

**THE ROMISH REACTION
AND ITS PRESENT
OPERATION ON THE
CHURCH OF ENGLAND**

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The Romish Reaction and Its Present Operation on the Church of England by Henry Soames

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THE *With the Author's
kind Regards.*

ROMISH REACTION,

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PRESENT OPERATION

ON



THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

BY

HENRY SOAMES, M.A.,

AUTHOR OF THE *HISTORY OF THE REFORMATION.*

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THE

ROMISH REACTION.

MANY yet alive remember the riots of 1780, and most elderly people have heard accounts of them from contemporaries. Popular antipathy to Romanism then reached its height, and afterwards regularly declined. Its diminution was not, however, much observable, until the Catholic claims, as they were called, came before the public. Then considerable indifference towards the papal church soon became apparent among laymen in good circumstances. Clergymen generally retained an attitude firmly Protestant so long as the contest lasted, and their polemical activity kept Romish advocates within bounds of exemplary moderation. When the restrictive system fell in 1829, a reaction was to be expected, but such a one has actually occurred, as few would have anticipated, twenty years ago. English Romanism now does not only feel relieved from obloquy and opposition, it boldly challenges publicity. Its edifices rise in all the pomp of architecture; cathedrals are designed; and even under execution; nor have successive exhibitions been without a papal ecclesiastic pourtrayed in the gaudy vestments of his function. Romish writers, too, have at length attracted popular attention, and the whole papal party has naturally been led by a reaction so

complete, into a tone of triumph, defiance, and expectation.

It has even received encouragement within the Established Church itself in taking this new position. Its principles, rites, and champions, lie no longer under one unbroken mass of clerical neglect, or opposition. The Church of England, rightly understood, approaches, it has been said, very near to that of Rome. Youthful inexperience, apparently, enamoured of ritual pageantry seen abroad, has discovered a disposition to naturalize the like on English ground. Romish formularies have courted public approval with Protestant introductions. The Reformation, though considered as probably requisite, and not schismatical, has been disparaged as a source of injury to religion. Hildebrand, Becket, and Innocent III. have been extolled, Cranmer, Ridley, and Jewel censured. Papal authority to canonise has been tacitly admitted, by giving the saintly title to men who have none but Romish claims to any such distinction. Even the very name of Protestant, in which England, for ages, gloried all but universally, has been treated as a reproach that she should wipe, or explain away.

The reaction, undoubtedly, has not gone to such extremes, except among the younger clergy. The seniors almost in a body stand aloof, surprised and grieved. At least so much as that, may be safely said of nearly all the laity. Hence this movement would require but little notice, were not its admirers anxious to force it on the country generally. As the first step, they clamour for the revival of certain obsolete formalities in public worship. These in

themselves really are so very unimportant, and can often besides plead some sort of authority, that inattention to a general call for them would neither be politic nor reasonable. But the country makes no such call. It is indifferent, or hostile, and much more the latter than the former. It is, in fact, proud of the Church's offices, as they have been immemorially performed. Why risk unpalatable change? Surely, when men are quiescent, and even pleased, it cannot be judicious to thrust among them elements of debate, dissatisfaction, and disgust. Who shall venture to foresee what forms a strife that stirs a nation shall take, what spirits may ride upon it into notice, what havoc may follow in its train? The parties who struck the spark may have meant nothing so little as the flame. In this case, undoubtedly, it is so. The innovators may be warped, half-unconsciously, by a longing for augmented ecclesiastical importance. Apart from this venial frailty, they are wholly above suspicion. But as purity of motive is not always joined with sufficient consideration, it must be desirable to inquire whether present clamour for a new religious face, may not labour under this disadvantage. The cry should really find no hasty countenance; it has been raised before, and most unfortunately for both Church and monarchy.

It is of still more importance from its bearing on the spiritual interests of men; a due regard for these now renders it necessary to give the public generally some means of estimating Romanism. Advocates of that creed might colourably maintain from late events, that English antipathy to it originated in sel-

fishness, and never found support in anything more respectable. Hence opposition to it had no sooner ceased to answer any worldly end, than the force of truth converted men, trained for enemies, into real friends. For such representations, however, there is really but a slender foundation. Assimilations to Romanism are not necessarily Romish. On the contrary, some of the most cherished papal principles may be entertained by those who are both able and willing to use them against the papal church herself. Unwritten tradition, for instance, on which she chiefly leans, has been often shown to be at best a two-edged sword, above her power to meet, when wielded with an able hand. Still, recent approximations to the Church of Rome have been convicted of a dangerous tendency. Some conversions, rather perhaps apostasies, have actually occurred, as every body knows. Any considerable number of these defections may not, indeed, be likely among clergymen, even in quarters most open to misconception. A moderate portion of professional knowledge will discover indefensible points in the Romish system, and a rising disposition to abandon Protestantism may be restrained by marriage, or by dependence upon preferment of some value. But laymen have no such protections. Hence opinions of a Romish cast are no safe candidates for popular approbation. It is true that genuine Protestants may think very differently upon many subjects from extreme holders of reformed opinions. Nor will those who know the Church deny the expediency of spreading sounder impressions upon ecclesiastical questions than have been current in some Protestant bodies. But

unwonted prominence given to tradition, church-authority, sacramental efficacy, ritual observances, and other questions on which Rome relies, is likely to prepare the way for her emissaries, and to divert attention from the vitals of religion. Serious evil may also lurk under a studied extension of ritual formalities. Once engender a prevailing fondness for externals, and Protestant worship may be thought without facilities for satisfying the reasonable cravings of mankind. For such a taste, however, ample gratification is provided in the theatrical rites of Rome. Unless, therefore, Protestants desire some sort of coalition with the papal church, they should, in justice to the weak and uninformed, be very wary of approaches towards her. But coalition would be soon found impracticable. The papacy, though weakened and humbled, still has power and haughtiness enough to demand an unconditional surrender. And her friends may ask, Why should Protestants refuse one?

When inquiring minds would return a well-considered answer to this important question, they soon discern a most unsatisfactory prospect before them. As Romanism rises to the view, really two systems are disclosed; one of which has no defenders, or none of any note: this latter system may, indeed, be disclaimed altogether, without renouncing the Romish communion. Hence Bossuet, whose *Exposition of the Catholic Faith in Matters of Controversy* has become a text-book in papal polemics, would not undertake its advocacy. He pleads for nothing unsanctioned by the wary council of Trent. This determination leaves, however, that superstition undefended, which chiefly makes up the