

THE CATHOLIC PRESBYTERIAN.

No. XLIX.—JANUARY, 1883.

PRESBYTERIANISM.*

IT is the common thing to test the Church by external signs. An historical chain of Church officers, a correct form of baptism, a pure orthodox creed, are some of the symptoms which prove a true Church, according to the prevailing theory. The Roman Catholic triumphantly points you to our Lord's promise to be with His Church for ever, and to the regular institution of Church officers by His apostles, and thinks he has thus furnished an impregnable argument for the Papacy. The Baptist gives you the etymology of βαπτίζω, and shows you the conformity of his Church to the primitive method and principle of baptism, and feels secure behind this impenetrable rampart of genuineness. On the same plane with these are those who find their Church's claims in the Scriptural character of its formularies, and who thus gauge the army, not by its strength of men and arms, but by the banners it bears. All these tests of a Church are at war with our Saviour's declaration, that the kingdom of God cometh not with observation. That the kingdom of God is the Church of Christ, I will not stop to argue, against the Plymouth Brethren and other cunning contrivers of paradoxical interpretations. This kingdom does not come with observation,—that is, it has not outward signs by which the watcher can tell it. The word παρατήρησις (observation), has its primal and principal meaning in the sphere of external symptoms, and the context of the passage in which our Lord uses it shows conclusively that there it has this signification. The Saviour's other words, "The kingdom of God is within you," spoken at the same time as a converse proposition, rivets the interpretation we give. It is the positive form of the great truth. The kingdom of God is essentially spiritual. It is discernible not by the natural eye or the natural man, but by the spiritual sense as taught by the Spirit of God; it is within the man and not without him; it is a kingdom of hearts and not of faces, and

[* This paper, written for the Presbyterian Historical Society of America, is well worthy of a place in this journal, though it contains points that will not be acquiesced in by all, for the discussion of which, however (within moderate limits), all due encouragement will be given.—EDITOR.]

[CATHOLIC PRESBYTERIAN, JANUARY, 1883.]

its signs are not found in rites but in character. "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost."

We Presbyterians are in the same condemnation with others when we seek to prove the Scriptural character of our Church by our conformity to the Scripture model of Church government, and exhibit the Ephesian elders as the warrant of our genuineness,—nay, more, we are in the same condemnation when we hold up the Westminster Confession as our distinguishing banner, and show its perfect harmony with Scripture. The original form of government and the correct creed may be maintained by a perverted Church. They may form a shell around a worm-eaten kernel. It were better to belong to a Church that has a novel form of government and a defective creed, but which maintains a spiritual life in Christ, than to belong to a Church with an apostolic system and a perfect creed, which has lost the spirit of our Lord. Hence, on looking at our Presbyterian Church, and endeavouring to satisfy ourselves of its Divine authorisation and right, we are to leave all external order and profession out of the account, and turn our attention to the consideration of the spiritual life. We hold that Churches have gone astray and have made moral shipwreck by emphasising the external signs. Even so far has this error led, that in some cases it has set Antichrist on the throne of Christ, as Head of the Church. The Conquering Hero on the white horse has become the fearful rider of the livid horse, and his name is Death. Christ is no longer looked to for His orders, but another occupies His place, and from him, the bold usurper, comes the directing word to the so-called Church of God. This utmost stretch of antagonism to the Saviour and His grace has developed within the Church, and its prompting element was the externalism which treated the Church of God, the heavenly kingdom, as an earthly kingdom, with its offices of emolument and its material wealth. The Church paid no heed to the warning so often repeated by the Lord and His apostles, and became the slave of external regularity and human system. The same danger has beset the Reformed Churches, which were formed in a spiritual revolt from the carnal grossness of a corrupt organisation. Strength was sought, not in the Spirit, but in human government—in ecclesiastical law, in vigorous uniformity. Shibboleth separated Christians, and each party built up a carnal wall to protect the spiritual treasure. The old error had its old result. Cold, dead Churches were multiplied under orthodox flags, and the world looked on and could not see the difference between Zion and any other hill. The Reformed Church had a *name* to live and was dead. The Mediæval Church had tried the human form of an autocracy, and the Reformed Churches tried the human form of oligarchies or republics, but in each case the governmental force was not the Spirit of God. Antichrist was present in making human authority the ultimate arbiter of the Church's life. The true Church in all this time was to be found to human eyes

CATHOLIC PRESBYTERIAN, January, 1883.]

in a fragmentary condition, hidden in corners, where they that feared the Lord spake often one to another.

It is vain to look for a historic Church, that is a Church whose history can be traced by the outward connections of organisation. The kingdom of God did not come with observation, neither has it advanced with observation. Church histories are secular histories, touching the Church here and there, but giving no history at all of the Church of Christ. Mr. Green has followed a true principle when, in writing the History of England, he has turned his shoulder on the kings and followed the conduct of the people in the different ages. Analogously to this, the true Church history will not treat of bishops and popes and councils and edicts, but of the spiritual life of the humble children of God. Church history should be a transcript of the heavenly record, and not a catalogue of earthly ambitions, envies, and deceits. That the Church has an outward form we admit, but this outward form should be wholly subservient to the inward spirit. It should be as plastic as the needs of that spirit require. No cast-iron system of external government was ever given the Church by Christ or His apostles. That there should be a government is clear, and that this government (outside of all miraculous gifts) should be twofold, having pastoral oversight and a didactic function, is also clear. But beyond this the New Testament gives no prescription. The deacons were no part of the Church government, any more than the servants in a household are parts of *its* government. This simple and elastic organisation is all that the Church has derived from its Head. All the rest is human, right or wrong, according as the Holy Spirit has instructed the human mind. We may be quite sure that complicated organisations and hierarchies are utterly subversive of the simplicity of the Gospel of Christ.

It was not strange that, after the so-called Church had for ages been moulded in a human form and fully charged with human principles and forces, it should leave some of its manifold errors clinging to the Reformed bodies that came out of it. They came out like the ancient Israelites from Egypt, a people of God led by the Holy Spirit, but there was a riff-raff, a mixed multitude with false views and practices, adhering to the righteous movement. The notions of princely headship and protection, of Church and State union, of legislative anathema and punitive excommunication, of physical treatment of spiritual error, of formal subscription and external conformity, with many other shreds from the garment of Antichrist, disfigured the enfranchised Churches of the sixteenth century; and many of these ideas, in some modified forms, continue to be held as just in the Protestant Christendom which has succeeded the Reformation movement.

Our own branch of the Reformed Church has borne its full share of these errors, and to that extent has gone back from its vital principle of the great enfranchisement. It is our glory (under God) that the spiritual

force of the Presbyterian Churches has always subordinated these errors to the pure truth of God's Word, and generally counteracted their evil effects. An absorbing desire to save souls has practically left these serious mistakes to be but eddies in the onward current of Gospel truth. Still they existed, and in some sort *do* exist, and the attention of Christian souls should be turned to their entire eradication, lest at any time they should take advantage of any relaxation of piety, and assert themselves as the fundamental principles of the Church. Evils which are apparently small and which seem to be even good expedients, devised by pious souls, may become giant errors, leading astray the whole Church. Gideon, when he erected the ephod in Ophrah, had only the design to turn the people from worshipping him as a king, to worshipping Jehovah as God. The godly man invented a human expedient which promised well, but what was the result? All Israel went a-whoring after the ephod. That which was planned to further the worship of God became a seducer to idolatry. The monkish system, so fraught with every form of vice, arose from a laudable and honest desire to be separate from the follies of the world. Almost every enormity practised in the nominal Churches of Christ started from godly efforts put forth in human channels. There are to-day in our Presbyterian Churches seeds which, if nurtured, will prove to be poisonous plants in the garden of the Lord. Men contrive new methods to catch the public ear, to arouse enthusiasm, and to devise means of evangelisation, and then in their evident piety get the ready endorsement of leaders in the Church, until it becomes an apparent attack upon religion to withstand these new methods. So opposition is silenced, and these novelties bring the truth into contempt, and confirm infidelity on every side. The first week of the year is seized upon as a week for special prayer. The idea comes from a foreign mission station, and from the holiest of Christian workers. It is of course responded to by the zealous brethren everywhere. And so man's holy week is appended to God's fifty-two holy days, and the false thought that there is a special virtue in the coincidence of prayer becomes stereotyped. All history shows us that the creation of human holy time always derogates from the Divine holy time, and the concert notion of prayer introduces an element that impairs the simplicity of faith.

Again, we find the tithe-principle introduced into the Church, as if the Church had gone back to the twilight condition of pre-Christian times, and was coincident with a governmental polity; and under this tithe-principle, a man who ought to give at least one-half his substance to the Lord's great work, shelters himself. Doesn't he give a tenth? Doesn't he conform to the law? This tithe-principle stands directly in the way of the Christian principle that all we have is the Lord's, and that we should strive to give directly to evangelisation and the case of the Lord's poor as much as possible, knowing no limit to our communications of good. In spite of this truth, we find large portions of the Presbyterian Church adopting this tithe system, and advocating

CATHOLIC PRESBYTERIAN, January, 1883.]

it by preaching and printing. It is a human legalism, calculated to make all giving mechanical, and to check the flow of Christian fraternity. The excuse is, "Better a tenth than the much less that is now given." Yes, certainly. But do not let the Church put its seal of approbation on a tenth, and make that the godly fraction. The expedient will be a boomerang, and eventually injure the Church itself, even though at present it may have a temporary success.

Alas for these temporary successes! How they lure Christians to all sorts of unchristian schemes! They are the excuses for Church fairs and Church raffles, and Church puppet-shows. They are the excuses for pulpit buffoonery, for sensational advertising, and for a degrading subserviency to a godless daily press. When will the Church rise to the level of its Divine dignity, and trust its blessed Lord and Head for all that it needs in His own ordained way? When will it cease to approve of any scheme or method which shocks the common mind and secularises religion, and to salve over the inconsistency or enormity by enlarging on the worldly success or the immaculate orthodoxy that issues from it, or is connected with it? Of what avail is success if it kill the Church's purity; and of what avail is orthodoxy of creed if it be proclaimed by a harlequin diverting the populace?

It is a common thing to hear these follies defended by those who ought to know better, with an enumeration of the additions made to the Church by their means! as if the end would justify the means; as if all sorts of slang and vulgarity and irreverence were legitimate in the Church, if only it helped to increase the Church roll! A minister may joke about the awful themes of hell and the judgment, may cause a laugh at his witty allusions to the arch enemy of souls, and may talk with horrid familiarity of the Divine Majesty, and still be held in good and regular standing, because, forsooth, he is converting many. What kind of conversion, pray, must that be which is recognised as such by such unworthy ministers? Is not personal popularity and financial prosperity the real end sought for by all this ecclesiastical tomfoolery?

But, as I have already said, in the Presbyterian Church all the errors enumerated are but as eddies in the general flow of a pure and earnest godliness, and our Church only needs to arouse itself to a sense of the danger of permitting these errors to grow in order to destroy them. What I have said, therefore, has been to emphasise the fact that the externals of a Church are not the true indications of its genuineness.

In looking at the various bodies which profess to be Churches of Christ, we are to look beneath the surface and read a history that is not written in ordinary human annals. We apply the test not to professions, but to the life that lies below, and endeavour to find whether the Spirit of Christ is moving the affections and shaping the actions. Now, I have no hesitation in saying that, so far as I am able to apply this test, I find a most satisfactory result in the character of the Presbyterian Church. Not that it is immaculate, not that but both Geneva and

Scotland have displayed many of the old rags of Antichrist hanging from their garments ; but that, on the whole, and in a wide and righteous generalisation, a Divine Spirit has moved the Presbyterian Church forward in its course. It is here I find the Divine claim of our Zion. It is here I rest my judgment and obtain my satisfaction. It has always been a Church to testify against public sins, in the spirit of the Master who denounced the enormities of the Pharisees. It would not compromise with monarchs and courts, but stood stiffly for Christ's truth and Christ's crown, when all the physical power was in the hands of its enemies. It has its long and brilliant array of martyrs, whose deaths were seals of their faithfulness in withstanding the abounding corruptions of the day. They read history wrong who would resolve the long struggle in Scotland into a political contest. The simple and humble sufferers had but one thought that actuated and upheld them, the love of Christ their Saviour, and they died with His name upon their lips. Scotland has been especially (though by no means exclusively) the martyr-field of the Presbyterian Church, where its purity and spiritual steadfastness have been proved and vindicated. The valleys of Piedmont, the dykes of Holland, the French "desert," and the plains of Bohemia, have borne the same testimony to a Church that was virtually Presbyterian in all its distinctive elements. I would not say that a Presbyterian form of Church government was the cause of this heroic stand for truth, but I do believe that a pure Church will be apt to conform to the simplicity and consistency of the Presbyterian form, as against Prelacy on the one hand, and anarchy on the other. The Presbyterian Church has never been a political Church, in the common meaning of that term. It has meddled with political questions when those questions have been vital to the cause of Christ, and when God had, by His providence, made the Presbyterian Church a power that could not avoid the burden of responsibility for public affairs. But in all such cases there has been no secularising of the Church, no grasping at absolute power, no greed for carnalities. The Presbyterian Church is free from that stain. Of course, individual men have within its pale shown a worldly ambition, and even led the Church's action for a time astray, but these were manifestly exceptional cases, and flagrantly contrary to the well-known mind of the Church.

Taking even the most unfavourable instances of Presbyterianism, we find the spiritual character of the Church dominant, and its errors those of exceptional temptation, and not of vital principle. One of the indications of this character is the intense disgust of the world at the very name "Presbyterian." With the vain world, it means everything that is gloomy, frowning at the world's pleasures, and sternly proclaiming duty to God. This is but the world's interpretation of a faithful walk before God. We see at a glance what it means. It means a holiness of life that will not compromise with sin, either for emolument or for pleasure. It means a life that puts God first and everything else after-

CATHOLIC PRESBYTERIAN, January, 1883.]

ward. Of course this looks gloomy to the thoughtless multitude. The Methodist is almost the only other who shares with the Presbyterian this testimony to his faithfulness to God. There is surely something peculiarly commendatory in this hatred of Satan. A Church that the world likes must be very far from God. Antichrist has two characteristics, the wielding of physical power, and alliance with the world. As the second characteristic is manifested in any Church, its anti-Christian character is recognised by the godless, and they show it their favour, which, if accepted, is fatal. Antichrist grows out of the bosom of the Church. It does not come from without. It is the development of worldliness in the people of God, and hence judgment will begin at the house of God. Presbyterianism has never been accused of worldliness. Its reputation runs altogether the other way. No accusation of Antichrist could ever for a moment be laid at its door. The world believes it to be unworldly, and in its usual way has caricatured this unworldliness into a hatred of innocent and righteous enjoyments. The fashion and pomp of the world never sought the Presbyterian Church for its display, or desired its ecclesiastical endorsement. The loose endorsements of society never found any encouragement in it. The questionable habits and customs of trade never sought refuge in its connivance or absolution. A firm face against sin in all its social forms has ever characterised the Presbyterian Church from the days of Calvin and Knox. That it has had its errors and has made its mistakes we have already acknowledged in full, but these errors and mistakes have never been in the direction of carnal vices, but in the direction of their control and suppression. There has been sometimes a zeal that was unwise, and that would wield the secular arm, or would stretch the limits of authority, but never a going down into the low carnalities of the world.

This mark of the Divine character of the Church is not to be ignored. It is a very decided and conspicuous mark. But besides the determined attitude of the Presbyterian Church in denouncing public sins and in avoiding all connivance at worldly vices, there is a sign of its Divine character which is perhaps more conclusive than even these, inasmuch as it is almost unique. I refer to its Christian breadth. It admits to its communion every one who gives evidence of conversion. He may be Methodist in his Arminian views, Baptist as to the mode of baptism, Congregational in his preferences of Church government, Episcopal in his views of the sacraments. He may have adopted any theory of inspiration or of the future state, yet he is welcomed into the Presbyterian Church if only he gives evidence of a renewed heart and a humble trust in his Divine Saviour for salvation. I say "*Christian breadth.*" There is an *unchristian* breadth in some Churches which is not at all "*unique.*" A man may believe anything and be anything, and yet be a member of them. The Presbyterian Church is unique in demanding evidence of being truly Christ's through penitence and

faith, and yet asking nothing more. The Congregational Churches have long creeds which must be assented to by each member; the Methodist Churches even add a series of pledges regarding the outward actions of life; other Churches demand ecclesiastical mint, anise, and cumin, all of which narrow the fold and keep out some of the Lord's sheep. The Presbyterian Church holds that its ministry should have clear and uniform ideas on all the important truths of revelation. They are the teachers. But it holds that the people who commune at the Lord's Table are pupils, and need not have these qualifications so insisted on for the ministry, nay, that it would be unchristian to demand them of applicants for the communion. The love of Christ is to be the one distinguishing token of membership. It is this fact that renders Presbyterians the most liberal of all Christians in their association with others. They have no separating shibboleth to test other Christians by, and in using which to repel the most. The prelatist applies the touchstone of orders and apostolic grace by actual succession, and if a Christian is not in connection with these external scaffoldings, he is rejected or ignored as among the profane. The Baptist has an equal grasp on the beggarly elements of this world, and applies his test of immersion like a Pagan, rather than a Christian, and sweeps away from all communion the faithful children of God who follow not *him*. The Methodist has built up his *methods*, and loses all practical sympathy with those believers who cannot enjoy them. He does not actually cut them off from fellowship, as do the others, but he manages to make fellowship quite a difficult matter. The Presbyterian Church alone puts up no barrier against acknowledged piety, but welcomes all such to its bosom. Its exclusiveness is only that of the New Testament. It would exclude only those who do not love and serve the Lord Jesus Christ. It permits any difference of creed or conduct that does not militate against the possession of a Christian faith. Where it sees the work of the Holy Spirit, it cannot shut the door.

One of the consequences and signs of this Christian breadth and liberality is a readiness to engage in union movements of evangelisation. It is well known that in America, our Bible societies, tract societies, Sunday-school unions, and union mission societies, derive their principal strength from Presbyterians. From three-fourths to seven-eighths of the pecuniary income of some of these union societies come from Presbyterian sources. Presbyterians love to work with Christians of other names. They love to magnify the oneness of all in Christ. There is less of the mere denominational prejudice among them than among any other body of believers. It is true that there are some small Presbyterian bodies that do not answer to this description. They imitate the exclusiveness of the other denominations and utterly mistake the proportions of truth. But these bodies are very small, and their influence is becoming less and less, while the great, growing Presbyterian people

CATHOLIC PRESBYTERIAN, January, 1883.]

are displaying the Catholic feeling which is so plain a token of their Divine order. So also there are here and there bigoted Presbyterian individuals, who write the word Presbyterian higher than the word Christian, and who would put the orthodoxy of the head above the orthodoxy of the heart. These have no gracious word for any Christian who departs from the Westminster Standards, and you hear their growl every time that such a one approaches the iron bars of their cage. But it is folly to make the Presbyterian Church responsible for these narrow-minded men. They would be narrow anywhere. It is a part of their individual nature to have no sympathy with those who differ from them. They are destitute of that imagination prompted by love, which puts one into another's position and teaches him to think with him, so as to find a sphere in which their differences are dissolved. They are rather porcupines, shaking or throwing their sharp quills at everything outside their own little den. They are the excrescences on the Presbyterian body. Every denomination has such, and we probably have much fewer than any other. No! we may safely challenge investigation on this question of sound Christian catholicity. We might adopt as our descriptive motto the words of Terence (*mutatis mutandis*), "*Christianus sum, et nil Christiani a me alienum puto*" (I am a Christian, and nothing that is Christian do I count foreign to my heart).

A practical exhibition of the elastic character of the Presbyterian Church is given in its Congregational practices on our American frontier, where a transient and changing population make a Congregational colour wise, if not necessary; and in its episcopal practices on foreign mission fields, where an ignorant people have to be educated into the understanding of Christian manhood and government. These modifications are not the results of weakness, but parts of a system which considers that the shell must grow from the kernel, and not the kernel from the shell; and that hence making the spiritual truth the first object adapts the externals of the Church to present necessities, gradually leading the Church to the best and most perfect outward form—that of the preaching and ruling eldership. This elasticity is a twin with the catholicity we have noted, and together show the apostolic rule (in its holy sense) of "all things to all men" in the desire to save souls.

Such, then, is our plea for the Presbyterian Church—that it has been ever forward to rebuke public vice and wrong; that it has separated itself from the sphere of worldly power; that it has been ever hated by the world; that it has demanded an exalted standard of holy living; and that it has exhibited a broad Christian catholicity in a readiness to co-operate with all who yield allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ. These we count as the true signs of an apostolic Church. We look not on external forms or symbols, for they often deceive, but the spiritual characteristics reveal the heart of the Church, and show that it abides in Christ. While these characteristics exist,

(CATHOLIC PRESBYTERIAN, January, 1883.)

we may be sure that the irregularities, mistakes, and defilements that may be found in the Presbyterian Church do not belong to its normal life, but are accidents repulsive to its spirit. They are excrescences which will be sloughed off by the action of its spiritual life. That spiritual life must be allowed to exercise itself. No false conservatism must repress it. Standards and customs must be alike subjected to this spiritual life as guided by the Word of God. As Christ in the heart is the mark of the individual Christian, so Christ in the heart is the mark of a Christian Church ; and out from the Church's heart thus filled must come its outward expression, whether in formula or conduct.

HOWARD CROSBY.

ROMANISM IN IRELAND.

THERE is a general impression that the Church of Rome has begun to lose ground in Ireland as it has lost ground everywhere in the Continent of Europe. A Frenchman travelling in Ireland has declared the power of the Church to be already gone. The Protestant Bishop of Meath says :—“ It is impossible not to see that the Church of Rome, not merely as an aggressive but as a defensive power, is becoming daily weakened by the present land movement.” He thinks that, sooner or later, “ we shall have a new political and social element in our midst, answering in some degree at least to what is known as the anti-clerical and secular party in Continental lands.” A writer in the *Globe*, who is evidently an Irishman, says :—“ No one who has not lived in Ireland for the last twenty years can realise the extent to which the mass of the people has broken away from the control of the priesthood, as well in political matters as in all other relations of life.” He thinks the ascendancy of O'Connell and the aggressiveness of the Young Irelanders —“ who were anything but priests' men ”—prepared the way for the humiliation of the priests ; but he has seen within the last ten years a remarkable development of opinion, not in the direction of Protestantism, but of religious indifferentism, or of a strange sort of Deism, which first appeared in the writings of John Mitchel, who was a Unitarian, and is now more familiar to Irishmen in the impassioned rhetoric of the *Irish World*. It is further mentioned as a significant fact that the clerical agitators, including such men as Dr. M'Glynn of New York, and Dr. Nulty, Bishop of Meath, ignore “ the mysteries and rites of Catholicity ” in their political harangues, and talk in the language common to every class of Christians.

This representation of the attitude of the Irish laity toward their religious guides is said to be justified by the fact that a Protestant, Mr.