

Why I Left The Church Of England

By James Britten, K.C.S.G. [Knight Commander of Saint Gregory.]
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[James Britten was one of the best known Catholic laymen in Great Britain, and for many years had rendered invaluable service to the Church of his adoption. He was also an expert botanist, and an authority on Old English dialects and folklore.

[Born at Chelsea on May 3, 1846, he was educated privately and intended to become a doctor. At the age of 21 he was received into the Catholic Church, and two years later, having been offered a post in the Kew Herbarium, he gave up his medical studies. In 1871 he was transferred to the Botanical Department of the British Museum and produced a volume of illustrations of the Australian plants collected by Banks and Solander in Captain Cook's original 1770 expedition. He edited Turner's "Names of Herbs"; he started a catalogue of the Sloane Herbarium and, with R. Holland, he compiled a dictionary of English and Irish botanists. For eight years he edited Nature Notes, and was editor of the Journal of Botany from 1880 till his death in 1924. Britten was made a fellow of the Linnean Society in 1870 and was an original member of the Folklore, English Dialect, Bibliographical, and Catholic Record Societies. Besides actively helping in the work of these societies he published "Old Country and Farming Words," and an edition of Aubrey's "Remaines of Gentilisme."

[Among his most notable achievements was the revival of the Catholic Truth Society of London in 1884. He was to be its honorary secretary and vice-president until his death, as well as contributing many works for publication. What follows is one of his most famous pamphlets. We are proud to reproduce it here. Please note that the Church of England (often called the Anglican Church) is more commonly known in this country as the Episcopalian Church.]

WHY I LEFT THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

[A Lecture delivered in March, 1893, in St. George's School, Southwark, in answer to one given by a Mr. Fitzgerald, of the Protestant Alliance. The date of the lecture must be borne in mind by the readers of the pamphlet, which, save for anything between square brackets [], is reprinted without alteration.]

I WISH to begin this lecture with an apology. No one can be better aware than I am that, except to one person — myself — the reasons which impel me to any course of action are of the very slightest importance — or rather, of no importance at all. This lecture is, like others of our course, the sequence of one delivered lately in this neighborhood in connection with the Protestant Alliance: the title is an adaptation of that adopted on the former occasion; and the fact that up and down the country, various people, including more or less escaped nuns and others, are telling audiences — sometimes large ones — why they "left the Church of Rome," seems to show that the experiences of what used to be called 'verts ['converts'] are still attractive.

The reasons which people allege for leaving one communion and joining another are very serious, and sometimes very curious. Mr. Fitzgerald, for example, said he became a Protestant because of

the ignorance of the Catholic clergy and the worship of images. Well, as to ignorance, those who heard Mr. Fitzgerald will agree with me in thinking that he is hardly a competent judge; and as to the worship of images — supposing for one moment, what every Catholic will resent as an impossibility, that Catholics fell into so gross a sin — I would remark that the Jewish people more than once did the same, without thereby ceasing to be the people of God. Another Protestant lecturer was so shocked by the definition of Papal Infallibility in 1870, that she — at once left the Church? Oh dear no! remained in it for eighteen years, and then withdrew. A Nonconformist friend of mine told me the other day that his sister had joined the Church of England. "You see," he said, "she is a wise woman. She told me she found that if her daughters were to mix in the best society, they must be Church [of England] people, so she and her husband joined the Establishment." Another friend, who had been a Baptist all his life, suddenly joined the Established Church [that is the Church of England]. "The fact of it was," he said to me, "they were always quarrelling at the [Baptist] chapel, so one day I said I'd had enough of it, and I took the girls off to [the Anglican] church — and now I've had them confirmed there, and we like it." I do not think these were good reasons for changing one's belief; my object, however, is not to criticize other people's reasons, but to give you my own, and this I will proceed to do without further delay.

One thing only I will add — an assurance that I am most anxious to avoid anything which can in any way hurt the feelings of those who differ from me. I have no reason, indeed, for speaking harshly or disrespectfully of the Church of England. To one section of it I owe my training in many Catholic doctrines, while to another section I am indebted for having opened my eyes to the fact that these doctrines were not the doctrines of the Church of England. You will hear from me no attacks upon the character of the Anglican clergy, not only because I believe them to be an excellent body of men, but because, even if they were not so, their personal shortcomings would no more invalidate their teachings than the character of Balaam invalidated the truth of his prophetic utterances. It would, I think, be well if some Protestant lecturers would bear this in mind, just as they might remember that a Church which could claim the allegiance of a Newman and a Manning is hardly likely to be as corrupt or as ignorant as they would have their hearers suppose.

From my earliest days, I was brought up at St. Barnabas', Pimlico, — one of the churches most intimately associated with the growth of High Church views in London. It was opened in 1850, and among those who preached on the occasion was the late Cardinal (then Archdeacon) Manning. In 1851 the Protestant feeling of a certain section of the community was roused. The riots which from time to time have disgraced the Protestant party — which, nevertheless, claims toleration as one of its virtues — and which culminated some years later in the scandalous scenes at St. George's in the East, broke out here. The timid Bishop of London closed the church and caused the resignation of Mr. Bennett, who received the living [Anglican parish] of Frome Selwood, Somerset, where he died some few years since, deeply regretted by his flock, whom he had familiarized with almost every Catholic doctrine and practice. It is worth noting, as showing the marvelous stride which Ritualism has made in the last forty years, that at St. Barnabas' the only then unusual ornaments were a plain cross and two candles on the Holy Table; an oak screen before the chancel, surmounted by a cross; a surpliced choir; and a service modeled on that of the English cathedrals. No vestments save the ordinary surplice and black stole; no incense; no banners; no prayers save those in the Book of Common Prayer. The ornaments of the church, which forty years ago had to be closed to protect it from the mob, would now hardly excite the notice of the Church Association. [This organization recently, 1950, renamed the Church Society, is an evangelical 'Low Church' Anglican movement.]

My own memory dates, I suppose, from somewhere about 1856. The two great waves of conversion to the Catholic Church, which followed the secession of Newman in 1845 and Manning in 1851, had passed: and in spite of occasional Protestant outbursts, the effects of Protestant lectures, and the adverse judgments of Privy Councils and other bodies, the High Church movement was steadily and everywhere gaining ground.

I will as briefly as possible tell you what I was taught to believe. First I was taught that Our Lord founded a Church, which He had built on the foundation of His Apostles, He Himself being the chief corner-stone; that He had conferred on His Apostles certain powers by which they were enabled to carry on His work; that the Apostles had the power of forgiving sins, of consecrating the Eucharist, and of transmitting to their successors the supernatural power which they had themselves received; that the Apostles and those whom they consecrated were the rulers of the Christian Church; that this Church had power to define what was to be believed, and that it could not err, because of the promise of Christ that He would be with it, even to the end of the world; that the Church, moreover, was divinely guided in a very special manner by the Holy Ghost, and that its definitions to the end of time were inspired by the Holy Ghost, of whom Christ had said, "When He, the Spirit of Truth is come, He shall lead you into all truth"; that the Church and not the Bible was God's appointed teacher; that the traditions of the Church were of equal authority with the Bible; and that the Church was the only authorized interpreter of the latter.

I was further taught that the grace of God was conveyed to the soul principally by means of the Sacraments, and that by Baptism the stain of original sin was removed. With regard to the Real Presence of our Lord in the Holy Communion, I can best explain the teaching that I received by saying that I was never conscious of any change of belief when I became a Catholic. The books which I used as an Anglican I could use equally well as a Catholic; they were compiled almost exclusively from Catholic sources, and before ever I had entered a Catholic church or read a Catholic book, I was familiar with the wonderful Eucharistic hymns of St. Thomas, and the other doctrinal hymns, modern as well as ancient, of the Catholic Church.

I do not think that in those days we were taught, as Anglicans are taught now, that there were seven Sacraments, but the practical result was the same. I shall never forget the care with which I was prepared for Confirmation; it never occurred to me to doubt that the clergy had the power of forgiving sins; indeed, I think I exaggerated this power, for I thought that the declaration of absolution at Matins [the Morning Prayer service] and Evensong was sacramental. Confession was not urged as it is now, and confessional boxes were not, as they are now, openly placed in the churches; but in sermons and in private instruction the "benefit of absolution" as the Prayer-book calls it, was referred to and we knew that confessions were heard in the sacristy. I have already said that we believed in the apostolic succession — in other words, in the Sacrament of Orders and it was difficult to ignore the plain command of St. James as to Extreme Unction [the Anointing of the Sick referred to in James 5:14-15] — indeed, I have never been able to understand, save on the basis of Luther's well-known saying that the Epistle of James was "a matter of straw," how Protestants evade compliance with this text.

As to externals, although in those days these had developed but little, the principle of them was laid down. We were told — and I do not see how any one can deny it — that there were two rituals authorized by Almighty God — the ancient Jewish rite, and the mystical vision of the Apocalypse. In both were found the symbolic use of vestments and incense, music and ceremonial. Nowhere did we find any indication that these externals were to be done away, and we know that the Christian

Church adopted them from as early a period as was possible. The English Church, indeed, was shorn of her splendor, but the time would come when she would arise and put on her beautiful garments; and if there should be any High Churchman among my hearers, he will say, and say truly, that that time has come, and that, so far as externals go, the Established Church can now vie successfully with the Roman ritual in splendor and dignity.

And as with other externals so with music. Among the many things for which I am grateful to those who brought me up, few are more present to me than the love which they gave me for the old plain chant of the Church — the chant which we called Gregorian, thereby giving honours to the great Pope who sent St. Augustine to bring this nation unto God. And with the old chants we had the old words — not only the Psalms of David, but the words of the Fathers of the Church in her hymns — of St. Ambrose, and St. Gregory, and St. Bede, and St. Thomas Aquinas: for in those early days not a hymn was sung in that church which had not upon it the hall-mark of antiquity.

To the same hand which translated most of these hymns into sonorous and manly English, I owed my knowledge of the lives of the Saints, as portrayed in the volumes setting forth the “Triumphs of the Cross” and the “Followers of the Lord.” To Dr. Neale — that great liturgical scholar — I shall always feel a debt of gratitude for having made me understand, however imperfectly, what is meant by the Communion of Saints, and for having brought to my knowledge that wonderful storehouse of saintly history which is among the many treasures of the Catholic Church. It is true that we did not then, as Anglicans do now, invoke them, or address our litanies to the Mother of God; yet the veneration of the Blessed Virgin and the Saints was inculcated upon us in many ways.

So with the observance not only of festivals, but of fasts — the duty of keeping both was impressed on us. The brightness of the sanctuary, with its many lights and flowers, and the stately procession chanting psalms, were associated with all the great Christian festivals, making “the beauty of holiness,” something more than a name; while the times of self-denial and the penitential season of Lent were brought home to us by the silent organ and the violet-hung sanctuary. The duty of supporting our pastors, the equality of all men before God,

“Who has but one same death for a hind,

And one same death for a king,”

were also taught us, as fully as the [Catholic] Church herself teaches them.

You may wonder what were the impressions I received with regard to the Catholic Church on one side, and Nonconformists on the other. With regard to the Church I was taught that there were three branches — the Anglican, the Greek and the Roman — and that of these three the Catholic Church was made up: that in this country the Church of England represented the Catholic Church, and that the Roman branch had no business here — though I am thankful to say that I cannot remember ever having heard at St. Barnabas’ a single sermon against Roman Catholics, or an uncharitable word regarding them. I therefore had none of those prejudices which seem inseparable from certain forms of Protestantism — prejudices which prevent even a fair hearing of the Catholic position.

I remember one sermon on the honour due to the Blessed Virgin, in which the Roman devotion to her was spoken of as excessive; and another on St. Peter, in which his primacy as distinct from his supremacy was acknowledged; but until I was seventeen I never heard the Protestant side of the Church of England advanced from any pulpit, although then, as now, the itinerant Protestant lecturer presented to those who were credulous enough to accept his statements a caricature of the

Catholic Church. In those days a Mr. Edward Harper, who had some prominent position in the Orange Society, occupied the place which is now held by Mr. Collette, and was filled, until lately, by Mr. Mark Knowles.

I ought to add that I had never attended a Roman Catholic service, and had only once entered a Catholic church. This was the old Oratory, into which I went one winter afternoon on my way to the South Kensington Museum. One of the few things I knew about what I considered the Roman branch of the Church, was that the Blessed Sacrament was reserved on its altars, and I remember kneeling in the dark, flat-roofed Oratory, with its lamp burning before the altar, in adoration of the Presence which I felt to be there. I was quite sure — for I had never heard it called in question — that the views I have given were those of the Church of England that the Reformation, disastrous as it was in many ways, had not broken the apostolic succession and that the Western and Eastern Churches, equally with the Anglican, had Orders and Sacraments, and were of the unity of the Faith.

With Nonconformists it was different. They had no authorized ministry, and therefore no Sacraments. They had thrown off the authority of the Church, and substituted their own interpretation of the Bible. They were the followers of Korah, Dathan and Abiram; against them was directed the warning, "Mark those who cause divisions among you, and avoid them." I am afraid that we looked upon them as socially inferior to ourselves — certainly as people to be avoided — and as "Protestants," a term which even then Anglicans held in contempt.

With Catholics we had much in common — indeed, we were Catholic ourselves: but Dissent, with its numberless divisions, absence of dignity, unauthorized teachers, and ugly conventicles, was far from us, and with it we could hold no communion.

This was my position, until, at about the age of eighteen, I went into the country to study medicine. I shall never forget my first Sunday there. There was a magnificent old parish church, with deep chancel and broad aisles, choked up with pews of obstructive design. A small table with a shabby red cloth stood away under the picture which concealed the east window; a choir of a handful of men and boys, unsupliced and untidy, sang the slender allowance of music; a parish clerk responded for the congregation; — these were the objects that met my eyes and ears that first Sunday of my exile. But that was not all. We had a sermon delivered by a preacher in a black gown — to me a new and hideous vestment — on behalf of the Sunday-schools. That sermon I shall always remember. In the course of it, the preacher enumerated the things they did not teach the children in the schools they did not teach them they were born again in baptism, they did not teach that the clergy were descended from the Apostles, they did not teach that they had power to forgive sins, they did not teach a real presence in the Communion — "Real presence!" I heard a parson say in that church "I believe in a real absence!" — they did not teach the doctrine of good works. I began to wonder what was left to be taught, until the preacher explained that predestination and salvation by faith alone were inculcated upon the children. On the next Sunday the Holy Communion was administered — how, I can hardly describe, except by saying that it was manifest that no belief in its supernatural aspect was maintained. I can see now the parish clerk at the end of the service, walking up the chancel, and the minister coming towards him with the paten in one hand and the chalice in the other, waiting, while he, standing, ate and drank the contents of each.

My first feeling was that these clergy had no right or place in the Church of England. There was a moderately "high" church five miles off, and whenever I could, I found my way there. But it became unpleasantly plain that the Church of England, which I had regarded as an infallible guide,

spoke with two voices: — I began to realize that even on vital matters two diametrically opposed opinions not only could be, but were, held and preached. I knew my Book of Common Prayer and its rubrics as well as I knew my Bible; but to one part of it my attention had never been called, as it now was Sunday by Sunday. I had known without realizing all that it implied, that the Queen was, in some way, the Head of the Church — or rather, of two churches, one in England and one in Scotland: but I now found that she declared herself to be “Supreme Governor of the Church of England, and by God’s ordinance, Defender of the Faith”: that General Councils, which I had been taught to believe infallible, could not be held “without the commandment and will of princes,” and “may err, and sometimes have erred, in things pertaining unto God” that Confirmation, Penance, and the like, were not Sacraments of the Gospel: that the benefits of Baptism were “confined to them that receive it rightly”: that the reception of the Body of Christ in the Holy Communion is dependent on the faith of the recipient: and that “the sacrifices of Masses... were blasphemous fables and dangerous deceits.” This last was indeed a trial to me. It is true that twenty-five years ago the word “Mass” was not in common use among Anglicans as it is now, and I do not think an Anglican clergyman would have been found to say in public, as one said the other day, that “he would not stay a minute in a Church where the Mass was not, for if they had not got the Mass, they had no worship whatever.” But we knew that the term was retained in the first reformed Prayer book, and that it was the name employed throughout the Western Church for the Eucharistic service.

Here then was my difficulty: and the more I faced it the more I found that the ground which I had thought so sure was slipping away from under me. Not, thank God, that I ever doubted any of the truths which had been implanted in me: but I began to see, more and more clearly, that the authority on which I had thought them to rest was altogether lacking. I found that what I had received as the teaching of a Church, was only the teachings of a certain section of its clergy, and that other clergy, with exactly as much authority, taught directly opposite opinions: they were not priests, they said they claimed to offer no sacrifice; no office of forgiving sins was theirs; they possessed no supernatural powers.

This was bad enough, but there was worse behind. The other branches of the Church — what did they say on these momentous points? Alas there was no room for doubt here. Neither the Eastern nor Western “branches,” each of them far larger than the Anglican, would admit for a moment the claims of the Anglican clergy to be priests: and a large section of themselves equally denied it. The bishops in some cases expressly told the candidates for ordination that they were not made priests; and if there were no priests, how could the sacraments depending on them be celebrated? It was no special ill-will to Anglicans that Rome showed by refusing to recognize their orders; for she never denied those of the Greeks, although these were equally separated from her unity. The Branch Theory broke down — it would not work.

Then I read other books, many of them by Newman, for whom Anglicans in those days cherished a warm affection and respect in spite of his secession. And more and more the conviction was forced upon me that I had received the beliefs in which I had been brought up on the authority of certain individual members of a body which not only tolerated, but taught with equal authority the exact opposite of these beliefs — that the Anglican Communion, even as represented by those who claimed for it Catholicity, was a mere Protestant sect, differing only from more recent denominations in that it retained certain shreds and patches of the old faith. It was, in short, a compromise — a via media between Rome and Dissent — and it was as unsatisfactory as compromises usually are.

Meanwhile there came upon me more and more plainly the claims of a Church which taught with authority all that I believed; which claimed to be the one body having a right to teach; and which, without equivocation or hesitation, pointed out to its members one only means of salvation. By one of those occurrences which we call accidents I became acquainted with a Catholic priest — one of the first of these Anglicans who gave up friends and position and everything that could make life happy at the call of their Master. From him I learned what was hitherto lacking to my knowledge of the Church; I realized, as I had never done before, that the first mark of God's Church was unity — a mark which no one can pretend to find in the Church of England: and after a period of anxiety such as none can know who have not experienced it, I was received into that unity.

Of my experience since, you will not expect me to speak. If I must say anything, I will venture to employ the words of Cardinal Newman, which express better than any words of mine could, my feelings now: — “From the day I became a Catholic to this day, I have never had a moment's misgiving that the Communion of Rome is the Church which the Apostles set up at Pentecost, which alone has ‘the adoption of sons, and the glory, and the covenants, and the revealed law, and the service of God and the promises’, and in which the Anglican Communion whatever its merits and demerits, whatever the great excellence of individuals in it, has, as such, no part. Nor have I ever for a moment hesitated in my conviction that it was my duty to join the Catholic Church, which in my own conscience I felt to be divine.”

When I had told the friends with whom I was living that I had become a Catholic, the result somewhat astonished me: and those good Protestants who assume — as many do — that persecution and Popery are inseparably connected, while Protestantism and liberty of conscience are convertible terms, may like to know what happened. My desk was broken open; my private letters were stolen; letters sent me through the post were intercepted, opened, and sometimes detained; I was prevented from going to a Catholic church and from seeing a Catholic priest; a picture of the Crucifixion which I had had in my room for years, was profaned in a way which I do not care to characterize. These things are small and trifling compared with what many have suffered, but what light do not even they throw upon that right of private judgment which Protestants profess to hold so dear!

One thing which seemed to me at my conversion remarkable still remains to me one of the most wonderful features of Protestantism — the universal assumption that Catholics do not know what they themselves believe, and that Protestants understand it far better. The average Protestant for instance, thinks and often asserts that we believe that the Pope cannot sin, that we worship images, that we are disloyal to the Crown, that we put Our Lady in the place of God, that we sell absolution for money and have a recognized tariff for the remission of sins, that we may not read the Bible, that we would burn every Protestant if we could, that we lie habitually, that our convents are haunts of vice, that our priests are knaves or conscience imposters, and that our laity are dupes or fools — I could, if time would allow, easily bring extracts from Protestant writers in support of each of these positions.

Not only so, but — by isolated texts of Scripture; by scraps of the Fathers, torn from their context, and often mistranslated; by misrepresentation of history; by fragments of prayers and hymns, interpreted as no Catholic would interpret them; by erroneous explanations of what they see in our churches; by baseless inferences arising from ignorance of the very language we use — they formulate and are not ashamed to propagate charges against us which in many cases we cannot condemn seriously, because it is impossible to help laughing at them. Our contradictions are not

listened to; our corrections are unheeded; our statements are disbelieved. "Give us," we say, "at least fair play; hear what we have to say for ourselves; do not condemn us unheard; do not assume that we are all fools and rogues." But we are not listened to: we are not allowed to know what we ourselves believe! "Oh for the rarity of Christian charity," or at any rate of Protestant charity.

We are sometimes accused of omitting one of the commandments: but it is the bigoted Protestant who does this — he entirely forgets that there is in the Decalogue one which says sternly — "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour." How many Protestants who speak against the Church have ever expended a penny on the Catechism which contains a full, clear statement of Christian Doctrine, which is approved by authority, and on which the religious education of our children is based? Yet they would learn more from it of what we really believe than from every tract in Mr. Kensit's shop, or from all the books which Mr. Collette ever wrote.

It often puzzles me how it is that Protestants do not realize the utter futility of the attempts they have been making for the last fifty years to arrest the tide of Catholic tendency which is flooding the nation. Go into St. Paul's [the Anglican cathedral of the diocese of London] — say on the festival of the Gregorian Association — see the long procession of surpliced choirs with their banners, many of them bearing Catholic devices: listen to the old antiphons, unauthorized indeed by the Book of Common Prayer, set to the chants to which they are sung in the Church throughout the world wherever the Divine Office is chanted; see the preacher mount the pulpit prefacing his sermon with the invocation of the Blessed Trinity and the sign of the Cross; hear him refer, as one referred two years since, to "Our Lady" — a title only less dear to Catholics than that of Our Lord: and as you sit and listen, look to the end of the church, with its dignified and decorated altar and the gorgeous reredos, not unworthy of a Catholic church, with the great crucifix in its centre and over all the statue of Mary with her Divine Child in her arms; and as you leave the church, do not forget to notice the side chapel and its handsome altar, with cross, and flowers and lights, where the daily communion service is held. Then remember that less than forty years since, not one of those ornaments or signs could be seen in the desolate, dirty edifice, with its shabby communion table well-nigh out of sight under the east window.

Go to Westminster [the Abbey formerly a Benedictine Catholic Monastery but now controlled by the Anglican Church], and see, prominent at the restored north door, another statue of Mary with her Child. Go up and down the country, both to your large towns and to your remote villages, and you will find the same advance — only more developed. Last year I strolled into the magnificent old abbey church of a little Oxfordshire village: the air was dim and heavy with incense, there were three altars, each duly furnished with lights, cross and sacring-bell; on the notice board was a copy of the parish magazine, in which I read an exhortation on the duty of hearing Mass on Sundays which might have been taken — and perhaps, was taken — from a Catholic manual of instruction: and a list of the services to be held on the feast of Corpus Christi. The crucifix is now common in Protestant churches; pictures of Our Lady are not rare; statues of her are to be found — why do not our Protestant friends look to this, instead of raising their voices against Catholicism? They shriek and rant after their manner; yet one stronghold after another is captured, and they stand by and are powerless to hinder it.

Look at the wealth of literature of every kind, which pours forth from the ritualistic press; the manuals and treatises, the dogmatic works, the numberless little books, each more advanced than the last, with which the country is literally flooded, and of which the St. Agatha's Sunday Scholars' Book, which lately received a notice from the Protestant Alliance, is but one out of a thousand.

Look even at the leveling up which has marked the publications of so eminently respectable a body as the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. How is it that, with all your power and influence and money, you cannot arrest this advance in the direction of Rome?

And what about Rome itself? There are those who think that England is rapidly becoming Catholic. I am not of that number, but I cannot fail to see that the fields are white unto harvest, and I see too that the laborers are being sent forth into the harvest.

More than fifty years ago, Macaulay pointed out, in that wonderful essay on Ranke's History of the Popes which I would commend to all Protestants who do not know it, as a "most remarkable fact, that no Christian nation which did not adopt the principles of the Reformation before the end of the 16th century, should ever have adopted them. Catholic communities have since that time become infidel and become Catholic again but none has become Protestant." How is it at home?

Protestants have poured money into Ireland: they did not scruple to avail themselves, to their everlasting disgrace, of the sufferings of the great famine in order to buy over with their funds the souls and bodies of the destitute Irish. "God has opened a great door to us in Ireland" — such was the blasphemous announcement which prefaced one of the appeals for those liberal funds without which no Protestant missionary enterprise, at home or abroad can be carried on. What is the result? Is Ireland less Catholic than she was? Come closer — come to England — here are facts which Protestants will not dispute, for they will come to you with the authority of the Protestant Alliance, from one of whose publications I quote them. Since 1851, the number of priests in England has more than trebled itself; of churches, chapels and stations we have now 1,387, where in 1851 we had 586; of religious houses of men we have 220, against 17, forty years ago; of convents — those favorite objects of attack to a certain class of Protestants, those places whose inmates, to judge from the rubbish one hears and reads, have only one aim, to escape — we have just nine times as many as we had 1851: the numbers are 450 and 53.

Come nearer home: in 1851 the diocese of Southwark included what is now the diocese of Portsmouth; there were then in it 67 priests: there are now, in the two dioceses, 428 — an increase of 363: there were 57 churches and stations, where there are now exactly 200; there are 80 convents instead of 9: there are 38 monasteries instead of one! Come to these very doors; when I came to live in Southwark, eight years ago, there was for this vast district one church — the Cathedral — with four priests: now the staff at the Cathedral is more than doubled, and Walworth, the Borough and Vauxhall are separated into distinct missions, each with two priests. Add to this such churches as St. Alphege and St. Agnes, where the doctrines taught, and the ornaments used are almost identical with our own; All Saints' (Lambeth), St. John the Divine, Christ Church (Clapham), and many more, where sacramental teaching of an advanced type is given: and then calculate for yourselves what effect in this neighborhood the puny and impotent attacks of the Protestant Alliance are likely to produce: a society whose patron should surely be the good old lady who thought to sweep back the sea with a mop: whose members spend their money on red rags, and waste their time by shaking them in the face of a bull — I mean John Bull, who doesn't care twopence about them. My Protestant friends, there was one of old who gave sound advice to those who took counsel to slay Peter and they that were with him. Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to naught; but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found to fight against God." Remember that "in spite of dungeon, fire and sword," — in spite of penal laws, which the Lord Chief Justice has lately styled "a code as hateful as anything ever seen

since the foundation of the world" — the faith is among you still; the gates of hell have not prevailed against it.

And — speaking quite soberly and dispassionately — I do not hesitate to say that some of the weapons which are employed against the Church seem to me to come from within those gates. I respect the conscientious, God-fearing Protestants who, under the influence of strong delusion, feel it their duty to oppose the Church. I remember the case of Saul, afterwards called Paul, and how he persecuted the Church of God; and I do not despair of their conversion. I have only sympathy for those who are misled by prejudice and bigoted teachers. Every convert can say, with the man in the Gospel, "Whereas I was blind now I see"; and I am not sure that those who have had the happiness of being born Catholics always make sufficient allowance for the imperfect vision of those without the fold. But what shall be said in defense of those who are not ashamed to write and to publish calumnies, as foul as they are false, against priests and nuns, and the Sacraments of the Church — those "lewd fellows of the baser sort" who under the guise of religion, do not scruple to pander to the lowest and worst of passions by the circulation of filthy fictions of which "Maria Monk" is by no means the worst — of works which, so far as I know, are to be found in only two places in London — in the shop of a Protestant publisher, and in a street which has for years obtained an evil notoriety for the sale of indecent literature. I am not going to name these books: but if anyone is anxious, for any good purpose, to know to what I refer, I am ready to tell him. Some years since, one of the worst of these was seized and condemned as an indecent publication; since then, the Protestant purveyors of pornographic publications have been more careful to keep within the letter of the law, although it is not long since the editor of *Truth* — by no means a scrupulous purist — denounced some of their wares as outraging decency.

These and the highly spiced lectures "to men" or "to women only" — appeal to a certain class of persons; and I call upon all decent men and women, be they Jew, Turk, heretic, or infidel — and above all, upon Mr. Collette, who was at one time intimately connected with a body called the Society for the Suppression of Vice — to dissociate themselves from any part in the wholesale propagation of indecency which is carried on in the name of religion. The cause must indeed be a bad and a hopeless one which can stoop to avail itself of weapons such as these.

But I will not refer further to a hateful kind of warfare with which very few will sympathize. I will rather briefly apply to two among the many schools of thought in the Establishment the remarks which I have made.

To the Protestant or Low Churchman I would say:

Can you conscientiously remain in a Church the members of which claim to hold all Roman doctrine, save that of submission to the Pope — which permits the teaching not only of Baptismal Regeneration and the Real Presence, but of Confession, the Monastic or Religious Life, the use of Images, Fasting, Prayers and Masses for the Dead, the Invocation of Saints, Prayers to the Blessed Virgin, the power of dispensing from religious obligations; which not only allows these things to be taught, but permits them to be emphasized by every external adjunct?

To the High Churchman my question is exactly the converse of this.

You believe all or most of the points which I have just enumerated: can you remain in communion with those who deny them? Read, if you have not read it, a pamphlet on the Reformation by one of your own Bishops — Dr. Ryle — one of those whom you regard as successors of the Apostles, with the power of ordaining priests. He tells you how the reformers "stripped the office of the clergy of

any sacerdotal character" — how they removed the words "sacrifice" and "altar" from the Prayer-book, and retained the word priest only in the sense of presbyter or elder — how they denied the power of the keys — how they cast out the Sacrifice of the Mass as a blasphemous fable, took down the altars, prohibited images and crucifixes, and "declared that the sovereign had supreme authority and chief power in this realm in all causes ecclesiastical." What is gained by the wearing of cope and miter and the teaching of sacramental doctrine by one bishop, if another can at the same time, with equal authority, denounce all these things? And how can a Church with any claim to be considered as teaching with authority tolerate with equanimity both of these extremes?

We Catholics are so accustomed to the unity of the Church that we do not perhaps always think what a wonderful thing it is: and Protestants, I find, often do not realize it. They sometimes point to our religious Orders as if they were equivalent to their own manifold divisions. It is, I believe, the literal truth that, as the sun shines day by day on each part of the world, he sees at each moment the blessed Sacrifice of the Altar uplifted to the Eternal Father. Where, save in the Catholic Church, shall we find such a fulfillment of the prophecy "From the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same shall incense be offered to My Name and a pure offering"? Not only so, but throughout the world — from "Greenland's icy mountains" to "India's coral strand" — wherever two or three are gathered together in the One Name is the same belief, the same sacrifice, mainly the same ritual: so that the Irish exile leaving the Old World for the New, where Catholicism is increasing with rapid strides, is as much at home in the churches of New York as he was in his roadside country chapel in the old country. Can any Catholic for a moment conceive the possibility of finding any one doctrine preached at St. George's [Catholic Parish church], contradicted by the priest at Walworth [Catholic parish], controverted in the sermon in the Catholic chapel at Vauxhall, and called in question by Canon Murnane [the much-loved Catholic parish priest of Bermondsey] in the Borough? Can he imagine Cardinal Vaughan's teaching on the Mass contradicted by our own beloved Bishop? But will any Protestant tell me that — to take the two Anglican churches nearest to us—the teaching at St. Paul's is identical with that at St. Alphege's? Could Mr. Allwork's congregation next Sunday avail themselves of Mr. Goulden's ministrations, or join in the hymns and prayers addressed to the Blessed Sacrament and the Mother of God?

The Catholic can go all over the world, and wherever he goes he will find the same Faith and the same Sacrifice. The Protestant cannot go at random into two churches in the same neighborhood with any certainty that the teaching or ceremonial will be similar, and that with regard to the most vital points of faith. "How can two walk together except they be agreed?" Remember that as the cowl does not make the monk, so the most elaborate ritual and the most advanced teaching cannot make Catholic. A few weeks ago I strolled into a handsome church in this neighborhood, just as a lady dressed like a nun was taking the school children to service. There was the raised altar, with its flowers and lights and crucifix and what looked very like a tabernacle, and before the altar burned seven lamps. "Is this a Catholic Church?" I said to the verger. "No, sir, Church of England," was the reply. My friends, disguise it as you will, the truth will out: your Catholic church is only the Church of England after all.

One point more. When I was thinking of becoming a Catholic, I pointed out to a friend these differences existing in the Church of England. Both, I said, cannot be true, but neither the Church herself, nor the State which supports her, is able to say with authority which is right. My friend told me — what I believe people still say — that High and Low Church were united in essentials. Surely the most ignorant and superstitious Papists ever invented by a Protestant lecturer would recoil

before such an absurdity as this statement involves! Surely it is “essential” to know whether Baptism is a mere symbol or a regenerating sacrament; it cannot be a matter of indifference whether the sons of men have or have not the power on earth to forgive sins; it cannot be a matter of opinion whether the Sacrifice of the Mass is a blasphemous fable and dangerous deceit, or the renewal of the great Sacrifice offered on Calvary? There must be an authority to pronounce upon these points, and the Church of England neither has nor claims to be such authority. From the time of the Gorham Judgment, which left Baptism an open question, down to the Archbishop of Canterbury’s decision the other day, uncertainty, vagueness, and indecision have marked every attempt to formulate any definite opinion. This last attempt has indeed justified ritualism on the ground that it means nothing in particular, and above all, nothing Roman. No wonder the *Times* spoke of a “sense of unreality” in “the effort to treat, as neutral or colorless, acts which we all know to be, in the view of a party in the Church, technical symbols and unequivocal doctrinal signs. It is true that, with marvelous effrontery, a popular Anglican hymn asserts —

We are not divided,

All one body we;

One in hope and doctrine,

One in charity.” *

But does an Anglican believe it to be true?

- [It would appear that even Anglicans themselves have been struck by the absurdity of this statement, for in the new edition of *Hymns Ancient and Modern* the verse begins:

“Though divisions harass,

All one body we.”]

“Not divided!” Is there any one who will assert that the “doctrine” preached in the first half-dozen Anglican churches he comes across will be “one”? — Or that the teaching of what is termed, with unconscious irony, the “religious press,” has any claims to be considered identical? If the “doctrine” is one, why do we find in the same Church two such organizations as the English Church Union and the Church Association, each diametrically opposed to the other, and the latter continually prosecuting the clergy who represent the views of the former? Is there anywhere such a spectacle of division as this — a division which, as soon as the bonds of State Establishment shall have been broken asunder, cannot fail to be even more manifest than it is at present.

“Not divided”! It must be nearly thirty years ago, I think, that St. Paul’s, Lorrimore Square, was in the forefront of Anglicanism. There was a change of vicar, and the congregation so little realized that they were “one in doctrine” with their new clergyman, that a great part of them seceded, and formed the nucleus of what is now the large body of worshippers attending St. Agnes’, Kennington. But why, if they were “not divided,” if they were “one in doctrine,” did they not stay where they were?

“Not divided!” Is not division the very essence of Protestantism? And are not the divisions in the Establishment sufficient proof that it is Protestant? “We have within the Church of England,” said the *Times* on one occasion, “persons differing not only in their particular tenets, but in the rule and ground of their belief.”

Put it another way. Take the case of a Nonconformist who desires to become a member of the Church of England: suppose him to be some one in this neighborhood: is he to be taken to St. Paul's or to St. Alphege's? Who is to decide? Surely it is not a matter of indifference. Mr. Ruskin has said that "The Protestant who most imagines himself independent in his thought, and private in his study of scripture, is nevertheless usually at the mercy of the nearest preacher who has a pleasant voice and ingenious fancy." And surely the Faith which is put forward as that of the Church of England, depends entirely on the belief of the individual parson referred to. How different is the case with the Catholic Church.

I have said that the Church of England neither has nor claims authority; and my last words shall be devoted to making this plain. If she has authority, as our High Church friends assert, whence does she derive it? Not from the old Church of England, for, by the Reformation of Elizabeth, the old Catholic episcopate was swept away.

Of the sixteen surviving Catholic Bishops, all save one — Kitchin of Llandaff, who took no part in the Reformation, nor in the consecration of Parker [as Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury under Queen Elizabeth I] — were imprisoned, and Parker and those consecrated by him were intruded into the sees of the imprisoned Bishops. But granting that Parker and the rest were validly consecrated, whence did they get jurisdiction? Certainly not from the old Catholic Bishops; most certainly not from the source whence these obtained it, namely the Pope; not by the fact of consecration, for orders and jurisdiction are distinct, and received independently of each other; not from any of Parker's consecrators — Barlow, Scory, Coverdale, and Hodgkins — for not one of these was in possession of a see, and they could not give what they themselves did not possess. The only answer possible, however unpalatable it may be to High Churchmen, is that they got jurisdiction from the Crown, or not at all.

Every Protestant Bishop now takes the oath of supremacy, by which he professes that the Sovereign is the "only supreme governor" of the realm "in spiritual and ecclesiastical things, as well as in temporal." Whence the Sovereign obtained this supremacy, or what "warranty of Scripture" can be adduced for it, I do not know; nor do I think it easy to ascertain.

Moreover, the Establishment not only does not possess authority, but she expressly disclaims it. The First General Council of the Church prefaced its teaching with — "It seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us": and the Catholic Church, right down to the present day, has spoken with like authority. But what does the Church of England say? Her anxiety not to be regarded as having any authority is almost pathetic: "All Churches have erred," says she, "in matters of faith," and it is implied that she may fail also. "The Church has power, indeed, to decree rites and ceremonies, and authority in controversies of faith, but it cannot decree anything unless it is taken out of Holy Scripture. General Councils are not only dependent on the will of princes, but, when assembled, may err and have erred, nor may the Church declare anything of faith which is not read in Holy Scripture." These things she tells us in her Articles of Religion. But, to go a step further, who gave Holy Scripture its authority? It claims none for itself as a whole; it nowhere tells us of what books it is composed; Christians are nowhere told to read it: no text bids us keep Sunday holy, or authorizes infant baptism, or the taking of oaths. Who vouches for the authority of the Bible, I repeat? Who but that Church which from the earliest times has been its guardian and its only rightful interpreter.

It is true that to claim authority is one thing and to possess it is another. If saying we had a thing were equivalent to having it, we should find nowadays authorized teachers in abundance. But it is

difficult to believe that a body deriving its teaching power from God would take so much trouble to deny the possession of it. The Catholic Church does not act thus.

And when the spiritual head of the Establishment is consulted, he shows himself her true son. Some years ago, Mr. Maskell, who afterwards became a Catholic, asked the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Sumner, whether he might or might not teach certain doctrines of faith? "To which," the Archbishop said, "I reply, are they contained in the word of God? Whether they are so contained, and can be proved thereby you have the same means of discovering as myself, and I have no special authority to declare."

Here is the judgment passed upon the Church of England by the learned Dr. Dollinger, a man who has some claim to respect from Protestants, seeing that he had the misfortune to die outside the unity of the Catholic Church. "There is no Church that is so completely and thoroughly as the Anglican, the product and expression of the wants and wishes, the modes of thought and cast of character, not of a certain nationality, but of a fragment of a nation, namely the rich, fashionable, and cultivated classes. It is the religion of deportment, of gentility, of clerical reserve. Religion and the Church are then required to be, above all things, not troublesome, not intrusive, not presuming, not importunate." "It is a good Church to live in," someone said, "but a bad one to die in."

The absence of authority and of definite teaching — these were the reasons which induced me to leave the Church of England. The step once taken, all was clear; and on every side I found abundant evidence that, if there be a Church of God upon earth, the Holy Catholic and Roman Church can alone claim that title. That evidence I cannot bring before you now — I have already detained you too long. My Catholic hearers do not need it, and my Protestant friends will do well to seek it from those better qualified than myself, qualified to speak with an authority which cannot attach to any sayings of mine. To both Catholics and Protestants I would recommend the perusal of the Lectures on the Present Position of Catholics in England, which were delivered by John Henry Newman, "the noblest Roman of them all" not long after he left the Establishment, thus, as Lord Beaconsfield said upon one occasion, "dealing the Church of England a blow from which she still reels." In those lectures you will find almost every popular objection against the Church met with a charm of literary style, and with a courteousness of expression which, so far as I know, has never been equaled; and even those who remain unconvinced of the truth of the Church will be constrained to admit that there is at least another aspect of things which seemed to them to admit of only one, and that a bad one.

[{Modern readers will note that John Henry Newman has now been beatified.}]

It has been well said that the truths of the Church are like stained glass windows in a building: look at them from without, all is confusion; but go inside, let the lights of heaven stream through them, and each fragment takes its place in the glorious and beautiful picture which is presented to your delighted gaze. So, from without, the doctrines of the Church seem dark and confused; but the light of heaven pours through them to those within.
