

## SCOTCH DOGMATISM.

(Saturday Review, July 19th.)

It appears to be pretty generally agreed that there is a great break-up going on of the old dogmatic temper once so characteristic of Scotch religion. . . . And at this moment, we believe, the synods of more than one of the three disunited but doctrinally concordant churches which accept the formularies of John Knox are exercised by the open disavowal on the part of influential preachers and professors of the authority of the Longer and Shorter Catechism and Confession of Faith. It has been even rumoured that, in the event of disestablishment, a large section of the ministers of the Kirk would come over to the Episcopal Church and bring their flocks with them, not, indeed, from any abstract preference for episcopacy but in pursuit of a wider freedom than the Presbyterian platform seems likely to afford them. Be that as it may—and we are not engaged here in predicting future possibilities—the change of feeling which has recently taken place, if it is not greatly exaggerated, is a sufficiently remarkable phenomenon, and can hardly imply less than a serious change, whether for better or for worse, of national character. Our readers may probably be familiar with Mr. Buckle's elaborate comparison of Scotch and Spanish bigotry; he even identifies the two countries as the most "priest-ridden" in Europe. The word would, no doubt, require explanation, when so applied, but the meaning is obvious enough. And it may be worth while to show by a brief review of the facts, that there was in the temper of Scotch religionism an element of dogmatism, or bigotry, or intolerance, or whatever we may please to call it, distinguishing it alike from that of England and of most nations of the Continent.

It has been observed by a modern writer that there was one country where the Puritan ministers succeeded in moulding alike the character and the habits of the nation, and that while England was breaking loose from old superstitions and advancing along the paths of knowledge, "Scotland still cowered in helpless subjection before her clergy." And one way in which this clerical influence was kept up was by boasting the belief in a continual succession of miracles, sometimes wrought for the protection or greater honour of the clergy themselves, but, in most cases, miracles of terror. . . . Sir Walter Scott has pointed out, in his letters on *Demonology* that the Calvinists were of all sects the most suspicious of sorcery, and the most eager to punish it as a heinous crime. Hence, in a country where almost every kind of amusement was suppressed or tabooed, and men's thoughts were concentrated with peculiar energy on theological ideas, the dread of witchcraft was all but universal. It was not, as elsewhere, a superstition diluted by imposture. Mr. Buckle has called attention to the remarkable circumstance that, among all the terribly numerous witch trials in Scotland not a single instance of imposture is recorded. These trials were almost entirely conducted by the clergy, but the "secular arm" was placed ungrudgingly at their service for the execution of sentence. On the hideous tortures employed to extract confessions, and the punishments eventually inflicted, it is unnecessary to dwell here. Suffice it to observe how one traveller casually mentions having seen nine women burning together at Leith in 1664, and how, in 1674, nine others were condemned to be burned in a single day. . . . And it is noticeable that, ignorant and superstitious as the people had been in the middle ages, the first law against witchcraft in Scotland was passed in 1563, and it was not till thirty years later that it began to be systematically carried out. The persecution was, therefore, in a very special sense the work of the Presbyterian ministry, or rather of their creed, which, partly from political causes connected with the history of the Scotch Reformation, was shaped more directly on the teaching of the Old than of the New Testament. These executions for witchcraft came to an end about 1730, but not apparently by the good-will of the Presbytery, who passed a resolution fifty years afterwards deploring the prevalent scepticism on the subject.

It must not, of course, be imagined that the dogmatism and intolerance of the Scottish Kirk showed itself only in the matter of witchcraft. There was no less zeal displayed in persecuting Papists when opportunity for it occurred. One of the first results of the final triumph of the Reformation in Scotland was a law prohibiting any priest from celebrating, or worshipper from hearing, Mass, under pain of confiscation of his goods for the first offence, exile for the second, and death for the third. John Knox publicly denounced the exceptional toleration of Queen Mary's private Mass at Holyrood as "more fearful than if ten thousand armed enemies were landed in any part of the realm." At the time of the Commonwealth the Presbyterians did their utmost to thwart the more liberal policy of the Protector, who was willing to tolerate all forms of Christianity with the significant exception of "Popery and Prelacy." They wished those only to be tolerated who accepted the fundamentals of Christianity, and the list of fundamentals was so drawn as to exclude not only Socinians, who were to be punished by death, but Papists, Arminians, Antinomians, Baptists and Quakers, who were to be imprisoned for life. In 1645, the Scotch Parliament solemnly protested against "the toleration of any sects or schisms contrary to our solemn league and covenant." And the Puritans carried with them across the Atlantic to the new world the intolerance they had practised at home. Maryland, in the hands of its Catholic founders, had been—much to their credit—the solitary refuge of oppressed sectaries of every kind; but, when the Puritans gained the upper hand there, they at once subverted the existing rule, and enacted the whole penal code against those who had so generously received them. . . . The vexatious and inquisitorial interference of the Scottish Kirk Sessions with every department not only of public but private life was another very effectual means of sustaining this rigidly dogmatic spirit. Resistance was punished by fines, whipping, branding with red-hot iron, and public penances of the most humiliating kind. . . . It was a sin to visit a friend, to water your garden, to shave, to ride, to walk, or to whistle on the Sabbath. To bathe was a deadly sin on Sunday, and of very questionable lawfulness at any time; a boy had once been miraculously struck dead while indulging in that carnal amusement, and the Glasgow Kirk

Session in 1691 invoked the aid of the civil power to prevent boys from swimming altogether. As Chambers puts it in his *Annals of Scotland*, "to the Puritan Kirk in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries every outward demonstration of natural god spirits was a sort of sin, to be as far as possible suppressed," and thus "the whole sunshine of life was, it were, squeezed out of the community." The standard of a religious nation was the prevalence of universal gloom.

That this scheme of life is the consistent and logical result of the Calvinistic theology is true enough. . . . We may be sure that the Westminster Confession must have been subjected to a "verifying faculty" of divines, and the Longer and Shorter Catechism have lost their hold over the popular mind before the tone of ordinary preaching and practice could undergo any material alteration. What may be the moral or religious results of this change in the long run is a question on which it would be premature as yet to hazard any confident opinion. A narrow or prejudiced creed may often be better than none, and the collapse of a firmly compacted dogmatic system not unfrequently brings with it, at least for the time, a dissolution of all religious belief. Thus, as Macaulay observes, Catholic countries have become infidel and again reverted to Catholicism, but do not become Protestant. On the other hand, it must be remembered that the profession, however sincere, of a rigidly ascetic code of obligation has by no means always proved a sure guarantee for even an average observance of morality. Nature will have her revenges, and when the most ordinary and harmless recreations are forbidden as sinful, is apt to seek compensation in indulgences which no moralist would be willing to condone. The charges brought against Novatians in the early ages of the Church have been brought with equal plausibility against Puritans in our own day. One vice at all events which Christians of every school, as well as non-Christian moralists, are agreed in condemning, is reputed to be a special opprobrium of Scotland, and the strictest observance of all those minute and oppressive Sabbatarian regulations to which we have referred just now has been found compatible with consecrating the day of rest to a quiet but unlimited assimilation of the liquid which inebriates but does not cheer. And, under the old *régime*, to be drunk in private, though of course not sanctioned as allowable, would have been accounted a far less heinous outrage on the dignity of the "honourable Sabbath" than to whistle in the public street. On its theological side Calvinism has in some countries shown a tendency to develop into Socinianism, which the early Calvinists never hesitated to treat as a capital crime, and it will be curious to watch whether a relaxation of the old orthodox strictness in Scotland tends in the same direction. . . . For the last three centuries the national religion of Scotland has shown a stern and vigorous tenacity of life which has no parallel, so far as we are aware, in any of the Reformed Churches elsewhere. It has now, for the first time since the Reformation, entered on a state of transition of which as yet we only see the beginning, but which cannot fail, whatever may be its ultimate term, to have an important bearing not only on ecclesiastical matters but on the habits and character of the people.

## A PREGNANT MOTTO.

ACCORDING to the royal custom holding for centuries among his predecessors, the medallion commemorative of the Pontificate of Leo XIII has been struck; the work was finished in June last. On the obverse is the likeness of the Holy Father, majestic and calm, and the year, 1879. On the reverse stands the Church, figured as a matron, the tiara on the head, the cross in the right hand, and the tables of the law in the left. On the exergue are the words:—*The nation and the kingdom that will not serve Thee shall perish.*

There is no denying, that these words, taken from Isaiah lx. 12, are a repetition, but with more force, of those we have just noticed in the encyclical of 1878. Every one who has studied history with profit will declare that the words of Isaiah have been closely verified. The rejection of the authority of Christ's Church is followed by social disorders: it tends to anarchy and barbarism.

Isaiah's words are thus explained by St. Jerome:—"The nations and their rulers, who refuse the excellent and useful service of the Church, by which they are made partakers of the Apostolic dignity shall fall into that perdition which is prepared for the wicked, and whatever they have shall become desolate, since they would not have God for their guest."

The illustrious Commentator of more modern times, Cornelius a Lapide, records a long series of kingdoms of old that assailed the Church and are no more; that of the Arians, the Goths, the Vandals, the Nestorians, the Eutychians, the Iconoclasts, the Monothelites, and of other heretics, powers that have now disappeared. Referring to the Turkish empire, which was then all powerful, Cornelius a Lapide remarks that it too would be broken up unless it submitted to the Church. What would he have said in reference to the Kingdom of Italy that is now established in Rome, to war against the Church and the Pope? We know what he would have said, and also we know what has actually been said, only a few weeks ago, by an Italian Statesman of a great name, by Joachim Napoleon Pepoli.

On the 19th June, the Marquis Pepoli commenting, in the Italian Senate, on the prophetic words of Isaiah engraved on the medallion of Leo XIII., declared "his country to be sick, needing a radical cure, if they would avoid a catastrophe." He showed that "misery in Italy is as a wave that is daily increasing." He reminded them that every year thousands upon thousands of Italians flee from their homes, through sheer inability of finding a livelihood. He read to them the telegram despatched on the 27th April last from Genoa by 700 Venetian working-men to Garibaldi: "We are on our way to rejoin our fellow-countrymen in the vast regions of Brazil, being driven from our native land by the sad consequences of the administrations that misgovern Italy." And he added, "there are more deaths in Italy than in other countries," and "it is a very sad fact, that while mortality is decreasing in other countries, it is increasing in Italy by three per cent."

Pope Leo XIII. has already appealed twice to Italy, to repent and return to the service of Christ's Church and His Vicar. Will time be granted to the people for a third warning?—*Bombay Catholic Examiner.*