

POPERY AND INFIDELITY

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Popery and infidelity by James Douglas

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BY

JAMES DOUGLAS OF CAVERS.

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IT IS WRITTEN.—In these words of Emanuel—God in our nature, we have the Divine point of view in which the Holy Scriptures are to be regarded. Within this circle there is light and life, peace and assurance for ever.

It is *not* written—Within this circle there is doubt and darkness, and inextricable error.

From the Bible proceeds the religion of God, pure, unchangeable, and eternal, like its Author. From the fallen mind of man issue the religions of men, vain as various; ever changing, yet ever marked with the impress of departure from God, which they derive from their inventors. The Bible is a perfect whole. It admits of no additions from the superstitious, and no curtailments from the rationalist. It remains fenced, as holy ground, from every impure hand, with the Divine sanction on its perfect integrity; having the closing words of the Revelation applicable to every part of it—“If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this Book: and, if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the Book of Life,” &c.

Of the Bible it may be said, in a far higher sense than of Tyre of old, “Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in

beauty." The Bible is its own evidence—like its Divine Author, whose brightness and character it reflects. It is a light, which "coming into the world enlighteneth every man" who is willing to receive its testimony concerning Jesus. It is also its own commentary—explaining, enlarging, and confirming one passage by another, and one book by another. It is our prayer-book—containing words given from God Himself, whereby we may approach Him—pleading the most needful petitions, in the aptest words. It is our creed, and confession of faith—for there we find every statement that is requisite concerning God our Creator—God our Redeemer—God our Sanctifier—free from all scholastic technology, and bearing directly upon the heart and the life. In the Bible we have our best and only true Theology, containing all that can be certainly known respecting our salvation—not arranged in an artificial system—but so disclosed to us, both in its light, and in its shadings, as to present to us not only what is true, but every truth in its due proportion and distance. And the written word is thus complete, because it is the exact transcript of the ever-living Word—the Word that was in the beginning—the Word that was with God—the Word that was God. The Bible is the complete record of a divinely completed salvation. Holding the Head, we possess all things. Being in Christ, we are complete before God in Him. When we believe in Him, He is ours and we are His. His life is ours, and his whole fulfilment of the law, during a life of sorrow and suffering. As He lived for us, so He died for us—and as by faith we partake in the benefits of His death, so we become sharers in the glories of His resurrection.

We are saved by faith—and by faith alone—by believing God's testimony concerning His Son, we pass at once from death unto life, and into a preparation for future glory. All who by believing belong to Christ are led by the Spirit of Christ. The Spirit is one infinite Spirit, but the gifts of the Spirit are divided, in order that the whole body of believers may be united—none having a self-sufficiency of spiritual graces appropriated to themselves, but all made complete only in the unity of Christ's Uni-

versal Body—the congregated assembly of believers throughout all ages, to be united together in the Heaven of Heavens.

The true religion evidently consists in receiving the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible. He who would mix man's words and man's thoughts with God's words and God's thoughts, neither truly believes in the Bible, nor in its Author. "Add not thou to His words lest He reprove thee, and thou be found a liar." He who would attempt to illustrate, confirm, or extend the Truths of God by the comments of man, might as well light candles to search for the sun shining in noon-day splendour in the heavens—and he who would turn aside his ear to hearken to what man is saying, when God Himself speaks, would act as unwisely and impiously as an Israelite, who might have ceased to listen to the voice of Jehovah, speaking from Sinai, in order to count the reverberations of the accompanying thunders, as they rolled from mountain to mountain, in the increasing distance.

Tradition always alters where inspiration ceases. The scholastic maxim is true, "whatever is received, is received according to the capacity of the recipient." Something is omitted, and something is added, as tradition passes from mouth to mouth; and what was imperfect at first, becomes mutilated or perverted at last. This has been the case in philosophy and in false religion, as well as in true religion. In the philosophy of the mind, we formerly pointed out a striking instance, in the school of Pythagoras. "If innovation in opinions could ever possibly have been checked, it would have had no place among the disciples of Pythagoras, who silenced every rising doubt by the Pythagorean 'Ipse dixit,' and affirmed the truth of their doctrines by oaths as well as arguments—swearing by the name of their master—the demigod who had revealed to them the innermost secrets of nature;" "but, as in pouring liquor from one vessel to another, a minute portion is generally lost, and a secret taint may be received; so opinions adapt themselves to the mind that receives them, and the same words in another mouth have no longer the very same significance—for their meaning is, in

some degree, qualified or clouded—coloured or expanded. To the eye of the passing observer the current of opinion may seem to run smooth in its ancient bed, nevertheless it is all the while wasting away the opposing banks, and preparing for itself another channel." And, if the intelligent followers in almost every succession of this school altered the tenets of their master, how much greater a change would the higher doctrines of Christianity have suffered had they been entrusted to tradition, without written and inspired records, when passing through the hands of the first unlettered disciples!

Another example of the disfiguring effects of tradition might be taken from the false revelation of the Koran. The religion of the Caliphs was different from that of their prophet, owing to the additional mass of legends and traditions that were accumulating round it; like the vapoury tail of a comet, much larger than the little nucleus to which it is attached—and when the Wahabees began to separate these foreign admixtures from the original elements of Islam, they seemed like the propounders of a new faith, to the majority of the Moslem.

But far the most striking example is that of the Jews about the time of our Saviour. Though venerating the sacred volume of the Old Testament with a blind and unhesitating homage, counting each book and section—and letter—to preserve it free from admixture, they so obscured the heavenly light with the clouded fancies of their own minds, and the dark traditions of their rabbins, that they incurred the merited condemnation of the Divine teacher, who had descended into the midst of them: "In vain do ye worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." And, if the Church of the Jews drew down upon themselves such a sentence, what doom is impending over the false Church of Rome, which has heaped up human authority above measure; and buried the living oracles under a tumultus of the piled up rubbish of antiquity, and a mass of idolatrous fables.

Rome subordinates the Bible to tradition—the infallible to the fallible—God to man—and the Divine words to the human

comment—for, if the Bible is to be interpreted by tradition, mightier is tradition than the Scriptures! But where does that tradition exist, and in what form? God has so ordered it, that though all traditions are defective, Christian tradition is most so. We shall first point out the fact, and then assign the cause.

We must, however, premise, that two works are especially wanting, a complete Church History—and the lives and opinions of the early Fathers. Two works which would stand in intimate relation with each other, as History and Biography, (the size need not alarm, if the rubbish were cleared away;) and might well be executed by the same hand, from the same materials. Historians too frequently veil the defects of the absence of documents, endeavouring to make that appear continuous, which is only fragmentary: thus Gibbon conceals the want of information by the oracular style of Tacitus, and covers over the chasms of history with a profusion of flowers.

The writer of a just and genuine Church History would be careful to point out that his work must necessarily be fragmentary, from the want of that which Rome with all her arts cannot supply, genuine Christian tradition. The progress of Christianity is imperfectly noted—the attention of the earlier Christians was arrested by two subjects—heresies and persecutions. “If you can follow the Christian Church in her early history,” says Leighton, “it is by the track of her blood; and if you would see her, it is by the light of those fires in which her martyrs have been burnt.”

Milner greatly perverts history by selecting only pious sentiments, and leaving the impression that these were characteristic of the life and actions of the person who spoke them: he is more partial than Gibbon himself, though in an opposite direction. What can be more contrary to the whole truth than Milner's account of Pope Gregory the Great? Mosheim, though trustworthy, presents but the skeleton of antiquity. Neander's, though full of promise, is, properly speaking, no history at all. It is not a narrative of events, but a narrative of what Neander felt and thought when he was revolving these events in his