

SERMON X

SERVANTS, NOT LORDS.

"Neither as being lords over Gods heritage."—1Peter v. 3.

THE Church is God's heritage. This fact cannot be too deeply impressed upon our minds. The Church is not a plaything for man to trifle with. It is not a sphere in which every one may do that which is right in his own eyes. It is not a possession over which man may claim arbitrary power and jurisdiction. "It is God's heritage." Purchased by the blood of God, sanctified by the Spirit of God, constituted and preserved by the glory of God alone, the Church is not the heritage of man, but wholly and exclusively " God's heritage."

This heritage, then, of God consists of two distinct sorts of members—those who minister and those who are ministered to—the clergy and the laity. It is very important to bear this carefully in mind; because it is the practice of modern times, and of that party in the Church of which we are at present speaking, to make it appear that in greater or less degree the clergy are alone the Church. There is no instance that I am aware of, in any part of the New Testament, of the word "Church" being made use of to signify the "Clergy" alone. This is quite a modern use of the word. Is such a person about to enter the Church?—is a common form of expressing a wish to know whether a person is about to enter upon the ministry of the Church. Common and almost proverbial expressions not unfrequently become insensibly the foundation for a superstructure of grievous error. Such has been the case in the present instance. This random use of a word, in a sense very different from that which it was ever intended to bear, has afforded the Tractarians an opportunity of copying one of the worst features of the Roman system. For it has always been the endeavour of Papal Rome to make as wide as possible a separation between the clergy and the laity. The whole system tends to this. This, without doubt, is the object and the result of the celibacy of the priesthood. This is the object and result of the institution of the monastic orders. This is certainly the result, if not the object, of the miraculous power attributed to the priest of changing, by the use of a few words, the simple elements of bread and wine into the real flesh and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ; of absolving the sinner from his guilt; and in the last mortal agonies giving the soul a passport to the kingdom of glory. The consequence of all this is that, in the Roman system, the priesthood is regarded as almost exclusively the Church. There is an impassable boundary line between the laity and them. And not only this, but they exercise a most tyrannical power over the consciences and conduct of those committed to their care. They are, in the fullest meaning of the expression, "lords over God's heritage." Witness the power of the priesthood, for instance, in the sister country of Ireland—one year to raise the standard of open rebellion through the length and breadth of the land : another year peremptorily to put their veto upon that march of intellect which none beside are strong enough to check. Witness their power even in this enlightened country: for the sake of her splendid dowry, to immure an inexperienced maiden in the prison of a convent, and scare a miser on his death-bed out of his hoarded treasures. Witness the marvellous manner in which, throughout the whole extent of the continent, they exercise a mysterious but almost omnipotent influence in the councils of sovereigns; and, though no longer openly, yet none the less surely, in secret sway the destinies of some of the most mighty empires of the earth.

Now, in holy Scripture the clergy are never described in language which can afford the least foundation for such a system as this. Quite the reverse. Ministers or servants, stewards, pastors, or shepherds, ensamples—such are the expressions made use of to describe the office of the clergy. 1 Cor. iv.—" Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God." 2 Cor. iv. 5—" For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves, your servants, for Jesus' sake." 1 Tim. iv. 12—" Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity." 1 Peter v. 3—" Neither

as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock." Not exclusiveness of position, not arbitrary authority, but exemplary humility, zeal, and piety, as servants not only of their heavenly Master, but of their fellow-men, are here set forth as the marks by which the clerical is to be distinguished from the lay portion of the Church. The striking words of our blessed Lord Himself to His apostles are sufficient surely to check the exhibition of any other spirit than this. Matt. xx. 25—"We know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you; but, whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant. Even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and give His life a ransom for many." So far was St. Paul from a desire to stretch his power beyond its legitimate limits that there are many occasions recorded in the Scriptures in which he was very unwilling to use even that measure of power with which he was endued. Thus, we find him saying, in 2 Thess. iii. 8, "Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought, but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you: not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us." And again, Philemon 8—"Wherefore, though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin thee that which is convenient, yet for love's sake I rather beseech thee." So entirely was the great apostle of the Gentiles of opinion that love was far before authority, and persuasion better than force, that I may use his own language, 1 Cor. ix. 19—"For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more." 2 Cor. i. 24—"Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy."

In direct opposition to all this, and as far as possible after the example of the Roman Church, the Tractarians seek to be "lords over God's heritage." They encourage, by every means in their power, the dangerous but prevalent idea already noticed, concerning the clergy constituting the Church. The mystery almost as great as that surrounding the awful miracle of transubstantiation, with which they contrive to accompany the administration of the Lord's Supper; and, connected with this, the exclusion of the laity from the east, and as they consider privileged end, of the church, together with their studied disuse of the words "minister, steward, servant, or pastor," in speaking of their own order, and substitution of the ambiguous title of "priest," all assist in keeping up this delusion. It would be well, however, if the lording of the Tractarians over God's heritage ended in words alone. Words are, comparatively speaking, but an unimportant part of the tyranny which they seek to establish. The carrying out of rubrics and canons, which owing to the changed circumstances of the times have been long since by almost common consent allowed to fall into disuse; the revival at once, and with scarcely any previous preparation, of the rigid Church discipline of olden time, concerning much of which it may well be doubted whether it would under any circumstances be advisable to revive it, and concerning all of which it may be confidently asserted that its restoration would require the laborious preparation of many previous years, as well as the gradual reparation of at least a century of carelessness and neglect; their claim of being the sole educators of the rising generation, to the entire exclusion of the lay members of the Church; in some cases an attempt to revive auricular confession and priestly absolution: these are some of the ways in which, at this moment, the Tractarians are to no inconsiderable extent seeking to be lords over God's heritage. Weigh well their claims and pretensions—mark their haughty and overbearing manner in making and carrying them out—observe the indifference with which they cast the firebrand and inflame a whole neighbourhood with strife and discord; keeping haughtily aloof from sinners whom they ought to seek, and driving to despair souls whom it is their business to bring to Christ; and then tell me, whether these men are in any way following the precepts or example of Christ or His apostles, as they have been already set before you; whether they, in the least degree, bear the marks of ministers, servants, stewards, or pastors; whether they are not, to the very utmost which times and circumstances admit of, "lords over God's heritage?" Priestcraft, wherever and under whatsoever circumstances it is exercised, whether amongst the Hindoos of the far East, the American Indians of the far West, the subjects of Papal Rome throughout Central

Europe, or in the bosom of the Church of England itself, always has been, and in the nature of things always must be, fatal to the interests of evangelical truth and real vital godliness. That there is at this moment a combined and vigorous attempt to set up priestcraft in the Church of England cannot admit of a doubt. It must be met with vigorous, combined, persevering, resistance. It must be carefully enquired whether "Church principles," so much vaunted in the present day, are the principles of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, or only of haughty and intolerant priestcraft. And as we value all which the Martyrs of blessed memory so dearly won for us amidst the fires of the Reformation, through the length and breadth of the land, we must cause to be loudly heard the memorable words of Peter in olden time, Acts xv. 10—"Now, therefore, why tempt ye God to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear."

Brethren, a more than twenty years' experience amongst you has convinced me of the soundness of the opinions which I have now advanced, of the danger of seeking to be lords over God's heritage, of the happy result of striving to feed and be ensamples to the flock. In whatever direction I cast my eyes, and see the lording system attempted to be carried out, there almost always I behold strife and discord; the sheep biting both the shepherd and each other; religion and morality at a stand still; truth preached, if at all, in the meeting-house; the labouring classes, in many instances, growing up uneducated; the pure and apostolical Church of England becoming an object of distrust, if not of detestation; and her members fast falling away to recruit the ranks either of Popery or Dissent. Here, on the other hand, where the opposite system has been for a long course of years steadily carried out, where the clergy have ever sought—God grant they may ever continue to seek!—to be, not the lords, but the servants of God's heritage, I speak reluctantly, not to praise my many invaluable coadjutors, still less myself, but simply to show the happy result of the strictly ministerial system—here there is unbroken peace, sheep and shepherd dearly loving each other; religion and morality steadily on the increase; the Gospel preached in a full church; a sound religious and superior secular education afforded and generally embraced under the joint direction of the clergy and laity; few Papists or Dissenters in the district; and, except the venerable and spacious parish church, not a single place of worship. Such is the result here of our being not lords, but servants. Such, I believe, is everywhere the result of the same system. God's blessing marks the scriptural character of the "servant;" the absence of it no less surely attests the unscriptural character of the "lord." Would that the warning-voice of experience could reach the hearts of many of my younger brethren in the ministry, already neutralizing much of their usefulness by seeking to be lords over God's heritage! Would that they would bear constantly in mind that the heritage is not theirs, but God's! Would that the honor and glory of God in Christ rather than their own, the seeking and saving of lost souls rather than the vaunting the authority and wielding the power of office, were their single aim! Would that not only strife, division, and discord, but "peace on earth and good-will towards men," were the burden of their song! Would that they strove to realize the beautiful description of his own ministry given by St. Paul, 1 Thess. ii. 7, 8—"But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: so, being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the Gospel of God only, but also our own souls." Would that even at the humblest distance they endeavoured to realize the words of the prophet and of Him in whom they were fulfilled! Isaiah xv. 12—"He shall feed his flock like a shepherd, he shall gather the lambs with his arm and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young." John x. 14—"I am the good Shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep." It is when we thus follow the pattern which both He and His apostles have set us, of not being "lords over God's heritage," but ensamples to the flock, that we may have just ground for expecting a fulfilment in our own persons of the gracious promise by which the text is followed up, 1 Peter v. 4—"And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory which fadeth not away."

Deane, Fifth Sunday in Lent, 1851.