

DR. HOOK'S SERMON.*

"Hear the Church."—Matt. xviii 17.

This little sanctuary, in which we are now assembled, will always be regarded by the English Churchman with feelings of pious sentiment and respect. Here, from time immemorial, our sovereigns have worshipped and our Bishops preached; and these walls were the first which heard the sound of our English Liturgy. Here young Edward imbibed the principles of divine truth from the lips of Ridley and Crammer; and here, in the reign of Elizabeth, her Bishops, supported by her united firmness, wisdom, and piety, manfully upheld the principles of the English reformation, maintaining the equipoise against the papist on the one hand, and on the other, against those ultra-Protestants who were anxious to introduce the foreign system, and to revolutionize religion instead of reforming the Church. Here, too, Charles, who died a martyr for the principles of the Church—for the Church of England boasts the only royal martyr in the calendar—sought that strength from on high, which enabled him to lay down his "grey dis-crowned head" upon the block with a blessed peace of mind, which a rebel nation, while depriving him of everything else, was unable to take away. Here, ever since, by faithful pastors, our British sovereigns have loyally, dutifully, and respectfully, but at the same time, I hope with firmness and fearlessness, been reminded of that solemn account they will one day have to render to Him who is King of kings, and Lord of lords, and the Ruler of princes—here they have been admonished of the awful responsibility of high office, of the temptations by which they are surrounded, of the example they are bound to set, of their duty as the nursing fathers and nursing mothers of the Church—and here those sovereigns, in the ordinances and sacraments of the gospel, have sought for that divine grace, of which they have stood in need as much as, yea, from their increased responsibility, from their greater temptations and difficulties, if possible, more than the very meanest of their subjects.

In such a place, then, it cannot be deemed improper if I briefly lay before you the claims, the character, and the privileges of the Church. May God the Holy Spirit be with me while I speak, and with you while you hear; with me that I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak, and you, that you may receive the word with pure hearts, with me that I may not give, with you that you may not take, offence!

Now, at the very outset, I must state that I refer to the Church, not as a mere national establishment of religion, but as the Church, a religious community, intrinsically independent of the State; that is to say, I am about to treat of the Church not in its political, but simply and solely in its religious character.

No one who reads the Bible can for one moment doubt that religion is, or ought to be, a national concern, so long as the Bible contains such awful denunciations against national apostasy and national vice, and while, among the predicted blessings of Christianity, it was foretold as one, that kings should be the nursing fathers, and queens the nursing mothers, of the Church. And to desire to belong to that religious society which happens to be established in our native land, is a sentiment patriotic, praiseworthy, and honourable. But there is always a still further question to be asked; namely, whether the society of Christians established by the government, and invested with certain emoluments and privileges, be a pure branch of that Church which was instituted by our blessed Lord and his Apostles? And if it be not such, however willing we might be to preserve the peace of society, by refusing to injure a national institution, we should, nevertheless, be amply justified, as religionists, in refusing to conform to it. If the mere fact that a religious society is established by the civil government be sufficient to claim for it our adhesion, see what the consequence must be; we should be obliged, on such principles, to become Presbyterians in Scotland and Holland, papists in France and Italy; nay, in some parts of the world, worshippers of the mosque, and votaries of Brahma! whereas the consistent Protestant could

not, of course, conform to the established church in France or Italy, until those churches have undergone a thorough reformation, the consistent English Churchman cannot conform to the Presbyterian establishment in Scotland, but in that part of the island attends the services of the Scottish Episcopal Church, which, though at one time established, was, at the revolution in 1688, from political considerations, deprived of its endowments, which were then given to the community of Presbyterians, which has there become the established religion.

Bless God, then, we may, that the true Church is established here in England, and that, while as patriots we would support its establishment for our country's good, we can also, as Christians, conscientiously conform to it; yet it is not on the ground that it is established by the State, but on grounds much higher and holier than these, that in this sacred place we are to state its claims. So entirely independent is the Church (as the church) of the State, that were all connexion between Church and State at this very moment to cease, (though we may be sure the monarchy would be destroyed,) the Church as the Church, would continue precisely as she now is; that is to say, our Bishops, though deprived of temporal rank, would still exercise all those spiritual functions, which, conferred by higher than human authority, no human authority can take away; still to the vacant sees they would consecrate new bishops, still ordain the Clergy, still confirm and baptize, still govern the Church; our priests, assisted by the deacons, would still administer the sacraments and preach the gospel; our Liturgy, even though we were driven to upper rooms of our towns, or to the very caves of the desert, would still be solemnised. We may be sure of this, for this very thing has happened in times past. When the United States of America were English colonies, the English Church was there established: at the revolution, the State was destroyed. Monarchy has there ceased to exist; but the Church, though depressed for a time, remained un-injured; so that there—among the American republicans—under the superintendence of no fewer than sixteen bishops, you will find her sacraments and ordinances administered, and all her ritual and liturgical services celebrated, with not less of piety, zeal, and solemnity than here in England; there you may see the Church, like an oasis in the desert, blessed by the dews of Heaven, and shedding heavenly blessings around her, in a land where, because no religion is established, if it were not for her, nothing but the extremes of infidelity or fanaticism would prevail.

And so you may perceive what is meant, when we say, that we wish to speak of the Church, not as an establishment, but as the Church, a religious society, a particular society of Christians.

We will commence with an indisputable fact. In this country there is at the present time a religious society, known by the name of the Church. The question is, when and by whom was this society instituted?

Now the Roman Catholics or papists assert that it was instituted and founded, like the generality of Protestant sects, by certain reformers in the 16th century, and thence they would deduce a strong argument against us. They would ask us, whether any man can take unto himself the office of the ministry, unless he be sent by God; and if we are scriptural Christians, if we take the Bible for our guide, if we act on that sound Protestant principle, with the fifth chapter to the Hebrews open before us, we must answer, no. Then they proceed to ask how can you prove that your ministers are called of God to the office? And if their assertions were true that our Church was founded at the reformation, we could give them no answer at all.

But at the period of the reformation, when Crammer and Ridley flourished, there was a Church existing and established in England, and as archbishop of that Church, Crammer, our celebrated reformer, was consecrated. That Church had existed, as all parties admit, from the first planting of Christianity in England. But Archbishop Crammer found, that in his time, it had become in certain respects corrupted; that the Bishop of Rome, for example, had usurped over it an authority and influence which he did not possess by right; that many practices prevailed, some of them contrary to Scripture, and some

of them much abused to superstition; such as the shipping of saints and images, and the use of theurgy in a language not understood by the people; while opinions were prevalent (such as those related to transubstantiation), decidedly erroneous, which the Church did not protest against, but, on the contrary, rather seemed to sanction. Now when once the errors were pointed out and proved to be unscriptural, our divines would have been guilty of heresy had they pertinaciously adhered to them. Before the Reformation, those who adhered to them were not guilty of heresy, for they held the doctrines which (ever since the Reformation), we have renounced, from a error of fact. They supposed them to be revealed doctrines, and therefore they in humble faith received them; we on the contrary, have ascertained that these doctrines were not revealed, and therefore, influenced by the same faith, we reject them; and it was by one and the self-same principle, that before and since the Reformation, the true members of the Church of England have been actuated. They say, and we say precisely the same, whatsoever revealed that we will not question but believe. As to the fact, whether this or that doctrine was revealed, they were less cautious than we are now; who perhaps err on the very side of caution.

But to return to the Archbishop and the Prelate who aided him in the work of reformation. They discovered that all the errors which they detected in their Church were innovations, gradually and imperceptibly introduced, and not belonging, originally, essentially, to the Church of England; that, even in the seventh century, five Councils were held in England, when the doctrines denounced by the reformers were unknown. What, then, did the Archbishops and his associates determine to do? They determined as they had an undoubted right to do, not to overthrow the old Church and establish a Protestant Church in its place, but merely to reform, to correct the existing Church. And, aided by the civil powers, this they did, by asserting, first, their independence as bishops against the usurped authority of the Pope, who had no more authority of right in England than the Bishop of Canterbury had in Rome; by discontinuing practices which led evidently to scriptural superstitions; by protesting against prevalent erroneous doctrines; by translating the Scriptures and the ancient ritual and liturgy, which had been translated, they re-arranged; but, though they did this, they still remained the same Bishops and Prelates of the same Church. An attempt was made to give the old superstitions in Queen Mary's reign, but by the pious firmness of Elizabeth, her Bishops were enabled to complete the work so happily commenced in the reigns of her father and brother.

Now, from this historical statement, you see the absurdity of which the papists are guilty when they accuse us of having deserted or dissented from the old Church, and of having reared a new Church of human origin—the absurdity of their speaking of us as the old Church and the old religion.

About two years ago, this very chapel in which we are now assembled was repaired, certain disfigurements removed, certain improvements made: would it not be absurd, on that account, to contend that it is no longer the Chapel Royal? Would it not be still more absurd if some one were to build a new chapel in the neighbourhood, imitating closely what the old chapel was five years ago, and carefully piling up the dust and rubbish which was at that time removed from hence, and then pronounce that, not this, but the ancient chapel of the sovereigns of England, is precisely what has been done by the Roman Catholic papist. The present Church of England is the same Catholic Church of England, reformed, in the reigns of Henry, Edward, and Elizabeth, of certain notorious errors; it is the same Church which came down from our British and Saxon ancestors, as such, it possess its original endowments, which were never, as ignorant persons foolishly suppose, taken from one Church and given to another. The Church remained the same after it was reformed, it was before, just as a man remains the same after he has washed his face as he was before, as Naaman the leper, remained the same after he was cured of his leprosy as he was before.

*Preached before the Queen, in the Chapel Royal, on the 17th of June, 1828.