

From the Catholic Herald.

TO THE REV. W. H. ODELMER, A. M.  
RECTOR OF ST. PETER'S CHURCH, PHILADELPHIA.

No. XII.

REV. SIR:—When the members of the Protestant Episcopal Church are asked to assign the cause of the change of faith and discipline which took place in the sixteenth century, they will reply, like all other Protestant sects, no matter how jarring their doctrines,—that a faithful study of the Sacred Scriptures and of ecclesiastical antiquity unveiled the errors of their fathers, and effect the Reformation. But when we look to facts, and forget the vain pretensions of partisans, we are compelled to say, that the will of tyrants was the main cause of the first change, and of the various modifications which this church was forced to undergo; that lust and avarice and worldly interest were the springs of action in the tyrants; that that church itself never originated any important step, unless when from being a bantling of tyranny, circumstances enabled it to become a tyrant itself, and that then, as well as in every movement not directed by this disgraceful influence, its course has been guided by what worldly interest and expediency dictated, often by motives still more unworthy of a body claiming to be the “ministers of Christ, and the dispensers of the mysteries of God.”

The first change in religion, and the first step in reforming the liturgy, took place under Henry VIII. The slightest acquaintance with the history of that event and its causes, must make the youngest tyro laugh in hearing it represented as the act of a King “an instrument in God’s hands, aiding the metropolitan of Canterbury and the other bishops and doctors of the holy Catholic Church in England, to prepare the way to return to a purer and uniform mode of worship.”(1)

Heylin himself, explaining “the councils by which the action (the Reformation) was conducted, the rules of piety, and prudence upon which it was carried, &c.,” commences by the following statement. “This king being violently hurried with transport of some private affections, and finding that the Pope appeared the greatest obstacle to his desires \* \* \* extinguished his authority in the realm of England. This opened the first way to the Reformation, and gave encouragement to those who inclined to it.”(2)

The same motives that made Henry separate from the Pope, made him select Cranmer for Metropolitan of Canterbury. A more appropriate tool could not have been selected, as was clearly evinced by the only constant feature in that man’s whole character—his readiness to carry out all the views of those in power, no matter how opposed to justice, or even to his own notions of religion. Swearing obedience to the Pope when consecrated, and by a private protest making a declaration which in plain English meant, that he did not intend to perform what he was about to promise upon oath: declaring

null the marriage of Catharine, and that with Boleyn valid, and a short time after declaring again that of Boleyn to have been null from the beginning, and in the same breath condemning her as an adulteress: condemning persons to the stake for rejecting doctrines which he himself did not believe, and for believing which he afterwards condemned others;—the wily Cranmer, constant in nothing but in reflecting the will of the crown, was a fit instrument in founding a new religion, of the orthodoxy of which such will was to be the standard.

Under the auspices of these two worthies came forth “The institution of a Christian Man,” the first step in the reformation of the liturgy. It was an exact representative of the King’s sentiments; not even of Cranmer’s, much less of those of “the bishops and doctors of the Catholic church in England.” The king, “hurried by the transport of private affections had extinguished the authority of the Pope” and the blood of a Moro and a Fisher, England’s noblest sons, had told the world, what should be the consequence of adhering to the ancient doctrine; the sanguinary statutes enforcing the six articles, told the admirers of Luther and Calvin who went farther than himself, that the “defender of the faith” was determined to support, with the sword and the gibbet, the positions which he had defended with the pen against the German Reformer. “The Institution of a Christian Man” expressed the exact amount of Protestantism into which Henry had been “hurried by his private affections” and “politick ends,” and the portion of Catholic doctrine which the antagonist of Luther was pleased to retain, and insist on being retained. The study of Scripture or antiquity had surely nothing to do in all this.

At the death of Henry the state of affairs changed. The crown devolved on a boy ten years old. Cranmer, in return for the support given by him to Somerset, in his perjured violation of Henry’s will, received this man’s support for the execution of his own plans. From being the minion of a tyrant, he was now able to act the tyrant himself, and well were his steps marked as those of the slave who seizes on power; insolent and cruel where his power extended, and crouching to faction where that power was threatened.

Heylin, does not hesitate to attribute the zeal of the lay reformers to the most sordid avarice. “Under color of removing such corruptions as remained in the church, they had cast their eyes upon the spoil of shrines, and images, though still preserved in the greatest part of the Lutheran Churches, and the improving of their own fortunes by the chatery lands. All which most sacriliciously they divided amongst themselves, without admitting the poor king to a share therein, though nothing but the filling of his coffers by the spoil of the one and the increase of his revenue by the fall of the other was openly pretended in the conduct of it.”(3) We can learn their motives from the interrogatories, at a later

period ordered by them to be put where altars were to be removed, “what jewels of gold and silver, or silver crosses, candlesticks, censors, chalices, copes, and other vestments were then remaining in any of the cathedrals or parochial churches, or otherwise had been embezzled or taken away: the leaving of one chalice to every church with a cloth or covering for the communion table being thought sufficient.”(4) The same writer tells us that “many private men’s parlors were hung with altar cloths; their tables and beds covered with copes instead of carpets and cover-lids: and many made caousing cups of the sacred chalices, as once Belshazzar celebrated his drunken feast in the sanctified vessels of the temple. It was a sorry house and not worth the naming, which had not somewhat of this furniture in it. Yet how contemptible were these trappings in comparison of those vast sums of money which were made of jewels, plate, and cloth of tissue either conveyed beyond the seas or sold at home, and good lands purchased with the money.”(5)

But this, it will be said, was only an abuse, which the church was obliged to connive at; the doctrinal reforms were purely the acts of bishops and clergy.—Let us see how far the bishops and clergy took a part in this movement.

One of the first acts of Cranmer was to intimidate the bishops and annihilate their authority. Acting on the principle, that all authority proceeding from the crown, expired at the death of the monarch, he petitioned the king to be restored to his former jurisdiction as long as his services would be acceptable.(6) The other bishops were required to do the same, and were appointed *durante beneplacito regis*. Burnet himself says that this “was done by reason of the present juncture, because the bishops being generally addicted to the former superstition, it was thought necessary to keep them under so arbitrary a power as that subjected them to; for they hereby held their bishoprics only during the king’s pleasure, and were to exercise them as his delegates, in his name, and by his authority.”(7) What could be expected from men who submitted to be thus considered but as ecclesiastical magistratos, deriving their authority from the crown, and holding it during its good pleasure?

Shortly after visitors were appointed, and the jurisdiction of all bishops suspended, no clergymen were allowed to preach unless licensed by himself or the protector. The bishop of Winchester was consigned to the fleet, because he would not instantly submit to the regulations of the visitors; the bishop of London was treated in the same manner for a similar offence. Under various pretexts the Protector had engaged the services of an army of foreign mercenaries, who “were con-

ceived more likely to enforce obedience, if his designs should meet with any opposition, than the natural English.”(8)—By these acts the way was prepared for taking vigorous measures.

It was then, what you call the “greatest step” was taken, in compiling the new liturgy: and the first book of Edward VI. was published. Eight of the bishops appointed on the select committee for its compilation, openly protested against it, and had their protest inserted on the journals of the house of Lords.(9) Yet in the act of parliament by which it was enforced, it is declared to have been compiled “by the aid of the Holy Ghost, and with one uniform agreement” of those to whom the compilation was entrusted.[10] Its use was enforced by the severest penalties. For refusing to use said book for preaching, declaring, or saying any thing in derogation, or depraving of it, or of any thing therein contained, increasing penalties were inflicted for each offence; a third offence was punished with imprisonment for life.[11]

Yet this same book, now declared to have been drawn up “by the aid of the Holy Ghost,” was altered in its most essential features in a very short time by the very persons who made this declaration. Much remained yet to be done before the “Prayer Book” acquired its most vigorous maturity “having become ripe with years and the wisdom of experience,” which only happened when it put on its American dress,—so says, at least, the Rector of St. Peter’s.[12]

The rupture, therefore, which called for such a compilation as the “Prayer Book,” was, by the confession of the best supporters of the new church, caused in the first instance by a tyrant acting under the influence of the basest passions. The English primate, whose efforts caused the work to progress, was first selected for the office which he held, merely because he was known to be made willing to become an instrument of the monarch’s passions. His public acts were always in accordance with the monarch’s pleasure, as long as the power existed before which he crouched. Though during Henry’s reign, men according with his own views were raised to the highest places in the church, few were to be found to enter warmly into the precise modifications which characterised the established church, and it was only by fraud and violence that it was established on the basis on which it was placed during the reign of Edward. The primate did not merely tolerate for a time those things which he believed to be abuses and superstitions; he openly practiced them himself even after the death of Henry, until he succeeded in securing a sufficient number of adherents to feel safe in taking bolder steps. His fellow bishops were intimidated and

(8) Heylin p. 39, 40.

(9) See note to Rapin’s History of England, vol. ii. 233, quoting from the Journal of Parliament, Burnet ii. 61—95. Collier ii. 255.

(10) 2 Ed. vi. 1.

(11) Ibid.

(12) Offering, p. 187.

(13) He said more publicly for the king of France six months after Henry’s death.

(4) Heylin Hist. p. 95.

(5) Ibid. p. 134.

(6) Waterworth in proof of this quotes Burnet vol. ii. p. 9 Strype Mem. Cranmer 202, and Wilkins iv. 2. Collier p. 2. book 3, p. 163, proves at length that Cranmer took out a commission of this import.

(7) Burnet loc. cit.

(1) Offering, p. 90.

(2) Introduction to his History of the Reformation.

(3) Ibid.