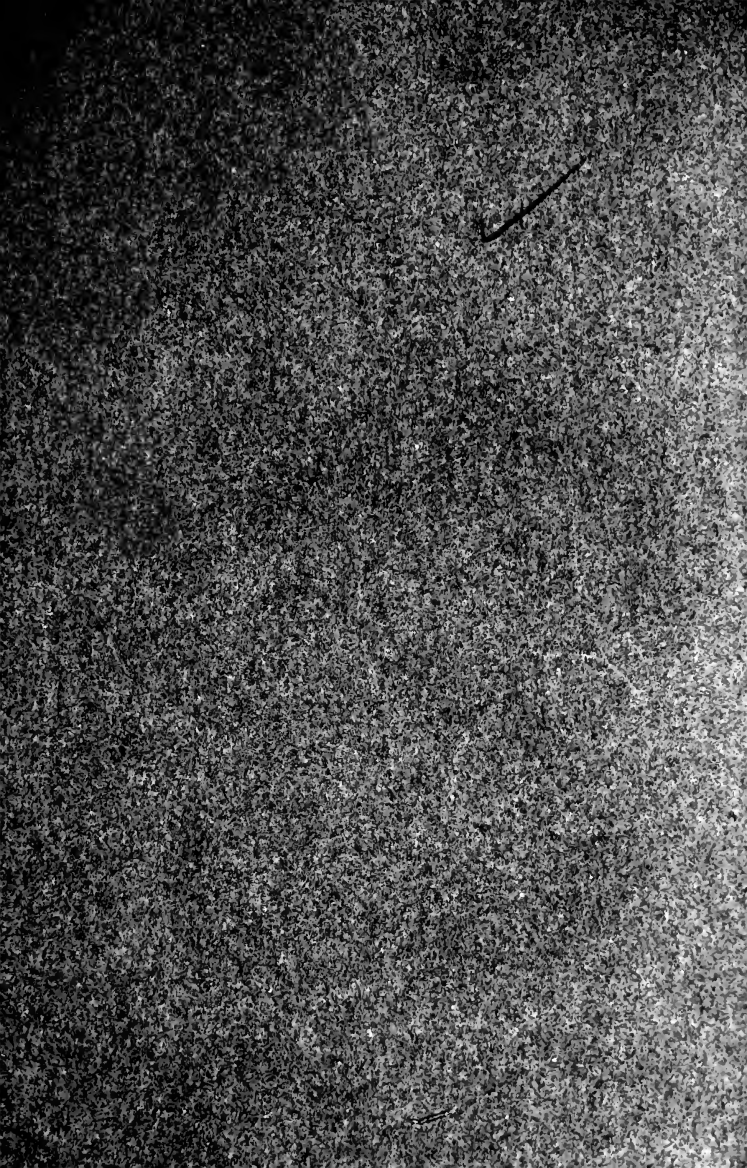




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THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND,
PAST AND PRESENT.

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CHURCH OF ENGLAND,
PAST AND PRESENT.
A POPULAR LECTURE

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THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND, PAST AND PRESENT.

THE subject which this title brings before our minds is a very wide one, and one which it is manifestly impossible to discuss completely in a single lecture. This character belongs to almost all important subjects: there are few, if any, that can be exhausted in the course of an hour.

The subject however is an important and a practically useful one; and though it may be impossible to do much more than give a few indications of the manner in which it should be studied, still these indications may be as seeds, which will take root and bear fruit hereafter if only they be carefully tended.

But the subject which I have taken for our consideration this evening is not only wide and important and practically useful; it is also not unfrequently to a great extent misunderstood. I should be sorry to accuse any one of wilfully misrepresenting important facts for party purposes or with any evil intention whatever; I

should much prefer to attribute any misrepresentation to ignorance or misapprehension: but certainly one does occasionally meet with such strange assertions concerning the Church of England, that it requires a stretch of charity to believe that they arise wholly from ignorance and that no party feeling is mixed up with them.

Whatever may be the origin of their erroneous character, you certainly not unfrequently meet with such assertions as these:—that the Church of England is a department of the State, and is supported by payment from the State: that the Church has no higher authority than that of Parliament: that the Book of Common Prayer is merely an Act of Parliament, and that consequently worshippers in Church pray as Parliament orders them: that the endowments of our churches are national property, in a sense in which other public endowments are not: that the State Church, as the Church of England is sometimes called, is only one sect out of many, which has been arbitrarily and unfairly adopted by the State and endowed with state privileges and emoluments.

This I think may be taken as a fair specimen of the statements which are made concerning the Church of England; and upon the strength of

such statements systematic efforts are made to change fundamentally the position which the Church occupies. I do not know whether those who are agreed as to the fact of a fundamental change being needed, are also agreed as to the principle and details of the fundamental change: I rather think not. Some perhaps would be content to deal with the Church of England upon the lines adopted in the case of the Church of Ireland—that is, simply to strip her of her temporalities and let her go: others would probably not be so easily satisfied, and would deem the snake to be only scotched and not killed by this somewhat severe treatment. Some, according to a programme which I have seen, would like not to destroy the Church altogether, or indeed as they would say in any sense at all, but to reform it upon such broad liberal national principles, that it should include everybody, and that no one should have any reason to object to its existence. I need hardly say that questions of this kind will not be dealt with by me this evening. I scarcely think that they are at present within the horizon of practical politics. For my own part I trust they may long remain below the horizon: but anyhow, what I propose to do this evening is to put out of mind as much as possible designs hostile to the

Church of England. I am not here to maintain that all such designs are, on the part of those who favour them, simply and intentionally mischievous: I will admit for argument's sake, if for no other reason, that there are sincere and honest men who would wish to upset the present position of the Church of England, just as there may be sincere and honest men who would wish to upset several other institutions for which most Englishmen feel thankful, and in the possession of which they are honestly proud. But, admitting all this, I should like to put before you such a view of the Church of England as may tend to make you question the wisdom of these sincere and honest men, however much credit you may give them for honesty and sincerity.

In the first place, then, when did the Church of England begin to exist, and what is her history? In a certain sense the Church began to exist as soon as Christ had any disciples in this country; and this consideration carries us back to very early times indeed. Give me your attention while I endeavour to present a slight sketch of the manner in which the light of Christ dawned and strengthened upon this land of ours, once dark and barbarous.

The Romans, as you know, visited Britain

before the date of the birth of our Lord. They did not however settle in the country till nearly half a century after that event. When they made their settlement, which continued for about three centuries and a half, the probability would be that they brought some sparks of Christian light with them. We know that from the first there were Christians among the Roman soldiers, and it is quite possible that in the earliest times of Roman occupation some such forerunners of the Gospel may have come into our land. I put aside, as not resting upon any sufficient foundation, the legend that St. Paul himself visited our shores. What is quite certain is this,—namely, that as time went on the light of the Gospel spread in Britain as it did in other lands: and as the light spread here, so the same means were taken by the Roman power to extinguish it. We have evidence of the raging of the last great persecution—the Diocletian persecution—in the martyrdom of St. Alban. Alban was a native of Verulam in Hertfordshire: the place of his martyrdom now bears his own name. He seems to have come under the displeasure of the authorities by hiding one of the clergy in his own house during the persecution. When he could hide him no longer he dressed himself in the priest's clothes, and so went before

the magistrates as the party accused. He behaved manfully as a disciple of Christ; would not sacrifice to the heathen Gods; and so, after being scourged like his Master, he earned the martyr's crown. It is clear from this, that before the end of the third century there were not only a Christian here and there throughout Britain, but there was also something like a Church, which the authorities of that day thought it necessary to disestablish.

But we have more distinct evidence than this of the early existence of an organised Church in Britain. Early in the fourth century, after God had given rest to the Church through the conversion of Constantine,—this Emperor, by the way, was in a certain sense a Yorkshireman,—we have the record of a Church Council held at Arles in France, at which three British bishops were present. We know their names and their sees: there was Eboracus, Bishop of York; Restitutus, Bishop of London; and Adelfius, Bishop of Caerleon, in South Wales. Now just consider what is implied by the presence, in the year of our Lord 314, of three British bishops at a Council in the south of France. It implies not only a complete Church organisation throughout the west of Europe, such as we know to have existed on

other grounds, but also the existence of the Church of this country as a part of the organisation. A Church which was ready to take its part in an important meeting as far off as Arles, in A.D. 314, must have been a well-established recognised body; and there is much to indicate that it was a Church in close communion with that of Gaul, whether in the proper sense of the word a daughter Church it may be difficult to say.

And so, when the Romans withdrew from Britain, about a century later, they certainly left behind them a Christian Church. Some few years ago a large number of Roman altars were discovered in a field in my diocese, near to the Roman station at Maryport. The altars had evidently been carefully buried, and the care had been rewarded with success, for their place of concealment had not been discovered for more than 1400 years. The hiding away of these altars seems to suggest that the Roman soldiers in leaving Britain foresaw the triumph of the Church over their worship, and that they desired to save from desecration the sacred implements of their own religion. However this may be, they must have seen that the power of the Church was manifestly rising, and that their own religion would not retain its hold when they themselves were gone.

Thus the Romans left a Christian Church behind them. Was it the Church of England? I have carefully abstained from calling it so, because in one important sense the title would be a misnomer: there was no such country as 'England' in those days, and therefore a 'Church of England' could not well exist. Nevertheless I would have you to observe, that there has been a Church in this country from the earliest times: and although the Church of the Britons cannot be called the Church of the English nor confounded with it, yet this early British Church was the forerunner of the Church of England, and in some important respects prepared the way for it.

England may, I suppose, be said to have become England when, in the fifth century, our ancestors, Jutes, Saxons, and Angles, arrived in Kent. The story is well known of the British inhabitants inviting these dangerous visitors to help them against their northern enemies, who had become troublesome since the departure of the Romans, and of the manner in which the visitors accepted the invitation, and, like the horse's rider in the fable, could never be got rid of afterwards. This English invasion, if I may so describe it, forms an epoch in the history of the Church, as it does in that of the State. The

Britons, speaking generally, were Christians; the new inhabitants were Pagan. The Britons, not unnaturally perhaps, but very unwisely, determined not to evangelise, not to give their spiritual treasures to, these unwelcome visitors; consequently the condition of the country became, roughly speaking, that of a people with a Christian Church to the West, whither the British population retreated, and of a pagan colony to the East, where the English fixed themselves.

And this will be, with sufficient accuracy for the purpose which I have in hand, a description of the condition of the country when the next great ecclesiastical event took place. You have often, no doubt, heard the story of Pope Gregory the Great seeing the handsome Yorkshire lads in the Roman slave-market, and upon being told that they were Angles, replying that they ought rather to be Angels. The beauty of the Yorkshire boys and Pope Gregory's wit between them gave rise to one of the most important events that ever happened to this country: it would scarcely be too much to say that they founded the Church of England. Just at the end of the sixth century Pope Gregory sent a body of missionaries, with Augustine the monk at the head of them, to convert England to Christ. I should think it

probable that when the mission was planned the information concerning the condition of the country was very imperfect: certainly very little was known at Rome concerning the principles and condition, perhaps even the existence, of the old British Church: probably also nothing was known concerning the good work which had been done by such men as St. David, St. Columba, St. Aidan, and many others. Moreover, Augustine could scarcely have expected to find that Ethelbert, king of Kent, had a Christian queen, and that she had a Christian bishop as her chaplain. In other words, if Augustine expected that he was coming to evangelise a country which knew nothing of the Gospel, he would find himself widely and very happily mistaken. Still there was plenty for him to do: the land to a great extent was pagan; it had receded, not advanced, during the preceding century in Christian character; and the English race as a whole was still waiting to be gathered into the Church of Christ.

I feel disposed to mark the arrival of Augustine in England as the commencement of the 'Church of England' properly so called. An outward symbol of this fact is to be found in the custom which still prevails at Canterbury, that on solemn

occasions the Archbishop in our own days occupies a seat traditionally known as Augustine's chair. You will perceive that there is all the difference in the world between dating the foundation of the Church of England from this epoch, and assigning this same epoch as that of the first introduction into Britain of a branch of the Church of Christ. I have already endeavoured to impress upon you, as strongly as possible, the existence, and even the flourishing, of a British Church centuries before the arrival of Augustine's mission party: and in truth the pre-existence of this British Church was in one sense a difficulty to the new missionaries, and not a help. One would have thought the fact of the land being half christianized already would have made the other half of the work much more easy: and indeed upon one solemn occasion Augustine did appeal to the British Church to join with him in bringing the English into the fold. I am sorry to say that the appeal was not heartily received; but in saying this I am far from wishing to throw all the blame of the misunderstandings between Augustine and the native Church upon the British side. There can be no question but that Augustine held his head very high, that he expected all Christianity of native growth to bow before

him, and that in cases of difference of practice between the British and Roman Church, he expected the Britons to give up that which they had received from their forefathers, and adopt in its place that which he brought from Rome. There is an interesting story told of the manner in which the British bishops determined to test the claims and the character of the new missionary. Augustine invited them to a conference; they agreed to go, and they endeavoured to test him thus:—‘If,’ said they, ‘when we come into his presence, he rises and receives us as brethren, then we shall think him a true servant of Christ; but if he treats us as inferiors, keeping his seat, and not accepting us as equals, then we shall know that he cannot be what he wishes us to believe that he is.’ Unfortunately Augustine did not give the sign of Christian humility and of Christian greatness which the British bishops desired; and though this does not prove that he was not a genuine and an earnest missionary, yet it does indicate a weakness in his character, which manifested itself not unfrequently, and which I fear must have seriously stood in the way of doing his work to perfection.

One point however of interest rises out of the dissensions and discussions between the

British Clergy and the new missionary. The existence of such dissensions shews clearly that the Church of Rome had not in those days the predominance which she subsequently acquired. One of the principal matters of dispute, which may seem small to us now, but did not seem small then, was with regard to the time of keeping Easter. I am not going to enter upon any explanation of the point; but it is clear that a Church, which held a custom concerning Easter different from the Roman, considered herself to occupy a position of independence and to owe Rome no allegiance. It is however still more important to remark, that whatever may have been the origin of the British Church and its relation to other Churches, there is no evidence of any substantial difference between it and the Church which Augustine established: they had 'one Lord, one faith, one baptism'; and it is only to be regretted that in this, as in other cases of much later date, the rulers of Christ's Church were not able to dwell upon the thousand great points of union and agreement, rather than upon the two or three smaller points of diversity—upon the weightier matters of the Gospel, rather than upon the mint, anise and cummin.

Nevertheless, Augustine did his missionary work vigorously and, in a certain sense, successfully, if not always as gently as might have been desired. He was in due time consecrated Archbishop of Canterbury, and we have an unbroken chain of archbishops from him, down to the prelate who now not unworthily occupies his place. Augustine died A.D. 604.

Supposing then the Church of England, properly so called, to date from Augustine, we have nearly thirteen centuries of history during which to mark her growth and her doings. I wish not to take you through all these centuries, which would be impossible, but to pick out some points here and there, which may help to bring before your minds a connected and coherent view of the Church, past and present.

Observe, for example, that in the seventh century—that is, the one following the mission of Augustine—we find the commencement of our present parochial system. To evangelise a country by means of missions from a centre is one thing; to settle the country under a pastorate, with churches dotted about here and there and everywhere, and with clergy attached to them, who shall conduct the worship of the people and minister to them in church and at home,—this

is quite another thing, and one which ought to follow the other. The original conception of one of our cathedrals is that of a bishop settling himself down in a convenient spot, within reach of much pagan population, accompanied by a body of missionary priests ready to do his bidding. The bishop sends these emissaries round about preaching the Gospel, and conducting worship in such buildings as can be found. By and bye this system of evangelisation has done its work, and the Christian people of the distant villages demand the residence of a priest among them. Accordingly the bishop divides off a district, and appoints one of his presbyters to go and reside there, and become the parish priest of the people of the district. This process, or something very like it, went on in the seventh century: but there was this interesting feature connected with the establishment of a parish—namely, that the great man of the district usually built the church and supplied the maintenance of the parish priest. It is impossible to say that this was the invariable process; but undoubtedly the thane or lord, as a general rule, built and endowed the church upon his estate, and so became its patron. This is the origin of our church endowments, which so far from depending upon any action of Parliament, had

in reality begun to exist before Parliament itself was born.

Perhaps I ought scarcely to say this: for in a certain form Parliament existed in very early times indeed. Our forefathers had a gathering of their chief men, which they called the *witena-gemote*, or meeting of wise men,—a better name, I cannot but believe, than *Parliament*, which means strictly a meeting at which men talk. This however by the way. I mention the *witena-gemote* because it affords an early example of what is called the *union of Church and State*. The wise men who formed the *gemote* were earls, thanes, bishops, abbots, and clergy: they all consulted for the common good, whether of Church or State; and though the condition of things is different now, and it is impossible to argue from the seventh century what may be good for the nineteenth, still it is not without interest that we trace to the highest antiquity the conjunction of the spiritual and the temporal in the legislative assemblies of England.

I was speaking however of the progress made by the Church of England in the seventh century. It is clear that it had speedily become a well organised and powerful body. As a proof I may mention that a synod was held at Hatfield, under

Archbishop Theodore, in which many admirable and businesslike canons, or ecclesiastical regulations, were made. The disputed question of Easter was set at rest; laws were passed for the regulation of bishops, monks, and priests; arrangements were made for increasing the number of bishops as the spread of the Church demanded; and all the dioceses were confederated under the Archbishop of Canterbury as Metropolitan.

I may mention also that at this period the Church of England produced some great lights. Doubtless there was much ignorance and much barbarism, but also there was much zeal for God and piety and learning. Let me remind you of just one name, that of the Venerable Bede, our great Church historian and divine: the man who died in the act of translating the Gospel of St. John into his native tongue, and who when the last sentence was written calmly gave up the ghost. It is a pretty legend which tells us that his epitaph was originally written thus—

‘Hâc sunt in fossâ Bedae ossa,’

the writer of the epitaph having failed to find an epithet exactly to his taste to fill the blank; and that having slept upon his work he found next morning the gap supplied by the word *venerabilis*, the name which Bede has ever since borne and ever

will bear. The Church of England might be proud of such a man in the seventh and eighth century ; she may be proud of him still.

While the Church was in these early days enlarging her boundaries and strengthening her position, there was also another development taking place which it is impossible to contemplate with complete satisfaction. I speak of the monastic system. I am not going to condemn monasteries without any qualification: undoubtedly they were valuable institutions in dark times; they preserved learning, they were the almoners of the poor, and they were the means of helping education in days when knowledge of all kinds was at a terrible discount. But on the other hand, they tended much to the growth of superstition, they interfered with the parochial system, they did not help much (so far as we can judge) in the religious elevation of the people, and they strengthened the hands of the Pope. I have neither time nor occasion to go deeply into this question; but I wish you to observe that the monastic system, whether good or bad, or to whatever extent it was the one or the other, was to the Church of England rather what the ivy is to the oak, than the oak itself. Monks and nuns, and, what was much worse, subsequently begging or mendi-

cant friars, abounded in England, as they did in all parts of Europe; but they were no necessary portion of the Church of England: the idea of the Church was complete without them; and when the religious houses were suppressed, as they subsequently were, the edifice of the Church as such was not shaken thereby.

Passing by this question for the present, it is impossible to deny that dark days came upon the Church of England soon after the period at which we have now arrived. There is a portion of the history of Europe which we commonly denote as emphatically 'the dark ages.' Perhaps some writers have made them to appear darker than they were; and perhaps others have been tempted to throw a halo over them as ages of faith, which is very unreal. But that darkness was over the land cannot be questioned: gross superstition reigned, ignorance abounded, pilgrimages and adoration of relics of saints and pretended miracles usurped the place of a simple Christian life, and the Pope took the opportunity of enlarging his claims and fortifying his supremacy. If I were to assert that during this dark time the Church of England was more enlightened and more active than any other Church, I should assert that which it would be difficult to prove; but

I wish you to observe that there was a Church of England all this while, and that it was in the Church of England that some of the first rays of light showed themselves when the dawn at length arrived. Nay, I can well believe that in the darkest times there was much quiet light : it was a dark time both religiously and politically when King Alfred governed the land ; but Alfred was in every way a light, and it may very well be that in a time recognised as dark there may have been much light of which the world knew nothing, and the English clergy may have been doing good work in their parishes, which God could see although the days were dark.

And so we move down the stream of the Church's history till we come to the Norman Conquest. I think it right to notice this great national event ; but I do so chiefly for the purpose of remarking that it forms no break in the history of the Church of England. The refined Normans brought in with them a refined architecture for our Churches, and several of our archbishops were of foreign importation ; but there was no discontinuity ; the Church of England was after the Conquest essentially what she had been before. In fact, nothing at all like a break in the history occurs till the period of the great event which we

know by the name of the Reformation. But it is worthy of remark, that, long before that event took place, English feeling was leading up to it in two ways.

In the first place, there was a strong anti-papal feeling in England long before the final breach with the Pope took place in the reign of Henry VIII. It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that there was a perpetual feud between England and the Pope. English kings and the English people alike were very independent in their feelings and jealous of foreign interference. Moreover they had good cause to be jealous: the Popes did not claim only a spiritual authority, but claimed patronage of abbeys and churches, and abused their patronage by nominating foreigners; and, as if for the purpose of making their interference with the affairs of the Church of England intolerable, they used what were called 'letters of provision,' or appointments made before the posts had become vacant, in virtue of which when the posts seemed to become vacant it was found that they were already filled. Moreover the Popes claimed money from the country: on some occasions as much as one-fifth of all ecclesiastical revenues was demanded; and so far as the King was concerned, it is manifest that he could not

properly govern his people, while there was a foreign potentate claiming the right of sending commands to the King's subjects, and of exercising an authority in the kingdom superior to that of the sovereign.

In the second place, the teaching of John Wycliffe in the fourteenth century, and the work which he had done in translating the New Testament into English, had to a great extent prepared the way for the great change which took place at the Reformation. I feel a pride in mentioning the name of Wycliffe, because I have Wycliffe blood in my veins, and am probably one of the nearest relatives of the great doctor still extant; but I do not entirely go with him in all that he taught; I am not surprised that some of his doctrines were thought dangerous; I think however that there can be no question that it was he, who more than any other man, when the days of religion were the darkest, kindled a new light and pointed the way in which men ought to go.

And thus we come to Reformation times. I have been endeavouring to show you that from the first planting of the Church of England, which I am content to assign to Augustine, though there was a Church of Britain centuries before, the growth of the Church has been con-

tinuous and unbroken. But now what shall we say of the Reformation?

In the first place, I think we may well confess that such an event as the Reformation is one much to be deplored. Nothing short of a question of life and death could justify the action taken by the Church and Realm of England in the sixteenth century. My belief is, that it *was* a question of life and death; and that not only the Church of England, but the Church of Rome itself, has reason to be thankful for the great convulsion. It is worth while to undergo any kind of amputation, if life can be saved.

In the next place, let us bear in mind that what was done was distinctly intended to be a reformation, and not a building of a new church. The succession of the clergy was preserved, and the same prayers and services, subject only to the worship of the Church being in English, and to the dropping of such doctrines as had manifestly been foisted upon the Church since primitive times, and such rites and ceremonies as were superstitious or unprofitable. I am not saying that everything which was done in this matter was done to perfection: few things are perfectly done in this imperfect world. But I wish you to perceive what was the purpose which the Church

had in view at the time of the Reformation ; and I would add that there is reason to believe that God's blessing was with her in carrying out her work.

Still further, I think we ought to try to divest our minds of too much thought about the part which King Henry VIII took in this business. Some years ago I was travelling in Italy with two Italian ecclesiastics. They were anxious to know why I was not in communion with the Holy Father: I replied, 'Because the Holy Father has excommunicated me.' 'Oh no,' said one of them very politely, 'the Holy Father would not excommunicate your excellence; he only excommunicated Henry VIII, because he wanted to have a number of wives.' And this is the view which a great many people take of the Reformation: they make it a question between Henry VIII and the Pope, and the Reformation has to bear the sins of that not very chaste and not very holy king. But this should not be so: the Reformation of the Church of England stands upon a deeper foundation than this.

Let me say, however, a word about Henry VIII and his doings. No doubt he *was* an instrument in the hands of Providence in bringing about a great change in this country; and perhaps

the change with which his name is more connected than anything else is the destruction of the monasteries. It was a bold thing to do: it is difficult, I think, to conceive the strength of will and firmness of purpose which enabled one man to carry through a change so opposed to the general current of feeling, and involving such a mighty social revolution. But I wish you to observe, that, so far as the Church of England was concerned, there was no indication in the destruction of the monasteries of any hostility to *her*, neither did their destruction in any way affect her religious position. I have already said that the religious houses were something like ivy upon an oak; and King Henry showed no indication of any wish to fell the oak: on the other hand he made use of some of the spoils of the monasteries to increase the number of Episcopal sees, to found Deans and Chapters, and to endow colleges of sacred learning. So far as I know Henry never pulled down or impoverished a parish church. I am not saying that he was not greedy of pelf, or that he was justified in enriching his courtiers with the spoils of abbeys, or that he was in most ways all that we could have wished him to be: but I do assert that he did nothing to break the continuity of the Church of England, or

to make her an essentially different body after his reign from what she was before it.

Sometimes you may hear it stated that the present churches and endowments were taken away from the Roman Catholics at the time of the Reformation, and were given to us Protestants. What has been already said will I trust serve to expose the fallacy of this view. The Church of England always was the Church of *England*, and not the Church of *Rome*. England had often protested against the usurpations of Rome, before the time came for her final emancipation: even after the Reformation the Pope was more than half willing to acknowledge the Church of England as a true Church, if England would have owned his supremacy. And in fact the rejection of the Roman obedience, the ceasing to agree with that community of Churches which held the Roman primacy, was the only change made in the position of the English Church with regard to those of other countries: the continuity of the Church was not affected by this: the present Archbishop of Canterbury, not Cardinal Manning, represents Augustine.

Observe that I do not deny the Reformation to have been in a certain sense a great calamity. If one can conceive the question of reformation,

which every thinking person acknowledged in the sixteenth century to be necessary, to have been taken up earnestly by the whole Western Church ; if one can imagine a General Council to have been assembled in the power of the Holy Ghost, for the purpose of examining how far the Church of the day had practically drifted from the ways of the Apostles and the primitive Church,—it is easy to picture a bright scene of errors repudiated, truth reasserted, the word of God made known with power, and all Christendom reinvigorated with a new supernatural youth. Unfortunately this was not possible: not only had doctrinal errors crept in,—mischievous errors too,—but the Pope was committed to the practice of selling indulgences and other immoral deeds, which struck at the very root of holiness, and rendered a *bonâ fide* attempt to cure the ills of Christendom quite impracticable. It is with reference to the actual condition of the Church and the world at the time, that we must form an opinion of the Reformation; and in view of the condition of things which history reveals, the thought of the Reformation being a calamity seems to me to vanish in comparison with the other thought, that, by God's good providence, the life of the Church was saved.

It was a troubled life to which the Church of

England returned after her Reformation trial. She had much to do in the way of rearrangement and readjustment: she had to settle a reformed service-book, a reformed ritual, and much had to be done in order to dispel the darkness and ignorance which had so long brooded over the land; superstitions had to be cleared away, and the Gospel preached in a manner worthy of the new effusion of light with which the Church had been blest. All this would have made the early days of the Reformation difficult and trying: but the work would have been comparatively easy, if all those who took a part in it had been animated by one heart and one soul. Unhappily this was not so. A school of divines sprang up, who were not satisfied with the sober reformation that had been effected: they wished to cut themselves free from all connection or complicity with what had gone before: everything which had touched Rome was to their apprehension defiled: the surplice was a mere rag of Popery, and the simplest form or ceremony was superstitious. There were good and earnest men no doubt in this Puritan party; but, taking a broad view of their conduct, it is difficult to estimate the mischief which they were the means of doing: they destroyed the unity of the Church's action, and terribly weakened her posi-

tion when attacked by enemies. Finally, Church divisions resulted in a terrible catastrophe: Church and Throne fell together; and for a few years the Book of Common Prayer was a proscribed book, the orders and traditions of the Church were set aside, and a new system established. In one sense this was the most calamitous period of the Church's existence since the days of Augustine: but there was this redeeming feature in her present trouble—namely, that it had been brought about by a fanatical zeal, and not by sloth or indulgence in evil. Zeal of any kind is better than death and decay: and yet it is sad to think how many scars have been left behind by those days of Puritan triumph. A restoration came, and the Church of England was placed as far as possible in the position which she occupied before: the same Book of Common Prayer, the same Orders, the same Ceremonies, the same sober principle of adhering to the truth as delivered in Holy Scripture and held in the primitive ages,—all these things the same, but yet with a soreness produced by past struggles, and with seeds of division and discord which were to germinate at once and to bear a terrible crop in due time.

People sometimes ask when the Reformation of the English Church was completed. I am dis-

posed to say that the conclusion of the Reformation may be dated from the year 1662, when our Book of Common Prayer received its last revision. If we wish to know what the Church of England is, I think we cannot study her better than as we find her in that Book. She has never swerved from the principles therein contained: you find there the picture of a Church adhering to primitive teaching, ministering the Word and Sacraments in accordance with the precepts of Holy Scripture and the practice of the early Church; with a modest ceremonial, with a power of adaptation to the simplicity of the village church or the grandeur of the cathedral,—the picture of a Church free from the corruptions of Rome on the one hand and the errors of ultra-Protestantism on the other. Is there any Church which possesses such a book of public devotion? I know not where it is to be found.

I could wish that the history of the Church of England, since the conclusion of her reformation, had been as happy and prosperous as her Book of Common Prayer is noble and good. I do not know how her history could very well have been altered, if the time had to come over again: the breath of an Englishman's nostrils is liberty, and he cannot be compelled in religious matters to do

otherwise than his conscience directs him. Other views than these at one time prevailed: it was thought that ill-instructed people were bound to follow the advice of those who knew better than themselves; a very close connection was drawn (not always without reason) between religious belief and allegiance to the Sovereign, and it was deemed not unreasonable that in certain points the law of the land should dictate to men their religious practice. Hence the ideal of a Christian state in England some two centuries ago was that of a uniform service in every Church, to which every honest man and loyal subject was to be bound to go. This conception of ecclesiastical uniformity has, as I need not say, utterly vanished; and when I observed just now that I wished the history of the Church of England had been as happy as her Prayer-book is good, I did not mean to grieve over the loss of this view of uniformity. But I do certainly grieve that the forced uniformity of other days should have been replaced by such a multiform body of sects as that which seems to exist in our own day. I have lately been examining a list of no less than 167 different sects, on behalf of whom places of worship have been certified by the Registrar General: surely this is a misfortune. I do not

say that any jealousy or ill-feeling necessarily exists amongst the sects, but surely it is at least a sad waste of power; and it is not a strong witness in favour of the truth of Christ, that there should be such diversity amongst those who call Him Lord, and whose visible unity was to be the chief means of preaching Him to the world.

However, we must take things as we find them; and what we do find is this,—the Church of England standing fast to her primitive and reformed principles as exhibited chiefly in the Book of Common Prayer, and upon one side of her a Romish hierarchy and clergy who are committed to all the errors and corruptions of doctrine upon which the Pope (now declared infallible) has unfortunately put his seal, and upon the other side of her a number of sects, all calling themselves Protestant, and differing from the Church, some in matters of doctrine, some in matters of discipline, and some in both. I say the Papists on one side, and the Protestant sects on the other; but alas! this enumeration by no means exhausts the people of England with whom we have to deal. If all were earnest Papists or earnest Protestants, the condition of things would not be so serious as it is: the real truth is, that there is a large fraction of the people who

care not for religion at all, and no inconsiderable number who expressly disavow faith of every kind and deny the very being of God.

It is with reference to all these whom I have now specified, the Papists, the Protestant Dissenters, the indifferent, the unbelievers, that I venture to represent the existence and the strength of the Church of England as being of great spiritual and national importance. Bear in mind the point which I have been endeavouring to impress upon you—namely, that the Church of England of to-day is the Church of England of the last twelve hundred years or more; in fact that there never has been any other Church of England than that to which it is your privilege and mine to belong. I have given you merely the sketch of the historical argument upon which this conclusion depends; but I announce the conclusion with much confidence, and feel sure that careful impartial study will tend to confirm it.

Let us look then at the Church of England of to-day, substantially and really that which she ever has been, but of course surrounded by circumstances peculiar to our own times.

I have no desire to use boastful language with regard to the Church of England as she now is; but I think that no one will contradict the

assertion that she is an immense power in the country, and that she is doing more good work than probably ever was done by her in any previous time. It is difficult to give evidence of spiritual and unseen things; and the real work of the Church is of course to a great extent spiritual and unseen: but it is perhaps not unfair to infer the unseen from the seen, and to conclude that when a million of pounds is spent year by year in providing and improving churches, there must be a great deal of spiritual activity corresponding to this material expenditure. Moreover, I think it is impossible for any one who is old enough to remember the last half-century, or a considerable portion of it, not to perceive that during that period there has been a manifest growth of power, growth of determination to make the Church of England, as far as may be, adequate to the wants of England. I have no desire to speak slightingly of the clergy and laity of fifty years since: there were good men then as there are now; and it would be easy to point to very remarkable signs of spiritual vitality, which manifested in those days the abiding influence of the Holy Spirit of God. But still, comparing those days with these,—and I am old enough to recollect them,—I am compelled to say that there is an

energy in the Church now, a sense of responsibility and a determination not to leave any work undone which it pertains to the Church to do, which in my judgment difference the spirit of the present altogether from that of the recent past, and give the palm beyond all manner of doubt to the days in which we are now living.

But without making any comparison between past and present, I would ask you to contemplate calmly the great spiritual and social institution which we have inherited from our ancestors, and which we call the Church of England. The Church of England as established in this kingdom means practically nothing less than this:—

You have the whole country cut up into convenient districts, in each of which are a church and a residence for a parish priest. This church is open to all; every one has a right to worship in it; while at the same time no temporal or civil evil ensues to any parishioner, who either prefers to worship in some place provided by himself, or not to worship in public at all.

The parish priest is provided for by funds to which the people are not asked to contribute; consequently there is no temptation to servility; the clergyman feels, or ought to feel, that while

his whole time and energy are secured to his people, he can minister to them independently and speak to them frankly, as a messenger from Christ, and not as their paid servant. Still further, the parish priest is not a mere missionary or preacher: he lives amongst the people and is one of them; he ministers as much or more in private houses than in the parish church. In country places he knows every man, woman, and child in the parish; he is constantly in the school; he is the educator of the whole population; he is the friend of his parishioners from the font to the death-bed.

I will not dwell upon the nature of the service which he is privileged to conduct, or upon the contents of the Book of Common Prayer; because it might be said perhaps that these need not be altered, even if the Church of England were disestablished and disendowed, as some desire that she should be: but I will just say in passing that it does seem to me to be a blessing to a country, that a service like that of the Book of Common Prayer, which really represents the best treasures of Christian antiquity, which is an embodiment of Catholic truth and is the result of so much anxious labour on the part of the English Church in bygone times,—that a service such as this should

be recognised as the utterance of the nation, and not as the prayers of one particular sect.

I may be told that I am drawing an imaginary picture. No doubt, if it be asserted that the picture which I have drawn is not everywhere to be seen, the assertion must be admitted to be true; but the question is, whether the picture can not be realised, and whether it is not frequently realised in fact. Practical defects will be found in the best institutions: even the House of Commons, of which Englishmen are so proud, has lately so creaked on its wheels that it seemed at one time probable that it would come to a standstill altogether: but no one wishes to get rid of the House of Commons; and I do not see why any one should wish to get rid of the Church of England. Get rid of it of course in one sense you cannot: no human power can destroy that which is spiritual and divine. But you may, if the nation should think fit, get rid of it as a national institution; you may say that it shall stand upon the same footing as any sect; you may confiscate its endowments, and do a great many other things, upon the exact nature of which the favourers of the great anti-Church movement do not seem to be quite agreed: but I want to know, when the revolution has taken place, who is to be the

better for it? Who is aggrieved now, that will not be aggrieved then? And will not a new grievance be established of far larger dimensions than any that exists now? Will it not be a misfortune that a secluded village should be deprived of perhaps the only educated man living within its limits? Will it be no loss to poor folks that they should cease to have a friend, who is bound by his profession, and by the very fact of his being where he is, to help them with counsel and kind words and religious ministrations in sickness and in health? It should ever be borne in mind, that the question is *not*,—What would you do in a new country, which is being settled under the conditions which exist in this nineteenth century? but rather *this*,—What will you do in an old country, which has institutions inherited from olden times, institutions valuable in themselves and bound up with the history and traditions and associations of the past?

Of one thing I feel quite sure, and I should be glad to impress my conviction upon you—namely, that if anything should occur to materially weaken or partially paralyse the strength and activity of the Church of England, it would not be the earnest simple-hearted spiritually-minded Dissenter that would have any occasion to rejoice. Wesleyans,

for example, if they be true to their principles, will not wish evil to their spiritual mother, with whom they have still so much in common. But I cannot doubt that any heavy blow dealt at and made effectual against the Church of England, would be heard of in the Vatican with such a burst of joy as has not gladdened the Pope's heart for several centuries. Taking a broad view of the matter, I cannot doubt that the Church of England is by far the most powerful witness in the world against the errors and usurpations of Rome: she, and her daughter Churches throughout the world, are a witness for primitive truth such as can nowhere else be found; and it would be a misfortune to the whole world, if England should do anything as a nation to weaken the power and influence of these Churches. And there would be joy connected with any blow struck at the Church of England in the hearts of a very different class from those who are in communion with the Pope: those, who wish to upset Christian faith and worship altogether, would undoubtedly consider that any catastrophe to the Church of England was a victory to them. It does not admit of a doubt, whether people like the fact or not, that the Church of England is by far the most powerful religious body in this country. I spoke not long

ago of 167 sects in England ; but when you add these all together, the most sanguine calculation is that they form just a majority of the population ; and there is good reason to believe that even this estimate cannot be substantiated. Giving the most favourable terms possible, however, the Church of England, as compared with any one of the sects, is manifestly a giant ; and the mere number of those in communion with her by no means measures her strength. With her open Churches, her hold upon all classes, her highly educated ministry, her Catholic basis, and her traditional standing, she has a power of spiritual influence, with which it is simply absurd to compare that of any other religious body in the country. Would there be any hesitation on the part of any of those who are so anxious to propagate unbelief, in joining to strike a heavy blow at the Church of England ? It is very well for some of our reformers to say that they have only the best interests of religion at heart in attempting to pull down the Church ; but let them bear in mind what allies they will certainly have in the work : they would do well at least to pause and consider this, before they commit themselves to the attack.

For my own part, I should feel little anxiety as to the future of the Church of England, if those

who wish her well and who are proud and thankful to call themselves her children were all of one mind, or at all events at peace amongst themselves. Unfortunately it is impossible to deny that to some extent the Church of England is a house divided against itself. Pray observe that in grieving over this view of the case I am by no means regretting the great latitude of theological opinion, which is compatible with loyalty to the English Church. It would be an evil day in which this latitude should be diminished. If the Church of England is to be in any sense national, and if she is to be a true representative of the Church of primitive times, the conditions of membership must be as simple and as broad as they can possibly be made; but the recognition of this principle does not make our internal troubles on questions of ritual and the like any the less mischievous; nor does it stand in the way of honest sorrow at the thought, that it is difficult to secure unanimity upon a variety of points with which the welfare of the Church, and of the truth committed to her keeping, is very much bound up. If the Church were as much at unity in herself as she fairly might be expected to be, and as I think she ought to be, all fear of damage being done to her from without might be safely dismissed from our thoughts.

But I find that I am running into considerations concerning the future, whereas I announced as the title of my lecture, 'The Church of England, Past and Present.' This warns me that I must stop: and yet it is impossible not to look to the future, and not to be anxious with respect to the things which it may bring forth. The future moreover is in a certain sense our own, and is bound up with the present. Concerning the past, what we have to do is to study it patiently and carefully, and try to learn from it lessons of experience, warnings and encouragements. The present is in some sense the resultant of the past: but it is still more what we ourselves make it; and in contemplating the present we are not looking upon a picture which we can study but cannot alter; we are rather looking upon a living scene in which we ourselves are the principal figures. The future of the Church, like that of all other things, has yet to be developed. I am not here to prophesy what it will be: time will show. God only knows that future now. But this we may say with certainty, that the past, if full of warning, is also full of encouragement, and that much depends upon the manner in which those who live in this present time make use of their privileges, and manfully discharge their duties. I am not

speaking the language of narrow party feeling, not uttering anything but the words of truth and soberness, when I say that in the Church of England we have received a most precious heritage, for which we are bound to offer up our thanks to Almighty God. She has seen troublous days, and in some sense her days are troublous now; she has been tried by prosperity and tried by adversity; she has survived her troubles and trials; and she is now substantially what she was more than a thousand years ago. Shall we be ashamed of her? Shall we desert her? Shall we suffer her to be crippled and maimed? God forbid! We will love her and honour her and pray God to bless her; and so we will hand on the Church of our forefathers past, and of ourselves present, as the best legacy that we can bequeath to the future of our children and of our children's children.

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