

An Attack on the Catholic Church

In last week's Register editorial reference was made to certain verses written by Prof. Tyrrell of Trinity College, Dublin. The Dublin Freeman's prints the following protests, one by a Catholic Bishop, the other by an Anglican layman:

FROM THE BISHOP OF LIMERICK

Sir,—A friend of mine has sent me a newspaper cutting containing a letter written by Professor Tyrrell of Trinity College, Dublin, by way of defence of some verses which he published recently. The verses were had enough, in my opinion, this letter is incomparably worse, and more offensive to us Catholics. From some pages in it, one would think that Professor Tyrrell is quite unconscious of the grossly offensive nature of his words, but this only illustrates the tone of insolence and contempt towards Catholics in which the thoughts of this gentleman, and I fear many of his co-religionists habitually run. Incidentally I cannot help thinking what a "slog" of the true atmosphere of T.C.D. is in these productions. What a comment on the invitation to the Catholics of Ireland to accept this gentleman and his fellows as teachers for their sons!

An disclaimer any intention of writing against the Catholic religion, Professor Tyrrell informs us that what he protests against is "the undoubted fact that the Catholic clergy inculcate on their flocks cold acts of observance in lieu of sincere feelings of religion," and his indignation is aroused against "the ill-considered zeal of the rank and file of an unscrupulous priesthood practising on the ignorance and superstition of an illiterate peasantry."

Now that is a definite statement capable of proof, easily tested. If true, it is a terrible condemnation of the whole Catholic Church in Ireland. We Bishops, who are the chief clergy, must know it, and see it, and be responsible for it. I think, then, Tyrrell for the evidence on which he makes this shocking accusation. For myself, I know that it is an utter falsehood. My whole life has been spent amidst the inner workings of the Catholic Church amongst our people, and I can say that a more outrageously untrue, or unfounded statement was never made and that it is simply the projection from the Protestant prejudices and animosities in which Professor Tyrrell's mind seems to move, on to the Catholic Church in Ireland, which he knows, and that know, only on the surface, and from outside.

Of course, he will not accept my testimony, but, perhaps, the following appreciation of the religion of the Irish people, and the influence of the Catholic clergy upon it, by a Professor of Trinity College, a man of something different calibre, from Professor Tyrrell, may induce him to modify the rancour, if not of his views, at least of his language:

But should further ask of anyone, no matter what extreme Protestant opinions he may hold, to think of all that the Catholic Church has done, and is doing, for the Irish people. Let him judge it by the manifold in which it has brought to the hearts of the Irish people a knowledge of these great truths which he himself accepts as essential. In the humblest cottage in the land he will find among its inmates a knowledge of these truths. With all that he himself most values, he will find man and woman and child familiar with the knowledge of our common Saviour, in a belief in His Divine Mission, in love of the Saviour, in reverence for God, in all the pious charities of life, in submission to the Divine Will, in misfortune, in hope and trust in the Providence of a Heavenly Father, in all the beliefs and aspirations which may excite the smile of the philosopher, but which are the hopes and the sustenance of Christians in every country and in every clime, in all these things he will find that the Irish people will not suffer by a comparison with the most favored people upon earth.

And if, as he contemplates the deep and reverent piety, the undoubting faith, and the large-hearted charity of the Irish peasant, he asks himself by what teaching all this has been brought about although that teaching may not conform in all things to his notions, he will, if he be a Christian, find a better, than his sectarian prejudices, hesitate long, and often, before he will destroy or weaken the teaching that has produced these results until at least he is quite sure that he can replace it by one that can do as much.

"The Problem of Irish Education."—Isaac Butt, P. 117.

In which quotation the important point is that whosoever would judge the Irish peasant and his clergy fairly should love Christianity more than his own sectarian prejudices. As to the cost of church building in Ireland I should wish to offer a few remarks. In the first place it is a subject that might be discussed without polemical heat, or insult on either side, and for myself I should gladly accept and carefully consider any criticism which an intelligent though impartial observer might offer of matter of ecclesiastical policy "Fas est et ab hoste doceri."

But Professor Tyrrell's criticisms are only a thin veil for insult, and can do no good. To tell an intensely religious people that the spires of their churches like tall bullocks lift their heads and lie, can only cause exasperation, and provoke retorts equally angry, and perhaps more just. Without using any needlessly offensive language, I would submit to Professor Tyrrell's consideration the following facts and views:

(1) Throughout the greater part of 1700 there has been an absolute necessity to see Catholic Emancipation, to the Catholic Churches. For all though the whole population of the country remained true to their ancient faith, the sect of which Professor Tyrrell is so distinguished a

member, being identified with English domination in Ireland, deprived the Protestant population of every church and house of worship which they possessed. Those of them that the Protestants wanted for their own use, such as St. Patrick's and Christ Church Cathedrals in Dublin; and St. Mary's, the Blessed Mother of God's Church, here in Limerick, they simply appropriated, broke down the altars, desecrated the shrines and in general from Christian Churches turned them into Protestant meeting houses. There was no waste of the people's substance here. No shillings were withdrawn from the support of an impoverished peasantry. Irish Protestants are not open, to the charge of a blind and superstitious waste of money on building the House of God. There was the true worldly wisdom of the cuckoo, and they are fully entitled to taunt us with our extravagance.

But while Professor Tyrrell's co-religionists were quietly and thrifflingly appropriating to their own uses our Cathedral Church, which they did not build, my two last predecessors built and I have been able to bring to completion a larger, a richer, and more beautiful Cathedral even than old St. Mary's. Its lovely spire out-tops St. Mary's. To which of these I would ask Professor Tyrrell, do Pope's lines which he so offensively quotes, most aptly apply? Which resembles the tall bully? Which stands as the monument of oppression, of religious persecution and spoliation? Which of them, in the hands of those who have no more right to it than the highwayman to his plunder, lifts its head and lies?

I speak of places which I know of my own personal knowledge, but my words have a universal application throughout the country.

(2) In all the principal towns of my diocese the churches, and costly churches, too, have been erected by a most generous people; our people love to give something towards building a church. Let a priest come from Asia, Africa, any quarter of the globe, to collect money to build a church, and his appeal finds the readiest response. No wonder then that they are enthusiastic in building their own churches. Now, beside every one of the splendid churches which we have at such places as Rathkeale, or Kilmallock, or Ballynary, of Kilmacne, or Askeaton, there stand the ruins of an ancient church. In most instances we can see by the tracery of their windows, by the carving of their sedilia, that they were worth money, that many of them were rich and splendid churches of Ireland not survived for the use of the Irish people, as they have in every other church in Europe? Why have we, in this most ancient Church, to begin as if we were settlers in some new country, such as the United States or Australia? Professor Tyrrell, before taunting us with extravagance in building, would do well to answer

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these questions first. Let him ask these venerable ruins. There is none of the "tall bully" about them; their heads have been laid low; they tell no lies, and if he only listens for a few moments to what they whisper in their desolation, he will probably find, as we do, some other object for his indignation than the devotion and generosity of the clergy and people who would replace them by others not less worthy of their sacred uses. Anyhow he would see the grotesque absurdity of an Irish Protestant raising the question at all.

(3) He quotes some English newspaper correspondent, who, with the Englishman's instinctive consideration for the feelings of others and characteristic modesty, went to the bottom of the whole question, while flying through the country after the King, to the effect that these chapels "are built of people's lives and substance." Of course, that is final. A newspaper correspondent said it, and that's enough.

Now, I have to say to this that a greater falsehood was never told. If Professor Tyrrell and this correspondent made this remark about the old Protestant Cathedrals in Dublin, or rather what has been called their restoration, they would be nearer the mark. Whiskey and porter have restored them; every stone that has been put into them stands, indeed, for human misery.

(4) But our Catholic churches have been built by the people, and, on the whole, by poor people, but who else was to build them? Take this county of Limerick. Its valuation is nearly £500,000 a year. Except about £2,000 or £10,000 a year, every pound is owned by the Protestant successors of the old Catholic gentry, whom they disposed. What have they given towards building the churches of the people? For the matter of that, what have they given towards building their own? I don't suppose in the history of the world

that there ever existed a more selfish, worthless, unpatriotic class than these same Protestant landlords, and if Professor Tyrrell wants to find the secret of the impoverishment of the Irish people, let him not mind his work more by the ideal of what the House of God should be than by the resources of his people. But it was a fault on the right side. But I wonder does Professor Tyrrell know how much of the cost of our Irish churches has come from America and Australia? In many instances, for one pound contributed in the locality five pounds have come from outside, and most of it has gone in much-needed wages to mechanics and laborers.

If you subtracted from the labor bill of the building trades of Limerick for the last fifty years the amount of wages that have been paid to workmen in our churches and religious institutions, the balance would be small indeed.

(5) Church building in Ireland has done something for Art. McCarthy has left some fine Gothic churches, so have Mr. Ashlin, and Mr. Byrne, and Mr. O'Callaghan. Where would ecclesiastical architecture be but for our Catholic institutions? Painting and sculpture have lagged somewhat behind; but they will come, too, and we must hope that the best stained glass will be made in Ireland, and used largely in our churches.

But if the spirit of Professor Tyrrell's insulting criticisms were adopted, there would soon be little ecclesiastical work of any kind amongst us, and architecture and all its subsidiary arts would perish.

In truth, Professor Tyrrell differs from us fundamentally, in his views of what a Catholic church is, in itself, and in our belief. He has got the idea of the sense in which it is the House of God for us, and consequently he cannot understand the lavishness with which our people act towards it. He is a rather narrow Protestant, discussing a deep feeling of Catholic hearts. His mistake is not so much in his conclusions, and the offensive language in which he clothes them, but in his interference at all in a matter which he cannot understand, and where such interference necessarily appears to us a mere impertinence. Let him not mind our religious practices, either as a theme for his verses or newspaper letters; but if he does feel for the ever-growing poverty of the country, there are two great drains on our people's resources which he might help us to arrest—drink and landlordism; but the

Catholic Church—he may as well let her alone—she is the one great organization that has stood by the people—and the consolations which she has given them, in temporal as well as spiritual things, have been and are almost the one bright spot in the desolation which the English Government and Protestantism have brought upon us.

Neither Professor Tyrrell nor Dr. Mahaffy, nor all Trinity College, can stop "the growth of Romanism." That is the real trouble. Our churches are but the symbols of our resurrection. They are the evidence of that growth in strength, in self-reliance, in independence which has marked the advance of the Catholics of Ireland for the last fifty years. Hinc illae lacrymae.

I am, sir, etc., EDWARD THOMAS, Bishop of Limerick.

FROM MR. HUGH LAW, M.P.

Sir,—It not infrequently happens that the letters of some action of theirs which has met with criticism serve an exactly opposite purpose.

That, I think, will be proved true of Dr. Tyrrell's letter in your columns some days ago. What a very strange document it is! First of all, he declares that he "never said, thought, or wrote anything against the Catholic religion," and then proceeds to repeat in prose what he had already stated in verse—viz., that "the Catholic clergy inculcate on their flocks cold acts of observance in lieu of sincere feelings of religion, and exact from an impoverished peasantry money to be spent on sacred buildings erected in places where no such edifices are needed, and where there are but a handful of worshippers to frequent them."

And finally he seeks to clinch his argument by a quotation from a writer in the "Daily Mail" who finds in the cheap decorations of the Irish country chapel "the ugly expression of an ugly kind of disease," and who deploras (good Christian man!) the fact that "the shillings of the people, cheerfully given to God instead of to the nourishment of themselves, have raised the fabric of these chapels."

I will not insist on the discrepancy between Dr. Tyrrell and his chosen witness on the point as to whether the shillings are "exact" or "cheerfully given." My own knowledge, so far as it goes, indeed, bears out Mr. Young's rather than Dr. Tyrrell's view on the matter. I have known an old woman to give literally and actually insist upon giving—all she had in the world towards the building of God's house, trusting with an apostolic faith (not often found, I regret to say, among Anglicans), that He to Whom she gave would not fail to remember her. Nor will I express more than a passing wonder in what part of Ireland are these churches erected with "but a handful of worshippers to frequent them." I do, indeed, recall many edifices where the congregations are very sparse indeed; but, oddly enough, these belong not to the Roman Catholic but to the Irish Church. On the other hand, many people must, like myself, be but too familiar with the spectacle of worshippers kneeling outside the doors of a Roman Catholic chapel during the celebration of the Mass, the interior of the building being too full to hold any more.

As to the first part of Dr. Tyrrell's invective I do not know what the Roman Catholic clergy "inculcate" on their flocks (no more, I very strongly suspect, does Dr. Tyrrell, but I do know something of what these flocks believe. I live amongst a Catholic peasantry, and I have over and over again been amazed (and I must add, as an Anglican, humiliated) by the evangelical simplicity, fervour, and reality of the faith by the light of which they live their daily lives.

Dr. Tyrrell would be better employed, I am quite sure, in inculcating similarly "sincere feelings of religion" among the members of the Communion to which he and I both belong.

I have only to add that it is strange to find a man like himself objecting to sacrifices made for the sake of religion. I should have thought that it was rather a matter for congratulation that still, in one small portion at least, of the modern world, there are some few people who are still prepared to seek first the "Kingdom of God and His righteousness."—Very faithfully yours, HUGH A. LAW, December 2nd, 1903.

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THE LECTURE "She says they can be done without." "What?" "Men can. Be done without!" "Why, how ever—well, go on." "She says they're discordant notes in creation's scheme—" "Well, I never!" "I wrote some things down best I could on the margin of newspaper that was there, so's to get 'em by heart." "She says what a woman can't do ain't worth doing. Curb not your powers, my sisters, with bit and bridle, like to the ox and mule," she says. "Oxen don't wear bits." "That's what she says, anyhow. 'Shame not the glorious possibilities of womanhood by following like a bondswoman when the sovereignty of leadership is by right yours!' I pretty near got off the bench, and Miss Jessup turned red in the face and untied her bonnet strings. The lecture lady went on telling how becoming it was for a free female to turn in appeal to a man for everything. 'Use your own inspired intellects,' she says. 'Can you name a man in this village whose mind you consider superior to one of this noble assembly of representative women? No!'

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(Continued on Page 7.)