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TRACTS FOR THE MILLION.

PROTESTANTISM WEIGHED IN ITS OWN BALANCE AND FOUND WANTING.

THE CHURCH.

In examining the famous watchword of Protestants—the Bible and the Bible only—we pointed out how much more careful they were to reject every thing that is not contained in the Bible than to receive every thing that is contained there; and, in fact, it may be truly said that Protestantism consists much more in denying than in affirming.

It is far easier, as every one knows, to pull down and to destroy than to build and set up; and so, in the same way, it is far more easy, beyond all comparison, to deny a thing, than to affirm, prove, and establish the same. Hence, if we look carefully at all that was done by the so-called "Reformers" of the sixteenth century, we shall see that they entirely confined themselves to that which is more easy; they pulled down and destroyed the abbeys, monasteries, churches, and altars, which Catholics had built, and they rejected and denied in Christian doctrine what Catholics had always published and maintained; but they did no more than this. They took away from the Christian world much of what it had before, but were at no pains to put any thing else in the place of what they took away.

We see this very clearly when we come to examine into Protestant doctrine; for it is almost impossible to get at a distinct positive notion of it upon any subject whatever. It is very easy to say what it is not, but extremely difficult to say what it is. It is not the Catholic doctrine; and that is all that can be ascertained about it. The good and wise Sir Thomas More, who was chancellor of England when Protestantism was just in its infancy, has well ridiculed this peculiarity of the new heresy in his own quaint way. He says, "Now-a-days there are almost as many sects as there are men, and not one agreeth with the other. Hence, to try and learn the right way of them, is much the same as if a man, walking in a deep forest, would fain find the way to the town for which he is making, and inquire of a parcel of lewd, mocking knaves, who, when the bewildered man had prayed them to tell him the way, should get them into a circle, turning themselves back to back, and then speaking all at once, should each one cry, 'This way!' pointing with his finger in the direction of his nose." They all agree in turning their backs upon the Church, in denying and rejecting the ancient Catholic faith; but when they come to speak for themselves, they are quite at a loss; they know not what to say; they speak at random, so that one man says one thing, and another another; nay, that very same person says one thing to-day, and quite another thing to-morrow.

Such is the general condition of Protestantism on all matters of Christian doctrine. But there is one subject in which this endless confusion and uncertainty and contradiction is even more glaringly exhibited than on any other; I mean, the subject of the Church. Ask a Protestant to define his notion of the Church, to say what it is, who is in it, and who is out of it, and you will find that he is wholly unable to give you a plain, intelligible, and consistent answer. And yet, Protestants profess to go by the Bible; and the Bible says a good deal about the Church in one place or another; and what it says sounds very grave and solemn too, and very important, so that one would have thought Protestants would feel it absolutely necessary to have some doctrine upon the subject. For instance, only to mention two texts out of many: the Protestant reads in his Bible, (Acts ii. 47.) that "the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved;" and again he reads, (1 Tim. iii. 15.) that "the Church of the living God is the pillar and ground of the truth." Now these words, being part of the written Word of God, certainly demand the most serious attention of Protestants, who profess to be guided by that Word in all things. For if "such as shall be saved are added daily to the Church;" and if eternal salvation be a matter of importance, it must be of the same importance to ascertain what the Church is, and where it may be found; or, again, if "the Church is the pillar and ground of the truth," and if, in order that we may be saved, it is necessary that we hold the truth, as it has been revealed by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, it is of course absolutely necessary to our salvation that we give heed to what the Church says.

Yet, Protestants in general have, as I have said, no doctrine about the Church: they do not care to have a plain answer ready for all such as may put to them this plain question—What is that body which Scripture calls the Church, and of which it says so many and such glorious things? The great majority of Protestants consider that our Lord came down upon earth to deliver a doctrine, or set of doctrines, but founded no institution whatever for the continual

preservation of those doctrines; others again, amongst those who profess the established religion of England, are of opinion that He founded a Church at the first, and made very special promises to it, and that it really was perhaps for a while the pillar and ground of the truth, but that this gracious purpose of our Lord was afterwards frustrated by the sin of man; that the fulfilment of His promises was made to depend upon certain conditions, which conditions not having been observed, the promises themselves have failed and come to nought. These are the two most popular notions upon the subject generally prevalent amongst Protestants, and neither of them can properly be called a religious doctrine. Persons who entertain such opinions may indeed venerate the memory of the ancient Church, or even profess some degree of respect and consideration for whatever they may be pleased to call the Church at the present day; perhaps they really do set a high value upon the Church as a "depository of historical matter, or a witness of past ages;" yet, since they do not look upon her now, in the nineteenth century, as the oracle of the Most High, the pillar and ground of the truth, they cannot be said to have any religious doctrine about her; they may have their own notions or private opinions about her, just as they have about any other great public institution, whether of past or present times; but she does not, in any real way, form a part of their religious creed, though they still repeat with their lips, "I believe in one holy Catholic and Apostolic Church."

On the other hand, the Catholic doctrine upon this subject is clear and positive and consistent, just as upon every other article of the creed. Catholics believe that Christ set up a Church, or visible body upon earth, with the Apostles for its rulers, and Peter, the chief of the Apostles, for its head, and all Christian people for its members; that He endowed it with certain high and supernatural privileges, and appointed it to be the depository of His truth, and the minister of His grace to all mankind; moreover, that this Church, thus founded and established, will never, as long as the world lasts, be brought to an end; and, that in any matter of faith or morals, that is, in any thing that she may declare respecting Christian doctrines to be believed, or Christian duties to be fulfilled, she can never fall into error. Every one can see at once that this doctrine is at least clear, distinct, and positive; it is also consistent, each part thoroughly agrees with every other part. For if the Church be indeed the divinely-appointed teacher of mankind, it follows, as a matter of course, that she must be intended to last as long as the world lasts, otherwise, mankind would be left at some future time without a teacher; of course, also, she must be preserved from falling into error, for a divinely-appointed teacher teaching what is false is a contradiction of all our ideas of God, whom we believe and know to be the very Truth, who can neither deceive nor be deceived.

This, then, is a plain and simple account of what was universally believed three or four hundred years ago to be the true nature of that body which is spoken of in Holy Scripture, and in the Creeds under the name of the Church. At that time, however, there rose up certain persons who taught something very different on this subject; and this new teaching has generally prevailed in England ever since. Now both those who introduced it at the first, and those who maintain it now, profess to be guided by the Bible and the Bible only, in all the details of their religious belief; and yet one can scarcely imagine a stronger contrast than there is, at first sight at least, between the language of these so-called Reformers and the language of the Bible. For instance, our Lord had distinctly said, (St. Matt. xvi. 18.) "I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Protestant preachers of the sixteenth century did not hesitate to affirm, that "for the space of the last eight hundred years and more, the whole Christian world, laity and clergy, learned and unlearned, all ages, sects, and degrees of men, women, and children, had been altogether drowned in abominable idolatry;" and that the only body then in existence claiming to be Christ's Church, and known and recognised by that name, was in fact the kingdom of Antichrist; that Christ's Church was in truth nowhere to be seen at that moment upon earth, but would presently be restored by themselves. Again, Christ said, (St. Matt. xxviii. 19, 20.) "Go teach all nations . . . and lo! I am with you always, even to the end of the world;" and (St. John xvi. 16, 17.) "I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth;" but now the Reformers said that the successors of the Apostles, the pastors and ministers of the Church, were "the authors of all error, ignorance, blindness, hypocrisy, and idolatry;" and that the religion then professed by the whole Christian world under their guidance was

nothing more than a gross superstition and an apostasy. Once more, it was written in the Bible that "the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved;" it was preached by the Reformers that to belong to the communion of the Church, was "to ride to the devil with idolaters." Lastly, whereas St. Paul called the Church "the house of God," (1 Tim. iii. 15.) Cranmer, Latimer, and the rest, called it "the cursed synagogue of Satan."

I know, indeed, that these men would not have acknowledged that the Church against which they brought such railing accusations was the same as that spoken of by our Lord and His Apostles. Of course not; for this would have been at once to declare their own condemnation. Nevertheless the stubborn fact remains, that whereas the Bible speaks distinctly of a Church which our Lord would build, and which should last for ever, there was at the time of the Reformation a certain society which claimed to be that Church; moreover, that whatever other things were spoken about the Church, either in the Old Testament or in the New, this society unhesitatingly appropriated to itself; and (which is the mean point) that there was no rival society making a similar claim. When, therefore, the Reformers thus raved and blasphemed against the only society in existence which either claimed for itself, or had conceded to it by others, the name and attributes of the Church, as described in the sacred writings, it is not easy to see how they proposed to make good their case by an appeal to that only standard which they allowed, viz., those very writings themselves. And, indeed, their attempts to reconcile their teaching upon this point with the teaching of Holy Writ, were clumsy and awkward enough. "When I tell him"—says Sir Thomas More, speaking of one of these new teachers—"when I tell him of Christ's promise that He would leave behind Him a spouse—His Church—without spot or wrinkle, and yet that according to his teaching it would appear otherwise, he equivocates, he scuds in and out like a hare with a dozen brace of greyhounds after her; and finally he slinks slyly away by saying that the Church ever had spots and wrinkles of sin, and yet for all that, the Church of Christ is very pure and clean, because abiding in the knowledge of her spots and wrinkles, and asking mercy for them, God layeth none of them to her charge. I know not what to make of a Church pure and clean, and yet with spots and wrinkles both. He might as well have told us, that if there were a woman with a crooked nose, yet as long as no man tell her of it, so long her nose stood straight."

You may think this perhaps an exaggerated specimen of the shifts and quibbles whereby these men attempted to explain away the declarations of the Bible respecting the Church; but the truth is, that those declarations are so precise and positive, that it requires no little ingenuity to escape from them; and if the arguments which the Protestants use upon the same subject at the present day do not exhibit the same manifest absurdities, it is because they have invented a theory, more plausible indeed, but certainly not a whit more true or more scriptural.

This theory may be briefly stated thus: that the Church of which such glorious things were spoken by the prophets, by our blessed Lord, and by His Apostles, was not a visible, but an invisible society; not a mixed company of good and bad men living together in the enjoyment of certain privileges bound by the same laws, and obeying the same head, but rather the secret company of the elect, scattered here and there all over the world; unknown to one another and to the rest of mankind, but known to God alone. Such is the ordinary notion of the Church which prevails at the present among Protestants; yet surely a more violent perversion of the plain words of Scripture can scarcely be imagined.

For consider, first, the words of our Lord. The Gospels, indeed, contain but two passages in which He spoke of His Church under this name; and although our adversaries will not admit that in the first of these passages—that wherein He declares His purpose of building His Church, and promises that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it—any thing is revealed to us concerning its nature, whether it was to be visible or invisible, yet it is not so easy for them to evade the force of the second. Our Lord is giving His disciples certain practical directions with reference to their behavior under certain circumstances, and He says, "If thy brother shall offend against thee, go and rebuke him between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou shalt gain thy brother. And if he will not hear thee, take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may stand. And if he will not hear them, tell the Church: and if he will not hear the Church, let him be to thee as the heathen and publican," (St. Matt. xvii. 15-17.) Here, then, the Church is clearly set before us as a society having authority distinct from any authority belonging to

individuals, whether one or many; for first there was to be a private admonition or rebuke by a single individual; then by "one or two more," still having no authority to pronounce a judicial sentence; then, lastly, there was to be an appeal to the Church; and this Church, in whatever way it was to be constituted, must needs have been a visible body, since it was to have real authority even in this world, and a sentence pronounced by it was to affect the social condition of those whom it concerned; a person censured or condemned by the Church was to be treated henceforth as the heathen; that is, he was no longer to be looked upon as a Christian or a member of the kingdom of heaven. And our Lord immediately goes on to add that most solemn consideration, namely, that this sentence of the Church upon earth should be ratified in heaven: "Amen, I say to you, whatsoever you shall bind upon earth, shall be bound also in heaven; and whatsoever you shall loose upon earth, shall be loosed also in heaven," (ver. 18.)

This, then, as I have said, is a passage in which our Lord has revealed to us something about the nature of His Church, calling it by its own name of Church; and you see how contrary it is to the Protestant notion of the Church, as already explained. And if we turn to other passages in which our Lord speaks of the Church under other names or titles, the result will be the same. Thus—only to mention a single instance—nobody doubts but that the long and solemn prayer recorded in the seventeenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. John, was in fact a prayer for the Church. Whether we look upon the Church as the whole visible society of professing Christians, or as the elect only, at least we shall not refuse to identify them with those for whom our Lord prayed:—"Not for these only do I pray, but for them also who through their word shall believe in Me," (ver. 20.) And what is it that he prays for them? "That they all may be one, as Thou Father in Me and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me; . . . that they may be made perfect in one, and the world may know that Thou hast sent Me, and hast loved them, as Thou hast also loved me." The unity of the Church, then, was to be a token to the world of the divine mission of our Saviour; but how could the world be made to recognise this property of a body which it could not see? How could the unity of an invisible body be itself visible, and a token, a very important token, to others?

And if we turn from the Gospels to the Epistles, from the words of our Lord to the words of His Apostles, or, again, from the New Testament to the Old, from the Apostles to the Prophets, it is always the same idea of the Church continually set before us. It is the body of Christ, into which all Christians are incorporated by the sacrament of Baptism, (Eph. i. 23; 1 Cor. xii. 13;) it is the house of God, in which are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth, and some indeed unto honor, but some unto dishonor, (1 Tim. iii. 15; 2 Tim. ii. 20;) it is the house of the God of Jacob, prepared on the top of mountains, and exalted high above the hills, unto which all nations should flow, (Isa. ii. 2,) reminding us of our Lord's own words, "A city seated on a mountain that cannot be hid," (St. Matt. v. 14;) it is a rich habitation which our eyes shall see; a tabernacle that cannot be removed; a straight way so that fools shall not err therein, (Isa. xxx. 20; xxxiii. 20; xxxv. 8;) in a word it is scarcely possible to quote a single passage of Holy Writ which speaks of the Church at all, which does not describe it more or less distinctly as a visible body, invested with invisible privileges; a treasury and channel of spiritual blessings to mankind, yet itself made up of good members and of bad; and above all, as a body that might be easily known and recognised, just like any other external object, so that a plain and simple person could not fail to discover it.

Without entering, however, on a particular examination of these texts in detail, every one of which is contradicted or made to have no sense at all by the theories of Protestantism, it will be enough for our purpose to look at the matter from another point of view, and to make a brief statement of facts, that must be admitted on all sides.

(To be Continued.)

On Monday, the 13th October, pursuant to a requisition signed by upwards of two hundred of our fellow-citizens, a highly influential and respectable meeting assembled at the City Court-house at twelve o'clock, for the purpose of expressing its approval of the course pursued by the Rev. Mr. O'Farrell, Chaplain to the Boherbuoy workhouse, in seeking to procure admission into the workhouse for destitute poor persons, who were refused relief by the guardians of the union, and also his protection of the Catholic inmates of that establishment from proselytism.—*Limerick Reporter.*