

WHY AM I A CHURCHMAN ?

(Continued from No. of 16th March.)

I am a Churchman—

IV. Because the Church which we call the Church of England is part of that One Church which Christ founded upon His Apostles and Prophets, being lineally descended from it, as one visible organisation in unbroken continuity.

It is very curious how hard some popular fallacies die.

One of the most remarkable instances of this is the persistency with which people cling to the idea that somehow at the Reformation one organisation was substituted for another (as was the case in Scotland and Switzerland), and that a new body now known as the Church of England was then created, and took the place of the old Church, which was the Roman Church. And yet such an idea is entirely without foundation in historical facts. It is a mere popular delusion, fostered by Romanists and Schismatics in light literature (though they do not pretend to maintain it in any writings of real importance), to which Churchpeople, who have not studied the history of their Church, too frequently give thoughtless credence.

NO HISTORIAN OF ANY NOTE HAS EVER VENTURED SERIOUSLY TO MAINTAIN THAT THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND WAS NOT ONE AND THE SAME BODY BEFORE AND AFTER THE REFORMATION, both legally and spiritually.

The fact of her continuity is witnessed to by (1) the State Laws of England; (2) the evidence of those who took part in the Reformation; (3) the undoubted continuity of (a) the Faith, (b) the Ministry, (c) the Forms of Worship, and (d) the name of the Church.

We will give a few proofs of each of these witnesses.

1. The Continuity of the Church is borne witness to by the *State Laws of England*. There are many people who will be more convinced by such a line of argument as this, showing the continuity of the Church as a definite legal corporation, than by any proof of the spiritual continuity of the Church as a distinctly religious body. It is therefore well to dwell upon it, though of course it is by no means so important as the latter.

A. No Act of Parliament can be produced transferring, at any time, the Church property from one body to another. There is none on the Statute Book.

And yet,—

(1) All ecclesiastical corporations in England—Bishoprics, Cathedral bodies, and Parishes—hold their property, whether estates or titles, by an undisputed title dating, in the great majority of cases, from long before the Reformation.

[An Act of Parliament of late years has transferred some of the property to the "Ecclesiastical Commissioners" for re-adjustment, as some corporations had become exceedingly wealthy, while other portions of the Church greatly needed aiding. But this in no way alters the principle stated above.]

(2) Property leased for 999 years has lately reverted to Church corporations, as the legal representatives of those who gave the lease.

(3) Property left to the "Catholic Church," in any place in England, would, as it has been

decided, be given by law to the Church of England, not the Roman Church, whose legal title is the Church of Rome, or the Roman Catholic Church.

(4) The Archbishops and Bishops in England hold their seats in the House of Lords by right of their being the rightful occupiers of Sees to which anciently Baronies were attached.

[Here, again, very recent legislation has slightly modified the principle which, till then, had been uninterruptedly recognised in the constitution of the country. When, a few years ago it was desired to increase the number of bishops it was not considered desirable to increase the number sitting, at the same time, in the House of Lords, nor was it thought expedient to create what might be regarded as two grades of bishoprics, one giving the right to a seat in the House of Lords, the other not. The expedient was, therefore, devised, of allowing the occupants of the newly-created Sees to sit in the House on an equality with the bishops of the old Sees, but by rotation, so that there should not be a greater number sitting in the House at one time than there had been previously. Exceptions were made in the cases of the two Archbishops and the Bishops of Winchester, London, and Durham, who still sit by right of the ancient prerogatives of those Sees.]

(5) The Ancient Canon Law of the Church of England in pre-Reformation times still holds good in England, and has to be consulted in ecclesiastical causes where it is not contrary to the Statute Law, and does not interfere with the rights of the Crown, or has not been specifically revoked.

[N.B. The Roman Canon Law never ran in England.] (Blunt's "History of the Reformation," p. 329.)

All the bishops of the Roman Church in England in 1826 issued a Declaration in which they distinctly repudiated the idea that they claimed the property of the Church of England as the property of their Church.

Section IX reads as follows :

"British Catholics are charged with entertaining a pretended right to the property of the established Church in England. [Italics in original.] We consider such a charge to be totally without foundation. We declare that we entertain no pretension to such a claim. We regard all the revenues and temporalities of the Church establishment as the property of those on whom they are settled by the laws of the land. We disclaim any right, title, or pretension, with regard to the same."

This Declaration was signed by ten bishops of the Roman Church. It has been lately republished in full by Mr. G. H. F. Nye, Secretary of the Church Defence Institute. Dr. Littledale, in commenting on the above Declaration, well says, "This language cannot be explained away as meaning only a disclaimer of any right which a secular law court would recognise. It covers the whole ground." We have seen that the property was never at any time "settled by the laws of the land" on the Church of England as distinct from the Roman Church. The Church holds its property under the laws of the land by the same title, and no other, as it did before the Reformation.

B. The statutes passed for various purposes at the time of the Reformation plainly testify to the continuity of the Church with whose affairs they are dealing.

In 1551, an Act was passed abolishing the payment of *Annates*, or first-fruits of bishoprics, to the Pope. This was in accordance with a petition from the Clergy in Convocation, who also prayed that should the Pope persist in requiring such payments, *the obedience of England should be withdrawn altogether from the See of Rome*. This provision was embodied in the Act. And yet in the course of the Act the king and his subjects are spoken of as "obedient children of Holy Church." The clergy had urged that this payment was of late growth, and contrary to a decree of the 21st session of the Council of Basle.

In 1532-3, the important Act for the "*Restraint of Appeals*" was passed. That Act declares that England is an independent empire, composed of a "spirituality" and "temporality," or Church and State, of which each is competent to take judicial cognizance of all causes within its own sphere. "The body spiritual whereof," it alleges, "having power when any cause of the law divine happened to come in question, or of spiritual learning, then it was declared, interpreted, and showed by that part of the body politic called the English Church; which always hath been reported and also found of that sort, that both for knowledge, integrity, and sufficiency of numbers, it hath been always thought, and is also at this hour sufficient and meet of itself, without the intermeddling of any exterior person or persons, to declare and determine all such doubts, and to administer all such offices and duties, as to their rooms spiritual doth pertain."

It refers to laws that were made in the reigns of Kings Edward I, Edward III, Richard II, and Henry IV, and other kings for much the same purpose, and for preserving the rights of the Crown.

In the following year, 1533-4, an Act was passed transferring certain functions of a spiritual nature, such as the granting Dispensations from the Pope to the Archbishop of Canterbury, which Act was confirmed and extended in 1536.

The 19th clause of this Act contains a statutory declaration that it is not intended to change the character of the Church of England as a sound branch of the Catholic Church. "Provided always," it declares, "that this Act nor any thing or things therein contained, shall be hereafter interpreted, or expounded, that your grace, your nobles and subjects intend by the same to decline or vary from the Congregation of Christ's Church in anything concerning the very [true] articles of the Catholic faith of Christendom, or in any other things declared by Holy Scripture and the Word of God, necessary for your and their salvation."

The first Act of Uniformity, establishing the use of the First Reformed Prayer Book, which had been prepared by a committee of divines, and which a letter of the King and Council to Bonner says had been accepted "by the assent of the bishops and all others the learned men in this our realm in their Synods and Convocations provincial," was passed Jan. 21st 1549.

It says, "Whereas of long time there hath been used in this realm of England and Wales divers forms of common prayer, commonly called the Service of the Church, that is to say the use of Sarum, of York, of Bangor, of Lincoln, and besides the same, now of late much more divers forms and fashions have been used..... the King's Highness..... having respect to the most sincere and pure Christian religion taught by the Scriptures as to the usage in the primitive Church should draw and make one convenient and meet order," &c., &c. The chapter entitled "Concerning the Services of the Church," in our present Prayer Book, was the Preface to that book.

In 1559 (Queen Elizabeth) an Act was passed to annul the Acts of Philip and Mary, and "restoring to the Crown the ancient jurisdiction over the State, ecclesiastical and spiritual." It appointed a Court of High Commission as final Court of Appeal in ecclesiastical cases, but made