

CT 94

FIVE LETTERS

ON A

CONVERSION TO ROMAN CATHOLICISM.

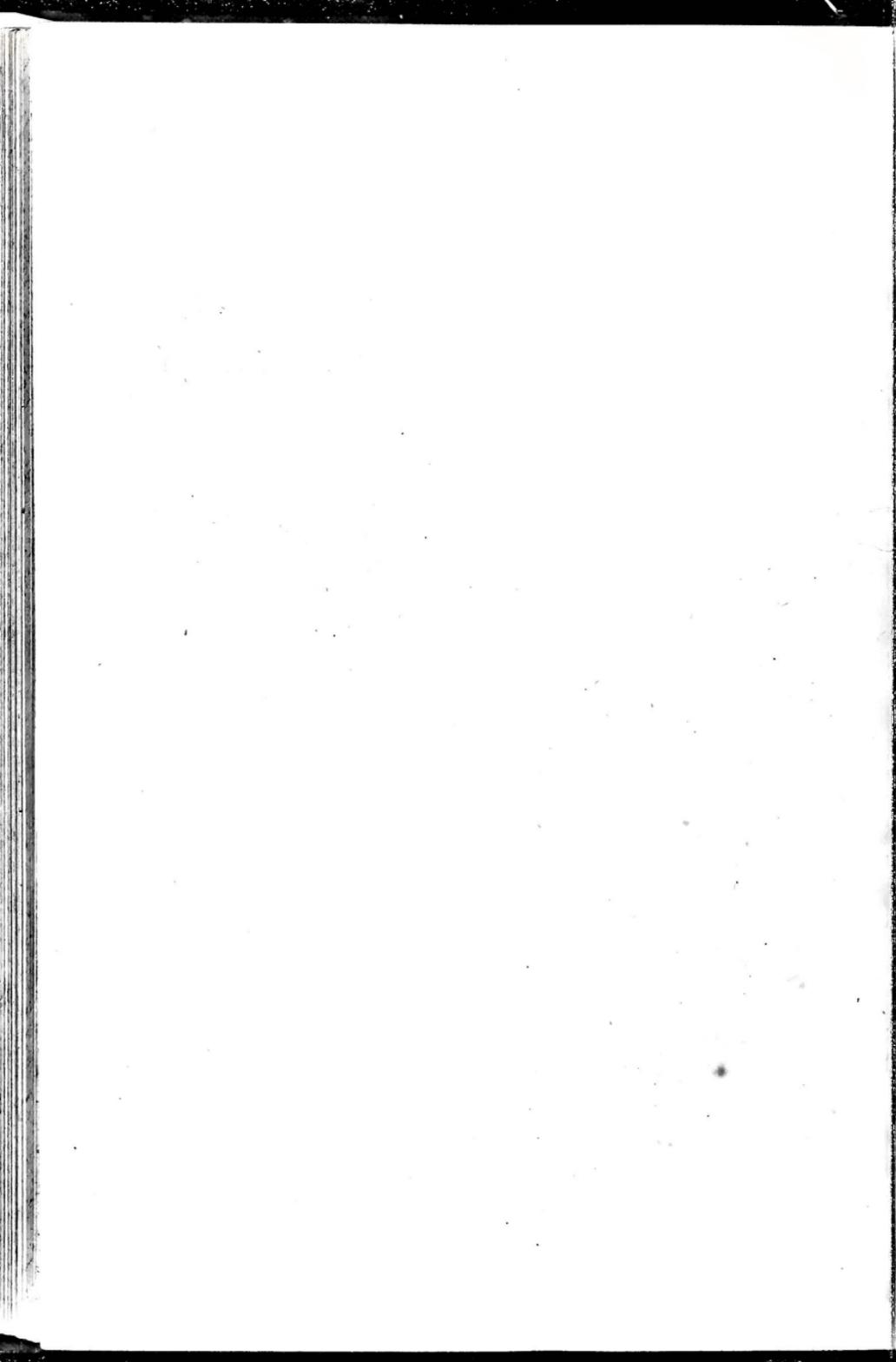
BY

ROBERT RODOLPH SUFFIELD.



PUBLISHED BY THOMAS SCOTT,
NO. 11, THE TERRACE, FARQUHAR ROAD,
UPPER NORWOOD, LONDON, S.E.

Price Threepence.



ON A CONVERSION TO ROMAN
CATHOLICISM.

Alfred Villa, 2 Parson's Mead,
Croydon, Surrey.

MY DEAR SIR,—Your niece is, with the best intentions, preparing for herself an almost irreparable calamity. For a brief period, she can, without self-reproach, use those powers of reason and conscience given to her by God, to be cultivated—not abrogated. It would be a crime to destroy our own natural limbs, our own natural eyes, and replace them with the limbs of another or the docile eyes of a machine. But it is also a crime (though perpetrated without malice) to substitute for our individual reason, the conscience and will of another. From the moment she has sworn the soul's servitude to an Italian nobleman, and to any English or foreign gentleman appointed to represent him in the confessional, she will deem herself bound not to think "what is right?" but to ask another, "Tell me what is right and I will be your slave and do it, and if my thought or conscience suggest to me that you are mistaken, I swear to banish such suggestions from my mind as a temptation?" She will reply, "I do not intend submitting to these men as men, but as the chosen and infallible representatives and mouth-pieces of God." Then to elect that infallibility, she must use her own fallibility. Thus, the result can

6 *On a Conversion to Roman Catholicism.*

never (logically) be to her more infallible than the result of her own fallible investigations, but it will become all that the man claiming that infallibility chooses to make it, for that man will use his absolute and irresponsible authority to forbid his mental and moral slave from ever even interiorly questioning his assumptions. Obeying an ex-officer, a nobleman's son, an Italian who received a very meagre education, who is aged, benevolent, infirm, wayward, honest, obstinate, and profoundly self-conscious that he is the inspired representative and infallible vicegerent of the god of the universe, your niece will imagine that she is performing an heroic act, in prostrating before a foreigner she has never seen, the conscience, the responsibility, the judgment imparted to her by God. She will reply "God tells me thus to cast my mental and moral nature at the feet of a stranger." Where? How? When? Those are the tremendous questions she is now preparing to solve. That investigation must indeed be lengthened and profound, seeing how stupendous, how unnatural is the result. A miracle of miracles, indeed, is needed, to set aside the personal responsibilities proclaimed by the creation of God. Your niece is preparing to consign to eternal torture every individual who does not recognise a Roman nobleman as the infallible governor of mankind: who does not accept as essential to eternal salvation, a dogma, which was an open question amongst Roman Catholics until the last three years. She is preparing to renounce the Universal Father and to substitute for worship the God of a privileged sect, who will appear on the altar like a small biscuit. She is preparing to renounce the brotherhood of mankind, to seek admission into a sect anathematizing—not only her parents and friends, but millions and millions of mankind. Profound, indeed, must be the investigations, certain the convictions which can enable her thus, innocently, to blaspheme

God's goodness, to limit His mercy, and to anathematize His children.

When I was a Roman Catholic I often discussed with fervent and believing Roman Catholic priests, a fact we all noticed, namely—that converts invariably deteriorated—either mentally or morally ; we puzzled ourselves over the solution. I am inclined to think the solution is this—Converts are very sincere and earnest ; they work out the system thoroughly and practically, and thus reap its gravest disadvantages. For a few years your niece will be very fervent, very eccentric, and very happy. Then if her former better human nature begins to arise again, she will sadly feel that she has made a mistake. She will probably hardly dare, thoroughly, to own it to herself and never to others, but will bear it as a silent sorrow to her grave. She will say strong bitter things against heretics, and wear scapulars, and confer for hours with a “director,” but a universal scepticism will have possessed her heart—wearied, disappointed, and fearful. I have witnessed this a thousand times. She is worshipping a vision of beauty which only exists in her imagination ; like many other gentle and good souls, she will cling to the illusion and fancy it a reality. Should she enter the Roman sect, I could almost wish that the illusion should endure to the end ; otherwise, when the disenchantment comes, and she, awakening to the reality, sees not a vision of beauty, a heavenly Jerusalem on earth, but an ecclesiastical polity, striving by ignoble means for the mastery ; sickened, saddened, and deceived, she will wish she had never been born.

You ask me what books would help her. The question is to me a difficult one. I have read much in defence of the Roman Catholic dogmas, but very little on the other side. There are works which I could commend for many facts and arguments, but disfigured by calumnious attacks upon the Roman

8 *On a Conversion to Roman Catholicism.*

Catholic clergy and the Roman Catholic nuns, and by misapprehensions as to some doctrines. Moreover, the present Roman Catholic Church is only three years old, and the antagonistic literature is therefore limited. The controversy is limited now to the infallibility of the Pope. If the Vatican dogma be accepted, all the rest must follow. Upon that subject I might name "The Pope and the Council, by Janus."—"Papal Infallibility and Persecution;" a small brochure (Macmillan, 1870), "The Roman Catholic not the one true religion" (Trübner), and Whately's "Errors of Romanism" and "Cautions for the Times."

Blanco White's works are invaluable, but unfortunately difficult to obtain; they ought to be reprinted.

I name authors who assume as divinely authoritative the Canonical Scriptures, and who believe that in our little world the God of the Universe became an infant and died; but I consider that she ought to study deeper, and to ask herself "Is the Bible infallible?" "Did God become a baby?" "Did God die?" In such inquiries she would be helped by the works of Francis Newman, Greg, Martineau, Hennell, Voysey, Vance Smith, and Thomas Scott of Norwood.

Surely she ought to pause and examine before committing herself to a position from which she would not easily recede. She will become attached to priests and nuns, and Roman Catholics, for she will find them, in England and Ireland—kind, gentle, and affectionate; just the characters she would the least wish to wound; not in reality, more good than others, but, in some respects, perhaps to her, more attractive. If I exaggerate the virtues of English and Irish Roman Catholics, you will pardon the partialities of affection, of gratitude, and of memory.

The more I love them, the more do I lament that terrific dogma which compels them to reply to that love with an anathema. These words of warning you may use as you like—but I am not hopeful—many

are the slaves of the imagination, and they offer themselves as holocausts to an illusion.—Yours very sincerely,
ROBERT RODOLPH SUFFIELD.

SECOND LETTER.

It is probable that your niece has made up her mind to become a Roman Catholic; in that case, I do not think that the most cogent arguments would affect her. She has committed herself to a corpse, and her whole existence will be occupied in an unceasing effort to galvanise it into life, and dreaming amidst illusions to persuade herself that they are realities. Once let a person with blinded eyes grasp a leader, and be persuaded that it would be criminal to doubt his infallibility, the docile slave "knows" that all arguments and facts opposed to his claims are wrong, and only asks, "What are the best replies?"—and there are plenty of replies—replies sufficiently plausible to satisfy those who are determined to be convinced; sufficiently skilful, contradictory, and refined to embarrass those who have good sense, an honest heart, and not much learning.

All persons have their special moral weaknesses. Men and women whose minds have been either effeminated by the "nothingness" of what is with cruel sarcasm called "good society," or at once wearied and weakened in futile search after that absolute certainty which all the sects insist on declaring to be essential for "salvation," plunge into the Roman Church, much as the fevered forlorn will plunge into the dark flowing river—one leap, and it is all over. *During* the leap, what can you do? *After* the leap, the corpse floats along with the current; if eddies of foam occasionally are seen, it is because there is still a remnant of life, and amidst the pleasantly benumbing flood, the victim moves on restlessly to death.

No arguments can dispel a moral weakness which all the churches have conspired to create, and to enforce by creeds. All her life she has been praying against "heresy," as if it were a foul moral crime, and professing opinions over and over again, as if so to do were the essential virtue. Correct opinions on abstruse and intangible questions have been done up into amulets, which hung in chains over her mind as an Anglican ;— she suddenly has been startled by perceiving that there are difficulties she cannot solve ;—morality would require her to think—weakness makes it easier to submit—and she submits to the most reckless asserter. A mind weakened finds comfort in yielding to whatever is the most positive. The Roman Church has no doubts, can answer everything, and though the answers contain absolute contradictions, that is all so much the better, because 'it is all a mystery.' Moreover, the mind cannot easily embrace in its vision opposing difficulties, when each difficulty aggregates around a dogma, set off with all the paraphernalia of poetry, legend, and tradition.

In the Church of England she had a cultured and zealous priesthood, confessors, absolution, sacraments, baptismal regeneration, sodalities, creeds, superstitions, prayers, anathemas against sectaries, apostolic succession, submission enjoined to ecclesiastical authority—she is frightened lest there should be a flaw in some of these, so she resolves to seek them in the church whence they flowed into the Church of England. If we say to her, "Perhaps there is a flaw in the Roman Church," she replies, "Oh, but there must be certainty and security somewhere, and where, if not in Rome?" She is probably too much imbued with anglican orthodoxy to be able to accept the only reply, "There is not absolute certainty anywhere, but there is security everywhere to the seeker who never utters or acts a conscious lie in the name of religion."

Nevertheless she may possibly be open to a warn-

ing; and you may, as you desire it, use my name in conveying to her the following:—

My statements on this subject cannot be treated as devoid of authority. For twenty years I was apostolic missionary, and discharged duties not unimportant in many parts of England, Ireland, Scotland, and France. I published a work ("The Crown of Jesus,") which obtained the widest circulation, was publicly commended by all the archbishops, and received the papal blessing. I left the Roman Catholic Church on the day on which the Papal Infallibility was proclaimed. I never incurred, even in the smallest matter, the censure of any ecclesiastical superior. I never even had a quarrel with any Roman Catholic lay or ecclesiastic. Therefore I have none of the bitterness which sometimes is found as the result of conflict. I have the most perfect and intimate acquaintance with all the minutest workings of the system in all departments of the Roman Church. All who have known me in public or in private during the last three years, can testify to the affectionate kindness of my feelings and speech as to all the Roman Catholics whom I have known at any period of my life. From my father, who, like all his predecessors and relatives, belonged to the Roman Catholic Church, into which I was received by lay baptism in infancy, I obtained those feelings of respect and sympathy towards the old religion which brought me to its sacraments in the midst of my university career. My father had privately ceased to believe in any orthodox creed, and though during two-thirds of his life he never practised the Roman Catholic religion, he never opposed it. Sharing the liberal ideas then so common amongst educated Romanists, he regarded the Church of England as almost identical with the Roman Catholic Church, but more beneficial in its influence, less dangerous, less logical, less arrogant,

less consistent, more enlightened. His remembrance of the first French Revolution retained him in a conservatism at once religious and political, and family traditions flung around Catholicism a halo of poetry, and inspired, even to a sceptic, a chivalric affection like that felt by Royalists towards the Pretender. Reared thus amidst a union of Scepticism, Conservatism, Catholicism, and Anglicanism, and surrounded by characters of singular beauty, just at the period when Anglicanism was extolling Romanism, and returning to it as a child to its mother, I gave myself to the priestly life with an enthusiastic and undivided allegiance. Unable to prove to my satisfaction any of the dogmas of orthodoxy, I accepted them all "on the authority of the Church." The "authority of the Church" I accepted because a revelation without a distinct interpreter could be no revelation at all, and taking the premise for granted, there was no alternative for a Christian but to acknowledge either the Roman Church or the Greek Church; but the Greek did not claim a living infallibility. At that time the "authority of the Church" was left undefined—a faithful Roman Catholic could change his stand-point according to the exigencies of historic or logical difficulties; at one time he could mentally meet a difficulty by remembering that the personal infallibility of the Pope had never been defined; at another time he could allow to the system its full logical development, and deem the papal infallibility true, though modified by restrictions mentally invented to meet difficulties as they arose. Thus argumentatively the "authority of the Church" rested on its *necessity*, if dogmas be essential. The Roman Church presented the credentials of supplying that condition now; and having supplied it in times past, it possessed the logic of success, a success by no means adequate to its claims, but the success of having alone lived through generations to realise the idea of a wide-spread theocracy.

Under that vague conception of "authority" vested in a divine society, many could have died peacefully without a doubt. But the present Pope was determined to accomplish in his reign the wildest dreams of mediæval ambition. Encyclicals were issued to anathematise liberty of conscience, the liberty of the press, the liberty of the state, the liberty of science, the liberty of association, the liberty of the episcopate; to denounce civilisation, freedom, progress, and investigation; the world was to be divided between slaves and the accursed. Honest men began to say the Pope cannot be infallible, for these teachings are obviously immoral, they renew in precept the very enormities which we have all our life long been indignantly repudiating. If these decrees are to be deemed infallible, no Roman Catholic can without hypocrisy engage in political life, or demand a single political liberty. Then a few prelates like Dr Manning, urged on by laymen like Dr Ward and M. Veuillot, and by a section of the Jesuits, flung themselves into the papal schemes, and began to urge on the definition of Papal Infallibility; thus for two or three years raged a domestic controversy which touched the very foundation of the Roman Catholic system, viz., "Where does the infallibility exist?" The most learned Romanists proved that the contemplated dogma of papal infallibility was utterly opposed to Scripture, reason, history, morality, religion. The infallibilists (or Neo-Catholics) argued that it was the only logical development, and that it obviously existed nowhere else. During this controversy doubts arose in numerous minds. Most Roman Catholics determined to refuse to think, they drove away doubts by the violence of their denunciations and the loudness of their professions. Many priests and laymen (to my certain knowledge) lost all faith, but bound to the Church by the ties of interest, affection, family, and pride, have remained in it, often

siding with the bitter outward profession of the party of non-thought. Several of the learned refusing to abdicate reason, virtue, and history, yet clinging to sacramental and traditional Christianity, being men of courage and sincerity, renounced papal allegiance, and became "Old Catholics." Some (of whom I was one) saw every atom of the fabric crumble away on its foundation of mist. Such, from the religion of a sect girding itself for the persecution and debasement of humanity, passed, at first sadly (how sadly few can tell), out of the associations of the past, into the religion of the universe, the theism which, if undefined, embraces all.

When the fearful interior conflict had ended, and I found myself no longer a slave to Pope, bishop, superior, confessor, and a sectarian God, it still seemed to me almost wrong to think or to act independently. It was only by degrees that I could realise the degrading, soul-subduing bondage from which I had been delivered; then great joy and peace possessed me, as I felt myself rise from slave into man. Most docile Roman Catholics are happy whilst they believe; slaves are happy under prudent masters, but it is a happiness which degrades master and slave. This personal history will explain the mixture of opposing feelings with which I touch the Roman Catholic question, viz., tenderness, gratitude, and love towards the Roman Catholics I have personally known, and heard of in my family, along with an intense dislike and dread of the system of Neo-Catholicism which is now identified with Vatican Infallibility. Your niece, like many others, has mistaken for palliation of the system, my homage of affection rendered to persons who conscientiously are its victims. Moreover, I have no sympathy with the vulgar, ignorant calumnies against Roman Catholics, and therefore, even in the first sermon I preached in London as a Unitarian or Theist, in a Unitarian Chapel, hearing that some intended to come

expecting to hear an anti-Romanist oration, I selected for my subject, a practice familiar to Roman Catholics and many other religionists, but rejected by most Protestants. Thus, whilst I systematically deprived my secession of every feature which could conciliate vulgar support, I felt that I reserved to myself that power which in the end belongs to those who, though they occasionally with calmness warn, yet more frequently extenuate, and never calumniate.

THIRD LETTER.

The English Romanism of to-day differs from that of Gother, Charles Butler, and Lingard, as much as Pusey differs from Tillotson. The declarations made by the Vicars Apostolic whereby Roman Catholic emancipation was obtained, are now "damnable heresies." For the modern Vatican religion teaches that the Pope is, and always has been, infallible whenever he in his own mind means to speak or write authoritatively as Bishop of Rome and Vicar of Christ. That decree elevates all former bulls, encyclicals, pastorals, and pontifical teachings into inspired and infallible documents. The Pope is by divine right supreme (in all matters he deems important) over all potentates and all individuals. He is an irresponsible universal dictator. A Roman Catholic has to believe with interior assent not only every statement in the Old and New Testament and in the apocrypha, but also everything in the bullarium. Almost every infamy and absurdity possible has at some time or other been thus proclaimed. Besides the dead weight of the past, nothing remains for the future but a leaden despotism. At any moment the Pope may, at the instigation of an ignorant Italian monsignore, send a telegram or letter which he may intend to be official (*ex Cathedrâ*)—that document may contradict

science, fact, and the whole universe of God, but it must be not only obeyed, but believed—intentionally to doubt it would entail an eternal hell. Volumes are already filled with “condemned propositions”—all these are now divine condemnations, and mercy, justice, and toleration, will be found therein accursed.

To ordinary Roman Catholics, the papal authority is publicly exercised through the Bishop, and privately through the Confessor. If an ecclesiastical order is given, and to a grave degree violated, it is a mortal sin, such as excludes from heaven unless absolution has been given to the penitent promising never to repeat the disobedience. These orders regard innumerable matters of ordinary secular, domestic, political, social, educational, commercial, scientific, and social life—in short everything a person cares about. Books, newspapers, societies, amusements, soldiers, magistrates, peace, war, parents, husband and wife, children,—all are minutely legislated for. It is a mortal sin in any matter to obey the state, or parent, or conscience, in defiance of the Pope. Therefore all such matters have to be treated of in the confessional, and settled there.

However, still there remain a few things at the choice of this papal slave. There is a machinery to enslave even that feeble remnant of personal responsibility. The system of the Jesuits has now permeated the Roman Catholic Church, and operates through the Bishops quite as much as through the “Society.” The Jesuits annihilate the individual by “direction.” During the last few years they have rapidly spread the system of direction throughout this country, and the Anglicans are extensively adopting it.

The theory of direction is this—besides the confession of sins—it is highly pleasing to God to ask the advice of the confessor on all the minutest details of life,—individual, domestic, political :—the direction

of the confessor is not infallible, "but his very errors will be overruled to the spiritual benefit of the docile penitent." Jesuit directors chiefly exercise their skill on people of the higher and middle classes, or on interesting penitents, but, to the disgust of many of the older clergy and laity, this odious system of espionage and arbitrary interference is rapidly pervading all the confessionals. Frequently have I heard good and experienced Priests deplore the fatal results—the character rendered morbid and weak, cast at the feet of a man the least qualified to guide—for it is notorious that the Priests who chiefly strive to become "directors" are the most self-sufficient, narrow, conceited, and egotistic, though under a mark of sanctity which deceives no one more than themselves.

On incidental occasions the confessional has rendered a service, but I fully concur in the conviction expressed by several of the most thoughtful, excellent, and believing Priests, that very frequent confession is invariably an evil. Continually are Priests painfully puzzled by noticing that people never improve by confession—that those who do *the least* required by the ecclesiastical law, are nearly always superior in character to those who do the most.

Knowing, as I do, the excellent intentions of most of the priests and most of the lay people practising that rite—knowing the many sacrifices entailed for its accomplishment—I do not make these remarks with pleasure, but I tear them from my memory, with grief of heart, in answer to your inquiries.

FOURTH LETTER.

Your niece says that whether the Roman Catholic religion be true or not, anyhow it is good *for her*—of course it is right for her to do whatever she honestly and thoughtfully deems right. Individual rectitude

depends on conscientious intention. In such cases intentions are sometimes mixed and vague. Although not agreeing with you in blaming the priests, I cannot accept the statement as worded by your niece.

In the end, an illusion cannot be the best for any sane person. The question is whether certain statements are true or not. If true, we ought all of us to embrace them. If false, it is *morally wrong* knowingly to embrace or to encourage them.—it is *injurious* to do so ignorantly,—*e.g.*, Was Peter Pope at Rome when Paul wrote to the Romans without naming him? Was Peter Pope when Paul opposed him? Does ecclesiastical history show us the Bishops of Rome claiming the infallible powers now claimed by Pius IX? All the modern Roman Catholic religion rests on papal infallibility. What are the overwhelming proofs to substantiate a dogma disbelieved by the most learned Roman Catholics only three years since? Such matters do not rest on internal consciousness, but on history. Can it be God's intention that all religion should rest upon a complicated historical investigation? Again, all past papal teachings are now infallible, therefore the condemnation of Copernicus and Galileo, should be approved. The devout Roman Catholic ought to believe that the sun moves round the earth, the earth being stationary and flat.

Again, all the past decrees about purgatory, indulgence, and the scapulary now bind as articles of faith. Therefore any one who can contrive to die wearing two bits of blessed brown cloth cannot go to hell, and will be saved from purgatory by the Virgin Mary on the Saturday after death. All miracles and visions approved by the Pope, *now* are articles of Christian Faith. These things are either facts or fables. Dr Manning sometime after the death of his wife became a Roman Catholic; almost immediately he was ordained a Roman Catholic Priest, then he went to

begin the study of Theology at Rome. He maintained the papal claims and became archbishop; a young man kneels before him, gets his head touched by him, and a little oil rubbed on his hand, whilst a few words are muttered. The next morning that young man takes hold of a little biscuit and a glass of sherry, and when he has whispered four words over these, the biscuit becomes a man, and the glass of sherry becomes a man—any person must go to hell for ever who should in his mind fail in his belief that all the flesh, blood, and limbs of Jesus as man are in each, as also his human soul, and his divinity—should any crumbs drop from this divine man, who looks, feels, tastes, like baked bread—each such crumb contains the hands, feet, and entire body of that same man.

A priest had taken this “sacrament” in a pyx in a little bag in his waistcoat pocket to give it to a sick person [for a Roman Catholic has to believe that he eats a man, and swallows his God]; the sick person died without the sacraments necessary for salvation, because the priest had on his way called on a friend to fix a boating trip. The priest was grieved, but as the man was dead, he went his boating trip, having the “host” in his pocket—a shower of rain came on, and the water got into the pyx in which Jesus Christ was. The priest on his arrival at the house, opened the pyx and could not decide whether what he saw was Jesus Christ or dough—if the appearance of bread remained, then it was Jesus Christ—if the appearance was that of dough, then Jesus Christ was not there. Such is the theology binding on all. The question is, are such things revealed truths? if so, how tremendous must be the evidence which can alone justify our accepting such statements without the immorality of hypocrisy or conscious illusion. What evidence did the Apostles adduce that they possessed such powers? Did they ever

claim such powers? Priests now only claim them by a virtue handed down to them by the rite of ordination. How would the evidence satisfy an English court of law?

When a Roman Catholic has swallowed the host, he has within his stomach the limbs, feet, hands, heart, blood of Jesus—the identical human body which was once on the cross—that body continues within his body as long as the qualities and appearances of bread remain, *i.e.* until it is decomposed. The appearances of bread are merely present in the host miraculously. Surely such transcendent miracles ought to have been propounded distinctly by Jesus and the early disciples, if truly believed by them.

FIFTH LETTER.

Roman Catholics are strictly forbidden to dwell on any thought likely to produce doubts;—but for that crushing of the mind, no one could live in such unceasing uncertainty. Uncertainty accompanies every act of his religious life, from its commencement to its close. Nothing in his religion is valid unless the minister of the sacrament *means* the miracle—the outward act is not enough. Unless the Pope *means* to speak officially, his utterances are not infallible; his saying that he means it is not sufficient, he must *mean* it; but the outward act binds others just as much as if he did mean it. I would never do anything for the sake of wounding the feelings of Roman Catholics; but if I, though no longer a priest, (except by a Papal theory), chose to go into a baker's shop and say, *Hoc est corpus meum*, and *meant* to consecrate; all the quarterns, half quarterns, rolls and biscuits made of pure flour and water would become men—so many Jesus Christs;—but those wherein the ingredients were, to a considerable part, potatoe,

alum or rice, would not change. When I was at St Sulpice, a devout priest of the Solitude at Issy, thus thought he had accidentally consecrated all the French rolls at dinner, and requested people to pause and adore their God present on the table-cloth with his human body. On another occasion, that same priest forgot to say the words of consecration at mass, being in ecstasy ; so he communicated all the people with bread instead of flesh, and only afterwards remembered his mistake. If I went into a wine merchant's, and whispered a short sentence over the bottles and casks adequately open to my view,—the wine, if not too much brandied, watered, or adulterated, would all become God and man. If the wine on the altar be not pure, there is no change produced at consecration—no God—no human body—no blood. The priest buys his altar breads of a bookseller ; his house-keeper cuts them up and trims them with scissors, and puts them out ready for consecration ; if the priest does not mean to consecrate when he says the words, or if he says the words erroneously, no consecration takes place ; or if he means only to consecrate the hosts in one particular vase on the altar, whereas other hosts are lying close by, these others continue bread. The same doubts infest all the Sacraments. The Roman Catholic abdicates his reason to a church which presents to him nothing but a complication of uncertainties, to be acted upon without investigation.

As to the beauty of the services—it is all very well for people who like tinsel, and haberdashery, and genuflections, and plenty of wax candles ;—undoubtedly, young children, and grown up children, are pleased with such pretty baubles, but those who are behind the scenes are perfectly sick of them, and only go through them as a duty. Before a high festival, a vestry is like the green-room of a theatre ; and in the month of May, the dressing up of the Madonna is gone through with a feeling of shame by every man

who is not a born woman. I think an exception must be made for the bishops. I believe that when a bishop is dressed up in all his tawdry, crowned with a mitre of gilt pasteboard, and genuflected to, and addressed as my Lord, that it does rather please the recipient—though I know that some of the bishops are not beguiled by the adulation, but regard it all as necessary nonsense to be gone through for the sake of a good slice of absolute power. People who like a show, can see it done better in a theatre—and it is quite as religious; for the instruction given to all the performers of the solemn masses, and other grand functions, is *not to pray*, but to mind the ceremonies, so as to perform them accurately. Dr Gentili used to say —“I have been all over Italy, and found *once*, in a country village, a sacristan who was *not* an atheist;” reminding me thus of the repeated saying of an English Roman Catholic bishop when he returned from Rome: “There is one honest man there, and he is weak, vain, and obstinate.” Every one understood him to mean the Pope. The whole thing is rotten where it is not an illusion; and these dear good English and Irish Roman Catholics being not allowed to think or to question, are the more easily surrounded with the halo of their own gentleness, and tenderness, and reverence. I do not mean that they are gentle or tender towards heretics and unbelievers, for they are not. They are bound to believe them morally criminal; hateful to God, and deserving of all punishment. To a believing Roman Catholic, persecution is *now de fide*, and a virtue. The Vatican sect is in enmity with the human race.

You are not correct in your opinion regarding priests and nuns. I quite concur with your statement, that if your niece gives herself up to them, and then *leaves* them, she will have to endure much from them even in this country. When Dr Newman and Dr Manning left the Church of England, and joined the

Church of Rome ; when —— (a Unitarian lady) became a Roman Catholic, Unitarians expressed surprise, but never calumniated, knowing how impossible it is for all good and clever people to think alike ; but if your niece leaves the Roman Catholic church, she must expect to be calumniated. The Roman Catholics regard heresy as so foul a moral crime, that to impute to a heretic one or two more lesser crimes, cannot be regarded as a grave injury. The kindest thing they will say of her will be—"She is mad ;—she always was rather weak—she is not responsible ;" or else it will be, "She deceived us when she joined us ; she never really had faith, only opinion :—she is proud and wayward." Such sayings whispered against her, will not be pleasant ; especially when, in all probability, accompanied with more malignant insinuations ; she had much better pause now, reflect more, read on both sides, weigh real evidence. It will be terribly difficult and painful to retract ; particularly in countries like England or Ireland, where she will probably not get shocked by scandals, but on the contrary, attracted by many gentle virtues and pleasing child-like simplicities. At one time I thought such virtues existed *only* amongst Romanists, and those Anglicans who approximated to them. I now perceive with gladness that all these beautiful qualities are the appanage of human nature, that where they exist, their existence is not the creation of any dogma or sect—that they are to be found in all churches, sects, and creeds, united with all beliefs and disbeliefs. When I left the Roman Catholic Church, I expected never again to find *some* of the attractive specialities of characters I had known and loved. I have found them just the same—just the same variations—I now believe in human nature.

You will thus perceive that I cannot endorse your apprehensions regarding the Roman Catholic clergy in countries happily possessing numerous opposing sects. Nothing would be so fatal to morality as what anglicans call the union of the churches. You know the admirable reputation of the anglican and nonconformist clergy—the Roman Catholic clergy equal them. The life of a Roman Catholic priest (especially if belonging to a religious order) is a very comfortable life ; he has no anxieties, no responsibilities, no future to provide for ; he may become somewhat egotistic, self-indulgent, and pharisaical ; he may attend sick calls and the confessional much, as an ordinary minded surgeon will visit cases ; the high-flown things said of him are in general moonshine ; but his life will be as morally respectable as if he were a rector or a minister. The differences will be merely external. In most parts of South America no native ever goes to confession—the “ religion ” consists in wax madonnas—and the madonnas are decidedly preferable to the priests ; also as to Spain, Portugal, and Italy, unimaginative Roman Catholic travellers do not report well. But in England, Ireland, and Scotland, it is different—the priests vary as to birth, education, and characteristics, but they are neither better or worse than their fathers, brothers, and companions.

As to the nuns, most priests of experience are agreed that they ought not to have parochial schools, reformatories, or boarding schools ; that secular teachers succeed much better, with much less show ; also, that nuns after some years of convent life, nearly invariably deteriorate. But never in the way you suppose. I do not mean that nuns do not even, very frequently, dote on their confessor with a morbid, sickly, and intense personal attachment ; they very often do ; as do also the girls injudiciously secluded in convent boarding schools ; but I assert, emphatically, that other accusations as applied to *this* country, are not

true ; I have been "extraordinary" of different convents ; if I knew of scandals through private confidences thus intrusted to me, I should of course, in honour, be silent on the whole subject : but I unhesitatingly assert that, as to the popular rumours of criminalities between nuns and their confessors, it is, to the best of my English experience, absolutely false. I the more willingly glance at real evils, that I may be trusted when I deny unfounded charges. Many nuns in convents are not happy, but then they deem that unhappiness a sign that it is pleasing to God, and if they were turned out by Mr Newdegate, they would seek re-admission. But many more are very happy—lead the life of harmless and rather supercilious, self-righteous children, and if they never become superiors, retain their childish simplicity and sweetness much more than when they become "representatives of God." Nuns all regard Jesus Christ as their husband, and cultivate towards him the conjugal feeling, especially in the most recluse communities.

And now I have answered all your questions. I leave my letters at your disposal according to your urgent request. You can unite with them the first inclosure, changing in all the letters enough to conceal the persons alluded to. The other parties agree to their free circulation or publication.

For myself, under the circumstances I felt bound to speak, but it has been with pain. When anglican converts have left the English church—in which they had passed so many happy and holy years, they speedily published against it diatribes, in which they seemed to delight, for they dipped their pen in gall. I cannot say that it is with any approach to such feelings that I write of Roman Catholics ; I know that, theoretically, they cannot reciprocate my affection and esteem ; but it has been always a delight to me when I have been able to clear them from unjust

aspersions; it is with sadness that I warn against that fearful despotism, under which they must, as time advances, be prostrated more and more. May some of those, dear to me by a thousand memories, obtain courage to investigate, and then, conscientiously shaking off the incubus, arise as the freed children of the Universal Father.—Yours very sincerely,

ROBERT RODOLPH SUFFIELD.