

COBBETT ON PROTESTANT TOLERATION.

(From the Aberdeen Herald.)

Among the reasons assigned for referring to allow the Roman Catholics the free exercise of their religion, one of the most prominent is, that Popery has been, and would still be, intolerant and persecuting. The answer to this is, that all Churches, when invested with supreme authority, have been persecuting; and that if they had the power they would be so still, their cruelties being only modified by the greater prevalence of liberal and enlightened opinions—an influence which, as is shown in France, and other Catholic countries, operates on Popery as well as on Protestantism. Of the intolerant spirit that actuates a large portion of the English Church, at present, we have abundant proof, in the language held by her clergy, and the demand put forth for new religious penalties; and history testifies only too strongly to the extent of her persecution in former times. Both parties being equally amenable to the charge of intolerance, it is only natural to find that, when the cry is raised by one, the other is ready to retort it, producing a beautiful illustration of the old pot and kettle recrimination.

In carrying out this game, the Catholics have no want of good cards; and they contrive to play them dexterously enough. One of their best is, the testimony of Protestant writers to the intolerance of Protestant Churches. They cite Macaulay as to the overstrained influence, in religious matters, of that royal prerogative which is now so clamorously defended, and an ingenious correspondent of a Catholic journal has raked up a twenty-year-old letter of Cobbett's, in which the claims of the English Church to toleration are pretty roughly handled. For the benefit of such of our readers as, through the absence of a good system of secular education, and by the help of a very partial pulpit teaching, have been brought up in the innocent belief that the persecutions of the dark days were all on one side, we shall quote a portion of Cobbett's summary history of the early proceedings of the Anglican Church. Lord Tenterden—the Lord Chief Justice of England—in delivering a speech on the Catholic Relief Bill, in 1829, had pronounced a high eulogium on the Church of England, praising especially her toleration, whereupon Cobbett in his own forcible style, thus addressed him:—

Now, with very sincere respect for your Lordship, I do think it my duty to the people of this country, to show that the character which you have given the Church of England, as by law established, is not correct; to show that she is not and never has been tolerant in matters of religion; and is not, nor never has been favorable to civil liberty.

First, then, my lord, let us take your proposition, "that there is no Church so tolerant as this." I am sure your Lordship has never read her history; I am sure you have not. If you had you never would have uttered these words. Not being content to deal in general terms, I will not say that she has been, and was from her outset, the most intolerant Church that the world ever saw; that she started at first armed with halberds, ripping-knives, axes and racks; that her footsteps were marked with the blood, while her back bent under the plunder of her innumerable innocent victims; and that for refinement in cruelty, and extent of rapacity, she never had an equal, whether corporate or sole. I will not thus speak of her in general terms, but will lay before your lordship some historical facts to make good that contradiction which I have given to your words. I assert that this LAW CHURCH is the most intolerant Church I ever read or heard of; and this assertion I now proceed to make good. This Church began to exist in 1547, and in the reign of Edward VI. Until now the religion of the country had been, for several years, under the tyrant Henry VIII, a sort of mongrel: but now it became wholly Protestant by law. The Articles of Religion, and the Common Prayer Book, were now drawn up and established by Acts of Parliament. The Catholic altars were pulled down in all the Churches: the priests, on pain of ouster and fine, were compelled to teach the new religion, that is to say, to become apostates; and the people who had been born and bred Catholics, were not only punished if they heard mass, but were also punished if they did not go to hear the new parsons: that is to say, if they refused to become apostates. The people, smarting under this tyranny, rose in insurrection, in several parts, and indeed, all over the country. They complained that they had been robbed of their religion, and of the relief to the poor which the old Church gave; and they demanded that the mass and the monasteries should be restored, and that the priests should not be allowed to marry. And how were they answered? The bullet and bayonet at the hand of German troops slaughtered a part, caused another part to be hanged, another part to be imprisoned and flogged, and the remainder to submit, outwardly, at least, to the LAW CHURCH; and now mark this tolerant and merciful Church; many of the old monasteries and priests, who had been expelled from their convents and livings, were compelled to beg their bread about the country, and they thus found subsistence among the pious Catholics. This was an eye-sore to the LAW CHURCH, who deemed the very existence of these men, who refused to apostatise, a libel on her. Therefore, in company, actually in company with the law that forced the new Church, came forth a law to punish beggars, by burning them in the face with a red-hot iron, and by making them slaves for two years, with power in their masters to make them wear an iron collar. Your Lordship must have read this Act of Parliament, passed in the first year of the first Protestant reign, and coming forth in company with the Common Prayer-book. This was tolerant work to be sure; and fine proof we have here of this Church being "favorable to civil and religious liberty." Not content with stripping these faithful Catholic

priests of their livings: not content with turning them out upon the wide world, this tolerant Church must cause them to perish with hunger, or to be branded slaves.

Such was the tolerant spirit of this Church when she was young. As to her burnings under Cranmer who made the Prayer-book, they are hardly worthy of particular notice, when we have before us the sweeping cruelties of the first Protestant reign, during which, short as it was, the people of England suffered so much that the suffering actually thinned their numbers. It was a people partly destroyed, and that, too, in the space of about six years; and this is acknowledged even in acts of Parliament of that day. But this LAW CHURCH was established in reality during the reign of old Bess, which lasted forty-five years—that is from 1558 to 1603; and though this Church has always kept its character, even to the present day, its deeds, during this long reign are the most remarkable.

Bess (the shorter the name the better) established what she called "a Court of High Commission," consisting chiefly of bishops of your lordship's "most tolerant Church," in order to punish all who did not conform to her religious creed, she being "the Head of the Church." This commission was empowered to have control over the "opinions" of all men, and to punish all men according to their "discretion, short of death." They had power to extort evidence by the *prison* or by the *rack*. They had power to compel a man (on oath) "to reveal his thoughts," and to "accuse himself, his friend, brother, parent, wife, or child;" and this, too, "on pain of death." These monsters, in order to "discover priests," and to crush the old religion, "fined, imprisoned, racked," and did such as would have made Nero shudder to think of. They sent hundreds to the *rack*, in order to get from them confessions, "on which confessions many of them were put to death."

I have not room to make even an enumeration of the deeds of religious persecution of this long and bloody reign; but I will state a few of them.

1. It was death to make a new Catholic priest within the kingdom.
2. It was death for a Catholic priest to come into the kingdom from abroad.
3. It was death to harbor a Catholic priest coming from abroad.
4. It was death to confess to such a priest.
5. It was death for any priest to say mass.
6. It was death for any one to hear mass.
7. It was death to deny or not to swear, if called on, that this woman was the Head of the Church of Christ.
8. It was an offence, punishable by heavy fine, not to go to the Protestant Church. This fine was £20 a lunar month, or £250 a-year, and of our present money £3250 a-year. Thousands upon thousands refused to the LAW CHURCH, and thus the head of the Church sacked thousands upon thousands of estates! The poor conscientious Catholics, who refused to go to the "most tolerant" Church, and who had no money to pay fines, were crammed into the gaols, until the counties petitioned to be relieved from the expense of keeping them. They were then discharged, being first publicly whipped, and having their ears bored with a red-hot iron. But this very great "toleration" not answering the purpose, an Act was passed to banish for life all these non-goers to Church, if they were not worth twenty pounds; and, in case of return, they were punished with death.

I am, my lord, not making loose assertions here; I am, all along, stating from Acts of Parliament, and the above form a small sample of the whole; and this your lordship must know well. I am not declaring, but relating undeniable facts; with facts of the same character, with a bare list made in the above manner, I could fill a considerable volume. The names of the persons put to death merely for being Catholics, during this long and bloody reign, would, especially if we were to include Ireland, form a list of ten times as long as that of our army and navy, both taken together. The usual mode of inflicting death was to hang the victim for a short time just to benumb his or her faculties, then cut down and instantly rip open the belly, and tear out the heart and hold it up, fling the bowels into a fire, then chop off the head, and cut the body into quarters, and then hang them up at the gates of cities, or other conspicuous places. This was done, including Ireland, to many hundreds of persons, merely for adhering to the Church in which they had been born and bred. There were ONE HUNDRED AND EIGHTY-SEVEN ripped up and boiled in England, in the years from 1577 to 1603; that is to say, in the last twenty-six years of Bess's reign; and these might all have been spared if they would agree to go to Church and hear the Common Prayer! All, or nearly all of them, were racked before they were put to death; and the cruelties in a prison, and the manner of execution, were the most horrible that can be conceived.—They were flung into dungeons, and kept in their filth, and fed on bullock's liver, boiled, but unwashed tripe, and such things as dogs are fed on. Edward Gennings, a priest, detected in saying mass in Holborn, was, after sentence of death, offered his pardon if he would go to Church; but having refused to do this, and, having at the place of execution boldly said that he would die a thousand deaths rather than acknowledge the Queen to be the spiritual head of the Church, Topliffe, the Attorney-General, ordered the rope to be cut the moment the victim was turned off, "so that," says the historian, "the priest being little or nothing stunned, stood on his feet, casting his eyes towards heaven, till the hangman tripped up his heels, and flung him on the block, where he was ripped up and quartered." He was so much alive, even after the bowelling, that he cried with a loud voice, "Oh, it smarts!" And then he exclaimed, "*Sancte Gregorie ora pro me.*"

The tolerance of the LAW CHURCH was shown

towards women as well as towards men. There was a Mrs. Ward, who, for assisting a priest to escape from prison—the crime of that priest being saying mass—was imprisoned, flogged, racked, and finally hanged, ripped up, and quartered. She was executed at Tyburn, on the 30th of August, 1588. At her trial, the judges asked if she had done the thing laid to her charge. She said—"Yes;" and that she was happy to reflect that she had been the means of "delivering that innocent lamb from the hands of those bloody wolves." They in vain endeavored to terrify her into a confession relative to the place whither the priest was gone; and when they found threats unavailing, they promised her pardon if she would go to church, but she answered that she would lose many lives if she had them rather than acknowledge that heretical church. They therefore treated her very savagely, ripped her up while in her senses, and made a mockery of her naked quarters.

There was a Mrs. Clithero pressed to death at York in the year 1586. She was a lady of good family, and her crime was relieving and harboring priests. She refused to plead that she might not tell a lie, nor expose others to danger. She was, therefore, pressed to death in the following manner:—She was laid on the floor on her back. Her hands and feet were bound down as close as possible. Then a great door was laid upon her, and many hundred weight placed upon that door. Sharp stones were put under her back, and the weights pressing upon her body, first broke her ribs, and finally—though by no means quickly—extinguished life. Before she was laid on the floor, Fawcett, the sheriff, commanded her to be stripped naked, when she, with four women who accompanied her, requested him on their knees, for the honor of womanhood, that this might be dispensed with, but he refused. Her husband was forced to flee the country: her little children, who wept for their dear and good mother, were taken up and questioned concerning their religious belief, and answering as they had been taught by her, were severely whipped; and the eldest, who was but twelve years old, was cast into prison.

Need I go on, my lord? Twenty large volumes, allotting only one page to each case, would not, if we were to include Ireland, contain an account of those who have fallen victims to their refusal to conform to this "most tolerant church in the world." Nay, a hundred volumes, each volume being 500 pages, and one page allotted to each victim, would not suffice for the holding of this bloody record. Short of death by ripping up, there were death by martial law, death in prison, and this in cases without number, banishment and loss of estate. Dr. Bridgewater, in a tale published by him at the end of the "Concertatio, Ecclesie Catholicae," gives the names of about 1200 who had suffered in this way before the year 1588—that is to say, before the great heat of the "tolerance."—In this list there are twenty-one bishops, one hundred and twenty monasteries, thirteen deans, fourteen archdeacons, sixty prebendaries, five hundred and thirty priests, forty-nine doctors of divinity, eighteen doctors of law, fifteen masters of colleges, eight earls, ten barons, twenty-six knights, three hundred and twenty-six gentlemen, sixty ladies and gentlewomen. Many of all these, and indeed the greater part of them, died in prison, and several of them died while under sentence of death.

There, my lord, I do not think you will question the truth of this statement; and if you cannot, I hope you will allow that no lover of truth and justice ought to be silent while reports of speeches are circulating, calling "his the most tolerant church in the world." But, my lord, why need I, in addressing myself to you on this subject, do more than refer to the cruel, the savage, the bloody penal code? Leaving poor half-minded Ireland out of the question, what have I to do in answer of the praises of this Church and your assertion as to its tolerance, but to request you to remember the enactments in the following Acts of old Bess, the head and the establisher of this Church?—Stat. 1. chap. 1 and 2; stat. v. chap. 1; stat. xii. chap. 2; stat. xxiii. chap. 1; stat. xxvii. chap. 2; stat. xxix. chap. 6; stat. xxxv. chap. 1; stat. xxxv. chap. 2. What have I to do, my lord, but to request you to look at or rather to call to mind, those laws of plunder and of blood—fine, fine, fine; banish, banish, banish; or death, death, death, in every line? Your lordship knows that this is true. You know that all these horrors, all this heinous tyranny, that the whole arose out of a desire to make this Protestant Church predominant. How, then, can this Protestant Church be called "the most tolerant in the world?"

When a large portion of the press, and almost all the pulpits of the kingdom, are occupied in denouncing Roman Catholic intolerance, past, present, and future, real, and imaginary, we may, perhaps, be excused for taking this method of showing that something can be said on the other side.

PROTESTANT CHAPEL AT ROME.

(From the Pittsburgh Catholic.)

It is no part of our business to apologise for the acts of the Roman Government. Assuming the statement to be true, it is perfectly evident that a permission so recently granted would not have been recalled, unless it was found that its continuance tended to endanger the well-being of the city or the State. It is not supposed, we presume, that the Pope, in allowing American Protestants at Rome to meet for what they call worship, intended to grant them a free license to diffuse their detestable impurities amongst his subjects, or to use their meeting-house for the purpose of concocting schemes for driving him again from his dominions, and re-enacting the horrible scenes which afforded such delight to themselves, and too many of their brethren at home. It is evident, on the other hand, that such use of the permission accorded would probably be made. As to American Protestants from all parts and parties of this country,

meeting together in one house for "social worship," that is all very palpable humbug. American Protestants have not yet agreed who is the proper object of religious worship; whether there is a Heaven and a Hell; whether the Bible is inspired; whether baptism is necessary; whether Saturday or Sunday is the appointed day of rest. One meeting-house cannot contain the religious differences of the Protestant inhabitants of the smallest village at home; and are we to be told that, in Rome, the Unitarian, Calvinist, Methodist, Episcopalian, Baptist, Shaker, and Quaker, all meet together as brethren, and for the purpose of "social worship?" The Roman Government has probably discovered, by this time, what worship means among Protestants; that it is not prayer, but preaching; that but one kind of address is palatable to the motley assemblage which congregated at the American chapel; that hatred of Popery is the only point on which they are agreed; and its speedy destruction, the only object in which they can all unite; it has probably discovered that the American meeting-house is the head-quarters of all the Red Republican villains in Italy, and that from it are disseminated tracts and pamphlets inculcating the right of rebellion, and the duty of private judgment.

For our own part, we never alluded, in any way, to the opening of the Protestant Chapel; but we take this opportunity of expressing our hearty delight at its suppression. This may be thought intolerant; but when, we would ask, did we ever profess to be tolerant of error, or to advocate the doctrine that error ought to be tolerated. On the contrary, we hate error, we detest it with our whole heart and soul, and we pray that our aversion to it may ever increase. We hold it meet that, within the walls of the Eternal City, no worship abominable to God should be publicly conducted; and we are sincerely glad that the enemies of Truth are no longer allowed to meet together, openly as such, in the capital of the Christian World.

"How does this treatment of Rome to the few American Protestants in that city compare with the treatment which millions of European Catholics have met with in this country? Here they are allowed to build churches, seminaries, monasteries, and propagate their faith, with none to molest them or make them afraid. Are we wrong in allowing this perfect liberty of conscience? For, if we are not, then the Pope is wrong in restricting it."

Such are the questions of the Preacher, in relation to this matter, and such are, in substance, the interrogatories of the Protestant press. We will briefly answer them.

There is no parallel to be drawn between Rome and the United States—between a government which recognises the truth of the Catholic religion, and a government which recognises no truth of any religion at all. Catholics in this country are indebted to no one for the liberties which they possess. There is no distinction made in their favor; they do but enjoy the privileges granted to the Presbyterian, the Mormon, the Turk, and the Jew. These privileges were granted to them because it was impossible to keep them back; they are continued because it is impossible to take them away. Could the Presbyterians obtain the mastery, they would vanish in an instant; even the Unitarian and the Quaker would, probably, effect their destruction; but, fortunately for us, the power of our enemies is less than their malice. No thanks, however, to you or to them; you hate us with your whole hearts, and seize every opportunity to do us mischief; but you cannot enlist the Government into your service without destroying the distinctive principle of the Government itself. We are citizens of the republic, and we love it. There is not a man of us who would not shed the blood of his heart for its defence and its protection. And why do we love it, think you? Because it is not a Protestant Government—because it interferes with the religious sentiments of no man—because, while it neither recognises nor admits that there is such a thing as Religious Truth, it does not attempt to compel men to profess with their lips, falsehoods which they despise or detest in their heart.

We are, as you say, "millions of Catholics;" yes, and millions whom, with all your malice, you dare not attempt to deprive of the rights guaranteed to them by the Constitution—millions, in whose loyalty the Government may yet feel her best strength to lie, if days of misrule, the approach of which some Protestant ministers are straining every nerve to hasten, should ever really arrive—millions who obey the laws, and reverence, and will uphold, the Constitution and the Union. We build churches, seminaries, and monasteries; but it is false to say that we are allowed to build them; we build them with the same free right that you have to erect your meeting-houses, or the Jews to put up a synagogue, with "none to make us afraid," indeed, because we are not fearful by nature, and our religion makes us bold; but not without molestation, because the mob, at the instigation of the preachers, occasionally burns down our churches, and turns our Religious women into the streets.

"Are we wrong in allowing them liberty of conscience?" Liberty of Conscience! You have doubtless enough to answer for already, and we will fully acquit you of all sin in this matter. You never allowed us or any body else liberty of conscience, or any other kind of liberty. Luckily for society, the Puritans have had rope enough in the matter of government, and they have effectually hung themselves; the tyranny of Cromwell, and the New England Theocracies, have taught the world what respect the Puritan has for liberty of conscience. What would a true blue Presbyterian allow to a Papist but an axe or a gibbet. It is well for us that we need not ask you for allowance.

"For, if we are not" (wrong in allowing this perfect liberty of conscience) "then the Pope is wrong in restricting it." This is a great mistake.