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THE
REAL CAUSES
OF
“THE PAPAL AGGRESSION”
CONSIDERED;

IN A STATEMENT RESPECTFULLY PRESENTED TO THE LORD
BISHOP OF GLOUCESTER AND BRISTOL, BY CERTAIN OF HIS
CLERGY, IN LENT, 1851.

“Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy : when I fall, I shall arise : when I sit in darkness, the LORD shall be a light unto me. I will bear the indignation of the LORD, because I have sinned against Him, until He plead my cause, and execute judgment for me.”—MIC. vii. 8, 9.

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TO THE RIGHT REV. JAMES HENRY BY DIVINE
PERMISSION LORD BISHOP OF GLOUCESTER
AND BRISTOL.

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR LORDSHIP,

WE, the undersigned clergy under your Lordship's jurisdiction, having drawn up and subscribed, for the satisfaction of our own consciences, and as an humble effort towards the deliverance of the church of England, a statement of some of the evils under which she now suffers, and which to our minds account for the high and arrogant hopes entertained by the see of Rome, desire to lay the said statement, with all dutiful respect, before your Lordship.

We have nothing at present to solicit but your fatherly sympathy; nor do we even expect any reply from your Lordship; all that we desire is to entreat your careful consideration of the facts herein set forth, facts which do not, as it appears to us, admit of any question or doubt.

For reasons of prudence and charity, it has been thought advisable that not more than a definite number of signatures should be attached

to this our statement ; nor do we know whether it will meet with the approbation of many or of few of our brethren.

We remain, always,
Your Lordship's dutiful sons and servants
in CHRIST,

Lent, 1851.

*[Signed by those of the clergy whose names were affixed
to the Statement.]*

THE REAL CAUSES OF "THE PAPAL AGGRESSION."

THE attention of the people of this country has for some time past been directed to the Bull, wherein the Pope has suddenly taken upon himself to divide England and Wales into new dioceses, over which he has set bishops of his own appointment.

We, the undersigned clergymen of the church of England, desire to lay before our spiritual father, and our brethren both of the clergy and laity, our view of some real causes of this movement of the church of Rome, many of which are deep and of long standing; and in so doing, we shall endeavour to render our statement as brief as the largeness and extreme importance of the subjects on which we have to touch, will permit.

We would observe in the first place, that the change in the Papal system in England amounts to this:

The bishop of Rome is not now, as heretofore, making a temporary provision for the spiritual oversight of those who, cleaving to him, separate themselves from the church of England, but he

is now founding among us a new church, or at least a new hierarchy, of his own creation. It would appear therefore, not that he is sanguine of the reunion of the existing church of England with his own see, (for in that view it would have been his natural course to continue this temporary provision,) but rather he believes that the national hierarchy and parochial system have so far lost their hold on the affections and the reverence of the country, that he may reasonably hope to attach our people to this new church which he is now setting up amongst us.

It cannot then be supposed that the late secessions to Rome, and the Romish tendencies still discernible in some few individuals of the clergy, and of the higher ranks of the laity, can account for this view which the Pope appears to take of our condition, nor for the measures he has in consequence adopted.

Neither again can these things be accounted for by the change made in the law in the year 1829, nor even by the systematic favour shewn by successive governments to the Roman church in Ireland and in the colonies, (although this last fact may well have led the Pope to expect no more at most than a languid and simulated resistance on the part of the civil government;) still none of these things could at all account for the fact of his regarding the English hierarchy as on the verge of extinction, or at least as inoperative

on the great 'masses' of the nation, and all but ignored by them.

No class of persons, however prepossessed against our church, could take such a view of her actual position, unless it had been in some measure true that our episcopate and parochial clergy have in fact lost that hold on the affections and respect of the people which they ought to have and which they once possessed.

And while we admit it to be highly probable that this unhappy change in the feelings of the people towards the bishops and clergy may partly arise from the general decay of the principles of religious reverence and respect for superiors, we feel it our duty openly to confess that the blame rests principally with ourselves, the parochial clergy, and with our rulers spiritual and temporal.

We have to confess and deplore the existence among ourselves, the PAROCHIAL CLERGY of the church of England, during almost a century and a half, of a lamentable degree of indifference to the sacred trust committed to us, in respect both of the preservation of the Faith in its integrity, and of the salvation of the souls committed to our charge, the purchase of Christ's Blood.

Church preferment has been too much looked upon by us as little more than a means of obtaining a comfortable livelihood. Simoniacal

transactions of various kinds have been in consequence very common amongst us, and we fear that they still continue to be practised often in indirect ways, and sometimes even openly and notoriously. The property of the church has been regarded rather as a freehold for life, than as a maintenance allowed by God to those who devote themselves to the service of His Church ; and the sacred ministry itself has been looked upon as no more than one of the “ professions,” out of which persons of a certain education and position in society have to make their choice, for occupation and maintenance. This secular spirit has begotten amongst us a sinful fear of man, shewn both towards individuals possessed of wealth and power, at whose vices or heresies we have been found too ready to connive, and still more towards large bodies of people, to whose excited passions and strong will the clergy have too often yielded, as necessarily paramount to all law.

We are convinced also that we are to blame for too great laxity in giving letters testimonial whether to candidates for orders, presentees to benefices, or persons nominated to curacies ; in consequence of which very unworthy persons have found and do still find but little difficulty in obtaining ordination or appointment to the cure of souls. Hence it is that in many cases the pastoral charge is grievously neglected, and too much of the time which “ so weighty a work”

demands, is occupied by worldly amusements or business, to the dishonour of the church, and “the hurt and hindrance” of many souls.

And although these evils have been, we are thankful to say, in some degree mitigated of late years, yet there remain still hundreds of thousands of souls, some whole parishes, (and in certain cases amply endowed parishes,) left as sheep without a shepherd, tempting, almost craving the intrusion of the Romish or Protestant dissenter.

One obvious cause for this sad state of things is the decay of ecclesiastical discipline, even of that part of it which relates to the control exercised over the teaching and the moral conduct of the parochial clergy; which decay is traceable (as it appears to us) mainly to the want of synodical action in the church. The only efforts that have been made from time to time for the partial restoration of discipline have consisted in drawing up occasionally acts of Parliament for the correction of clerks; which acts being mostly prepared by individual bishops with a view of accommodating them to the mind of secular legislators, and being often tampered with in their progress through the Houses of Parliament, have proved in the result grievously ineffective, or even in some instances have increased the evil they were intended to remedy.

At any rate it is well known that any attempt on the part of a bishop to punish one of his

clergy for viciousness of life the most scandalous and notorious, is attended with very great difficulty, expense, and uncertainty ; while we fear it is only too certain that to deprive an incumbent for false doctrine, however gross and palpable his guilt might be, would be quite hopeless, unless his error should happen to be of a kind against which popular feeling is excited ; since the court of appeal as at present constituted takes little interest in theological truth, and is far more concerned in the question whether their sentence is or is not likely to be acceptable with the people at large^a.

Another fruitful source of weakness and disunion is the want of a systematic and distinctive education for the clergy. Owing to this, we have to deplore a great want of theological learning :

^a Here we desire to refer to the recorded convictions of a statesman of eminence, the right honourable W. E. Gladstone ; who in his letter to the bishop of London on the subject of the late Gorham judgment observes in reference to the bill which the House of Lords rejected last session, though recommended by a great majority of the episcopate ;

“ None can resist the principle of your” (the bishop of London’s) “ proposal, who admit that the Church has a sphere “ of proper jurisdiction at all, or any duty beyond that of “ taking the rule of her doctrine and her practice from the “ lips of Ministers or Parliaments.”

Surely, if such be the conviction forced upon the mind of a layman, a statesman, whose attachment both to our church and to the principle of her union with the state has been undoubted ; in what light must her enemies regard the present position of the church of England, and the subjection in which she is held by the civil power ?

the teaching in many of our churches is defective, falling lamentably short of the standard set us in the Articles, Homilies, and Prayer-book, (especially in the Catechism,) and of the rule of doctrine supplied us by "Catholic fathers and ancient bishops." A very small proportion of our people, we fear, are at all carefully instructed even in the great and distinctive doctrines of the Christian Faith, such as that of the HOLY TRINITY, and the Incarnation and Mediatorial Acts of the Son of God.

In some churches the Creed of St. Athanasius is seldom or never heard, and in many more we fear that sermons follow the Nicene Creed which can scarcely be reconciled with the plain statements of doctrine contained in that Creed.

It is not too much to say that in many of our churches Divine Service has become a mere formal act, which both clergy and laity are content to perform as seldom as may be, and then to hurry it over, or to go through it with a careless and even contemptuous disregard for the injunctions of our ritual, and sometimes even of the common principles of decency and order. This irreverent formalism has we believe tended more than any thing to beget in the minds of the people a contempt for the clergy, for the Prayer-book, and we must add, even for God's Word and Sacraments.

This is surely matter for humiliation and re-

penitance, and the late contemptuous intrusion of our enemies ought to move us all to a careful amendment. May our merciful God grant us this amendment before it is too late !

And we who have ventured to subscribe our names to this declaration deeply feel, and here desire to acknowledge unreservedly before our bishop and the whole Church, for ourselves in particular, that we, at least, have great need of this amendment, as having been in our own persons partakers of these sins and negligences. For who can look back upon the time he has spent in the work of the ministry, without perceiving that his own deficiency in zeal and self-devotion, in watchfulness and personal holiness, and even in heedful obedience to the Church, has greatly tended to lower the authority of her ministry in the minds of her people, to weaken her influence in the conversion of souls, and to open the door not only to Romanism and other forms of error, but even to profaneness, unbelief, and ungodliness of life ?

When from the parochial clergy we turn to the CATHEDRALS, we see institutions whose value to the church might be indeed inestimable. For they might supply us with schools of theology for training up future ministers ; they might enable and encourage us to pursue one harmonious method in the management of our parochial

schools, whether for the middle or for the lower classes ; but especially they might furnish the whole diocese with a standard of orthodox preaching, and a model for the celebration of Divine Service.

But which of these ends can we say has been attained ? The daily Service has indeed been kept up in the cathedrals during the time when in parochial churches it had become nearly extinct ; and this is undoubtedly a cause for thankfulness.

But it is matter of notoriety that the deans and canons are often grievously negligent even in their own personal attendance at the week-day services, leaving them to subordinate ministers ; and so far from taking pains to maintain the decency and the beauty of the choral Service, they are sometimes found forward to repress any attempt that is made to restore it to its ancient efficiency.

It is not difficult to account for the existence of these evils ; the deaneries and a large proportion of canonries (being in the gift of the government of the day) are generally bestowed with a view to parliamentary or political interest ; sometimes as a reward for classical learning, or scientific discoveries ; but always, as we may say, without any consideration whatever of the fitness of the person appointed for the *special* duties which he has to perform ; a mode of acting on the part of our rulers which would not be tolerated in

any department of state whether military or civil ; but which has been for years habitually followed in the dispensing of cathedral preferment.

In consequence, instead of being councils for the bishops, and models for the parochial clergy, the deans and chapters stand in a position disjointed both from the one and the other, impeding rather than assisting them in their work. To see such noble, such glorious institutions made useless, and even a dishonour to the church, this is of itself a temptation to the intruder.

We must seem to him, to be giving up some of our chief advantages, nay turning them into an expensive and useless machine, a disgrace and a clog to us ^b.

^b In a letter from the right honourable Sidney Herbert to the late dean of Salisbury may be found the impression naturally made on the mind of a zealous, faithful and intelligent layman of the church of England by the present state of our cathedral establishments.

We extract from it only two sentences.

“How much of the present diversity of doctrine would have been avoided, had there been in every diocese real centres of learning and authority at which the parochial clergy would have themselves been trained, and to whom in after life, habit would have taught them to defer ! To the insufficiency of the episcopate, and the inefficiency of the chapters may be attributed in no slight degree those divisions, often upon the most ordinary matters of form, which have been not only an injury to the church but a scandal to religion.”

“They (the chapter clergy) saunter about their cathedral closes, a spectacle, which delights the eyes of every enemy to the church, and affords a point and an epigram for every attack on her discipline.”

When from the whole body of inferior clergy, we proceed to the BISHOPS, to those who sit in the seats of the Apostles, we have first to thank God for various instances of single-hearted generosity and fatherly kindness in many members of the episcopal body, and in him in particular, under whom God's Providence has placed us. We have to acknowledge with gratitude the assistance and guidance which the bishops have afforded to the efforts lately made to increase the number of churches, schools, and parochial clergy, so as to make them in some degree more adequate to the wants of a rapidly increasing population.

At the same time we are bound to confess there is much truth in the sneer of a well-known liberal historian, that if our episcopate were destroyed, the mass of the people in the country would scarcely be conscious of its disappearance. One reason for this is that the number of the bishops is wholly inadequate; so that their personal visitation of the parishes under their charge, which the due exercise of the episcopal function plainly requires, has become in a great measure impracticable. And it should be observed that the late changes in the arrangement of dioceses, though they have made the evil less enormous in some parts of the country, have nevertheless had the effect of diffusing that evil over the whole kingdom.

And yet churchmen dare not ask for an in-

crease in the episcopate, because they feel and know that the absolute nomination to this most sacred office in the Church is more or less in the hands of those who are hostile alike to her faith, and to her discipline.

The evil of government appointments to the episcopal office has of late years been greatly aggravated :

First, because not only the election but the confirmation of bishops is now authoritatively treated as a delusive ceremony, “ a sham,” and “ a shadow^c.”

And secondly, because the tradition of an habitual deference to the opinion and wishes of the church at large^d, which had been more or less maintained throughout the reign of George III., and even to the end of the Duke of Wellington’s administration, has been gradually set aside ; indeed the fact that a man is obnoxious to churchmen in general has now become a motive for selecting him to fill the office of a bishop. In one or two deplorable cases it is hardly possible to believe there was any other.

Under these circumstances great evils have naturally arisen from the want of confidence between many of the bishops and their clergy ; while from the middle classes and from Christ’s poor the overseers of His flock are so utterly

^c Jebb’s “ Report of the case of Dr. Hampden,” pp. 384—7.

^d See *British Magazine*, vol. xi. p. 139. et seq.

separated, that their very existence has really in many instances become a matter of faith.

A large proportion of the bishops are living at a distance from their cathedrals and their cathedral cities, mixing almost exclusively with persons of rank or wealth, overwhelmed with secular business, spending a considerable part of the year out of their dioceses in attendance at the House of Lords ; and while their work is at times more than human strength can well bear, it is only a part of it that really relates to the cure of souls under their charge.

Confirmation is not much more frequent now than as required by the canon of 1603 ; though the population is probably at least four times as great, and in consequence a large proportion of the professed members of our church are never admitted to an ordinance which is numbered by the Apostle among the fundamentals of Christianity^e ; and some of the Confirmations are necessarily so crowded, so disorderly, and so hurried, that there must be much in them to pain all reverent minds, and to give great offence (as we fear) to Almighty God.

The Visitations have lost almost every thing that used to give them a religious character. Presentments for heinous and notorious sins are rarely made or enquired after ; the bishop and clergy meet and separate without partaking of

^e Heb. vi. 1.

that spiritual Food which should be the great bond of union ; in the sermons and charges very seldom do we find any reproof of popular errors or prevailing vices ; though bitter and uncharitable language is too often used in assailing whatever is opposed to the favourite opinions of the day.

Of the candidates for holy orders, bishops in the present day can have but little or no personal knowledge. In but few cases they venture to reject for false doctrine, unless it be also unpopular. Indeed, if any bishop attempts to maintain the due standard of orthodoxy, those who are refused ordination by him, will seek and obtain it at the hands of other prelates ; so that we fear that it would not be found difficult for any heretic, who was not absolutely a Socinian, to obtain ordination in our church in these days.

Another evil, the notoriety of which must have given great encouragement to our adversaries, is to be found in the lamentable divisions in our episcopate.

We need but advert to the fact that when a bishop ventured to require of one of his clergy before institution to a benefice, a simple and real acceptance of the doctrine contained in the Nicene Creed and in the Prayer-book, the suffragan found himself in the result compelled to renounce communion with his metropolitan ; and the church of England is thus placed, by an act

of her own Primate, in a condition unparalleled in her history for more than 600 years.

One evil effect of this disjointed state of the episcopate is that in different dioceses wholly different interpretations of the rubric are enforced by the bishops; or rather, while in some few a conscientious observance of the rules of the Prayer-book is encouraged, in others the clergy are not only permitted, but in some cases enjoined to disregard at one time the written injunctions, at another the immemorial usages of our church. For some of our bishops, we grieve to observe, assume to themselves not merely the right of interpretation in doubtful cases, (which the Church does really allow them,) but a power to set aside her undoubted rules on grounds of expediency; so that instead of "the whole realm having but one use," we are in danger of having as many rituals as dioceses, while in each particular diocese the ritual will be made to vary from time to time according to the private judgment or will of each successive bishop; unless indeed an entire laxity and indifference to the order of public worship should be brought in and prevail, as the only escape left from these confusions and difficulties.

However, when we look to the motives which the ministers of the crown for some years past are known to have had in view in the selection of bishops, and in the virtual suppression of the

church's voice both in their election and their confirmation ; when we recollect that we have seen a bishop who was neither lawfully elected nor canonically confirmed, consecrated by the present archbishop of Canterbury on the express ground (for so it was, with good reason, generally understood) that he *must* consecrate whomsoever the government of the day should appoint ; we feel that we have great reason for thankfulness to Almighty God, who in His mercy to us has yet ordered that many of our bishops should be earnest and zealous in advancing, according to their views, the welfare of the souls under their charge, and that a few yet remain desirous to preserve the ancient faith and discipline of the Church.

On the whole, then, it can be no matter of wonder that the Pope should think that the hour has arrived for him to plant his standard again in this country with good hope of success, when he sees the church of England (the only body that can offer to his claims a resistance founded alike on ancient possession, and a more real adherence to Scripture and to antiquity) in the relentless grasp of a latitudinarian government ; having bishops forced upon her, whose doctrine she is bound to “hate^f,”—deprived of all power of defining what

^f Rev. ii. 6.

the teaching of her own ministers ought to be, —having the children of the poor, the lambs of Christ, so far as is possible, taken from her to be brought up in an indifference to religious truth,—debarred from the exercise of that spiritual discipline, which she herself declares to be essential to her well-being,—not allowed to withhold her sacred ordinances, no, not even the communion of her Lord's Body and Blood (except under severe penalties) even from the notorious profligate or the avowed unbeliever;—and lastly forbidden, (in spite of the royal promise prefixed to the articles,) to make any attempt in convocation to settle the differences that distract her, to remove the evils that oppress her, to reaffirm the articles of the Christian faith which have been impugned, or even to complain of the grievances under which she labours.

It appears to us no more than natural that Rome, seeing our church thus held in chains and prevented from putting forth the energy which God hath given her, should think that her own time is come, when she may step in and usurp that office, (which the state so far as it can, is forbidding the church of England to fulfil,) namely, to be the witness and depository of God's truth, and the guide of souls to their eternal rest.

In conclusion we desire solemnly and distinctly to declare that while thus deploring the evils that

exist in our own church, we have no wish to exaggerate them, or to forget that other churches are suffering under other and greater evils.

We believe that the church of England has neither added to the truth of God, nor taken from it; and that if she were but allowed to carry out the principles of her formularies, she would present to the world, a real (though it may be an imperfect) likeness of the Primitive Church, as it first rose into life at the descent of the Holy Ghost; a more real likeness of it, we would venture to affirm, than (with one exception[§]) any church now existing on earth.

How deplorable then, that she should be thus held in fetters, while an alien and corrupt communion is thereby enabled to occupy her rightful heritage! the Roman church resolutely and successfully maintaining her freedom in all essentials both of doctrine and discipline,—that freedom which is withheld indeed from the church of England alone, whilst the wildest forms of heresy, and even scepticism and atheism, are allowed to spread themselves without restraint throughout the land.

If there be any of our brethren, whether of the clergy or laity, with whom our voice has

[§] Bishop Horsley's saying is well known, 'that if St. Paul were on earth, he would doubtless prefer the Scotch church to all other.'

any influence, we would solemnly entreat them to be instant in prayers day and night for the emancipation of the church ; and careful to search out, and repent of those sins which have moved Almighty God to inflict upon us a mark of His displeasure, so grievous, and so fearfully degrading, as the tyranny which now oppresses us. And in these things we trust even those amongst us who appear to differ one from another may find a bond of union. For whilst we sorrowfully confess that our dissensions, on some matters and in some cases, touch the very substance and vitals of the faith, we thankfully declare our belief that there is much misunderstanding amongst churchmen with respect to each other's views and language, which dispassionate explanation and charitable intercourse might remove. At any rate we are sure that earnest unceasing prayer, and real amendment of life and heart, will, by God's blessing, engender in us such a true, deep-rooted, and loving zeal for the purity and integrity of our Faith, as will bring us in His good time to truth, to unity, and to freedom. And then we need fear no "aggression" FROM ANY QUARTER.

[Here followed the signatures of twenty-four of the clergy.]

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