

CORRESPONDENCE.

"LORD SELBORNE ON DISESTABLISHMENT."

To the Editor of THE WEEK :

SIR,—In an article entitled "Lord Selborne on Disestablishment" in a recent number of THE WEEK, the following passage occurs in reference to the Church of England in the pre-Reformation era, which appears to me misleading. The writer says :

"Moreover, the Church in England was not the Church of England, it was a segment of Latin Christendom ; its head was the Pope of Rome ; when it showed its distinctive character, as it did under Becket, instead of being national it was anti-national, and set the Government of the nation at defiance."

A reference to Magna Charta will show that the first of these statements is historically untrue, and that the Church in England was then known as, and called, "the Church of England." The first clause of that celebrated document reads : "The Church of England, or English Church, (Ecclesia Anglicana) shall be free, and shall have all her whole rights and liberties inviolable." Other statutes and public documents might be referred to in which the Church in England is styled "the Church of England," e.g., in letters patent of 3 Edw. II., printed at p. 165 of Ruffhead's Edition of Statutes, the following words occur, "Nos ad honorem Dei et pro pace et tranquillitate Ecclesie Anglicane." In 9 Edw. II., st. 1, the same words occur. The 25 Edw. III., st. 6, speaks of "seinte Eglise d'Engleterre," i.e., "the holy Church of England." The 6 Rich. II., c. 1, says : "First, it is ordained and accorded that our holy mother the Church of England (sancta mater Ecclesia Anglicana) have all her liberties whole and unhurt, and the same fully enjoy and use." Many other statutes might be referred to, passed in pre-Reformation days, to show that the people of England called the Church in England "the Church of England," or "English Church."

The Church of England was, no doubt, in one sense, a segment of Latin Christendom very much in the same way that Ontario and Quebec are segments of Canada ; but Ontario is not Quebec nor a part of it, nor is Quebec Ontario.

Is it not also a popular error to speak of "the Church" as if it consisted solely of the clergy ? Were there no laity in the Church of England in Becket's time ? Were they anti-national ? Did they set the Government at defiance ? If not, how can it be truly said that the Church of England in Becket's time was anti-national ?

The fact is, in Becket's time the Church of England was merely another name for the people of England, for the one composed the other, and there were no dissentient sects from the national church.

No doubt the priesthood contributed very largely to the Papal encroachments in England ; but whoever will calmly examine the statute law of England will find ample evidence that these encroachments were regarded long prior to the Reformation as usurpations of authority, and that the people of England in Parliament were constantly endeavouring to restrain these encroachments on the liberties of the national church.

For instance the 25 Edw. III., st. 5, c. 22, provided that persons purchasing "a provision" in Rome for an abbey should be out of the King's protection. The 25 Edw. III., st. 6, recites at length the grievances of the King and people by reason of the Pope assuming to appoint aliens to fill English benefices, and imposes penalties on those who seek such appointments from the Pope. The statute 27 Edw. III., st. 1, c. 1, imposes the penalties of *Premunire* (i.e., put the offender out of the King's protection) on all suing in a foreign Court, i.e., the Papal Court ; 38 Edw. III., st. 2, c. 1, imposes like penalties on persons receiving citations from Rome in causes pertaining to the King ; 3 Rich. II., c. 3, provides that none should take any benefice of an alien or convey money to him : obviously aimed at the Pope, who was the only alien who assumed to give away English benefices. See also 12 Rich. II., c. 15 ; 13 Rich. II., st. 2, c. 2 and c. 3 ; 16 Rich. II., c. 5 ; 2 Hen. IV., c. 3 and c. 4 ; 9 Hen. IV., c. 9 (Ruffhead's ed.) ; 3 Hen. V., st. 2, c. 4 ; all of which statutes are plain and incontrovertible evidence of the struggle maintained by the Parliament (in which of course both the laity and spirituality of the Church of England were represented) against the encroachments of the Papacy on the rights of the Church of England. So far from it being true that the Church of England was even anti-national in the pre-Reformation period, it must be apparent that it was always intensely national, and it could not well be otherwise, unless the people in their Christian aspect were opposed to themselves in their political aspect.

It appears to me the writer of the article in question also fails to grasp the distinctive character of the Reformation of the Church of England. Neither clergy nor laity at the Reformation pretended to set up a new church. Their object was simply to purge the old Church of England of errors. Out of 9,400 beneficed clergy in Elizabeth's reign, only 189 refused to conform, and yet the writer of the article says if the clergy could have had their way they would have left things as they were. For eleven years after the Reformation was effected in England, as we learn from Sir Edward Coke, those who favoured Romish doctrines continued to worship with their brethren who rejected those doctrines, and communicated at the same altars. Would they have done so if they had thought a new church had been set up ? When the Pope, in the eleventh year of Elizabeth's reign, excommunicated the Queen, and ordered his followers to withdraw from the national church, the schism was effected, but that was the act of the Pope, not of the Church of England. She never excommunicated the Romanists ; all that she essayed to do was to prevent Romish doctrines being imposed on people as a condition of communion in the Church of England.

The position taken by the Church of England was simply this : her

reformers said in effect, Here is a mass of doctrine and practice which has grown up in the church, which is not sanctioned by the Scriptures, by the usage of the primitive church, nor by the church as a whole. Its sole sanction is derived from the decrees and usages of that part of the church which adheres to the Roman see. This part of the church is not competent to formulate articles of faith for the whole church ; that is a matter within the province of an Ecumenical Council alone. We will, therefore, no longer suffer these doctrines to be taught in the Church of England as necessary to salvation, nor require them to be accepted as a condition of communion in the Church of England.

I do not understand how any Protestant can adopt the argument that this had the effect of destroying the identity or historical continuity of the Church of England, unless he adopts the further argument that the rejected doctrines are essential parts of the Christian Faith. The identity of the Roman Church is maintained by her succession of bishops. So is that of the orthodox Eastern Church ; so is that of the Anglican Church. The standard of faith in the Church of England is the Nicene Creed, which is the standard to which, barring the *Filioque* clause, the whole church has assented. No other profession of faith is required from communicants at her altars.

No doubt in pre-Reformation days it was believed by members of the Church of England that the world was flat and stationary, and that the sun moved round it. No one would now say that this error was an essential part of the Christian faith, even though a Pope once thought it was, or that a church rejecting this error loses its identity. Neither can Protestants say that the belief in purgatory, transubstantiation, the worship of saints, angels, and relics, belief in the immaculate conception, the supremacy and infallibility of the Pope, the use of images, the denial of the Eucharistic cup to the laity, etc., are essential parts of the Christian faith, or that a church which rejects these doctrines and practices loses its identity. To reject that which is an essential part of the Christian faith might well be said to destroy the continuity and identity of any part of the church, but how the simple rejection of erroneous or non-essential opinions or practices can have that effect is not apparent. The Church of England at the Reformation imposed no new creed ; she simply restored the ancient creed of the undivided church (namely, the Nicene creed) to the place of honour.

In this country we can afford to look at the question of disestablishment from the simple point of honesty, without regard to the exigencies of politicians. No one here will profit by the spoliation of the Church of England. If the Church of England is identical with the church of pre-Reformation days, as I think it must be admitted it is, then her title to the ancient endowments is older than any other title to property ; but even if, as her enemies allege, it dates only from the Reformation, is three hundred years of undisputed enjoyment not a sufficient title ? Any honest man, if his own property were concerned, would say that it was.

No doubt the nation has power to deal with the property of the church just as fully as with that of individuals. It has power to take the property of A and give it to B, but such legislation can only be justified by extraordinary circumstances. If it could be fairly shown that the property of the church is in excess of its needs, or that it is being diverted to improper uses, a case for legislation might be made. But the attack is not based on any such suggestion, and the enormous sums which the members of the church have voluntarily given of late years towards extending the offices of the Church, is a sufficient proof that the ancient endowments are not adequate for the present spiritual needs of the nation, nor for that part of it which accepts the ministrations of the National church.

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["ECCLESIA ANGLICANA," in a document of the Catholic Middle Ages, is, we take it, either a mere expression of locality, or a synonym for the Clerical Estate. It does not mean that the Church was a national establishment, as it certainly has been since the Reformation, whether that event affected its spiritual continuity or not. The Church of England cannot be despoiled of property, for the simple reason that it neither holds nor is capable of holding any. It has no independent or corporate existence, and can no more maintain an action of ejectment for glebe or a suit for tithe than the Army or Navy can sue for the arrears of an officer's pay. Each incumbent is a corporation sole. Let us remind our learned correspondent that we take practically the conservative view of this question, and wish, so far as we have any interest in the matter, to see a good compromise made while there is yet time. But a good compromise can be obtained only by asking for it on practical grounds, not by filing a Bill in the court of ecclesiastical and legal history against the nation.—ED. WEEK.]

THAT the course of the reign of Charles II. should be ignored, and frequently misunderstood, is indeed natural enough. Neither to historian nor to student can it at first sight seem attractive. The age of great things is past, and the age of great men too. Admiration and sympathy and enthusiasm look in vain for one noble exponent of a worthy cause around whom they may gather. There is scarcely a man who lives his life in the open light of day, scarcely one to reverence or to love. Great principles, indeed, are at work, but to watch their working the historian has to breathe an atmosphere of profligacy and dishonour. The time, indeed, despised itself, and as men who look back through their own lives pass with averted eyes over the years of low motive or disgrace, so now we habitually and instinctively avoid a close and familiar acquaintance with the reign of Charles II.—*The Athenaeum.*