

Current Topics

'Reorganising' Lord Aberdeen

The Empire is once more in danger, the Throne is rocking, the Bible is in a bad way. So much, in substance, we learn from an alarm raised in the shape of a resolution by the Grand Orange Lodge in Dublin. The cause of the coming cataclysm is a visit which Lord Aberdeen (Lord Lieutenant of Ireland) and Lady Aberdeen had the unspeakable audacity to pay recently to the Man of Sin—the 'Pope o' Room'. The gifted couple are being treated to some of the chunks of old red sandstone which the saffron brethren have been heaving off and on at the King and Queen. But the viceregal pair know their minds. They know their Ireland, too—how (among other things) a large landslide from the Orange ranks has crossed the valley to the side of the men who love their country; they see the shadow of impending events; and they are not likely to sit up o' nights worrying over busybody resolutions passed by the ultra-Tory leaders of the Yellow Agony. Lord and Lady Aberdeen are very popular in Ireland. And since the days of Lord Fitzwilliam, no viceroy in the Western Isle has come so near to the ideal expressed in Chesterfield's words: 'I would rather be called the Irish Lord Lieutenant than go down to posterity as the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland'. Therein lies the head and front of Lord Aberdeen's offending.—In all probability he will be the Home Rule Vicerey. If the brethren want to dish and carve him, they had better let the contract to somebody else.

'A Fanatical Crank'

A woman's strength is greatest when robed in gentleness; a man's, when clad in Christian courtesy. Strength and dignity are lost by a man when he swears, by a woman when she nags. In such circumstances it is well to give either a good deal of leeway. This is, no doubt, the reason why the Catholic ecclesiastical authorities in Melbourne decline to touch the clergyman of a small conventicle who has for some time past achieved a very unenviable notoriety for the utter recklessness, the coarse vehemence, and the venomous iteration of his attacks on the Good Shepherd nuns.

'That man is sure to lose
Who fouls his hands with dirty foes;
For where no honor's to be gained,
'Tis thrown away in being maintained.'

Like the prince's clown in 'Much Ado About Nothing,' he is a dull fellow, with a gift for spreading impossible slanders. The third of his attempts—all unsuccessful—to remove girls from the care of the nuns was met with an official minute by Sir Alexander Peacock to the effect that 'a very complete report' had been made on the case; that the parson's 'statements are not correct'; and that 'the child will remain at Abbotsford Convent, where she was placed at the request of her father on his deathbed.' In his report the official investigator 'sized up' the reverend 'Pasha of many tales' thus:—

'The writer of the attached letter is a fanatical crank who is constantly bringing himself under public notice by his wanton attacks on the Abbotsford Convent, and getting people like young S. to sign them.'

If a Catholic priest made such unjustifiable attacks upon a Protestant charitable institution at this 'fanatical crank' has been making on curs, he (the Catholic) would very soon find himself under ecclesiastical censure.

'Nothing New, Nothing True'

We have just risen from the perusal of a speech by a much-advertised exponent of the 'new theology'—a

clergyman who, professing to be a minister of the Gospel of Christ, serenely denies or questions sundry dogmatic facts upon which Christianity is based. As Byron said in another connection,

'His speech is a fine sample, on the whole,
Of rhetoric which the learn'd call rigmárole.'

It is a combination of very diluted biblical lore, damaged logic, fuzzy and foggy indefiniteness—a rehash of old heresies, containing (as one critic has pithily put it) 'nothing new and nothing true.' The surprise is (as we said last week)—that the preacher's Reformed brethren should express any astonishment at the 'new theologian's' vagaries. The explanation of their 'indigent cirprise' lies evidently in the fact that (as Brownson says) 'few men ever reason out their own systems.' The Reformed creeds disclaim any authority to teach. They (officially) refer the individual inquirer to the Bible. 'Take it', they say, 'study it; understand it as best you can; interpret it as may seem well to your critical knowledge or ignorance; draw up your own creed and moral code from it. That is your affair; it is your right—the right of private judgment.' And then, if, in the exercise of this supposed 'right,' he happens not to understand or interpret the Scriptures according to their standards, they excommunicate him! But on their own principles, are not the Rev. Mr. Campbell's denials as 'orthodox' as their affirmations? Why (on their principles) is it wrong for Mr. Campbell to differ from them, and right for them to differ from Mr. Campbell?

Summa: It is not Christianity that is placed before the bar by the old 'new theology'—it is the principle of private judgment, as opposed to the principle of authority, in religion. More than three centuries ago it was pointed out that the tyranny of private opinion in religion involved perpetual self-contradiction and led to creedal anarchy. It has given the world more than three hundred years of doctrinal stammering in all the tongues of Babel. But there is this difference: that the Reformed principle has never given us even the decent semblance of an ordered or symmetrical doctrinal structure—a creedal tower of Babel—as a memorial of the confusion of tongues; for it pulled down with one hand what it built up with the other. Creedal confusion and anarchy began with the birth of the Reformation. The 'new theology' is simply the old Reformed theology driven in to the Unitarian notch. Driven home to the head, it spells pure rationalism—of the sort that has played such havoc with belief in dogmatic Christianity among many of the Protestant clergy in the German Fatherland. Those who recoil from unbelief and rationalism dare not push the Reformed principle of private judgment to its consistent and logical issue. In fact, not one Reformed denomination frankly accepts this principle as a working proposition. They whittle down the 'right' of private judgment by all manner of creeds and standards and confessions of faith, assent to which they require under pain of excommunication. On their own principle, this is a tyranny and an usurpation. But this self-contradiction, this speaking with a double tongue, is a necessity of their position. It is the enforced (though wholly inconsistent) partial recognition of the principle of Church authority, against which the Reformers rebelled during the religious revolution of the sixteenth century. This curious effort to mingle oil and water, to reconcile Yes and No, to overlay the supremacy of private opinion with authority, enabled the new creeds, however, to maintain some semblance of religion. Those who follow the lead of the private judgment to its terminus, land in pure rationalism. Those who (like Brownson, Newman, Manning, and so many others) follow the lead of the principle of authority that is quietly smuggled into the Reformed creeds, are brought by an invincible logic into the bosom of Catholic