



“RELIGIOUS EDUCATION.”

A LETTER TO

CARDINAL MANNING.

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PART I.

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BY

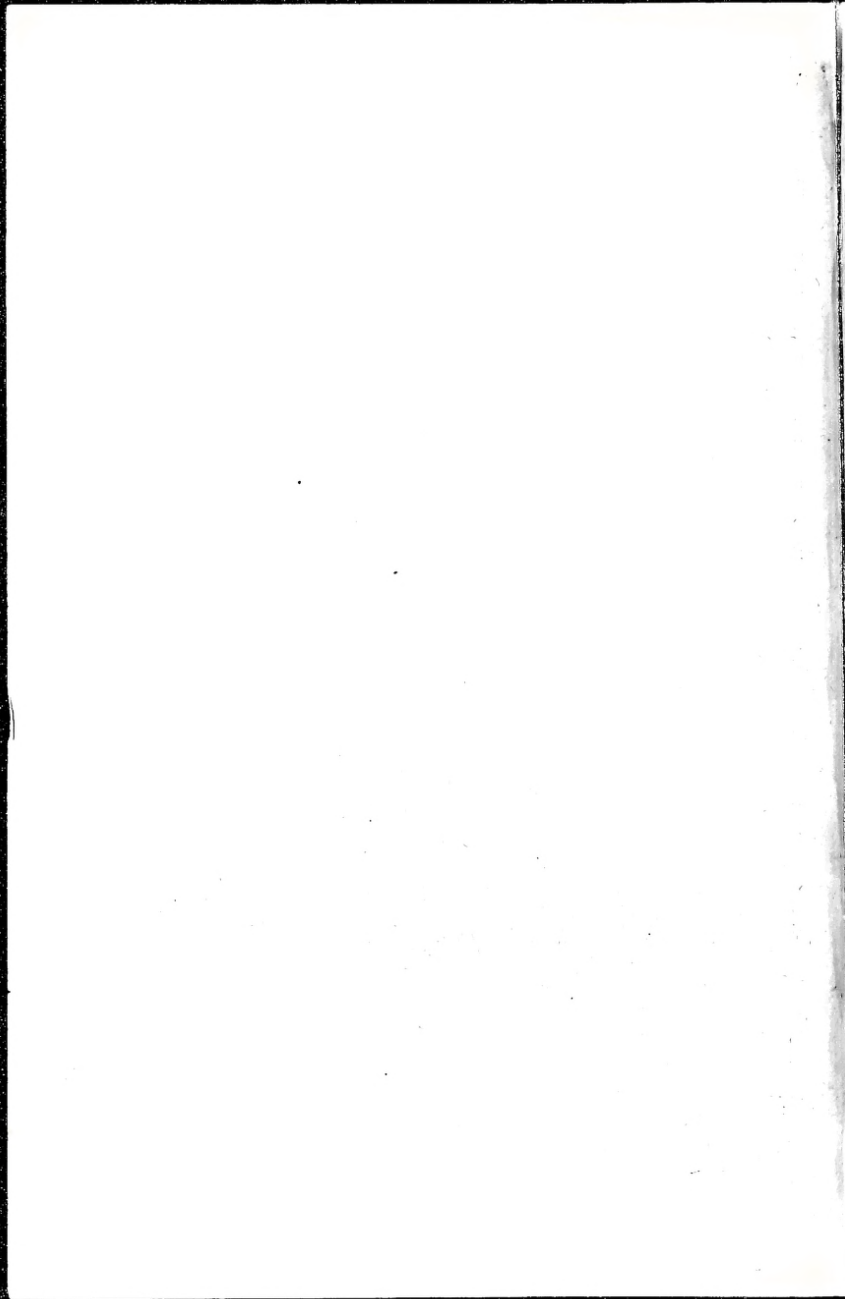
*Saladin,*



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## “RELIGIOUS EDUCATION.”

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MAY IT PLEASE YOUR EMINENCE,—I have read in the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle* the report of your sermon, delivered at St. Mary's Cathedral, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, on Saturday, September 26th, 1885. From your interesting biography, venerable age, and exalted position in the Romish Church, your utterances challenge criticism. Whether they challenge criticism from any intrinsic considerations I leave your readers and mine to decide.

Recognising that you and I respectively stand at the very antagonising poles of modern tendency and thought, I will make an effort to come within touch of you, in order to, as far as possible, realise your position before I assail it. Your attitude I recognise to be a complete anachronism: it belongs to the time when Rufus founded a castle on the banks of the Tyne, not to the generation in which Stephenson spanned that river with an iron bridge.

Your Eminence lays stress upon the special solicitude heaven took in children, although only the children of Jews, before the Christian dispensation, and then you exclaim:—

How much more, then, are yours—your children that are born again by water and the Holy Ghost, and are made children of God in a higher sense than the children of Israel—members of Christ, heirs of the eternal heirship of the Son of God, of the kingdom of heaven?

Am I to infer from the hackneyed and half-meaningless pulpit jargon of this passage that God likes Jew children well, but Christian children better? I have been told by God, on the authority of his own book, that he is “no respecter of persons;” but you apparently know better. Has the unchangeable God changed his mind and given your Eminence the advantage of a private revelation, prefaced by: “Don't mind my old book: I

am a much older and wiser God than I was when I wrote that"? My children, your Eminence, are neither Jewish nor Christian : perhaps you would be courteous enough to say how he regards them. If there be a God who, on account of the faith of its parents, would even comparatively disfavour (as you allege he does) an innocent child, I am glad I am only an Agnostic, and cannot, by searching, find out such a God ; for, were I a Theist, and could find him out, I should denounce him as a malignant fiend and curse him to his face. Thrust aside your theological tantrums for a moment, Cardinal Manning, and tell me if you are not ashamed of this mean little godling you worship, who, before he determines to what degree he will love an innocent baby, takes into consideration whether its parents are Jewish or Christian.

One of the reasons you allege why God loves the Christian baby more than the Jewish one is, that the former is "born again by water and the Holy Ghost." Pray be good enough to step down for a moment from your ranting theological perch to the firm ground of common sense, and tell me, in the name of all that is explicable, what this means. "Born again by water and the Holy Ghost"! You know as well as I do that this expression is as utterly nonsensical as if your Eminence had said : "Born again of a paving-stone and of the fire-shovel." Your dupes ask you for bread, and you give them a stone ; they ask for an idea, and you give them words. Your Church conducts much of its service in Latin, to impose upon the ignorant and keep them ignorant ; and your priesthood take care that their English is as unintelligible as their Latin, the threadbare and laboriously nonsensical platitudes of pontifical jargon. The "fools and blind" are awed by the presentiment that some fearfully significant and mysterious meaning underlies your priestly babblement. "Born again by water"! Such jargon, instead of exciting reverent piety with those with whom you have to cope now-a-days, evokes only the irreverent contempt which asks : Do you refer to parturition in a punt on the river, or to an *accouchement* down in a diving-bell? And as for your exceedingly phantasmal Holy Ghost, will you tell me anything he ever did, except his being mixed up with an affiliation

case under remarkably shady circumstances, appearing once in the guise of a dove or fantail pigeon, and once again in the shape of "cloven tongues as of fire;" while appearing as Paysandu tongues, at 9d. a lb., would have been more to the purpose? Is this scurrilous blasphemy? So be it. It is our contemptuous reply to divine thimble-rigging. Give us arguments to deal with, and we will deal with them; but insult our reason with the hackneyed and vapid platitudes of professional priestcraft, and our sneer and our sarcasm will give you to understand what we think of them and you.

Your Eminence assures us that, as regards children—

They have an invisible guardian—an angel ever watching over them.

Here, your Eminence, you have effectively curbed my irreverent levity. To talk, as you do, of an "invisible guardian" watching over every child is too sinister and solemn a mockery for flippant refutation. You are double my age, Lord Cardinal. Have you not seen children as I have seen them? Do you speak in ignorance, or do you speak in truculent and terrible jest? Have you seen the child, partially born, have its skull crushed in in splinters upon its brain by iron forceps, as the solution of the desperate alternative whether the life of the mother or that of the child should be saved? Where was the "invisible guardian"? Have you seen the child born mutilated and covered with ulcers, fearful heirloom from the sins and sorrows of its progenitors? Where was the "invisible guardian"? Have you seen the babe, with sunken eyes and ravenous lip, and the haggard look that babyhood should never know, tug at the milkless nipples of a starving mother? Where is the "invisible guardian?" Have you seen that haggard baby dead and shrouded in a newspaper, as I have seen it, and smuggled surreptitiously into the coffin of an adult pauper, and buried with him to save expense? Where was the "invisible guardian"? That baby was so buried in its newspaper cerements because its mother, who followed it to the grave, through want, would not stoop to prostitution, even to save its life and her own. Where was the "invisible guardian"? Have you seen,

as I have seen, the child born in "holy wedlock," but with the prostitution of its mother resorted to in order to save its life and hers ; and have you seen that babe, as I have seen it, drain from its mother's breast the syphilitic virus till the cartilage of the baby nose and the scalp on the baby skull rotted away, and the innocent infant was putrescent before it reached the tomb? Where was the "invisible guardian"? Have you seen the prepossessing female child fed and nurtured by its own parents, to be sold to the lecher—incipient human flesh exposed on the shambles of lust, and knocked down to the highest bidder? Where was the "invisible guardian"?

I could go on with interrogations like these, your Eminence, mounting step after step in the terrible climax; for I, who write to you, am a man who have turned from the study of Greek to study the fearful moods and tenses of the streets; and I have left Hebrew that I might study the square characters of the alleys and the Masorah of the slums. The hand that holds the pen that now writes to you has lain upon the pulse of the world, and felt all the irregular throbbings of the heart of Humanity. The eye that glances upon the paper upon which this missive is written has, for GOD, gazed through the clouds of the esoteric till it has been compelled to look down in Agnosticism, dimmed and blinded, outside the unopening gates of Mystery. I have seen falsehood on the throne, and truth on the scaffold; but I have never traced, and neither have you, the action of the "invisible guardian."

In pleading for the support of schools in which the Romish faith may continue to be inculcated, your Eminence remarks:—

And, lastly, some of you, perhaps, may remember the schools of this parish when you make your last will and testament, and your Lord's name will be found among the names of your heirs.

Did your Eminence so far master your risible tendencies as to look sufficiently solemn for your sacred calling when you uttered these words? Cicero opines that two augurs could not meet without laughing in each other's faces, in tacit recognition of how they managed to gull the populace. When you spoke of Catholics executing their

wills, and making Jesus Christ one of their heirs, did you, internally, put your divine thumb to your sacred nose and extend your holy fingers? You well know that Jesus Christ—whether that half-mythical character ever really existed or not—wants none of your filthy lucre. You use his name as the shears with which to shear the sheep, that the fleece may come to the priests. This lending money to the Lord in celestial debentures is a very old confidence trick and financial swindle, Cardinal Manning. The swindle has never been a farthing in the pocket of "the Lord," whatever and whoever *he* may be; but it has, for centuries, swelled the coffers of a fat, lazy, and licentious priesthood. For how many dreary and black ages the priest of your baleful creed has attended at the bedside of the dying man and indemnified the expiring wretch against the red fire of hell in consideration of the Church receiving the red sheen of his gold! Is the palpable imposition not yet played out? How long, O Lord, how long, will the mothers of our race only bear and suckle fools?

Your Eminence goes on to say:—

I would fain much rather speak upon the Sermon on the Mount, or upon the useful history of the gospel we have read to-day, than upon the matter on which I may say necessity compels us at this time to think with all the energy of our hearts—I mean the state and condition of the education of this country, the peril that is before us, the unconsciousness of that peril; and that peril multiplied by the fact that men are not roused up or awakened to see what is certain and inevitable in the future. Let us, then, consider this. From the seventh century down to the present the education of the people of this land was a Christian education. The Christianity of England was perpetuated by that which made England in the beginning. At this moment we have come to what I may call a deviation from that sacred tradition, which, until now, has sustained the Christianity of the people of this land. Some men will call it a new departure. It is the language of the day; and it is a useful phrase for us for it is a departure—a striking off from the tradition, the broad highway of the people, of Christian England. And we are threatened at this time with a system of education neither Christian nor English, but borrowed from the vain and shallow theories of the first French Revolution—that is to say, a State education without definite teaching, and, therefore—I will say it boldly—Christianity. Down to fifteen years ago the education of this land was in the hands of the parents of children and those whom they spontaneously and voluntarily chose. For the last fifteen years the State has claimed the children as its own,

and the State has claimed to be the educator of the children born within its boundaries. These two principles are the principles of the old Greek philosophy of the Platonic Republic, revived at the end of the last century, as I have said, by the vainglorious and superficial minds who wrecked the noble and Christian people of France. And these two principles are establishing themselves in the minds of the people of this country.

I quite credit your Eminence when you allege that you would much rather dilate upon the "Sermon on the Mount" than comment upon the, to you, extremely painful fact of the education of the children of this generation passing out of the hands of your Church, and, indeed, out of the hands of Christianity. The "Sermon on the Mount," with its cruel mockery and fiendish sarcasm of "*Blessed* be ye poor," is, possibly, the source from which you have drawn your terrible trope anent the "invisible guardian" which stands in watch and ward over every child. But be assured, my Lord Cardinal, that men are "roused up or awakened to see what is certain and inevitable in the future." They see as clearly as you do that the "inevitable" is that your Church is doomed; but they anticipate its dissolution and ruin with equanimity, where they do not contemplate it with satisfaction. You, most reverend father, and your caste, have lived upon the base craft of the priest and ascended on the wings of sacerdotalism to the high places of the earth; but those who do not belong to your craft have had to maintain you, and they begin to find out that they have been gulled too long by your wheedling them to endure a hell upon earth on the promise that they will have wings and glory in the skies. They are beginning to discover that they know as much about the wings and glory as you do, and find that they are so extremely problematical that they have resolved to make the best and the happiest of Here and Now, leaving the wings and the glory to take care of themselves. They have resolved that their children shall be taught Reading and Writing and Arithmetic, and, where practicable, the "Extra Subjects;" and they have freely permitted themselves to be rated for this purpose, and have practically told you and yours to stand aside with your Gospels and your "Sermon on the Mount," and let them have a little more bread and intelligence here, and not stultify them any



longer with your child-bearing Virgin, your crucified joiner, and your other monstrous, but to you profitable, "teachings" upon which your poor dupes are to depend for their wings and their glory.

The very France upon which your Eminence lays such great stress is drifting away with England from the rusty and obsolete moorings of your Church. In France the item for education has just been considered in the Budget; and, when Bishop Freppel objected to secular schools, M. Debost replied that they were gaining in popularity, having had since last year 65,000 more attendants, while the scholars in the Catholic schools have in the same time decreased by 13,000. The establishment of professorship of the History of Religions, to be filled with men who count the Christian religion as but one among many, was also very naturally objected to by the Bishop, as virtually teaching a State irreligion. But to all this it was considered sufficient to reply that these posts would be filled by men like Ernest Havet and Renan, who would discuss texts, and not dogmas.

What does your Eminence think of men of the type of Ernest Renan and Ernest Havet? They are not exactly the kind of persons upon whom your Church has pronounced panegyrics. Your Almighty God and your infallible Church are behind you. Strike and spare not. Scatter the charred dust of the heretics on the wings of the wind, as you were wont. You would do so without invocation from me; but your God has become decrepit and your Church has become imbecile. There are, alas for you, no lightning at Sinai to vindicate, no Holy Inquisition at Rome to avenge. We "Infidels" have emerged from the Stygian gloom. Our eyes have caught from the far horizon the sunrise of the world's morning; and, long before the sun has climbed to the zenith, we will stand with our heel upon the neck of your God and your Church, proclaiming that heaven is annihilated and hell extinguished, that the Demon of the Seven Hills is dead, and that man, at last, is free.

Renan and Havet! Alas! poor Cardinal. Your lines have not fallen in pleasant places. Simeon Styletes, standing uselessly on the top of his pillar praying, while

worms and vermin were eating holes through his shrunken flesh into his sapless bones, was the type of manhood your papist cultus produced. Marie Angelique, praying forever, except when she stood on her head before the Lord, and pointed up to his throne with her unwashed heels ; or when she sucked, in his holy name, rags that had bandaged and were saturated with the pus from sores, was the model type of womanhood your Church produced when she alone was the educator, and none durst say unto her, What doest thou ?

Your Church, when all the power was hers, my Lord Cardinal, inculcated a coarse, but devout, blasphemy far beneath the mental and moral status of the School Board system which you abhor. For instance, in several churches of France, remarks Russell, in his "Modern Europe," a festival was celebrated in commemoration of the Virgin Mary's flight into Egypt. It was called the "Feast of the Ass." A young girl, richly dressed, with a child in her arms, was placed upon an ass superbly caparisoned. The ass was led to the altar in solemn procession. High mass was said with great pomp. The ass was taught to kneel at proper places ; a hymn, no less childish than impious, was sung in his praise ; and, when the ceremony was ended, the priest, instead of the usual words with which he dismissed the people, brayed three times like an ass ! and the people, instead of the usual response, brayed three times in return !

Your Eminence objects to the School Board and to secular education generally : no wonder, it is so exceedingly different from the "religious education" which held sway when all the power was yours, and when Protestants and "Infidels" were unknown. A "religious education" embraced profound speculations as to whether Adam, not having a mother, was "created" with a navel, and as to whether Christ could have taken any other form but that of man—as, for instance, that of a woman, of the devil, of an ass, of a cucumber, or of a flint stone. Then, supposing he had taken the form of a cucumber, how could he have preached, worked miracles, or been crucified ? Whether Christ could be called a man while he was hanging on the cross ;

whether the Pope shared both natures with Christ ; whether God the Father could in any case hate the Son ; whether the Pope was greater than Peter, and a thousand other niceties far more subtle than those about "notions," "formalities," "quiddities," "ecceties," "instants," and "essences." This "religious education," whose demise you lament, disposed the mind all through Christendom to give a ready credence to miracles worked by bottles of Christ's blood and bottles of Mary's milk, "God's coat," "our lady's smock," part of the last supper, a piece of the halter with which Judas hanged himself, a bone of Mary Magdalene, at least *two* different heads of Thomas-à-Becket, Christ's picture on a handkerchief which he had sent to Abgarus, Christ's foreskin, and *a finger of the Holy Ghost*. In the genuineness of these and thousands of other sacred and miracle-working relics all Europe believed, Cardinal Manning, when your Church had undisputed power in education ; and, in the few remaining dark dens of ignorance where your power remains unbroken, your dupes believe in these relics still ; but, except in her dens of ignorance, Europe will tolerate your "religious education" no more forever.

ICHABOD ! the glory of your house has departed ; and it would not be without sympathy that I should listen to your wail of desolation, your voice as of one crying in the wilderness ; but I hear in your wail the clarion-blast which heralds that the New World is drawn up in battle-line against the Old. I hear in your voice in the wilderness the clash of steel in the Armageddon in which Truth shall conquer Error, and from which the world shall emerge, not looking for its salvation to your poor Jew upon Calvary, but looking to the might that slumbers in its own heart and brain for the working out of its own sanctification and redemption.

Your Eminence states that, "from the seventeenth century down to the present," the education of this country has been a "Christian education." Yes ; but it is just because Christianity was established in England so early as the seventh century (it was established much earlier than that, as your Eminence will see when you begin to read history) that it should be continued no longer. What suited the seventh century will not suit

the nineteenth. Human progress is as slow as the proverbial "mills of God;" still, it is progress; and what suited lethargic Saxons or steel-shirted Danes under Offa or Hardraga will not suit the awakening intelligence of England in the reign of Victoria.

Could I sympathise with a terrible calamity falling upon the defenceless head of Abaddon, I should sympathise with your Eminence in your cry of tribulation that the education of the children of our time is passing—has almost passed—out of the control of the Church. This, to your Christian ABRACADABRA, simply means perdition. It was only because the Christian priesthood got hold of plastic childhood, and maimed the intellect and mutilated the understanding, that you got Christianity to be accepted by any except lunatics. Try it with adults who never heard of it till they were adults, and from the experiment you will be able to determine whether or not what I say is true. I make bold to allege that there never was a really sane human being in the world who had reached manhood before he had heard of Christianity, and then adopted it from the appeal it made to his mental and moral acceptance. You have tried the adult Jew and the adult Hindoo for ages, and what have you to show for your missionary zeal and vast monetary sacrifice? Your labourers have got no souls for their hire. The field consecrated by their devotion, and not infrequently watered with their blood, is sterile. The effort is stupendous, and the result is *nil*.

No wonder that you cry with a bitter and despairing cry that the children are taken from you. For centuries you have crippled and debased them to bring them down to the low standard of your creed and render them the half-hewn caryatides to support the superstructure of your wealth and power and splendour. It is in youth the Chinese must distort the feet of their ladies into the pedal abortions upon which Chinese ladies walk. If they tried to do so in later life, the more consolidated tarsal and metatarsal bones would resist, and the woman would perish before the deformity was effected. It is only in early youth you can bend the credence into accepting as fact that Jonah was three days "in the whale's belly," and that the Son of Man was three days "in

the heart of the earth;" and that, at the end of three days, Jonah got vomited out on dry land; and that, at the end of three days, the Son of Man got up out of his grave and flew to heaven. Tell this to any *man* out of Colney Hatch, and see whether he will believe you. Then, is it moral to impose to such an extent upon the innocent credulity of a child as to impress fables upon him as facts, and burn them so deeply into his soul with the accursed branding-irons of your priestcraft that the intellect of his manhood is unable to deface the scars? You can rely upon the judgment finding for Christianity only when that judgment is strongly warped by early prejudice. Without the instilling of that early prejudice you cannot make Christians, and you never will. You use with skill all the most powerful influences of mental distortion: you use shuddering fear; you use the most exalted love. You terrify the child with the fire and brimstone of your hell, and you decoy him with the tenderest emotions to which the human heart ever throbbed; for the child first lisps his prayer at his mother's knee, and, in after years, the words have still memories of a mother's kiss and the halo of a vanished face and the echo of a voice that is no more. The first dread of hell, the first memories of a mother's love, are skilfully linked on to a debased and degrading superstition, and they are, alas! too often strong enough to support that superstition through a whole life. And this deep engraving of prejudice, in favour of monstrosities which, but for this prejudice, would never, on their own merits, have had a moment's serious consideration, is what you and your clerical fraternity of all denominations call *Education!* Education, forsooth—it is the very antithesis of it. You know that the intellect, if left un mutilated till it matured, would attach at most as much credence to the Arthurian as to the Gospel legends. Accordingly, to make sure that the intellect shall never see above and beyond the "truths" which must be believed in the interests of priestcraft, you take the intellect in its infancy and burn out its eyes, or at least afflict them with myopia and a malignant squint.

And this is Education! For shame, my Lord Cardinal! If your Christianity be so true and reasonable, wait till

the reason is developed before you attempt to teach. I will then make you welcome to the half-dozen idiots in all England who will believe your fable. But, in the name of all that is sacred in the soul of the race, desist from mutilating the intellect and debasing the morals of little children in the interests of your irrational and execrable creed. They are guilty who mutilate the feet of Chinese girls, that when they become women they may not wantonly walk into their neighbour's houses; but thrice damned is the guilt of those who mutilate the intellects of European boys and girls, that when they become men and women they may "walk in the way of the Lord."

The section of the Christian Church of which your Eminence is an ornament has always presumed upon the crass ignorance of its votaries, and done its best to keep that ignorance devotedly dense. But surely you presume too much upon the ignorance of even the dupes of the Church of Rome when you slanderously refer to "the vainglorious and superficial minds who wrecked the noble and Christian people of France." Surely some, even in your ignorant auditory, must have had a surmise that the "vainglorious and superficial minds" you referred to were the Economists and the Encyclopædists. Your disparaging sneer was flung at Voltaire, D'Alembert, Diderot, Duclos, Mably Condillac, Rousseau, Turgot, Marmontel, Helvetius, and Raynal. Was there not, even in the dull brains of the bigots who listened to you at Newcastle as you sneered at "superficial minds," some unbidden vision of a living pigmy kicking at a phalanx of dead colossus?

And, as for "the noble and Christian people of France," where did they exist outside of the prejudiced imagination of your Eminence? As for the people of France before the Revolution you deplore, "Christian" they may have been; but "noble" they were not. The world has never seen—and may the world never see again—a people so utterly trampled down into the abyss of want and misery and general degradation. Every schoolboy knows this; but your Eminence, apparently, does not know it—or, rather, does not want to know it. "Everything was fastened on by a few hands; everywhere the

smaller number was in set opposition to the plundered many. The nobility and clergy possessed nearly two-thirds of the landed property ; the other third, possessed by the people, paid taxes to the crown, a multitude of feudal dues to the nobility, tithes to the clergy, and was, moreover, subjected to the devastations of noble sportsmen and the depredations of their game. The taxes upon commodities weighed upon the great mass, and, consequently, heaviest upon the people. The mode of levying them was vexatious ; the gentry might be in letters with impunity ; the people, on the contrary, were ill-treated and imprisoned in default of payment. It maintained by the sweat of its brow and defended with its blood the higher classes, while scarcely able to subsist itself. The inhabitants of towns, industrious, enlightened—less miserable, certainly, than the peasantry, but enriching the country by their industry and reflecting credit upon it by their talents—enjoyed none of the advantages to which they were entitled. Justice, administered in some provinces by the gentry, in the royal jurisdictions by magistrates who had bought their offices, was slow, often partial, always ruinous, and especially atrocious in criminal cases. Personal liberty was violated by *lettres de cachet*, the liberty of the Press by royal censors. Lastly, the State, ill-defended abroad, betrayed by the mistresses of Louis XV., compromised by the ministers of Louis XVI., had just been dishonoured in the eyes of Europe by the shameful sacrifice of Holland and Poland.\* So much for "the noble and Christian people of France," and the glorious state of affairs that the "superficial minds" overthrew !

It is with diffidence I remind your Eminence of what a "noble and Christian people" the French were before the "superficial minds" wrecked their nobility and Christianity. To pay the infamous *gabelle*, a tax on salt of about sevenpence in the pound, and other grievous taxes, "I have known poor people," says Michelet, "sell their beds and lie upon straw ; sell their pots, kettles, and all their necessary household goods, to content the unmerciful collectors of the king's taxes." There is a

\* Thiers' "History of the French Revolution," vol i., p. 9.

well-known official document extant which proves that the people were oppressed to such a degree that they "could not buy wheat or barley; they had to live on oats, to nourish themselves on grass, and even to die of hunger." "The people have not money to buy bread;" and Foulon, the model tax-collector, retorted: "*Then let them eat grass*"—this "noble and Christian people of France," whose exalted position the "superficial minds" so wickedly overthrew! No doubt your Eminence admires the *corvée* with the admiration you lavish upon the *vingtième* and the *gabelle*. By virtue of this *corvée*, on certain days in each year, the officers of the Court went through the country, seized the peasants at will, and marched them off in droves to make or repair the public roads. For this the peasants received no pay; and, if they could not, during their short respites from labour, *beg* enough to keep themselves alive, they might perish of hunger. Your Comte de Charolois amused himself by going about with his musket in his hand, looking out for peasants thatching their cottages, that he might fire at and shoot them for the sport of seeing them roll off the roof to the ground. How deplorable it is to be sure that the "superficial minds" should object to such a happy condition of affairs among "the noble and Christian people of France!"

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## THE SECULAR REVIEW:

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