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George Townsend

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Journal of a Tour in Italy, in 1850

A Church of England clergyman and biblical scholar, George Townsend (1788–1857) gained recognition for preparing chronological arrangements of both the Old and New Testament. First published in 1850, the present work is an intriguing account of his journey to Italy for an audience with Pope Pius IX, whom he intended to convert to Protestantism. Townsend's journal features details of his stay in Paris, where he was received by the city's archbishop, as well as remarks on the churches and clergy he encountered along the way. In Rome and the Vatican, he visited the main sites of interest while commenting on points of doctrinal divergence and the hospitality shown towards him. Warmly received by Pius IX, who chose to interpret the visit as ecumenical, Townsend inevitably failed in his ultimate objective. Tendentious and forthright, his work sheds light on a strain of English anti-Catholicism.

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University Printing House, Cambridge, CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

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www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108069267

© in this compilation Cambridge University Press 2014

This edition first published 1850
This digitally printed version 2014

ISBN 978-1-108-06926-7 Paperback

This book reproduces the text of the original edition. The content and language reflect
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JOURNAL
OF A
TOUR IN ITALY,
IN 1850,
WITH AN ACCOUNT OF AN
INTERVIEW WITH THE POPE,
At the Vatican.

BY THE REV.
GEORGE TOWNSEND, D.D.
CANON OF DURHAM,
AUTHOR OF "THE CHRONOLOGICAL ARRANGEMENT OF THE BIBLE,"
"SCRIPTURAL COMMUNION WITH GOD,"
"ECCLESIASTICAL AND CIVIL HISTORY PHILOSOPHICALLY CONSIDERED,"
"ACCUSATIONS OF HISTORY AGAINST THE CHURCH OF ROME,"
SERMONS, &c.

LONDON:
FRANCIS & JOHN RIVINGTON,
ST. PAUL'S CHURCH YARD, AND WATERLOO PLACE.
1850.

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THE Tour in Italy, of which an account is given in the following pages, was begun and completed, and the narrative itself, with the exception of a few sentences, was written, long before the promulgation of the late unscriptural, absurd, and insolent bull of the Pope, whom I visited at the Vatican. I could not be aware, that three years ago the plan of dividing England into dioceses, as if we were either a Heathen or a Popish country, could have been imagined, much less acted upon. The folly and the presumption, however, of the Pope's action has not altered that opinion which I believe I am almost alone in holding, expressing, and enforcing; but which, until I can be convinced I am in error, I shall still hold, express, and enforce—that God will so order, by His Providence, the course of this world, that in His own good time the Holy and Omnipotent Spirit of God will change the Papists of France, Italy, and

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Spain, as He changed, three centuries ago, the Papists of England, Scotland, and Germany. In spite of all the blasphemous pretensions of Rome—in spite of all its unjustifiable additions to the Primitive Faith of Christ,—in spite of all the indefensible assumption, by which, in this hour of its decrepitude, it asserts the divine right to permit to, or withhold from, the soul of man, the birthright of all men, the free use of the Word of God,—in spite of all the wicked laws, bulls, rescripts, and edicts, which are alike hostile to the ancient early Religion of Jesus Christ, to modern constitutional liberty, and therefore to National happiness; I believe, against all appearances to the contrary, that the Omnipotent power, and grace, and influence of the Spirit of God will finally make the Church of Rome become what it is not now, but what it once was, when St. Paul approved and blessed it. If this great Protestant country will now do its duty to the civilized world, as it did in the reign of Elizabeth, when it beat back Popery; or in the reign of William III., when it trod down the divine right of Kings, and all regal despotism; or as it did in the reign of George III., when it rebuked and vanquished the Infidelity of the Continent;—then will England be not only safe within itself, but more and more influential as the blessing and the example to mankind. Towards the close of that great and

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terrible war, which began with the first French Revolution and ended with the contest at Waterloo, an English General began one of his despatches with the memorable words—"England has saved itself by its firmness, and Europe by its example." So must it be now, in the revival and renewal of the great war between Christianity and its corruptions, between the Reformation and Papistry.

But what, it will be demanded, is the remedy? What must be done? How are we to resist these aggressions? How can we meet these encroachments?

They must be all met, we answer, by untiring, vigilant, sleepless resistance. This resistance must be of three kinds: *Political, Christian, Ecclesiastical*.

There must be untiring, vigilant, sleepless, *Political* resistance.

The details of this first mode of resistance must be left to our Rulers: but as the soldiers of a foreign enemy are justly regarded as enemies, and are not, therefore, invested with the privileges of citizens, even if they are permitted to traverse the country on their parole of honour; so also should it now be with the members of the Church of Rome. The Pope has declared himself to be the foreign enemy. By the promulgation of a bull as atrocious and as hostile

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to the Protestant Institutions of England as any that were issued in the reigns of Elizabeth or James I., the Pope has cancelled the claims of his subjects to the civil privileges of their Protestant countrymen ; and has placed them in the position of foreigners, aliens, and enemies. No man in a state of society is entitled to any other privileges than the law of the land allows him. All privileges are granted, or are maintained, upon certain implied or expressed conditions. The privilege of participating with the legislative power in assisting in the formation of the laws of the land, was granted to the Romanists on the solemn condition, that such obedience be not rendered to a foreigner which shall ultimately endanger the Throne of England. If the Pope does not rescind this bull, our political security requires that he be declared to be “a foreign enemy.” If the subjects of the Pope do not repudiate this bull, they will then be the soldiers of that foreign enemy. They forfeit their political privileges. They place themselves under their parole of honour only ; and though we may safely grant to them peace, toleration, and protection, under the watchful superintendence of the public law ; we shall do wisely to insist upon their resignation of the peculiar conditional privileges which we granted to them in the year 1829, and thus relieve them from the

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burthen under which their consciences, as the subjects of the foreign enemy, must so deeply suffer,—the power of legislating for the prosperity, the strength, the extension, and the influence of the Protestant Institutions, which their duty to God, and their allegiance to the foreign enemy, the declared vicar of Christ, requires them to endeavour to destroy.

This is the commencement of the *Political* resistance to the aggression of which we complain.

The second mode of resistance may be called *Christian* resistance, because it is founded on the principles of abstract Christianity, which ought ever, so far as is possible, to be the guide and direction to the disciples of Christ.

We are the disciples of Christ, and the followers of the primitive martyrs of the early Church. Two examples are before us of the manner in which our discipleship may be shown.

Jesus Christ loved His people. He reproved their apostasy, He wept over their destruction; and, at the very moment when they were nailing Him to the cross, He offered the prayer for His murderers, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”

Stephen, the first martyr, loved his countrymen. He reproved the fearful crime of their crucifying Christ, and stigmatized them as the resisters of

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the Holy Ghost. When they cast him out of the city and stoned him, then, at the very moment when they were overwhelming him with the instruments of persecution and death, he kneeled down and cried with a loud voice, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge."

As Christ, and His servant Stephen, were willing to lay down their lives, protesting against the errors, and corruptions of their people; so ought we, after their example, in opposition to errors and corruptions as inveterate, obstinate, and unscriptural, to persevere in the second mode of our resistance to the encroachments of Rome. We must maintain our protestation against their doctrines, their superstitions, and their usurpations, to the grave. We must appeal to them, expostulate with them, pray for them, and love them: but we must never, never submit to them, never sanction their idolatry, never uphold their apostasy, never endure their pretensions. Ever watchful, ever on our guard, ever mindful of the uniform experience of many centuries, and especially of the testimony of the last century, that Rome never sleeps, that—

Still to new flights her restless wishes soar,
Claim leads to claim, and power advances power;
Still whimpering on, "Think nothing done," she cries,
"Till at our feet the Church of England lies—"

our duty of resistance is strengthened by her

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boldness of aggression. The result must be left to God. Only let our motto be—No peace with Rome, as it is; no peace with Rome, till God shall give it repentance; no peace with Rome, till its Pauline Faith be restored, its mediæval additions to Christ's Truth be removed, its cruel canons be rescinded, and its odious bulls be withdrawn. No peace with Rome, till the unrestricted Bible be its rule; and its rulers, and its people, once more become the repentant and humble Church, with their brethren. No peace with Rome, till the Spirit of God shall change it, and render it no longer our duty to protest against its errors, and to resist its domination.

The third mode of resistance to the aggression of Rome is *Ecclesiastical*.

By the words *Ecclesiastical* Resistance, as contradistinguished from Political Resistance, I mean that opposition to the usurpations and pretensions of the Bishop of Rome, which may be, and which must be, sooner or later, made by Christian sovereigns, states, and people, considered as members of the one universal Church, and founded upon the revival of the scriptural, primitive custom, of conciliar deliberation on the controversies which agitate that Church. The battle is not between Popery and Protestantism, considered as two adverse parties, but between Christianity and its corrup-

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tions. England alone is not interested; the whole human race, to whom the knowledge of the religion of Jesus Christ has been, or will be made known, is concerned in the results of this mighty contest. The controversy is between truth and falsehood, liberty and slavery, constitutional government and arbitrary despotism, monarchical authority and papal usurpation; between good and evil. The temporal monarchs of the world are the guardians of the people committed to their care. Scriptural Christianity is the only effectual mode of blessing their people; and the monarchs, to whom God has given the crown and the sceptre, are required, as their first duty, to take care that no priesthood changes that blessing into a curse. There is, in fact, but one only question to be considered.—Christ gave to one of His Apostles a commission to build His Church, and a prophecy that he should execute His commission. The preaching of that Apostle first to the Jews, and then to the Gentiles, accomplished the commission, and fulfilled the prophecy. The chief question for the princes, the rulers, and the people of the Universal Church to consider, in the Council which it is their duty to summon is this, Whether the Bishop of Rome, because Christ said to His Apostle, “Thou art Peter,” is entrusted with the

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power of saying to all States, and to all Churches, 'I ordain, and I decree, that public prayer shall not be offered to God in the language in which the people think best, but in the language which I deem best. "Thou art Peter;" therefore I give the Holy Scriptures as I please, and as I permit. "Thou art Peter;" therefore I, the Bishop of Rome, command all Senates, Rulers, Kings, and people, to enact no laws, grant no liberties, make no decrees, which shall affect the best interests of nations, without my sanction, without my permission. "Thou art Peter;" therefore I, the Bishop of Rome,—whatever be the laws of England, whether Scriptural, absolute, constitutional, old or new, ecclesiastical or civil,—divide England into dioceses and districts at my will and pleasure; and I command this law—my law—to be observed by my subjects in that country.'—Such is the claim of ecclesiastical supremacy. In England the papal ecclesiastical supremacy has been met by ecclesiastical resistance. The Convocation, in the reign of Henry VIII., met and rejected it: and the State, in its Parliament, acted upon the decision of the Convocation. But the Councils of England are peculiar to that Empire alone;—and this question of the Ecclesiastical Supremacy is not an English question only; it is,—if I may use new terms,—a European question, a universal Church

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question, a human race question. If Christianity is to be, as I believe that God's holy revelation affirms it eventually shall be, the uniter of all mankind in one Universal Church ; then all mankind, through all its aggregate of states, peoples, nations, languages, and tongues, are interested in the overthrow of an Ecclesiastical Supremacy which poisons the Fountains of spiritual life at their source. The union of Churches, on the foundations of Papistry, would only be a universal apostasy, which would bring down the second deluge of fire from heaven to destroy the world, and its Churches.

I only add, that if I could have imagined the possibility of the folly and crime which the Pope has committed, I would never have entered Rome ; and that distance from the press, and many avocations and interruptions, have prevented the earlier publication of my Journal.

COLLEGE, DURHAM,
Dec. 4, 1850.