

ART. VI.—THE CHURCH IN WALES.

A Call to Arms.

DISESTABLISHMENT—so far, at least, as the Church in the four Welsh dioceses is concerned—is once more in the air, and we are threatened with what will probably prove to be the most determined attempt to disendow and disestablish that portion of the National Church which happens to be in Wales, that we have yet witnessed.

It appears to us, therefore, that the time has arrived when we should seriously try to realize the exact position of affairs as regards this important matter, and endeavour to suggest the best means of counteracting the mischievous designs of those who are so anxious to cripple, if, indeed, not altogether to destroy, a very important portion of our national inheritance.

Since the date of the General Election we have been reminded almost daily, that, because a considerable number of members of the Legislature, representing Welsh constituencies, have been returned professedly pledged to Welsh Disestablishment, therefore, in justice to the people of Wales, a measure for Disestablishment ought to be proceeded with immediately, and some there may be who think that further resistance in the matter is almost useless.

It must be admitted that such an inference is, on the surface, plausible enough, and we do not wonder that those who are hostile to the Church should do their very best to hasten a measure which for many a long year they have tried in vain to persuade the Legislature to pass.

But when we dive a little below the surface, when we come to think about the matter a little more deeply than the casual observer is wont to do, we confess that we see no reason for despair, but, on the contrary, much to encourage and nerve us to renewed exertions on behalf of that portion of our Church which is the object of such bitter and relentless attack.

It is true, indeed, that there are more members representing Wales, pledged to Disestablishment to-day, than there were in the late Parliament. But what then? A careful analysis of the voting strength of Wales reveals the fact that, after all the tall talk we have been forced to listen to of late, notwithstanding the chapel interest (the Welsh political Dissenting preacher is perhaps the most powerful factor in the promotion of Disestablishment), notwithstanding the noise and bluster—to say nothing of the malice—of the Welsh Dissenting press, few Radical candidates polled more votes, proportionately, than in 1885; whilst, on the other hand, that which so largely con-

tributed to the defeat of the "Church" candidates in Wales, was the notable abstention of Churchmen from the polls. In many of the Welsh constituencies the "Church" candidates showed a remarkably good record when contrasted with the number of votes given to their opponents; but the strength of the Church vote has yet to be given in Wales, as given it will assuredly be, when the question above all others before the country is Disestablishment for Wales. If proof of this assertion is needed, we have only to cite the case of Sir John Llewelyn, who stepped forward at the last moment to contest Swansea, a stronghold of political Dissent, and whose gallant fight caused so great terror in the camp of his opponents that almost superhuman efforts had to be made by the Welsh preachers—one in particular—to secure the seat to the Radical party. And yet in that constituency it is well known that the "Church vote," had it been seriously employed, would have placed Sir John—as it assuredly will place him at the next vacancy—at the head of the poll. Notwithstanding all we have lately read, we are not amongst those who believe that Welsh Disestablishment will be seriously taken in hand in the new Parliament. It is true that in their haste to secure—what they know perfectly well they will never get if their demand is much longer delayed—the spoils of the Welsh Church, Liberationists are injudiciously, and, as we think, indecently, pressing the new leader of the House to grant them all they ask and desire. It may indeed be that, for party political purposes, Mr. Gladstone will be compelled to make some movement, however slight, in the direction of satisfying this grasping section of his party, perhaps by introducing some measure directed to the end they have in view; but such measure, even if introduced in the next session will never, we venture to think, be seriously proceeded with in the face of Parliamentary difficulties which those who are best informed believe will effectually block any legislation in this direction.

Any measure for Welsh Disestablishment, in fact, must inevitably stand on one side so long as Home Rule blocks the way. That means, to our thinking at least, so long—and perhaps no longer—than Mr. Gladstone's life is spared. Whether, therefore, any measure is introduced in the new Parliament for the spoliation of the Church in the four Welsh dioceses or not, one thing, it appears to us at least, is quite certain, and that is that it will not become law in the present Parliament, however much ardent Liberationist members may desire to see their cherished hopes gratified, before they may be finally dashed to pieces by the growing influence of the Church in Wales.

But, it may be asked, what about the next General Elec-

tion? Assuming, for the sake of argument, that the rallying battle-cry of the Radical section at the next General Election is Welsh Disestablishment, our firm impression is that if the Church candidates in Wales will but place the Church in the forefront, and consent to stand or fall on that question alone, the Principality will be aroused from one end to the other, and thousands of voters who abstained from taking any part in the late elections will, at the proper time, rally round the champions of the Church.

Much may be done—nay, if our national recognition of Christianity is to be preserved, *must* be done—before the next election comes on; and here our remarks apply directly to English constituencies, though they are intended to include Welsh constituencies also.

It is a fact that up to the present English Churchmen, as a rule, have not sufficiently realized what Welsh Disestablishment means or what it involves. They have yet to understand two important facts. The first is that the Church in Wales and the Church in England is absolutely and identically one and the same thing. We ourselves constantly come across people who are possessed of the idea that, in some unexplained way or another, the Church in Wales differs from the English Church, and this idea must at once be got rid of. The second fact is that the Church in Wales grows day by day in strength and influence, and by its splendid work is fast gaining the affections of the Welsh people in every part of the Principality. English Churchmen ought to make themselves intimately acquainted with the history and progress of the Church in Wales. They have only to do this to become the most ardent defenders of that much misrepresented and misjudged portion of the National Church.

The question we have to consider now is, How can we make Disestablishment an impossibility? Careful observers have noticed, with no small satisfaction, that the best results in Welsh constituencies have followed where the work of Church defence has been continuously and systematically carried out. What, it may be asked, then, is Church defence work? In a word, it consists in Wales, as elsewhere, of spreading abroad a true knowledge of the Church's history, position, and work. Districts are carved out, and living agents, chosen and appointed for the purpose, visit the parishioners and impart true information about the Church, irrespective of politics, to every town and village. In Wales this often means the diffusion of information in two languages, the holding of innumerable meetings, the giving away of thousands of leaflets, books, and papers containing information which every voter ought to make himself acquainted with. If it be asked, Why has the organization

not been productive of better results? the answer is that the work has only been partially done; but wherever it has been thoroughly well accomplished it has told in a remarkable degree.

Now, our suggestion to render Disestablishment impossible is that first and foremost we must dispel the crass ignorance displayed concerning the Church, not only in Wales, but in every corner of our land. Very few regular Church-goers know anything at all of the magnificent history of the Church in which they worship. It is not too much to say that some of the clergy appear to know less even about the subject than their flocks. It may be said that the task of imparting information necessary to create an enthusiastic public opinion in favour of the National Church is gigantic. Granted, but not impossible. Given the necessary time—and, oh, how precious are the few short months which may separate us from the next General Election!—we affirm that it can be done. But one thing is needful, First and foremost, the clergy *must* awake to the impending danger. They *must* encourage their people to inquire about and learn for themselves what a glorious heritage they possess; impress upon them that the Church is the one great national institution which has stood from time immemorial as a witness to God's truth in this land, and that the gravest consequences to the nation must be looked for on the day when, if it should ever happen, for purely political purposes England turns its back upon its most precious possession, and in forsaking its national religion, dishonours Almighty God. If it be argued that Church defence is a layman's question, our answer is that the clergy, as the natural leaders of the laity, must lead the way.

2. The work must be done systematically. We believe we have in the Church Defence Institution the organization necessary for the purpose. The whole country should be parcelled out into districts. In every district a living agent should be found to carry out detailed instructions. Every house should be visited. Meetings should be held. Church history lectures should be given wherever and whenever possible (these last by the aid, in large halls, of dissolving views, in small rooms with oil-lanterns). Not a vote ought to be given for a "Dis-establisher" aspirant for Parliamentary honours, until the voter has been made aware of the gravity of his action.

3. Wherever possible Church reading-classes should be formed. These might be made both valuable and interesting. Parishioners, without distinction, should be invited to join these classes, and popular books on Church history and doctrine, should be read and discussed, and at the close of the season a small prize (say a good book, or five shillings), might

with advantage be awarded to the one who answers most intelligently questions suggested by the readings. This last suggestion seems to us very important, because the offer of a prize would lead many to pursue the subject in their own homes, whereby other members of the family would be led to take more or less interest in the proceedings.

Our unshaken belief is that the Disestablishment of the National Church of England rests, not with outsiders, but with Churchmen themselves, and this view is shared by Mr. Chamberlain, M.P. (*vide* letter in *The Standard*, September 1). No outside combination of forces alone, we believe, is able to accomplish so stupendous, so national a catastrophe. Let us, then, unite during the ensuing winter in this great work, first by learning ourselves all that we can about the grand old Church of our forefathers, and then by imparting such knowledge to others. Once the people fully realize that they are asked to give over to the would-be spoilers, not a political or state-paid institution, but *their own Church*, that Church which their forefathers built with their own substance, that Church, which these same forefathers dedicated in all humility to the glory of God and the use of man in the ages which should follow them—once they realize all this, and much else beside, concerning the Church of England, and we are bold to say that Disestablishment and Disendowment will vanish as a dream, as a nightmare, and the nation will know it no more.

G. H. F. NYE.

Short Notices.

The Expository Times, Vol. III. Edinburgh : T. and T. Clark.

AS usual, this vigorous periodical is marked by a wide catholicity both of subject and treatment. Some of its contents are almost too scrappy and superficial to be of permanent use, perhaps, but there are very few students and preachers who would not find much that was useful.

Hill-a-hoy-o. By a Country Cousin. London : Alex. Gardner.

A singularly fresh and pleasant volume of verse. The author to a great extent touches ground that has been little trodden of late, and has entirely avoided that fatal characteristic of most modern poetasters—the spirit of commonplace. The impression that is left on one's mind after reading these poems is similar to that which would be left by a peep into the Lowland country—clear air, ringing burns, heathery hills, and all the honest homely signs of an old-fashioned agricultural district. Some of