

**THE PRESENT STATE OF THE
CONTROVERSY BETWEEN THE
PROTESTANT AND ROMAN
CATHOLIC CHURCHES**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649475117

The Present State of the Controversy Between the Protestant and Roman Catholic Churches by
Hunter Gordon

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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BY

HUNTER GORDON,

OF LINCOLN'S INN, ESQ.

LONDON:

G. B. WHITTAKER AND CO.

AVE MARIA LANE.

1837.

116.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY T. BENTLEY, RUPERT STREET, PATERNOSTER.



P R E F A C E.

WHETHER the Roman Catholic faith is, as some contend, making a sensible progress in this country, is, to say the least, extremely doubtful; and the fact difficult to be ascertained. The increase of chapels proves nothing, unless it be, that the rate of increase is not less among the Catholic, than among the Protestant population. But that there has lately arisen, in this island as well as on the continent of Europe, a prejudice in favour of some of the leading principles of the Romish Theology, and above all, a desire to effect a

combination of these with Protestant principles, must, I think, be apparent to every one. Whence this bias proceeds, I propose to consider in the following discourse. It is certainly a question of considerable importance, and worth inquiring into.

I begin by assuming, that the cause of this disposition is to be found in something within the pale of the Protestant Church, rather than in the active force of the Catholic Priesthood, or in any external cause whatever. Neither the rage of civil faction, which has often raised one hierarchy on the ruins of the other, nor the allurements of the Church of Rome, which in ages of ignorance were so powerful, could, in so advanced a stage of society, have produced this relapse, had not the principle of Protestantism been pushed to a dangerous extreme. It is to this point that the following observations are mainly directed. I shall,

therefore, merely touch on the present state of ecclesiastical parties; I shall briefly run over the common topics of Romish controversy; I shall hasten through the beaten ground of vulgar prejudices; and shall reserve a fuller illustration for that view of the Controversy, which alone merits a serious consideration in the present age of the world.

It may be proper to observe, that by reason, as opposed to faith, I do not mean that suspense of judgment which weighs the evidence of a Divine Revelation and assures itself of the divinity of the Christian Doctrine, before assenting to it; but that licentious spirit which, after it has been thus assured, continues to argue for or against the *subject matter* of revelation, on moral presumptions wholly inapplicable to a subject above and beyond the range of human experience. By faith I mean rather an act of the will, than the force of evi-

dence on the understanding, the mortification of those vicious inclinations which are the main causes of unbelief, and especially the resignation of that prejudice which makes human comprehension the measure of truth, its test, and ultimate standard.

However thick the veil of bigotry which blinded men in monkish ages, it may safely be asserted, that that spirit which is called in modern phrase rationalism, tends more directly to extinguish the light of the world, which even in Popish times, never altogether went out, and which in Catholic countries, in the present day, though obscured by profane rites, is living and burning still. But what is here said, is not insinuated in discredit of presumptions drawn from the comparison of God's moral government with the economy of the Gospel; but is urged against inferences for or against those mysterious parts of revelation

to which no analogy can be traced within this visible theatre, and which are therefore simply incomprehensible. That human reason must be commensurate with revelation, is generally taken for granted as a self-evident proposition; whereas, even according to the common principles of probability, the presumption is, that a scheme revealed from Heaven, would be a scheme imperfectly comprehended by finite beings. This is the point with which Bishop Butler took such great pains.

1, *King's Bench Walk,*

Temple, June 15th, 1837.