

From the Catholic Herald.

TO THE REV. W. H. ODENHEIMER, A. M.
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No. IV.

REV. SIR:—Having proved the spurious character of the principal document produced by Protestants, to prove the alleged independence of the ancient British Church, I now pass to examine the other arguments that are brought forward to support this position. In my next I will prove, that they admitted the supremacy of the Roman Pontiff. Before entering on the examination of the authorities, that bear on this question, it will be amiss to make our readers acquainted with one fruitful source of dispute, which was often conducted with bitter acrimony by the Christians of the Saxon race on the one side, and by those of British origin, and the Irish, on the other.

The church never required that all its members should adopt the same usages on points not connected with the integrity of faith. Her spirit, however, has always tended to produce a certain uniformity even in these things; but the degree of this uniformity has always much depended on time, and place. Where faith was in danger, or christian morals likely to suffer, she has insisted on the abandonment of local usages, with a firmness that will afford an ample field for declamation to those who do not appreciate the principles by which she was animated. Many usages different from those established in the other portions of the church, prevailed among the British christians.—Some were perfectly harmless; while others verged on the very limits of what could be tolerated. Amongst these last must be enumerated their mode of celebrating Easter. The church was very sensitive on this point. The errors of those who, for a long time, endeavored to uphold the necessity of observing the Mosaic law, even under the Christian dispensation, were expressed in their observance of the Easter solemnity at the same time as the Jews; and though the practice was for a long time tolerated, because it did not proceed from any erroneous opinions, it was finally condemned, when it assumed this unchristian signification. The British and Irish mode of celebrating Easter was not, indeed, in conformity with that which was thus condemned; it proceeded merely from different mode of computing the month in which it should be celebrated, according to the decree of the Council of Nice; yet it was attended with a great inconvenience. The uniformity which was required to guard against the errors of the Quartodecimans, could be exacted with less force, as long as any discrepancy was tolerated in others; and as the greater part of the festivals of the year, as well as the fast of Lent depended on the time of celebrating Easter, this difference of discipline created great confusion.

The Holy See, however, did not exact uniformity with rigor; Columbanus, who preached to the Alcmanni on the borders of the lake of Constance, and founded the celebrated monastery of Bobbio in Italy,

as well as Aidan, who labored so successfully in the conversion of the Northumbrians, not only enjoyed while living, the communion of the Holy See, but were venerated as Saints after their death, though both adhered to the discipline of their Irish ancestors. Both in England, especially in those places where missionaries from Ireland and from the continent met, the controversy was often conducted with acrimony. It enlisted national pride and ancient usages and the authority of venerable names on both sides; and while a mistaken respect for those holy men who had observed the Irish and British discipline induced its later adherents, to retain it, though not conformable to the custom of the rest of the church, the moderate course of Rome itself was not always sufficient to prevent those who pretended for its discipline, from going beyond the bounds of moderation.

This statement is necessary to explain many acrimonious expressions, which are found in the ancient English writers, and were used by men who carried their disputes on this point beyond the legitimate bounds, while they entertained no clashing opinions on faith.

I now come to examine the proofs that are brought forward, to show that the ancient British church did not admit the authority of the Bishop of Rome. The account of St. Augustine's interview with the Britons, which is alleged in support of this position, is given by Bede.

After stating the unsuccessful issue of the first interview, in which Augustine had endeavored to induce the British bishops to lay aside several of their usages, that were not in accordance with those of the other portions of the church, and unite with him in preaching to the English, he gives an account of the second. Previous to this meeting, the Britons had been advised by a hermit to disregard Augustine, if he should fail to rise at their approach. Bede then continues: "It happened, when they came, that Augustine was seated. Which when they saw, they became angry, and accusing him of pride, they endeavored to contradict every thing he said. But he said to them: 'In many things you act in opposition to our usages, nay, to those of the Universal Church; and still, if you will comply in these three things—if you celebrate Easter at the proper time, if you solemnize baptism, by which we are born again to God, according to the custom of the Holy Roman Church, and Apostolic Church, and if you unite with us in preaching the word of God to the Angles (English,) we will bear patiently all your other usages, however opposed to ours?' But they answered, that they would not do any of those things, nor would they look upon him as their archbishop, saying to one another, 'if he would not rise up to us now, how much more will he despise us, if we begin to be subject to him.'"

It will be observed in the first place, that there is not here one word about subjection to the Pope having been asked or refused, though, after most Protestant writers, you speak as if such were undoubtedly the case.

But you will say, the argument supplied by their conduct is unanswerable. They refused to submit to Augustine, tho' he was invested with authority over them by the Pope; therefore they did not acknowledge the authority of the Pope. Now, Sir, this argument proceeds on two assumptions. It assumes in the 1st place, that Catholics never deem it lawful to refuse immediate acquiescence in every arrangement made by the Pope; and in the second place, it assumes that all Catholics have at all times, and in all places, invariably

acted with as much deference to his authority as their principles would require. Both these assumptions are groundless. The acknowledged truth, that ecclesiastical authority is instituted for edification, and not for destruction; the supposition that existing rights are not intended to be interfered with, more than is absolutely necessary; may sometimes justify the conscientious bishop in remonstrating with vigor, and will always afford a plea to those, who for less justifiable motives, wish to avoid compliance. How often have persons, who undoubtedly admitted the authority of Rome, neglected to comply with its injunctions, without assigning any, or a very insufficient reason for their refusal? Even when resistance was unjustifiable, and higher principles were not at stake, the church has often relented in her injunctions, lest disastrous consequences should ensue.

For illustrations of these remarks, we need not go back to the 6th or 7th century—they are to be found in almost every age. The laxity of discipline introduced at that time into the British church, sufficiently explains why they were unwilling to submit themselves to the austere missionary from Rome. Whether we consider the advice they received from the hermit, or the reason they assigned for refusing to acknowledge St. Augustine as their archbishop—it will be seen that their refusal had other grounds than that of their independence, or the pretended equality of all churches.

On the other hand, St. Augustine's readiness to be satisfied, if they complied with the three definite demands he made: nay, his anxiety, that in this case they would unite with him, in preaching the gospel to the English, is a clear proof, that they did not differ from him in more essential points. I can hardly imagine how any impartial enquirer can refuse to acknowledge that St. Augustine believed, and acted on the doctrine of the supremacy of the Bishop of Rome; of this you are so convinced, that you call him, on that account, 'a schismatic,' 'an usurper.'—It would be absurd to suppose, that, with this conviction, he should be so anxious to engage the Britons to unite with him in preaching to the English, if he thought they held principles different from his own, regarding this most important subject. The account of their interview therefore, so far from being a proof, that they did not admit the authority of the Pope, must be regarded as a proof that they did.

The next witness you allude to, in proof that the 'protest,' was kept up by the British Church, against the 'intruder,' is Daganus. Daganus, however, was not a Briton, but an Irishman. He is spoken of in a letter of Laurence, Melitus, and Justus, and to the bishops and abbots of Ireland. Though they say that they became acquainted with the Irish through him, and Columbanus, and complain that when he had visited them, he would not eat at the same table with them, nor even in the same house, every thing shews that they did not differ from him or the Irish nation in any essential points. They address the Irish bishops and abbots as 'most dear brethren;' they speak of the custom of 'the Apostolic see,' of sending missionaries into 'all parts of the world,' as if this were perfectly known in Ireland, which shews that the universal jurisdiction of Rome was acknowledged by the Irish, as well as by themselves.—Daganus had visited them of his own accord; we have no other way, therefore, of explaining his conduct, than by saying that he was one of the few from Ireland, who manifested great want of moderation on the Easter controversy, and that this was the cause of his harsh proceeding.

You may find many instances of equal-

ly intemperate conduct amongst the Britons; but before it can be adduced as an argument, to show that they denied the authority of Rome, it will be necessary to establish a connection between the two points, as the controversy then stood.—The conduct of the King and clergy of Northumberland, in the case of St. Wilfrid, so far from favoring your theory on this point, supplies a strong proof of the contrary, which I shall give you in my next.

As to Wickliffe, I give you the full benefit of his 'protest,' and leave you to settle with the New York Churchman, how far he may be considered as a specimen of the principles of the English church. When you will have shewn how many bishops of England agreed with him,—and I think any one who admits the divine origin of episcopal government should do so before much importance is given to his authority,—it will be time to enquire what weight must be given to the authority of any man, bishop or priest—who teaches doctrines in the 14th century opposed to those taught by all antiquity.

Having now disposed of the witnesses you allude to, who, you say, entered their protest against the authority of Rome, allow me to say again, that I consider your positions, though not now, very strange for 'a churchman.' I cannot see why you consider it irrelevant in me to allude to the fact of St. Gregory, and St. Augustine being retained in the calendar of the Established Church of England. You consider yourselves 'under God indebted to that church for your first foundation;' 'everywhere speak of her as your 'mother church,' and we are always told that your doctrines are the same as hers. Surely, then, you should pause before treating as schismatics, and usurpers, those whose names are enrolled in her calendar of saints. If your enquiries proved to you, that these holy men introduced into England what you are pleased to call the *Romish faith*, a conclusion might have been drawn from this fact, different from that at which you arrive. The first of these saints was so anxious to make the Gospel of Christ known to the Angles, that he was ready to go forth himself on that mission, had not the citizens of Rome, resolved not to lose so great a treasure, prevented him by violence; the other undertook, and, to a great extent, accomplished the good work; and you must search the pages of a worthless scribe of the 16th century, to represent their zeal as the suggestion of sordid avarice! Your fathers worshipped as gods the work of their hands, and fell down in adoration before Thor and Woden; and yet you have no more appropriate figure to express the labors of those who bro't them to a knowledge of Christ, than that of a 'robber to be ejected as soon as discovered!' And if I am wrong in holding you responsible for the debt of gratitude which the Anglo Saxon race owes to the memory of Gregory, and Augustine, (as your name points to another origin;) may I not ask—What voice announced the Gospel amidst the wilds of Germany, with more force than that of Boniface and Willibrod, themselves 'the seal in the Lord' of the Apostleship of Gregory, and Augustine? Such were not the sentiments of the old English Church. It gladly acknowledged, with Bede, that by the labors of these great saints, the English nation was 'converted from the power of Satan to the true faith,' and from 'a people enslaved to idols, made a church of Christ.'

The proofs of the orthodoxy of the British Church shall be given in my next.

I remain, Rev. Sir, respectfully

Your obedient servant,

CATHOLICUS.