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Anti-cath. REFUTATION
literature

BX
1760

OF

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AGAINST THE

CATHOLIC CHURCH.

BY

REV. JAMES C. BYRNE.

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THE CATHOLIC TRUTH SOCIETY.

American Series of Publications, No. 1.

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REFUTATION OF SOME CALUMNIES AGAINST THE CATHOLIC CHURCH.

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Envy yields tribute to worth and to worth alone. The indifferent talker is patiently endured, the orator is criticized; ordinary workmanship satisfies, but flaws are detected in the masterpiece. To be the object of the slings of envy is the condition of all that is noble and exalted of its kind, from the humble work of human handicraft to the infinite perfections of God, from the teaching of the prophets, who were stoned, to the wisdom of Christ, who was crucified. It is not to be wondered at, then, that the compact and impregnable organization, the miraculous and indomitable vitality, the logical system of doctrine, the corresponding faith and practice, and the ever increasing resistless ranks of the Catholic Church have ever been the objects of the envy, the calumny and the unfair criticism of fallen man. Every age has laid at the feet of the Catholic Church the tribute of its hatred. Turning back the pages of her eventful history we behold, strewn along her path, the crumbling redoubts and dismantled strongholds of her enemies. “Here the Dolopian soldiers, there the fierce Achilles pitched his tent.” Deserted now, and cold, are the hearths where once the flame of enmity fiercely burned, but the same spirit has moved onward contesting every step of the Church’s progress. To deny the existence of this spirit is to deny the excellence of the Church.

But even were we so simple and confiding as to beguile ourselves that this spirit of enmity does not exist,

we should be very harshly undeceived on all occasions when the Church has reached a new outpost in her undeniable onward march. It is then that the antagonism of the sects breaks forth with all the bitterness of one who finds himself allied to a losing cause. It is not a surprise, therefore, that recent events—the Baltimore Centennial, the convocation of a Catholic Congress, the consecration of four new bishops in this Province—through which the world around us was made in spite of itself to feel the strong and healthy throbbings of life in the Church so often denied, were the occasion of an unusual outburst of hostility. While the press was most fair and commendable, what writhings in, what abuse issued from, sectarian pulpits! It is not, however, to honor calumniators (far be it from us to notice unmanly adversaries!) but to meet the sentiments of the Catholic public too often outraged by the publication of the vilest vituperation, that we deem it proper to make some calumnies against the Catholic Church the subject of our brief remarks.

On the eve of a political struggle there is nothing which either party so much fears as a plausible campaign lie, well directed, the falsity of which it will take time to make apparent. The reason is evident. Excitement is at a high pitch, the soul is strung to its utmost tension, all power, both aggressive and defensive, is exhausted, and the multitude is prone to be led more by frenzy than by the cool and calculating act of reason. Hence, such falsehoods, which at other times would be insignificant, are, in this rush of feeling, like the rock in the path of the torrent, capable of producing the greatest results.

Now, the Catholic Church is ever in the midst of a great campaign—made a spectacle worthy of the admiration of men and angels. Every moment her members realize that they have followed Christ's injunction to renounce all they possess in order to become his disciples. They have allowed their reason to be taken captive by faith, and they have curbed their will and mortified their inclinations to meet faith's requirements. But flesh and blood will assert themselves, and the battle against the spirit will cease only with death. A new calumny, therefore, adding ignominy to their

every sacrifice, is almost more than human nature can bear. But just as the combat with flesh and blood never ceases, so also there is the incessant assault from the world outside. Every sectarian if he wish to justify his name of Protestant, feels called upon to use every means to bring about the destruction or paralyze the action of the Church. The incessant combat ever thickens, and calumnies, as falsehoods in a political campaign, spread like wildfire among non-Catholics, and false impressions thus made crystalize into the most deep-rooted prejudice. It will not be amiss to take a brief glance in particular at a few of these falsehoods, which, only through the most unjustifiable frenzy, could have passed current for genuine truth.

Fifty years ago there was not a more common or catching heading on all non-Catholic pamphlets, sermons and religious journals than the celebrated motto: "If ever the liberties of the United States be destroyed it will be by Romish priests.—Words of Lafayette." Lafayette had promised his Catholic wife on her death-bed that he would give more attention to religion. He had received the last rites of his Church, and he had been laid to rest in a Catholic cemetery, with Catholic hymn and prayer, two years before the scandalous words ascribed to him had risen to the surface of religious bigotry. But, being a revolutionist by profession, on the one hand, this saying ascribed to him was just possible, and being most dear to the American people on account of his gallant deeds, on the other, there was enormous weight attached to the mere possibility of such an utterance. The improbability of the saying had to be proved, the testimony of lying witnesses had to be dissected and confuted, the character of the great general had to be discussed, and all his speeches and writings diligently scanned. And, while this work took up the time of churchmen, the motto went bravely on doing its deadly work of destruction. Yet when all the evidence was in, it was convincingly shown that just the contrary were the sentiments of our country's defender. He had argued in the French chamber in opposition to the bill for the expulsion of the Irish trappists, that if the Jesuits of Georgetown were not dangerous to the United States, much less would these

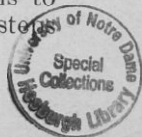
refugees from Ireland be dangerous to France. Thus the lie was nailed by documentary evidence, but the prejudice it had engendered remained.

Hence, taking another step forward, we meet with a like calumny which has had a most peculiar history. Forty years ago there appeared in the *Shepherd of the Valley*, a paper published by a Catholic layman in St. Louis, the following words: "If Catholics ever attain, which they surely will, the immense numerical majority in the United States, religious liberty, as at present understood, will be at an end — so say our enemies." The words "so say our enemies" indicate that this was an objection which the Catholic editor undertook to confute and did confute in the same article. Yet strange to say, these words, garbled and mutilated, were quoted by the Protestant press as a positive declaration of principles on the part, not of an individual and irresponsible layman, but of the Catholic Church. The calumny spread here and was refuted. It crossed the Atlantic and Pacific, reappearing in Ireland and Australia, and was refuted again. These words were attributed to Archbishop Kenrick, and again the charge was set aside. Finally, judge our surprise when, in the year 1888, in a book entitled "Christianity in the United States," this calumny is put down as a "recent utterance" of the Archbishop of Philadelphia. But this was evidently overdoing it, and the summary call on the author to produce the evidence or retract has obtained from him a full retraction of this statement. And thus another lie was put in its coffin, and there is documentary evidence of its natural death.

Again, what more common attack against the Jesuit Fathers, and by inference against the Catholic Church, than that they teach that "The end justifies the means" in the sense that a good intention can sanctify actions which are intrinsically bad? Every child can understand that there is the closest relation between the means and the end to be attained by them. If the end is natural, natural likewise are the means; if the end is supernatural, supernatural must be the means to attain it. A walk, a drive, a talk, things indifferent in themselves, may be made good or bad according to the

end in view. It is evident that an act of heroic charity may be destroyed by a bad intention. Hence in particular cases it is true that the end does determine the morality of an act, and, in the writings of the Jesuit Fathers, such doctrine, with well defined limitations, may be found, but nowhere the general maxim that "The end justifies the means." On the contrary, all Jesuit moralists have taken care to teach that the end does not justify the means, and that, no matter how good the intention, it cannot make good what is intrinsically bad. In the year 1852, in Frankfort, a Jesuit Father read a declaration, that, if any witness could produce a Jesuit author who had uttered the maxim "The end justifies the means," either literally or in equivalent terms, he would pay him a thousand florins. Ten years elapsed and only one applicant appeared, and the Protestant University of Heidelberg, to which was left the decision, would not allow that his garbled extracts from Jesuit authors proved this claim. A few years ago the former pastor of this church offered a thousand dollars to any one who could produce, from a Catholic author, the equivalent saying, "Evil can be done that good may come." But he offered it in vain; there was no applicant. Yet with all this the Protestant Bishop of New York had the effrontery, in the year 1888, to produce some mutilated texts and claim the money on a similar challenge. He added, however, naively, that he did not expect to get it. Who will ever remove from the minds of Protestants this silly prejudice? It has been embalmed in the Encyclopedia Britannica by another Protestant clergyman, and there it will remain forever—a monument of bad faith.

But, alas! There is a more dreadful calumny still, which, to the shame and disgrace of all manhood, from time to time reappears in our press. It often happens, as you know by experience, and from a thorough familiarity with the facts, that in Catholic families, now here, now there, there is a daughter who, by her innocence, sweetness and strength of character, is the joy and reliance of her home. Where she enters the sunlight falls, and whatever she does is done well. When into this angelic heart God whispers the summons to leave all for his sake, surely he will guide her steps



and be her guardian. Of such are the inmates of our convents and cloisters. And their work? It is charity to the aged, charity to the fallen, charity to the unlettered, the sick and the dying. Surely if there is goodness on earth there is its home, and if all other Catholics must be reputed bad, these inoffensive females will get the credit of good deeds. Would that, for the honor of the human race, we could say this were the case. But, alas! We find that those whom the greatest villain will reverence in the street, are outrageously wronged in these days from Christian pulpits. And not only they, but we find always that the serpent who hisses against the Sister of Charity casts his venom against the Mother of God. But, just as of old, Mary crushed the serpent's head, so also now, whoever, with her, have a common adversary, are by this fact alone sufficiently protected. But from this calumny let us learn this lesson, that there is no hope of shielding the Church in other countries and other times from calumny, since we cannot shield her in our own; there is no hope of protecting the innocent, who are unknown to us, from abuse, when we cannot save our own acquaintances, friends and relatives from the vilest slander.

A few general observations will not be out of place in regard to this subject.

Our enemies visit so-called Catholic countries and come back with no knowledge of the home, but they do show a very suspicious acquaintance with the slums. It is no pleasure to Catholics to learn of the dark immoralities of London, of Stockholm, or of Berlin, but what fiendish delight these ministers take in rooting in the mud of Italy, of Mexico, or of South America. We have never gathered up, with ghoulish glee, the frailties of ministers, however frequent they may be chronicled. This news is really more painful to us than to a good many infidel preachers. Yet many a minister has traveled the country and made a fortune by outrageously exaggerating the human side of the Church. Can such conduct be Christian? And statistics? What can they prove? With us heresy is a great sin; with outsiders it is a glory. Denial of the prerogatives of Christ, of Mary, of the Church, is, with

us, an unheard of crime; with them it is the climax of a flight of oratory. Divorce with us is attempted sacrilege; with them it is the end of a bad bargain. Statistics, therefore, ignore both the greatest virtues and the greatest crimes in the calendar; but the crimes are not ours—the virtues are. Notably, workhouse statistics are often worthless. A poor man takes a glass too much and is sent to prison. A rich man, for the same offense, is taken home in a carriage. Only the poor of all religions drift into the workhouse, and the religion which has the most poor must naturally deplore the largest proportion there. The Catholic Church, therefore, which has a mission to the poor, the weak and the outcast, which has no exclusive membership, is not to be judged by the faults of those over whom she weeps, but by the exalted fruits of charity, of chastity, of patience, of evangelical counsels put in practice which are, in her, everywhere manifest, and in her alone. Thus is a tree judged by its fruit—not by that which falls to the ground and is cankered and dwarfed, but by that which remains cleaving to the tree, and therefrom imbibing vitality and worth. As for American freedom, our adversaries may rest assured that the Church which first raised aloft the standard of religious liberty on this soil will be the last to strike down these colors. Everything around us brings home this conviction. The Catholic Church belongs to no party. She enters into no deal to divide the spoils of the school system and university. Her priests nowhere are superintendents of state schools, reformatories or asylums. Over one-half of the soldiers in the United States Army are Catholics, and yet in the width and breadth of this land there are only two Catholic chaplains. There is no church in this land that has carried respect for the religious convictions of others to such an extreme as the Catholic Church. If, however, the dynamiter and the socialist say that it is impossible to be good Catholics and American citizens, according to their idea, we cheerfully—nay, triumphantly, admit the charge.

Yet, with all this, the Church cannot expect to make her teaching more limpidly clear than did her divine founder. She will never appear more clearly of divine origin than he appeared; and, therefore, in a wicked

world she will always find enemies as he did. We know that the devil and the flesh militate against us; let us be persuaded that the world will not be our friend. That hoarse cry of the world, breathing fury and hatred, "Crucify Him, Crucify Him," is as audible to-day as it was in the *prætorium* of Pilate. The world is against the Church, and the true spirit of the Church is against the world. It is not, therefore, her great glory that kings have professed her faith, although she numbers some of them among her saints; but it is her glory that she has given strength to the weak virgin to withstand the cruelty of tyrants. It is not her glory that the rich encircle her sanctuary; she rather leaves to them the unsolved problem how they can enjoy the good things of this life and the glorious things of the next; but it is her glory that she can console the poor, alleviate the pain of the suffering, bring joy to the earnest seeker after truth, and assuage the sorrow of the heartbroken. Hence, a voluptuous people will not accept her, because she crucifies the flesh. A money-making people will hold aloof from her because she teaches no love of riches, and because she is humble, a proud people will persecute or despise her. From out her fold, therefore, will always go those who have not her spirit. "They went out from us," says St. John, "because they were not of us." Into her fold will come those noble souls who appreciate the gem of truth, and receive the grace to barter all they possess to obtain it. Then, indeed, it is for us to beware lest a worldly spirit overcome us and we despise the humility of the cross. Oh, may we ever have in horror that spirit which would have been ashamed of the Divine Master had it found him in the poverty of Bethlehem, the seclusion of Nazareth, or the humiliation of calvary. Christ yesterday, to-day and forever. We must love him amid hisses as well as hosannahs; in Gethsemane and on Tabor; with his crown of thorns as well as with his crown of glory.

