

Rome and Civil Liberty – The Partitioned Land.



"Catholic England has been restored to its orbit in the ecclesiastical firmament, from which its light had long vanished, and begins anew its course of regularly adjusted action round the center of unity, the source of jurisdiction, of light, and of vigor." - English Roman Catholic prelate Nicholas Wiseman (3 August 1802 - 15 February 1865)

Continued from [The Edict From The Flaminian Gate](#)

WELL, but what avails, it is asked, this fine scheme of a restored hierarchy? It is a scheme, and nothing more. It looks very pretty and very imposing, extended on Papal parchment, and seen in grand perspective, dressed out with many an artistic illusion; but one thing it lacks, – tangibility, and reality even. The Pope has but reared an empire in the air. He has left the solid earth to us; and so long as we are masters of it, we make the Pontiff heartily welcome to construct as many kingdoms in the clouds as he pleases. His kingdom and ours lie far apart: they are, in fact, in different worlds; and the two never can come into collision. In partitioning England, he might, for that matter, as well have mapped out the moon, or crossed and re-crossed our country with chalk-lines, or written with his own apostolic finger, "I govern, and shall continue to govern," upon the sea-shore when the tide was out.

In Wiseman and his twelve suffragans we have but a repetition of Sir John Falstaff and his men in buckram. The red hat of the Cardinal has not yet converted England; and the throne of Victoria still stands, despite the "Edict" hurled against it by the man on the Seven Hills. Why should not the Papacy take a somnolent fit, and fall a-dreaming? and what vision so likely to visit its pillow as that of mighty England, with sackcloth on her loins and ashes on her head, doing obeisance before the Papal throne, and, in token of profoundest penitence for her sins of three hundred years, soliciting permission to kiss the Papal toe? But the Papacy will awake, and find that it is but a dream. We daresay the Times expressed very fairly the general mind of England on the point when it said, in some such words as the following, – that the return of Dr. Wiseman to our country, with all his high-flown titles and his bravery of office, need give us no more concern than if it had been the pleasure of his Holiness to bedeck and bedecorate the editor of the Tablet in style equally gorgeous, and assign him the puissant rank of "Duke of Southfield."

It was natural for us to reason in this manner. Our unquestionable superiority in science, in material wealth, and in political power, – the creation, as we boast, of our own skill and courage, – has given us an

overweening sense, more perceptible to foreigners than to ourselves, of self-sufficiency and self-importance. We are the men. The love of liberty is in our blood. Our freedom lies safely entrenched within the double fortress of law and usage, of our social instincts and our political forms. The Pope, of course, puts his own meaning upon his own acts; but the question is, not what he understands by them, but what we understand by them. This reasoning, we grant, is very specious; but it is, we maintain, and will endeavor to show, thoroughly fallacious.

It is true, Great Britain is not yet converted to the Popish faith. No one – not even Rome herself – expected that this would happen in a day. But Great Britain is at this hour nearer conversion – very considerably nearer – than at the period of the Papal aggression. The more one reflects, the more one is astonished at the great change which a very short time has sufficed to bring about. The Roman deposit, like a crystallizing salt, has been adding layer after layer, and expanding silently, yet continuously, from one day to another. Look at it now: what solidity of nucleus and what goodness of bulk, – and all within a few years! The Church of Rome has nearly quadrupled her priesthood. She has quadrupled her members, quadrupled her funds, quadrupled her edifices. She is now as good as endowed, and every year the country is acquiring a more Roman look; and yet we console ourselves by saying, “England is not converted.” England’s Government is in the hands of the Roman Catholic members of the House of Commons; these, again, are in the hands of their priesthood; and to that priesthood neither pension, money, nor money’s worth, can be denied. The nation, in both its religious and its worldly sections, is sleeping its quiet sleep. To Any one who would rouse it by unwelcome prognostications it mutters in its sleep, “Go thy way, bigot, for this time. Come back and call me when England is converted.” Nor will this be long. What with the continual flow of Romanists from Ireland; what with the increasing manufacture of Papists in the Ruseyite camp; and what with the recoil in favor of Rome from infidelity, – for to weak and frightened minds that Church will appear the only real protection from, and the only effectual bulwark against, a universal skepticism, – the progress of Romanism will go on, not simply in an arithmetical progression; – it will proceed in geometrical ratio. The balance numerically is still in our favor; but from one hour to another it tends towards equipoise. The Roman community, like the cave of Caucus, exhibits many a foot-print going in, but it shows *nulla vestigia retrorsum* (never a backward step). One pervert today, a dozen tomorrow, an hundred the day after; and with whom will the majority be found very soon? “And surely the mountain falling cometh to nought, and the rock is removed out of his place.” And when the mountain of our Protestantism has fallen with this ceaseless corroding and trickling down of its substance, and we go back, and cry to a slumbering nation, “Awake, arise!” we shall be answered, “It is too late now: England is converted.”

The question is, not what the Pope understands by the restoration of the hierarchy, but what we understand by it. So do many most confidently argue, as if this were decisive of the whole matter. This, doubtless, is a true canon of interpretation in ordinary cases. But those who so oracularly enunciate it, and so confidently rely upon it, in this case totally misapply it. They fail to take into account, because they do not, or will not,

understand it, the peculiarly subtle genius of the Church with which they are dealing, and the marvelous efficacy which she attributes to all her arrangements. The Church of Rome is a Church of shams in one sense, but in another she is, above all other Churches, a Church of realities. As a moral and spiritual organization, she is a sham; as a political and earthly confederation, she is a compact, energetic, terrible reality. There is not under the sun a greater contrast than there is betwixt the necromantic and illusory character of the agency which she employs for her spiritual ends, and with which, nevertheless, she leads a great many clever people, as we say, by the nose, and the intense common sense, and the almost, indeed we may say the altogether, superhuman knowledge of human nature, especially of its weaknesses, with which she labors to attain her political and worldly objects. She never does anything without a meaning, and that meaning she almost always contrives to make good. And we may depend upon it, that whatever Rome understands by the Papal aggression she will compel us too to understand by it in the long run: what she holds to be its legal import she will eventually oblige us to recognize as its actual import.

We maintain, therefore, that the question is, not what we understand by the restoration of the hierarchy, but what Rome understands by it. What, then, does she understand by it?

And, first, to determine this question, it is not enough to look at the form of the act. The fundamental and primary consideration here is the character and constitution of the Church whose act it is.

It has been said with great plausibility, that the Episcopal Church parcels out Scotland into dioceses; that the Free Church partitions it into Presbyteries and Synods; and that the Wesleyan Conference, and other religious bodies, map and over-map, cross and re-cross, with their ecclesiastical lines, the surface of England. In fact, you can conceive of Great Britain as covered from sea to sea with these ecclesiastical arrangements, lying one above another, like the coatings of a bulb or the reticulations of a plant Rome comes, and adds one more to those previously existing. You have not said a word about the former: why object to this last? We object because the two cases are widely dissimilar.

Other denominations are purely spiritual societies. They exist for only spiritual objects: their organization is spiritual; and the power they wield is solely spiritual: therefore any mapping out of the country on their part is, and only can be, spiritual. They all recognize, practically as well as theoretically, the two great jurisdictions, the temporal and the spiritual; and while they claim full liberty of action within the one, they as expressly disclaim all right of entrance into the other. Any attempt to exercise a particle of temporal jurisdiction would amount to a flagrant violation of their most fundamental principles, and would speedily result in their destruction.

But the Church of Rome differs radically on the point in question from all other Churches. She is not a pure, but a mixed society: the secular element enters as largely as does the spiritual into her constitution. Her jurisdiction must be of the same kind with her constitution. In constitution,

we have said, she is a mixture of temporal and spiritual power; and of the same mixed kind must be the authority she wields. She can advance no claim, and make no arrangement for giving that claim scope, which does not embody the temporal quite as much as it does the spiritual element. It would be not less in violation of the fundamental principles of this Church to forego the temporal jurisdiction than it would be in other Churches to claim it. And when Papists ridicule the idea of their Church seeking to exercise temporal jurisdiction, and speak of her confining herself to spiritual power, they are simply presuming on Protestant ignorance, and, for the good of their Church, are concealing and denying her fundamental principles.

But, second, the restoration of the hierarchy has in it a new spiritual claim. That spiritual claim is rested on a territorial basis. Beforetime we had, no doubt, Popish bishops in the country; but let us mark the difference. They were here, not in their character of bishops, but in their character of missionaries. They bore titles taken from other countries, and from old extinct bishoprics. Dr Wiseman, for instance, was Bishop of Melipotamus, and Dr Gill of Edinburgh was Bishop of Limyra. At Rome these ecclesiastics were viewed as having a territorial relation to these places, wherever they are, and episcopal jurisdiction over all their inhabitants, if they have any; but in our country they were simply missionaries, or missionary bishops. To England they had no territorial relation; and they had no episcopal authority, save only over the members of their own Church in the land.

But the Papal aggression brought this state of things to an end. It gave us bishops with territorial titles taken from our great cities, – for the law prohibiting the assumption of the titles of existing bishoprics was evaded, – and so it gave us bishops with a territorial relation to Great Britain, and episcopal jurisdiction over every baptized man and woman in their several dioceses. Instead of a mission, henceforward we had a regularly constituted Church, with territorial relations, and episcopal authority, not over Romanists only, but over all. The Papal aggression rooted the Roman Church in the soil, and gave it infetment (the official or symbolic bestowal of heritable land on a person), as it were, of stone and earth. The Pope stamped his seal upon Great Britain as his own, – his own to distribute territorially, to teach doctrinally, and to govern by direct Spiritual power and indirect temporal power. There is neither Church nor Christianity in Great Britain, in the eyes of the Church of Rome, but herself.

Not to go back upon the specimens of Papal vauntings already given as decisive of the light in which the Papal aggression, to this hour steadily prosecuted, was held by its authors, we adduce only the figure of Dr Wiseman. "Catholic England," said he, in his "Pastoral," "had been restored to its orbit in the ecclesiastical firmament, from which its light had long vanished, and begins anew its course of regularly adjusted action round the center of unity, the source of jurisdiction, of light, and of vigor." Who or what was this unhappy planet, – this "Son of the Morning," which had long been fallen from heaven? Not the Romanist body in England, surely? It had never strayed from its "orbit:" its light had not "long vanished."

This fallen star is, without doubt, – indeed, there is a heresy in the Cardinal's words should we interpret them otherwise, – Great Britain, the

whole body of the people, which for three centuries had strayed in the gloom of Protestant night; but which, by the grace of the Pope, and the omnipotence of Infallibility, is now restored to its orbit. It was upon the British people as such that Rome fastened this claim, which she holds to be legal and valid to all and every effect with territorial bishoprics in other Catholic countries, and to be enforced as such, when circumstances shall permit, by the powers and penalties for that end made and provided.

But, third, this partitioning of the country is manifestly an usurpation of the powers of the Sovereign. To erect territorial sees, and appoint, is, in virtue of the ecclesiastical supremacy, the Queen's sole prerogative. So has the Constitution of the country decreed. But here comes a foreign potentate, and does what the law declares the Queen, and the Queen alone, has a right to do. Is not this to insult the Sovereign, violate the law, and degrade the nation?

We are aware that there is a difference of opinion among ourselves as to this part of our Constitution, – the ecclesiastical supremacy, to wit. But the question is not, whether the power of the head of the State to appoint the officers of the Church be right or wrong morally considered, but whether it is right or wrong legally and constitutionally considered, – whether, in short, the Queen's ecclesiastical supremacy be according to law. This admits of but one answer: most undeniably it is. Right or wrong, the nation has so ordained. If we wish that the laws of Great Britain should be changed, we will change them ourselves. We give to no foreign Power on earth, – we give to neither Pope nor Kaiser, – right to step in and alter our laws. But this man in purple has claimed a right to alter the law. What the Queen could not do, for she has no dispensing power in the matter, – what the nation would not permit any of its own courts or servants to do, – this legate of a foreign prince has done. We maintain that he has committed an usurpation upon the Queen's prerogative, and offered an affront to the nation's independence and dignity.

That we put no forced interpretation upon this act, but that, on the contrary, Rome held that this was the real meaning of the Papal aggression, we may quote the words of the Paris *Univers* of that day. The *Univers* distinctly tells us that the "Edict from the Flaminian Gate" effaced all previous territorial sees in England, and put down all ecclesiastical dignitaries set up by the Queen. The chairs of York and Canterbury were no more. "From the promulgation of the brief," said the *Univers*, "there exists neither see of Canterbury, nor of York, nor London, nor any of the sees established anterior to the Reformation. The personages who shall for the future assume the titles of Archbishop of Canterbury and Bishop of London will be mere intruders, schismatic prelates, without any spiritual authority..."

In England it is sought to calm apprehension by comparing the new dioceses and divisions to those of the Episcopal Church of Scotland or the Methodists; but nothing can be more false than such a comparison. The Methodists have never pretended to attack the spiritual authority of the Anglican Bishops, or, in dividing the dioceses of London or Oxford, to abrogate the authority of those sees, and render void and without effect all acts emanating from the

Anglican prelates who occupy them. We prefer, since the Holy See has thought fit, in its wisdom, to take this grave step, to avow plainly and openly its bearing, to attribute to it all its importance, rather than weaken it in order to calm the irritation of the enemies of the Church. Yes; the act of supremacy just exercised by Pius IX. denies the existence in England of all other spiritual authority save his own."

And, last of all, the greatly enhanced splendor and prestige which the restoration of the hierarchy has thrown around the Popish Church in Great Britain is not unworthy to be taken into account. Rome knows well that the great mass of mankind are more governed by show than by reality. None knows better the value of the *ad captandum* argument (an argument to try to win public favor). She has here employed it to purpose. Instead of a Church in humble serge, she has given us a Church in cloth of gold. Instead of a little missionary staff, with outlandish titles, – men from Trachonitis and Sardiac, – she has sent us bishops from the very foot of the throne of the Vicar of God. Instead of a nondescript body, half-missionary, half-episcopal, standing on two countries at once, having one foot in Melipotamus and another in London, one foot in Limyra and another in Edinburgh, we have now a regular and complete hierarchy, bedizened with titles secular and spiritual, full to the very brim with apostolical authority and virtue, singing its masses and reciting its litanies in magnificent cathedrals, and, with coquettish air, now showing itself in all the bravery of gilded chariots in our streets, and now hiding from public gaze, which it courts while it seems to shun, amid the shades of the cloister, – a full hierarchy, rising rank on rank in spiritual pomp, from the sandals of the Capuchin (a member of the Order of Friars) to the red hat of the cardinal. Thousands who passed it by unnoticed aforetime will now stop to gaze, and fall down to worship.

With all our advancement, real independence of mind is still rare. **The world, to a large extent, still worships shams.** Even in quarters where complete emancipation from everything like superstitious thralldom is loudly vaunted, how often are we astonished to find a sneaking reverence for the Church of Rome! We discover this weakness peering out in a hundred quiet ways, – many of them so well known that we need not enumerate them.

Continued in [A Battle That Was Not Fought.](#)

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