

EDITORIAL

THE CROWN'S TEST OATH.

By DANIEL DE LEON

LONDON despatches announce with much furore that a Government bill, altering the Crown's test oath at which Roman Catholics took umbrage, was introduced on June 28th, was received with cheers, was supported by the leader of the Opposition, and passed its first reading with only 42 votes against and 383 in favor.

One should expect great things from a bill so heralded. Fact is the bill is a positive disappointment.

The present Test Oath was the product of extraordinary circumstances. James II had turned Roman Catholic, surrounded himself with a bevy of Jesuits, and played fast and loose with the laws of the land—all obedient to the dictation of Louis XIV. He was dethroned. William and Mary, the continental center of opposition to Louis XIV, were enthroned in his stead. Parliament, of course, sought to guard against a recurrence of what came to be known as Jacobitism, and it did so by two leading acts—one in the nature of a declaration of Rights which made the crown the creation of the "people"; the other the Test Oath.

The Test Oath was intended to cover the reigning monarch of France, with whom and his Jesuits the Pope himself was at such variance that he made common cause with William against Louis. Under such a combination of circumstances the Oath spoke the language of the hour: the political purpose was clad in the verbiage of theology: the same was pointedly anti-Jesuit, and, of course, also generally anti-Catholic.

A Test Oath, sprung from such circumstances, is to-day ridiculously archaic. Even without umbrage being taken by Roman Catholic British subjects, the Oath should have been discarded as unfitting. But umbrage having been taken, and the proposed altered bill being the result of such umbrage mainly, the sentence whereby

the Crown is to declare that it “will, according to the true intent of the enactments which secure Protestant succession to the throne of my realm, uphold and maintain said enactments to the best of my power according to law,” becomes a fresh insult—an insult all the more unprovoked, considering that the bill was introduced by the Premier with the statement that “Nobody doubts the loyalty of the Roman Catholic subjects of the realm.”

If religious faith in a certain creed is not incompatible with loyalty, then the passage cited above is gratuitous insult; if religious faith in a certain creed is incompatible with loyalty, then the Premier's declaration of Roman Catholic loyalty is the equivocation of a juggling fiend, unworthily paltering with the people in a double sense.

Weighed in the scale of Reason, the only thing that the Test Oath, as now proposed, does test is the orthodoxy of the British Ruling Class concerning the fat livings of the Anglican clergy. And that test puts Great Britain down as four-fifth feudal.

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