

PAROCHIAL MINISTRATIONS

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Parochial Ministrations by S. Best

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S. BEST

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BY THE

HON. AND REV. S. BEST,

RECTOR OF ABBOTT'S ANN, HANTS; LATE FELLOW OF
KING'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

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1839.

370.

TO THE
RIGHT HON. GEORGE LORD KENYON,

This Volume is respectfully Dedicated,

NOT WITH THE VIEW OF IDENTIFYING HIS NAME WITH
ALL ITS OPINIONS,
BUT IN TESTIMONY OF SINCERE RESPECT FOR THE CHARACTER
HE HAS MAINTAINED THROUGH LIFE
FOR
ZEAL AND ATTACHMENT TO OUR CATHOLIC AND
SCRIPTURAL CHURCH.

INTRODUCTION.

THE position of the church, as an engine for the spiritual good of its children, is such as to awaken in the breasts of its members a degree of anxiety for its temporal stability. It is impossible to consider its present situation in any way satisfactory, and its friends and members naturally look around them to see how its hands may be strengthened and its permanency secured. Without any assertion unwarranted by Him in whom we trust, we may boldly aver that we feel not this in any manner for the security of the church it-

self, which stands equally firm whether it be supported or opposed by human agency. Its present means of doing good, and furthering, in the hearts of this generation, our great Master's kingdom, is all that human interference can jeopardise. It is not whether the church shall live—a question beyond our settlement, or the control of human means—but whether it shall diffuse its blessings over our times, or whether it shall pass under a cloud for the present, to shine out with still brighter lustre on some happier age. We well know the trials it has already undergone; and from each it has arisen brighter and more perfect. Nor can the Christian who in support of his church appeals to scripture, and declares that "whatsoever is not read therein, or may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man that it should be believed as an article of the faith, or thought requisite or necessary to salvation,"* have one moment's misgiving of the continued

* Art. 6.

and ultimate triumph of a church thus based upon the word of God. But, be it remembered, the blessings it offers may be rejected, and, historically speaking, have often been rejected, as against ourselves. It is true, the same pure light has always burned, but men preferred darkness rather than light. It has never been for one moment extinguished; but "when knowing God, men glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, they became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened."* The same passage teaches us that "they changed the truth of God into a lie." Now that which is pictured to us as taking place in ancient days has been again and again the case under all the different phases of persecution, lukewarmness, and apostacy. Under which of these clouds the church is now passing, or whether under either of them, when the subject is closely examined, it would be difficult to determine; but there is that

* Rom. i. 21.

afloat in the social atmosphere which the Christian will more dread than any of these threatening evils. Poison we may avoid, or find for it its antidote ; but the injurious vapour which floats and is imbibed in the atmosphere, we have no means of contending with. Such appears that want of fixedness of purpose, that vagueness of design or of system, which, on the one hand, weakens all clerical ministrations; and, on the other, feeds and fosters the principles of dissent. We live in an age when the whole social system is unstrung, and the church unappily partakes of the general and pervading spirit of the times. It is impossible, even in theory, to idealise a more perfect liberty, whether civil or religious, than that we possess ; and the Christian will thank God for this shadow of the gospel. But the greatest of blessings has its concomitant evil ; and, in the present instance, we find this in the relaxation of all wholesome discipline, in the weakness and disarrangement of all

system, and the unrestrained liberty of every man to isolate himself and his welfare from that of his brethren, and by following what he believes his own interests, however selfish, to withdraw his strength and co-operation from the common cause.* The Christian rejoices and basks in the liberty which he feels to be pre-eminently his own, as enjoyed under the same charter in which he reads all the great privileges of his faith. History tells him that it has grown with the growth and strengthened with the strength of religious truth ; that the ablest defenders of the one have been often

* It is delightful to me to be able to make frequent reference to a late charge of the Lord Bishop of Winchester. There is feeling of satisfaction in the accordance of our views with those under whom we are called upon to labour, not unwarranted by the hope that when embraced and enforced by persons so influential, they may be carried into execution. The Bishop says, "It becomes us to be upon our guard against the approaches of an enemy who will find, I fear, his vantage-ground in our departure from the primitive ecclesiastical discipline, and in the general vagueness of principle which prevails on the subjects of church-membership and church-union."