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ON THE RIGHT USE
OF
THE EARLY FATHERS.

FIRST SERIES.

LECTURE I.

The study of the early Fathers recommended. Their testimony appealed to by the Church of England in the Prayer Book, in the Articles, in the Canons; and by the Reformers, *e. g.* Jewel, Philpot, Grindal. Decline of reverence for antiquity at the period of the Rebellion. Milton. Effect of the Revolution. Influence of foreign Reformers. Treatises of Dailé and Barbeyrac.

I DO not think that I shall be employing my time or yours ill, if I call your attention in a Course of Lectures to the *right* use of the *early* Fathers and the force of the objections made against them. It is true that when on former occasions I have produced an analysis of them successively, I have not lost sight of this object; and having completed the abstract of each, I have briefly shown the purposes such Father might serve, and the questions he might be made to illustrate. I have reason to hope that a more correct estimate of the merits and defects of these primitive authors has been formed, or is in the course of formation, amongst many of the younger students of this place. Still I cannot but observe, in mixing with society in the country, that the amount of real knowledge on this subject generally dispersed is very small—very small even amongst the clergy themselves—and the smallest

of all amongst such of them as deal in the loudest declamation against patristic authority, a subject still much misunderstood, and regarded with a jealousy altogether unreasonable.

Now whatever may be the case with the Protestant Churches on the Continent, nothing can be clearer than that the Reformed Church of England does refer her members very constantly to these Fathers; does make her appeals to them with great confidence; that Isaac Casaubon, in writing to Salmasius, Ep. 837, a passage quoted by Dr. Wordsworth in his very valuable *Theophilus Anglicanus*,¹ has reason to say, “*Si me conjectura non fallit, totius Reformationis pars integerrima est in Angliâ, ubi cum studio veritatis viget studium antiquitatis.*” So that to treat them with contempt, which so many, and those even ministers of her communion do, is to act as much in violation of the spirit of that Church as others are represented by them to do, whose bias lies in another direction. I made this appear, some time ago, in two introductory Lectures to the study of the Fathers, which I published, as well as since, in many incidental remarks which have fallen from me in the course of my Lectures themselves. Without, therefore, repeating at full all the details I may have put you already in possession of, I shall still think it best to remind you, at the opening of this present series, of a few of the more undeniable tokens of this characteristic of our Church, her respect for antiquity, in order to justify myself in making the right use of the early Fathers, and the consideration due to the objections levelled at them, the express argument of a Course of Lectures; in order to show that in thus employing myself and you, I am acting strictly in accordance with the instructions she gives me, as a Professor in her schools; and in order to vindicate our own University (if vindication she wants) in causing the Fathers to be an element in the theological examination to which she now invites those amongst her students who have an intention of entering into Holy Orders.

You will find our Church, then, explaining the principles on which her Prayer Book is constructed, in the preface to it, in the following language:—First of all she remarks that “there was never anything by the wit of man so well devised, or so sure established, which in continuance of time hath not

¹ Part II. ch. v.

been corrupted: as, among other things, it may plainly appear by the Common Prayers in the Church, commonly called Divine Service. The first original and ground whereof, if a man would search out by the ancient Fathers, he shall find that the same was not ordained but of a good purpose, and for a great advancement of godliness." She then goes on to lament that for "these many years passed," (*i. e.* in Romish times) "this godly and decent order of the ancient Fathers hath been altered, broken, and neglected, by planting in uncertain stories and legends, with multitude of responds, verses, vain repetitions," &c. She then proceeds to announce that these inconveniences having been considered, "such an Order" (in the Common Prayer Book) was "set forth, whereby the same" were "redressed." And she concludes with recommending her Prayer Book as "an Order for Prayer, and for the reading of the Holy Scripture, much agreeable to the mind and purpose of the old Fathers, and a great deal more profitable and commodious, than that which of late was used." Such is the spirit in which our Prayer Book was compiled; and if you examine it in detail, you will perceive at once how very large a part, both of its liturgy and ceremonial—how many of its prayers and hymns—how much of its creeds—how great a proportion of its sacramental offices and rules—it owes to early antiquity.

The Articles, as not deriving their original construction from the same primitive date, but begun and perfected during the period of the Reformation itself, have naturally less of this primitive complexion, and consequently find greater favour than the Liturgy in the eyes of those who would have been better pleased, had our Reformation proceeded upon principles of more extreme Protestantism, and who would, therefore, be ready to adopt the Articles, and the Articles only, as the test of heresy; thus disintegrating the Prayer Book, and deposing the authority of that portion of it which, if any comparison is to be instituted between the several parts, certainly occupies the more direct channel of primitive tradition. It will be perceived, however, that though not formed expressly out of ancient models, they are to a very great degree consistent with ancient patristical precedent, and have been shown to correspond in the main, both in sentiment and phraseology, with the writings of the Primitive Church, both by Bishop

Beveridge in his notes on his Exposition of the Articles; by Welchman; more recently and more fully by Mr. Harvey¹; and still more recently by Mr. Browne.² Nor, indeed, does the language itself of the Articles fail, occasionally at least, to point to this fact; sufficiently often, at any rate, to show that their compilers were not under the impression which now prevails among so many, that those writings are but dangerous edge-tools. Thus, in the 6th Article, we read of the "Canonical Books of the Old and New Testament," being those "of whose authority there was never any doubt in the Church;" of the Church reading "other books (as *Hierome* saith) for example of life and instruction of manners." In the 24th, of its being "repugnant to the Word of God, and the custom of the Primitive Church to have public Prayer in the Church, or to minister the Sacraments in a tongue not understood of the people." In the 35th, of the Books of the Homilies containing "a godly and wholesome doctrine, and necessary for these times," the very plan of which Books of Homilies, be it remembered, from first to last, is to argue by appeals first to Scripture and then to the Fathers. It would be waste of time to give proofs of this. Such is the spirit of the Articles.

No wonder, therefore, that in the canons of 1571, it should be enjoined on preachers, "Concionatores," "First and foremost to take heed, that they do not teach anything in their sermons as though they would have it scrupulously held and believed by the people, save what is agreeable to the doctrine of the Old and New Testament, and what the Catholic Fathers and ancient Bishops have gathered from that doctrine." Or that the Bishop in the Ordination Service for Priests, is instructed to inquire of the candidate who presents himself for imposition of hands, whether he will "be diligent in Prayers, and in reading of the Holy Scriptures, and in such studies as help to the knowledge of the same"—what studies do help to such knowledge in the estimation of the Church being made sufficiently manifest by the canon just recited, which may be taken, indeed, as a comment on the Bishop's question. For though these canons may not be technically binding, howbeit subscribed by the Bishops of both provinces, and approved by

¹ *Ecclesiæ Anglicanæ Vindex Catholicus. Cantabrigiæ, m.dccc.xli.*

² *An Exposition of the Thirty-nine*

Articles, by Edw. Harold Browne, M.A., 1850.

the Queen, but as it happened not ratified by her in form¹; yet as coming out in the very year, 1571, when the Book of Articles was again solemnly approved by the Queen and Convocation, they may well be used to interpret the animus of the Church.

And as if the Church would herself, by her own authoritative teaching, give her ministers an example of the manner in which the knowledge of the primitive Fathers would enable them to maintain her cause against her enemies and gainsayers, and the way in which she would have it applied by them, she proposes in her 30th Canon to 'defend the use of the Cross in Baptism, alleging, amongst other arguments, that "the honour and dignity of the name of the Cross begat a reverend estimation even in the Apostles' times (for aught that is known to the contrary) of the sign of the Cross, which the Christians shortly after used in all their actions;" that they "signed therewith their children when they were christened, to dedicate them by that badge to his service, whose benefits bestowed upon them in Baptism the name of the Cross did represent;" that "this use of the sign of the Cross in Baptism was held in the Primitive Church, as well by the Greeks as the Latins, with one consent and great applause;" that if at that time "any had opposed themselves against it, they would certainly have been censured as enemies of the name of the Cross, and consequently of Christ's merits, the sign whereof they could no better endure;" that "this continual and general use of the sign of the Cross is evident by many testimonies of the ancient Fathers." And then, from the particular case under consideration passing on to the general principle, the canon continues, that "it must be confessed, that in process of time the sign of the Cross was greatly abused in the Church of Rome, especially after that corruption of popery had once possessed it;" but that "the abuse of a thing doth not take away the lawful use of it. Nay, so far was it from the purpose of the Church of England to forsake and reject the Churches of Italy, France, Spain, Germany, or any such like Churches, in all things which they held and practised, that, as the Apology of the Church of England confesseth, it doth with reverence retain those ceremonies, which do neither endamage the Church of God, nor offend the minds

¹ Grindal's Remains, edited for the Parker Society, p. 327.

of sober men ; and only departed from them in those particular points, wherein they were fallen both from themselves in their ancient integrity, and from the Apostolical Churches, which were their first founders." And then reverting to the case which gave rise to these general remarks, the use of the Cross in Baptism, the canon proceeds, that accordingly, "for the very remembrance of the Cross, which is very precious to all them that rightly believe in Jesus Christ, and in the other respects mentioned, the Church of England hath retained still the sign of it in Baptism : following therein the Primitive and Apostolical Churches ;" that "the use of the sign of the Cross in Baptism, being thus purged from all popish superstition and error, and reduced in the Church of England to the primary institution of it, upon those true rules of doctrine concerning things indifferent, which are consonant to the Word of God, and the judgment of all the *ancient Fathers*," it is "the part of every private man, both minister and other, reverently to retain the true use of it prescribed by public authority."

I have given the substance of this canon at greater length, as considering it a fair specimen of the line of argument which our Church suggests as the safe and judicious one for her ministers to take in dealing with popish antagonists, and as giving evidence of the impression she wishes her members to receive with respect to the principles of the Reformation, and the spirit with which she desires to animate them.

Accordingly, if you look at Jewel (to whose Apology you see this very canon refers, affording it, as it were, an indirect sanction), you will perceive throughout the work this same characteristic of the Reformation, a reverence for antiquity—his argument, the whole Apology through, adverting to the Primitive Church, to Scripture and the testimony of the Catholic Fathers, to the witness of the ancient Fathers and ancient Councils, to the model of primitive times, to the Church of the old Catholic Bishops and Fathers, for so continual are his allusions to this topic, that he has to ring all the changes he can think of on the terms, in order to relieve his style. Nor is there anything singular in the instance of Jewel. The reverence for antiquity is a feature, more or less marked, of the temperament of almost every member of the Church of England of that day, of whom we know anything at all. How, indeed, could it be otherwise ? It was an inheritance to which

they succeeded. Instead of turning, as we do in these days, to a contemporary commentator, or to one who has not preceded us by more than a few generations, to a Hammond, a Patrick, a Whitby, a Henry, or a Scott; they as naturally took from their shelves an Augustine or a Jerome, a Basil or a Chrysostom, or some catena collected out of the works of these or other authors of a like date. Did they want a form of prayer? Instead of devising one for themselves, they betook themselves to the old liturgies, and based their own upon those. All the controversies that took place at the Reformation, and long afterwards, are deeply involved in the investigation of antiquity—it was a line of debate which none shrank from. It is a spirit foreign to that of the Reformation, and one that has sprung up since the Reformation, or at least which has gathered all its strength since that event, which is regardless of antiquity—a spirit which various causes have served to foster, which I may touch upon by and by—but as a practical and easy way of convincing yourselves that I am not misrepresenting the Reformers, turn to the series of works edited by the Parker Society, edited, no doubt, from a feeling that it was time, as it indeed was, to draw the country back to the contemplation of the sentiments of the Reformers, and so provide a caveat against the supposed increasing allurements of Rome. Is it then found, that because those Reformers resisted the Pope, and the abuses of the Church over which he presided, even to the death, they flinched from the test of antiquity? That they set themselves to disparage and vilify the Fathers, who are the witnesses of it? If any expected to discover this in them, they must by this time have perceived their mistake. No such disposition is theirs, but the contrary. I waive such an example as that of Ridley, one of the authors whose writings and dissertations that Society has published, and a very mainspring of the Reformation, indeed the ablest and the most learned, perhaps, of its leaders. I waive him, because he may be justly considered to have taken higher Church grounds than many others in that great movement, probably higher than those with whom he more immediately acted; and I content myself with those who had the reputation of being amongst the lowest and most liberal Churchmen of their time; and who on that account have ever been spoken of with tenderness, if not with

affection, by dissenters themselves. Even in these I observe a respect for patristic authority, such as would now expose the party who entertained it to reproach.

Thus, let us take the case of Philpot, the friend of Bradford¹; the approver of the Church of Geneva, and the doctrine of the same²; the admirer of Calvin and of his *Institutes*³; one, therefore, we may be sure, who was no type of the High-Church party of his time. What, then, are the sentiments that we find him advocating with respect to the reverence due to antiquity, and to the Fathers its expositors? I give some of them in the order in which they occur in the publication itself.

“Why, do you not think that we have now the true faith?” is one of Bonner’s questions to him. “I desire your Lordship to hold me excused for answering at this time—I am sure that God’s Word thoroughly, with the *Primitive Church*, and all the ancient writings do agree with this faith I am of”—is Philpot’s reply.⁴

“Take the book” (a copy of Irenæus) “Master Philpot, and look upon that place, and there may you see how the Church of Rome is to be followed of all men;” saith to him the Bishop of Gloucester.

Philpot takes the book, and sifts the passage⁵ and then concludes, “but the Church of Rome hath swerved from that truth and simplicity of the Gospel, which it maintained in Irenæus’s time, and was then uncorrupted from that which it is now: wherefore your Lordships cannot justly apply the authority of Irenæus to the Church of Rome now, which is so manifestly corrupted from the *Primitive Church*.”⁶

“I pray you,” says the Bishop of Gloucester once more, “by whom will you be judged in matters of controversy which happen daily?”

“*Philpot*. By the Word of God. For Christ saith in St. John, the Word that He spake shall be judge in the latter day.”

“*Gloucester*. What if you take the Word one way, and I another way? who shall be judge then?”

“*Philpot*. The *Primitive Church*.”

¹ Philpot’s *Examinations and Writings*, p. xiv.
² p. 153. ³ p. 46. ⁴ p. 17.

⁵ Irenæus, III. c. iii. § 2.

⁶ Philpot’s *Examinations*, p. 25.

“*Gloucester.* I know you mean the Doctors that wrote thereof.”

“*Philpot.* I mean verily so.”¹

“I pray you,” saith the Bishop of Coventry, “can you tell what this word ‘Catholic’ doth signify? Shew, if you can.”

“*Philpot.* Yes, that I can, I thank GOD. . . . I esteem the Catholic Church to be as St. Augustine defineth the same: ‘We judge,’ saith he, ‘the Catholic faith, of that which hath been, is, and shall be.’ So that, if you can be able to prove that your faith and Church hath been from the beginning taught, and is, and shall be, then may you count yourselves Catholic, otherwise not.”²

“*All the Catholic Church (until these few years),*” saith the Bishop of St. Asaph, “have taken him” (the Bishop of Rome) “to be the supreme head of the Church, *besides* this good man Irenæus.”

“*Philpot.* That is not likely, that Irenæus so took him, or the Primitive Church: for I am able to shew seven general Councils after Irenæus’s time, wherein he was never so taken; which may be a sufficient proof, that the Catholic Primitive Church never took him for supreme head.”³

“*Bishop of Coventry.* Why will you not admit the Church of Rome to be the Catholic Church?”

“*Philpot.* Because it followeth not the Primitive Catholic Church, neither agreeth with the same, no more than an apple is like a nut.”

“*Coventry.* Wherein doth it dissent?”

“*Philpot.* It were too long to recite all; but two things I will name, the Supremacy, and Transubstantiation. . . . Transubstantiation is but a late plantation of the Bishop of Rome; and you are not able to shew any ancient writer, that the Primitive Church did believe any such thing.”

“*Coventry.* How prove you that the Church of Rome now dissenteth in doctrine and use of the Sacraments from the Primitive Church?”

“*Philpot.* Compare the one with the other, and it shall soon appear; as you may see both in Eusebius and other ecclesiastical and ancient writers.”⁴

“*London.* How long hath your Church stood, I pray you?”

¹ Philpot's Examinations, p. 29.

² pp. 37, 38.

³ p. 39.

⁴ p. 40.

“*Philpot*. Even from the beginning; from Christ, and from his Apostles, and from *their immediate successors*.”

“*Chancellor*. He will prove his Church to be before Christ!”

“*Philpot*. If I did so, I go not amiss: for there was a Church before the coming of Christ, which maketh one Catholic Church.”

“*Chancellor*. It is so indeed.”

“*Philpot*. I will desire no better rule than the same which is oftentimes brought in of your side, to prove both my faith and Church Catholic; that is, *antiquity*, universality and unity.”

“*London*. Do you not see what a bragging foolish fellow this is? He would seem to be very well seen in the doctors, and he is but a fool. By what doctor art thou able to prove thy Church? Name him, and thou shalt have him.”

“*Philpot*. My Lord, let me have all your ancient writers, with pen, and ink, and paper, and *I will prove both my faith and my Church out of every one of them*.”¹

I had transcribed a good many passages from the writings of Philpot, as published by the Parker Society, to the same effect; and meant to have produced them all, but I fear it may weary you—possibly indeed you may think I have quoted more than enough already; but I have laid these before you, because in the first place I bear in mind, when composing these Lectures, that some of my hearers are young, and have not yet had time to make themselves masters of points in theology which are very familiar to older heads; and I would rather be too copious than too concise, for the sake of those to whose use these Lectures are chiefly dedicated—and furthermore I have so done, because I could not otherwise adequately possess any of you with the conviction, how entirely the Church of the Reformation, so far from abandoning or contemning the early Fathers, claimed them for her own, and argued from them not incidentally and by the bye, but systematically and perseveringly, producing them in her controversies without stint or reserve; and not only the higher Churchmen, but the very lowest and most latitudinarian, adopting this practice.

Take the case of another of the divines of that day, whose

¹ Philpot's Examinations, p. 73.

remains have been also edited by the same Society, Archbishop Grindal; and whom I select for the same reason as I did Philpot, his strong anti-high-church bias; though, to say the truth, his letters on the one hand, and his injunctions or articles of inquiry to his clergy and others on the other, often leave us a little at a loss to discover by what steady principle of conduct he was governed. Without, however, entering into these particulars, suffice it to say in a word, for it conveys much in little, that he, like Philpot, was an admirer of Calvin. "Accedit etiam, uti ais," he writes to Zanchius, "Domini Calvini calculus, qui subscriptionem tuam cum illis conditionibus et exceptionibus approbavit: quod me multum confirmat: nam illius judicio multum soleo tribuere." "The opinion of Master Calvin, moreover, as you say, is with you; who approved of your subscription under those conditions and exceptions; which much confirms me: for I am wont to pay much deference to his opinion."¹ Yet even he, in his "fruitful dialogue between Custom and Verity," on the sense of the words, "This is my body," one of the few things he left in print, deals in language from time to time such as the following.

"Wherefore first," says Verity, "I will declare the meaning of these words, 'This is my body;' and next in what sense the Church and the old Fathers have evermore taken them."²

Again. "But you will say, these are worldly reasons. What, then, if the old Fathers record the same? Irenæus saith, 'Quando mixtus calix et fractus panis percipit verbum Dei, fit Eucharistia corporis et sanguinis Domini, ex quibus augetur et consistit carnis nostræ substantia.'³

Again. "Tush," says Custom, "what speak you of the Word of God? There be many dark sayings therein, which every man cannot attain to."

"*Verity.* I grant you, there be certain obscure places in the Scripture; yet not so obscure, but that a man with the grace of God may perceive: for it was written not for angels, but for men. But, as I understand, Custom meddled but little with Scripture. How say you by St. Augustine, St. Jerome, St. Ambrose? What, if they stand on our side?"

¹ Grindal's Remains, pp. 276, 277.

² p. 40.

³ p. 47.

"*Custom.* No, no ; I know them well enough."

"*Verity.* So well as you know them, for all old acquaintance, if they be called to witness, they will give evidence against you."¹

Again. "*Custom.* The doctors and old writers, men inspired with the Holy Ghost, have evermore been against your doctrine : yea, and in these days, the wisest men and best learned call you heretics and your learning heresy."

"*Verity.* As touching the old writers, I remember well they speak reverently of the Sacraments, like as every man ought to do ; but whereas they deliver their mind with their right hand, you, Custom, receive it with the left. For whereas they say, that it is the body of Christ, and that it must be verily eaten, meaning that it doth effectually lay before the eyes Christ's body, and that it is to the faithful man no less than if it were Christ himself, and that Christ must be eaten in faith, not torn nor rent with the teeth ; you say that, howsoever it be taken, it is Christ's body, and that there is none other eating but with the mouth. And that the Fathers meant no other thing than I have said, it shall appear by their words."²

And again, after a while : "What is so heinous in these days, as to call the Sacrament the token, or the remembrance of Christ's body ? Yet did the old writers in manner never call it other. Tertullian, in the fourth book against the Marcionites,"³ &c.

And, after many authorities cited in proof of this proposition, it is added : "Hereby you may understand how and in what sort the *old Fathers*, how the *Primitive and beginning Church*, how the *Apostles*, how *Christ himself*, took these words, 'This is my body.' Now, to withstand, and stoutly to go against, not only *ancient writers*, or the congregation of Christian people, which at that time was not overgrown, no, neither spotted with covetousness and worldly honour, but the *Apostles* also, and *God himself*, no doubt it is great fondness."⁴

And the whole Dialogue is summed up in these terms following : "Thus, so shortly, and in so few words as I could, I

¹ Grindal's Remains, p. 52.

² p. 63.

³ p. 64.

⁴ p. 72.

have declared to you what Christ meant by these words, 'This is my body;' what the Apostles taught therein, and in what sort they delivered them to their successors; in what sense and meaning the holy Fathers and old writers, and the Universal and Catholic Church, hath evermore taken them."¹

This reverence for antiquity, however, this appeal to the Primitive Church, this respect for the Fathers, its witnesses—so characteristic of the Reformation, as carried on in England—was, by degrees, worn out; several causes, as I have said, concurring to efface it; some of a violent, some of a more insidious kind. Of the first of these kinds was the great Rebellion, which took the form of a religious contest, and was conducted by the triumphant party on principles entirely opposed to those which the Fathers are calculated to uphold. The tendency of their teaching, as to the state, is passive obedience; for, though many of them living and writing under emperors who were persecutors of the Church, they manifest no disposition whatever to resist them, or to persuade others to do so. They content themselves with making appeals to their sense of justice; with disabusing them of many misconceptions, with respect to the Christians, under which they laboured; with praying for them; and defending in general the faith and practice of Christians; and with reminding the Christians that the powers which were ordained of God were adapted to the times in which they governed—good rulers sent for the benefit of a good generation; evil rulers for the correction of a bad one; but both sent by God.² Again, as to the Church, their tendency was clear for three orders of the ministry; an Apostolical succession; definite creeds; strict unity; as we shall see in the sequel of these Lectures. How could the impatient spirits which worked out the great Rebellion find satisfaction in authors like these?

Accordingly, for the matter of fact, look at Milton—not an unfair type, surely, of his party; not the coarse fanatic, which was the material of which so large a portion of the Puritans was composed, who had few early associations, whether of literature or of birth, to soften him; but one who had ever himself a certain feeling for ages gone by, and the monuments they had left us.

¹ Grindal's Remains, p. 74.

² Irenæus, V. c. xxiv. § 3.

" But let my due feet never fail
 To walk the studious cloyster's pale,
 And love the high embowed roof,
 With antick pillars massy proof,
 And storied windows richly dight,
 Casting a dim religious light:
 There let the pealing organ blow,
 To the full-voic'd quire below,
 In service high, and anthems clear,
 As may with sweetness, through mine ear,
 Dissolve me into ecstasies,
 And bring all heaven before mine eyes."

I say that a man who, at any period of his life, could write in this spirit, may be taken as, at least, no exaggerated type of the Puritan, and of the ecclesiastical sentiments which animated him. How, then, does Milton speak of the Fathers, howbeit in this general invective giving no indication of any close knowledge or acquaintance with them? Turn we to his "Treatise of Prelatical Episcopacy."

"Notwithstanding this clearness, and that by all evidence of argument, Timothy and Titus, whom our prelates claim to imitate only in the controlling part of their office, had rather the vicegerency of an Apostleship committed to them, than the ordinary charge of a Bishopric, as being men of an extraordinary calling; yet, to verify that which St. Paul foretold of succeeding times, when men began to have itching ears; then, not contented with the plentiful and wholesome fountains of the Gospel, they began, after their own lusts, to heap to themselves teachers; and, as if the Divine Scripture wanted a supplement, and were to be eked out, they cannot think any doubt resolved, and any doctrine confirmed, unless they run to that undigested heap and fry of authors, which they call antiquity. Whatsoever time, or the heedless hand of blind chance, hath drawn down from of old to this present, in her huge drag-net, whether fish or sea-weed, shells or shrubs, unpicked, unchosen, those are *the Fathers*. Seeing, therefore, some men, deeply conversant in books, have had so little care of late to give the world a better account of their reading than by divulging needless tractates, stuffed with the specious names of Ignatius and Polycarpus; with fragments of old martyrologies and legends, to distract and stagger the multitude of credulous readers, and mislead them from their strong guards and places of safety, under the tuition of Holy Writ; it came into my thoughts to persuade myself, setting all

distances and nice respects aside, that I could do religion and my country no better service for the time, than doing my utmost endeavour to recall the people of God from this vain foraging after straw, and to reduce them to their firm stations under the standard of the Gospel; by making appear to them, first, the insufficiency; next, the inconveniency; and, lastly, the impiety of these gay testimonies, that their great doctors would bring them to dote on."¹

And, again, in his Dissertation "Of Reformation in England:" "Such were these that must be called the ancientest and most virgin times between Christ and Constantine. Nor was this general contagion in their actions and not in their writings. Who is ignorant of the foul errors, the ridiculous wresting of Scripture, the heresies, the vanities thick-sown through the volumes of J. Martyr, Clemens, Origen, Tertullian, and others of eldest time?"²

Moreover, how entirely Milton was impressed with the notion, that the Reformers, properly so called, were governed by feelings on this particular question, entirely opposed to his own and those of his party, is manifest from another passage in the same tract—a passage, which actually, and, in some degree, even unjustly, confounds the Reformers with the Fathers—so far is Milton, at least, from having discovered, as many now do, that they are utter antagonists; the one, all that we can admire; the other, all that we should eschew.

"And here withal I invoke the Immortal Deity, Revealer and Judge of all secrets, that, wherever I have in this book plainly and roundly (though worthily and truly) laid open the faults and blemishes of *Fathers, Martyrs*, or Christian Emperors, or have otherwise inveighed against the error and superstition with vehement expressions, I have done it neither out of malice, nor list to speak evil, nor any vainglory, but of mere necessity to vindicate the spotless truth from an ignominious bondage, whose native worth is now become of such low esteem, that she is like to find small credit with us for what she can say, unless she can bring a ticket from *Crammer, Latimer*, and *Ridley*; or prove herself a retainer of Constantine, and wear his badge. More tolerable it were for the Church of GOD that all these names were utterly abolished,

¹ Milton's Prose Works, vol. i. pp. 32, 33, Birch's ed.

² Vol. i. p. 9.

like the brazen serpent, than that man's fond opinion should thus idolize them, and the heavenly truth be thus captivated."¹

If there be those who sympathize with the great poet in his estimate of the Fathers, are they prepared to join him too in the price he thus sets on the Reformers of our Church? After contemplating his case, should they not rather be induced to suspect, that the same party who are adverse to the one (whether conscious of the fact or not), are, in truth, adverse to both; and would be found to be so, were the turbulent times in which Milton wrote, and which removed restraints and reserve, to return, and all disguise to cease? The crisis, however, of the great Rebellion, which was one of extreme violence, naturally called forth in corresponding strength the principles that were antagonistic to it; so that if there was then a large and headstrong party who thus despised antiquity, and set at nought all reverence for patristical testimony, there was also a most learned and able body of divines, who vindicated both—some of the greatest our Church has ever known. To such men as these, and their efforts, allusion is made by Milton in the extracts I have read to you. They may be supposed to have had the advantage in the controversy; for they had far the most knowledge of the particular kind required for it on their side²; so that, had the cause of antiquity been subjected to no further assault, it would have recovered from this shock.

But, after a while, came on the Revolution; an event which shed a much more disastrous influence on the taste for patristical learning, because a more enduring and insidious one, than the Rebellion. "What we did at the Revolution," says Dr. Johnson, "was necessary; but it broke our constitution."³ Much more might he have said, it broke our Church, which, however, was possibly what he meant. Henceforward a Presbyterian form of Church government was to be recognised and supported by the law of the land in one division of the Island, as clearly as the Episcopalian in the other. The King and

¹ Milton's Prose Works, vol. i. pp. 4, 5.

² Milton, indeed, publishing his treatise of Reformation expressly "to help the Puritans, who were," he says, "in-

ferior to the Prelates in learning."—Johnson's Lives of the English Poets, vol. i. p. 98.

³ Boswell's Life of Johnson, vol. v. p. 50, 8vo. 1831.

Parliament were henceforward taught to halt between the two; and the great landed proprietors who had estates in both countries, or even private persons who were connected with both by ties of marriage or of trade, were neutralized upon questions of ecclesiastical polity, which would heretofore have been thought vital, and of which the Fathers were the undeniable witnesses. The Non-jurors were the representatives of the old Church feelings of the country; and became, in consequence of their sentiments, now out of fashion, dislocated from a generation which had no sympathy with them; carrying away with them (though not entirely) that regard for primitive times, which with them was destined by degrees almost to expire. Convocation, which might have tended to keep it somewhat alive, by encouraging a learned clergy, and by bringing habitually before the laity ecclesiastical topics, which, from the long absence of such a monitor, have now faded so entirely from their minds as simply to call forth, if by chance produced, their supercilious dismissal—Convocation soon ceased to have a voice. The Church sunk into the Establishment; and the fruits of the change soon began to discover themselves. By the time of Wesley, the high and holy spirits, which had once animated it, had so far degenerated into the secular, that some revival of it was seen to be plainly necessary. But it was attempted in an age when the ancient ways were forgotten; and, consequently, in a spirit new and revolutionary. The old Catholic usages (as distinguished from the popish), instead of being sought out again, and quickened into wholesome action, were set at nought, and a system then devised, vigorous for the day, but which, having no foundations laid in the depth of time and sacred precedent, has long since given tokens of decrepitude and decay; and so far as it is likely to survive at all, seems destined to do so as a schism. It has had, however, its effect on the Church itself; and has helped to harden many even of its clergy in that contempt, or at least dislike, for antiquity and its witnesses, which the other events I have touched on had so grievously engendered already.

These were all causes acting to the disadvantage of the Fathers and the disparagement of antiquity within ourselves. There is one more which I shall name, that operated from