

WHAT DO THE TIMES REQUIRE?

Church Association Tract 147

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The times require of us an awakened and livelier sense of the unscriptural and soul-ruining character of Romanism.

This is a painful subject: but it imperatively demands some plain speaking.

The FACTS of the case are very simple. No intelligent observer can fail to see that the tone of public feeling in England about Romanism has undergone a great change in the last forty years. Father Oakley, the well-known pervert, an ally of Cardinal Newman, asserts this triumphantly in the last number of the *Contemporary Review*. And I am sorry to say that, in my judgment, he speaks the truth. There is no longer that general dislike, dread, and aversion to Popery, which was once almost universal in this realm. The edge of the old British feeling about Protestantism seems blunted and dull. Some profess to be tired of all religious controversy, and are ready to sacrifice God's truth for the sake of peace.—Some look on Romanism as simply one among many English forms of religion, and neither worse nor better than others.—Some try to persuade us that Romanism is changed, and not nearly so bad as it used to be.—Some boldly point to the faults of Protestants, and loudly cry that Romanists are quite as good as ourselves.—Some think it fine and liberal to maintain that we have no right to think any one wrong who is in earnest about his creed.—And yet the two great historical facts, (*a*) that ignorance, immorality, and superstition reigned supreme in England four hundred years ago under Popery, (*b*) that the Reformation was the greatest blessing God ever gave to this land,—both these are facts which no one but a Papist ever thought of disputing fifty years ago! In the present day, alas, it is convenient and fashionable to forget them! In short, at the rate we are going, I shall not be surprised if it is soon proposed to repeal the Act of Settlement, and to allow the Crown of England to be worn by a Papist.

The *causes* of this melancholy change of feeling are not hard to discover.

(*a*) It arises partly from the untiring zeal of the Romish Church herself. Her agents never slumber or sleep. They compass sea and land to make one proselyte. They creep in everywhere, like the Egyptian frogs, and leave no stone unturned, in the palace or the workhouse, to promote their cause.

(*b*) It has been furthered immensely by the proceedings of the Ritualistic party in the Church of England. That energetic and active body has been vilifying the Reformation, and sneering at Protestantism, for many years, with only too much success. It has corrupted, leavened, blinded, and poisoned the minds of many Churchmen, by incessant misrepresentation. It has gradually familiarized people with every distinctive doctrine and practice of Romanism,—the real presence,—the mass,—auricular confession and priestly absolution,—the sacerdotal character of the ministry,—the monastic system,—and a histrionic, sensuous, showy style of public worship;—and the natural result is, that many simple people see no mighty harm in downright genuine Popery!

(*c*) Last, but not least, the spurious liberality of the day we live in, helps on the Romeward tendency. It is fashionable now to say that all sects should be equal,—that the State should have nothing to do with religion,—that all creeds should be regarded with equal favour and respect,—and that there is a substratum of common truth at the bottom of all religion, whether Buddhism, Mahometanism, or Christianity! The consequence is that myriads of ignorant folks begin to think there is nothing peculiarly dangerous in the tenets of Papists any more than in the tenets of

Methodists, Independents, Presbyterians, or Baptists,—and that we ought to let Romanism alone, and never expose its unscriptural and Christ-dishonouring character.

The *consequences* of this changed tone of feeling, I am bold to say, will be most disastrous and mischievous, unless it can be checked. Once let Popery get her foot again on the neck of England, and there will be an end of all our national greatness. God will forsake us, and we shall sink to the level of Portugal and Spain. With Bible-reading discouraged,—with private judgment forbidden,—with the way to Christ's cross narrowed or blocked up,—with priestcraft re-established,—with auricular confession set up in every parish,—with monasteries and nunneries dotted over the land,—with women everywhere kneeling like serfs and slaves at the feet of clergymen,—with men casting off all faith, and becoming sceptics,—with schools and colleges made seminaries of Jesuitism,—with free thought denounced and anathematized,—with all these things the distinctive manliness and independence of the British character will gradually dwindle, wither, pine away, and be destroyed, and England will be ruined. And all these things, I firmly believe, will come, unless the old feeling about the value of Protestantism can be revived.

I warn all who read this paper, and I warn my fellow-Churchmen in particular, that the times require you to awake and be on your guard. Beware of Romanism, and beware of any religious teaching which, wittingly or unwittingly, paves the way to it. I beseech you to realize the painful fact that the Protestantism of this country is gradually ebbing away, and I entreat you, as Christians and patriots, to resist the growing tendency to forget the blessings of the English Reformation.

For Christ's sake, for the sake of the Church of England, for the sake of our country, for the sake of our children, let us not drift back to Romish ignorance, superstition, priestcraft, and immorality. Our fathers tried Popery long ago, for centuries, and threw it off at last with disgust and indignation. Let us not put the clock back and return to Egypt. Let us have no peace with Rome till Rome abjures her errors, and is at peace with Christ. Till Rome does *that*, the vaunted re-union of Western churches, which some talk of, and press upon our notice, is an insult to Christianity.

Read your Bibles and store your minds with Scriptural arguments. A Bible-reading laity is a nation's surest defence against error. I have no fear for English Protestantism if the English laity will only do their duty. Read your Thirty-nine Articles and "Jewell's Apology," and see how those neglected documents speak of Romish doctrines. We clergymen, I fear, are often sadly to blame. We break the first Canon, which bids us preach four times every year against the Pope's supremacy! Too often we behave as if giant Pope was dead and buried, and never name him. Too often, for fear of giving offence, we neglect to show our people the real nature and evil of Popery.

I entreat my readers, beside the Bible and Articles, to read history, and see what Rome did in days gone by. Read how she trampled on your country's liberties, plundered your forefathers' pockets, and kept the whole nation ignorant, superstitious, and immoral. Read how Archbishop Laud ruined Church and State, and brought himself and King Charles to the scaffold by his foolish, obstinate, and God-displeasing effort to unprotestantize the Church of England. Read how the last Popish King of England, James II, lost his crown by his daring attempt to put down Protestantism and reintroduce Popery. And do not forget that Rome never changes. It is her boast and glory that she is infallible, and always the same.

Read facts, standing out at this minute on the face of the globe, if you will not read history. What has made Italy and Sicily what they were till very lately? *Popery*.—What has made the South American States what they are? *Popery*.—What has made Spain and Portugal what they are? *Popery*.—What has made Ireland what she is in Munster, Leinster, and Connaught? *Popery*.—What makes Scotland, the United States, and our own beloved England the powerful, prosperous countries they are, and I pray God they may long continue? I answer, unhesitatingly, Protestantism,—a free Bible and the principles of the Reformation. Oh, think twice before you cast

aside the principles of the Reformation! Think twice before you give way to the prevailing tendency to favour Popery and go back to Rome.

The Reformation found Englishmen steeped in ignorance and left them in possession of knowledge,—found them without Bibles and placed a Bible in every parish,—found them in darkness and left them in comparative light,—found them priest-ridden and left them enjoying the liberty which Christ bestows,—found them strangers to the blood of atonement, to faith and grace and real holiness, and left them with the key to these things in their hands,—found them blind and left them seeing,—found them slaves and left them free. For ever let us thank God for the Reformation! It lighted a candle which we ought never to allow to be extinguished or to burn dim. Surely I have a right to say that the times require of us a renewed sense of the evils of Romanism, and of the enormous value of the Protestant Reformation!

[Ed: This extract can be found in the chapter "Wants of the times" in the book 'Holiness' by J. C. Ryle.]