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THE GOOD AND THE BAD

IN THE

ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH :

IS THAT CHURCH TO BE DESTROYED OR REFORMED?

A LETTER FROM ROME.

BY REV. HENRY M. FIELD.



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ROME, May, 1848.

I FEEL alternately admiration and disgust for the Roman Catholic Church. And if any man tells me that this is inconsistent, I answer that it is this very inconsistency which is alone consistent with truth. Human institutions are not wholly good or wholly bad. And he who praises or blames without discrimination is sure to be wrong.

Protestants generally will not admit that there is any thing good in the Roman Church. They can never look at the Romish dogmas and worship as a Catholic does, even long enough to judge of them. To do so would almost require a transmigration of souls. I have tried to lay aside this prejudice as far as possible, and to look around with an impartial eye. I see enough of evil in this poor world to make me willing to recognize the least appearances of good.

The Holy Week is just past. This is the season of the year at which the Catholic Church fixes the date of our Lord's death, and puts in requisition all the pomp of its ceremonies to celebrate his last week on earth, from his entry into Jerusalem to his death and resurrection. The idea is a beautiful one, of recalling at a fixed anniversary the closing scenes of our Saviour's life ; and here at least, thought I, I shall witness the spirit of Catholic devotion.

I prepared myself, by reading the explanation by Catholic writers of the ceremonies of Holy Week, and when Palm Sunday came—on which the Pope blesses palm branches, in commemoration of Christ's entry into Jerusalem, when the people strewed palms in the way—I set out for St. Peter's, trying to divest myself of every particle of bigotry, and in a mood to be edified with any thing that had the semblance of devotion.

But what did I see ? The Pope riding to church in a coach with six horses, and followed by a body of cavalry. He was carried into St. Peter's on men's shoulders, and after a while carried out again, and then brought in again, and then carried out again. The Cardinals advanced to the foot of the throne, arrayed in the most costly silks and furs, and knelt to kiss his robe, and receive the palm which he blessed. The whole had the air of a holiday show, and with the music, which kept up a constant blast, produced about the same dramatic effect as a well-acted and well-sung opera. Not a single thing had on my mind a religious impression. The only thing at all impressive was the kneeling of the Swiss Guards on the pavement at a passage in the chant which

described the Saviour expiring ; and even this was done with such a flourish that it made nobody serious. It was from beginning to end *a show*, and so Catholics as well as Protestants seemed to regard it. None of that solemn stillness which reigns in our Protestant places of worship was there. I felt sad to think that this was the homage addressed to God.

The other services of the week produced the same impression as the first. On Thursday the Pope washed the feet of thirteen pilgrims in imitation of Christ at the last supper. Yet this act of apparent humility was somewhat diminished by the dozen assistants who surrounded him. (I know there were so many, for I counted them.) The Pope afterwards waited on these pilgrims at dinner ; that is, he placed on the table the dishes *which the Bishops and other high dignitaries on their knees handed to him !*

On the whole, the impression of Holy Week was very unfavorable. I turned with pain from seeing the adoration of relics, and hearing the Miserere chanted by eunuchs. The experience of the week made me feel more than ever that Romanism was *an empty shell*, a form once perhaps animated by faith, but to-day a withered mummy, from which the soul had long since departed. It is a sublime architecture. It is a mighty tradition. But it is not a Religion. Such, said I, is Romanism at Rome, and all the efforts of Oxford men in England, or of Mr. Brownson in America, to galvanize this dead body, may produce some convulsive twitchings at those extremities, but can never send back life to the heart.

Such was my first impression. Truth now compels me to say that I have attended other services of the Catholic Church less ostentatious, which have had upon me a very different effect. I go often to the Convent of Trinitá dei Monti, to hear the nuns sing their evening hymn, and it would be quite impossible for me to describe the effect upon my feelings. I listen till my heart dissolves. It seems as if some choir of the blessed were chanting a celestial hymn ; as if that tender and plaintive melody, which comes to bear up my soul from gloom, were the distant music of angels.

Ofttimes too, at such an hour, I see the most simple and earnest devotion kneeling on the pavement of the church. I ask no questions, but there is a *look* which tells me that the thoughts of the worshipper are fixed on something beyond this world. A look of sorrow and yet of peace. And often I say to myself, as I see men and women who have evidently led a life of extreme poverty and suffering, kneeling on the church floor, "While we sneer at their worship, these poor beings are ascending to heaven."

The contrast of these different services produces in my mind a confused feeling in regard to the Roman Church. I see evil there, but I see good also. And if I denounce the one, I will not deny or disparage the other.

Besides the fact stares me in the face that this Church has produced innumerable Saints—some of an order of saintliness which has hardly a parallel in the world's history. If she has had a Cesar Borgia, she has had also a Charles Borromeo, a Francis Xavier, a Pascal and Fenelon. I often go to the Church of Jesus in this city to muse at the tomb of



Ignatius Loyola. This simple inscription is written over his body, AD MAJOREM DEI GLORIAM. Was ever epitaph more simple or just? And shall I deny that such a man was a Christian, when his heroic self-denial, his voluntary poverty and labors, put to shame the Protestant world?

Farther observation has led me to modify still further my views of the Roman Catholic Church; to discover in it many things beautiful, of happy influence, and worthy of imitation. To these I am happy to bear a tribute of admiration. Our condemnation as Protestants of what is bad would come with a better grace, and produce more effect, if we showed a readiness to appreciate and acknowledge what is good. There are several pleasing aspects which I wish particularly to notice:

First—The Catholic Church eminently cherishes the feeling of Reverence. Its history, its associations, its very architecture, contribute to this. Its age of itself makes it venerable, and supplies many touching associations which Protestantism wholly wants. It has been the faith of a large part of mankind for eighteen centuries. Millions have staked their eternal salvation upon its truth, and supported the agonies of life and of death upheld by its hope. They have found in its communion comfort, joy and peace. A cloud of witnesses seems to fill the arches of every cathedral, and stretch forward like a shining column into heaven.

Often, as I stand at twilight in some old cathedral, leaning against a column which has stood while centuries have been rushing past it,—just as the last rays of the dying day

gleam through the stained windows, shedding "a dim religious light" on the marble monuments and the kneeling worshippers, and as the vesper hymn is filling the vault above,—

"Dimly on my soul streams the light of ages."

Then more than at any other hour I feel myself united to all the living and the dead—a unit in that mighty host which is hurrying to the unknown, yet inseparable from the rest. I think how many have come up here to drink the waters of life and gone away to die in peace. On this pavement generations have knelt, and looked up to heaven, and now "the sheeted dead" seem still to walk here. An invisible bond unites me to all the human souls that are kneeling at my side. I should feel guilty if I dared to disown my brotherhood to them. I feel that we are one family, one great brotherhood of guilt and misery, and that I can unite in their prayers.

Again—The arrangements of the Catholic Worship seem to me peculiarly fitted to nourish a spirit of devotion. Its churches are open at all hours, and my observation is that I have seldom entered a Catholic church that I did not find some individual—some poor man or woman—absorbed in prayer—and often with a look so eloquent of woe, and yet of that peace which passeth understanding, that I have wished that I might receive the same consolation.

The *hours* of devotion are chosen with a wise discernment of the periods at which man is naturally disposed to reflection and to prayer—to thoughts of a better world. The Church celebrates the rising and the setting of the sun with

her matin and vesper hymns. As the sunset touches with its last rays the mountain tops, the shepherd on the hills and in the valleys hears the evening bells that call him to prayer. How touching is that music of the Convent bell ringing among the mountains! The air seems hushed and holy. Nature unites in the worship of man.

“Blessed be the hour,  
The time, the clime, the spot, where I so oft  
Have felt that moment in its fullest power  
Sink o'er the earth so beautiful and soft,  
While swung the deep bell in the distant tower,  
Or the faint, dying day-hymn stole aloft,  
And not a breath crept through the rosy air,  
And yet the forest leaves seemed stirred with prayer.”

The Catholic Church shows wonderful tact and knowledge of human nature in its use of the Poetry of Religion—architecture, painting, and music. This is a most important part of man's nature, and it is a divine skill that touches these delicate springs of feeling, and leads the mind to God by the gentle methods of Art. I would be careful of making too much of the Poetry of Religion—for I know that mere poetic sensibility, the gratification of an artistic taste, unless blended with deeper emotions, has a slender influence on the life of man. Yet, with those stronger feelings in action, these nicer sensibilities are important to the graceful moulding of the character. And while I am suspicious of a Religion which addresses itself solely to the imagination, I cannot but think a Religion very defective which does not address the sense of beauty at all. The beauty of the Cath-

olic Worship is therefore so far a valid argument in favor of the Catholic Church. It is to its praise that it knows how to subsidize the gratification of taste—the emotion of beauty, to devotional feeling, to the quickening and exaltation of man's religious nature.

Another winning feature of the Catholic Church is *the repose* which its numerous institutions offer to the weary—the broken heart. Protestantism has no cloisters—no places of holy retreat, to which a man broken with the labors of life, or with private grief, or sick of the selfishness of the world, can retire to pass his last days in devotion, and in communion with the wise and good of other days—or in labors of charity and mercy.

To an old man—if without children, or if they are dead—or his lot is hard, or his life unhappy—I can conceive of nothing more grateful than such a retreat as he approaches the evening of life. There the seductions or the treachery of the world cannot reach him. He is secluded from its occupations, and heavy, wearying care. Hours of study alternate with the gentle religious excitement of matins and vespers. His life has been full of sorrow, and now he finds a soothing repose in the monastery which creates a solitude in the heart of a city—the stillness of its paved court broken only by the murmur of a fountain, and its long corridors echoing only to the footfall of some passing solitary who has retired from the world. In the lonely imprisoned cell, the lamp suspended from the ceiling lets fall its light on the bald head of the aged pilgrim bending over the pages of St. Augustine,

“The scrolls that teach him to live and die.”

In former ages monastic institutions had a high literary utility. Never have I seen a monastery afar on the top of a mountain, glowing in the sunset, without recognizing gratefully a luminary of the Middle Ages—one of those stations along which the torch of knowledge was transmitted from summit to summit while the world beneath lay buried in darkness.\* The importance of these institutions to learning is lessened, now that the sun shines down into the valleys as well as on the hill tops. But as places of religious seclusion, I cannot but wish that there were some such retreats in Protestant lands to which a man, who has nothing more on earth to live for, could retire to calm the fever of his mind, and prepare to go to God.

The Catholic Church deserves also great honor for her charitable institutions. She has erected monasteries in lonely and almost inaccessible places; on the top of the Alps and of Mount Sinai; amid perpetual snows and frightful deserts, to extend assistance and relief to lost or helpless travellers. I walked over the Pass of the Simplon with an Episcopal clergyman, and I remember well his animated exclamation, as we first caught sight of the Hospice on the top of the mountain, "There is what the Catholic Church does!" And I confess I could resist any abstract argument better than the Monks of St. Bernard, or the Sisters of Charity.

\* Readers of the *New Englander* may recognize in this paragraph the same remarks on the Monastic life which I have made before in that Review in an article on the Italian Revolutions of 1848.

I believe no church is so faithful to the sick and to orphans as the Church of Rome. In hospitals the Sisters of Charity are the most faithful watchers, performing the most menial services with their own hands; and much as I dislike their vows, I can never see these sisters pass in the streets of our cities without a feeling of pitying admiration.\*

When a city is visited by plague or cholera the Catholic priest has the feeling of a soldier in the hour of danger. If his people ever need him, they need him then. And the priest never deserts his flock, while the Protestant minister often flees with precipitation.

No other church is so faithful to the poor, and to this I ascribe the hold which she has on the Irish peasantry and on the masses wherever her faith prevails. She has accom-

\* It is perhaps not generally known, that within a few years past Protestants both in England and France have established institutions very similar to the orders of Sisters of Charity and Mercy. Such organizations for the care of the sick, and for the education of poor or orphan children, are now in operation in London and Paris.

And what is there absurd in it? Why might there not be an order of Sisters of Charity among Protestants—a society of unmarried females, devoted to teaching or to the care of the sick? At present there is hardly any way in which such a person can make herself useful. She is flippantly styled “an old maid,” and if she attempt to do good out of her family, she is said to be stepping out of her sphere.

The want of such an order has been felt even in America. What is Miss Catharine Beecher’s army of young ladies sent to the West to teach, or Mrs. Farnham’s expedition to California, but a Protestant order of Sisters of Charity,—except that they are not bound by a religious vow not to be married!

plished that greatest task of any religion—to make it penetrate the lower strata of society—to make it sink down into the ocean of popular ideas and affections.

In countries where the Catholic Church is dominant, Religion has at least some hold on all classes. The lowest, the most degraded, have some touch of religious sentiment about them, some veneration for sacred things, some sensibility to holy influences. The Irish peasant, the Sicilian beggar, still keep some fraction of Christian faith even in circumstances fitted to cast down and brutalize human nature. They do not sink to such brutish degradation as the same class in Protestant countries. They are not such *animals* as the low population of London, the haggard wretches of St. Giles. It appears to me that it is the highest triumph of the Catholic religion that it has infused some touch of heavenly love and hope into such stern and savage breasts.

Eternal honor to the Catholic Church for this—that she makes no distinction between the rich and the poor! In that church, as before God, all men are on a level. In the immense multitude that prostrate themselves on the floor of the Cathedral, the rich and the poor, the prince and the laboring man, kneel side by side, and feel that God is the maker of them all. The thought of their Creator and of their immortality that rushes over them at such a moment, makes them equal.

To all conditions of men the Church administers the same sacraments, from baptism in childhood to extreme unction in the hour of dissolution. When the poor man is taken

sick, the priest is at his bedside to administer the consolations of religion ; and over the departing soul of the poorest of her children, the Church pronounces her last benediction, "Go forth, O christian soul ! from this world, in the name of God the father Almighty who created thee ; in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who suffered for thee ; in the name of the Holy Ghost, who sanctified thee—When thy soul shall depart from thy body, let the resplendent multitude of the angels meet thee ; let the triumphant army of the martyrs, clad in their white robes, conduct thee."

Being pervaded by the same sentiment of religion, there is a *sympathy between all classes* where all belong to the same communion, which in our divided Protestant communities does not exist. The tendency of sects is to isolate a man from his neighbor, to make him selfish, clannish and proud.

It is perhaps owing to this difference of religion, that there is much less of aristocratic pride and assumption in Catholic countries. Their religion has at least a softening and beautiful effect upon *manners*. In persons of the highest rank they are softened by a courtesy which the burly Englishman, or the purse-proud American, never knows. I believe there is more *pride*, more insolence in England, than on the whole continent of Europe. I do not suppose that their religion has produced this pride, but it certainly has not prevented it.

Protestantism seems to have no machinery to reach the poorer classes. The most that has been done in England or in this country, has been done by the Methodists. But the



spirit of our churches generally is worldly, self-seeking. They court the rich. The ambition of a Protestant minister even in democratic America—is to be the head of an aristocratic congregation. The churches themselves are a kind of religious aristocracy. In New-York for example, what a rivalry as to which congregation shall be most *exclusive*! The very buildings in which they worship are constructed as if on purpose to shut out the poor. They are arranged just like a theatre, *in boxes*, which are sold to the highest bidder, and all are held at such a price that the poor are almost as a matter of necessity excluded.

I may be wanting in reverence, but to me a *fashionable church* is about as sacred a place as a fashionable theatre. One is as much devoted to the god of this world as the other. Both are fitted up with gay or gaudy decorations. Both resorted to by very fashionable audiences for curiosity or display. The principal feeling excited or gratified is poor pitiful human vanity. In the church, as in the theatre, the audience are entertained for an hour with public speaking, in which there is an occasional religious reflection or sentiment, about as solemn, though by no means as eloquent, as the moralizing of Hamlet. From both places the public, or the poorer part of it, are strictly excluded.

How Christianity is to penetrate the whole mass of society by the agency of such churches surpasses my comprehension. Sad would be the fate of the world, if its moral condition or happiness depended on these fashionable Christians, who are giddy with folly and dissipation half the year, but—religiously abstain from the opera during Lent!

Lastly, I honor the Catholic Church for this—that it has held inflexibly to its high ground, that Christianity is a divine religion ; not merely what Mr. Emerson or Mr. Parker *thinks*, or what any body *supposes* ; but that it is the eternal truth of God ; not a system of philosophy like that of Plato, or a mere classification of natural laws which man has discovered, but a revelation from the invisible world, which the Son of God has come down from heaven to give to mankind. We have been so long trying to explain every thing in the Christian Religion, from a wish to make its truth and evidence palpable to all, that we have insensibly let go the sublimity and grandeur of this mighty faith. We have sought to reduce its mysteries to the level, not only of the highest, but of the most vulgar comprehension ; to classify its stupendous facts under the ordinary course of nature. Some have gone so far as to reduce Christ to be a mere man, his miracles to be merely natural phenomena, and his teachings to be simply the wise sayings of a virtuous philosopher. Christianity is merely the reiteration of those general laws of the mind which we knew before, or might have known, from our own consciousness. When we have reached this point, what place is left for faith, or for any thing that had been before called religion ? What need of temples, and altars, and anthems to bear up the soul on high ? The church becomes merely a hall for public lectures, and human flattery and compliment take the place of the prostration of man before his Maker.

I do not wonder that some minds, when they reach this lowest point of belief, or disbelief, rush back from it into the unquestioning faith of the Church of Rome. A dark, half-

understood faith, mysterious yet sublime, is better than total unbelief, than universal doubt. As they turn away sickened from the miserable transcendental philosophy of the day, which reasons God and all spiritual existences out of the world; which knows no being but man—the faith of Rome presents itself as a refuge. There is an attraction in its mysteries—there is a solemnity in that darkness of the future and the invisible, which the Catholic Church professes to illumine but dimly, as with a few faint stars twinkling in the midnight sky, which casts over the soul a spell as deep and awful as the shadow of eternity.

Better even an excess of veneration and belief than a total abnegation of faith. Better even for the intellect, for the arts, for poetry and eloquence, which can only live in an atmosphere of faith; and infinitely better for the character. Superstition may be a weakness, but it is the error, though of an ignorant, yet of a sincere and truth-loving mind. Skepticism, still farther from the truth, is the error of an understanding but half instructed, yet conceited and flippancy. Better any extreme of credulity than this, the laugh and gibber of a low, licentious, sneering infidelity.

The Catholic Church, I think, deserves the thanks of all Christendom for this—that it has held so firmly that Christianity is a divine religion, the direct revelation of God, and eternal and immutable as its Author. Standing on this foundation, that church asserts the majesty of religion above all the interests of this world, in face of the secularizing influences of a commercial, and the sneers and scoffs of a skeptical age.

And she is not ashamed to bear her cross before the world! I confess I like those popular signs of its faith, crucifixes and oratories by the wayside, which are the landmarks of a Catholic country. I once looked on all such things as superstition; but now they produce on me rather a pleasant impression. I like, as I enter a foreign country, to be greeted with some token that I am entering a Christian land. A Protestant country you may travel through, from one end to the other, without meeting a single symbol of the national faith. You see buildings devoted to religious worship, but whether Christian temples, or Mohammedan mosques, or Hebrew synagogues, no visible sign tells. But over every Catholic church a silent cross proclaims *whose name* they bear. Along the highways stand a thousand shrines like so many fountains, inviting the pilgrim to stop and drink of living waters. I confess I love to see these things; as I travel through strange kingdoms, to behold here and there the blessed symbol of my faith standing in a grove of pines, or on some headland overlooking the deep; and as I see it standing at the head of those swelling mounds, which mark where we all must lie, it gives me a firmer hold of my immortality. It seems to say, "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live."

*Ought we then to desire to see a Church, in which there is so much that is good, wholly destroyed, or only reformed?*

Many Protestants will say at once, "The whole Romish Church must be rooted up; Babylon must be destroyed."

I confess I do not feel so. They seem to think that the overthrow of the Papacy would at once inaugurate the Millennium. But this is a very wild expectation. The more probable result would be to leave the greater part of Europe without any religion. It would be the Millennium of Paine's Age of Reason. Were the question between Romanism and Protestantism, I should certainly prefer the latter as a purer form of Christianity. The most delightful Christian society into which I was introduced in Europe, was in Geneva, in that limited Evangelical circle to which Merle D'Aubigné belongs. I wish I could see such faith and such fruits every where in Europe. But when the alternative is Romanism or No RELIGION, I must pause and consider before I help to tear it down.

I must doubt also very much the expediency of the efforts practised by many zealous persons to convert individual Catholics to the Protestant faith. It is a very delicate matter to tamper with the early religious belief of any mind. The danger is that in rooting up the old faith, you will destroy faith in any religion. You may tear an oak out of the earth, if you use violence enough, but you can never make another oak grow there as vigorous as the first. And in the case of persons who are weak and ignorant, as the Irish servant girls in our families, can any thing be more cruel than to attack them with arguments against their religion? We may set Christianity before them in its simplicity, and let them draw their own conclusions. But any direct attack on their church by argument, or by ridicule, does them no good. It does a positive injury. It unsettles their old religious belief,

but gives them nothing in its place. It would moderate the exultation of our friends at the conversion of Romanists, if they knew that for one Catholic who becomes a Protestant, a dozen become Infidels. I dare not attempt a course of persuasion which may push a fellow being out into the dark night of skepticism. I had rather hope for his salvation in a church, which, with all its errors, still confesses, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, and in His only Son Jesus Christ our Lord."

The whole question turns here, *Is the Roman Church to be regarded as a portion of the Church of Christ?* If so, it is of God, and cannot be destroyed. And why should any Protestant hesitate to allow that it is a true Christian Church? Its doctrines are substantially the same as ours. They are the common faith of the whole Christian world. We have derived our faith from them. I think all the Christian churches of the world owe a debt of gratitude to the Catholic Church for having preserved the body of Christian Truth through so many centuries. To that Church we owe almost all the religious truth that is at present in the world. This is not enough considered by Protestants. I do not deny nor palliate its abuses and corruptions. Yet underneath all this rubbish lies that Catholic Faith which is the most precious deposit which ancient times have transmitted to us. One has but to compare the Roman Missal and Breviary with the Episcopal Prayer Book to see how closely one is copied from the other. The devotional writings of Catholics inculcate the same virtues as ours, a devout life, self-denial, forgiveness, and humility. Let any good man read Thomas à

Kempis' Imitation of Christ, and if his heart refuses fellowship with such men, I must regard his own as but an indifferent Christianity.

I am disposed therefore to look favorably on any signs of life in the Roman Catholic Church, and to hope to see it reanimated by being reformed, rather than to see it totally destroyed. And if God has raised up the enlightened man, who at present fills the Papal chair, to be the means of such reformation, I think the whole Christian world must hail it with joy.

*What then are the things to be reformed?* The doctrines, as I have said, are substantially those held by all Christian communions. And stripped of the traditions which have been added to them, these doctrines will stand always. They inculcate reverence towards God, faith in Christ, and the practice of all piety and virtue. These truths surely need no reformation.

What then does need it?

*First*—The Romish *worship*. This is overloaded with forms to such an extent that the spiritual part of religion is in danger of being smothered. These forms need to be reduced in number and simplified.

I know indeed that some things in the Catholic worship, which appear absurd to us, may be for those who understand and can enter into them, both proper and edifying. Thus to a stranger who strolls for the first time into a Catholic Church, when the priest is celebrating mass, it appears mere mummery. But the Catholic perceives in this a symbolical representation of the agony and death of Christ.

When the priest enters and advances to the altar, that act is intended to represent the entrance of Christ into the garden. When he elevates the host above his head, that represents the lifting up of Christ on the cross. The significance of the whole service lies in the idea of Sacrifice, which it is intended to set forth in a visible form. Those who regard that as the central idea of Christianity may indeed have other and valid objections to the Mass, but they cannot say, after knowing these things, that it is a service without meaning.

Still it appears to me that these forms suit better an ignorant than an enlightened age. The Romish Church has copied in its worship the ceremonies of the Jewish temple. The rich vestments of the priests, the form of a sacrifice retained in the Eucharist, the swinging of incense, and the lamps ever burning on the altar, are the same. Like the old ceremonial economy, it may have had its use in an ignorant age. When the art of Printing was unknown, and not one in a thousand ever read a book, it was perhaps necessary that Religion should speak to the eye by statues and paintings and an imposing ritual. But when mankind are educated to more spiritual conceptions of God and of his worship, it is reversing the order of nature to go back to the outward forms which suited the infancy of the world. These artificial aids are then clogs to devotion. The leading-strings of the child are a lion's net to the man.

It was from this excess of pomp that the services of Holy Week were so repulsive to me. When I enter a quiet place of prayer, and listen to

“ Those strains that sweet in Zion glide,”



my soul takes wings. But the gorgeous pageantry of St. Peter's permitted no such simple feeling. My senses were dazzled and bewildered, but my heart was not touched, while a simple choir of nuns, singing their vesper hymn, brought me back into an atmosphere of devotion, and melted me to tears.

*Again*—The service is at present performed in a dead language. This is a great wrong to the common people. When I hear the priests chanting their service in Latin, running through with the most solemn rites in a language which the poor do not understand, I think of what Paul said, "In the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding"—that is, intelligibly—"that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue."

Besides this, there have been in the course of time appended to the devotions of the Catholics many things which are puerile, and which, being connected with Religion, tend to bring the general cause of Christianity into contempt. Such are its absurd legends of miracles, wrought by the bones of some old saint, its frivolous ceremonies, and its veneration for relics. I had a specimen of this the day after I entered Rome. The whole city was in motion for the performance of a great ceremony. And for what? Why it seems there was a skull, that had long been kept at St. Peter's, which was said to be the head of St. Andrew the Apostle! This skull a few weeks since was stolen. Searches and prayers to God were made for its recovery. It was at last found, and now all Rome was to be turned out to carry back the head in solemn procession to St. Peter's. I went to the

church and saw the whole display. The troops were brought out; cannon were fired from the Castle of St. Angelo; and there was a procession of priests that I was afraid would never end—all the orders of Monks that were ever invented—Franciscans and Dominicans, Benedictines and Capuchins, and barefooted Carmelites; and then the officiating priests of the different churches of Rome. After these came the head of the saint, followed by the Pope on foot, and the Bishops and Cardinals, and numerous state dignitaries. Religious services were continued for three days.\*

Away with such childish follies from a Church which claims to be Divine.

Another thing which needs to be restricted or abolished, is the practice of confession. This seems to me a very dangerous thing. To a pure mind, a sensitive, trembling, fearful spirit, like Pascal's, I can conceive that it would afford the greatest relief to unbosom his feelings to a spiritual guide, and to hear that guide, acting as he believes with a divine authority, say, "The Lord pardon and absolve thee from all thy sins."

But few minds are of this ethereal temper, or of a nature so self-distrustful that they need to be reassured by a priest of the Divine forgiveness.

In the case of others, more selfish or wilful, I fear that this easy absolution is only an indulgence to sin. Many a bad man does wrong with a light heart, thinking that he can get a release from the Divine penalty by whispering into

\* This fact I have mentioned before in correspondence with the New-York Observer.

the ear of the priest. Confession relieves his conscience altogether too easily. And in this way, I fear it has often a positively demoralizing tendency. Besides, it gives an impression, which is utterly opposed both to reason and religion—that *a man* has power of himself to forgive sins. The priest may explain this away, by saying that he only speaks as the minister of God, or pronounces pardon conditionally; still the false impression will remain in ignorant minds. They cannot make nice distinctions. And what a terrible power this gives the priest over the man who has confided to him all the secrets of his life—the secrets perhaps of his family as well as of his own soul. These are things not to be told to any man. There is a Holy of Holies in every man's heart which no stranger has a right to penetrate. They are things secret and sacred—which the heart reserves to itself and to God.

Another great abuse is the forced celibacy of the priesthood, producing, as it does, scandalous profligacy. Of this the priests in Rome itself are melancholy proofs.

In particular, the different orders of monks need to be thoroughly reformed. These orders have grown into an abuse from their great number and negligent morals. Their original design was pure, and the conception beautiful. But institutions with large endowments, which support their members in a life of learned leisure, naturally attract to them many who seek mere exemption from labor. The effect of the Establishment in England is the same as of the monasteries in Italy—to support a swarm of spiritual drones. If there

have been more in Italy than in England, it is because there have been fewer occupations of a different character opened to young men. Where there is little encouragement to enter other professions—the law, or medicine, or the army, or into commercial pursuits, and no opportunity whatever to enter into politics—the church or the monastery seems the only resort for men of high family or education, or of a literary or religious taste. But the number attached to these orders has become so enormous as to be a great burden to the state.

But a few months ago it was said that there were ninety-eight thousand ecclesiastics in Naples alone, including twenty-five thousand monks and twenty-six thousand nuns. This number will be rapidly diminished. Young men will be turned aside to the more exciting pursuits of politics or war; and on the first occasion the property of the convents and monasteries will be seized, to defray the expenses of a great struggle for Italian Independence.

The morals, too, of the monks are often a scandal to the church. So that these orders will soon either have to be abolished altogether, or some new St. Francis must arise to reform their discipline.

And then the great sin of this Church against God and man is its impious assumption to be the sole dispenser of the forgiveness and condemnation of the Almighty; to hold the keys of heaven and hell, and to have the power to open and shut the gates of everlasting happiness on mankind. This is usurping the throne of the Almighty, and establishing a perpetual reign of terror.

These abuses I believe the present Pope sees as clearly as any man living. No doubt he is heart and soul a Catholic. But he sees the character of the age in which he lives, and the necessity of bringing the institutions of church and state into harmony with it. Hence his political reforms, so manly and heroic, with the whole College of Cardinals against him. He has already got rid of the Jesuits. And I hope that his noble character and the providence of God will lead him on till he has effected a complete reformation of the Roman Church.

I anticipate some movement of reform in the Church of Rome, because by that alone can she hold her power. Where are her most eloquent preachers to-day? At Rome? No, at Paris. And why? Because there the awe of Roman authority is gone, and nothing but the exertions of her most eloquent men can keep that church from perishing under contempt. One has but to hear Father Lacordaire at Notre Dame, to be satisfied that the Catholic Church is feeling the influence of the spirit of the age, of its enlarged toleration, and enthusiasm for liberty. Had he preached two centuries ago as he preaches now, he would have been burnt. And if Pius IX. had begun his present bold course in the days of Jesuit ascendancy, he would have been laid to sleep by some course more speedy than that of nature.

Let these men, and the powerful party in Germany, which calls aloud for reform, go on with their work of reconstruction. Let there be, if necessary, another Council of Trent, to revise the whole system of Catholic doctrine and

discipline. Let the Roman Church, really venerable from her antiquity, get rid of the rubbish of superstitions which long centuries of darkness have accumulated upon her—relics, images, and dead men's bones; let her clergy be permitted to marry, and to have sympathies in common with the world which they are trying to benefit; let her really sublime liturgy be read in the language of the people; and her preachers preach like Augustine and Chrysostom; and the world will render this regenerated Church due homage.

Fears are often expressed of the prevalence of Romanism in this country, and advantage is taken of this nervous apprehension to excite a feeling of bitterness against that Church, against its priests especially, and to some extent, against all its members. This is cowardly, and wholly unworthy of men who are as confident that they are right as are our Protestants.

What are they afraid of? What does this fear that Romanism will become the religion of America imply? It implies that the good people of this land may become convinced that it is *the true religion*. But this they will not be without strong proof and a long trial. I ask any sober man, Are you afraid that *you* shall be so convinced? If not, do not doubt that others too have common sense. People talk as though the Catholics were masters of some jugglery by which men could be bewitched out of their religious faith without knowing it. But I do not believe that I am likely to be made a Catholic against my own better judgment, nor that any body else will or can be.

The efforts which the Catholics make to extend their religion in this country, are no more than we should make if we were in their place. They are no more than we actually make to extend Protestantism into other countries. And as we claim the right everywhere to teach and to preach, so let us give them the same privilege. We think it hard, and call it persecution, when our missionaries are assailed with coarse and abusive epithets on entering a new country. Let us regard at least the rules of common politeness, if we do not those of Christian charity, when strangers present themselves on our shores. We need not fear that truth will ever suffer in a fair field. A good cause does not need to be defended in a bad temper, nor by unfair means. Nor does any man who is perfectly sure that he is right need to fortify his position by working himself into a passion, or by calling up his prejudices and religious hatred.

Besides, these exertions of the Catholics are perhaps subserving to some extent the general cause of Christianity. Many of our good people sigh even at the erection of a house of worship for Catholics.—But ought we not rather to rejoice that the poor emigrants who are flocking to our shores can have churches of their own faith, where they will be under some Christian influences? Suppose there were no such churches, what would become of our Irish and German population? They would never show their heads in our churches. They would be left to go astray without any religious restraint whatever. All holy influences withdrawn, they would become brutalized. They

would sink down into low infidelity and sensualism. They would be carousing in grog-shops on the Sabbath instead of kneeling before the altar. Let our Protestant friends consider the alternative.

There appears to have been within the last fifty years a revival of activity in all the communions of the Christian world. It began in the last century with the Wesleyans in England, and extended to other religious bodies in that country and in this.

Those who have scanned closely the Puseyite movement in England know, that however well or ill devised, it originated in the purest desire to raise the standard of Religion in the Church of England. Both Dr. Pusey and Mr. Newman are men, not only of vast learning, but of uncommon sanctity of life.

The Church of Rome has shown of late years an activity in sending missionaries into all parts of the world, such as she has not displayed, since the disciples of Loyola penetrated China and Japan. In one view at least this is a gratifying fact, as it evinces a degree of vitality, of spiritual life and zeal, which few Protestants believed to exist in the Church of Rome.

The question then of the ascendancy of the Catholic or Protestant religion in this country lies here; (and here I am willing to leave it);—*Whoso, in this strife of religions, shall show the most practical, self-denying Christianity, they are the true Church, and God will give the continent to them.* Here is opportunity to prove our superior claim to be con-



sidered Christians, and the true Church, not by abstract arguments, but by good works. The Church of Rome throws a challenge to Protestantism; "Show me thy faith without thy works; and I will show thee my faith by my works."

If then Catholics show greater self-denial than Protestants; if they are content to bear privation and contempt, while we idle in luxury and sloth; if their priests are willing to be poor and despised, and to suffer incredible hardships to carry the Gospel to the tribes of Canada and among the Blackfeet of the Rocky Mountains, while our ministers in city or country, receive large salaries, and recline upon their ease and their reputation; if Protestant ladies are carried away with fashion, while the Sisters of Charity go through our cities searching out the poor, tending the sick in hospitals, and teaching orphan children, we must expect that our countrymen will conclude, that that is the better religion which produces the better fruits. If Protestantism, with the advantage of having the ground pre-occupied, cannot muster force of argument and examples of piety enough to keep possession, I think we ought to rejoice to see it supplanted by a religion that has more vitality. God, I believe, will act in this matter with a righteous impartiality. To those who undergo the most, who suffer most, and labor most, will God give the empire of this land.

There is but one way to render our Protestant Christianity unassailable. And that is, to show by our lives that it is the best of all Religions—that it makes men honest, kind, friends of the poor and the sick, free from guile, envy, deceit,

and all uncharitableness. And I believe that I am doing service to Protestant churches by urging this fact on their attention.

If our good people are fearful and trembling because Catholics are building so many orphan asylums, and schools for poor children, and hospitals, lest the gentleness and devotion of the Sisters of Charity should win the hearts of all the friendless and suffering among us, I know of but one direction which will relieve their anxiety:—GO AND DO LIKEWISE.

I write these pages in the hope to soothe the irritated feelings of at least a few Protestants towards Roman Catholics and their Religion. We complain much of Popish bigotry and intolerance. But is there not quite as much bigotry on our part as on theirs? Suspicion begets suspicion. We distrust them and they distrust us. Would it not be well to lay aside this mutual jealousy, and to treat each other with common courtesy as men, if not as Christians? We might find some good things in them and they in us. I ask no compromise of principles on the part of Catholics or Protestants. But only that, when one sees a good man who is not of his own communion, he should treat him as a good man. If his life be that of an humble and devout Christian, let no difference in forms of worship prevent a christian cordiality towards him.

Religion was meant to be a bond of peace among men. Let us not turn it into an occasion of discord. "The religious sentiment," says Madame De Stael, "unites men inti-

mately with one another, when self-love and fanaticism do not make of it an object of jealousy and of hatred. To pray together—in whatever language, in whatever rite—is the most touching fraternity of hope and of sympathy which men can contract upon this earth.”

Is it not time that Christians should unite to banish bigotry from the world ; that we all should look beyond ourselves, and recognize goodness wherever God has caused it to exist, as the lover of nature discovers beauty under an endless variety of forms ? Shall we not rejoice that there is so much that is good in different communions, and claim kindred with them all ?

Let us not be so hide-bound with prejudice as to refuse to acknowledge goodness out of our own petty sects. I should feel sad indeed if I thought that all the virtue of the world was comprised in the one communion to which I belong. But

“I have wandered over many lands,”

and I have found some goodness, some piety, every where—some devout men and women, who believed in Christ, and were walking in his steps. In the Scottish glen, and on the moor ; in the Alpine gorge, and on those upland pastures where the shepherd feeds his flock, the voice of singing ascends to God. Yonder, down in the deep forest, where a solitary lamp from a cottage window twinkles through the darkness, an old man is at prayer !

“There kneeling down, to Heaven’s eternal King,  
The saint, the father, and the husband prays.”

These are all members of One Church Catholic—of One Invisible, but Universal Communion, “the communion of saints.” They are the scattered sheep of one fold, and under One Shepherd.

The Church of God includes all the good that have lived on earth, and that shall live to the end of time. It is a mighty army, issuing out of the regions of Death, gathering out of every clime, and stretching into heaven. It includes a multitude whom no man can number, both among the living and the dead. And sure I am, that it includes numbers in that great communion to which Fenelon, and Francis de Sales, and St. Vincent de Paul belonged, with so many other saints, in whom human nature appears aggrandized, and whose example sheds a glory, like that of the sunset, over the earth, after they themselves have sunk below the horizon.

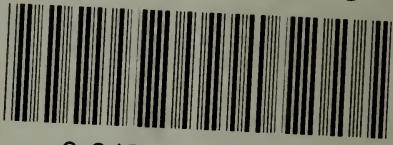
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