

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

ART. VIII.—THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CHURCH
OF IRELAND.

The Constitution of the Church of Ireland. Edited by
W. G. BROOKE, M.A. Dublin: G. Herbert. 1879.

THIS work fills up a gap which must otherwise have existed in the minds of most Englishmen with regard to the condition of the sister Church. At least, we do not know of any other work which exactly supplies its place; it deserves, therefore, a warm reception at the hands of the English public, if, as we must charitably hope, they still take an interest in the well-being of the Irish Episcopalian Church. It is true, indeed, that she is now no longer (as formerly) "bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh;" but the mere fact that she once belonged to us, and that she still retains the forms and doctrines of our Church, ought to endear her to us, and to make us anxious for her welfare. What her future will be, time only can decide for certain; but it is allowable to form conjecture on the subject from the data with which the work before us supplies.

And this is all that we can undertake on the present occasion.

The truth is proverbially hard to discover, and doubly so in Ireland. It is a well-known saying of Archbishop Whately's, that the information with which an Englishman is generally supplied, when he visits Ireland, about the condition of that country, is like the prospect of it when viewed from an Irish jaunting-car, differing according to the side on which you happen to sit, and of course, therefore, only a partial view.

This is, in a measure, true of most countries; the information we receive respecting their condition must more or less take its colour from the mind of the informer, however veracious he may intend to be. But in Ireland this liability is stronger, because party spirit runs so high in that country. And as regards the particular question of the Irish Church, the mortification which was felt by almost every member of it, when its disestablishment and disendowment were decided on, was so deep and so bitter, that it may fairly be doubted whether many of them are even now fair judges as to the manner in which the present system works. Besides, even supposing them to be unbiassed on the subject, in a large question like the present men are likely to form a hasty decision, founded on their own limited experience.

These considerations should make us suspend our judgment, at least for some years; and indeed in any case, even supposing

our information to be strictly correct, we cannot argue from the past as to what the future will be. At present the Church in Ireland labours under certain difficulties which time will remove. It is not in the position of a Church which has never had an establishment. It is like a child who has been used to being carried in arms, and has been only lately set to walk on its legs. It has the double disadvantage of having to learn and to unlearn. We must wait and see how things will work when these disadvantages have been removed by time. But we have ample opportunities now afforded us of making some conjectures on this subject by the work before us. The matter contained there, suggests reflections on a great many important subjects; but we content ourselves at present with noting certain points in the new code for the regulation of the Irish Church, which appear to us likely to tend very much to her advantage.

At the same time, we wish it to be distinctly understood that we are not expressing any opinion as to the expediency of dis-establishment, a subject which we do not wish to discuss here. That measure, whether expedient or not, has been passed, and will never be recalled, and therefore it behoves us now to try, as far as it is possible, to look on the hopeful side of a state of things which is settled.

And there certainly are some grounds for hope. The work before us contains the complete code for the legislation of the Irish Church (except revision statutes) for the ten years from the passing of the Irish Church Act, 1869. How this code was formed the following extract from the preface will show:—"The code was prepared by a committee first appointed by the General Synod in 1877, and consisting of the Lord Bishop of Cork (R. S. Gregg, D.D.), chairman; Lord Justice Fitzgibbon, Rev. R. W. Dixon, D.D., Rev. Canon Henry C. Jellett, Rev. Canon J. G. Scott, Edward Pennefather, Q.C., and W. J. Brooke, hon. sec."

The first schedule contains a declaration of what was determined on by the general convention of the Archbishops and Bishops of the Church of Ireland, together with the representatives of the clergy and laity of the same. They begin by a solemn declaration that they are "the ANCIENT Catholic and Apostolic Church of Ireland." This appeal to their antiquity is important to keep in mind, for it is strictly true, and too often lost sight of. They then express their intention of securing and approving the book of the Articles of the Church of England and also of the Book of Common Prayer adhering to the use of the Church of Ireland as approved and adopted by the Synod held in A.D. 1662, only reserving to themselves the right of making such alterations as may appear fit from time to

time by the lawful authority of the Church. This last proviso is not unimportant, as it does not leave the Church in a stationary position, but introduces into the government of it an element of change, and, it is to be hoped, of reform, if such be found necessary; but there is also another element introduced which strongly deserves our notice. It is mentioned in page 5, sec. iv. We will quote the words of the schedule:—"The Church of Ireland, deriving its authority from Christ, who is head over all things to the Church, doth declare that a General Synod of the Church of Ireland, consisting of the Archbishops and Bishops and the representatives of the clergy and *laity*, shall have chief legislative power therein, and such administrative power as may be necessary for the Church and consistent with its episcopal constitution."

What we think particularly important in this declaration is, that it announces the introduction of a lay element into the government of the Church of Ireland. It is much to be wished that our English Church could imitate her in this respect. Our laity have too little regular official posts in the Church. Some people (we are aware) think that the Irish Church has gone too far in this direction. They consider that the lay element in her Synod is, proportionately, too large. This, of course, is a questionable point; but that the deliberative body in the Irish Church were right in admitting the laity officially into their deliberations on Church matters, there can be, or ought to be, no question; for such was the practice of the early Church in the apostolic ages, as any one who reads the Acts of the Apostles with moderate attention can hardly fail to see—*e.g.*, see Acts vi. 2-5. But, independently of this testimony, we may see that there are many advantages in lay co-operation. In the first place, there is generally a more decidedly Protestant feeling in the laity than there is in the clergy; in the highest classes this may not be altogether the case, but certainly it is so in the middle, as well as the lower classes, and these form the bulk of the nation. Then, again, the laity are considered (and rightly so) as, generally speaking, better men of business than the clergy; as, indeed, might antecedently be expected, for they are more trained in habits of business. Then, again, the mere fact of their having some share in the government of the Church is likely to attach them to her, and to render them less liable to go into Dissent than they would otherwise be. Indeed, the love of holding an important and responsible position in the Church to which they belong, has, in many cases, led to Dissent. This feeling, when displayed in such a manner, is perhaps an unworthy one. Still it exists in human nature, and it is well that it should be directed into a safe and useful channel. And certainly it has been said, whether truly or not

we cannot tell, that, since the disestablishment, Plymouth Brethrenism has been less on the increase in Ireland. If so, this is a confirmation of our theory.

On the whole, when we look at the state of our sister Church, we see some things for which we pity her, and others in which we might well envy her position. Certainly a regular systematic Church government is a great want in our Church, though whether disestablishment be not too heavy a price to pay for such an advantage may fairly be questioned. But the fact that such an institution has been set on foot in Ireland would seem to be a step in the right direction, if we could be sure that it would work without much let or hindrance, especially as the framers of it have not bound themselves to reject any improvements in their system which may seem reasonable. The hindrances which arise from the novelty of the thing, time is likely to cover.

There is, however, another hindrance, which appears at first sight to be less surmountable—the fact that the Irish Church (like the English, though perhaps less so than she) is composed of heterogeneous elements, which may prevent the members of it from working in harmony.

It was predicted, before the disestablishment, that this would operate as a hindrance. How far it has done so we cannot exactly say, but it seems that even this difficulty is likely to be much lessened as time goes on. The mass of the Irish nominal Protestants are in favour of what is really Protestant in doctrine and practice. Consequently, the most important clerical appointments have, as far as we know, been given to men whose opinions tended in that direction. Possibly, therefore, eventually the unanimity of sentiment in the Church of Ireland may become more universal. There is, moreover, one thing which we and all Evangelical Christians must rejoice in, and that is that the power to put down any practices which savour of Romanism is now as strong as the will. That which *we* can only effect with great labour and expense through the instrumentality of the Church Association, or Public Worship Act, can in Ireland be effected more expeditiously and more satisfactorily by means of the Synod. It will be seen, also, by Canons 34, 36, and some others, that certain ornaments and usages are now forbidden in the Church of Ireland which are allowed in our Church, but which, savouring as they do of Popery, are much better excluded.

Then, again, the system of patronage which now exists in the Irish Church is better than ours. Preferments are more likely to be impartially bestowed when patronage is in the hands, not of individuals who are naturally anxious to advance their own friends or relations, but of the members of a Synod, with whom,

of course, individual interests cannot operate so strongly, because those interests, being different, neutralise one another.

How appointments to cures of souls are made will be seen by canon 8, page 39, which we will quote :—

When a vacancy in a Cure of Souls shall occur, the Committee of Patronage of the Diocese, with the Parochial Nominators of the Cure so vacant, shall form a Board of Nomination, presided over, *ex-officio*, by the Bishop, if present, who shall have an independent vote, and also a casting vote. Provided that no person shall act, or be capable of acting, as Diocesan Nominator with respect to any parish of which he shall be at the time a Parochial Nominator. But the Bishop shall summon in his place, to act as Diocesan Nominator, for filling such vacancy, the person whose name stands first on the Supplemental List.

Such, then, are some of the advantages which lead us to be hopeful as regards the future of the Irish Church. There are, probably, to counterbalance them, disadvantages, some of them arising out of the new system there. If we were on the spot, we should perhaps have the opportunity of observing. Some disadvantages there are, also, incident to disestablishment and disendowment, and for which, of course, the Irish Synod is not responsible. Some of these we could mention, but had rather take the hopeful side of the subject, the more especially as the last-mentioned evils are irremediable. In every case, however, all true Christians in the Irish Church ought to have this topic of consolation, in that God, who works good out of evil, will certainly not desert His own people, and that the depression and adversity of their beloved Church may be the means of purifying her. Her position, in a worldly point of view, is certainly lowered by the disestablishment, and her funds by the disendowment, but her spiritual condition may eventually be raised and purified by these reverses.

We cannot conclude without bearing testimony to the able and skilful manner in which Mr. Brooke has accomplished his difficult task, by which he has rendered valuable service both to his own Church and her friends and sympathisers in England.

E. W. WHATELY.

ART. IX.—THE CHILDLIKE SPIRIT.

Thoughts suggested by St. Mark x. 13, 16.

WE can hardly have failed to notice the touching patience which our Lord manifested in His treatment of the disciples. Stupid men these disciples were not—on the contrary, all