

## THE TRADITIONS AGAINST CATHOLICS.

Two of my instances are despatched, and now I come to my third. There is something so tiresome in passing abruptly from one subject to another, that I need your indulgence, my Brothers, in making this third beginning; yet it has been difficult to avoid it, when my very subject is to show what extensive subject matters and what different classes of the community are acted on by the Protestant Tradition. Now I am proceeding to the legislature of the nation, and will give an instance of its operation in a respectable political party.

The fountain springs up in this case, as it were, under our very feet, and we shall have no difficulty at all in judging of its quality. Its history is as follows:—Coaches, omnibuses, carriages and cars, day after day drive up and down the Hagley Road; passengers lounge to and fro on the footpath; and close alongside of it are discovered one day the nascent foundations and rudiments of a considerable building. On inquiring it is found to be intended for a Catholic, nay, even for a monastic establishment. This leads to a great deal of talk, especially when the bricks begin to appear above the surface. Meantime the unsuspecting architect is taking his measurements, and ascertains that the ground is far from lying level, and then, since there is a prejudice among Catholics in favour of horizontal floors, he comes to the conclusion that the bricks of the basement must rise above the surface level at one end of the building than at the other, in fact that, whether he will or no, there must be some construction of the nature of a cellar or vault at the extremity in question, a circumstance not at all inconvenient, considering it also happens to be the kitchen end of the building. Accordingly, he turns his necessity into a gain, and by the excavation of a few feet of earth, he forms a number of chambers convenient for various purposes, partly beneath, partly above the line of ground. While he is thus intent on his work, gossipers, alarmists are busy at theirs too. They go round the building, they peep into the underground brickwork, and are curious about the drains.\*

They moralise about Popery and its spread; at length they trespass upon the enclosure, they dive into the half-finished shell and they take their fill of seeing what is to be seen, and imagining what is not. Every house is built on an idea, you do not build a mansion like a public office, or a palace like a prison, or a factory like a shooting-box, or a church like a barn. Religious houses, in like manner, have their idea; they have certain indispensable peculiarities of form and internal arrangement. Doubtless, there was much in the very idea of an Oratory perplexing to the Protestant intellect, and inconsistent with Protestant notions of comfort and utility. Why should so large a room be here? why so small a room there? why a passage so long and wide? and why so long a wall without a window? the very size of the house needs explanation. Judgments which have employed themselves on the high subject of a Catholic hierarchy and its need, found no difficulty in dogmatising on bed rooms and closets. There was much to suggest matters of suspicion, and to predispose the trespasser to doubt whether he had yet got to the bottom of the subject. At length one question flashed upon his mind: what can such a house have to do with cellars? cellars and monks, what can be their mutual relation? monks—to what possible use can they put pits, and holes, and outhouses, and sheds? A sensation was created, it brought other visitors, it spread, it became an impression, a belief; the truth lay bare, a tradition was born, a fact was elicited which thenceforth had many witnesses. *Those cellars were*

\* This is not the first time a dwelling of mine has been the object of a mysterious interest. When our cottages at Littlemore were in course of preparation, they were visited on horseback and on foot by many of the most distinguished residents of the University of Oxford. Heads of houses and canons did not scruple to investigate the building within and without, and some of them went so far as to inspect and theorise upon the most retired portions of the premises. Perhaps some thirty years hence, in some "History of my own Times" speculations may be found on the subject, in aid of the Protestant Tradition.

cells. How obvious when once stated and every one who entered the building, everyone who passed by, became I say, in some sort, ocular vouchers for what had often been read of in books, but for many generations had happily been unknown to England, for the incarcerations, the torturings, the starvings, the immurings, the murderings proper to a monastic establishment.

Now I am tempted to stop for a while in order to *improve* (as the evangelical pulpits call it) this most wonderful discovery. I will therefore briefly consider it under the heads of—1. The Accusation; 2. Its Grounds; 3. The Accusers; and 4. The Accused.

First.—The Accusation.—It is this, that the Catholics, building the house in question, were in the habit of committing murder. This was so strictly the charge, that, had the platform selected for making it been other than we know it to have been, I suppose the speaker might have been indicted for libel. His words were these:—"It was not usual for a coroner to hold an *inquest*, unless where a rumour had got abroad that there was a necessity for one; and how was a rumour to come from the underground cells of the convents? Yes, he repeated, underground cells and he would tell them something about such places. At this moment, in the parish of Edgbaston, within the borough of Birmingham, there was a large convent, of some kind or other, being erected, and the whole of the underground was fitted up with cells; and what were those cells for?"

Secondly.—The Grounds of the Accusation.—They are simple, behold them: 1. That the house is built level, 2. And that the plot of earth on which it is built is higher at one end than at the other.

Thirdly.—The Accusers.—This, too, throws light upon the character of Protestant traditions. Not weak and ignorant people only, not people at a distance, but educated men, gentlemen well connected, high in position, men of business, men of character, members of the legislature, men familiar with the locality, men who know the accused by name, such are the men who deliberately, reiteratedly, in spite of being set right, charge certain persons with pitiless, savage practices; with beating and imprisoning, with starving, with murdering their dependants.

Fourthly.—The Accused.—I feel ashamed, my Brothers, of bringing my own matters before you, when far better persons have suffered worse imputations; but bear with me. I then am the accused. A gentleman of blameless character, a county member, with whose near relatives I have been on terms of almost fraternal intimacy for a quarter of a century, who knows me by repute far more familiarly (I suppose) than any one in this room knows me, putting aside my personal friends; he it is who charges me, and others like me, with delighting in blood, with enjoying the shrieks and groans of agony and despair, with presiding at a banquet of dislocated limbs, quivering muscles, and wild countenances. Oh, what a world is this! Could he look into our eyes and say it? Would he have the heart to say it if he recollected of whom he said it? For who are we? Have we lived in a corner? have we come to light suddenly out of the earth? We have been nourished for the greater part of our lives in the great schools and universities of Protestant England; we have been the foster sons of the Edwards and Henries, the Wykehams and Wolseys of whom Englishmen make so much; we have grown up amid hundreds of contemporaries, scattered at present all over the country, in those special ranks of society which are the very walk of a member of the legislature. Our names are better known to the educated classes of the country than those of any others who are not public men. Moreover, if there be men in the whole world who may be said to live *in publico*, it is the members of a College at one of our Universities, living, not in private houses, not in families, but in one or two apartments which are open to all the world, at all hours, with nothing, I may say, their own; with college servants, a common table, nay, their chairs and their bedding, and their cups and saucers, down to their coal scuttle and their carpet brooms, a sort of common property, and the right of their neighbours. Such is that