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CONVERSION OF ENGLAND.

Though many months have elapsed since the first publication of the following article from the *Rambler*, upon the "Conversion of England," the importance of the subject fully justifies us in laying it before our readers, to many of whom it must be unknown:—

It was said the other day by one of the most independent and able of those formidable organs of public opinion, the daily press: "Would it not be a strange issue of religious controversies and political perplexities, if the whole or the majority of the Romans should embrace Protestant principles, whilst the shades of Wiclif, and Cranmer, saw England drifting before the tide of Catholic reaction?"

Can any man look back 300 years, and mark what Englishmen have been, and still are, and believe that this speculation is within the limits of possibility? Is it possible, is it credible, that the people into whose heart and head the very essence of Protestantism, in its most malignant form, has been so deeply ingrained as to have become the only thing in which all Britons rejoice to agree, should bow itself down before the Pope of Rome, believe its transubstantiation, and worship the Virgin Mary? Who could go into general society, who could mix with peers or with peasants, with lawyers or with shopkeepers, with men, women, or children, and note the intensity of those prejudices of triple brass with which the mind of England is begirt, and yet count such a conversion a thing to be contemplated among rational contingencies? Who could go into a bookseller's shop, and glance over the pages of histories, novels, poems, books of devotion, and even books of science, and not come away with the impression that we might as well attempt to square the circle, as to make England Catholic?

Yet, wonderful to see, in every nook and corner of society tokens are springing up, which show that the national mind is preparing to regard this incredible change as at least a possibility, if not absolutely prebable, or morally certain. Wrapped up and absorbed as are our thoughts, in the occurrences of each hour as it passes, we scarcely note, as we ought, the extraordinary revolution in men's ideas, which must already have taken place, in order to permit them even to regard the conversion of England as a subject for sane and practical persons to prepare for. Yet, look back some ten or fifteen years, and observe what a mighty stride has already been made. Let any intelligent Catholic or Protestant, who, ten or fifteen years ago, was acquainted with the relative position of Catholicism and Protestantism, in this kingdom, recall the state of things which then existed, and compare it with that in which we now find ourselves. What were the prospects, and what were the circumstances of the Catholic faith, when Catholic Emancipation was carried? Why, even then, an actual, living, walking, speaking and praying Catholic, was regarded as a sort of wild beast, a *lusus nature*, an anomaly in the race of Britons, a product of Satanic agency amidst a heaven-born people. "What!" cried the indignant Englishman, if by any chance the thought of the progress of Catholicism was suggested to him; "do you speak of Catholics setting themselves up at my door; of my family being disturbed by priestly craft; of my being compelled to hear Papistical bells ringing for Mass; of a Popish Priest walking in his foreign-looking dress before my house; of Popish books lying upon my table; of people telling me what the Pope wishes, and what the Catholic Church would have me believe? Begone, sir; is not Protestantism a part of a Briton's birthright? Never, no, never shall that accursed system make its way in our happy island. Englishmen are free—Englishmen are bold—Englishmen are honest—Englishmen love their king and constitution, and therefore, they never can endure the mummeries of priests, and all their idolatrous cruelties."

But now, so rapid has been the march of truth and candor, it is no longer a part of the national creed that Catholics are necessarily unlike other men, either in body or in soul. It is beginning to be received as an established truth, that they may be Christians; may be attached to their wives and families, and, above all, may be patriotic Englishmen. It appears that Catholics possess a very tolerable share of the usual attributes of humanity, after all. They dress like other people, they eat and drink like others, they pay their bills, they make love and marry, they are very fond of their children, they read the newspapers, the reviews, and *Punch*; they fall sick, and send for Protestant doctors, and take Protestant physic; in short, if there is any distinguishing peculiarity attached to them, it is this, that they are less madly devoted to business, and more given to merriment, than the common species of Englishmen. Priests too, and even monks and nuns, appear to be much the same as other men and women; and perhaps very respectable men and women too, in their way. They also eat, drink, talk, laugh, fall ill and send for the doctor, and

pay their bills, like other folk. Priests do not generally carry about with them either daggers or bowls of poison, or concoct treasonable plots against Queen Victoria, or schemes for burning the House of Lords and the bench of Bishops in Smithfield. And if the concrete Catholic is thus unlike what he has been represented, perhaps, also, say his Protestant fellow-countrymen, his religion is not so bad as some people say. There is something in it, they think to themselves, notwithstanding all the sermons and speeches against Popery. Catholics do, somehow or other, get to heaven; and perhaps quicker, oftener, and more easily than Protestants, though, of course, say the latter, their religion is not so pure as ours. And, thus, when daring speculatists suggest that if Rome become Protestant or Infidel, England may become Catholic; men now only shrug their shoulders, and content themselves with admitting that if it must be so it must; and then proceed to their wonted labors or amusements, without experiencing the slightest tremor or distress.

In addition to the natural reaction against ultra-Protestantism, to which this change of feeling is partly due, two other causes may be specified as having powerfully tended to its production. The first of these is the "Oxford movement." Few, in comparison to the population, as have been the converts made to Puseyism, in its various modifications, its influence, without its own proper circle, has been immense. It has held up the Catholic Church before the eyes of the nation, and forced it to look at her as a real, powerful, and attractive institution, whose might was to be dreaded as much as her charms were to be loved. All the denials of the Tractarians, by which they strove to prove that they themselves had no inclination for Popery, have been laughed at by the bulk of the people. The crowd cannot draw distinctions, whether the crowd is made up of nobles, gentlemen, or mechanics. The nation, as a body, has believed that a large section of the Established Church were devoted, heart and soul, to the faith and ceremonies of Rome; and has thus been driven, for many consecutive years, to consider how vain a bulwark is Protestantism against this terrible creed. The whole mind of the country has been familiarised with the fact that the Catholic Church exists, that she shows no signs of decay; that she ardently desires, and strenuously aims, at the conversion of England; and that so mighty is her power to charm, that neither Articles nor Prayerbook, nor wealthy livings, nor all the terrors of domestic persecution and worldly dishonor, are sufficient to deter free-born Protestants from yearning for her embrace.

Another potent cause of the revolution of thought which we speak of has been the conversion of individuals of all ranks and professions during the last few years. These conversions, in numerical multitude, have been few: but they have been of such a character, and so widely spread throughout the social system, that they have brought every class of Englishmen into personal contact with living Catholics, either converts or otherwise. Men and women who would formerly have started with horror from the very sight of a Papist, as they would from a rattlesnake or a tiger, have been led on by uncontrollable circumstances to see Catholics, to speak to them, to associate with them, to shake hands with them, to sit down to dinner with them, to sleep under the same roof with them, to look at their writings, and to hear them justify or explain their creed. What in their youth they thought an impossibility, they have now found to be a reality, and no very terrible reality, notwithstanding all their fears. The vast surrounding wall of prejudice which shut them in has been broken down in countless breaches, and they behold the foe marching in upon their citadel with bands of music and flying colors. And the natural result of this personal contact with Catholics has ensued. The old true British hatred, contempt, and dread of Catholicism is passing away. Common sense is resuming its sway. People are becoming ashamed of palpable absurdities. The better parts of the Englishman's character, his love of justice and fair play, are being called into action. It is believed that a Catholic priest may sometimes be a very good man, and work wonders among the poor. "There seems to be something to be said for the celibacy of the clergy," thinks the observant Englishman. "Catholicism is a cheap religion in many respects. Judiciously controlled, it works well. The Established Church is all very well in its way, and is a highly respectable institution, but there is a certain rough work to be done, which the priests do better than the parsons. In some way or other, the Anglican Prelates do not gain by a comparison with the Romish Bishops. Even though an exile, Pius the Ninth has something more attractive about him than Dr. Philpotts, or the excellent and amiable Archbishop of Canterbury. Certainly High Mass is very fine and splendid, and it looks like real worship. Catholics undoubtedly have

many advantages which Protestants have not. Their clergy do not lock up their churches; and it appears that it is not a practice to pay for absolution, or for leave to commit future sins. I wish I had been born a Catholic; it would have saved me a great deal of painful thought; and if it were not for family disunion, I should not mind my children being brought up Catholics."

Thus, in his secret heart, meditates many a person who was once a bitter foe of every thing that verged upon the religion of Rome, and who would have thought it an insult if he had been told that he would come to think Popery no worse than Protestantism. Silently and hidden, but surely and universally, is the change at work. Not a year goes by, but we perceive its noiseless advance. Not a wild and zealous attack is made upon Catholicism by its implacable foes, but we see that those foes have lost ground with the nation, and that Catholicism has made good its footing a few steps further than when we last watched its conflict with its adversaries.

Viewed, then, as a mere question of change in opinion and national reaction, it is clear that having gone so far, England may yet go farther. If it once, as Protestants and philosophers have it, debased itself to the superstitions of Popery, why should it not once more submit to that yoke which its forefathers delighted to wear? The men who achieved *Magna Charta*, and fought at Cressy and Agincourt, and built York Minster and Westminster Hall, were surely not less manly, bold, and great, than a generation which glories in Peel, and the Reform Bill, and the new Houses of Parliament. What once was, may be again, by the ordinary laws of humanity; and now that the *robur et as triplex* of anti-Catholic hate is cracking and decaying in all directions, who shall say where the revolution of opinion shall stay itself?

Apart, then, from all hopes resulting from our knowledge of the truth of our religion, and our confidence in the power of Divine grace, it is impossible not to anticipate a period when heresy shall be laid low, and at least a majority of our fellow-countrymen return to the creed of their fathers. We anticipate such a period, we say, as possible and almost probable, though more than this would be rash and senseless. The mysteries of Divine Providence are unfathomable; and He in whose hands are the hearts of men so often delights to teach us humility by defeating all our most careful calculations, that we can venture on nothing more than a joyful hope for the future conversion of our country. Still, what has passed is an undeniable source of encouragement. It ought to strengthen our hands, and bid us redouble our energies, and at the same time warn us to look well that we play our own part with wisdom, and in such a spirit as to co-operate with, rather than frustrate, the designs of Almighty love towards our wandering brothers. And it may not be altogether profitless if we call attention to one or two points in connection with this great subject which demand to be constantly borne in mind, and thoroughly well considered. There may be little that is new in what we have to suggest; but still it may be of advantage now and then to recur to the question, for the purpose of refreshing our memories and quickening our zeal. So many and pressing are the topics which interest us respecting ourselves, that we may be led to overlook our duties towards our Protestant fellow-countrymen, unless we occasionally return to the general subject of their conversion, and reconsider it in all its various bearings.

A paper has recently fallen into our hands which can scarcely fail to awaken the sympathies of all English Catholics in respect to the conversion of their country, and which calls attention to one great and glorious instrument for effecting it, which has not hitherto been roused into action with sufficient energy and faith. We give it at length, premising that it has received the approval of the Irish Prelates, and that many, if not all, of the English Bishops have also expressed their warm approval of the sentiments it utters and the work which it proposes. It is an "Address to the Catholics of Ireland," and runs as follows:—

"The Catholic people of Ireland are invited to unite in prayer to Almighty God, through the intercession of the blessed Virgin Mary, for the conversion of England to the true faith.

"This object has been dear to the hearts of many holy servants of God, who, in different parts of the world, have prayed for it, ever since the unhappy fall of that Kingdom; but, in later times, various causes have combined to increase greatly the number of faithful souls who have zealously entered into this devotion.

"And is not the present state of England such as may encourage them to persevere? But a few years back, who would have expected to see the magnificent churches, the numerous great colleges, the many

flourishing religious houses of different orders both of men and women, which may now be seen in England, where for so many years our holy religion was hated and proscribed? And that it may not be said that the obstacles to conversion are insurmountable among any class of men in England, it has pleased Almighty God that the light of Catholic truth should have again begun to shine on the minds and hearts of multitudes from the University of Oxford, which may unquestionably be called the chief bulwark and nursery of Protestantism in the country; and a body of men has been gathered into the Church within the last few years, and of these many are already numbered among her priests, who, in becoming Catholics, had to make sacrifices of worldly interest, pride, and ambition, such as no other class of men in the kingdom would be called to make.

May it not, then, be said, that there is hope for England, if only humble fervent prayer be offered in her behalf to God by His faithful servants throughout the world?

"But where are the Catholics, in whose prayers for England the chief reliance may be placed? The eyes of one English Catholic at least—of him who writes these lines—have long been turned to Ireland. Oh, let the Catholics of Ireland, as one man, enter the lists in this great struggle. Let them take the lead in this great assault on Heaven in behalf of England. And why should the choice fall on Ireland? First—Because it is written, 'Hath not God chosen the poor in this world, rich in faith?' (James ii. 5.) It is the poor of Ireland especially to whom this appeal is made. The people of Ireland are poor in this world, but they are rich in faith. Their faith, like that of the Roman Church of old, 'is spoken of in the whole world.' (Romans i. 8.) For three centuries, all the power and all the wisdom of England have been engaged to root it up. It has borne the shock unmovable. May it not be that Almighty God has thus strengthened it, that now Ireland may rise, and, by the power of her faith and the holy violence of prayer, may bring England herself once more under obedience to that faith?

"But it may be asked, 'Can it be from Ireland that charity and prayers for England are looked for? For England, from whom she has suffered such wrongs? These very wrongs, for which no excuse is here pleaded, are the strongest reason why the prayers of Ireland are called for in preference to all others. Let it be granted that these wrongs are unexampled in the history of man. For this very reason, the prayers of Ireland for England will be the most powerful that have risen to God for the conversion of souls, since that ever memorable prayer on Calvary, 'Father, forgive them! uttered by the Son of God for his enemies. But will a whole people be ever moved to act on principles of heroic charity?—Yes, such a people as the Irish will, if the attempt be made. An Irishman of the true sort cannot resist an impulse of religious generosity. It is an Englishman who speaks thus. Let not the Irishman be found who will deny this honor to his country.

"This is an offer made to Ireland of certain vengeance on her persecutors. To those who seek vengeance thus, God himself promises entire satisfaction, either in the conversion or the confusion of their enemies. 'If thy enemy be hungry, give him to eat; if he thirst, give him to drink; for, doing this, thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head.' (Romans xiii. 20.) Fire will either melt or burn.

"It may be—though God forbid it should be so—yet it may possibly be, that England will reject the grace thus proffered her, and not receive benefit by these prayers. But it cannot be, that, if Ireland worthily enters on this work, it should fail of opening for her the richest treasures of Divine bounty. For it is again God himself who says: 'Forgive, and you shall be forgiven; give, and it shall be given to you; good measure, and pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall they give into your bosom.' (Luke vi. 37, 38.)

"In conclusion, it may be asked, what prayers are especially proposed? It has been thought well to ask for very little, but to ask this of all. It is, then, asked, that every man, woman, and child should say, for this object, one Hail Mary every day; and, when this is said in company with others, as it is hoped will be done in communities, schools, and private families, if not publicly in churches, let the person who leads the prayer remind the others of the intention of it, by using the following or some similar words; 'Let us pray for the conversion of England. Hail Mary,' &c.

"Let millions be thus enlisted in the cause; and in due time, it is hoped, God will direct us to what farther may be done.

"Although this trifling prayer is all that is now asked, it is not supposed that the flame of charity, once kindled in zealous breasts, will stop here. And if any would do more, let them offer their Masses,