

The Papal System – XXIX. The Family and Public Worship, and the Books of Protestants



Gospel tracts

Continued from [XXVIII. Secret Societies.](#)

The Irish Catholic, when not cursed by whiskey, nor degraded by crime, when his religion is not called in question, is an obliging, good-natured man; a kind word will make him extravagantly happy; a loving act will summon up a torrent of grateful expressions, to be followed, if necessary, by all the practical exhibitions of thankfulness a man ever displayed. He is ready on the most trivial successes to shake off care, and to impart to his family and friends all the joy he can give. He will carry his wife and children, and his old father and mother in his heart over the oceans, and down the stream of years; and his generous love will make him labor in America, denying himself every comfort, to save money to send for the parents of his youth, the wife of his heart, the children that sported around his knee in his mud home in the "Green island," and called him "father." He has his faults; but when free from drunkenness and crime, his ready wit and warm heart make him many friends among the sternest Protestants.

And yet, ask him to come to an Evangelical church, and you are treading on excitable ground; press the invitation stiffly, and the "exile of Erin" may burst into a towering passion; and perhaps threaten your life. Or, instead of an effort to bring him to an Evangelical church, offer him what he knows to be a Protestant tract or Bible, and insist upon his taking and reading it, and his countenance will instantly exhibit the fiercest passions, and his burning words, lighted up by oaths blazing with the flames of the pit, will make you wonder why such a cause should make him angry.

The Protestant will listen to an invitation to a Romish church, and commonly will not be irritated however much it is pressed. He occasionally may be found at Catholic worship. The Romanist is hardly ever seen in a non-Catholic sanctuary. Nay, the Catholic will not come to family worship in the house of his Protestant employer. The anti-papist, instead of being angry at the offer of Catholic books, will generally accept and read them. The tract-distributor is welcomed by Jews and Protestants, but frowned upon, if not insulted, by a man as full of good nature on other questions as any one whom the world contains. And if you ask how this change is produced, we answer:

His Creed embitters him against the Protestant, his Worship and his Books.

Among the questions which he is asked in the confessional are these: "Have you allowed yourself to be enticed into the churches of heretics, to join in their family prayers, or to read their religious books? How many times?"

Another part of the same manual of prayer tells him in preparing for the confessional he must ask himself and be prepared to answer these questions: "Have you read Protestant Bibles, tracts or other books on matters of religion, circulated by heretics? Have you kept them in your house, or sold them, or given them to others to read? How many times? Have you joined in the worship of heretics either in public or in private? Have you gone to their worship? Have you listened to their preaching? How often?"

And this, the "Mission Book" calls a sin against the first command: "Thou shalt have no other Gods before me." Again, in the same book, page 261, "It is said to be a sin to join in the worship of heretics or schismatics, or to be present at their meetings or preachings. Yes, it is a sin to countenance their doctrines or their worship in any way." "The Garden of the Soul," under the first commandment, proposes these questions to the penitent in view of the confessional: "Have you by word or deed denied your religion, or gone to places of false worship (Protestant), so as to join in any way in the worship? How often?" It places along with this sin under the same commandment, idolatry, witchcraft, blasphemy, and other enormities, as if joining in Protestant worship was their equal.

Now here is the secret of the good-natured Irishman's wrath, of his refusal to take. your tracts, or to go occasionally to your church. *He dare not*. He would have to confess it, and do penance for it before his next communion; or be guilty of a "sacrilegious confession or communion by concealing some mortal sin on confession, or what he doubted might be mortal." In all probability he might have to dine without flesh for a week, while compelled to work hard to earn bread for his children, or suffer something else equally unpleasant for such favor shown to heresy. In his mind Protestant tract and Bible reading are associated with pain; Protestant family worship with labor on an unsatisfied stomach; and attendance at a Protestant church with priestly wrath in the confessional.

We have sat on the old wall of an ancient city, not far from the boundaries of two kingdoms, around which fierce conflicts raged at intervals for several centuries; and once for two hours we watched a convent, below and outside the bulwarks which we occupied. A lofty wall around the convent kept off much of the pure air and bright sunbeams, and all human intruders; the windows were small, to keep men out, or the sun; they had iron bars to keep the nuns in, or their enemies from disturbing them; no nun in the yard must look at the worldly people on the wall, lest some portion of the inflammable material in her heart might be set on fire by seeing the freedom women outside enjoyed; or by the splendid looks of handsome men. The inmates of that prison never came out of their bastille, though from visible precautions it was clearly not a happy home to them all. A near relative could speak to a nun through a pigeon-hole, with a wall between, and watchful eyes and ears attentively observing the parties to the interview. That was a *place of safe keeping* provided for those who needed to be guarded against themselves and the world.

The "Holy Church" places the restraints of a moral convent around all her children. She rears high moral walls around them, to keep out the blasts of liberty, of Protestant free inquiry; they must enjoy the light of the Sun of Righteousness, not by walking abroad and bathing without restraint in its blessed oceans, but through the little barred and cobwebbed windows of her system of apostasy; like the nun of downcast eye, they must not even look at Protestant worship; and if they speak a word with the tract distributor or the donor of Bibles, it must be through a pigeon-hole in the thick wall of superstition with the priest standing by, with an ear trumpet in one hand, called the "confessional," listening to *all that is said, and a club in the other, called "penance," ready to bruise and blacken without mercy* if he deems its use expedient. There is not so much cause for astonishment in the surly look and answer of the good-natured Romanist when Protestantism claims his attention.

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