

Houses of the Oireachtas

# SOME THOUGHTS

ON THE

PRESENT CRISIS OF PROTESTANT CHURCHES,

PARTICULARLY OF THE

EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN IRELAND.

ADDRESSED TO

THE VERY REVEREND THE MODERATOR  
AND OTHER MEMBERS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
OF THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND.

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BY

A PRESBYTERIAN LAYMAN.

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THE present is justly considered, to be, on many accounts, a time of crisis with the Protestant Established Churches in the united kingdoms of Great Britain and Ireland. What is the duty of the Church of Scotland in these circumstances, is a question interesting to all her members, and more especially to her representatives in the supreme ecclesiastical court. And the answer which I would give is shortly this, *Let the Church of Scotland stand upon her own foundation.* This is her paramount duty, and in discharging it faithfully she will receive that support from her best friends to which she will then be entitled. Let her proceed with the noble work in which she has lately been engaged, of strengthening that foundation, by purification of her own body, revival of her wholesome discipline, and strenuous efforts at once to extend her usefulness, and to shake off every remaining yoke of bondage. Let her farther continue, as she has done in her best times, to protest against error



and resist its aggressions, under whatever form and in whatever quarter it appears. But let her not, with any temporizing view, or for any temporal end, forsake or forget for an instant her own pure and scriptural standards, nor in the hour of alarm seek to draw help from any unhallowed source.

It is in this latter respect that I am jealous for the consistency of our revered Establishment ; and this jealousy is proportioned to the love and admiration which I entertain for her character, her many noble works, and the station which she has long and justly occupied as an honoured portion of the general church of Christ upon earth. We know that she has been often cast into the fire, and as often come out purified ; that she has resisted the allurements as well as the frowns of the world, and the temporal powers of the world, and has risen superior to both ; and that, although seasons of coldness and apathy have intervened, she has been preserved in time past from dereliction of her principles, and possesses within herself, and by her admirable constitution, the power of renovation, and the machinery by which abuses in her administration may be corrected.

The grounds of my present anxiety are the sentiments which have been expressed by some of her members, and the proceedings of some public assemblies, and even ecclesiastical courts in Scotland, with reference to the Protestant Episcopal Church of Ireland, and certain overtures and addresses which have emanated from these bodies in favour of that Establishment, couched in no very



measured terms of approbation. The motives which have led to these declarations appear to be chiefly these two: 1. The apprehended increase of Popery and Roman Catholic influence in the united kingdoms, and the consequent duty of all Protestant churches and people to resist that dangerous heresy and fatal form of Antichrist. And, 2. The duty of standing forth as defenders of the Protestant Establishments of religion, from the attacks which are aimed against them, whether by Roman Catholic foes or other opponents, and whether these attacks be separate or combined.

In the few remarks which I propose to make, it would be unnecessary to consider these grounds *seriatim*, or to dwell upon considerations that do not bear upon my immediate object. Such is that opposition which is made to Christianity, in its spirit and power, and consequently in all its forms, by irreligious men who desire not that Christ should reign over them. This enmity is not peculiar to the present or any other age of the Christian church. The infidel will never cease out of the land: and his assaults, which are nearly equal in their nature and extent, if not in their form, at all times, are to be resisted now, as they ever have been, by the helmet of faith and the sword of the Spirit.

Nor would I dwell upon that opposition which is of more recent origin, and which is directed against our Church Establishment as an establishment, not by irreligious men alone, but also by others of like faith and doctrine, but who conceive that all tem-



poral aid from the civil government, in the form of ecclesiastical endowment, is injurious to religion, or oppressive to the consciences of men. These latter, I conceive, are rather to be admonished as brethren than accounted as enemies. At all events I would contend with them on no other ground, than that of usefulness and zeal for the cause of truth. I am a decided and unhesitating friend to the Presbyterian Establishment of Scotland, and consider it the duty of the civil governor, both on principles of high expediency, and as bound by his oath of office, to uphold and protect it in its whole privileges and its fullest extent. But as I am a friend, as decided and uncompromising, to the freedom of opinion, and to the principles of toleration, as it is rather inadequately termed, in the largest and most unqualified sense of the word ; and as I address myself to those who are not only friendly to the Establishment, but themselves of the Establishment, I have no occasion to enlarge upon the question. Desiring equally with them its stability and strength, and only anxious how these objects may be best attained, I would repeat what I have already said, *let the church of Scotland stand upon her own foundations*. In this way she will not only best protect herself, but most effectually advance that great cause of which she has been so often honoured to be the powerful champion. It is of her conduct and testimony in regard to other churches and communities, that I feel myself constrained to speak in the language of humble, but earnest warning, if not remonstrance ; and my en-



treaty would be that she may not, from any consideration, whether of favour or of fear, not even from the dread of Popery itself, compromise her own principles either in respect of doctrine or constitution.

It is a question with some whether the Roman Catholic religion is making advances within Great Britain, that is, the countries of England and Scotland, in its moral and intellectual force ; or only in the number of its ignorant and deluded adherents, who reach this country from the Irish shores. The solution of this question is not important. For whatever be the cause of that increase, whether Popery is a periodical import merely, or whether it is actually taking root in any part of our soil, the duty of Protestant ministers and people is the same, to oppose it as a gross superstition, and unscriptural heresy, fatal to the souls of men, and hostile both to religious and civil liberty. It is scarcely less adverse to political freedom than to religious truth. Its history from first to last has proved that slavery follows in its train. This is a genuine result of the power which it claims over the consciences of men ; and the union is one of those which, in the nature of things, cannot be dissolved. What has rendered Ireland a degraded and turbulent country ? what renders her now a thorn in the side of Britain, an element not of strength to the empire, but of weakness ? The short answer is, Popery.

The Roman Catholic religion reigns in Ireland under its worst form, and with its most unrelenting sway. Other countries have obtained some relief, more or less, from its bondage. Though it was

*misgov-  
-ment  
not  
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once the bad eminence of France to be addressed as the "eldest son" of the church, that nation has long ago asserted her Gallican liberties, refusing to sanction unconditionally the decrees of the council of Trent; other transalpine kingdoms have begun to withdraw their necks from the yoke; recent events shew that even in his own states and patrimony the papal head is no longer an absolute monarch; but in Ireland, a Protestant realm at least by name, he rules as a despot with unsubdued and fatal tyranny.

Various means have been resorted to for diminishing the extent and influence of Popery in that island; and what has been the result? Penal statutes and biting laws have been tried, and have failed. The lesser persecution of civil disabilities has been tried, and with the same result. The armour was not of proof, and the weapon has broken short in the hand. The penal statutes have been abandoned, the disabilities have been removed, and the evil remains in its whole extent and force. The sword of the Spirit was not used in the beginning, the time of need; and it has not even yet been taken up, and grasped firmly, by the hands which ought to wield it. Experience has proved, what might well have been understood without so long and so painful trial, that the religious strength of the papacy, like other religious error, will never be subdued either by the force or the flattery of the civil magistrate.

Controversial discussions through the press, though sometimes indispensibly necessary for the refutation



of error, are more adapted to the comprehension of the learned, than to the intellect and habits of the people at large, particularly in a country like Ireland. The effect of public and oral disputations ~~it is not very easy to appreciate.~~ One inconvenience attends them, and by which their usefulness is lessened, in the irritation and excitement of angry passions, to which they so often lead, and which is ever unfavourable to conviction. Public and private teaching of the word of God, has always proved, as the command itself may satisfy every Christian that it would, the great instrument of conversion from error to truth, from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light.

But, in devising a cure, it is indispensable to examine the origin as well as seat of the disease. To what, then, has the papal cause, and the growth of the Roman Catholic power in Ireland, been chiefly owing? I answer, to the Protestant government, and the Protestant Established Churches. The remark is applicable to every period, in a greater or less degree, since the conquest of that island. The legislature, for political ends, kept the Irish people out of the pale of the law, and compelled them to remain barbarians. The rulers of the Episcopal Church neglected their spiritual interests, and defrauded them of their birthright. *Longa est historia, longæ ambages.* But the result is, that the native Irish have been handed over as an heritage to the priests and emissaries of a false religion, and a hostile power, too skilful not to improve the opportunity, and cultivate the possession. Such



has been in time past the condition of the Irish peasantry ; and in many of its leading features such it still continues.

If these results had been merely the consequence of individual acts, and individual neglect, or if the policy of the established Church in the present day, as a community and organized body, did not partake of the same character, it might be invidious, perhaps unjust, to recal the history of the past. But such is not the case ; these consequences have been a result of the system. The Protestant governments, and Protestant legislatures, for selfish and worldly ends, treated the native Irish as aliens, and even interposed direct obstacles to their moral as well as physical improvement. And the Protestant Church, too closely allied to the civil power, was partaker of its guilt. In the measures which, as a body, they long pursued,—for there were great and honourable exceptions among her sons, in Usher, Bedell, Walsh, Daniel, King, Boyle, and others, but their efforts were counteracted,—the Episcopal Church did not consult the spiritual interest of the people, or follow the true methods for evangelizing them. The civil Government adopted not the wise policy of Rome, to incorporate the vanquished province by a communication of laws, but the barbarian policy of terror and exclusion : And the ecclesiastical rulers attempted not to win, but to compel. The native Irish were asked, like captive Israel by their conquerors, to sing the songs of Sion, not in a strange land indeed, and this even embittered the mockery,



but in a strange tongue, which they and their fathers knew not ; which sounded too, in their ears, like the voice of oppression, more repulsive, and not less unprofitable for the ends of speech, than the dead language of the mass. And here I bless God, that in the like case, our Presbyterian church is free from the like blot, that she has not sent the gospel message to the poor natives of our mountains and seas, by men of another tongue, and a stammering speech which they could not understand.\*

If the Church of Scotland is called upon to pronounce any judgment upon the present state of Ireland, and of its Protestant Establishment, she is bound, I humbly conceive, to lift up her voice in solemn protestation against the evils of a system, by which such results have been produced.

From the doctrinal standards of the English and Irish Church in general, no Presbyterian need dissent ; for they are scriptural symbols like his own. The English Church has furnished in, her best times, a noble army of confessors and martyrs, as well as of powerful champions in the cause of Christian truth. To the truly Christian character, and Christian efforts of individual clergymen of the episcopal churches at the present time—and happily their number is not small, and is daily increasing,—he may not only bear his testimony, but entertain

\* It is an interesting, and to both people an affecting circumstance, that the first successful effort to give the Irish a metrical version of the Psalms in their mother tongue, to them so dear, has been made in the present day, and the boon conferred by an individual clergyman of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland.



towards such individuals a warm love and admiration. Communion between members of the two Churches, as among all Christians, can easily be maintained, for it can be maintained upon Catholic principles ; it is a common cause in defence of common truths. But with what consistency can a Presbyterian church, while giving encouragement to such men, and expressing sympathy with their efforts in the Christian cause, keep silence at the same moment, as to the unscriptural bondage in which they are held, and the galling yoke imposed upon them by their ecclesiastical superiors, the effect of which, in paralyzing their exertions, is felt by none more acutely than by these excellent men themselves?

Can our church allow it for a moment to be supposed, even by implication, that she is blind to the popish character of the English and Irish prelacy, and the worse than even Popish erastianism of her political constitution ? that she approves of all that is contained in the liturgical services of these churches, the apocryphal lections, the offices of baptism and burial, with the unscriptural sponsorship in the former, the priestly absolution, and much of their ritual and ceremonial observances ?

Let the Protestant cause be encouraged by all means in Ireland, and let the hands of the truly Protestant clergy be strengthened. But let this be done by hallowed means : let them strive for the mastery, but let them strive lawfully ; not by the help of the civil power, so much as by Christian zeal ; and looking to the former, as secondary and subordinate to the latter.



The Church of Scotland possesses within herself the power and means of renovation in all spiritual matters and discipline, through her well organized ecclesiastical courts, and that independence which her people claimed and asserted. Not so the Episcopal churches of the nation. Too much and irresponsible power is there committed to the heads and rulers, who are not bound to consult even with the body of the clergy themselves, still less with the lay members of their communion. I do not allude now to their temporal and political powers, but to their ecclesiastical authority ; in the unrestrained exercise of which have naturally arisen most of the abuses under which those churches now labour, and by which, if not effectually removed, they will be shaken to their foundation. The Episcopal Church must engage earnestly and effectually in the work of her own reformation, before it appeals to the people of Scotland for a testimony on its behalf : she must exhaust her own means before she "prays in aid" from other reformed churches.

An Establishment of religion is an instrument of great and eminent good ; but it is not a positive and ultimate good in itself ; not the end, but the means. An Established Church, which is not at the same time, in a fair sense of the word, a national Church, cannot long be maintained in its charters and privileges. To this state it is acknowledged that the Church of Ireland has now, I would rather say long ago, arrived. What is *her* duty in the circumstances, and what course should be



recommended to her by other Protestant Churches? I repeat, let her engage strenuously in the correction of her abuses. She may not have the power and the machinery within herself for that purpose, in its full extent. We know that the English hierarchy bound themselves in the beginning of their reformation, by an unlimited submission to the king; without whose consent they cannot propose a question of reform in church affairs, or discuss it in their courts, without being exposed to a writ of *præmoneri facias*, for contempt of the royal authority. If the same church in Ireland is under the same bondage, let her seek the necessary authority from the legislature, or let the legislature impose it upon her. In this way only can she reclaim her waste ground, strengthen herself, and weaken her adversaries. The Church of Ireland, to regain her usefulness, must become now, what she ought to have been two centuries ago, a missionary Church. The obligation thus powerfully imposed upon her, I consider not as afflictive, but as a peculiar blessing, and pointing out the road by which she may escape from her present danger. In this duty it is our business to encourage her, rather than to connect the cause of Protestant truth with the support of her outward fabric merely, and the preservation of her temporal revenues unimpaired. The predecessors of the present race of churchmen gave up the field to the enemy; the shepherd was unfaithful, another is in possession of the flock, and the country continues in its original state, swarming with an unreclaimed



population. These can only be brought into the fold by the appointed means ; the preaching of the gospel, by faithful men, uncramped by chilling forms, and uncontrolled in their spiritual work by superior agency. To this great duty they have not hitherto been incited, but rather obstructed in it by the hierarchy as a body.

It would be unjust to place the spiritual disease of Ireland to account altogether of the Roman Catholic priesthood. Dark and foul, indeed, is the superstition, and dangerous the policy of that church ; and from the bottom of my heart I reject their blasphemous doctrines, and repudiate their idolatrous rites in every form and shape. But can it be doubted that if half the vigilance, and less than half the energy, which the heads and other clerical members of that church have displayed in the cause of error, had been manifested in the cause of truth by the leaders of the Protestant Establishment, if the latter had served their God with half the zeal they served their king, He would not now have left them naked to their enemies ? It is with nations and with churches as with individuals,—their sin will find them out ; and it is with churches and with nations as with individuals,—their safety and deliverance will be consulted best by not despising the chastisement.

In as far as the heads of the Protestant Episcopal Churches are at the present moment co-operating in a reform of the many abuses in their Establishment, they are worthy of commendation and encouragement. But let it not be a temporizing and



inefficient reform ; and let it not be concealed, that the greatest difficulties and danger of the time have been created by their long and hope-killing delay in that indispensable work. Let not the ministers and people of Presbyterian Scotland, in this season of our own revival, assist in keeping a blind upon the eyes of those who bear the rule in another church.

Whether the success of that church, as a Protestant Establishment, has been in the least degree commensurate to her great means, let Ireland herself answer. Let Protestant Ulster, compared with the other three provinces, answer. Let the counties of Down, and Antrim, and Derry, compared with Monaghan, and Fermanah, and Tyrone, answer. Is it not unquestionable that the Protestant cause has been more indebted to the humble Presbyterian ministers and people settled in that corner of the land, than to the widely spread Episcopal Church with its far stronger temporal arm, and its much more abundant revenues ? Is not the gleanings of the grapes of Ephraim greater, as well as better, than the vintage of Abiezer ?

The Irish Church, not less than the civil government, instead of improving her opportunity, *instans operi regnisque futuris*, remained in a state of supine indifference to her own interest as well as her duty, when watchfulness would have been availing. She did not sow the dragon's teeth, indeed, with her own hand, but she closed her eyes while others did ; and she must not be surprised that a harvest has sprung up of armed men. Neither is it possible to destroy



such an enemy at pleasure, and simply by the throwing of a stone. Encreased numbers, encreased wealth, and encreased intelligence, must always give encreased power ; and no mere legislative acts and decrees can ever be effectual of themselves to suppress power so acquired. If not too late in that country, Roman Catholic influence must be weakened by Protestant doctrine and instruction ; and the instruments used for that purpose must be restored to their former brightness and edge.

It is a true, though becoming a trite sentiment, that they who defend acknowledged abuses and corruptions of an Establishment, are the persons who most surely promote its fall. It is for this reason that I protest against whatever may be so construed. I desire not to assist in pulling down any Protestant Establishment. Who that is a friend to the Protestant faith, or a friend to the Christian religion, would contemplate, without alarm, any attempt to overthrow the Church of England and Ireland, even with a view to its reconstruction ? The evils of such a course would, in all human calculation, far outweigh the benefit of raising a new, even though a better edifice, on its ruins. But that is not the present question. The friends of religion desire to see those churches purified, by which they will be strengthened also ; to see them put on their beautiful garments, as distinguished from those which are costly alone and dazzling. I lament, as a friend to the reformed religion in its purity, that the Episcopal Churches of this nation were left upon their pre-



sent model ; that the reformation in England, especially, was nipped in its blossom ; that the pious work of Edward VI., that prince on whose tomb, notwithstanding his tender years, it could have been written, without a fraud, Here lies a Christian king ; a rare example of such character, if not

*Solus præteritis melior majorque futuris,*

I lament that his measures were stopped, and even in part reversed by his Protestant successor, who could not emancipate herself from the trammels of a Popish ritual, and delighted in the exercise of uncontrolled authority, even in matters ecclesiastical. Hence the English Church has remained a half reformed Church in its constitution, discipline, and worship ; and, by a singular retribution, that apostate body, to whose ceremonies and rites she clung in an evil hour, is now the instrument of her correction.

I repeat, then, let the Church of Scotland be faithful to herself, faithful to the Protestant cause in its holiest and best state, and faithful to the clergy and people of the English and Irish Establishment. If a sense of duty leads us to appeal on behalf of the latter to the legislature and the people, let us do so on well-chosen ground ; but let us not from a dread, most just and salutary in itself, of Popish power and influence, identify ourselves with any principles which are in direct opposition and repugnance to our own. It was the error and unwarranted concession of Melancthon, in his



addressess to the Papal body, to assume that there were no essential and vital differences in doctrine between the Roman Catholics and Protestants ;—a false and most dangerous position, which, strange to say, has been taken by more than one Irish prelate in our day. It is equally erroneous, though not attended indeed with equal danger, to suppose that there are no essential differences between the Protestant Episcopal and Presbyterian Churches. For constitution, order, and ritual are of essential importance, even for the maintenance of sound doctrine ; and, when these are unscriptural or ill organized, the soundest formulæ, and the most scriptural articles of faith may sink into a dead letter. The church and people of Scotland have opposed Prelacy with a resolution scarcely inferior to that with which they have resisted Popery ; for experience taught them, that the former was the natural road to the latter, and at all events, inconsistent with Christian freedom, if not adverse to pure and spiritual religion.

We know that a comprehension of Protestant Dissenters into the English Church, and even a union between the Presbyterian and Episcopal churches themselves, has often been projected, and more than once attempted, but with such results as proved that the elements are essentially different. It was attempted at the Restoration, in 1660, and the Conference which followed in 1661, at the Savoy, but resisted by the Bishops delegate, and broken off without effect ; or rather with the effect of encreasing the separation, and rendering the alliance



more hopeless through the Act of Uniformity, which immediately ensued,—and afterwards by the Test Act in 1673. It was proposed again, at the Revolution, in 1689, in special convocation held at Westminster under the royal writ, but whose proceedings were defeated by prorogations, without coming to a decision. Since that period, although Convocations were frequently summoned, till the beginning of last century, no serious endeavour has been made either for that end, or for the removal of any of those bars which precluded communion of the churches, and have retarded the spiritual growth and strength of the Episcopal Church itself. Members of the Church of Scotland are now indeed, in common with others, admissible by law into the British Legislature, and offices of trust; but this legal right was only conferred upon them in this the 19th century, and *multum renitente Ecclesia*, more than a hundred years after that incorporating Union which entitled them to that and every other privilege of the civil estate. And in so far as the power and influence of the Episcopacy extends, the principle and rule of exclusion continue unabated. I do not rest upon acts of tyranny and oppression in times past; though I may well ask, what debt of gratitude do the people of Ireland, whom she neglected and despised, owe to the English Church, or what does Scotland, whom she persecuted? But I speak of the present day: for her character of exclusion and intolerance remains the same. The English Church does not even allow the validity of Presbyterian ordination, or, consequently, the right



administration of Christian ordinances by the clergy of Scotland, whom she considers as intruders ; a tenet which, going to the root of ecclesiastical order, must of itself forbid either union or communion of the churches, except upon the supposition, taken up by the English prelates in their conferences at the Savoy and Westminster, that one party should surrender much even of substantial principle, and the other party surrender little even of unessential form. But a purification of the English Church will not widen the breach, it will rather lessen the distance at least between us.

While our Church, therefore, may bear testimony to the scriptural doctrines of the episcopal, she is not less bound to qualify her support of that establishment, by bearing testimony against whatever is unscriptural in its constitution, spirit, and forms ; otherwise would she condemn herself, or even inflict voluntarily upon her own body the Mezentian torment.

For these reasons I perused with sorrow, and not without surprize, the following passage in a Declaration issued by one of the Presbyterian Synods of Scotland in 1835 ; and upon which Declaration an overture was framed and transmitted to the last General Assembly. “ The main cause “ of the depressed state under which it” (namely, the Irish Church) “ now labours, is to be found, not in “ evils inherent in itself, but in the insidious and “ revolting persecutions to which, for a great length “ of time, it has been systematically subjected.” From this statement, both doctrinally and histori-



cally, I at once and unequivocally dissent. And I have little doubt, that, when the temporary and political agitations which now disturb our people have passed away, none will regret more than the reverend body alluded to, that such a Declaration should be left upon their provincial record.

But it is said, that the principle of Church Establishments is called in question at the present time, and therefore it is the duty of all Protestants, whether individual or corporate, to support the Protestant churches; and particularly the Irish Establishment, upon which, as being the weakest part of the lines, the first assault has been made. To those who attack it for the purpose of subversion, I would answer as an individual, that a determined resistance ought to be made. But where the object is to improve, a different conduct must be pursued. Why is the church of Ireland first and chiefly subjected to the process of amendment, but because she requires it most, and that her case is the most urgent? But in reality, the important question is, not the mere defence of one or another Establishment; the question is, how best to defend and maintain the Protestant faith? And to this my answer is, by rendering the Protestant Establishments most efficient as instruments for that important purpose. The interest of a particular religious incorporation is intimately connected with the interests of religion; they may be involved; but it is the interest of religion which is the leading and paramount consideration. The interest of one ecclesiastical corporation may seem to be in-



volved in the support of another : but this is not a ground of interference, where no religious principle is in question. Let it not be said, that the Church of Scotland, as an Ecclesiastical Establishment, has any interest in obstructing the reformation of the Irish Church, even if interested and secular motives could enter into calculation. Evils may exist in one Establishment which do not exist in another. The revenues of one church may be larger than necessary or even useful, or they may be distributed so ill as to defeat the end for which they are granted ; while in another no such evils of constitution may exist to impede its usefulness, and the revenue may be no more than adequate, and may be distributed in just proportions. In these and other respects, the treatment which one body may require forms no precedent for the other, and need create no alarm.

As the ecclesiastical heads of the Irish Church have been either unable or indisposed to engage in the work of removing the greatest abuses in that Establishment, it has become necessary for the civil government and legislature, to undertake the task : and the question for Presbyterian Scotland to consider, is, whether she is called upon, and if so, to what extent is she called, to interfere with the provisions made or contemplated for that purpose. These provisions relate partly to the order and discipline, and partly to the revenue of that church and its distribution. They are avowedly brought forward as remedial, not subversive measures ; and the people and church of Scotland ought to inter-



fere in their progress only upon sufficient evidence to satisfy them that the latter is their real character, and that the cause of Protestant faith would be endangered or retarded by adopting them.

There are few Presbyterians, who, in a religious view,—for I lay aside and reject all reasons and questions of mere political party on whatever side,—will be inclined to interfere in regulations respecting the outward order and discipline of the Episcopal church, and the arrangement and number of her office-bearers. This is scarcely a religious question; and, in so far as it is a question of ecclesiastical policy, is one upon which a Presbyterian people, whatever opinions they may entertain, are not called upon, and perhaps not very competent, to decide. Those other measures and provisions, to which the attention of the legislature is called, have reference to the temporal incomes of the Irish church; their amount and distribution. And it is upon this subject that an alarm has been manifested on the part of some of the Presbyterian bodies. I allude to certain overtures and addresses of the Synods of Moray, Ross, and Aberdeen, and the Presbyteries of Perth, Annan, and some others.

It is to be regretted, I think, that the first manifestation of Presbyterian feeling on behalf of the Irish church, as a body, should have been upon occasion of measures affecting the temporal possessions of that Establishment. With those who maintain that ecclesiastical property and revenues are inalienable from those bodies in which they have once been vested by law, it is consistent to protest



against all interference with such funds. But this argument is not generally or strongly maintained ; and it is evident that the doctrine would, if well founded in public law, go far to invalidate the rights of every Protestant community in this country ; for these rights are based upon the opposite principle. The supreme civil power in every state has claimed and, in the time of need, exercised the power of regulating property which has been bestowed for public purposes ; and the extent to which national revenues are applied, for any department of national service, has been determined by the national council. The legislature may be called upon, and justly called, to increase the funds required for endowments to the ministers of religion, as a great national purpose, where these funds are insufficient ; an acknowledgement that property held for such purposes is not merely the property of individuals, or even corporate property, in any more limited sense than the corporation and community of the whole nation. For, if the legislature has no more right to deal with the temporalities of a church than with a private estate, and these kinds of property are of the same nature, and rest upon the same foundation, how can it be called upon to augment the one more than the other ? But this distinction does not weaken the claims of the Established Churches. On the contrary, it strengthens these claims, by resting them on the ground of public and national advantage. Public good and public expediency are a better and a more sure foundation in such cases, than corporate right or other title. Is the



Church of Scotland, then, prepared to say, by her full acquaintance with the case, whether the revenues of the Irish Establishment, under whatever distribution they are allotted, are more or less than adequate, or exactly commensurate to the necessities and well-being of that church—that it is inexpedient, in any circumstances, to reduce the amount of her temporalities, or to enquire whether that amount is useful or detrimental in serving the ends and purposes for which it is given? Such an opinion and judgment would, I conceive, be unwarranted in itself, and it would come very ungraciously from a body which has ever held a different and much nobler position, not measuring the usefulness, and still less the purity of her clergy by the extent or superfluity of their endowments; by the magnificence of their temples, the pomp of their service, or even the splendour of their scholastic foundations.

I would ask, then, is our church called upon, or, if so, prepared to deliver an opinion upon the amount of endowment which is adequate and just to be appointed for the Irish clergy, and the several orders and office-bearers in that Establishment? I apprehend, that she is not required, and would not be sufficiently qualified, to decide that question.

It remains to ask, in the event that the revenues of the Irish Church shall be so apportioned as to serve adequately the whole purposes of that Establishment, and to leave an excess, whether larger or smaller, unappropriated for these ends, whether the Church of Scotland is called upon to state her opinion, by remonstrance or otherwise, regarding



the application of that contingent and supposed surplus? I allow, that this is a question both of importance and delicacy; for I would be among the last to contend, that the Presbyterian church has not a right both to form her judgment, and to give vent to her remonstrances, in any case where she conceives the interests of religion to be at stake. I merely wish, that she should not go beyond the necessity, and should form her judgment free from the influence of all secondary and extraneous considerations.

It is not, in general cases, either very wise or profitable, that one Church should interpose by advice to the legislature, regarding the regulation of another Establishment. Much confusion would naturally be created by such mixed and ultroneous counsel. And unless some principle of Christian doctrine or Scripture precept is at hazard, such interference is scarcely warranted, and will form an evil and a dangerous precedent. Is any Christian principle, then, involved in the present case? and if so, to what extent?

According to one of the Bills for the regulation of the Irish Church revenues, which was formerly before Parliament, and is again introduced with certain modifications, it has been proposed, that any surplus which may exist after providing for the due maintenance of that Establishment, and certain other ecclesiastical uses, shall be applied to the purposes of general education in that country, without distinction of religious bodies and sects. If the import of this provision was, that such surplus, or



any other fund and revenue, of whatever kind, or from whatever source,—for the distinction of its source, is, I conceive, quite immaterial,—should be employed for inculcating Roman Catholic doctrines, or for the religious uses of the Roman Catholic church, I would say, let our Presbyterian courts and Presbyterian people, be the first, and loudest, and most strenuous remonstrants against the unhallowed attempt. One such misappropriation has been made by the foundation of Maynooth college ; a measure deeply to be deplored, and which remains a foul blot on the face of Protestant Britain. As a point of civil policy, the institution of this seminary was a very imprudent, and, in a religious point of view, an unpardonable act of the government of 1795. For this inauspicious precedent cannot be placed to the account of those late administrations which have been accused of manifesting too much indifference to the inroads of Roman Catholic power ; having been the measure of a minister of the Crown, supposed the most favourable to the royal prerogative and the privileges of the English Episcopal church, of any minister in the memory of the present generation. Against the continuance of this grant, every Protestant is not only entitled, but bound to enter a protestation. For it exceeds all the limits of toleration, and is a direct supply of force to the Papal cause,—educating the priests of a false and hostile faith, at the expense of a Protestant country and people.

But an application of any surplus fund, at the public expense,—for I assume that a surplus ecclesi-



astical fund, if it should exist, is public money,—to the purposes of general education, does not stand upon the same footing with a grant of money for promoting education in the doctrines and rites of the Roman Catholic religion. The education of the people is not merely an authorized, but a commendable act. The application of part of those funds which had been ecclesiastical funds, to the purposes of popular education, was not considered by our early reformers as alien, even from its religious uses; and at the period of the Reformation, both in England and Scotland, no small portion of the church revenue was appropriated to the endow-ment and support of colleges and schools in both countries, for education in science and literature, as well as in theology, and is still possessed by those bodies upon that tenure. An objection to the general principle of such allotment would therefore sound somewhat harshly from our reformed church. In like manner, it was not considered, when the reformed religion was established in Scotland, that the application of part of the ecclesiastical revenues to the relief and maintenance of the poor, was an improper use of that fund. The principle, I apprehend, cannot justly be called in question. The propriety and expediency of the measure depends on the mode of applying it. And here we are brought to that single question so much agitated of late, and restless as the waters of “the still vex’d Bermudas,” in what manner, and under what limitations and restrictions, is it the duty of the Protestant government and legislature to educate the Roman



Catholics of Ireland at the public expence? It is a question which might almost be accounted insoluble, if experience had not proved, by the successive failure of so many schemes and attempts, that the methods hitherto followed, however excellent in themselves, or even the only proper methods for other parts of the empire, are not adapted to the present necessities of Ireland.

What is the state of that country and its population? About five parts of seven, or nearly that proportion, are of the Roman Catholic faith. The case is anomalous. That country cannot, I fear, be considered as an incorporated part of the Protestant empire, though it is an incorporated part of the people; nor can we legislate for it without consideration of its peculiar condition. The Roman Catholics have been incorporated in the imperial legislature. This was a great evil. It was a mistake to suppose that the power and influence of the Roman Catholic religion in Ireland, or the hostility of its members to the Protestant churches, would be diminished by the removal of civil disabilities. But that measure was not the evil *in se*, or the real origin of the danger. It was the result, not the cause of the increase of Popery. And it is an equally great mistake to suppose, that a denial of that measure, and the continuance of civil disabilities, if that had been possible, would have either suppressed or even weakened the Roman Catholic power. That power arises from the number and resources of the Roman Catholic people. It is their existence, not their admission to civil privileges,



which we have to lament ; for the latter was an inevitable, and I will say a just sequel to the former ; nor could any power of man have averted that consequence, either with or without a dismemberment of the empire.

The question of Irish education stands now nearly on the same ground with the question of relief from civil pains and disqualifications, affecting Roman Catholics, when that measure was resolved upon by the Protestant administration of 1829. The legislature must either undertake the education of the Roman Catholics, or leave it to be carried on by the Roman Catholic church exclusively on their own principles, and with the risk of all those consequences to which these principles and that system lead. As the necessity for admixture of Roman Catholics in the magistracy and legislature was a great evil, so it is a great evil to give civil education without full and unembarrassed religious and scriptural education. But is the necessity less plain or less urgent in the latter case, than it was in the judgment now of every intelligent and unprejudiced man, in the former case ? The concession is painful : but there remains only this alternative, either to give no education at the expense of the state to the children and youth of Ireland, or to give an education less perfect than a protestant people would desire. It is, and always has been, the machiavelian policy of the Romish church to hold her adherents in the fetters of ignorance. An ignorant people are among the aptest instruments for her political ends ; and nothing more endangers



her power than the admission of light ; above all, of that which is the strongest and the purest. But the question is, what instruction is it now in the power of the British legislature to bestow upon the Roman Catholic peasantry of Ireland, and by what means ? *quid possit*, as well as *quid velit*, *rerum concordia discors*. I know what I would desire to give ; but I do not know that I am able, in the seats of the Roman Catholic population, to accomplish that desire. I am instructed by the word of God what is the best knowledge ; but I do not read there of any knowledge which is prohibited, that of evil only excepted. The English church and government have placed the Irish nation in its present position ; and the people of that nation must be treated now by the legislature, not so much according to its desire, as according to its power ; for the position cannot be reversed by a mere act of authority. In answering the question, then, what course ought to be pursued, I look naturally to the conduct of our own church in a case analogous at least, if not the very same. No one doubts the value attached by the Presbyterian Church of Scotland to a complete, as well as pure system of Scriptural education, as the sure basis of all moral instruction. But in those parishes and districts of the Highlands and Islands where there is a considerable number, if not in some of them a preponderance, of Roman Catholics, it is a direction and rule in the management of the Assembly Schools there planted, that the children of Roman Catholics shall not be required, without their free consent, to join in the reading of the



Scriptures. In allowing this deviation, or rather exception from their own model, our church has, I think, dealt justly with the case ; not with prudence merely, but in a catholic and Christian spirit ; not attempting to force the consciences even of ignorant parents, and at the same time not debarring their children from the benefit of that instruction which is in itself useful, because they are not prepared to receive all that we are willing and desirous to impart. She does not on this point adopt the rule of the Episcopal churches, which allow no modification of the plan and discipline of their schools, with a view to the comprehension of those belonging to any other communion. But what is the effect and influence of their system, not only in regard to the Roman Catholics, but in regard, likewise, to other Protestant bodies, to the Protestant cause, and to the Protestant Episcopal Church itself?

In the schools established by the Church of England, under the name of National, (I do not allude now to the higher schools and universities,) no scholar is admitted without being taken bound, by himself, or parent, or guardian, to conform to the services of the Established Church ; nor is any distinction made of Protestant or Roman Catholic, of the Established Presbyterian Church, or other Protestant communion. A member of the Church of Scotland cannot, of course, procure for his child the benefit of scriptural education in these schools, unless he will forego his religious principles, so far as to allow that child to be separated from his parents and family in the public worship of God,



as well as to be trained in the catechisms and formulæ of another church. A similar rule is adopted, and with similar result, in the Association schools of Ireland. I do not question the right of these bodies so to act. I talk of the Christian spirit and wisdom, and the consequences of such a course on Christian society and intercourse. Is not the object itself of scriptural instruction marred, and its enlarged diffusion prevented, by any rule which is opposed to the gospel law of love? Is it less consistent with Christian duty and Protestant principle, to offer as much scriptural instruction as can be communicated to the Irish Roman Catholics in the public schools of that country, although subject to limitations, than to deny all scriptural education in the schools of a Protestant country, except to those who will receive the Word of God, qualified and leavened by the word of man? Do we condemn our forefathers because, in opposition to the highest civil authority, and under the pressure of the severest civil pains, they refused to attend the public worship of a church, the rites and forms of which they considered to be at variance with the gospel spirit and precept? Is no allowance to be made even for the uninformed mind, and unenlightened conscience of the Irish Roman Catholic? Our church has made an allowance; and her conscience does not condemn her in that which she so allows. If such is her conduct even towards the fewer and less bigoted Roman Catholics in our own land, I apprehend it is still more just and wise in the case of the more numerous, more deluded, and more ignorant



papists of Ireland; a people quick of intelligence, and eager for knowledge, but hitherto sunk and degraded; where, for more than six months in every year, above two millions of the peasantry suffer all the evils of famine, occasioned in a great measure by their intellectual prostration, and an ignorance, not the parent perhaps, but the nurse of their superstitions.

It is much to be regretted that so many clergymen of the Church of Ireland, if not the majority of their number, should have declined taking the benefit of the government education grant: for, in the case of schools under Protestant patronage and superintendence, the full advantages of scriptural instruction may be superadded to the more general course of religious, moral, and literary education, carried on in common and at stated hours; the clergy are not in this respect straitened by the law, however indifferent to this great object the lawgivers may be, if they are not straitened in themselves: whereas, by refusing, or at least foregoing, a share in that grant, they leave a larger fund, of course, for those schools where the Roman Catholics predominate, and which may be thus established under Roman Catholic patrons,—augmenting the resources of institutions, not under their own controul, but under that of the anti-protestant body, whose influence they deprecate and dread. I can respect consistency, even where it leads to extremes, and appearing in its sternest form, if it stands alone; but I cannot approve the wisdom, and, if other interests are involved, I must be allowed to question the motives, of those who



aggravate by their own conduct an evil which they deplore.

Whatever errors, then, may have been committed in the detail of that plan of popular education which has lately been proposed, and is in the course of trial in Ireland, let not the Presbyterian clergy and laity of Scotland do more than remonstrate against such errors of detail ; nor, without the fullest enquiry and consideration, throw their weight in opposition to the ground and principle of these measures. Let not any political feelings, or any sensitive alarm, connected with the temporalities of an Established Church, influence their conduct. Every plan is beset with difficulties. The Kildare Place Society, formed by religious as well as benevolent men in Ireland, found it necessary to make a large compromise as to the extent and quality of scriptural education ; to use extracts from the Scriptures in place of the whole Bible ; to confine the reading of Scripture to the books of the New Testament, and allow them to be read in the Roman Catholic version ; to prohibit all explanation of what was read ; and to admit Roman Catholic schoolmasters as the teachers of Protestant schools. Does the compromise made in the present instance go farther in its principle ? or is it less necessary now than it was when that society was instituted ?

Farther, let it ever be remembered, that instruction, and it is true of the greatest and best as well as of the least and the worst, cannot be compelled, though it may be encouraged, by outward means and incentives. In this, as in every case, and with



the receiver as with the giver, "the quality of mercy is not strained." It is like dew upon the tender herb, like showers upon the mown grass; that water the earth and make it fruitful. But the largest supplies, poured by the erring hand of man upon the unprepared ground, may only add to its sterility. Witness the Charter Schools of Ireland, the politic but empty and worse than useless device of Bishop Boulter; and witness many other institutions intended for similar purposes, but which have given no effectual relief to that afflicted land. And why? I answer, because they were political, not Christian measures.

Whether on the question of education, then, or on those other questions which at present agitate the public mind and feeling in relation to the Irish Church, it becomes us to pause before we pronounce a sentence, or even offer a voluntary advice. Independent of that opposition which has been lately manifested towards all national Establishments of religion, the Episcopal Churches of England and Ireland, especially the latter, are subjected to an attack, directed not against their abuses only, but against their existence. It is well for the Church of Scotland to be alive to the interests and the cause of Protestant Establishments, on account of that Protestant doctrine of which they are constituted guardians. But while she not only condemns the hostile spirit which seeks their overthrow, but lifts up her voice in defence of all that is scriptural and holy in these institutions, let the word of God be, as heretofore, the rule of her conduct, as well as the



standard of her opinions ; and if duty calls her publicly to vindicate what is excellent in another Establishment, the same duty equally forbids her silence regarding what is evil ; not shunning to declare the whole truth, even while repelling a foe. To be silent altogether on the question of the Irish church is not to compromise the truth ; for no claim of duty obliges us to speak. And at the present time, a time of danger as well as of rebuke, I conceive that this is the course dictated to our church, both by a sense of justice to herself, and by charity to others. But by all means let her not issue any uncertain sound.

The misapprehension which I conceive to exist in the minds of many members of our own Church, including some of the ablest and most faithful of our clergy, on the question of the Irish Establishment, as a branch of the Church of England, and its influences upon the people of that country, a mistake which would not have been committed if they had witnessed the actual operation of the system on the English and Irish people, has induced me reluctantly to offer these remarks ; which, though hastily penned, are not the result of any hasty or slight consideration, but the deliberate opinion of one who will yield to no other in attachment to Protestant principles, and to our national Establishment. I consider it to be now as much as ever the imperative duty of the Church of Scotland, and her best attitude for the defence of Protestant truth, to stand upon her own foundation. That Establishment I believe to be scriptural and pure



in constitution, doctrine, and worship ; and to be yet hallowed, as it deserves to be, in the memory and affections of our people. Its principles are revered by none more than by

A PRESBYTERIAN LAYMAN.

MAY 16, 1836.



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