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A CHARGE,

DELIVERED BY
EDWARD COPELSTON, D. D., LORD BISHOP
OF LLANDAFF.

AT HIS TRIENNIAL VISITATION IN OCTOBER, 1842.
(From the St. James's Chronicle, 3rd December.)

Reverend Brethren,—Upon all former occasions of our solemn meeting, although each has been distinguished by some topic more especially connected with passing events affecting the welfare of the Church, yet there has always been one important theme forced upon me by the peculiar circumstances of this diocese—the prevalence, I mean, of dissent and separation among those who call themselves Christians; and who not only profess their faith in the same Lord, but who receive the same Scriptures, and who profess to be governed by the same rule of faith—namely, I may add, that they interpret these Scriptures, in the main, nearly in the same manner, bidding their hearers look to the same means of salvation, namely, faith in their Redeemer's atonement, sanctification by the Holy Spirit, and repentance for every act of disobedience to the Divine Law.

Thus, in a recent appeal to the various classes of Dissenters from our Church, urging them, in affectionate terms, to return to the fold from which they had wandered, I did not hesitate to say that they "had much more in common with us, than of difference from us" and upon this fact I ground my hope that a day will come when most of these differences will disappear, and when the one great duty, with a neglect of which they are now chargeable—that of maintaining the unity of the Church—will present itself so forcibly to their minds, as to throw into the shade all minor points, which are now pleaded as reasons and excuses for separation.

Whether we have made any progress towards this reunion since our last meeting, is more than I am able to say with confidence. But this I can assert, that we have not been wanting on our part in endeavours to remove all obstacles and hindrances, by divesting the matters in dispute of everything that can wear the appearance of prejudice, or personal animosity, or party spirit—that we have anxiously and affectionately invited those who separate themselves, to ponder well the dying injunctions of their Saviour, who last foretold prayers were poured forth, almost in agony, for the unity of that Church, the foundation of which he had just laid, and the perpetuation of which he had committed to a chosen few, of whose authority, and of whose general course of proceeding, no doubt has ever been entertained; neither, indeed, is this now pretended by the several sects that have disturbed the common Peace.

It would be superfluous in me, and not very respectful to you, my reverend brethren, if I were now to enter upon any historical proof of the sacredness in which this duty was held by the primitive Church, and of the vital and fundamental importance then attached to it—if I were to demonstrate in detail that the Church is invariably represented by the writers of the first ages as a mystical society, formed under one invisible Head, maintaining spiritual communion with Him, and governed upon earth by persons deriving their appointment, and consequently their authority, from Him—that this incorporation is signified by the strongest and the most endearing epithets, denoting an intimate and indissoluble union, as *the body of Christ—the spouse of Christ—as a holy temple, wherein His Spirit dwelleth*: and that even those portions of it whose creed was infected by heretical opinions, such as the Nestorians and the Arians, and that schismatics, such as the Donatists, still asserted and carefully cherished this original constitution derived from the apostles, and never conceived the wild imagination that the office of Christian minister could be assumed by men of their own authority, or in violation of that order which had subsisted from the beginning. All these are notions of modern growth, and may easily be proved to be so, to any candid inquirer.

The phrase "Holy Church," "Holy Catholic Church," is one of the earliest with which we are acquainted. It is embodied in that summary of Christian doctrine which has obtained the name of the Apostles' Creed; and to this Church the attribute of unity as much belongs, and is as uniformly ascribed, as to the Divine Being by whose name it is called, and by whose Spirit it is sanctified and governed.

How then is it, that, after the lapse of fifteen hundred years, retaining the same Scriptures, and substantially, I may say, preaching the same doctrine of redemption through faith in Christ, this grand principle should now be set at naught by so many thousands of believers?—that what before was deemed an essential and inalienable character, should now be regarded almost as a matter of indifference?—that the question is not so much, which body of nominal Christians is best entitled to the appellation of the true Church, as whether any such body exist at all?—and whether all the solemn injunctions and fervent prayers of our Lord, and all the admonitions of his apostles, and all the exhortations of the bishops and councils of the Church in the first ages, for the preservation of its unity, be not so many idle sounds, without force or meaning, which the superior wisdom of a later age has learnt to disregard?

Such, I say, seems to be the state of the question with the Dissenters of the present day; and it is a paradox capable only of one solution. That solution is to be found, I believe, in the long-established usurpation, and the false teaching, of the Church of Rome. The usurpation of that domineering Church, acquiesced in by the Western Churches for seven or eight hundred years, had succeeded in destroying the true principle of Church unity, by transferring it from its heavenly original to a spurious earthly dominion.—By slow degrees, acting on a steady principle of ambition, the bishops of Rome, taking advantage of the defence paid to the spiritual ruler of the imperial city, and of the greatest diocese of the West, contrived to substitute the head of that diocese for the Head of the Church—to teach and to persuade men, that unity consisted in adhering to this chief—that he was the visible representative of its invisible Head—and that to separate from him, was equivalent to a separation from all communion with that body, of which he was the divinely-appointed ruler.

In support of this claim was brought the fabulous investment of St. Peter with paramount jurisdiction; and upon this fiction was engrafted (without the slightest authority, either from Scripture or from history) the right of each subsequent bishop of that see, supposed to have been St. Peter's, to the same privilege.

It may easily be imagined how a persuasion of the absolute necessity of such a system would soon arise, that to constitute the unity of the Church there must needs be one governor upon earth, a constitution analogous to the scheme of worldly monarchies, and conducive among them to order, to peace, and to perpetuity. The resemblance is striking between this case and that of the Church under the law: when the prophet, in his severe reproof to the Israelites, told them their wickedness was great in asking an earthly sovereign, when "the Lord their God was their King." We will see it to be if the Romish Church would confess, as the children of Israel did, "We have added unto all our sins this evil, to ask us a king."

That in the age when these pretensions began, there was not learning sufficient to refute them, we all know; neither was there a spirit of independent search after truth, or even a sufficient acquaintance with Scripture to detect the fallacy. Those who knew the Scriptures kept the key of knowledge to themselves, and were themselves interested in maintaining the vicious system. Or, if a few of better spirit occasionally arose among the clergy, how could their voice be heard or regarded, in opposition to the power of the Papacy? With what hope of success would an isolated individual "have then wrestled against principalities, and powers, and spiritual wickedness in high places?" That our Lord's kingdom was not of this world, was a truth then ill understood. Neither be ye called masters, for one is your Master, even Christ, might be taught as a lesson of Christian humility; but who would venture to produce it in that age as evidence against the claim of an individual who acted, both in name and in the imaginations of men, as the sole legitimate representative of that Master?

The spell then continued unbroken, gathering strength with time; for though men were found in every age who bore testimony against the impurity, and fraud, and tyranny, and covetousness of the see of Rome, and against the abominations sanctioned by her example, yet were they restrained in their opposition through a dread of incurring the sentence of exclusion from the Church of Christ, by the judgment of him who was supposed to be divinely authorised to govern it.

As soon, then, as the veil was removed from their eyes—when it was clearly demonstrated that the whole claim rested upon an unreal foundation—when it was perceived that the authority was not only imperfect, but that it was altogether fictitious—that no individual governor ever was appointed over the Church on earth—another great error, though a less dangerous one, naturally sprang up in many minds—that the unity of the Church, as a visible society, was unreal and fictitious also. It was a natural, but by no means a necessary error, springing out of that state of things.—And it is one of the many blessings which demand the gratitude of the authors of our Reformation. That work went on temperately and firmly, without detriment to the sacred institutions which required to be thus purified. Her foundations were strengthened—her genuine form was restored—her ancient and primitive rites were retained, and carefully separated from the impurities which had in a long succession of ages defiled and profaned them. But the body of the Church in its original structure remained unchanged; and the name Catholic (which thoughtless men among us still allow to be confined to Romanists) was anxiously preserved, as expressive of our allegiance to the great Founder of the Church, of our belief in its unity, and of the eternal obligation we are under to maintain ourselves in its communion.

That the other portions of Christendom, renouncing as we did the pollutions of Popery, did not equally recognise the original form of the Christian Church as one of indispensable importance, and thus loosened with their own hands the fabric which the apostles had constructed for the preservation and transmission of the truth, is indeed to be lamented. But although much extravagance and error mixed itself with various schools of reform, and the word Protestant became a title comprehending many heterogeneous elements, yet this in no degree affects our own Catholic character. It ought indeed to enhance our reverence and gratitude towards those great and good men, who for many of whom was shed the lustre of martyrdom, who won for us this mighty deliverance, and to protect their memory from that unfeeling and unchristian disrespect which it has been within these few years assailed.

There is a class of publications which has attracted almost universal notice, sometimes for praise, but of late more frequently for censure and admonition, from those whose office in the Church requires them more especially to watch over the purity of our doctrine, and the due administration of our religious ordinances.—To those publications the topics to which I have just adverted naturally lead me.

I know they originated in a desire to correct a laxity of opinion, or rather a culpable thoughtlessness, and a superficial knowledge of divine things too frequent among those who were educated for the ministry; and they have brought many minds to think seriously, and they have led, and to reason justly, upon points which in the last age were either little understood or little regarded. They have opened sources of information, and excited a spirit of inquiry among theological students, which may be productive of much good. In particular, they have displayed in all its fulness and beauty the nature of that heavenly institution, the Catholic Church of Christ; they have developed the characters of unity, of sanctity, of authority, which belong to it; and they have raised an awful sense of the mystery of man's redemption, and of the means which the Church is commissioned to employ, for impressing upon all her members a constant veneration and love towards the Redeemer, and for enabling them to make a personal application of his merits, to the benefit of their own souls.

These are principles, indeed, which have never been absent from the teaching of the Church; but they have been more or less prominent, and they have had more or less influence, according to the temptations and corruptions of each succeeding age.—at one time buried and stifled, as it were, in the superstitions of Popery—at another, carelessly and rudely handled in the rage of theological controversy—or again, slumbering amidst the formalities of a settled and secure establishment.

That this last, however, was the state of our own Church, when these publications began, I can by no means admit. As compared with the preceding age, there had sprung up, long before they appeared, a juster sense of the nature and duties of the pastoral office, and of the obligation of ordination vows, a growing improvement in the performance of public worship, and in the tone and matter of preaching—and certainly there was spread throughout society a more enlightened acquaintance with Church history, and with the grounds of our separation from the Church of Rome.

It was, therefore, with pain and sorrow, that I observed the early indication of that evil, which almost invariably attends the formation of what must be called a school, or a party, in matters of religion. The points on which they first insist are soon exhausted; and there is a tendency, unconsciously perhaps operating, to provide fresh materials, to multiply the topics of animadversion, to exaggerate their importance, to enlarge the field of action, to work upon feelings that have once been moved, and to engage them in some new direction; till at length the older lessons begin to be slighted or forgotten, although still infinitely more pregnant with instruction, and more momentous than those which have superseded them in gaining the attention of the day.

What, for instance, can more strikingly demonstrate the danger of dwelling upon one point, however essential, till it acquires an all-absorbing power over the mind, than the case which these writings acknowledge to have occurred within their own sphere. A distinguished member has openly joined the Romish Church; and, though already an ordained and officiating priest, has submitted to be ordained anew, simply on the ground that he could not reconcile the unity of the Church, as answering to its types in the Old Testament, except by admitting the supremacy of the Pope;—yet the prodigious enormities of that see, in doctrine, in discipline, and in profane practice, are not only denied by his former associates, they are set forth in all their extravagance and atrocity, and are even admitted to be more flagrant now than when our Church on that account renounced her authority, and practically withdrew from her communion.

Again, another writer, who has not glossed over the papal corruptions, and who moreover justly observes, that Rome is worse now than formerly, inasmuch as

she has imposed those very corruptions as terms of communion, which before the Council of Trent were only taught, or tolerated, under her sanction; and who declares that the Pope has usurped the "ordinance of God," yet calls this tenderness for the very centre and core of corruption? Why all this hankering after her ritual and her formularies, even if they can be proved not altogether anti-scriptural and idolatrous? for it cannot be denied that they border close upon the worst errors, and tend to mislead the ignorant into gross idolatry.

It is true, that in these tracts the falsehoods of Popery are occasionally held up undisturbed for rejection, and even for abhorrence. But this, so far from being a justification of the tone in which at other times her faults are palliated and her pretensions respected, rather strikes me as carrying with it a self-condemning evidence. If she be guilty to the extent described, it is inexcusable to hold communion with her, or to court her favour.

Whatever may be our opinion of the Apocalyptic prophecies, as specially directed against the Church of Rome, yet if those corruptions be inherent in her which they themselves admit, surely the spirit of that warning voice, "Come out of her my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins," applies as forcibly to them as to any enormities of vice and cruelty that have ever prevailed in any seat of empire. Can any man believe that the curse and the warning relate only to the profanity of a Babylon, or of any other great and licentious city? and that they are not applicable, even in a superior degree, to a power practising all this fraud and iniquity in the name of our Holy Redeemer?

To say of such a tyranny that it is "ordained of God," is a rash and irreverent speech. The mere possession of power resting on no earthly right, does not entitle it to the submission of men, as being the ordinance of God; much less when *divine* authority is claimed without a shadow of right, and is vindicated by corrupting God's Word, and perverting His best gift to man; much less can it be allowed to a Christian to throw around it the protection of God's law. For the support of lawful government, we are taught that much evil must be quietly endured. The evil is the work of the devil, engrained upon God's institution. But when the institution itself is evil, when it is originally and entirely a profane assumption of God's name, it is not merely the abuse of the power which we regard as the act of our spiritual authority, but the very claim and exercise of it is not protected from rebellion, like the governments of this world, by respect for God's ordinance, but it becomes a sacred duty, as part of our allegiance to a higher power, to resist and to subvert it.

There is undoubtedly in these Tracts an admission of various corruptions, sanctioned and enforced by the Romish Church; but they are commonly introduced as a kind of set-off and counterpoise to the defects alleged to exist among Protestant communions. When, however, we examine in detail the matters of complaint, even as regards continental churches less perfect in their constitution than our own, how weak in comparison of Romish corruptions are they found to be! The absence of episcopal government, the interruption, lamented often by themselves, of episcopal ordination, the disuse of ancient liturgies, the disputes concerning the form of administering the Holy Communion, much more than any real difference as to its nature, much more than any real difference as to its nature—these are the sum and substance of all the evils, which seem to create a greater aversion than all the enormities, which is needless again to enumerate, of the Romish see—its gross superstitions and idolatries, its creature-worship, its withholding the Scriptures, its exaltation of the power of the priest, and its load of ceremonies, all contrived to rivet that power, and to hold its votaries in blind subjection.

Still more, when we examine their strictures on what they find wrong or defective in our own Church, so slight are the points which call for animadversion, so little are they involved in our own formularies, or even authorised by them, that were we to grant all they seem to desire, we should come indeed in outward show a little nearer to the Romish Church; but not one particle of Divine truth should we recover that is now lost among us; not one Divine commandment should we place in a clearer light, or impart to it a more effective obligation, than the institutions of our Church, if duly observed, now provide.

I say, "if duly observed." And here perhaps I shall be met by a remark, that this is all that is aimed at by the writers themselves. Now I will admit, that they have laboured conscientiously and zealously to restore the spirit of our discipline, in many respects falling into decay—that they have exercised a salutary influence in turning the minds of all, laity as well as clergy, to a due consideration of the awful mysteries of our redemption, to which the whole of our ritual bears a continual and a close relation—that the feelings have been softened, the heart subdued, the fervour of devotion kindled by their commentaries on our Liturgy—and that men have been taught to value that highly, which because it has been familiar, they were too apt to slight—and to see a beauty, and a connection with their own spiritual welfare, in many parts of public worship, in which they often carelessly or ignorantly joined.

More than all, they have succeeded in awakening the soul to a just sense of that holy brotherhood, the Catholic Church of Christ; into the privileges of which we are admitted by baptism, and in communion with which we must endeavour through life to continue, if we would inherit the blessing prepared for us from the beginning of the world. A forgetfulness, or an imperfect view of the relation in which we stand as members of Christ's Church upon earth, was, as I before observed, one of the chief errors of the day; and if the ceremonial of the Romish Church, mixed up as it is with the observances of every day, presenting memorials of it to the eye and to the ear continually, in the churches, in the streets, and by the way-side, enforcing a scrupulous distinction of meats and days for the same purpose, and bringing back even the old bondage of the law, "Touch not, taste not, handle not;" if, I say, she possesses this advantage over us in maintaining unity, dearly purchased indeed by the superstitious mixed up with and inseparable from the whole system, let us at least carefully cherish those expedients which our Church provides, in a purer form, for the same end.

The more frequent performance of the daily service, and especially of the celebration of the holy Communion, the most devout and solemn ministrations, both outwardly and inwardly, of these sacred offices, the frequent explanations to our flock of their true design and meaning—these are duties which, according to the circumstances of each parish, a conscientious minister will gladly perform, and gladly increase, as opportunity shall be given and need require; carefully remembering the Apostolic rule, that in the Church all things are to be done unto edifying—that such is the design of these very services—that the most exact observance of the Rubric has no virtue in itself, and that it may be practised by those who will never impart a corresponding sense to their congregation, and may even be indiscreetly obtruded and magnified, as if, besides decency and solemnity, it possessed a saving merit of its own.

And this, I fear, will be the effect on many minds if obsolete ceremonies be revived, especially such as approximate to those of Rome. For where can be the advantage of drawing us nearer than we now are in outward observances? when, too, it is universally admitted that Rome will never draw nearer to us? And when we consider how much mankind are influenced by superficial and merely conventional practices,

which smooth the way towards a coalition in more important matters, do we not risk giving offence to weak minds, and put a snare in their way, if we appear to attach value to what is in its own nature indifferent, merely because a church notoriously corrupt in essentials, retains it, and sets a value upon it? She has attractions enough already, calculated to entrap and to mislead simple and unstable minds. Why should we add to them?

The rule of Christian charity inculcated by St. Paul is, not to use our liberty so as to hurt another man's conscience. How weak mankind are apt to be in minute points connected with religion, the history of all religious disputes sufficiently proves. To men of the present day the agitation caused about matters of ceremony, even among powerful and well-informed minds, during the progress of the Reformation, is almost inconceivable; the matters in dispute being the lawfulness of clerical vestments, the use of the sign of the cross in baptism, and of the ring in marriage, and others of the like unimportant nature, about which men not only fiercely contended, but were even ready to lay down their lives. These examples, however, are instructive on that very account; for they teach us to be tender and scrupulous in regard to the conscience of another, lest what we look upon as insignificant, or a mere ceremony, should be the means of misleading the judgment, or of disturbing the faith of any member of the Church. We ought undoubtedly to make great allowance for religious prejudices, originating in early education and long use, supported too by high authority, provided they do not militate against any essential Christian doctrine. When they are not positively hurtful, we may leave them to die of themselves, following the illustrious example set by St. Paul, and at length by all the apostles, in reference to the Mosaic law. But I cannot think the same allowance due to those who have not been trained and educated in usages closely allied to the corrupt doctrines we have abjured, and which justly excite an apprehension that, if solemnly asserted, they may revive the corruption together with the kindred ceremony.

The wisdom and charity of our Reformers, in gently weaning the public mind from their false religion, cannot be too highly commended. I know not whether there is a more interesting portion of that great historical lesson can be found than the changes made in the Liturgy between the first and the last years of King Edward's reign. They illustrate the principle of which I am speaking in a remarkable manner. But the chief inference I would now draw from the example is, that to invent that order a slur upon their holy work, and to cast aspersions which they retained would probably be omitted if the work were begun anew in our own time; and certainly the spirit of their proceeding is opposed to the revival of those which are fallen into disuse, merely because they once prevailed, unless a positive and edifying advantage can be shown to arise from them.

There is, moreover, in the Tracts of which I have been speaking a tone (I can call it by no better name) of indignation, and even of fondness, towards the Romish Church, as if something of affection or reverence were due from us, as from a child to a parent. The use of the title Holy Mother for the Church, which is an affected phrase, not authorised by Scripture or by primitive antiquity, had got such a hold upon the mind during the middle ages, that any act of disobedience was regarded as impious and unnatural. I am concerned to see the phrase again employed, even by those who tender no allegiance to Rome; for it is one of those symptoms which inadvertently betray a vestige of false opinion, lurking under an apparently amiable sentiment. Let us pray for Rome, that she may renounce her corruptions—let us hold out the right hand of fellowship to all members of her communion who are willing to join us—but let us carefully abstain from every appearance of a disposition to think lightly of her sins.

But it is not merely our defective ordinances that some of these writers censure. Even important points of faith are not sufficiently set forth, according to their judgment, in our Liturgy. For instance, it is said that although we recognise the communion of saints, as an article of our creed, yet "Bible it is heard among us." This sentiment seems to be a favourite and a growing one. But if we, as compared with the Church of Rome, say little about it, is there not a cause? Is it not because we know little about it, except the general truth? And is it not from a pretended knowledge, beyond what was ever revealed "intruding into those things which man has not been permitted to see," that Rome has engendered that monstrous brood of superstitions relating to angels and saints, and their intercourse with man, and their tutelary influence, which together with the doctrine of purgatory, and indulgences, and relics, and shrines, has converted the simplicity of the Gospel into a religion much more resembling heathen mythology than the doctrines of Scripture? When we thus see the source of the error, and its pernicious consequences, and when the flagrant impley, borrowed from the Roman senate, is to this day practised, called canonisation of deceased individuals, who are declared to be already in Heaven, and capable of hearing our prayers, and of interceding for us, is it not our duty to be cautious and reserved in our teaching on this point, lest we also fall into the like condemnation?

And yet it is by no means a just complaint, that in our Church this doctrine is either untaught or little regarded. The Collect for All Saints Day alone comprises all that a Romanist has any warrant from Scripture to say on this subject. In the Communion Service we join in swelling the heavenly chorus of praise and thanksgiving from the "whole family in heaven and earth;" and in the Burial Service a most affecting acknowledgment is made of the same blessed community, with a fervent prayer that we, together with our departed brethren, may form one happy and holy fraternity in the kingdom of our Redeemer.

There are other complaints of the insufficiency of our religious offices and formularies, scattered through these writings, to which I have neither time nor inclination now particularly to advert. But I must again declare my decided opinion, that these complaints arise more from the indulgence of a morbid feeling in religious matters—a feeling which, when supported by ability and learning and a reputation for sanctity, is highly contagious, than from any reasonable cause of dissatisfaction. As far as this frame of mind tends to correct light and careless performance of religious duty, or habitual want of devotion, or superficial acquaintance with the ordinances of our Church—as far as it promotes the study of their origin, their import, and their sacred use, and to inspire a devout love and reverence for them, it may do much good, and in the instance before us it has done much good. This it is which has called forth the praise and encouragement of many, who now lament the mixture, or rather I may say the predominance of evil, which has lately manifested itself, and which, if unchecked, threatens to counteract, and even to corrupt, the good already done—"to eat as doth a canker"—confounding the relative importance of things, and leading young and susceptible minds to turn away with disgust from any sober statement of Divine truth which does not harmonise with their own visionary ideas and excited feelings.

What the tendency of all this is, if the history of the last age has not sufficiently instructed us, the experience of the present age too plainly shows. It has ever been the policy of Rome to provide this species of allurements, adapted to minds of a devout temper-

ament, as well as to captivate the worldly-minded and the vulgar by imposing ceremonies. All are thus alike tempted by what is to each the most attractive bait. All errors, whether of credulity, superstition, or fanaticism, are not only tolerated, but, if held in conjunction with her creed, are sanctioned, and are employed as means of increasing the number of her votaries, and of insuring their blind submission. The devout but inexperienced mind, thus flattered and encouraged in its favourite propensity, is easily brought to think our form of worship insufficient; and after much tormenting doubt and perplexity, seeks relief at last in that communion which not only indulges its weakness, but assures it that under her guidance and authority it cannot err; and this desperate resolution once made, there is no retreat.

This disease of the soul, under whatever form or denomination it may be classed, is essentially the same. In a work published about the middle of the last century, entitled "The Enthusiasm of the Methodists and Papists Compared," a multitude of striking parallels are exhibited, intended to guard the Church against the rising sect, and using the example of Popery as an acknowledged standard of error, by which the nature of the other might be illustrated, and its dangerous tendency exposed. In the present age, the danger of the lesson might be inverted. Of the evils of sectarian enthusiasms we have had abundant proof; and they may now be held up as a beacon light, guarding men against an approach to that more seductive, and I may add more fatal, danger to which these rash teachers are exposing the younger members of our Church. They seem to think it enough, here and there to protest against certain Popish corruptions; but they love to lead their disciples to the very confines of that treacherous ground—they encourage a taste and a liking for the prospect—they study to make its boundaries less distinct and perceptible, and they seem intent upon smoothing the way and affording facilities for passing on from our own side to the other.

If this be not dangerous to the purity of our Church, and of the faith which has been established among us by the blood of martyrs, it is hard to say what is; and if it be reconcilable with that allegiance to which all her ministers have vowed and pledged themselves, then have we over our sanctuary in vain. But I entertain good hope that the reality of the danger, evinced as it is from day to day by the fruits of this delusion, and denounced from authority by those who, far from being prejudiced against the writers, were among their earliest friends and favourers, will work that conviction which reasoning alone seldom brings to a mind warmed with fancied discoveries in religion.

If there were merely a cessation from such discussions, time would be given for the judgment to regain its empire; and then, evincing their credit for having pointed out real defects and irregularities in our Church system, yet these, upon a calm and dispassionate consideration, would appear to be but as "dust in the balance," when weighed against the evils from which our Reformation delivered us, and from a return to which the Articles of our Church are provided as a perpetual security.

Ever the bold figure, by which our Lord characterised the folly of the Pharisees, were applicable to disputes among Christians, it surely is to these, "To strain at a gnat," is but a feeble designation of some of their strictures upon certain alleged inconsistencies in our ritual or our formularies; while the palliation of Popish enormities, with which the same Tracts abound, almost forces a suspicion of the sincerity of the writers.

But I do not charge insincerity upon them. Their characters stand too high for that imputation. It is merely that infirmity of mind to which we are all liable, when engaged and absorbed in a favourite pursuit; and is similar to certain optical illusions, which have their origin, not in the organ of sight, but in the mind enlarging or diminishing objects, not according to their true dimensions, but to some preconceived idea of their relative position to ourselves.

I have already adverted to the pontifical supremacy as an instance of this kind, as if it were a thing essential to the unity of the Church. Yet to all learned inquirers, not only is this claim known to be an innovation, but the very notion that Church unity at all consisted in, or was in the slightest degree connected with, the supremacy of any one individual, as Vicar-general of Christ upon earth, or as *ANNO DOMINI*, as Vicar-general over all the rest, is an innovation also. It was unheard of during the first five centuries. And if this plea be groundless, what other is left? Or what shadow of excuse can be offered for that apparent attachment to Rome, as being in some sense our parent, our mother, the source of our own spiritual existence?

Even if this island had first received the Gospel from that quarter, which it did not, or if its first bishop had been sent from thence, yet this would have afforded no reason whatever for submission in after ages to her authority, any more than the Episcopal Church of America is now bound to be guided by a council of this nation, because her first bishops were consecrated here. With the Scriptures for our guide, and with the clear historical proof we have of the practice and discipline of the Church in the first ages, it is trifling with our understandings to assign such reasons for allegiance, or deference, or even attachment to that see. Yet, if we reject these reasons, the whole spell by which Christendom was held in thraldom is broken at once, and the illusion vanishes.

Again, they bid us cherish every right and custom which has what they call a Catholic character. Under this abused word lurks a mischievous fallacy, if by it Rome be at all regarded as preserving with fidelity the universal practice of early times. Rome is no criterion of Catholicism, in the genuine sense of that term. As a criterion, we ought rather to suspect it than to consult it. Her frauds, impieties, and superstitions, with which she has overloaded Christianity, far outnumber the pure ordinances and doctrines of the primitive Church, which she has been the means of transmitting to the western branch of it. To Rome therefore, as evidence of what is Catholic, when any doubt arises, no credit is due. It is to that noble army of pious, honest, learned and intrepid men, who burst the bonds of Rome, that we turn; and when we find that their opinions were held by the early Fathers of the Church, and were carefully compared with, and deduced from, their writings, we want no Papal confirmation; we only inquire whether the ordinances thus transmitted from apostolic times are agreeable to the Scriptures, and we admit their claim to our devout acceptance, though still we venture not to pronounce their indispensable obligation as necessary to salvation.

Of this kind are the Sabbathal observances of the Lord's Day, the practice of infant baptism, the three orders of bishop, priest, and deacon, the ordination by episcopal hands, and a variety of forms which tend to edification in the offices of our Church.

But I have already detained you too long upon these topics. I must compress, within a shorter compass than I had originally intended, some remarks on the very loose and dangerous doctrine maintained by the same authority on the subject of subscription to the Articles of our Church—Articles which, as you well know, are not imposed on all its members as terms of communion, but are required to be subscribed by all its ministers, as a safeguard against erroneous and heretical opinions which have at various periods infected the Church, and more especially the Church of Rome.

To speak of the language of the Articles as being capable of two or more senses, and to teach that the subscriber may, therefore, take them in his own sense, knowing at the same time that the authority which requires his assent understands them in another, is surely a dishonest course, tending to corrupt the conscience, and to destroy all confidence between man and man. If the subscriber BELIEVES merely that the design of the subscription is different from his own opinion, and yet by his act willfully defeats it, he not only deceives the party who seeks to ascertain his opinion, but, what is still worse, he deceives his own heart; and he dares to engage, by means of deceitful pretences, in the service of Him who is truth itself.

If, for instance, in subscribing to the article which condemns the Romish doctrine of purgatory, he mentally reserves the right of holding that doctrine, provided it differ in some respects from the Romish, he betrays, according to my judgment, a want of principle, which ought to exclude him not only from sacred functions, but from every office of important trust.—This is the opinion which I have recently avowed to all the candidates at my ordination; and I doubt not, my reverend brethren, that your own voice would join with mine in reproaching such disingenuous subtleties.

The language of our Articles is not ambiguous. In treating of obscure points, they wisely abstain from an attempt at precise definition or precatory decision; condemning only what is contrary to Scripture, but careful not to narrow the doctrine so as to exclude anything which Scripture warrants. Their language is indeed comprehensive and moderate where the dogmas of Trent, and those of many sectarian teachers, are unwarrantably bold and precise; but it is not equivocal. They give the judgment of the Church upon many points, which yet they do not presume to say are necessary to salvation; and being neither Calvinistic nor Arminian, they forbid the favourite tenets of either party to be so taught as to contradict the truth chiefly maintained by the other.

But the distraction introduced into our Church by the circulation of opinions such as these, and by occasionally practising forms of no intrinsic importance, as if they were vital parts of Christianity, is an evil which requires some more definite and decisive authority to control it, than the actual condition of our National Church supplies. The diocesan is in the first instance the appointed judge in cases of doubt.—But different bishops may decide differently; and cases of doubt will multiply, as time goes on, and manners change, and unforeseen circumstances arise. Even that serious point of discipline, the repelling communicants from the Lord's table, which by the Rubric is in certain cases enjoined, often involves doubts for which no adequate solution is provided.

The question of lay baptism, as entitling a deceased person to burial with the rites of the Church, is indeed now decided by the highest authority; and to that authority it is our duty to bow. But when we read the reasons upon which the decision is made to rest, and find it stated, that because the Church has generally held the validity of lay baptism in case of emergency, so far as to PRECLUDE THE PRACTICE OF REBAPTISING, therefore it is to be regarded also as sufficient, our knowledge of ecclesiastical antiquity makes us reject such a conclusion, if by it is meant that no further act is requisite to entitle the party to ALL THE PRIVILEGES OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP.—Whatever the Church may in charity have conceded to those, who being baptised by lay hands in infancy, died before they were formally received into the Church, we venture to declare, upon the evidence of ancient writers and of ancient canons, that the practice of the Church has ever required, as a general rule, such baptism to be completed, either by solemnly receiving the infant into the Church, or by confirmation with laying on of hands by the bishop.

To infer from a permission given in cases of urgent necessity, and that too when all the parties concerned, though laymen, were yet members of the Church, that therefore, a heretic or a schismatic may, without necessity, and acting in open defiance of the Church, merely by using the scriptural form of baptism, confer the full privileges of the Church; and that the clergy are bound to give their services in burying such a person, though never recognised, directly or indirectly, as a member, certainly wrong in Christian theology, as attested by the uniform practice of the Church in all ages, however deficient the ecclesiastical laws of this country may now be in providing for such cases. Before the Reformation such a case could not have happened.

Yet in the actual constitution of our National Church there is no remedy for this grievance. We must therefore, obey the law, as expounded by our lay judges. The Church must, to use a phrase injuriously applied to her sacred formularies, "continue to work in chains;" but we may appeal to the legislature for emancipation from this bondage, contradictory as it is, not only to the whole tenor of our ecclesiastical polity, but to the plainest principles of reason and equity. We have no wish to debar those who are out of the pale of the National Church from Christian burial—not even to deprive them of what is said to be their civil right, burial in the churchyard of the parish to which they belong; but for the minister of the parish to be compelled to read the service of the Church over those who neither belonged, nor wished to belong to the Church, is a grievance far beyond any which sectaries complain of as imposed upon themselves.

The best remedy, however, for this and for other existing anomalies is a topic of such vast extent and importance, that I must content myself with having barely touched upon it. It will not be long, I trust, before some ecclesiastical jurisdiction is framed, competent to decide questions of a purely spiritual character; or a commission, at least, appointed to prepare such laws, under the sanction of the Sovereign, as the state of the Church, from time to time, may seem to call for. Whether a convocation of the whole clergy of the realm be the form best calculated to give effect to Church government may well be doubted. Such bodies have been held by judicious and pious men to lead to so much strife and ambition, as to defeat in a great measure the good purpose for which they were convened. It has been thought that the evil will always predominate over the good; and certainly the latest experience this country had of them tends to favour that opinion. But the increasing conviction of the necessity of an efficient Church government will, if temperately expressed, doubtless lead to this improvement under some form or other.

In the meantime, my reverend brethren, be it our care to strive without censuring against the prevailing evil of this part of the country, religious dissension; to bring together, as far as lies in our power, the scattered sheep of Christ's flock, and to unite them in one fold as their Redeemer willed them to be, and appointed us His ministers for that purpose. If they still obstinately refuse, let it not ruffle our temper, or interrupt charity—may let it not grieve us overmuch, or be the cause of lasting uneasiness or vexation, in our minds. God forbid that we should cease to pray for them, although we bear testimony against the sinfulness of the course they are pursuing. Whatever the issue may be here, such labour of love you are sure will not be unrewarded in heaven. Your greatest difficulty will be to induce minds trained in another school, and long alienated from the discipline of the Church, to lend an unprejudiced ear to your instruction. That point once gained, I am certain that many will be brought to understand the obligation they are under to join us, in obedience to the last solemn injunction of the blessed Founder of the Church; and