The PREFACE.

It hath been the wisdom of the Church of England, ever since the first compilation of her Publick Liturgy, to keep the balance between the two extremes, of too much stiffness in refusing, and of too much easiness in admitting any variation from it. For, as on the one side common experience teacheth, that where a change hath been made of things advisedly established (no evident necessity requiring) fundy inconveniences have thereupon ensued; and of late many times more and more, than was expected, were intended to be remedied by such change: So on the other side, the particular forms of divine worship, and the Rites and Ceremonies appointed to be used therein, being things in their own nature indifferent, and alterable, and so acknowledged; it is but reasonable, that upon weighty and important considerations, according to the various exigency of times and occasions, such changes and alterations should be made therein, as to those that are in place of Authority should from time to time seem either necessary or expedient. Accordingly we find, that in the reigns of several Princes of blest memory since the Reformation, the Church, upon just and weighty considerations, her thereunto moving, hath yielded to such alterations in some particulars, as in their respective times were thought convenient. Yet so, as that the main Body and essential elements of it (as well in the chiefest materials, as in the frame and order thereof) have still continued the same unto this day, and do yet stand firm and unshaken, notwithstanding all the vain attempts and impetuous assaults made against it, by such men as are given to change, and have always discovered a greater regard to their own private fancies and interests, than to that duty they owe to the public.

By what undue means, and for what mischiefful purposes the use of the Liturgy (though enjoined by the Laws of the Land, and those Laws never yet repealed) came during the late unhappy confusions, to be discontinued, is too well known to the world, and we are not willing here to remember. But when upon His Majesty's happy Restoratation, it seemed probable that amongst other things, the use of the Liturgy also would return of course (the same having been legally abolished unless some contrary means were used to prevent it,) the men who under the late turbulent powers had made it a great part of their business to render the people disaffected thereto, saw themselves in point of reputation and interest concerned (unless they would freely acknowledge themselves to have erred,) which such men are very hardly brought to do, with their utmost endeavours to hinder the restitution thereof. In order whereunto divers Pamphlets were published against the Book of Common Prayer, the old Objections muttered up, with the addition of some new ones, more than formerly had been made, to make the number swell. In fine, great importunities were used to His Sacred Majesty, that the said Book might be revised, and such Alterations therein, and Additions thereto made, as should be thought requisite for the more tender Concerns: whereunto His Majesty, out of his pious inclination, gave satisfaction (so far as could be reasonably expected) to all his subjects of what persuasion soever, did graciously consent.

In which Review we have endeavoured to observe the like moderation, as we find to have been used in the like case in former times. And therefore of the fundy Alterations proposed unto us, we have rejected all such as were either of dangerous consequence (as secretly striking at some established Doctrine, or lawful Practice of the Church of England, or indeed of the whole Catholic Church of Christ) or else of no consequence at all, but utterly frivolous and vain: But such Alterations as were tendered to us (by what persons, under what pretences, or to what purpose forever tendered) as seemed to us in any degree requisite or expedient, we have willingly, and of our own accord, assented unto: not enforced so to do by any strength of Argument convincing us of the necessity of making the said Alterations: For we are fully persuaded in our judgement (and we here profess it to the world) that the Book, as it stood before established by Law, doth not contain in it any thing contrary to the word of God, or to sound Doctrine, or which a godly man may not with a good Conscience use and submit unto, or which is not fairly defensible against that any shall oppose the same: if it shall be allowed free, judicious, and favourable construction as in common equity ought to be allowed to all human Writings, especially such as are set forth by Authority, and even to the very best Translations of the Holy Scripture itself.

Our general aim therefore in this undertaking was, not to gratify this or that party in any their unreasonable demands; but to do that, which to our best understandings, we conceived might most tend to the preservation of Peace and Unity in the Church; the procuring of Reverence, and exciting of Piety and Devotion in the publick Worship of God; and the cutting off occasion from them that seek occasion of cavil, or quarrel against the Liturgy of the Church. And as to the several variations from the former Book, whether by Alteration, Addition, or otherwise, it shall suffice to give this general account: That most of the Alterations, were made, either first, for the better direction of them that are to operate in any part of Divine Service; which is chiefly done in the Calendars and Rubrics: Or secondly, for the more proper expressing of Some words or phrases of ancient usage in terms more suitable to the language of the present times, and the clearer explanation of Some other words and phrases, that were either obscure or figurative, or otherwise liable to misconstruction: Or thirdly, for a more perfect rendering of such portions of holy Scripture, as are inserted into the Liturgy; which in the Epistles and Gospels especially, and in many other places, are now ordered to be read according to the last Translation; and that it was thought convenient, that the Prayers and Thanksgiving, fitted to special occasions, should be added in their due places; particularly for those at Sea, together with an Office for the Baptism of such as are of other nations, which, although not to be necessary when the former Book was compiled, yet by the growth of such a usage through the licentiousness of the late times crept in amongst us, is now become necessary, and may be always useful for the baptizing of such in our Plantations, and others converted to the Faith. If any man, who shall define a more particular account of the several Alterations in any part of the Liturgy, shall take the pains to compare the present Book with the former; we doubt not but the reason of the change may easily appear.

And having thus endeavoured to discharge our duties in this no less solemn Affair, as in the sight of God, and to approve our sincerity therein (so far as lay in us) to the circumstances of all men, although we know it impossible (in such variety of apprehensions, humours, and interests, as are in the world) to please all; nor can expect that men of factions, beeves and perverses, should be satisfied with any thing that can be done in this kind by any other than themselves: Yet we have good hope, that what is here presented, and hath been by the Convocations of both Provinces with great diligence examined and approved, will be also well accepted and approved by all sober, peaceable, and truly conscientious Sons of the Church of England.