

**THE CONSTITUTIONAL ASSEMBLIES OF
THE CLERGY THE PROPER AND ONLY
EFFECTUAL SECURITY OF THE
ESTABLISHED CHURCH; AN ADDRESS TO
THE CLERGY OF THE IMPORTANCE OF THE
OATH REQUIRED OF CHURCH-WARDENS**

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The Constitutional Assemblies of the Clergy the Proper and Only Effectual Security of the Established Church; An address to the clergy of the importance of the Oath required of church-wardens by A Presbyter

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A PRESBYTER

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&c.

THE
CONSTITUTIONAL ASSEMBLIES

OF THE
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THE
PROPER AND ONLY EFFECTUAL SECURITY

OF THE
Established Church.

BY
A PRESBYTER
OF THE REFORMED CATHOLIC CHURCH IN ENGLAND.

—οἶκος Θεοῦ—ἦτις ἐστὶν ἐκκλησία Θεοῦ ζώντος, στίλος καὶ ἰδρυάματα
τῆς ἀληθείας.—1 Tim. iii. 15.

———— exercita cursu
P̄mina.————VIRGIL, *Georg.* III. 529.

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THERE is no doubt that the present is an era productive of many changes in the forms of society, which have been established in the western parts of the world, since the fall of the Roman empire. It was necessary and natural, that where Christianity was received, society should be moulded by it into such shapes as expressed the submission of the people, to the revelation which had been published to the world. As soon, consequently, as the governments which had been formed out of the wreck of the Roman empire, had become settled, provision was made for the maintenance of religious service; and the classes of society appeared distinguished into nobles, clergy, and commons. These, with the Sove-

reign at their head, were the three estates of the realm, in each European kingdom; and are the elements which still constitute every form of government that retains the principles of its institution.

In ancient France, that is, in France before the late revolution, the Courts of Parliament shewed marks of an origin precisely similar to that of our own House of Lords; which in a rude age was the general council of the realm, where the King distributed justice in the highest appeal to his people, and deliberated with his *magnates* on the arduous affairs of the kingdom. The Parliament of France was also anciently the deliberative council of the King, as well as the highest Court of Judicature; but through the disuse, in that country, of assembling the constituent bodies of the kingdom, when the General Estates were convoked by Lewis the XVIth; i. e. when the original principles of the constitution were called into action, the functions of the Parliament had become fixed, and it afforded no point of union between the people and the crown; had no power of preserving a balance between the estates—the revolution had taken place—the theory, and the practice of government were irreconcilable.

The present form of our constitution, or the mode by which the representative part of its

system is regulated, is traced to the reign of Edward I.; in the course of which Knights were summoned from each county, and Burgesses from every city, and town of importance, to represent the Commons of England; and that the whole body of the Clergy might appear by their representatives in the general assembly of the kingdom, (since they did not readily acquiesce in the exercise of any secular authority over them,) the King inserted in his writ to each Bishop, a clause *premonishing* him to call upon the *parochial* Clergy of his diocese to elect two Proctors; and that the *capitular* also, should appoint two of their own body; who together might represent the interests of the diocesan Clergy, and of the Chapters, in the Parliament which was about to meet; and contribute on their part to the general exigencies of the state; at which meeting also the Deans of Cathedrals, and Archdeacons, were summoned to attend personally. This was the original constitution of the present form of admitting the Commons and inferior Clergy to their share in regulating the public proceedings.

The first argument which would occur against the Clergy ever having really exercised parliamentary rights, arises from the evidence that their concurrence never has been necessary to

give force to the acts of the Commons. But this objection may be explained by considering the ancient mode of enacting laws; (which *form* still exists in those which originate with the Commons,) by petition, or the representation of grievances.

As the parliamentary presence of the Commons, and of the inferior Clergy, was required in the first instance chiefly to supply the wants of the King in the public business, their whole power grew out of the conditions on which they granted their supplies; or from the gracious compliance with which the King afterwards listened to their petitions. Their representations of grievances to be amended, or of benefits to be conferred, when consented to by the monarch surrounded by his Peers, received the force of law.

These bodies, the laical and clerical representatives, remained distinct therefore, from each other in their proceedings, performing peculiar offices according to their several duties, feelings, and interests in society at large; interfering only occasionally, in matters of common interest, or where those of each body seemed to clash.

It is no tenable argument then *in limine*, against the possession of parliamentary rights by the national assembly of the Clergy, to