

THIRD EDITION.

“IRISH PRIESTS,”

THE

GREAT OBSTACLES

*TO EVERY MEASURE INTENDED TO PROMOTE THE
TRANQUILLITY, CIVILIZATION AND UNANIMITY*

OF

IRELAND.

ADDRESSED TO THE RIGHT HON. CHARLES GRANT, M. P.

TO THE PUBLIC.

THE author of the following picture of “IRISH PRIESTS,” presents another edition to the public, finding so rapid and eager a demand for the former ones; he must, however, in candour confess, that he is indebted for this success, more to the *fidelity* of his portrait, than to any thing which it borrows from imagination. It is remarkable, that the deformities which disgust us in real life, often afford us most amusement when depicted. If this maxim be admitted; if a copy be *attractive* in proportion as the original is *detestable*, the author could have had no possible apology had he not succeeded.

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Houses of the Oireachtas

TO THE

RIGHT HON. CHARLES GRANT, M. P.

SIR,

THE Monarch has recommended, and the People have sanctioned, an oblivion of religious animosities in Ireland: the press too has adopted the sentiment, and like an angry porcupine, points a thousand quills, at all whom it accuses of disturbing the repose. Hitherto, however, the press has only chastised the errors of one party; and to read what has been published, since his majesty's departure, an uninformed person would suppose, that they who give the *Glorious Memory*, were the *sole* disturbers, demoralizers, and incendiaries of Ireland;—the *sole* cause of its past, and the probable promoters of its future discords! It may not be amiss therefore to say something of the errors of another party—a party, who are the first indeed to declaim against the prejudices of others—but by whose bitter bigotry, and insolent pretensions, these very prejudices have been either perpetuated or caused;—I mean the faction of the Irish Priests. To draw a faithful picture of their characters and conduct; and by holding “the mirror up to nature,” to make them, if possible, correct themselves; or if that be a vain hope, to assist in dispelling the delusion by which they uphold their influence, because that influence is perniciously exerted;—these shall be the objects of the following pages.

I have also taken the liberty of addressing myself to you upon the subject;—because, I do not believe the visit of the king was merely curiosity, or his parting advice, affectation; but that kind expressions will be followed by legislative measures:—because, your councils will naturally influence the nature of these measures:—because you appear to have *mistaken* the real character of the Irish Priests; and that to legislate for a nation, yet to *mistake* the materials of which it is really composed, would be like administering medicine to a patient, without knowing the seat of his disorder, or the nature of his constitution.

While most of those who are sufficiently near to the Irish Priests to observe them, are either so blinded by their prejudices, that they cannot see, or so subjugated by their fears, that they dare not expose their real characters;—while they are unceasingly represented by themselves and their adherents as beings possessed of miraculous gifts, and superhuman virtues: I who have studied them deeply, and know them well, shall take the liberty of considering them merely as men; neither more nor less inspired and gifted than other men, and liable to be excited to good or evil by precisely the same passions, weaknesses, and propensities, that actuate other human beings.

When, therefore, I consider the Irish Priests—not certainly as the primary source of the evil—but as the great existing impediment to its removal, I do so, not from any quality I find inherent in their natures, nor solely to the tenets peculiar to their religion; but chiefly from the *circumstances in which they are placed*—which put their particular interests at variance with the general interests of the community, and make them call into ac-

tivity, all the worst principles of their religion, and neglect the best.

As to the Religion itself, it is not without a considerable share in producing the mischief I complain of; because it is a church, founded upon the triumph of ecclesiastical power, over Christian doctrine; and accordingly, its clergy have, in all ages, invariably disturbed the peace of every nation, over which they were not permitted to domineer.

The principles of this church grew naturally out of the state of things in which it was formed. Christianity had not been many centuries established, when the Christian world was conquered by the Pagan. Barbarians were triumphant, but mind in its turn soon subdued physical force, and the conquered became the *masters* of the *conquerors*. Christianity in the struggle, however, made some sacrifices to Paganism. Prejudice was called in as the handmaid of truth—the ignorant who could not be conducted by Reason, were awed by Superstition—and where instruction could not reach to correct the passions, gorgeous ceremonies were invented to strike the senses. But human artifices are always a dangerous supplement to religion—and what began in pious frauds, ended in wicked impostures. For power seized upon religion as an engine. The clergy obtained a civil establishment, and assumed temporal pretensions; what was intended for their own protection, they perverted to the oppression of mankind;—they leagued with despots, they gave to the unjust exactions of power, all the reverential solemnities of religion, and monarchs, in order to be the tyrants of their people, became the slaves of their clergy. The clergy shared in the spoils,—they accumulated titles, power, wealth—every privilege of man was

violated in the name of God, and the sword, and the pile, and the gibbet, were mighty converters. Disinterested saviours of mankind!! who violated the laws of Christianity themselves, in order to make others comply with them; and generously damned their own souls, for the sake of the souls of other people!

The Reformation, however, has in a considerable degree, reformed the Church of Rome, and infused into the laity of that communion, a better spirit, and obliged, in many instances, its clergy, to conceal theirs. Undoubtedly, in the catechisms and canons of that church, the unchristian doctrine is still to be found, that there is *no salvation out of it*, and it appears to many, a contradiction, that its members should so confidently demand *temporal privileges*, from those to whom they deny *eternal blessings*. But let us recollect, that although they have particular tenets as Catholics, they have common natures as men—that even now, the men are better than their religion, and that while the doctrine of *exclusive salvation* is still adhered to by *the Church*, it is abhorred and denied by the enlightened, and virtuous of its members. The barbarism too, in which this horrible doctrine was invented and believed, has passed away, and there is no probability of its ever returning, and of all the pernicious doctrines which that period gave birth to—many have slumbered, some are denied, all are modified, and there is no power now left to execute any. An ambitious Pontiff can now no longer disturb the peace of nations, or of families, under spiritual pretences; or make people believe that by the plenitude of his apostolic power, he can make that morally right, which is in its own nature morally wrong. He can no longer give away kingdoms—absolve monarchs, or subjects from the

observance of solemn oaths—cannot raise a revenue by pardoning past crimes—or mortgage futurity by the sale of indulgences for crimes yet to be committed. Those wholesale violations of religion, perpetrated in its name, by those appointed to perform its duties, are now no more; art, and submission, and negotiation, are now substituted for the thunders of the Vatican, for bulls and anathemas;—protestant states are courted, which were formerly excommunicated; human nature too begins to assert its rights, even in those nations which were most corrupted and enslaved by perverted religion; the knowledge of truth will follow the detection of error; and the iron empire of ecclesiastical despotism seems tottering to its fall.

But while abroad, the Church of Rome has lost much of its power, and even abated somewhat of its pretensions; here its most virulent principles remain unmitigated, because the Irish Priests retain all the arrogant pretensions of former power, with all the active malignity of present dependence.

In order to comprehend me, it may be necessary to remind you, that the Irish Priest has no fixed stipend, but subsists solely upon the contributions he is enabled to levy upon his flocks, through the medium of their affections, prejudices, or fears. The evil of this is, that the Priest lives by his influence over his flock, and consequently, sacrifices every thing to preserve it: that he is more anxious to enlist adherents, than to make them virtuous; and would rather make one tributary convert, than a thousand pious and moral men. No gentleman, therefore, no man of birth, independence, or piety, would stoop to a situation, where he must subsist upon low cunning, and insidious arts, or submit to the degradation

of ecclesiastical beggary. The Priesthood is therefore supplied with men from the inferior and uneducated classes of life, who resort to demoralizing artifices, to preserve that obedience, which men gratuitously yield to rank, genius, learning, and wisdom. I know it is sedulously inculcated by the Irish Priest, and ignorantly credited by the poor deluded people, that all Priests have what they call a *spiritual calling* for the profession: but unfortunately for the credit of this pretended purity of motive, none appear to be inspired with it, but those to whom the situation of Priest, is one of great *worldly aggrandizement*. An Irish Priest is almost invariably, either the son of some petty farmer, some labourer, or artizan, or perhaps, himself worked for years at some laborious, not thinking occupation: and in either case, it is usually late in life, before he commences his limited course of studies, and not until he has been habituated to the sordid feelings, the vulgar manners, and narrow prejudices of the class of life he has left. When a clown of this kind is caught, in order to be tamed for the Priesthood, he is sent, usually, at about from 18 to 30 years of age, to a preparatory school, called a Catholic academy; where the raw material is destined to receive its first manufacturing process. I have known several of these academies, and never knew one, in which the heads of the students, were not filled with bigotry, and their hearts with sedition; where they were taught any art but cunning, any science but imposture, and where they did not lose whatever artless simplicity they might have had as clowns, without acquiring any advantages from education. After a year or two passed in this preparatory course of studies, for upholding arrogant pretensions with fraudulent arts, the predestined impostor

is translated to the College of Maynooth. Now the name of College is somewhat imposing, and may be associated in the mind with the idea of learning, with an extensive, if not a liberal course of studies: but no such thing. Ireland, often the victim of prejudice, was never more cursed by bigotry, than she was by that left-legged liberality, which gave her Maynooth. The very name is a burlesque upon learning, and, to any one acquainted with its nature, concentrates in the mind a term expressive of every thing contemptible and vile. Among the old Priests, educated in France, you sometimes meet a gentleman, a man of learning, and of christian feelings; but among those swarms of unfledged pedants, who issue from Maynooth;—in whom you perceive a constant struggle between spiritual pride, and aboriginal meanness—with demure and crafty looks—a scholastic and awkward air—vigorous limbs, disguised in the unaccustomed trammels of glossy black broadcloth—plump and shining cheeks, puffed up with the recent luxury of station, or month mines dinners, or fastings on fish, which would feast a London Alderman—sometimes affecting gentlemanly manners, which makes their real vulgarity more disgusting—with averted eye, crouching bow, and settled smile, endeavouring to conceal the rancorous bigotry of their hearts:—among such men, I say, one would feel an unmixed sentiment of disgust and abhorrence, were they not sometimes so ridiculous as to excite laughter. Laymen were formerly educated at Maynooth; but this class of persons, have totally abandoned it—none now resort there, but those intended for the ecclesiastical state; so that an Irish Priest now receives his sole education at a place which is found *unfit* for the education of any other class whatever. The

clown who entered a dupe, comes out an impostor, having only just superadded so much bigotry, and hypocrisy, and to so much ignorance, and superstition.

As the education of a Priest is not adapted to improve his understanding, so neither is his subsequent life, calculated to amend his heart. We all know the effect of power upon the human mind, how eagerly it is sought, how tenaciously preserved, and how calculated it is to corrupt human nature. But power is a relative term, and its effects must be estimated by comparing the situation which has been obtained, with that which has been left. Now I know no elevation in life so great or sudden as that which an Irish Priest obtains, compared with his former one. From being the laborious, ill paid, Priest flogged, squalid Irish clown—to that of being, the domineering, well fed, peasant flogging, rosy cheeked Irish priest;—from being to-day most thankful if he get leave to dine in some nobleman's kitchen; and to-morrow, seated at that nobleman's right hand at table, toasting his lady, praying for the souls of the faithful, or, elevated a little with his Lordship's wine, becoming jocose, or even tawdry in the drawing-room:—from being to-day an authenticated booby, under the coarse authority of the paternal lash; and to-morrow, before he is even yet bedubbed a Priest, during his preparatory course, finding himself, already the father Pat, or Tom, or John, of his wondering family, and the oracle of all his little cousins:—in a word, from being the dupe of Priests, the subjugated, demoralized, hoodwinked slave; to that of being himself, the awful, miraculous thing he before dreaded—the Right Rev. absolver and excommunicator of mankind. Such a transition as this is surely enough to intoxicate an Irish clown. To maintain and increase

that influence is the darling object therefore of the Irish Priest. But then he is not a person calculated to preserve an empire over enlightened minds. *His influence is in an exact ratio to the quantum of ignorance he can act upon.* Against *knowledge* therefore—knowledge, which, including the study of the Scriptures, by promoting the influence of Christianity, diminishes the influence of Priests;—which shews the Priesthood, instituted to administer the rites, and teach the doctrines of Christ; not to appropriate to themselves any of the powers or attributes of the one sole Mediator;—against knowledge therefore, which impresses the fear of God, instead of the fear of the Priest—the Irish Priest wages inveterate hostility. Now though the Irish Priest is happily deprived of the sword of power, so that he can neither make the contumacious groan in an inquisition, or shriek at an Auto de fé: yet under the circumstances of the country he can impede considerably the progress of knowledge. In the first place, the Priests are not married—they have given no hostages to society—the church is their family—its aggrandizement their darling passion—touch one and you awaken a nest of hornets:—they form a corporation—which not being identified with the common interests of society, subsists at its expense, and is elevated upon its degradation. In the next place, the great mass of the population are ignorant; consequently the dupes of priest-craft; the Priest is therefore enabled to make use of the existing blindness of the many, to crush every refractory exercise of reason in the few. So that an immense body of fraud, and imposture, is always ready to actuate an immense body of ignorance and credulity. Accordingly it is a disgraceful fact, but no less true than disgraceful, that

every member of the Church of Rome, who depends for subsistence upon any trade or profession, finds, particularly in the country parts of Ireland, his means of subsistence increased by the favour, or diminished by the displeasure of the Priest.—And that if he be obedient and submissive to the man; attend to the external ordinances of the church, or pay well for liberty to dispense with them; if he be diligent in dinners, and punctual in Easter dues—in short, if he maintain the church;—the church will maintain him, because the Priesthood will unite in exerting all its monstrous influence, to crush his rivals, and increase his customers. But should some unlucky man, be so adventurous as to obtain knowledge, and so imprudent as to discover that he has obtained it; should he read the Bible, and appeal for his religious opinions to the testimony of revealed truth—should he in fact let Christ reign in his heart, instead of the Priest over his actions;—then, this deputy mediator, this infallible man, will, with all the sanctimonial forms of holy hate, piously deprive him of subsistence in this world, and charitably send his soul to the devil in the next. The influence of the Priests, then, cannot be favourable to the religious character of a people, which is exerted in impeding the knowledge of the Scriptures, and holding out salvation as attainable through faith in the church, instead of faith in Christ. For although the Priests profess to act in the name of Christ, and to be his servants, yet like other servants, they usurp his attributes, and allow no communication with their master but through themselves. It consequently demoralizes the nation also, because it impresses the ordinances of men, more than the commands of God, and makes those who will not purify their hearts, or amend their lives,

entrench themselves in the security of external rites and ceremonies. So that we see those every day, violating without compunction the laws of God, who place an implicit reliance in the efficacy of holy wells, relicks, masses, fastings, paternosters, plenary indulgences, and absolutions. I speak of the ignorant, who are the great mass of the community; and really with the same form of worship; *the belief, the faith*, of an Irish peasant—that which constitutes the essence of religion, is as opposite to that of a Doctor of the Sorbonne; as that of a Welsh Jumper, to an enlightened member of the Church of England.

The Irish Priest, however, does not solely confide in the ignorance he can preserve, but also in the *irritation he can excite*. For as he lives upon the bigotry of his flock, and as political irritation, keeps alive religious bigotry, he is naturally anxious to extend a feeling from which he draws his emoluments. Strange, then, as it may at first view appear, there is no man in the community, more sincerely adverse to the repeal of the penal code, than the Irish Priest; unless that repeal be accompanied, *with an independent establishment for himself*. Accordingly, whenever the question of Catholic Emancipation had been agitated in this country, the Priests were invariably found, upholding all the bad measures, of those bad men, who so often marred its brightest prospects. Upon the memorable occasion of passing the notorious resolutions of 1812—resolutions, from which by the by, the cause has never since perfectly recovered the evil effects of—the Priests of Dublin employed themselves on the morning of the meeting, canvassing garrets, cellars, ale-houses, and from those abodes of ignorance and depravity—in which many

of themselves had been early nurtured, and from which they had but recently emerged—they collected together a mob of their loathsome inmates, whom they exhorted to “go and defend their religion,”—that is, to overwhelm moderation and good sense, with ruffian clamour, and shout for folly, violence, mischief, and O’Connell. You Sir, think that Catholic Emancipation would be servicable to this country: what then can you think of men, to whose conduct you may principally attribute, that you, or those who agree with you, have never been able to accomplish it? You think a resident, indulgent gentry, would also be desirable: what then can you say for men, who by teaching their flocks that their Protestant landlords must necessarily be damned; by impeding every effort on their part, to instruct or enlighten them; makes the tenant regard his landlord with distrust, and consequently the landlord, him without sympathy—who, by thus rendering the situation of the landlord irksome, sometimes *dangerous* among his tenantry—impels him too often to abandon them, to the fraudulent tuition of a crafty Priest, and the tender mercies of a grasping agent? You Sir, are also a member of the Bible Societies, and of course one of those *dangerous* men, who do not think the Bible a *dangerous book*;—who think that God did not leave a book;—professing *to make man wise unto salvation, and to render him THOROUGHLY furnished unto all good works.**—That he did not leave this book so imperfect and inadequate to its avowed object—that it must be consigned to the *purity, the disinterestedness and infallibility* of man, to supply the deficiencies and correct the

* See St. Paul’s Epistle to Timothy.

blunders of omnipotence! being, I say, one of those *deluded* men who think the Bible a *good* book, what will you say of men, who treat it as if it were a *bad* one, and make use of that activity against the circulation of the word of God, which they ought to employ against the ribaldry and blasphemy of Payne, Voltaire, D'Alambert, and Volney? In fine, Sir, you are an enemy to the orange societies, you think that all the insignia and watchwords of ascendancy, while they add nothing to real strength; are calculated to corrupt those who employ them, and to irritate those against whom they are employed; *and so do I*: what then shall we say of men, whose intermeddling spirit, whose atrocious thirst of power, and mischievous exercise of what they have, make these prejudices be cherished as duties—make *ascendancy* be associated with the idea of *self protection*;—and *equality of laws*, as giving a dreaded *predominance* to *Priestly power*? Yet you think the Priests contribute to the tranquillity of this people; now in my soul, I believe them to be one of the great causes, why they still continue their disposition to outrage. The Priests impede the word of God; they keep the people ignorant; they estrange them from their natural guardians; can they then be said to make them good subjects, good men, or contribute to forming a religious, civilized, or contented population? They may, it is true, preach against particular crimes; but do they not produce those general pre-dispositions which lead to crime, and render their particular prohibitions unavailing? The trade of an Irish Priest is that of a teacher of bigotry and discontent; because he is placed in circumstances which identify his pride, and subsistence with their prevalence. He meddles in pub-

lic affairs, he meddles in private families, and seldom to the advantage of either. It is he who renders this people bigotted without morality, and turbulent without any genuine sense of freedom.

As the evil has its source in the dependence of the Priests, so is its remedy to be found in making them independent. But it does not necessarily follow that they should be nominated by the court. One sect is not properly qualified to appoint the pastors of another. Should they appoint even none but the most worthy, they would still be received with distrust; and consequently a measure intended to destroy the *pernicious* power of Priests, would deprive them of *salutary* influence. I would give Priests an establishment:—one, sufficient for decent dignity, above want, but below splendour, and without any portion of political power: subject to internal regulations, paid by the country, but not in the patronage of the government. Then a superior class of persons would be induced to enter orders;—men, who to the sentiments of piety, would add the influence of manners—who would no longer find their subsistence depend upon keeping alive religious disunion, or political discontent;—but, at once identified with the constitution, yet independent of the court; advocates for good order, not instruments of corruption, they would preserve a benignant influence;—the influence of piety, manners, learning and virtue;—not exercised in exciting bigotry, or sedition, but in impressing Christianity, and preserving constitutional freedom. With this, no other securities would be necessary: without it, all others would be found unavailing.

I have the honour to be,

&c. &c.