



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. IV.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 1854.

NO. 27.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE RULE OF FAITH.

(From the Dublin Review.)

(CONTINUED.)

Another test, by which the rule of private judgment may be tried is this. Has Protestantism really acted upon it, or does Protestant theology practically rest on the violation of it? The latter is the truth. The Bible has not been the real arbiter of Protestant theology, urgently as it has been insisted on in defence of favorite positions. It has already been seen how it has disposed of all those texts relating to the Church by which the rule of private judgment is negatived. Yet these texts alone place Protestantism in a dilemma from which there is no extrication. If the Catholic interpretation of them be true, then Protestant theology must be false; if, on the other hand, the larger portion of the Christian world be deceived with respect to those texts, then the Bible cannot be a plain book which he who runs can read. The circumstance that Catholics find in the Bible a rule of faith negativing that of private judgment, does not prevent them from enjoying all faculties, without exception, which Protestants can boast for the elucidation of Scripture;—any more than the possession of eye-sight prevents a man from exercising the sense of touch also, and corroborating, by the evidence of a second sense, what that of a former one has already indicated. Equally strong is the conviction of at least five-sixths of the Christian body, (including both the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern communities,) that on many other subjects also Protestantism runs directly counter to the strongest statements of Scripture—a conviction which, if erroneous, confutes the Protestant rule of faith as decidedly as if not erroneous; since, if vast ecclesiastical bodies, including many of the most learned and holy men who have ever lived, can thus, for long successive centuries, and equally during their union and subsequently to the Western Schism, have mistaken the sense of Holy Scripture, it is almost a contradiction in terms to say that a private individual should be exempt from danger of the like error. If the whole Church of God, in East and West, was allowed to lie for centuries in most grievous errors;—nay, if the whole world was, for 800 years, and more, drowned in idolatry, of all sins the most hateful in God's eyes, was it not equally possible that the Reformers might have been allowed to fall into error respecting a particular doctrine, extemporized suddenly, and in the midst of manifold confusions, when morals were confessedly low, tyranny far spread, and rebellion emergent? Might not the rule of faith have been the erroneous doctrine in question? and must not the superstructure be as insecure as the foundation?

To apply this second test a little more in detail. The primary law of social life is that of marriage. The plainest expressions used by our Lord Himself forbid divorce in every case except one, and marriage with a divorced in all persons in all cases. Divorce, notwithstanding, is allowed for the most trivial causes, and without dispensation, or any special ground, in that country which was the cradle of the Reformation; and in England divorced persons are married again by Clergymen who contend that the text of Scripture is the sole arbiter of faith and morals! Polygamy, on the other hand, is not prohibited by the letter of the sacred text. It was forbidden by the Church as inconsistent with the spirit of Christianity, and injurious to the dignity of that which had been elevated into a sacrament. Yet Protestantism (notwithstanding such exceptions as are to be found in the opinions of Luther, and the conduct of Luther and Cranmer, who indulged their respective sovereigns in polygamy,) absolutely prohibits polygamy. In the latter case it preserves orthodoxy by the violation of its rule of faith; in the former it discards both.

Again, the primary worship of the Christian Church consists in the offering up of the Eucharistic Sacrifice. Such was the belief of the first Christians who continued daily in the "breaking of bread." Such was the belief of the early Church, which referred to the Holy Eucharist the celebrated text in Malachi, concerning that pure oblation which was to be offered in all lands, from the rising of the sun to the setting of the same. St. Paul, referring to the Holy Eucharist, says expressly, "We have an altar which they cannot partake of," &c. Our Lord commanded His Apostles, and with them their successors, to offer this sacrifice, saying, "Do this in remembrance of Me," when He Himself was offering it and instituting it. The reality of the Eucharistic Sacrifice, one with that offered in a bloody manner once for all on Calvary, and, in a bloodless manner, offered at all times in heaven, depends, of course on the reality of Christ's presence in the Holy Eucharist. That presence is asserted in a multitude of texts. "If any man eat of this bread he shall live for ever, and the

bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." (John vi. 51.) "This is my body," &c. words could hardly be plainer. Equally express is St. Paul. "The cup of blessing which we bless is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? the bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" "He that eateth of this bread, and drinketh of this cup unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body." "We are all one bread," &c. Surely these texts are at least as explicit as those in favor of infant baptism. Yet it is notorious that the two great mysteries which they assert are denied by the greater part of Protestants in deference to a preconceived notion of spirituality so negative and superficial in character, that if it were true, it would condemn the doctrine of the Incarnation as carnal. On the other hand, Protestants retain other practices with reference to worship for which no clear and stringent New Testament warrant can be found, such as the observance of festivals, congregational worship considered as a necessary and perpetual ordinance, and, above all, the abandonment of the Sabbath, and the celebration in its place of the first day of the week. That the example of the early Christians, in such matters, was intended to constitute a permanent obligation, is a truth that rests not on the text of Scripture, but on the authority of the Church.

Again, the primary law of the Church, as an organic body, is its Unity. It is one because its Head is one, because the Spirit which guides and rules it is one, and because its faith is one. Being a visible body, its Unity must be as visible as its Apostolicity; and for this a divine provision was made by the supremacy of St. Peter's See. To this supremacy very many texts refer. When Peter was first called his special function was marked by a change in his name analogous to that made in the case of Abraham. "Thou shalt be called Cephas." When the time was fulfilled our Lord addressed him again, and said, after Simon had confessed the Messiahship of Christ, "I say unto thee that thou art Peter, and upon this Rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it; and I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven." So far from the privilege of Peter being identical with that of the other Apostles, because in some instances the Apostolic College, in union with him, possessed the functions which to him only were committed singly, the difference between him and the rest is distinctly expressed. Our Lord tells him that Satan had desired to have them, (in the plural,) that he might sift them as wheat; "but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not; and thou, when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." Again he is asked three times, "lovest thou me more than these?" before to him is committed the rule of the whole flock, "feed my sheep, feed my lambs;" a distinction being here as plainly marked between him and the other Apostles, with reference to his love, as in the previous charge with reference to his faith. Entering on his sacred charge, Peter opens the commission of the Gospel to the Jews. When the Gentiles are to be admitted he is the Apostle to receive them also. Peter takes measures for filling up the Apostolic College, by asserting the necessity of choosing an Apostle in the place of Judas. Peter works the first miracle. Peter capitally condemns Ananias and Sapphira. In the first council, after no small dissension and disputation, Peter speaks, and judgment is given accordingly. Throughout the New Testament, wherever a list of the Apostles is given, the name of Peter stands at the head of the list. How is it that these texts, with most Protestants, mean nothing? Of course they do not amount to scientific demonstration, which has no place in religion; but to any one not prepossessed by a special tradition, are they not far more striking, when taken cumulatively, than the texts adduced to prove either that Episcopacy, or the institute of Presbyters, is of perpetual obligation in the Church?

It would be endless to point out all texts which, though at least in the judgment of the most eminent Fathers, before the division of East and West, and of the enormous majority of Christians at the present day, they are plain enough, have, notwithstanding, been set aside by "Bible Christians." Christ has instituted a sacrament for the remission of sins, viz., Baptism; yet Anabaptists, Quakers, and others, reduce to nothing the meaning of the texts which relate to it!—and in the "united Church of England and Ireland," the question of Baptismal Regeneration is an open one. Christ has instituted a sacramental means for forgiving sins after baptism, viz., Absolution. According He says to the Apostles, and in them to their successors, "whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted." St. James says, "confess your sins one to another;" and we know that the early Christians did confess, first publicly,

and then privately, and were absolved. Yet the greater number of Protestants evade the force of these texts by a mode of interpretation as lax as that which explains away the meaning of the words, "He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved." What then is to be done for those in whom either original sin, or sin after baptism, continues unforgiven?

Again, what can possibly replace the sacrament of Confirmation if thereby the Holy Ghost is indeed conveyed? We read in the Acts, (viii. 5, 17,) that the Apostles, Peter and John, were sent down to Samaria to confirm converts whom Philip, the Deacon, had baptized, but whom he was not qualified to confirm. "They laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost." Yet most of the Protestant bodies reject confirmation. How do they know that congregational worship was intended to be a perpetual ordinance, and that confirmation not so intended? Is not the "laying on of hands" distinctly included by St. Paul among the "principles of the doctrine of Christ," together with "the doctrine of baptism, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment?" (Heb. vi. 2.)

Again, as to Holy Orders, we read that the Holy Ghost said, "separate me Barnabas and Paul for the work whereunto I have called them; and when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed." Afterwards Barnabas and Paul "ordained Elders in every Church." We are told of those who are "appointed by the Holy Ghost as overseers, to feed the flock of God;" and St. Paul, writing to Timothy, says, "I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gifts of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands." Yet multitudes of Protestant sects see no more in these texts than in those that refer to the visibility of the Church, and the unity of the faith, and of the fold. Accordingly they reject ordination. Is it a slight error, and a matter not "fundamental," to reject ordinances that convey the Holy Ghost? If not, then the rule of private judgment must lead men into fatal error. The united Church of England and Ireland retains ordination and confirmation, but rejects the sacrament of Extreme Unction. St. James says, "Is any man sick among you? let him call for the Elders of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord." The Established Church sets this text at naught, and thus deprives the dying Christians of the last aid, whether spiritual only, or spiritual and temporal both, designed for him by the Divine mercy while still in this world. The whole of the Catholic, and also the Eastern Church, is against her; and she can assign no more conclusive reason for believing the rite in question to have been of temporary institution, than the other Protestants can assign for believing the same with respect to ordination or confirmation. She denounces the sects in question instead of the rule which misleads them, and which, in such cases, could not possibly, however momentous the matter at issue, impart certainty. Can any impartial person assert that these texts are plainer, or more numerous than those which relate to the Primacy of St. Peter?

So, with respect to Purgatory, there are at least half a dozen texts which, in the judgment of St. Augustine, bore in the most important way on that doctrine, and searchingly set forth the awfulness even of forgiven sin. Protestant theology passes them by, deriving from them no light, and imparting to them no explanation. On the subject of fasting there are crowds of texts which, to most Protestants, mean nothing. Such are the texts that relate to mortification, celibacy, the intercession of saints, the reverence paid to angels, and their care of us, the reward and merit which God is pleased to attach to good works, thereby "crowning in us His own gifts," the evangelical counsels and the hidden life, the difference between venial and deadly sin, the duty of obedience spiritual and civil, the personality of the devil, evil spirits, sorcery, vows, miracles, and relics, the exclusiveness of the gospel-scheme, the fatal character of heresy and schism, excommunication, certainty of faith as distinguished from opinion, the supernatural character of sanctity, the justice of God, eternal punishment, &c., &c. On all these subjects Scripture is full of texts which Protestantism has long since learned not to observe, or is daily losing sight of. A theology that did justice to them could not escape, in these days, the reproach of being superstitious, fanatical, mystical, dangerous, and cruel.

Let us next try the third test. So far from private judgment having been the Christian's guide in primitive times, it did not then please God to afford him any object upon which it could have been exercised. The last book of the Bible was not written till the end of the first century. The canon of Scripture was not determined, and the authentic books

discriminated from the spurious, till after a second century had passed away. It was therefore impossible that the Bible, as interpreted by the individual's private judgment, should, in those early times, have been the rule of faith. To suppose that the early Christians were what is now called "Bible Christians," is as preposterous as to assert that the Greeks and Romans used artillery in their warfare. The guide of the primitive Christian was the Church, which obeyed the apostolic injunction to Timothy, and kept safe the deposit of faith. Particular Epistles, and whatever other portions of Holy Scripture existed in particular Churches, were frequently read aloud and expounded in them. It is thus that the modern Catholic also is taught, except that the Breviary, Missal, and other books of devotion, contain a far larger portion of Scripture than was accessible to the early Christian.

After the disputes concerning the doubtful books had been settled, and the canon determined, it was as impossible as before to act on the Protestant rule of faith. God's providence had not yet given to man the art of printing; and there are more bibles in one Catholic city at the present day, than existed in a larger province of the old Roman empire. So it continued till the art of printing was discovered. It was thus in the time of the martyrs. It was thus in the time when the great general councils were defining the Christian faith. It was thus when the nations of Europe were successively evangelized. It was thus, not by man's neglect, but by the dispensation of God. Holy Scripture, far from being neglected, was faithfully preserved, assiduously copied, employed for the purposes of instruction, profoundly studied, meditated, commented on by the most learned fathers and schoolmen. Yet, in these heroic ages of faith and love, no one dreamed of the Protestant use of the Bible.

The Greek schism never admitted the rule of private judgment. It was proclaimed at the revolt, called a reformation. Under the pretence of exalting the Bible, the judgment of the individual was exalted as the interpreter of the Bible. Two principles which have nothing in common were thus connected by a verbal equivocation. But even then it was impossible to carry out a maxim which nature as well as providence disowns. It was necessary for every man to have a faith; while not one in a thousand was capable of forming even an opinion for himself. A few men, accordingly, wrote commentaries on Holy Scripture, and drew up so-called confessions of faith; and the many became vehement in defence of the traditions thus originated. Universal education is obviously among the pre-requisites for private judgment really becoming the rule in any religious community which takes the text of Scripture for its guide. It is not till within the last century that any serious thought has been bestowed on the education of the masses; and even yet but little progress has been made in the enterprise. Should it ever be accomplished, the Protestant problem will remain as far as ever from solution. The young (the larger portion of the human race) will present an obstacle as insurmountable as the poor do now. They are not only Christians, but ordinarily the best Christians. They must accordingly possess the Christian faith; but for them to extract it from Holy Scripture by their private judgment, is plainly impossible.

"If the Protestant rule of faith be true, we must know, on Scriptural evidence, what is the true canon of Scripture."

This is a difficulty which few Protestants can bring themselves to meet fairly, or even to look full in the face. Those who say that the Bible, interpreted by the individual mind, aided by the Holy Spirit, is the sole source of our religious knowledge, mean the pure Bible, not a spurious one. If the authorized edition of it contained but a single chapter interpolated by human fraud or error, the whole of our faith might be sophisticated:—how much more then, if it contained whole books not of divine origin! Again, the Bible, not a part of it. Had the Epistle to the Galatians alone been lost, we might have heard but little comparatively of the Lutheran theory of justification. Now St. Paul makes mention of an epistle of his to the Laodiceans, which no longer exists. (Colossians iv. 16.) How can the Protestant determine what doctrine may not have been contained in that epistle? How can he be sure that many other epistles may not be lost also? Had the last chapter of the last book of the New Testament been lost, Protestants would have missed the most specious of the texts which they allege against the veneration of the saints. The articles of the Established Church say, that "in the name of the Holy Scriptures we do understand the canonical books of the Old and New Testament, of whose authority was never any doubt in the Church." Such a test would be fatal to the Pro-