



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. VI.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, DECEMBER 21, 1855.

NO. 19.

PERSECUTION OF THE REDEMPTORIST FATHERS.

The Nation gives a report of the infamous persecution instituted against these exemplary priests at the instigation of the Government. It will be seen that Father Petcherine challenges investigation into all the circumstances connected with the Bible-burning business. The case was heard on the 28th ult., before the magistrates of Kingston. We copy from the Nation:—

"At a distance of about a hundred yards from the entrance of the Court-house a strong body of police horse, and foot, barred all passage that way; a similar barrier being placed beyond the Court-house in the opposite direction, and so far beyond, as to include the house where Father Petcherine is stopping, within the space from which the people were entirely excluded. Thus 'the authorities' prevented a repetition of what on Monday gave mortal vexation to the enemies of Father Petcherine—an 'ovation' as they termed his being accompanied to and from the court by the poor people who loved and revered him. At the risk of my life, from the heels of the four-footed members of 'the force' who were wheeling and prancing and kicking as furiously as if fully confident of the important part they were playing in the vindication of the authorised version. I succeeded in passing the barrier of biped and quadruped disciples of law and order, and reached the entrance to the court, which is hidden in the mysterious recesses of a narrow back lane, off Georges' street. Here I was again stopped by Colonel Brown's friends, and required to declare my business. I seized my tablets and wrote a few sentences in stenographic hieroglyphics which if he could have translated them would have made 184 B's loyal hairs stand on end—whereat he exhibited due and prompt respect, and inducted me into the court, a small room about 20 feet square. At one end was the Bench on which sat Mr. Porter (chairman) Mr. (J. M.) Bourke, Major Drew, and Mr. (R.) Burke, Magistrates. At the table in front on the left, was seated an elderly gentleman with hair white as flour, and a very florid complexion. He seemed nervous and consulted frequently with a gentleman by his side, from whom apparently he received his mental courage. There was a twitching of the thick lips, and a smile-seekingness in the glance which he threw around him, especially towards the corner of the court where a number of neatly tied, snow white cravats were congregated; and when he spoke, a kind of swagger like the bravery of a superstitious boy passing a lonesome light on the road at night—that at once proclaimed him as a man who was resolved by ultra severity to wipe out, to some degree, the stain, and atone for the misfortune of being a co-religionist of the accused. My conjectures were correct. This was Mr. Corballis, the Catholic prosecutor on the part of the Crown; doubtless, selected on the principle by which, it is said, the overseer puts the whip, in his own absence, into the hands of a slave, who is sure to strike the harder in order to escape the imputation of partiality to his race. On the left of the table, at the end nearest the Bench sat the object of the prosecution, the Rev. Vladimir Petcherine. He is aged about 39, and rather under the middle height. He was dressed in the cape and habit of the Order of Redemptorists—rather a contrast to the 'West of England' of the finest nap, which ornamented the revered inciters of the prosecution. Father Petcherine is a native of Odessa, and his features are of a decidedly foreign cast; but the expression of the face is certainly more like that of the Monks Murillo and Rembrandt loved to paint, than anything I've seen for a long time. There is a quiet, calm, goodnatured simplicity in the countenance, notwithstanding the plainness, as it would be called, of the features. His hair was cut short, his face was entirely shaven, and he displayed the 'tonsure' of the orders regular. His calm demeanor was audibly remarked upon; he listened most attentively to what was said on all sides, more with the air of a man curious to hear what they had got to say, than of one who could be in any way implicated by aught that could possibly be said on either side. On his left sat his counsel, Thomas O'Hagan, Q.C.; and seldom did I see exemplified the force of moral power and superiority, as when I saw Corballis positively quail under the calm dignity of the man who obviously was discharging not alone a legal but a moral duty; obeying not the behest of a civil functionary, but the call of conscience and of truth. At the end of the court, and on the right of the Bench, were a number of gentlemen in the garb of Protestant clergymen, one of whom seemed to have no desire save to catch the eye of Father Petcherine, in order that he might let off a ready-made laugh, which simmered in a smirk over his countenance. Once or twice the good Father happened to turn his eyes in that direction, when the gentleman in question let

fy his features, utterly forgetful of the wide field for denotistical operation he thereby displayed. Several Catholic clergymen were in court, some of them were accommodated with seats at the table near Father Petcherine.

"The proceedings commenced by Mr. O'Hagan's saying that he, on the part of Father Petcherine, not only courted, invited, but demanded most complete and rigid inquiry—that in order that such should take place, and to afford the most ample facility on their part, they waived all right to cross-examine or question any evidence which may be brought forward there on that day. Therefore his duty there was done, save to declare that his 'client instructed him most solemnly on his behalf to say, that neither directly or indirectly, by act of his, or any other person, with knowledge, privity, or consent of his, was he guilty in any way of any such offence, and that he challenged investigation. I decline to interfere further in this preliminary proceeding.' A very unseemly interruption on the part of Mr. Corballis drew from Mr. O'Hagan a well-merited and dignified rebuke, and Mr. Porter expressed his opinion that it was quite natural Mr. O'Hagan should desire to disclaim as he had done the imputations cast upon his client as that "nothing could be more unlike the facts of the case than the publications which society had been favored with, on all sides.' It was then suggested that 'the man, John Hamilton, against whom informations had been sworn on the last day,' should be called. He was. All eyes were strained to see the man for whose act—if act he had done—every Catholic was deemed accountable. Just before he was called, a good deal of winking, smiling, pointing towards Holyhead, and whisperings of 'fled,' 'dare not appear,' 'spirited away by Jesuits,' &c., went the round of the Tract Party; but lo! the moment his name was called it became evident that he, like Father Petcherine, had grievously disappointed them by not having fled. 'Here I am,' was called out in a sharp, juvenile voice, and a nice, chubby-faced, good-humored little boy of 13 jumped with the greatest alacrity on the table.

"A murmur of surprise arose from all but the Smith party. Was this 'the man, John Hamilton,' the counterpart of Guy Fawkes? This little boy, the delinquent whose supposed act had been trumpeted as the solemn and deliberate proceeding of Catholic men! 'John Hamilton' looked by no means cast down by 'the majesty of the law;' on the contrary, when asked by his greybearded prosecutor if he had any (legal) person to appear for him, he replied with great spirit and confidence, 'Oh, yes. I've Paddy Gaffney here, a boy who was with me.' Mr. Corballis looked shocked and grieved at the unhappy child, for not being frightened into tremulousness by a question from so terrific a personage as himself; whilst others in court maliciously construed the reply to mean that Hamilton considered the veritable 'Paddy Gaffney' as a match for Mr. Corballis any day in the year.

"The witnesses were then called, and their informations read over to them amidst the most perfect silence. The first two witnesses were heard with interest, but at the third, I can scarcely describe the feeling of dissatisfaction and impatience evinced to hear the evidence which was to be the keystone of all the rest—which was, in fact, to make evidence of the rest, by connecting Father Petcherine with the putting of the Bibles in the fire, or proving that it was at his desire or by his cognisance they were put into the fire. Judge of the suspense, amounting nearly to open indignation, felt when it became shamefully palpable that there was not the slightest attempt to prove the charge as trumpeted in England and Ireland—that so far from attempting to prove that there was an *auto da fe*, a 'bonfire of Bibles,' a 'demonstration against the Protestant Bible,' or against Protestant tracts, or against Protestantism at all—all the endeavors of the prosecutors were confined to the object of proving exactly what was conjectured in the Nation of the 17th November—viz., that among a heap of several hundred other books, some copy or copies of the Protestant version happened to be burned! For as then and there observed—'The real charge made against and denied by the Redemptorists, is not, simply, that a copy or copies of the Bible were burned. It is that they were knowingly and overtly and with public display, burned by way of disrespect to the volume, and defiance and insult to Protestants. If this be not what the charge means, it means nothing; and the language used with reference to it by our contemporaries, is scandalous and criminal in the extreme.

"Let us review the entire of the evidence. We find every one of the witnesses proving that the fire was one of 'novels,' 'bad books,' 'Reynold's Miscellany,' and as I have above observed, all alluding to any bible as an evident accident or exception, and

a thing likely to be overlooked unless looked for amongst the heap.

"Halpin the policeman tells us, that among a large heap of books, two barrows full, there were novels and penny journals and books of that kind, he saw one book with 'testament' on it, but he did not open it, and that he saw one of the little boys 'averaging from 5 to 12 years' take a book with 'bible' on some part of the cover. That Father Petcherine came out of the chapel in plain clothes, and pointed to the children to throw the books in the corner—that he heard the Missionary give them no directions; that the little boys struck matches and lit the heap; that the Missioner waited there four minutes during which time the children were crowding round to get his blessing. Every one in court was holding his breath to learn the question, 'was Father Petcherine near enough to detect a 'testament' among the pile of 'novels, journals, and books of that kind,' but no question of that kind was put.

"Mr. Darkens, Inspector of Factories, says that about 8 o'clock in the morning, ('at noon day in the public streets' shouts a horrified London paper) he heard that two barrows full of books were being burned in the chapel yard, he went in, saw them, they 'seemed to be of a light class of reading, some numbers of the Family Herald and such books.'—He saw a bible which a little boy took up and dashed back into the barrow. Mr. Darken very naturally was shocked, and called the policeman and told him it was an indictable offence to burn the bible. There is here no attempt to connect Father Petcherine with the transaction.

"Henry Lawson, coachman to Mrs. —, heard that a 'heap of novels' were to be burned—went amidst the heap saw a testament—went back to the stable; returned—saw Father Petcherine standing at the fire; he had several books in his hand, which he tore up and threw upon it, but he could not tell what they were.

"Charles, a brother of the last witness, came forward, with a haggard daring visible in his eye, that to my mind, suggested incipient insanity. I was not mistaken. He was a maniac (I believe under restraint) three or four weeks ago! He—this poor maniac, a week or ten days out of restraint—we are told went, the day after the burning, to the chapel-yard, and brought home to Henry some burnt leaves of a bible.

"William Hutchings strongly impressed me with the conviction that he was a sincerely religious, conscientious Protestant. His pain at being told insultingly by some ignorant wretched being inside, that they were burning what he verily believed to be the Word of God was most natural, and his expressions at the moment speak a mind pained and shocked to a degree. His evidence is merely that, amidst the burning heap he saw a page of what he is sure belonged to a Bible.

"Robert Wallace, of Sandy Cove, was next called, and the individual who presented himself demands my notice. He sloped into the witness box with a softened motion, like ghosts in the play, placed himself in a graceful posture and adjusted his lips to that placid expression which will best be imitated by putting a lozenge on the tongue and closing the lips. His toilet was faultless, his cravat was a *chef-d'œuvre* of the laundress, his coat a triumph of the tailor.—His hair was sleekly brushed off his forehead, and at each side straight over his ears—not a rebellious hair started out of place. He was about 30, nicely made, and with decided pretensions to being 'handsome.' There was a delicious languor in the half closed eye, which an opium eater in his elysium trance alone might exhibit—a sort of oily smack smoothness about the whole man, conveyed the idea that he could slip through a cullender or draw himself through a lady's ring, with as much ease as piously slip into the good graces of an evangelical lady of a £1,000 a year. He was handed the book to be sworn, and after glancing, in his own sleek fashion, around the court to see if all were observing, he slowly opened his fingers—closed them as if it were a poisoned cup.—Going to the train, his information tells us, he heard that Bibles had been burned at the chapel yard—he went up and saw in the chapel yard a smouldering fire which appeared to be that of paper; its diameter was, to the best of his opinion, from ten to twelve feet, and at its outskirts were patches of flame; a number of boys were standing round, and he saw them kicking, what seemed to him, and which he had no doubt were small-pocket Bibles into the flames. So scrupulous did he wish us to believe him, that he distinctly declared that he would not swear the fire did measure eleven feet exactly! But he did not doubt at all that the books were Bibles, though he would give no reason for thinking they were. The Rev. Robert Wallace, softly glided out of the box, and then we saw the spectacle of 'the Crown' and the Exeter-hall men dragging a little child aged 11

years into the box to add his cipher of evidence to the others, in the vain desire to prop a rickety case. Poor little Christie Duff cried and blubbered when put in the box, and even Mr. Corballis saw the necessity to ask if his age was an objection, and the Bench questioned him as to the nature of an oath, &c. Now had Christie Duff been the child of a Manchester cotton spinner or a Lancashire coal miner, the records of law courts in these places authorise us to say he never would answer as he did. But he is the child of Irish Catholic parents, and had been to hear the sermons of the good Father Petcherine, and so it turned out that little Christie Duff was able to teach some of the gentlemen present.

"This child says that at Father Petcherine's desire he took to his lodgings a wheel barrow; that he saw under the table a great heap of books. They were mostly, 'Reynold's Miscellany,' and 'the London Journal.' Amongst the heap in his barrow he saw what looked like a testament. He brought them to the chapel yard, put them in a heap and by Father Petcherine's desire he says they were lighted, but he did not see them lighted.

"This was all the evidence; how does it bear out the scandalous statements of the Protestant journals—how does it contradict Father Buggenoms' letter. We have no attempt to shew that he examined the books or was in any way cognisant of the fact that amongst the 'Reynold's Miscellanies' and 'London Journals,' there was a testament or a bible. We first have him in the room telling the children to remove a great heap of books from 'under the table,' to the chapel yard. We have him next standing in the yard, for four minutes while they were being burned. Was he likely to trouble himself to scrutinise the books, which were assumedly 'novels,' 'light reading,' &c. No, he had no reason to do so, he had no opportunity of even looking for three consecutive moments at any one volume in the fire, 'the children pulling him about, crowding round to get his blessing.' Some one saw him tearing a book and throwing it into the fire. Was it a bible—no. It is not even pretended that it was a bible. Bible leaves were found in the fire; admit it, and what then? Was Father Petcherine in any way directly, or indirectly cognisant that bibles were being burnt? No. He never said, no one ever said, that no bibles were burned. Because Father Buggenoms did not say so, which he could not, he was grossly abused—we now see why. He said and says, and the traducers shall know it to their cost, that if any bibles were burned it was without his knowledge, and without his wish.

"I have here briefly traced the whole evidence on the part of the prosecutors, and without even a knowledge of the evidence which will be brought forward for the defence, I predict as shameful a break down as ever terminated a trumped up case. A 'break down' which will upset Mr. Keogh and overwhelm the swaddling interest. The reverend Father was bailed, himself in £100, two sureties in £50 each, to attend for trial at ensuing commission in Green street.

"Meantime the suspense outside of doors had grown ungovernable. Every one who was seen to leave the court, was seized and questioned 'was the holy missioner safe and clear?' when the result of the sitting became known the excitement began to assume a dangerous aspect. Men muttered and women prayed, while the younger portion of the mass loudly declared mischievous intentions. The moment Father Petcherine was seen emerging from the court, leaning on two clergymen, a cheer rose which was at once understood, caught up, and swelled all along the lines and cross lines of streets which were full of people. With one roar and rush the barrier was burst through by a daring band, who positively fled over the space, then free, between them and the Priest. He was surrounded, seized—some caught his coat, some kissed his hands, others knelt and asked his blessing; all wept bitterly. He was powerfully affected. By great difficulty, and not without a little unavoidable rudeness towards these faithful and affectionate beings, his friends got him into his lodgings. 'Well,' sobbed a decent poor woman, and she knelt on the road outside the door, 'May God Almighty deliver you from your enemies, who hate and persecute you. Oh, I'd go in your place myself, and sure so I ought, for you brought peace and comfort to my hearth.' I understood her to allude to the reformation of her husband or other members of the family.

"For several hours the town continued in a state of ferment; the crowd cheering vehemently whenever any known friend of the Missionaries passed along the street, and hooting the most obnoxious of the proselytisers. But I am glad to say no violence of any kind occurred, and the greatest good will and moderation was maintained between the people and the armed force: All was tolerably quiet when I left."