

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

that, "as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many, and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin, unto salvation" (Heb. ix. 27, 28).

N. DIMOCK.



ART. III.—THE POSITION OF ROMAN CATHOLICS IN ENGLAND.

NO survey of English religious life would be complete without a notice of the Roman Catholics in our midst to-day. Few sections of the community have so large an influence and prominence in proportion to their numbers, and yet none have lain under such legal restrictions. They own chapels, schools, institutions, conspicuous often both for site and size. Their dignitaries have in recent times competed for social precedence with our own Archbishops. Politically they are a force to be reckoned with in both parliamentary and municipal contests. In the newspapers their lamp is rarely hid. At the same time, laws stand in the Statute-Book expressly forbidding a Roman Catholic to wear the English crown.

They are at once a curiosity and a problem. It is curious to trace how their story has been a career of the phoenix (a favourite metaphor of their own). It is also a story which cannot but oblige thoughtful readers to ask whether the characteristic trends of policy and activity that brought and kept them under suspicion, but yet did so much to win them their present standing in England, are forces that are to be seriously reckoned with in the future, and whether those old suspicions were just, and are still reasonable.

The history of Roman Catholic nonconformity in England dates undoubtedly from February 25, 1570. This was the day on which Pope Pius V. published the Bull that purported to excommunicate and depose the Queen and to absolve her subjects from their allegiance.

Till this move on the part of the Papacy, English Roman

'the initial step' of the offering, and that we should 'think of the offering as going forward everlastingly.' Such a view militates against the Scriptural view of Christ's death as a completed sin-offering; is connected with a strained interpretation of the New Testament passages concerning the blood of Jesus, as pointing to mystic life rather than to actual death; and needlessly confounds the two distinct thoughts of an offering that has been once for all offered, and of the abiding fruit of the oblation once made" (Bp. Saumarez Smith, in "The Church and her Doctrine," pp. 38, 39).

Catholics had as a rule been content outwardly to conform. Two Roman Catholic witnesses tell us distinctly that Roman Catholics did for some years attend the public worship of the Reformed Church of England. In the historical introduction to the Douay Diaries¹ we are told, "Not a few of the laity tried to persuade themselves that so long as their faith was sound interiorly, they might in good conscience be present at the new worship." More precise still, and not without a more than antiquarian interest to us to-day, are the words of Dr. Nicholas Sander in his work called "Rise and Growth of the Anglican Schism."² He does not hesitate to inform us: "By force or fraud it came to pass that the largest portion of the Catholics yielded by degrees to their enemies, and did not refuse from time to time publicly to enter the schismatical churches, to hear sermons therein, and to receive Communion in those conventicles. At the same time they had Mass said secretly in their own houses by those very priests who in church publicly celebrated the spurious liturgy, and sometimes by others who had not defiled themselves with heresy: yea, and very often in those disastrous times were on one and the same day partakers of the Table of our Lord and of the table of devils—that is, of the Blessed Eucharist and the Calvinistic supper."

The Bull of 1570 changed all this. Fuller³ calls it "the first beginning of Recusancy," and dates from this "the common distinction of Papist and Protestant—the former now separating themselves from our public congregations."

For the next century Roman Catholics who avowed their tenets shared with Jews and Quakers the distinction of being the butt of English penal law. Their priests were proscribed; attendance at Mass was an indictable offence; new restrictions were constantly imposed. For instance, under James I., an enactment (3 James I., c. 5, sec. 13) was made forbidding *convicted* Popish recusants to present to benefices. And even when the profession of being a Romanist was no longer always actually punished, an Oath of Obedience was rigorously administered to all Roman Catholics, pledging each one to loyalty to the Sovereign. "This oath," says Fuller, "was devised to discriminate the pernicious from the peaceable Papists." These deterrent measures largely drove Roman Catholics into secrecy, but they could not crush them out. The priests' hiding-places in many old houses sheltered the

¹ Douay Diaries: Historical Introduction, by Rev. T. F. Kuon, D.D., pp. xviii, xix.

² Sander, "De Schismatico Anglicano." Lewis's translation. London: 1877. Book iv., chap. iv., pp. 266, 267.

³ Fuller, "Church History of Britain," book ix., cent. xvi., § 29.

priest who kept alive the faith of his secret adherents in the district. Others lived in disguise as laymen. To quote again from Fuller: "He who on Sunday was priest or a Jesuit was on Monday a merchant, on Tuesday a soldier, on Wednesday a courtier." The private chapels of the ambassadors of Roman Catholic Powers were centres of the communion in London. From time to time secret missions were sent into England from abroad to advance the cause. About the beginning of the reign of Charles I., Richard Smith, titular Bishop of Chalcedon (in Fuller's words, "taking his honours from Greece, his profits from England"), was commissioned by the Pope to exercise episcopal jurisdiction over the Roman Catholics in England. He appeared in Lancashire in mitre and episcopal vestments with crosier, and conferred orders there; but, a proclamation being issued for his apprehension, he fled into France. The years in which the Roman Catholics had most respite during this century were strangely enough under the Commonwealth. Puritan and Papist might have seemed irreconcilable, but the Roman Catholics had little for which to thank Charles. He spoke himself¹ of his "proclamations for the putting of all laws severely in execution against recusants." They could not fare worse under another régime, so they did next to nothing to help the Royal party, either with men or money; and, to judge at least from the King's reply¹ to the Scotch General Assembly, far more Roman Catholic soldiers were to be found in the Parliamentary army than in the other. As a result they were as a rule unmolested during the Commonwealth.

The century that followed the accession of William III. was, perhaps, the period in which Roman Catholic nonconformity was burdened with the most annoying restrictions, even though the private celebration of this worship had ceased to be proscribed. Public feeling could not forget their disastrous lease of supremacy in the short reign of James II., or the miseries they brought about in France by the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. But the list of penal laws given in Scully's "History of the Penal Laws" is a disgrace to the Statute-Book of England. It is too largely composed of irritating futile restrictions on the ordinary liberty of a citizen. Not merely were Roman Catholics forbidden to carry arms, but their houses were liable to search night or day. Not merely could no Roman Catholic sit in either House of Parliament, but they were excluded from the franchise; they had no rights as jurors, or in parish Vestries; they were even shut out from the medical profession. A

¹ Clarendou, "History of the Rebellion," book vi., § 357.

Roman Catholic could not dispose of his estate by will, or take a longer lease than thirty-one years. He could not either keep a school or procure the education of his children at home. He was not even allowed to own a horse worth more than five pounds. He was forced to bury his dead in Protestant churchyards, and his destitute children were compelled to be brought up as Protestants. There were, however, two memorable Acts of Parliament at the beginning of this period deserving no stigma, and which should be named. They regulate the succession to the crown. By the Bill of Rights (1 William and Mary, sess. 2, c. 2), it was declared "to be inconsistent with the safety and welfare of this Protestant kingdom to be governed by a Popish prince, or by any King or Queen marrying a Papist," and it was enacted "that all and every person or persons that is, are, or shall be reconciled to, or shall hold communion with the See, or Church, of Rome, shall profess the Popish religion, or shall marry a Papist, shall be excluded, and be for ever incapable to inherit, possess, or enjoy the crown and government of this realm and Ireland, and the dominion thereunto belonging or any part of the same," etc. The Act of Settlement (12 and 13 William III., c. 2), by which the Princess Sophia and the heirs of her body, being Protestants, were declared next in succession after the Princess Ann (as she is called) of Denmark, also *debarred Romanists* from inheriting, and provided that "whosoever shall come to the possession of this crown shall join in Communion with the Church of England as by law established."

These regulations for the crown were the natural and rightful corollary from the bitter lessons learnt under James II. The Act of Union in 1706 (6 Anne, c. 11) recapitulated and reconfirmed the previous enactments confining the succession to Protestants.

A new era opened for Roman Catholics with 1829. On April 13 of that year passed the Roman Catholic Emancipation Bill (10 George IV., c. 7). This Bill, which was the climax of several measures of partial redress, relieved them from all vexatious disabilities, though it still made the Roman Catholic faith a bar to the succession to the throne, and to one or two high offices in the State. The first Roman Catholic representative in the House of Commons to take his seat under the new Act was D. O'Connell; and the first Roman Catholic peer to enter the House of Lords was the Duke of Norfolk. It is quite possible to over-estimate the effect of this Act upon the fortunes of Roman Catholic nonconformity in England. The contrast is very startling if we look back from the buildings and valuable properties like Stonyhurst College, and others which they hold to-day, to

the few and scanty tenements—such as those in Warwick Street,¹ South Street, and elsewhere, built amongst stables and to resemble stables, and to which the congregations could only come by stealth. The list of establishments with Church schools and presbytery suggests a growth of their adherents far in excess of the growth of population.

Undoubtedly the removal of the social ban and political disability made an active propaganda more fruitful. But it has been no mere automatic advance that has put them where they are to-day. The Irish famine drove thousands of Irish Roman Catholics away from the farms in Ireland to seek employment in English towns. Their coming swelled the ranks of Roman Catholicism in England—just as had happened at the beginning of the century, when the *émigrés* flocked over from France. This growth of adherents must not be counted as a proof that Roman Catholics are making inroads to that extent amongst Protestants. It is, however, an advance in influence rather than numbers that has marked their history in the last seventy years.

One chief factor in this growth of social and political prestige was undoubtedly the personality of Cardinal Wiseman. Convinced that just as men take a man at an estimate no higher than what he forms of himself, so it is with a cause, he determined to push Roman Catholicism into evidence. “*L’audace, et toujours l’audace*” was the motto he seemed to adopt. Material of a kind he had to start with. Burke in a famous passage in his speech at Bristol previous to the election of 1780, had said of “our Catholic dissenters”: “They consist mostly of our best manufacturers.” That was probably an orator’s phrase. But there was some wealth amongst them; they had also some of the old English nobility, who retained the old faith. Cardinal Wiseman—by methods such as Disraeli has shown us in his sketch of Cardinal Grandison—claimed and secured an *entrée* into English society. This policy has been pursued by his successors, and it has resulted in social respect. Part of the same line of action was the formation of the Papal Sees with English titles in 1851.

Another weapon which Wiseman is also credited with having forged is the intelligent countenance of the press. Undoubtedly no policy has borne such a harvest as that of training Roman Catholics as reporters and leader-writers. There is hardly a journal of any repute that has not one on its staff, and the Roman Catholic hand can often be traced by those who look for it.

¹ Flanagan, “History of the Church in England,” vol. ii., p. 451.

There are also Roman Catholic writers¹ who credit the Oxford Movement with some share in their prosperity—as having brought about a more careful study of the documents on which they base their position, and having thereby leavened public opinion with something of a silent sympathy, as well as at times having led new converts into their fold. We feel that the data are too abstruse and complicated for us to venture to criticise this surmise, affirmatively or negatively.

One question that suggests itself at the close of our survey is to ask why it was that the English Crown has all along treated Roman Catholic nonconformists with such unusual severity. Did they cause more uneasiness than any other class of the community?

Macaulay has pointed out in his history that there were facts in the past history of the Roman Catholic system which promoted a deep-seated dread of its adherents, as a disturbing element in social and political life, as an *imperium in imperio*, all the more formidable because, at need, it could use spiritual sanctions to achieve material ends, and claimed to over-ride at times ordinary moral laws, if it deemed that the end justified the means. Englishmen could not forget that the massacre of St. Bartholomew, the murder of the first William of Orange, the murder of Henry III. of France, the threats of the assassination of Elizabeth, the attempted plot of Watson, the secular priest, against James I., the Gunpowder Plot, were each revivals of the old memories. The horrors of the Inquisition showed what Roman Catholic theology allowed in Papist countries. The calmest English thinkers, such as Archbishop Tillotson and John Locke, contended that the Church which taught men not to keep faith with heretics had no claim to toleration. These arguments from the past were bequeathed to the men of the eighteenth century in England, intensified by the proceedings of James II. in his short reign. "To his policy the English Roman Catholics owed three years of lawless and insolent triumph, and a hundred and forty years of subjection and degradation."²

As we sit in judgment upon our ancestors to-day we are bound to come to the conclusion that this policy of persecution and repression of Roman Catholics was a blunder. It was a natural policy peculiar to the age, and the not unlikely outcome of the flagrant provocations that they had met—but, none the less, it was mistaken. Whilst it professed to attack the system, it only trammelled the individual members, with-

¹ Flanagan, "History of the Church in England," vol. ii., p. 454.

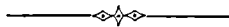
² Macaulay, "History of England," vol. i., pp. 331, 332; ed. 1873.

out in any way thwarting the purpose of the great organized system behind them. It could not stay the hand of those who wished to tamper with the loyalty of faithful citizens; but it did prompt disloyalty in men who in themselves would have been content with the Constitution as they found it, had it only allowed them the free use of their personal rights. It strengthened, rather than weakened, the Roman Communion, because it frightened away all superficial followers, and cemented the true remnant with a spirit of martyrdom for a common cause.

And so we may be glad that more enlightened counsels rule us to-day. England has gained good soldiers, statesmen, and lawyers, by admitting Roman Catholic nonconformists to their rights, and the cause of true religion has not suffered. It is no true cause which shelters its existence under the cowardly repression of an opponent instead of his confutation—*Magna est veritas et prevalebit.*

At the same time, we cannot ignore the characteristics of a system, and we must see to it that whilst the individual Roman Catholic is left free, the system is not allowed any hold by which it may infringe the rightful liberties, religious and civil, of other individuals. To this end we retain the law that makes the Sovereign a Protestant: its indirect is probably greater than its direct effect. We must see that the Queen's writ runs into all conventual buildings that we permit in England. We must prevent any astute attempt to get a footing in the Church of England. These are precautions against a system which is stronger than its members. But when we hear of their prayers for the conversion of England, we shall do well to be incited also to pray for unity—only it must be brought about, not by our acceptance of their tenets, but by their escape from the bondage of their system into the simpler faith of primitive days, from which they have wandered so far—to their loss and our own.

J. C. WRIGHT.



ART. IV.—POETRY IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.

“The poets have a hundred times more good-sense than the philosophers. In seeking for the beautiful, they meet with more truths than the philosophers find in their searching after the true.”

JOUBERT: “*Pensées.*”

“GOOD poetry,” so Boccaccio is made to say in one of Landor's “Imaginary Conversations,” “is like good music: it pleases most people, but the ignorant and inexpert lose half its pleasures, the invidious lose them all. What