

From the Catholic Herald

TO THE REV. W. A. ODENHEIMER, A.M.
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No. V.

REV. SIR:—In your attempt to establish the independence claimed by the British Church, you say: "The King and clergy of Northumberland are still later witnesses, for they treated with contempt the Papal mandate to restore his deposed bishop." In your note you refer us for your authority, to Bede lib. 5. c. 20, and Spelman's Conc. 1. p. 162, 203, 20.

The fact to which you here refer, does not indeed belong to the branch of the Church which existed amongst the old British race; but, I have no objection to follow you, and examine, whether the fact you thus allude to, supports your position, or mis. I said in my last, that this case was a proof, of which I would avail myself, rather than an objection which I would have to meet:—and I am now ready to support this view of the subject.

The bishop here spoken of is St. Wilfrid, who became archbishop of York, little more than half a century after the death of St. Augustine. The deference which he always paid to the authority of the Roman Pontiff, and the support which he asked and received from Rome in his many trials, have caused his name to be in bad odour with most Protestant writers; in whose hands the history of his life has almost become a romance;—so largely have they drawn on fancy. If you have occasion again to refer to his life, I would take the liberty of suggesting the prudence of recurring to the original writers. The reasons of this advice you will find in this letter. What I shall relate concerning him will be taken from contemporary and other ancient writers, especially from Eddius, his companion and biographer.

It is unnecessary here to state the history of his life. What concerns the present subject, is, principally, the account of his appeals to Rome. Theodore, to whom the English church owed so much, was then archbishop of Canterbury. He always had entertained a desire to multiply the number of the Saxon Bishoprics. A favorable moment for the execution of his projects presented itself, and contrary to the provisions of the canons, without the consent of Wilfrid, he took on himself to divide the diocese of York into three parts, and consecrate a bishop for each. Egfrid, King of the Northumbrians hated Wilfrid, and the archbishop availed himself of his enmity to carry out his plans. The holy man was thus deprived of his see, and of its emoluments, in violation of all principles of right and justice. Wilfrid remonstrated against the injury done him, but in vain; and when no other remedy was left him, he appealed to the judgment of the Apostolic See, as Eddius relates in the following words:—"Not satisfied with the unjust decision, by the advice of his brother-bishops, he preferred the judgment of the Apostolic See: as the Apostle Paul, condemned without cause by the Jews, appealed to Cæsar."

I do not undertake to prove, that Wilfrid admitted the authority of the Pope over the Churches in England, as this is not denied: I intend merely to show, that the other bishops admitted it in like manner. To ascertain this, it will be enough to compare the conduct of the English bishops of that day with what would be the conduct of the Protestant bishops of the present day, if any one of their body, in similar circumstances, appealed to Rome, which they yet kindly condescended to consider as a sister church. Or to form a case which would be exactly parallel if your theory be good, let us suppose that a bishop of the United States treated

another bishop, as Theodore treated Wilfrid; that the oppressed appealed to the Protestant bishop of London, and challenged his oppressor to appear before that tribunal; pray, sir, be kind enough to tell me what would be the sentiments of your bishops here regarding the value of such an appeal? I do not speak of an arbitration, to which both parties might consent, or of friendly interposition, which the aggrieved party might invoke; I speak of a regular, judicial appeal, the nature of which, if not sufficiently clear from the words I have just quoted, will be made more clear by what follows.—When the reader has formed a proper notion of what the sentiments of the Protestant clergy here would be in such a contingency, and thus conceived what Theodore's sentiments would have been, had he, and the clergy of his time, been as staunch Protestants, as you would represent them; let us now consider what these latter actually did.

Messengers were dispatched for the purpose of intercepting Wilfrid on his journey; the emissaries of Egfrid even attempted to deprive him of life. When these efforts failed, persons were sent to Rome, to prepossess the Pope in favor of his opponents. However, when Wilfrid arrived, a council of bishops was summoned by the Pope to aid him in investigating the cause. Wilfrid appeared in person; Theodore, the archbishop, was represented by the monk Kenewald; the cause was calmly discussed by that august assembly, and the decision pronounced unanimously in favor of Wilfrid. But this decision did not procure for him immediate possession of his see. The hatred of Egfrid and his other enemies was too bitter to allow them to yield; but that their reluctance was the effect of obstinacy, and not the result of not acknowledging the right of the Pontiff to interfere, is shown by subsequent events.

Various pretexts were resorted to, in order to justify their disobedience; Eddius says that "in addition" to the others which he mentioned, "to the ruin of their souls, they spread the calumnious report (which was most detestable) that the rescripts were obtained by money." This was an excuse, very often resorted to by those against whom the authority of Rome was invoked, it is quite unnecessary where that authority is not acknowledged. Theodore gives an ample explanation of the principles by which he was actuated. He did not acquiesce immediately; but that his reluctance did not proceed from a belief of the Pope's incompetency to act in such a case, he showed clearly at a time when the suggestions of passion are hushed, and conscience is left to act with all its force.

Eddius tells us that the year before his death, when he felt his end drawing nigh, "being troubled by fear, and paying due honor to the authority of the Apostolic See, he no longer deferred entering into friendship with Wilfrid." "He called him and the bishop Erkenwald to London; having confessed all his sins to them, he said that he was troubled principally by what he did against the holy man, in having suffered him to be deprived against the canons, either by his own acts, or patiently suffering others to molest him." He asked forgiveness from Wilfrid; he promised to make every reparation in his power; he even proposed that this holy man should be appointed his successor; and engaged himself to use his authority, and his entreaties, to reconcile the kings who were hostile to him. His letter to the king of the Mercians is extant, and breathes the sentiments of a noble mind, acknowledging with candor and with sorrow, its fault.—He entreats him,—he commands him, to be reconciled with Wilfrid, and reminds

him, that the authority of the Apostolic See required this from him. Eddius tells us, that he used the same argument to the king of the Northumbrians; he begged him to receive Wilfrid "through the fear of the Lord; and in obedience to the commands of the Apostolic See." "Though he did not live to behold the success of his efforts, the king of the Northumbrians yielded; Wilfrid was finally restored and for some time enjoyed the peaceful possession of his see.

This account, every part of which I have extracted from the ancient writers whom I have quoted, proves the truth of what I said in my last letter—that the decisions of Rome have often been disregarded by persons who admitted her authority; that "the treating of a Papal mandate with contempt," is not always to be taken for "a protest" against the Pope. It is clear that this authority was acknowledged by both parties; and this alone should make a candid enquirer cautious in concluding that that authority was denied—whereas it was merely disobeyed.

But Wilfrid was not long allowed to enjoy peace. After a few years, Alfrid became as hostile to him as Egfrid had been before; and Berthwald, the successor of Theodore, united himself to his oppressors. A council was summoned, before which he appeared; artifice was resorted to, but a timely hint from a disciple, who was present, put him on his guard, and enabled him to elude the snares laid for him.

Finally, when a degrading compromise was offered, by which the injustice of their proceedings became manifest, and all hopes of obtaining justice in England disappeared, the holy man again appealed to the Apostolic See—(fiducialiter sedem appello Apostolicum.) "and let the man," said he, "who presumes to depose me from the episcopal dignity, accompany me to Rome, and prove his charge before the Sovereign Pontiff."

His accusers followed him to Rome; a deputation was sent by Berthwald, to support his proceedings against Wilfrid before John, who was then Pope. Eddius gives us an outline of the proceedings. During four months, seventy different sessions were held, in which every accusation was carefully examined; every point minutely discussed, both accusers and defendant being present. Eddius describes the astonishment produced by the eloquent defence of Wilfrid: the consternation of his enemies when they felt themselves foiled in argument; and the unanimous conclusion at which all the judges arrived—that the accusations were groundless, and that Wilfrid was innocent of every crime laid to his charge.

The Pope wrote accordingly to the Kings of Mercia and Northumberland, communicating to them the proceedings which had taken place, and the sentence he had pronounced. He commands Berthwald to assemble a council, at which the other bishops, who had any complaints against Wilfrid, should be present, (Berthwald's complaints were already disposed of at Rome.) If their differences could be concluded at such a synod, he would be pleased; if not, he required them to recur to the Apostolic See. "But let him, (Berthwald) know that if any one refuse to come, he will expose himself to deposition, and will not be received as bishop either here or in England." The King of Mercia submitted,—Alfrid, King of Northumberland, at first hesitated, and then refused to recognise Wilfrid—but being seized with a mortal malady, immediately after the departure of his messengers, he considered it a punishment for his disobedience. Penetrated with sorrow for his crime, he promised to make every reparation in his power, if he survived; if not, the last request he

would make to his heir, should be to do justice to the persecuted prelate.

Agreeably to the instructions of the Pope, Berthwald assembled the council; and "there, according to commands of the Holy See, it was left to the option of the bishops, either to give way to Wilfrid in the possession of his See, or to go to Rome to defend their cause; whoever would act in a contrary manner should be excommunicated." The holy Abbess Elfreda, sister of Alfrid, then made known to them, that the King, her brother, had promised, that "if he recovered, he would obey without delay the orders of the Holy See; and that if death should prevent him, he would require it to be done by his heir." Berthwald, the chief of the nobles who defended the legitimate heir of Alfrid, against the usurper Edulfus, said that "he too, was of opinion that the orders of the Pope should be obeyed."—Wilfrid was then embraced by all; he obtained possession of his see, which he retained till his death.

I will not offend your judgement, by stopping to enquire whether these proceedings look like a 'protest' against Rome; or whether they are an argument that the 'king and clergy of Northumberland' admitted your doctrine or mine. They show, indeed, that there were acts of disobedience, acknowledged as such by the very persons who were guilty; but it is manifest that the authority itself was not for a moment called in question. But you will ask me, where I have found all these details? Will you believe it, Sir, when I tell you, that I found them at the very part of Spelman to which you refer me? They are contained in Eddius, the companion of Wilfrid; but, since I have ceased quoting from him, the words between inverted commas are of William of Malmesbury, embodied in his collection, and adopted by Spelman at the place in question. Yes; the submission of the King of Mercia; first, the hesitation, then the refusal of obedience, and finally, the repentance of the King of Northumberland, are related in Spelman, Tom. 1. page 203—the very page to which you refer me, to show with what contempt the King and Clergy treated the Papal mandate. The letter of Pope John with the submission 'to the Pope's commands' by Berthwald and the other bishops, as well as by the nobles, is related in the two following pages!! The history of the first appeal, including the trial at Rome, under Pope Agatho—the appearance of Kenewald, sent by Theodore—the decision—the repentance of Theodore for the course he had pursued towards Wilfrid, is related exactly as I gave it, in the other page to which you refer, (p. 163) and in those immediately preceding!!! The same account is given, though not so diffusely, in the chapter of Bede to which you also refer in the same place. Really sir, if this be a specimen of the mode of referring to authorities, to which you invite me, I would say—it is better to throw up the thing altogether. You will not, I am confident, deem it too bold in me to suggest, that when you are preparing the second edition, you would take the trouble to look into the authorities which you find referred to in Protestant authors; and I will venture to promise, that while, in most cases, you will find them altogether irrelevant, you will often find them, as in the case before us, proving exactly the contrary of that which they are brought forward to support.

I have dwelt on this case, though belonging to the Anglo-Saxon, rather than to the British branch of the Church, because your statement invited me to it, and because it is of importance in this enquiry, to know the established doctrine of the Anglo-Saxon Christians. For though you admit that Augustine, and his