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Full transcript

LORD JOHN RUSSELL
and
THE PAPAL AGGRESSION
From 'The Times', of Thursday, Nov. 7th, 1850

TO THE RIGHT REV. THE BISHOP OF DURHAM

MY DEAR LORD,

I agree with you in considering "the late aggression of the Pope upon our Protestantism" as "insolent and insidious", and I therefore feel as indignant as you can do upon the subject.

I not only promoted to the utmost of my power the claims of the Roman Catholics to all civil rights, but I thought it right, and even desirable, that the ecclesiastical system of the Roman Catholics should be the means of giving instruction to the numerous Irish immigrants in London and elsewhere, who without such help would have been left in heathen ignorance.

This might have been done, however, without any such innovation as that which we have now seen.

It is impossible to confound the recent measures of the Pope with the division of Scotland into dioceses by the Episcopal Church, or the arrangement of the districts in England by the Wesleyan Conference.

There is an assumption of power in all the documents that have come from Rome – a pretension to supremacy over the realm of England, and a claim to sole and undivided sway, which is inconsistent with the Queen's supremacy, with the rights of our bishops and clergy, and with the spiritual independence of the nation, as asserted even in Roman Catholic times.

I confess, however, that my alarm is not equal to my indignation.

Even if it shall appear that the ministers and servants of the Pope in this country have not transgressed the law, I feel persuaded that we are strong enough to repel any outward attack. The liberty of Protestantism has been enjoyed too long in England to allow of any successful attempt to impose a foreign yoke on our minds and consciences. No foreign prince or potentate will be permitted to fasten his fetters upon a nation which has so long and so nobly vindicated its right to freedom of opinion, civil, political, and religious.

Upon this subject, then, I will only say that the present state of the law shall be carefully examined, and the propriety of adopting any proceedings with reference to the recent assumptions of power deliberately considered.

There is a danger, however, which alarms me much more than any aggression of a foreign Sovereign.

Clergymen of our own Church, who have subscribed to the Thirty-nine Articles, and acknowledged in explicit terms the Queen's supremacy, have been the most forward in leading their flocks, "step by step, to the very verge of the precipice." The honour paid to saints, the claim of infallibility for their Church, the superstitious use of the sign of the cross, the muttering of the Liturgy so as to disguise the language in which it was written, the recommendation of auricular confession, and the administration of penance and absolution – all these things are pointed out by clergymen of the

Church of England as worthy of adoption, and are now openly reprehended by the Bishop of London in his charge to the clergy of his diocese.

What then is the danger to be apprehended from a foreign prince of no great power, compared to the danger within the gates from the unworthy sons of the Church of England herself?

I have little hope that the propounders and framers of these innovations will desist from their insidious course. But I rely with confidence on the people of England, and I will not bate a jot of heart or hope so long as the glorious principles and the immortal martyrs of the Reformation shall be held in reverence by the great mass of a nation which looks with contempt on the mummeries of superstition, and with scorn at the laborious endeavours which are now making to confine the intellect and enslave the soul.

I remain, with the greatest respect, &c.,
J. RUSSELL

Downing Street, Nov. 4.

KENNETT AND BREADS, PRINTERS, WEST STREET, HORSHAM