

THE ANTI-PAPAL PREJUDICE*

THIS anti-papal prejudice crops up over and over again in the history of our own and earlier times. Hardly is it to be eradicated, for the roots of the disease are in many lands a national inheritance, and Catholics share with non-Catholics the responsibility for keeping the prejudice alive. (How much alive it is affairs in Malta have manifested.) Father Thurston, patiently investigating the falsehoods of the enemy, exposes masonic libels, the foul pornography of popular writers on Vatican scandals, the mistakes and misrepresentations of our incorrigible Dr. G. G. Coulton, the queer perversions of fact offered to the public by Dean Inge and other Anglicans. It is all done very thoroughly, this investigation, and a vast amount of research has been involved. A noble anxiety for historic truth and a willingness to expand to the uttermost a large capacity for taking pains have always distinguished Father Thurston's work, and these things are, in this examination of the significance of the 'No Popery!' cry, as conspicuous as ever.

Has this prejudice its mainspring—as Father Thurston suggests, quoting from John Galsworthy in support of the suggestion—in the readiness of many to believe anything discreditable of public men?

Conspicuous position no doubt invites the arrows of the scornful and arrows tipped with the poison of slander. In the secular State, for instance, derision is apt to be poured on members of Parliament in general and ministers of State in particular. To describe them as 'politicians' is to sound the note of contempt and hint at corruption; integrity, it is implied, is not to be expected. In reality, of course, our public men in Par-

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liament and elsewhere are so rarely convicted of corruption that when they fall it is news. Yet, labelled 'politicians' their integrity is suspect. They are fair game for all who will shoot at them.

In certain of our medieval writers a similar readiness to think evil and write scandal of bishops and popes is apparent. Matthew Paris is notorious for his unfavourable criticism and we can recall Giraldus Cambrensis with his 'I do not say bishops cannot be saved, but I do say it is in our days harder for them than for other men.' Shameful stories of the papacy, stories as mythical as that of the woman pope, Joan, and the sorcery of Sylvester II, are readily retailed by the medieval writers of gossip. Not that these myths find contemporary recorders. Centuries pass before they are reported, to tickle the ears of the credulous and the prurient. A deplorable avidity to swallow untruth relating to great personages and a keen but highly culpable relish for anecdote defamatory to the character of men in high authority—of popes and other prelates in especial—is a persistent trait in human nature.

From a different angle is the papacy attacked and the anti-papal prejudice fostered by liberal and Anglican historians. All these writers without exception make great play with the medieval protests against papal exactions and extortions, the complaints of papal 'rapacity,' the statutes of *præmunire* and provisors. We know the theory of this school: an England 'groaning' under papal tyranny, anxious and ready to throw off the foreign yoke of the papacy at the first opportunity, hailing the policy of Henry VIII and Elizabeth with enthusiastic approval. (It is only fair to say that of late certain of our Anglicans and liberals are not quite so sure that the Reformation was entirely popular. But the Anglican still persists that his Church of England—obviously to liberal as to Catholics a parliamentary establishment—is but the *Ecclesia Angli-*

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cana of the middle ages liberated from the rule of the Pope. Anti-papal prejudice invents a legend of a medieval Church of England, though history knows nothing of such a body, *Ecclesia Anglicana* being but the style of the Church Catholic in England, and on this same legend anti-papal prejudice thrives. The legend is a myth, as baseless as the story of Pope Joan, but the Anglo-Catholic clings to his myth, perceiving that but for this anti-papal prejudice he would be constrained to submit to the authority of Rome. And who is willing in these enlightened days to give up his private judgment in matters of faith and morals? Possessed of this prejudice, how is it possible to come to the truth? And the prejudice being of the heart rather than of the head, it is the more difficult to be dislodged.)

Hostile comments on the financial policy of the papacy by contemporary writers are plentiful enough in the later middle ages. Taxes are naturally resented by men of property. If the spiritual health of England was brought low by the papal appointments and preferments in the Church—and to Bishop Grosseteste it was clear that many of these appointments and preferments were injurious—it is certain that the Church in France suffered far greater hurt by the concordat of 1516 that gave the Crown the right to appoint bishops and abbots. To assume, as our liberal and Anglican historians assume, that objection to papal ‘rapacity’ in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries implied a desire for the repudiation of papal authority is as reasonable as to assume that the fierce and frequent denunciations of modern British Governments for the methods of the tax collector imply a desire for revolution. It is always the men of property, a stable and conservative element in the State, that are most fiercely articulate in the chorus of disapproval when the tax-gatherer is abroad. Objection to high taxation in our own day

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is no more to be accepted as evidence of sympathy with bolshevism than is the objection to papal 'extortion' in the later middle ages to be received as evidence of a desire for revolutionary protestantism. Prejudice, sheer anti-papal prejudice, mistakes protests against taxation for demonstrations against the Faith. To grumble at papal rapacity, ecclesiastical incapacity and the shortcomings of superiors generally is no sure sign of inclination to heresy. We grumble, but pay in all loyalty. It is the privilege of the tax-payer to grumble, a constitutional privilege inherited from the middle ages.

The bitterness of the anti-papal prejudice of the professed Protestant is more pronounced, and is more shrilly voiced. It derives from the Protestant reformers in whom burnt the hate that is wont to kindle when the side is changed. They were ex-Catholic priests, these Protestant reformers of the sixteenth century—Luther and Zwingli, John Knox and Martin Bucer, Cranmer and Latimer—and they hated the priesthood they had discarded as men and women are apt to hate the cause they desert. (If Calvin was not a priest he had at least been trained and educated by Catholic priests). And literature such as Foxe's monumental 'Book of Martyrs' and, but perhaps in a lesser degree, the classical 'Pilgrim's Progress' of John Bunyan kept this prejudice alive, and fed and fostered it. The influence of Foxe cannot be rated too highly; his was the one book that steadily, year in, year out, preached hate of Rome and all its works. Pictures helped the reader along, and the falsehoods that abound in the 'Book of Martyrs' were no hindrance to the general acceptance of the work. People of the Pope's religion were judged capable of any enormity by the generations brought up on Foxe. It was readily taken for granted that Catholics set fire to London, in 1666 (had they not set fire to Rome under

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Nero?) and the inscription on the Monument in the city of London declared that Catholics had done it. The lying inscription was eventually removed, but it long remained in token—not of the wickedness of Catholics, but of a prejudiced mentality that willingly held them wicked.

Protestantism is no doubt disintegrated; its dogmas crumble and are dissolved. There is not a Protestant Church in Great Britain to-day that does not confess a declining membership. But hatred of Rome is still the common note struck at the meetings of Protestant Free Churchmen and of the remnant of the Anglican Low Church. A common dislike can create a bond, the heart goes out in fellow feeling when certain loathings are expressed. Nevertheless in the long run it is not in hate but in love that mankind holds together. The Protestant Churches conceived in hate, and brought forth in prejudice reduce the articles of their belief while their numbers dwindle. Yet to the last—so potent is prejudice—the ‘No Popery!’ sentiment that once thrilled the Orangeman of Belfast and the supplication that once found expression in the Church of England’s Book of Common Prayer—‘From the tyranny of the Bishop of Rome and all his detestable enormities, good Lord deliver us’—now less bluntly uttered, will continue to rally Protestants to decry the papacy and obstruct the work of Catholics.

At bottom much of the prejudice displayed against the sovereignty of the Pope is no more than the rooted dislike of worldlings for a sovereignty that places bounds to the desires and appetites of the flesh and proclaims a supernatural order to men who will have none of it.

Lord Acton confessed to another kind of prejudice against the papacy, a prejudice against all great men in power. Indeed Acton went so far—in complete contradistinction to Carlyle—to write: ‘Great men

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are almost always bad, even when they exercise influence and not authority My dogma is not the special wickedness of my own spiritual superiors but the general wickedness of men in authority.' And in another letter to his Anglican friend Bishop Creighton, Acton declared: 'Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.'

Creighton had not Acton's learning and he had not Acton's faith. But his shrewdness, knowledge and experience would not tolerate Acton's notion that history 'should be primarily a branch of the moral sciences and should aim at proving the immutable righteousness of the ideas of modern Liberalism—tolerance and the supremacy of conscience.'

This prejudice of Acton's against the Papacy, though of finer quality, was not far removed from what Father Thurston takes to be at the root of it all: the readiness of many to believe the worst of men in public life.

The body of false witness—masonic, medieval, pornographic, Anglican—presented by Father Thurston is amazing; the work accomplished in the assembling of this false witness is prodigious.

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