

'Soup Christians'

During the long agony of the famine years a little handful of the starving Irish peasantry—mere anatomies of death—

'Sowld their sowls
For penny rowls,
For soup and hairy bacon.'

But they 'came back to God' when 'the hunger was over.' In Melbourne, the Rev. Mr. Edgar also alleges that, some years ago, during a period of depression and distress, he found his way to an occasional hungry little 'Romanist's' soul through its stomach. 'Soup,' said he, 'is a grand preparation for an after Gospel service.' For many years the 'soupers' have been at work in Rome. They have had enormous funds at their disposal. Various enticing temporal inducements have been offered to little Beppo and Nino and 'Gnesina and Marietta to barter their ancient faith for a present mess of pottage. But in Rome, as in Ireland and Spain and every Catholic country, the curse of barrenness has fallen upon the labors of the 'souper,' and upon every effort made to win big and little 'Papishes' to any of the hundreds of shifting creeds that arose during and since the great religious revolution of the sixteenth century.

Churches have been built to further the propaganda of the Reformed creeds in Rome. Some of these edifices have changed hands or been closed. And all of them recall in a way what Sydney Smith said of the empty churches of the State creed of his day in Ireland. 'Though,' said he, 'I have the sincerest admiration of the Protestant faith, I have no admiration of Protestant hassocks on which there are no knees, nor of seats on which there is no superincumbent Protestant pressure, nor of whole acres of tenantless Protestant pews, in which no human being of the five hundred sects of Christians is ever seen. I have no passion for sacred emptiness or pious vacuity.' The 'sacred emptiness' and the 'pious vacuity' of the Reformed churches in Rome are never likely to be thronged by the bended knees and the 'superincumbent pressure' of Protestants of Italian race and tongue. Some months ago, in reply to a 'missionary tale' copied into a New Zealand paper, we gave the meagre dimensions of the Protestant population of the Eternal City as disclosed by the census of 1901. Here are the figures for the latest census, as given by the Rome correspondent of the Philadelphia 'Catholic Standard' (February 10):—

According to the census of 1905, the number of Protestants living in Rome was 5,993, or 1.1 per cent of the population. Thirty-four years ago, when the Protestant propaganda was commenced in earnest, they numbered 1,200. But since that day the population of Rome has increased by one hundred per cent.—it has exactly doubled itself. . . . However, we do not believe, despite the census of 1905, that there is 1.1 per cent. of Protestants in Rome. Many of the 5,993 returned belonged to the 45,000 foreigners who happened to be then in Rome waiting to witness some of the big functions in St. Peter's; for Protestants are as vigorous and persevering as Catholics in the rush for entrance tickets to the Cathedral of Christendom on such occasions. No strict idea can then be formed of the strength of Protestants living in Rome. Their "church" is made up chiefly of Germans, Americans, and English, who spend a couple of months in Rome, and then, like birds of passage, fly from weather unsuitable to their tastes.'

The same writer estimates the number of 'soup' converts at 'something about a couple of hundred.' This would indeed be a scanty harvest after all those years of effort and expense among a population impoverished by abnormal taxation. Each 'convert' is (he adds) computed to have cost from £6000 to £8000. The Latins and the Western Celts have at least one blessed privilege left: and that is a capacity for smiling expansively at those new apostles whose first and best arguments for their peculiar brand of Christianity are bribes of 'penny rowls' and 'soup and hairy

bacon'—and such-like temporal advantages. What Sydney Smith terms 'lucrative apostasy' was not the plan of conversion followed by Christ's Apostolate long ago.

The French Tyranny

There was at least one Emperor of Russia whose ear was not attuned to flattery. Madame de Stael committed one of her deadly sins against good statesmanship when she said to him: 'Sire, your character is a constitution for your country, and your conscience its guarantee.' The monarch's reply was a model of wit and wisdom. 'Even if that were so,' said he, 'I should never be anything but a happy accident.' All of which, being interpreted, signifieth that high character in a ruler, however desirable it may be, can never make up for the lack of just laws and sound institutions. But when rulers are devoid of character, when the law is made an instrument of tyranny, and when representative institutions are prostituted to the private ends of the enemies of all religion, then indeed a country has reached the abomination of political desolation.

Such is the case in lodge-ridden France. In that ill-starred land 'the Executive,' as an English contemporary points out, 'has powers of mischief unequalled elsewhere.' It was not by law, but by administrative decree, that Mr. Combes destroyed the teaching Orders and sent tens of thousands of persons into exile. Again: it was not by law, but by a decree of the Executive that the order (afterwards withdrawn under pressure) was issued to desecrate the Tabernacles all over France. This was an unnecessary and wholly unprovoked aggravation of wholesale spoliation by a sacrilegious profanation that is revolting to the Catholic mind and heart. 'Just what a non-religious State,' says the 'Boston Pilot' in an article reproduced elsewhere in our columns, 'wants of the vessels and vestments of our churches is not explained.' The Radical and Freemason press acknowledge with frank brutality (as we have shown by quotations from time to time) that the object of the legislative crusade against the schools and churches and religious Orders, and the confiscation of ecclesiastical property, is the utter destruction of religion in France. Ministers dare not make so open an avowal. They must discover pretexts more or less plausible for the infliction of such wholesale proscription, exile, and spoliation as finds a parallel only in the Great Pillage of Henry VIII. It is the homage which tyranny pays perforce to liberty, and the spirit of the sixteenth century to that of the twentieth. 'There's no such thing as hypocrisy in the wurruld,' says 'Mr. Dooley.' 'They can't be. If ye'd turn on th' gas in th' darkest heart ye'd find it had a good reason for th' worst things it done—a good varchous reason, like needin' th' money, or punishin' th' wicked, or tachtin' people a lesson to be more careful, or protectin' th' liberties iv mankind, or needin' the money.' Roper, the famous forger and coiner, long covered his exploits with a seraphic air of piety and bonhomie. And the historic murderer, Hooker, was arrested with a butterfly net in his hand, and gazing with a beatified air at the latest specimen of moth that had fallen into his hands. Republican France in particular seems to enjoy an evil pre-eminence for the crimes committed by her rulers in the name of liberty, ever since the days of Madame Roland.

The invasion of the people's sanctuaries—with a view to their final complete plunder and spoliation, down to the last packet of pins—has naturally aroused fierce and widespread opposition. But (as Sydney Smith has remarked) 'all rebellions and disaffections are general and terrible in proportion as one party has suffered, and the other inflicted.' We have more

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