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an Interview with the Pope at the Vatican

George Townsend

Excerpt

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## TOUR IN ITALY.

### INTRODUCTION.

#### REASONS FOR GOING TO ITALY, AND SEEKING AN INTERVIEW WITH THE POPE.

WHEN a member of the United Churches of England and Ireland, or a Protestant Episcopalian of Scotland, America, or elsewhere, goes up to the Table and Altar of the Lord, at the celebration of the Holy Sacrament, he is accustomed to pray, that —“God would inspire continually the Universal Church with the spirit of truth, unity, and concord ; and that all who confess His holy Name may agree in the truth of His holy word, and live in unity and Godly love.” In the Prayer of the Post-Communion we humbly beseech our Lord and Heavenly Father,—“that by the merits and death of Jesus Christ we and ALL His whole Church may obtain remission of our sins, and all other benefits of His passion.”—We pray in the Litany

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that it may please God “to rule and govern the Holy Church Universal in the right way.” In the Prayer for all Conditions of Men, we pray “more especially for the good estate of the Catholic Church; that it might be so guided and governed by God’s good Spirit, that ALL who profess and call themselves Christians may be led into the way of truth, and hold the Faith in unity of spirit, in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life.”—And in many other parts of our beautiful Service we implore the Almighty, to whom we pray, to grant the same petitions.

I have now, through many years, inquired of myself, Whether all these prayers are a mere mockery? Whether they are utterly vain and useless? Whether they have any meaning, or are merely the language of routine and form?—Solemn prayers like these generally imply a solemn vow. Those who pray for “Unity, Peace, and Concord,” are required to exert themselves, to labour, and hope, to accomplish objects so desirable. No Papist, nor Protestant, however, is found to make the least attempt to promote peace. Every Church, sect, and party, entrenches itself behind its own fortifications, and its own battlements, contented with affirming the Scriptural impregnability of its own position, and with exhausting the language of vituperation on the holders of the neighbouring

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fortress. "See how these Christians love one another!" was the language of antiquity. "See how these Christians hate one another!" is the language of the present day. Infidelity triumphs in our mutual hatreds. *Rome* charges England with originating and perpetuating this infidelity, by the obstinacy of its schism, and by the multiplicity of its sects, which it permits to exist, to speak, and to write, without control. *England* charges Rome with the same sin, by its stubborn resistance to the union of religious liberty with ecclesiastical authority; and by fettering the mind of man to the maxims, opinions, discipline, and traditions, which are neither divine in their origin, true in their nature, useful in their exercise, nor consistent with the spiritual improvement of mankind. *Rome* teaches its people that their opposition to its creed and government produces present political, ecclesiastical, and anarchical evil, as well as undoubted future misery. *England* regards the religion and polity of Rome as "the worst of superstitions, and the heaviest of all God's judgments<sup>1</sup>." Both are vehement in their condemnation of the real or supposed criminality which originates and perpetuates the greatest hindrance to the extension and influence of pure and primitive Christianity.

<sup>1</sup> Milton.

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The question, then, is, *What is the remedy for these evils?*—"Submission to Rome," is the answer of many of our own brethren, whose mournful defection we deplore; or who have endeavoured to soften or palliate the errors which our fathers so justly condemned.—"Submission to Rome," is the answer of the disciples of the school of Bossuet, who endeavour to explain away the more obnoxious tenets of the Church of Rome, and represent the differences between the two Churches as too minute and too trivial to justify the continuance of the separation.—"Implicit submission to Rome," says the bolder and more decided Papist. "We will rescind no law; we will abrogate no decree; we will alter no article of doctrine; we will change no rule of discipline; we will reconquer the Universal Church by our endurance, our patience, and our perseverance."—Alas, for the hopes of mankind, if truth is more pliable than error! With deep, sincere, impartial study of the arguments in favour of the Church of Rome, and of the evidence by which it would support its pretensions, I have endeavoured to answer this question; and I am compelled, as a lover of the truth, to come to the conclusion, that, while Rome remains as she is, resistance to Rome, and not submission to Rome, is the bounden duty of every Christian. I am compelled to believe, that *sub-*

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*mission to Rome is the worst evil that can befall the Church of God.* For Rome is chargeable with two errors which forbid the possibility of unity, peace, and concord between the Churches of the Catholic Church till they are removed. One relates to its doctrines, the other to its discipline. The first is, the reception of a Creed, which embodies, on the authority, not of a Council, but of an individual Bishop of Rome, the whole of the conclusions to which we are compelled to object. The second is, claiming and exercising the right and privilege of permitting, and therefore of withholding, from the believer in Christianity who receives that Creed, that word of God which the Almighty gave to all, as He gives them the fresh air of Heaven to breathe, or the light of the sun to enable them to see. Three degrees of happiness are given to all mankind. One is, the inferior happiness which we possess in common with the ignorant and the savage,—namely, the satisfaction of the appetites and the instincts of nature. The second is, the happiness which we share with the refined and learned, who may not possess the better and the higher felicity—the pleasures of poetry, the delights of eloquence, and the charms of literature. The third is, the happiness which we partake in common with the spirits of all true Christians—the knowledge of the Deity as it is given us in Reve-

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lation, the anticipations and the earnest also of the enjoyments of a future state, and all the elevations and blessings which the Son of God died to bestow upon man. This highest happiness can only be derived from the knowledge, the belief, and the study of the word of God. The suppression, therefore, or even the partial permission of that word, is warfare against the supreme happiness of man<sup>2</sup>. The claim of the Church of Rome to permit what the Almighty has freely granted to all, is an act of blasphemy and presumption against His Providence. The refusal of that word, because it has been sometimes misinterpreted, or sometimes rendered a source of controversy, is an impeachment of the wisdom of the Deity, and an injustice to the soul of man. To supply its place by human compositions, by an acted Mass, by well-painted pictures, by the finest statuary, or by any religious ordinances whatever, is as utterly impossible as the attempt to supply the place of the flowing river, the fresh air, and the realities of the scenery of nature, by the illusion of a panorama, or to satisfy the cravings of hunger by the sounds of music. The word of God is the birthright and heritage of all men. It is given to the Church and to the world; that from the world the Church might be formed. The

<sup>2</sup> Note 2, Appendix.

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Church is only the keeper of its truth, and the witness of its origin, its perpetuity, and its authenticity ; and so long as the Church of Rome continues its unholy warfare against the word of God, that Church must and will be deemed the chief hindrance to the best, highest, spiritual happiness ; and the first chief cause of the infidelity which now threatens Christianity.

Such are the reflections which have now, for many years, induced me to desire to seek some remedy for our mutual hatreds, and to make some effort, however feeble, and however humble, towards the accomplishment of the object for which, in common with my brethren of the Church of England, I ever pray when I go up to the Table and Altar of the Lord. They are not, therefore, new ; neither is my Prayer that the Church may be united in one true Catholicity, now offered by me for the first time. Ten years have elapsed since I commenced a laborious work on the Pentateuch, entitled "Scriptural Communion with God." The Sixth and final Part was completed at the end of the last year (1849), immediately before I left England for Italy. As the reunion of Christians, or the establishment of the truth, unity, and concord for which we pray, by unpoperizing the Church of Rome, was the frequent subject of my private prayers to God ; the meditations on

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which those prayers were founded were embodied in various Dedications, prefixed to the four last Parts of that work. The Third Part was dedicated to Pope Gregory XVI. It related to the mode in which the work of the reunion of Christians might be commenced in the manner which the great majority of the Catholic Church would require;—that as laws must be rescinded by the power which enacts them, and as the Bulls of the Popes have been repeatedly rescinded by their successors; the Bull, therefore, which decreed that twelve doctrines be added to the Nicene Creed<sup>3</sup>, as Articles of Faith, may be rescinded by the present Pope, or by any of his successors, without propounding any condemnation of the Articles themselves. If this were done, the propositions which the Council of Trent commended to the approbation of the Roman Catholic Church might be reconsidered in another Council, summoned under the authority of Christian temporal Princes, of whom the Bishop of Rome might be one; and in this mode the hope of a better state of Christianity might dawn upon the world<sup>4</sup>.

In the Dedication prefixed to the Fourth Part of my above-mentioned work, and addressed to the temporal powers of Europe, I placed before them the example of Constantine, the first Christian

<sup>3</sup> Note 3, Appendix.

<sup>4</sup> Note 4, Appendix.



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Emperor. If the Pope, as the chief Bishop of the Western Churches, I showed them, refused to commence this great work of promoting the reunion of Christians on the basis of the reconsideration of the past; it then became the duty of the successors of Constantine, in the secular empires of Europe and Asia, to adopt his plan of government in seven particulars there specified, and to deem it to be their bounden Christian duty to endeavour, on the basis of truth, without regard to the Pope, to re-establish peace and union on earth.

The Fifth Part was dedicated to the Sovereign of Great Britain and Ireland, as the fittest potentate to begin this holy movement.

The Sixth and last Part was dedicated to the general prelacy of the Universal Church, and more especially to the spiritual authorities of our own Church. I there urged upon them, the possibility of obtaining the consent of their several governments to assemble in Synods, in Congresses, or Councils, peaceably to deliberate on this most desirable reunion. To the Archbishop of Paris I related, in this last Dedication, the correspondence between Dr. Wake, the Archbishop of Canterbury in the reign of Queen Anne, and the learned M. Dupin<sup>5</sup>, author of the "Dissertation on the Discipline of the Ancient Church." I then, in

<sup>5</sup> Note 5, Appendix.

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the most earnest terms I could command, implored the Archbishop of Paris, and the Bishop of Rome, to devote themselves to the reformation of their Churches, in the manner in which the Apostles themselves would do, if they could be raised from the dead to judge the spiritual Israel of God. I implored the Pope to become the standard-bearer of that great number, which longs for the embracings of Peace with Truth<sup>6</sup>; but I assured him, that neither the Pope, nor his successors, with all the despotisms of Europe, if they could be restored—nor all the Jesuits who have ever uttered their curses on our energies—nor all the perverted traitors within our own tolerant Church, *will be able to re-unite the Christian Churches on the foundation of the old Popery*. From addressing the Pope, I conclude the Dedication with an appeal to the Archbishop of Canterbury. I entreated him to be able to look up to God when he is dying, and to say,—“No difficulties terrified me; no mere routine retarded me; no apprehension lest Princes should oppose me, no fear lest the people should deride me, no human motive prevented me from endeavouring to fulfil my duty to the Holy Catholic Church of Christ, as well as to its best portion, my own Church, the useful, the honoured, the Scriptural Church of England.”—And the Dedication is con-

<sup>6</sup> Note 6, Appendix.