

ed "to come to some discreet and learned Priest taught in the law of God, and confess and open his sins and grief secretly, that he might receive such ghostly counsel, advice, and comfort, that his conscience might be relieved, and that of him (as a minister of God and of the Church) he might receive comfort and absolution, to the satisfaction of his mind, and avoiding of all scruple and doubtfulness." [22] In the "Visitation of the Sick" the rubric says—"Here shall the sick person be moved to make a special confession of his sins (if he feels his conscience troubled with any weighty matter.) After which confession the Priest shall absolve him (if he humbly and heartily desire it) after this sort. 'Our Lord Jesus Christ who hath left power to his church to absolve all sinners who truly repent and believe in him, of his great mercy, forgive thee these offences: And by his authority committed to me, I absolve thee from all thy sins. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost Amen.'" [23] This form of absolution was ordered to be used in all private confessions. [24]—Though the words in the exhortation contain some things that would enable the Calvinist to interpret them of mere advice or assurance of pardon, if the penitent truly repented, without necessarily implying absolution, properly so called; yet this would not be a fair interpretation of the words, especially when supported by the rubric and absolution contained in the "Visitation of the Sick."

In the second book of Edward VI., another advance was made to pure Calvinism, without, however, shocking public sentiment too much; it was done in a manner that rendered the doctrine of absolution less explicit, and preparations were made to have the whole of the Catholic doctrine expunged at a more favourable moment.

In the exhortation, the people were no longer told to come to the priest that they might "receive absolution of him (as minister of God and of the Church)"—were now to come, that "by the ministry of God's word they may receive the benefit of absolution." Private confessions before communion had probably gone somewhat into disuse among those who listened to the new teachers; the reformers therefore could exhort the people to the use of them or omit it as they pleased. But at the point of death people were not yet willing to be deprived of the benefit of confession and absolution; the absolution to be given to the sick was, therefore retained, but the rubric ordering the same form to be used in private confessions was expunged. (25)

It may appear an enigma to a person unacquainted with the spirit of this movement, that the absolution at the morning prayer—the only thing, I believe, bearing at all the name of absolution in the American Prayer Book—should have been inserted only in the second book of Edward,

and therefore was probably the effect of the Calvinistic influence then in operation. But this only prepared the way for the total rejection of the doctrine itself. The nature of this absolution is such that any Calvinist may use it. Those who cared for absolution, on the other hand, could find it here if they pleased, and thus more easily bear its suppression in another part of the book. That this was the intention of those who inserted it, may be fairly presumed from the whole tenor of their proceedings. The premature death of Edward prevented these men from carrying out their plans fully; when Protestantism was again re-established, the law-Church felt its claims so bitterly attacked by the sects that sprang from its own bosom, that it was forced to throw itself on ecclesiastical antiquity for support, and, therefore, could not afford to abandon a rite which had been always sanctioned in the Church. (26) The absolution of the sick, however Popish its sound, and the advice to the sick man to make a special confession of his sins, are therefore retained to the present day in the English Prayer Book: though in practice these special confessions are probably, as little in use as amongst American Episcopalians.

It was reserved for the American Protestant Episcopal Church to carry out fully the designs that I have mentioned. In the Communion service, the people are not exhorted, as even now in England, to come to the priest that they "may receive the benefit of absolution, together with ghostly counsel and advice"; they are merely exhorted to come that they "may receive such godly counsel and advice as may tend to the quieting of their consciences." After the general confession, the minister in England "pronounces" the absolution; in America he is directed merely to "say" the words; which form allows those who please to consider what he says, as nothing more than an ordinary prayer. At the morning service, in England, the absolution is also "pronounced"; in America, the "declaration of absolution or remission of sins is made by the priest." (27) These differences, trifling as they may appear, will be seen to be of the greatest importance, when we recollect that the precise words, thus altered, had afforded the strongest proof to those writers of the Established Church who contended for the Catholic interpretation of the Prayer Book, regarding the power of absolving. (28)

The absolution at the "Visitation of the Sick," and the exhortation "to special confession," are expunged altogether from the American edition. The support which the other passages, already weak and

[26] "They, (the ancient) had absolutions, and these absolutions were supposed to procure a reconciliation with God, (neither of which I presume will be thought to want a proof.)"—Wheatly preface p 17

[27] Compare the English and American editions of the Book of Common Prayer.

[28] Wheatly, like most others, who contend that the absolution is a conveyance of pardon, lays great stress on the words "pronouncing absolution," in as much as this word "signifies much more than merely to make known or declare a thing."—p 120. See also Staunton, Dictionary of the Church, Art. Absolution.

ambiguous, received from the absolution of the sick is thus entirely abandoned.

The American edition has therefore attained, indeed, the most "vigorous maturity." The plan of the first reformers is fully developed. There is nothing which the most pure Calvinist, the man who scoffs at the power of absolving from sin, may not use, while the orthodox churchman will find enough in it through which he may pretend to exercise the absolving power in its most elevated acceptance. Being now "ripe with experience," the Prayer Book, on this point, is every thing, or nothing, as each one pleases.

I remain, Rev Sir, respectfully,

Your obedient servant,

CATHOLICUS.

From the Dublin Review.

DID THE ANGLICAN CHURCH REFORM HERSELF?

(Concluded)

The accession of Elizabeth, the successor of Mary, was followed by another revolution in the church. During the reign of her sister, Elizabeth had conformed; but the circumstances of her birth, and the adverse claim of Mary Stuart set forth by the king of France, the father-in-law of that pious princess, induced her to listen to the suggestions of those counsellors, who maintained that the preservation of her crown was incompatible with the existence of that religious form which proclaimed her a bastard. The resolution was taken, preliminary measures were cautiously adopted, and in her first parliament all enactments of the last reign on religious matters were repealed, and the statutes passed under Henry VIII. in derogation of the papal authority, and in the reign of Edward in favor of the reformed service, were called into force.

"It was enacted that the book of common prayer, with additions and emendations, should alone be used by the ministers in all churches, under the penalties of forfeiture, of deprivation, and of death; that the spiritual authority of every foreign prelate within the realm should be utterly abolished; that the jurisdiction necessary for the correction of errors, heresies, schisms, and abuses should be annexed to the crown, with the power of delegating such jurisdiction to any person or persons whatsoever, at the pleasure of the sovereign; that the penalty of asserting the papal authority should ascend, on the repetition of the offence, from the forfeiture of real and personal property, to perpetual imprisonment, and from perpetual imprisonment to death, as it was inflicted in cases of high-treason; and that all clergymen taking orders, or in possession of livings, all magistrates and inferior officers, having fees or wages from the crown, all laymen suing out the livery of their lands, or about to do homage to the queen, should, under pain of deprivation of incapacity, take an oath, declaring her to be supreme governor of all ecclesiastical or spiritual things, or causes, as well as temporal, and renouncing all foreign ecclesiastical or spiritual jurisdiction or authority whatsoever, within the realm." (Lingard, vii. 259.)

With respect to these enactments it may be remarked,—1st. That the parliament under Elizabeth did not follow the precedent set by the parliament under Mary. It did not merely repeal the acts of former parliaments, but also passed laws, which had for their object the establishment of forms of worship, and the exercise of spiritual jurisdiction; 2nd. That all this was done, not with the approbation, but in defiance of the church. Every bishop in the house voted against these bills: the convocation presented a confession of faith, and protested against the competency of any lay assembly to pronounce on matters of doctrine, worship, and discipline; and both the universities came to the aid of the convocation, and subscribed the same confession. Even the opposition among the lay members of the House of Lords was more powerful than on any previous occasion, and, if the act in favor of the book of common prayer passed at last, it was only by a majority of three; and that small majority could not have been obtained, had not two of the bishops been imprisoned to deprive them of their votes, and five commoners of reformed principles been previously raised to the peerage. Now these enactments are the basis on which the present Church of England was raised; does it not then follow that it is a parliamentary church, in the foundation of which, no ecclesiastical authority had any concern?

But has not the Church of England a hierarchy, which, if we may believe the Oxford divines, traces its descent in a direct line from the apostles? The present Church of England was founded by the enactments just mentioned, in March and April of 1559; it possessed hierarchy till the following month of December, on the 17th day of which Dr. Parker was consecrated Archbishop of Canterbury, by whom all the other prelates of the new church were afterwards confirmed or consecrated. That the present bishops, then, may trace their descent to him, is certain. If they pretend to go further, it is only through him that they can claim. How then did he become a successor of the apostles? The succession might continue in other churches, because in them there were bishops; in this it could not, because in this, before the 17th of December, there was no bishop. Let us then enquire how the difficulty was overcome; by what ingenious process it was contrived to hook Dr. Parker on the apostolic chain.

Soon after the dissolution, the council summoned before them the bishops who had attended the parliament, and required them to take the oath of supremacy.—With the single exception of Ki Chen of Landaff, they refused; and for that refusal, in the course of the two following months, all were deprived by commissioners, whom the queen, after the example of Henry and Edward, had appointed to visit the several dioceses. That such refusal was not a canonical, but only a legal offence, created in the late parliament, is evident; and how, on that account the bishops could forfeit their spiritual authority by the judgment of the civil power, it is not easy to comprehend. After this, it became the great object of the govern-

[22] Wheatly, p 139

[23] This is found in the Prayer Book yet in use in England.

[24] Wheatly, p 439

[25] Ibidem.