

From the London Christian Observer.

BISHOP OF CHESTER'S CHARGE, 1835.

A Charge delivered to the Clergy of the Diocese of Chester, in 1835. By John Bird Sumner, D. D., Lord Bishop of Chester.

THE pious and judicious writer of this valuable Charge seems struggling, amidst the multitude of his topics, to know to which to give the chief prominence; feeling the necessity both of grounding every thing solidly upon the broad general principles of the Gospel, and of exemplifying the working of those principles in some of the peculiar duties which the circumstances of his Reverend auditors more especially involve. The first of these considerations is never lost sight of; the essential doctrines of Christianity, and their bearing upon a minister's own personal hopes of salvation and his responsibility to God for the discharge of his high functions, being the substratum of the whole address; and upon this are founded such heads of practical exhortation as the exigencies of the times appear to the Right Reverend Prelate to demand.

In alluding to the interests which are engaged in opposition to our Church, his Lordship remarks:—

"It is time for us to look round, and examine her state, and prove the strength of her foundations and her bulwarks. It becomes us to take especial heed that she present no weak point to the adversary, through any fault or neglect of ours. It becomes us to seek and implore that grace which may strengthen and animate our souls, and unite our hearts as the heart of one man in fulfilling the great objects of our ministry. The greater the external difficulties, the closer ought to be the internal union. The danger which threatens from without is much diminished, when there is vigour and energy within. Whilst, however, we meet the attack which is made upon us with the zeal and firmness of those who believe that their cause is righteous, we must also meet it in the spirit of meekness and humility, remembering 'whose we are, and whom we serve.' To act otherwise would be to 'despise the chastening of the Almighty.' 'The Lord's voice crieth unto the city, and the man of wisdom shall see his name: Hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it.' God deals with churches, as with individuals; and says unto them, 'In the day of adversity, consider.' The Church of England, which from the time of the Reformation has been the pillar of Christian truth, was established by His providence, and can never be impaired, except by his permission. It is his building; and if he suffers it to be shaken, our duty is to examine and inquire, and see if there may be any ground for his displeasure."

It would be difficult to cluster together a larger number of important duties in fewer words. Zeal and activity, internal reformation, the aid of Divine grace, union, humility, and attention to the voice of God speaking to us, are all urgently enforced in this short passage.

His Lordship is very far indeed from doubting that the Church of England will be spared and perpetuated, notwithstanding all the machinations of evil or misjudging men against her.

"Believing, as I do, that our Church has been planted by His providence, and nurtured under His care, that she may fulfil His gracious purposes in extending the kingdom of his dear Son: believing, as I do, that the tree is sound at heart, being rooted in scriptural truth, and nourished by wholesome doctrine: believing that its soundness may be known by its fruits, the excellent fruits which it has borne, and is capable of producing still more plentifully: believing that I see grounds of hope and confidence even in our present circumstances. God is not casting us forth as a barren, unprofitable branch; but as a 'branch that beareth fruit,' he 'purgeth it, that it may bear more fruit.'"

Still our Heavenly Protector is not without just cause of displeasure against us: and in two things in particular the excellent Prelate remarks the Church of England has failed of discharging its obligations. The first is, in not building churches equal to the necessities of her largely increased population; and the second is, in not adequately following up the public means of grace with private pastoral labour. We will quote a few passages in proof of the Christian faithfulness with which his Lordship shows our culpabilities and present position in regard to our beloved and

enerated Church and the religious culture of the people, with a view to point out what is our duty under such circumstances, and what is the remedy for such evils.

"All impartial judges, whether interested in our church or no, will acknowledge the obligations due to her during the past century, for the support which she has constantly rendered to the great cause of Revelation. Whenever an enemy appeared, either under the form of heresy or infidelity, there has always been a store of learning and of zeal to repel the attack; weapons laid up in readiness, and hands prepared to wield them. But we cannot so truly affirm, that in the age which is gone by she sufficiently kept in view the charge which she had undertaken, the religious culture of our people, in all their divisions and subdivisions. She confined herself too much to certain times and limits; entrenched herself behind established usage and legal requirement; whilst unprovided flocks were 'wandering in the mountains,' and crowds were remaining 'idle in the market-place,' because 'no man had hired them.' She has been slow to adapt herself to the altered circumstances of the country; has remained fixed and stationary, whilst all around her has been progressive and expansive.

"It was sufficiently shewn by the success which attended the irregular exertions of Wesley and his followers, what the people needed, and what would engage the affections of the people. But no disposition appeared to profit by the example, and to supply to neglected hamlets, or hearers excluded from the church, through their regular pastures, the food which they were seeking elsewhere and from other hands. It was forgotten, that when a parish extended over many miles, a considerable portion of its inhabitants must necessarily be precluded from any regular attendance on the worship of the parish church. It was forgotten that the soul is not naturally disposed to 'seek the things that are above,' and requires to be continually watched, and roused, and led onward. There were indeed always some, but they were comparatively few in number, who looked upon the example of the Apostle as applicable to themselves, who 'taught both publicly, and from house to house, testifying repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ;' who seemed to remember that they had engaged to set one object before them as the business of their lives, how they 'might warn every man, and teach every man in all wisdom, that they might present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.'"

"It belongs to the condition of our nature that advantages are not unmixed; and near to the good which we possess lies some attendant evil. Therefore there is danger even connected with the system which we extol and uphold: there is danger lest endowment should lead to indolence; lest the temporal provision should be enjoyed, the spiritual obligation neglected. And no one who looks back on the past century with an enlightened and impartial view, will deny that some of this danger was realized in the general condition of our church.

"The counties with which we are ourselves concerned furnish a striking, but by no means a singular, example. The population of Lancashire and Cheshire, in the year 1800, consisted of 864,000 persons. In 1820 the number exceeded 1,300,000. During that period of twenty years, only fifteen churches were erected, with accommodation for about 16,000, to receive the vast addition of 450,000 people. These were chiefly confined to one spot: eight out of the fifteen were in the immediate neighbourhood of Liverpool. Perhaps 5,000 more seats may have been gained by the enlargement of existing buildings. Still, nineteen-twentieths out of every additional hundred thousand, were left neglected and unprovided. The national church deserted them, and left its duty, if performed at all, to be performed by others. So that when the State by a liberal grant, and the Incorporated Society as the almoner of private bounty, came at last into the field, it was pre-occupied, and we have since been attempting, under great disadvantage, to regain the position which has been taken.

"Now we know it to be God's providential ordinance, the rule of his moral government, that in cases of this kind the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children 'unto the third and fourth generation.' In the nature of things it must be so. The defects of a church in one age, of whatever kind, whether secular, or negligence, or unfaithfulness, are chiefly vi-

sible in their effects upon the age which succeeds. These effects are not removed, that character is not suddenly changed, like the colours of a landscape, because the sun has at last burst forth. The evil produced by long indifference and supineness remains even when indifference has become zeal, and supineness been succeeded by laborious exertion. Nay, that zeal, and those exertions, may inflame rather than allay the hostility which has been created, and exasperate the prejudices which have been imbibed.

"Such is our position. And where, you will justly ask, is the ground of confidence and consolation? My consolation is, that if the church has not retained an universal hold upon the affections of the people, the cause is not found in any imperfection of her own, any inherent evil, but in errors which are remediable, and which we are already in the way to remedy. Certainly the fault is not her own, not the fault of her constitution. Her constitution is that which the Apostles themselves set up, as far as their means allowed. Her doctrines are the 'form of sound words,' received from the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone. She has prescribed a diligent precaution, that her ministers should be 'apt and meet for their learning and godly conversation to exercise their ministry duly.' Her purpose is excellent, that every sheep should have a fold, and every fold a shepherd.

"But this our vantage ground we have suffered ourselves to lose. We have not multiplied the shepherds, as the flocks became more numerous: we have not added fresh folds, when our enclosures had become too full and over-crowded.

"If throughout the National Church a due sense had been maintained of the wretchedness of spiritual ignorance, of the consequences of unrepented sin, of the value of the Redeemer's sacrifice, and of the obligation on the part of his people, and more especially of his ministers, to extend his kingdom, objections would at once have given way, which were too long allowed to preclude the extension of our church. Imaginary privileges, and even real interests, would have been ceded, to advance still greater interests. A paramount desire for the glory of our God and Saviour would have overcome the personal feelings of jealousy, rivalry, or private advantage. It would have been seen that the time was come when men were called upon 'to seek not their own, but the things which are Jesus Christ's.' 'If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain; if thou sayest, Behold, we know it not; doth not He that pondereth the heart consider it; and shall he not render to every man according to his works?'"

"Certain it is, that our church, placed as it were on high, set up as 'a light to lighten every man that cometh into the world,' must fulfil the purpose for which it was set up, or it will be no longer valued, defended or maintained. Men will not prize a church, as they might admire a statue, for the beauty of its features, or the symmetry of its form: the mouth must speak the words of edification, and the limbs move as their uses are required. Our church, our ministry, will be loved and valued in proportion as it is practically effective.

"The arguments which have been lately revived against the unlawfulness or against the expediency of an establishment, are so unreasonable and unscriptural, that they can serve no purpose except that of popular declamation before a favourable audience. The only argument which we need now fear must be drawn from its utility or inefficiency; and this can have no force as long as it is practically disproved."

For the Colonial Churchman.

MISSIONARY ANECDOTE.—No. 3.

One of the Missionaries (Fairburn) to Australasia, in 1833, stated, that arriving one evening near one of the villages, he and his party soon were surrounded by a number of interesting and intelligent natives, who seemed much interested in their christian visit. The Chief pressed them to remain, saying, "This land is yours, come and live here!" The following day, another band of villagers repeated this offer, and gave the philanthropists the choice of their most fruitful lands.