

"THE UNION OF PROTESTANTS AND CATHOLICS."

We quote from *The Catholic* of this city, its reply to the editorial under the above caption in the *Century Magazine* which we noticed in our columns last month. Truly the gathering storm is bringing to the Nominal Church fearful apprehensions of danger and utter wreck. The loud boastings of both these hoary headed and decaying systems of error, are only the efforts of each to conceal their unrest and to guard against what the fearful forbodings of some term "a religious panic."

"*The Catholic*" says:

"Protestantism,--which was and is, a revolt against the divinely established authority of the Catholic Church, is seriously alarmed by the revolt of one of its own very legitimate children --Materialism, Agnosticism, Infidelity, or whatever else the thing may be known by--against itself. Having sown the wind it is at last reaping the whirlwind. Thoughtful minds are beginning to see and recognize the dimensions of the coming storm, and are anxious to save themselves from its strength and fury, by an alliance offensive and defensive, with the Catholic Church. In the February number of the *Century Magazine*, there is a very suggestive article in the editorial department, discussing the possibilities and probabilities of "a reunion in the future between the Roman Catholic and Protestant bodies. There is a peculiar significance in the discussion of such a subject in a periodical, which though secular in tone, yet has for its original editor, Dr. Holland, a strict Calvinist; and its present chief owner and manager, Mr. Roswell Smith, we understand, is a prominent and pronounced Presbyterian.

We can forgive the "*Century*" writer, because of his earnestness and honesty [R597 : page 2] of purpose, which can be traced from the beginning to the end of the article, the many serious errors into which his ignorance of Catholic teaching and practice, has doubtless led him.

The four hundredth anniversary of Luther's birth, and the discussions that its celebration called forth, supply the writer with a text. He says that the Lutheran celebration brought to view the fact that "the religious reformation of the last four centuries has not been confined to the Church of the reformers. A constant reformation in discipline, if not in doctrine," he thinks, "has been going on in the Church assailed by the German ex-monk." We need hardly remind our readers of the two very grave errors in this passage. There can be no reform of doctrine in the Catholic Church. Catholic faith is unchangeable, whilst a disciplinary reform is always in order, not only during the last four centuries, but constantly, from the very beginning.

But we are more interested, if possible, in the admissions which the writer makes, and the present tendencies of Protestantism that he notes, than in dealing with the well-meaning mistakes he falls into on the Catholic side of the question. This Protestant exponent shows that the bonds of sympathy are now joining Catholics and Protestants to a degree, which twenty-five years ago, could not have been anticipated. He sees the growth of a feeling that these two bodies of Christians need to be united to resist the encroachments of modern infidelity. Protestantism, twenty-five years ago, was boastful and disdainful of the Catholic Church, to-day it is powerless and helpless, when its own children--modern infidels--are using against itself the very weapons which itself has been using for the last four centuries against the Catholic Church. This makes all the difference in the world, and our Protestant friends are desirous, quite naturally so, of calling to their assistance the aid, sorely needed, of their Catholic neighbors. Hear the language of the "*Century*" editor: "As the conflict with Materialism and Agnosticism has been waxing hotter and hotter, it must have become

evident to intelligent Protestants that they have in the Roman Catholic theologians a strong body of theologians with whom they ought to maintain friendly relations. It is not Protestantism, nor the Papacy, nor Calvinism, nor Trinitarianism, nor any other secondary Christian dogma, that is now on trial," proclaims the writer further on, but "whether there is such thing as religion--whether there is a conscious God and a life beyond the grave, and a free will, and a moral law." For the last four centuries, Catholic theologians and writers have been in vain telling Protestants that their principles would land them exactly here. The early so-called reformers denied free will, and by their doctrine of justification by faith alone, practically discarded a moral law.

The "*Century*" readily acknowledges and pays a just tribute to the exalted ethical standards of the Catholic Church, and to its courage and consistency in maintaining them against all efforts of compromise.--For instance, it openly lays down that "the Roman Catholic doctrine and practice respecting divorce are much closer to the law of the New Testament than those of the Protestant Churches have been." It also speaks of an "earnest effort, at the present time to bring the practice of the Protestant Churches a little nearer to the Catholic standard." Luther and Henry of England made short work of the New Testament law regulating the marriage contract. And whilst leading Protestant ministers openly countenance and recognize the looseness, not to say, shamelessness, of modern divorce law and practice, there is little reason to hope that the Protestant Churches will be brought any nearer to the Catholic standard.

Whilst we fully recognize the kind disposition and earnestness of the writer, who is, doubtless, alarmed by what he, in common with many others, is daily witnessing in Protestantism and its tendencies, it is simply folly to think of any feasible plan of union between Catholics and Protestants, such as this well-meaning writer would propose. The only union that can be effected, is for our Protestant friends who are desirous to escape from being submerged by the deluge of modern infidelity, to seek safety in the divinely fashioned ark--the Catholic Church. Against this stately, wonderfully, supernaturally constructed vessel, the winds and the waves, and the fierce storms of nineteen eventful centuries have beaten in vain, because of the abiding presence of Him therein, "whom the winds and the sea obey."

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