

NEWSPAPER THEOLOGY.

It seems to the 'John Bull' a notable thing that Catholic sayings and doings should be so carefully chronicled by all the leading journals. "Who should have thought a few years ago," exclaims our Sunday contemporary, "that lectures on the life of St. Edmund, and parallels between that saint and Archbishops Anselm, Becket, and Stephen Langton would be reported, commented upon, and further debated upon by a Roman Catholic Prelate in the 'Times,' while a pilgrimage at Boulogne is chronicled at length! Truly our lot is cast in strange days!" It does not occur to our semi-clerical contemporary that there are older things in the world—more majestic even in their intellectual aspects—and much more worthy on other accounts, of the attention of thoughtful men, than the incoherent national sect which absorbs his own sympathies. He is very angry with Mr Hunt for saying, in his new volume on 'Religious Thought in England,' that "the doctrine of a visible Church with authority" is "not tenable by those who rejected the authority of the only Church which has anything like a claim to be the one society which Christ Himself established." Yet this is what every educated man, whose mind is not enslaved by attachment to a sect, is saying every day. All Englishmen who are capable of independent thought perceive, and are constantly avowing the conviction, that if God has made a Revelation, the Roman Church is its only witness. Whatever else they may doubt they have no doubt about that. The poor Church of England with its twenty different religions, only excites their laughter. If such a thing, they say, could be proved to be the work of God, Atheism would be a virtue. And it is precisely because Anglicans assure them that what others clearly perceive to be as purely human as a railway company or an association of "Odd Fellows" is part of the Church of Christ, or His Revelation. If the world contained nothing better than the Church of England, we should have no right to reproach them for doing so.

The 'John Bull' is distressed because the 'Times' expends so many words on a discourse of the Archbishop of Westminster, yet its own columns are filled with not less exuberant comments on Catholic pilgrimages and those who take part in them. Is it possible that our sincerely Anglican contemporary is not quite so indifferent to Catholic proceedings as he affects to be? Or does he suspect that in our day a newspaper which should systematically ignore the only subject which still excites universal interest, and awakens love or hate in every breast, would soon cease to have any readers? We do not wish to draw unauthorised conclusions, but if our newspapers give such eager attention to all that Catholics say and do, it is probably not because their readers care nothing about it. The latter know perfectly well in their hearts that the fortunes of Christianity are inseparably connected with those of the Roman Church. The master whom all sectaries unconsciously serve, knows it, too. He inspires them with his own impotent rage against her, but neither he nor they entertain the delusion that they can ever silence her voice, or quench her life. They know she is immortal. They are quite as firmly persuaded that no human sect is. They may go round her walls, shrieking maledictions like men possessed, but they tremble at the authority against which they revolt, and fear the anathema which they pretend to despise. They laugh at sects, even at those to which they themselves belong: but when she passes by, they laugh no longer. They may encourage one another to revile her, and loudly assure one another that they are not afraid of her; but they know she is not as they are, and half believe that, if their eyes were opened, they would see the Great King in her. Men may hate what is Divine, as millions do even in this world, but they cannot despise it. They who will one day hate God now hate His Church; but they comprehend, as the demons do, that she is more than human. And this, we suppose, is why the newspapers talk so much about her.

It cannot be said, however, that they talk to much purpose. It is, no doubt, an immense advantage to hear what journalists have to say about religious questions, which they are so admirably qualified to discuss, and to which they bring such devout gravity and spiritual moderation; but perhaps the advantage would be still greater if they could all contrive to say the same thing, or anything approaching to it. Unfortunately, they are in such hot haste to assail what they cannot understand or imitate, that they fall over one another, and half the blows which they aim at the Church only bruise their own friends. A recent example deserves notice. Two journalists of high repute, and adorned, more or less, with every Christian virtue, rushed the other day with such imprudent velocity at a distinguished Catholic prelate that they encountered each other midway. The shock was so violent that each fell backwards, and in that position they are still gazing at each other in much confusion of mind and body. The prelate passed on unhurt, but this is more than can be said for his assailants. Both the 'Times' and the 'Pall Mall Gazette' thought the sermon of the Archbishop of Westminster on the pilgrimage to Pontigny a good topic for a leading article. His Grace who has a right to speak of St. Edmund and St. Anselm, because he fills their place and shares their faith, observed, among other things, that the mediæval Bishops were at one, as even Mr Wlodo Emerson has noted, champions of liberty and of the Vicar of Christ. The 'Pall Mall Gazette,' one of our highest authorities in all spiritual and ecclesiastical questions, of which it has made a particular study, has a rooted objection to any alliance between liberty and the Pope. "It is somewhat sharp practice on the part of Archbishop Manning," it says, "to take a succession of English Archbishops, all of whom stood up for something or other"—our evening contemporary is deficient in gratitude—"and to make them out to have been chiefly interested in standing up for the See of Rome." It hurts the sensitive mind of the writer in the 'Pall Mall' to be told that such brave and good men, who really did, it must be confessed, "something or other," were above all things loyal to the Pope.

The thing must be contradicted. What is the use of a newspaper if it cannot refute an Archbishop? We who are journalists can do a good deal more than that. But we must do it in our own ingenious way. "Now there is no doubt," we say—i.e. the 'Pall Mall' says—"that all these Archbishops in common with everybody else in their day throughout Western Christendom did in a sense hold fast by the Pope as the Vicar of Christ." We should not gain anything by denying that, because the fact is, unfortunately, too notorious to be questioned. But we flatter ourselves we can take the sting out of it; and, therefore, we add, in the columns of our 'Pall Mall,' from whose ecclesiastical decisions there is no appeal, "but they certainly,"—we say "certainly," because when we speak there is an end of doubt—"did not do so in the same sense in which Archbishop Manning himself does, or even in that in which any modern Roman Catholic does." No doubt all our English ancestors, like everybody "in their day," believed that the Pope was Vicar of Christ, but they also believed that they were quite at liberty to resist him; and this was the enormous superiority of their simple creed over that of Archbishop Manning and modern Roman Catholics, who foolishly imagine, that he is not Vicar of Christ for nothing, and that they are bound to obey him. This is what we say in the 'Pall Mall,' from our private knowledge of ecclesiastical history, and everybody perceives that we have effectually disposed of Archbishop Manning and modern Roman Catholics. And for this reason, we add, with a serene air of victory, that St. Edmund, St. Thomas, and the rest of them, were primarily Englishmen, and can be called Papists, in spite of their ridiculous ideas about the Vicar of Christ, "only secondarily and accidentally."

This, we repeat, is what we say in the 'Pall Mall'; but in the 'Times' we say exactly the contrary. St. Edmund and his fellows may have "stood up for something or other," but it was all spoiled, we say in the 'Times' by their shameful subserviency to the Vicar of Christ. In our opinion, and we are the leading journal, they are they were primarily Papists, and only secondarily and accidentally Englishmen. "What St. Edmund and his contemporaries demanded," we say in the 'Times,' being much better informed than the 'Pall Mall,' "was to use national authority and national funds in the assertion of the supremacy of the Holy See."

If we might presume to offer advice to such eminent Christian authorities as the 'Times' and the 'Pall Mall Gazette,' which we can only do with extreme diffidence, we would suggest that when next they propose to refute the Archbishop of Westminster, which will probably be to-morrow or the day after, they should take these precautions. Let the 'Times' send a friendly embassy to its evening colleague, with some such message as this:—"We are going to pitch into Archbishop Manning, and of course you will do the same, as there is nothing our intelligent readers enjoy so much; but would you mind telling us what line you propose to take, because it would be just as well not to flatly contradict each other for fear we should make those infatuated Romanists laugh." For want of this simple precaution, we may confess privately to one another, we have just got ourselves into a muddle, and instead of correcting the errors of our Papistical brethren it much to be feared we have just produced the opposite effect. If the 'Pall Mall,' which cannot err, tells them the mediæval archbishops are splendid fellows because they were always resisting the Pope; and the 'Times' which can err still less, that they were grovelling Papists, because they were always asserting his supremacy—the effect will be disastrous, and people will think we are not so infallible as we used to be. It is a very small matter that the Catholics should laugh at us, but what if the Protestants should laugh too? Is there not danger that we should be "primarily" absurd, and "secondarily and accidentally" ridiculous?

We do not expect any gratitude from our contemporaries for the suggestion which we have offered, and should not obtain it if we did. With all their merits, to which human speech can hardly do justice, they are, perhaps, slightly deficient in candour and veracity, especially when they talk about Catholics. Not long ago we saw the 'Times' publish, on the authority of an escaped felon, an impudent slander upon the Fathers of the Society of Jesus; and when one of their number, who was perhaps entitled by dignity of character and cultivation of mind to almost as much respect as a half-mad Communist, contradicted in a letter of five lines the calumny of the shameless ruffian, the 'Times' refused to insert his letter. Some people saw in this fact a proof of the profound immorality of the English press. We prefer to adopt a milder judgment. May we not see in it rather a pleasing example of latent and undeveloped *verecundia*? For surely it proves that if the 'Times' is not ashamed to lie, it is very much ashamed of being found out. This may not be the highest degree of virtue, but as St. Leo says, "to be conscious of having done wrong is the first step towards doing right."

The 'Saturday Review,' though it has ceased to praise Döllingerists, has by no means ceased to revile Ultramontanes. It seems that in Sicily they are generally brigands, and misconduct themselves shockingly. That is the opinion of the 'Saturday Review,' and it is expressed with a moderation of language which leaves nothing to be desired. "Ultramontanism is for Italy" the 'Saturday Review' observes with calm sobriety, "a political danger and not merely a preposterous creed"; and it "is doing its utmost to shake off a civilisation it detests, and to restore the beloved reign of every kind of abuse." Considering that two-thirds of all the Christians in the world are now, and always have been, what this lively writer calls Ultramontanes; and that as the pious 'Church Review' laments, "Ultramontanism, in its most unmitigated form, has been, by the proclamation of the dogma of infallibility, simply identified with Roman Catholicism," we are concerned to hear, on the unquestionable authority of the 'Saturday Review,' that Ultramontanes are so desperately flagitious. If it were not for the sweet religious unity, and unexampled piety of Protestant England, we should almost despair of Christianity.