

ORIGIN AND INDEPENDENCE OF THE  
BRITISH CHURCH.

(Continued from our last.)

## CHAPTER VI.

## THE REFORMATION.

This celebrated event took place in the reign of Henry VIII., but owes little thanks to that monarch, who, in heart a Papist, and in conduct a despot, rather retarded than advanced the increase of spiritual Protestantism\* in this country. The evil spirit of persecution, which had languished in some degree in the preceding reign, raged with great violence in the first nineteen years of Henry VIII. The most dreadful cruelties were inflicted on all these who were convicted of what was then called *heresy*, i. e. reading the New Testament in English, denying transubstantiation, purgatory, the infallibility of the pope, &c.; and all those who were found guilty of these offences, whether men or women, old or young, were burnt to ashes without mercy, and without exception.

Six men and one woman were committed to the flames for teaching their children merely the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments, in their native tongue. Little, therefore, could it have been anticipated that the Reformation would have taken place under a monarch who not only hated and persecuted all heretics, but who was also zealously attached to the Church of Rome, whose battles he fought during the beginning of his reign, both by his sword and by his pen. With the latter he made so violent an attack against Martin Luther, the undaunted German Reformer, that he acquired from the Pope the title of "Defender of the Faith." But Henry, although he afterwards hated the Pope, for thwarting his will, by refusing to sanction his divorce from Catherine of Arragon, and became his bitter enemy, was yet no friend to the pure and scriptural doctrines of our great Reformers; as is sufficiently proved by his enactment of the statutes of the six articles, called the *bloody statutes*, which threatened with fire and sword all who denied transubstantiation, or refused to conform to this and other corruptions of the Church of Rome. It is true, however, that He who maketh even the wrath of man to praise Him, was pleased to make use of Henry as the instrument in his hands for emancipating England from the heavy oppression of the Papal yoke; thus inflicting a deadly wound upon that see, and increasing the severity of the blow, by making it proceed from one whom she had not only cherished and caressed as her devoted child, but who had proved himself one of her most zealous defenders. The act of emancipation which released this country for ever from all farther dependence on the Pope, was passed by Parliament in the year 1534 (which is reckoned as the date of the Reformation in England), and the following year Henry also authorised a translation of the Scriptures, known by the name of Cranmer's Bible. But as a proof how little dependence could be placed by the Reformers on the protection of this monarch, although he had ordered these Bibles to be placed in the churches (where, such was the anxiety of the people to read them, that for the sake of security it became necessary to chain them to the desks); yet a short time after, he issued another decree, forbidding any of his subjects, below the privileged classes, to read the sacred volume, under pain of imprisonment, fine, or confiscation. Such, indeed, was the vacillating conduct of Henry VIII., who favoured the Protestants one day, and the Romanists the next, that his death was considered rather as a blessing than an evil to the Church, as it certainly proved, by the protection it received afterwards from his pious and amiable successor, Edward VI. The reformation of the Church of England has, however, no concern with the personal character of Henry VIII., nor with the motives of his conduct; although we have much reason to praise Him who frequently causes good to come out of evil, for thus mercifully overruling the headstrong passions of a cruel and ungodly prince to the good of His Church and the glory of His name.

After the death of Edward VI. in 1553, and the accession of Mary, the cause of Popery again revived for a time in this country, and much misery ensued. Fourteen bishops were expelled by various means from their sees, and their places were supplied by others, who were constituted by the Pope. This proceeding, however, was altogether illegal; the authority and usurped jurisdiction of the Roman pontiff having been entirely abolished in England some years previous. A dreadful persecution took place in this reign against all those who rejected the errors of Popery. The venerable Cranmer, archbishop of Canterbury, Bishops Ridley and Latimer, and many others of the clergy, laid down their lives at the stake as martyrs, in defence of the truth; and hundreds, both men and women, perished in the flames for the same cause. But the blood of these noble martyrs only proved "the seed of the Church;" for in the following reign,

the glorious reign of Elizabeth, the old and true religion, divested of Romish abuses, was finally re-established in this country.

The great object of our reformers, "and that which they so happily accomplished, was to restore the Church of England to that state of purity which it enjoyed previous to the imposition of the Papal yoke." For let it not for one moment be imagined, that the Cranmers and Latimers, the Ridleys and Jewels,—those great and holy men who, "by God's grace, lighted up such a candle in England as shall never be put out,"—let it not be supposed that such men as these sought to invent any new doctrines: no; they merely divested the old ones of the corruptions which had been fastened on them. They "asked for the *old paths*, where was the good way, and they walked therein." They departed from the Church of Rome (be it remembered) only in those very essentials in which the Church of Rome had departed from her former self. They retained all that was in accordance with Scripture, or could be proved thereby;—"that only in which the Church of Rome had prevaricated against the Word of God, or innovated against the apostolic tradition, was pared away." For the great importance attached by our reformers to antiquity (to which they so carefully adhered), cannot be more strongly expressed than in the words of Bishop Jewel himself, who, in his celebrated "Apology of the Church of England, says, "now certainly there can nothing of more weight be said against religion than that it is new." And again, he afterwards adds, "We the English reformers, have approached as nearly as possibly we could to the Church of the apostles, and the ancient catholic bishops and fathers, which we know was yet a perfect, and, as Tertullian saith, an unspotted virgin, and not contaminated with any idolatry, or any great or public error. Neither have we only reformed our doctrine, and made it like theirs, but we have also brought the celebration of the sacraments, and the forms of our public rites and prayers, to an exact resemblance with their institutions or customs."\* The great majority, indeed, of our formularies (as Mr. Palmer observes), "are actually translated from Latin and Greek rituals which have been used for at least fourteen or fifteen hundred years in the Christian Church, and there is scarcely a portion of our Prayer-book which cannot in some way be traced to ancient offices."†

It is not only absurd, therefore, but most mischievous to our own cause, to speak of the Church of England as if it were a separated branch from the Church of Rome; for it was originally (as we have already proved) an independent Church; and therefore the re-assumption of that independence had belonged to her from the very first, and the correction on scriptural principles, and by the spiritual and authorised rulers of her own body, of those errors which never did belong to the primitive and apostolic Church, cannot be called separation, but rather what it really was, a restoration, as far as possible, to that pure and ancient model from which the Church of Rome herself had departed. For, as the judicious Hooker observes, "We hope that to reform ourselves, if at any time we have done amiss, is not to sever ourselves from the Church we were of before. In the Church, we were, and are so still." And moreover, "It is certain, that during the reigns of Henry VIII. and his successors, until the eleventh year of Queen Elizabeth's reign, there were not two separate communions and worships in England. All the people were subject to the same pastors, attended the same churches, and received the same sacraments."‡ It was only about 1570 (consequently many years after our rejection of the errors of Popery,) that the Romish party, at the instigation of foreign emissaries, separated itself, and fell from the Catholic Church of England. Sir Edward Coke, in the trial of Garnet the Jesuit in 1606, asserts, that before the bull of Pius V. against Queen Elizabeth, in the eleventh year of her reign, there were no recusants in England; all came to church (however popishly inclined or persuaded in most points) to the same divine service we now use; but thereupon presently they refused to assemble in our churches, . . . not for conscience of any thing there done against which they might justly expect out of the word of God, but because the Pope had excommunicated and deposed her majesty, and cursed those who should obey her; and so upon this bull ensued open rebellion in the north." (The same also is expressly affirmed in the Queen's instructions to Sir F. Walsingham, ambassador to France, dated August 11, 1570. Speaking of the leading Romanists, Elizabeth says, that "they did ordinarily resort, from the beginning of her reign, in all open places, to the churches, and to divine service in the church, without any contradiction or show of misliking.") "It is evident, then that the whole separation or schism was originated and perfected by the Roman pontiffs and their adherents, not by the Churches among us. I repeat it as a fact which ought never to be forgotten, that we did not go out from them, but, as the apostle says, they went out from us" (1 John ii. 19.)‡

It is a great mistake, therefore, to speak of the

Protestant Church of England as if it were a distinct body from the Church which subsisted in England until the reign of Henry VIII., or as if, at the Reformation, the Protestant clergy supplanted the clergy of the Church of Rome; for it is certain, on the contrary, that the bishops and clergy in England and Ireland remained the same as before, and that it was these, with the aid of the civil power, who delivered the Church of these kingdoms from the yoke of papal tyranny and usurpation, while, at the same time, they gradually removed from the minds of men those superstitious opinions and practices which at this period so greatly prevailed. In proof of this, when in 1534 the authority of the papal see was rejected by Henry VIII. and his parliament, this act was both sanctioned and concurred in by the bishops and clergy of England, who having assembled in their respective convocations of Canterbury and York, signed a declaration that the pope or bishop of Rome had no more jurisdiction in this country by the word of God than any other foreign bishop.\* "It is notorious, also, that afterwards (in the reign of Elizabeth, when the Reformation was established, all the parochial clergy, with the exception of eighty, conformed. The bishops (having objected to take the oath of regal supremacy,) with one exception then pursued a different course; but, happily, an adequate supply was found in those bishops who had retired from the Marian persecution. And thus, with a very small exception indeed, the Church in the reign of Elizabeth consisted of the very same body of persons which formed it in the preceding reign. And the Reformation in England was not one set of individuals supplanting another but was, what its name strictly expresses, the Reformation of that Church which had existed in this land without interruption from the earliest times."†

The reply of Queen Elizabeth, when solicited by the Emperor and other Roman Catholic princes to deal favourably with the ejected bishops, and to allow the papists some churches in cities and great towns, is well worthy of record. Her majesty's answer was as follows:—

"That although these bishops had refused compliance with that doctrine which, in the reigns of her father and brother, they had publicly recommended and maintained, yet, notwithstanding this inconstancy and misbehaviour, she was willing to treat them gently. But to grant them churches to officiate in their worship, and keep up a distinct communion, were things which the public interest, her own honour and conscience, could not allow; neither was there any reason for such an indulgence: for there was no new faith propagated in England; no religion set up, but that which was commanded by our Saviour, practiced by the primitive Church, and unanimously approved by the Fathers of the best antiquity. Besides" she added, "to assign churches to different ceremonies and persuasions, is the direct way to puzzle good people, and make them unresolved; to encourage faction, to break religion into sects and parties, and embroil both Church and State."‡

[By the Ephesine Canon it is enacted that "no bishop shall occupy another province which has not been subject to him from the beginning; and if he shall have made any such occupation or seizure let him make restitution." By this right, which is called the "Jus Cyprium," the Church of England is independent of all foreign jurisdiction; and by the same law the bishop of Rome is pronounced guilty of unwarrantable usurpation. And this was our ancient liberty before the coming of St. Augustine, when the seven British bishops paid obedience to the archbishop of Caer-Leon, now St. David's in Wales, and acknowledged no superior in spiritual matters over him: as Dionotus the learned abbot of Bangor told Austin, in the name of the British Church "that they owed no other obedience to the pope of Rome than they did to every godly Christian, to love every one in his degree in perfect charity;—other obediences than this they knew none due to him whom he named the pope. But they were under the government of the bishop of Caer-Leon-upon-Uske, who was their overseer, under God. No other sees were founded in Augustine's lifetime, but Canterbury, London, Rochester; and the placing and endowing of bishops was the work, not of the pope, but of Ethelbert, acting in this respect independently of him. That Roman Catholics for some time after the reformation ceased to assemble themselves together as a distinct body of worshippers, is also fully proved by history; and both in England and Ireland the bishops and clergy conformed to the national reformed Church,—no objections were made to the Service Book,—no exceptions taken to her claim to Catholicity, until the papal court found that its supremacy would not be recognized. Then were the thunders of the Vatican turned against Britain and Britain's Queen, and the bishop of Rome, on his own authority speaking great things, pretended to excommunicate a nation and to depose its sovereign. It is clear, therefore, that every Romanist born under the British flag is a schismatic. He has pretended to join himself to a church which can have no exist-

ence, or any valid claim to existence, out of the Roman territory; for as the seven churches of Asia were distinct and not confounded together,—as they were each responsible for the purity of the faith common to the whole Church of the Lord Jesus, being the parts of the body of all: he was the head,—so likewise was the Church of Britain distinct from the first, and responsible for her purity or impurity. The Church of Britain was not reformed by this or that preacher calling around him a set of malcontents; but by the acts of her synodal assembly, composed of her bishops and priests, and ratified and confirmed by parliament and sovereign: thus did she restore the ancient purity of her faith and government.\* Thanks be to God she still has the same power and the same right to vindicate her claims; and although her enemies would seek to Erastianize her utterly, she will, nevertheless, ere long again assemble in solemn synod, to eject a second time the papal supremacy,—to effect what acts of parliament cannot,—and prove herself to be what she has ever been, and will be, the Rock of our Salvation. ED. CH.]

We have now shown that there was neither a new faith nor a new ministry introduced at the period of Reformation; and with respect to our rejection of the papal yoke, while, having been unjustly forced upon us, we had a right to shake off,—in thus acting, we only rejected that which was from the very beginning, not only an usurpation, but a direct violation of the rules of the Church, as decreed by the third general Council of Ephesus, A. D. 431. The patriarch of Antioch having attempted, in the beginning of the fifth century to usurp authority over the Cyperian Churches (as the pope has since attempted over the British,) this great Council of the whole Christian world, assembled at Ephesus, issued the following remarkable decree, which clearly establishes the independence of the English and Irish Churches against the papacy, as well as that of Cyprus against Antioch. For it was ordained by that holy synod, "that none of the bishops most beloved of God do assume any other province that is not and was not formerly, and from the very beginning, subject to him, or those who were his predecessors. But if any have assumed any Church, that he be forced to restore it so that the canons of the Fathers be not transgressed, nor worldly pride be introduced under the mask of this sacred function. Wherefore," it continued, "it hath seemed good to this holy Council that the rights of every province should be preserved pure and inviolate, which have always belonged to it, according to the usage which has obtained; and should any rule be adduced repugnant to this decree it is hereby repealed."

Now it will be observed, this decree was passed not merely for the defence of Cyprus, but for the further security of the rights of all provinces in all future times. Here, then, the Romanists, who profess to hold the canons of the primitive Church the same in all ages, stand self-condemned, on their own principles. The pope has violated the canon above cited. For the British Churches having always been independent of the papal see up to the arrival of Augustine in 596, the Roman pontiff was clearly bound by this decree (passed in 431) to leave them in that state of independency, and not to attempt any encroachment on their liberties. And to this pope Gregory was particularly obliged, because, at his first promotion to the see, he declared, in a letter to the patriarchs of Alexandria, Antioch, &c., that he received the four general Councils of Nice, Constantinople, Ephesus, and Chalcedon, with the same submission and regard he did the four Gospels.†

"Since, therefore, it is beyond denial, that the Churches in these islands knew no subjection to Rome up to the close of the sixth century (as has been already stated,) it is certain that every exercise of jurisdiction which the bishop of Rome practiced afterwards, for a time, in this kingdom, was in violation of the decrees of the Catholic Church, and that the Churches here were merely acting in obedience to those decrees, when, after having made trial of that cruel bondage, they were enabled to release themselves from it." "Nor was it (as we have already seen) till the period of the Norman Conquest, in the middle of the eleventh century, that Rome assumed anything like an ascendancy over our Church; and then it was not without a long and arduous struggle, that she established it. So that the real fact of the case is this,—that out of eighteen centuries, during which the Church of England has existed, somewhat less than four centuries and a half were passed under the usurped domination of the see of Rome,—so great is the absurdity and palpable ignorance of historical facts evinced by those who represent the Church of England as a separated branch from the Romish communion. For, in all essential points,—in doctrine, in the sacraments, in the unbroken suc-

It is said that the laity had no voice in convocation. This is a mistake; for the acts agreed on by the synod were sent to parliament to be confirmed: the lay element having their seats in parliament, the houses of convocation sitting at the same time after the temporal, while the national synod or convocation looked after the spiritual affairs of the nation.

\* Greg. Epist. l. i. ep. 25; and Collier's Eccles. Hist., b. ii. p. 25.  
† See an excellent tract in the British Magazine, vol. viii. p. 644  
‡ See Romanism and Dissent, by the Rev. W. Dodsworth; Discourse on the Duty of Members of the Church of England, pp. 8-9.

\* The name of Protestant, though now used to denote all who protest against popery, was originally given to those who protested against a certain decree issued by the Emperor Charles V. and the diet of Spiers in 1529, which declares unlawful all changes in the doctrine or worship which should be introduced previous to the decision of a general council.

\* See Apology, chap. vi. 15; and Appendix IV.

† See Preface to Origines Liturgicæ.

‡ See Palmer on the Church, vol. i. pp. 455-458. [Eng. Ed.]

\* See Collier's Eccles. Hist. vol. ii. p. 94.

† See Strype's Annals, l. 73.

‡ Collier vol. ii. b. vi. p. 436.