

in the lines which he puts into the mouth of the English Sancho Panza:

Oaths are but words, and words but wind,
Too feeble implements to bind,
And hold with deeds proportion so,
As shadows to a substance do.

The declaration quoted above dates from the year 1688—a time when, as Father Bridgett points out in his valuable little book on the Coronation Oath, 'the question was not merely of securing a Protestant heir to the throne, but of total suppression of Catholic worship. Some fanatics would have it suppressed because they judged it idolatrous; some politicians called it idolatrous because they wished it to be suppressed.' The outline of this Declaration against Transubstantiation was first framed by the Puritans during the great rebellion which ended in the shortening of the stature of Charles I. by a head. In 1673 it appeared tricked out in a new dress in the Test Act, which was designed to keep Catholics out of every office, both civil and military—it did not exclude atheists and infidels. Five years later, in 1678, it was made more virulent and comprehensive, and was imposed on all members of Parliament. In this aggravated form it was extended to wearers of the crown by the Bill of Rights in 1688.

Queen Anne was the first British Sovereign who uttered the shameful words of the Declaration quoted above. They have been repeated by every wearer of the English crown since her day. On the passing of the Catholic Emancipation Act, this and the similar oath of the Test Act were abolished for Members of Parliament and for all civil and military functionaries except the Lords Chancellor of England and Ireland, and the Chancellors of the Universities of Oxford, Cambridge, and Dublin. An Act of Parliament passed in 1867 relieved these of the need of subscribing to the offensive Declaration that was invented by the Parliaments of Charles II. and William of Orange. The supreme ruler of all the realm is now alone compelled to officially fling evil epithets at a large and peaceable body of his subjects.

The oath has been the subject of a dropping fire of protest from both Catholics and Protestants ever since the time of first serious movements for equal religious rights in the British dominions. During the agitation for Catholic Emancipation, in refusing to take the 'old oath' at the Bar of the House of Commons, O'Connell said: 'In this oath I see one assertion as to a matter of fact, which I know to be untrue. I see a second assertion as to a matter of opinion, which I believe to be untrue. I therefore refuse to take this oath.' The oath was taken by the late Queen Victoria—then a maiden of eighteen summers—at the opening of her first Parliament on November 20, 1837, and again at her coronation on June 28, 1838. In connection with the 'cruel and indecorous' infliction of this oath upon a young girl of eighteen, the great historian Dr. Lingard addressed a letter of dignified remonstrance to the Lord Chancellor. It contained the following words: 'It will not be denied that before a man may safely and consistently affix the stigma of superstition and idolatry on any Church it is incumbent on him to make the doctrine and worship of that Church the subjects of his study; to be satisfied in his own mind that he understands them correctly, and not merely as they have been misrepresented by their adversaries; and to weigh with impartiality the texts and arguments by which they may be assailed and defended. But who can expect all this from a young woman of eighteen?' And who, we might add, could expect it from a man of forty-five, the course of whose studies has, in all probability, never yet led him into the vexed fields of theological controversy?

On the same occasion the distinguished naturalist Charles Waterton described the oath as 'abominable.' 'It is,' said he, in a published letter, 'a satire on the times; it is a disgrace to the British nation; it ought to be destroyed by the hand of the common hangman.' In 1867 Sir Colman O'Loughlan referred to it in the British House of Commons as a 'relic of barbarism.' And in the House of Lords in the same year Lord Kimberley, who had been Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, spoke of it in the following uncompromising terms: 'He had himself [he said] been

called upon to make that declaration before the Irish Privy Council, in the presence of a large number of persons of the Roman Catholic faith; and he must say that he had never in his life made a declaration with more pain than when he was required before men holding high office, and for whom he had the greatest respect, to declare the tenets of their religion to be superstitious and idolatrous.'

The bigots, like the poor, we shall, no doubt, have always with us. It is therefore possible that there may be a few of those afflicted with the 'no-Popery' mania who are prepared to defend even the barbarous anachronism of the Accession Oath. If such there be, we are persuaded that they will be very few, and that they will be both in numbers and intelligence utterly insignificant. The trend of feeling is now all the other way about. Slowly, but surely, the grinding disabilities of Catholics in England have been removed. And sooner or later this odious Declaration is doomed to go the way of all the rest. We do not mind how strongly the King is permitted or required to affirm his Protestantism, but that can be done without stigmatising other religions; and the royal declaration can never be regarded as satisfactory until every vestige of denunciation or condemnation of Catholic doctrines and practices is expunged. The time is ripe for the desired change. A new reign is opening out upon us; and for the King's Catholic subjects his reign could not be more happily ushered in than by the news that this 'relic of barbarism,' this inglorious monument to Puritan bigotry and injustice, had been once and for ever swept away.

Notes

An Appropriate Prayer

At an important Synod held in Paris just prior to the recent French elections, the Archbishop reminded his hearers that in a few weeks they would have a powerful weapon in their possession. 'Whoever you may be,' he said, 'I remind you that your duty is to ascertain that the man for whom you vote will respect the faith of your children, the rights of your families, and liberty of teaching,' and he quoted, with singular felicity and appropriateness, the prayer of the Belgian Catholics: 'From schools without God and from teachers without faith, deliver us, O Lord!'

The 'Scotsman' and the Conference

The 'Reformed Churches of the World' are to have a 'World Missionary Conference' next month in Edinburgh, at which no end of missionary societies are to be represented. Instead of being impressed at the prospect, the *Scotsman*—staidest and most representative of Scottish papers—bluntly raises the question whether the kind of Christianity which will be represented at the gathering is really worth exporting. In an article in which it moralises at some length on the subject of the conference the paper observes that 'the question may occur whether, from one point of view, the Christianity seen and known among us is worth exporting to heathen lands. That Christianity which has so often filled the land with bitterness and strife, which erects churches to perpetuate ancient feuds, which sets three and four men to do the work of one hindering each other all the time, which built rival colleges in India, and which is unable to veil its differences before the Hindoo, is that really worth sending beyond the seas? Were a Hindoo to visit a Highland village and inspect its five Protestant churches, each with a skeleton congregation, and ask, What meaneth this waste of human effort? what answer could the Christianity of this country give to that Hindoo? Would not the poor heathen be pardoned if he said that a religion which tolerated such abuses and waste could be no religion for him?' According to many competent and impartial witnesses, the 'poor heathen,' both in India and in China, is thinking and saying that very thing.

An Anglican View of the King's Oath

Prior to the coronation of the late King the terms of the impious oath required of the Sovereign engaged the attention, from time to time, of various Protestant bodies,

J. TAIT, Monumental Sculptor
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Just over Bridge and opposite Drill Shed. Manufacturers and Importers of Every Description Headstones, Cross Monuments, etc., in Granite, Marble, and other stones.