, if he has a Bible in his possession, he owes it, in the first instance, to the Catholic Church; that it was she preserved it safe through successive periods, first, of heathen persecution; then, of barbarism and darkness; and lastly, of that civilisation and light, which she herself had called into being; in a word, that she has been in all ages, and under all circumstances, the Guardian of holy Scripture.

### CATHOLIC EDUCATION—THE BISHOP OF CLOYNE.

To the Editor of the Freeman.

Fernoy, Nov. 3, 1851.

SIR—I believe I only enunciate one of the veriest of truisms when I assume that in whatever light the condition of our unfortunate country and its trodden down people is viewed, never did it present a more sad or calamitous aspect than at this moment. Ransack the annals of any age or clime, and in vain do you look for a parallel. During the last six years all the scourges ever employed to chastise or exterminate any portion of the human race have accumulated and fallen with an hundred fold execration and severity on the necks and shoulders of the unresisting poor Catholics of Ireland. Even the dread elements of nature seemed to conspire with the ingenious refinements of state policy for our utter extinction—blight, famine, pestilence, deportation, and persecution, have been running an unhallowed rivalry of it; and yet, after all, God be for ever blessed and praised, here we are, still alive and hopeful—a contradiction in the world—a phenomenon in the moral as well as in the physical order; for we are not dead—no, we only sleep, and shall soon awake again. Overwhelming as was the flood of our national ills, still it would never have swollen into a raging sea had not the sluices of political animosity and religious intolerance been thrown wide open upon us. How undeserved was this latter infliction I purpose briefly to review.

In the days of our strength and partial prosperity, we generously confided in the distinguished nobleman who now holds the responsible office of prime minister to our gracious sovereign. In consideration of his high station, as well as by reason of a few bland words occasionally bestowed upon us, we praised him to the echo—in short, his name passed as a cherished household word amongst us—when he recommended our beloved Queen to honor this despised portion of her dominions with her august presence. I venture to assert our acts and our conduct on that occasion did not belie our duty of allegiance or our professions to our gracious sovereign. In consideration of his high station, as well as by reason of a few bland words occasionally bestowed upon us, we praised him to the echo—in short, his name passed as a cherished household word amongst us—when he recommended our beloved Queen to honor this despised portion of her dominions with her august presence. 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