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Church Reform. Church Defence.

BEING THE SUBSTANCE OF

A N A D D R E S S

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ON

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BY

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Church Reform. Church Defence.

The President, in his letter which he has circulated among members of the Union, has laid stress upon the most obvious method in which the defence of the Church can be carried on at the present moment in the constituencies, namely, by refusing votes to candidates who have pledged themselves to Disestablishment, and by extracting pledges where possible from candidates that they will oppose Disestablishment, if it is brought on, not merely in this Parliament, but in future Parliaments. But I want tonight to take the question of Church Defence away from the turmoil of politics, and to consider it from the point of view of our duty as Churchmen rather than as politicians. One way undoubtedly of supporting the Church is to vote against her enemies. One way of obtaining justice for the Church is to let her influence be felt at the polling booths, but a far more efficacious support, and a far greater certainty of justice will, I am convinced, be obtained by taking away all just cause for enmity by purging the Church of the abuses which hinder her work, by justifying her existence and her privileges to the moral sense of the nation in the purity of her administration and the holiness of her life. She must reign in the hearts of mankind first if she is to rule at the polling-booths.

She must be pure, and she must be free if she is to inspire love. Church Reform is the truest Church Defence.

There often comes as we all know, in the history of the lives of individuals a crisis which makes or mars their career. It is just the same in the history of institutions and in the history of Societies. The Church of England, I believe, is just passing through such a crisis. The E. C. U. is just passing through such a crisis. Crisis did I say? It was the wrong word. Rather let me say opportunity. A crisis is but a God-given opportunity, and the Church which we love, and the Society to which we belong, have now an opportunity offered to them greater than any which God's providence has hitherto had in store for them. The moment therefore is a solemn one, the responsibility is serious, for who knows how soon it may be before the opportunity is past. To be too late has been the epitaph of a Government, let it not be the autobiography of the Church.

If we look at the tendencies of the political and ecclesiastical thought of the time it is quite clear that the day is past when the Establishment can be defended on the old Elizabethan theory of the identity of Church and State. Theories of the Divine nature of the State allying itself with the Church, and using the Church as its privileged defender against violence and fanaticism, have long passed away. It has been the fashion of late years rather to defend the Establishment on grounds of expediency, and on grounds of State policy. Some people have advocated the re-

tion of the Establishment because the connection with the State gives a guarantee of sobriety and moderation. Some because it raises the State into a higher level, and clothes it with the appearance of Christian morality. Some because of the great hindrances to religious work that so violent a change as Disestablishment would bring about. But whatever the theory on which the maintenance of the connection between Church and State is defended, no one pretends that it can any longer be defended on the theory of the exclusive national profession of religion since the abolition of Church Rates. Are we then to content ourselves with the pleas of mere expediency and of sentiment? Are we to bleat plaintively as the harpies encircle our sheep folds that the Church is too venerable, too sacred to be wantonly attacked; too closely bound up with the national life easily to be overthrown; too rich, too large, too influential to be allowed freedom of action?

To advance such pleas would not be merely to court defeat, but richly to deserve it. If the Church is what we believe her to be, the Divinely appointed Society in whom alone is found the perfect union between God and man, she must be able to adapt herself as the ages move on to the ever varying needs of human thought and human life, and she has the right to demand that no external power shall dare to hinder her free development, or check her steady progress, along the path of time. She must justify herself to mankind, not in this age or in that age, but in all ages, and she claims from human governments

as her indefeasible right the power to adapt herself to the needs of mankind freely and openly, without hindrance of any kind whatsoever.

Here we come back to the point from which I started. The truest Church Defence is Church Reform. If the Church can only use the great opportunity she has now been given, can adapt herself to the requirements of the day, can put herself before men in her true colours, can justify her privileges and her methods by the good use she is making of them, not as a great social, political or even moral machine, but as a Spiritual Society, a kingdom of God,—she need not fear either the attacks of her enemies or the lukewarmness of her friends.

I wish to insist, therefore, as strongly as I can, that the Church has now given to her a great opportunity, and on her use of that opportunity will depend her future usefulness and power. People are interested in her, they are asking on all sides for information. They will listen now, when six months' ago they would have run away. The attack has warmed the affection of many, it has stirred the enthusiasm of some, it has excited the interest of all. It is for us to seize the opportunity and put it to the best advantage. Let us put before people a reasonable theory of establishment, and a practical and attainable programme of reform. Let us force this upon the attention of men by all the means which the English Church Union has at its disposal, and I for one am sanguine enough to believe that we should rally all thoughtful Churchmen, and even

many of the less political Nonconformists to our standard, and carry eventually, if not directly, a scheme of reform which would enable the Church to use her endowments to the best advantage, and to meet the ever changing needs of modern life; a scheme which by purifying her administration, and giving her a control over her own affairs, would enable her to put forth that spiritual power which now lies so dormant, kindle the enthusiasm which is now so faint, and bring back to her fold much of the indifference and inertness which is her greatest scandal and reproach.

Let me try and indicate some of the lines on which I think this scheme of Reform should proceed.

I. *As to the theory on which Establishment can be defended.*

Let us boldly say that there is nothing in the theory of an Established Church opposed to modern political thought. Quite the other way. Of recent years the State has undertaken with regard to the individual more and more of the functions of a parent. It has supplied him with a support in his age, and education in his youth. It has defended him in his work by armies of inspectors from undue interference on the part of more favoured classes. It has undertaken moral as well as material responsibilities. What is there then incongruous in the thought that it should undertake a religious responsibility too in guaranteeing to him the opportunity of religious training. It cannot be the business of the State to teach religion, obviously it would teach it so badly,

but it may be one of its duties to see that religious teaching is provided.

If this is admitted as a reasonable theory of the duty of the State with regard to religion, the question which at once arises for the decision of the Statesman is which among the many religions of the day is the one which the State in its own interests should sanction and accept? There can be but one answer to the question. The Church of England is the only religious body which both by its principles as part of the Catholic Church, and its history as having been for so many hundreds of years closely connected with the State, can supply just those guarantees which the State is justified in asking—Continuity of teaching and of life. Steadiness of principle. Reasonableness of method. Let me quote in support of this the eloquent words of the President of our District Union, Canon Scott Holland, which seem to me to put the matter beyond dispute.

“No other Christian body, whatever its peculiar merits can, for instance, even offer to secure to England the dignity and reverence that belong to the sense of historic continuity in her religious life. No other body, nor any number of those bodies, can convey to her the calm and refreshment of a universal and traditional Pastorate, endowed with the security of unquestioned right to enter all doors of rich and poor, and proffer its sanctioned and hereditary service. It is in her capacity to fulfil these special and Catholic functions, that the Church is established and endowed. Her strongest justification will be discovered

by her falling back, as far as she possibly can, on the offices which she alone has it in her to do; and these belong to her inherent and historic claims to be One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic. I should have liked to exhibit this at greater length than is possible here; to show, for instance, her peculiar value for the purposes demanded of an Establishment, by virtue of her Sacramental system which is so richly adapted to the sanctification of those several epochs of human life,—birth, youth, marriage, child-bearing, death, which it is the special office of a National Church to dignify and hallow. Or, again, how she alone offers an ideal of United Worship in her Eucharist, which can, by its concentration in acts, rather than in expository speech, rally round it, with a wide-armed welcome, all grades of intelligence, all varieties of rich and poor, of young and old. Or, again, it might be interesting to shew her fitness for her post, in that she alone, through her Catholic hold on the fulness of the Incarnation, has it given her to receive and put to use those gifts of Architecture, Music, Painting, and Sculpture, Jewelry, and Weaving, for which the nation would wish to find a sanctioning and consecrating home. Or, yet again, it would be expedient to illustrate how a Church, by virtue of the firmness of her hold on the solid reality of Apostolic authority, order, and doctrine, can afford to permit to her members a variety of individual expression, which would be impossible to any sect having, for its sole basis, the accidental agreement of individual opinion; and that, thus, it is in an Episcopal Church that you arrive at such a com-

bination of personal individuality with corporate integrity,—of private reasoning with dogmatic solidity,—as you would most desire in a National Establishment.”

A theory of establishment such as this presupposes the legislative and judicial independence of the Church, for unless the Church was free she could not adequately fulfil her part of the bargain. The State accepts the Church system and doctrine as a reasonable and historically popular scheme of religion well fitted to undertake national responsibilities, and leaves the Church free to apply her system to the best advantage, merely retaining sufficient guarantees that nothing should be done detrimental to the national interests. A free Church in connection with a free State is perhaps the formula which best expresses the combination of religious responsibility on the part of the State with religious independence on the part of the Church.

II. *The Scheme of Reform.*—I. *Self-Government.*

In the forefront of our programme of Reform therefore, must come the cry for freedom. This has been the demand of the English Church Union ever since it was formed. During the last few years what was considered merely the dream of fanatics has now become a familiar idea to most thoughtful men.

We claim the right of self-government, both on behalf of ourselves and on behalf of the State. For look at the results at the present moment of the absorption of Church administration by Parliament, and

see if they are creditable either to the State or to the Church. The deadlock is one admittedly which is little short of an abdication of the functions of administration altogether. Every one acknowledges that a Parliament elected on political grounds alone, containing every section of religious and irreligious thought, subject to gusts of sentiment and passion, with demands upon its time and attention far greater than it can ever hope to satisfy, consisting of men who have but rarely had the opportunity of making themselves acquainted with Church history or law, is a body singularly unfitted to deal with the solemn issues which are bound up with ecclesiastical legislation and administration. If for the moment it were possible to put political contingencies out of the question, I believe that there is no Statesman who would not admit that Parliament does not and cannot manage Church affairs well, and that it would be a good thing if it was relieved altogether of the duty of mismanaging them. Then let us turn to the Church. Is there any reason why she should deprecate the freedom which I desire for her. I put out of sight for a moment arguments of a higher kind. I make no mention now of the right of the Church to self-government in virtue of her claim to be the kingdom of God upon earth, in virtue of our Lord's commission of the keys and His promise of guidance. I make no mention of her right to self-government here in England as a matter of history and a matter of law, but I am content to put it simply on the lower ground of expediency, because that at any rate has the

merit of raising no controversy, and being quite sufficient for my purpose. Let us look at the Church legislation of the last ten years and see how it has corresponded to the wants and needs of the Church. Of course I do not refer to such legislation as the Universities Tests Act and the Burials Act, which were directed to the adjustment of her relations with those outside, and not to internal reform. I believe am right in saying that the only Acts of Parliament relating to the internal affairs of the Church passed during that time were the Public Worship Regulation Act, the Bishoprics Act, and the Pluralities Act, 1885. The first of them I suppose every candid Churchman now admits to have been a failure and an injury, the others undoubtedly are most valuable measures, but they only make the conclusion more strong. Parliament, being by a series of historical accidents invested with the sole power of legislating for the Church, has in ten years passed but two Acts which have pointed in the direction of Reform, and has balanced that by a reactionary and harmful measure; Meanwhile in Convocation, in Diocesan Conferences, in Church Congresses, in Church newspapers, everywhere where Churchmen can speak with the chance of being heard, has been raised a continued demand for reform. The clamour has made its way into Parliament, it has been strong enough to force the appointment of Commissions, but there it has stopped. No practical steps have been taken to carry out even those reforms upon which all thoughtful Churchmen are agreed, because Parliament has not had the time or the inclination to take up such subjects.

Self-government is then our first demand. Self-government in the interests of the State, because it is to the interest of the State that the religion with which it is connected should be efficient, and State government has been proved to be grossly inefficient. Self-government in the interests of the Church, because it is her right, and because it is necessary to her life and to her reform. State government is killing her by inches, is binding her down, is cramping her energies. It is idle to imagine that it can last. The death knell of the system has already been rung. The only question is in what way it shall be done away with. There are two possibilities, and two only. By a generous and wise policy of confidence the State may give to the Church such self-government as is necessary for her progress and development, at the same time retaining such guarantees as may be necessary for the maintenance of her own interests—this is a policy of Reform. Or, if the State refuses to listen to reason, the Church will herself burst her prison bars, and go forth Disestablished and Disendowed naked into the light of liberty—this is a policy of Revolution. It is for us Churchmen now to say which we are going to pursue.

Self-government is our first great necessity, the first article of our Charter of Liberty. Its effects would be wide reaching I admit. The policy is a bold one, but if just and necessary, we need not fear its boldness. It implies more than appears perhaps at first sight. It involves distinctly the repeal of the Public Worship Regulation Act, the badge of

past servitude, the anachronism which still clings to us. It involves the revival, the adaptation, and in part the creation of the machinery necessary to carry on the business of government. It involves, amongst other things, therefore the establishment of a Representative system for the Church. The Convocations must be reformed so as to make them more thoroughly representative of the whole Clergy. Means must be found to enable them to speak with a united voice, and so make them better able to discharge the solemn duties of the *ecclesia docens*. Then we want a representative Lay Body to express the opinions of the great mass of Churchmen, and to work with the representatives of the Clergy in dealing with and administering the temporalities of the Church, remembering always the true principle that the power of the purse is in the hands of the Laity, the power of the keys in the hands of the Clergy. It involves if necessary a reconstruction of the Church Courts, diocesan, provincial, and final. Reconstruction which should follow in the main the lines recommended by the Ecclesiastical Courts Commission, and enforce the great principle, which to reasonable minds proves itself by being merely stated, that matters purely spiritual should only be decided in courts purely spiritual.

2. *Patronage*—Self-government once attained the Church would move easily and quickly along the path of reform. Abuses would vanish as if by magic, and first among the fortresses to fall at the sound of the trumpet would be the crying scandal of Patronage.

There is no question but that this is the one thing which makes the Church to stink in the nostrils of earnest religious men, both inside and outside of her pale. It is a scandal which Churchmen have long striven to overcome. That it retains its place is solely due to the inert selfishness of Parliament. I am convinced that the very first measure which would result from the restoring of self-government to the Church would be a Reform of Patronage, forbidding absolutely the sale of next presentations, abolishing donatives utterly, and limiting greatly the sale of advowsons.

3. *Appointment of Bishops*—Then there is another form of Patronage which may occasion scandal and does certainly give rise to much misconception, I mean the nomination of Bishops by means of a compulsory election. This I believe to be one of the easiest scandals to remove, and certainly would be removed had we the self-government we desire. The abuse lies not in the nomination of the Bishops by the State. I believe that on the whole to be a good way of appointing Bishops, and one certainly necessary is an Established Church. The scandal does not lie in the election by the Chapter. That I believe to be a wholesome safeguard and a valuable assertion of the rights of the Church, but it lies in the fact that the election is not free, and that the electors are personally subject to legal penalties if they do not elect the person nominated. I would simply repeal the penalties. The Crown would then nominate as before, but the Chapter would have a free veto. They

could not elect any one else, but they would be allowed to exercise freely the veto which the law still nominally gives them, and I am quite convinced that that right would only be exercised in the case of a scandalous nomination, in fact, just in those cases where it was to the interest of the State as well as the Church that it should be exercised, and would serve as a very wholesome check upon the possible recrudescence of political appointments which have been, thanks to Lord Beaconsfield and Mr. Gladstone, happily so rare of late.

4. *Pensions for Clergy*—Again with self-government would come another reform of great practical importance, but of too unexciting a character ever to force itself upon Parliament. I mean the establishment of a system of pensions for the Clergy. A single thought will shew how terribly religion suffers both in town and country, but especially in towns, from the fact that Clergy, who have grown old in harness, have perhaps broken down in health and are feeble through age, are obliged to retain their benefices and make a heart breaking shew of doing the work they know they cannot do, because there is nothing but their benefices between themselves and the workhouse. I do not know anything which would be of greater service to the Church than the establishment of a system by which a Clergyman might look forward as of right to a retiring pension when he became incapable of work.

5. *Pew Rents*—And again with self-government would come the speedy solution of another difficulty

which presses much upon the efficiency of the Church in some quarters. I mean Pew Rents. Of course we all know that in ancient parish Churches pew rents are now illegal; but in many places payments in the nature of pew rents are frequently made, and in some, where there are no payments, a system of appropriation has grown up which drives the poor away and stamps the Church as the home of the rich. Nothing can be more opposed to spirit of the establishment, as I have sketched it, than such a system as this. The abolition of pew rents, the restoration of the Church to the poor, must be among the first and most vital reforms to be carried out by a Church which justifies its connection with the State, because it is popular, because it is free, because it alone can thoroughly meet the religious wants of the people.

6. *Redistribution of Endowments*—Lastly there must be some means of redistributing endowments so as to make the emolument received bear a closer relation to the nature of the work to be done. The Church is not too rich, but its wealth is too unequally distributed. It is poor where it should be rich; it is rich often where poverty would be a happy discipline. Perhaps the phrase redistribution of endowments has a socialistic ring, and sounds like wholesale confiscation. There need be but little confiscation about it. The property of the Church is held and enjoyed by patrons and clergy as a trust for the Church; and if patrons or clergy refuse to consent to a re-arrangement of trust funds; without doubt sooner or later they will all be confiscated, but for the present the

opportunity is given us, and if we want to retain our Deans and Cathedral bodies, to avoid uniformity of emolument in order that there may be means of promoting study and rewarding ability ; some redistribution must infallibly take place soon, or else the deluge will come and sweep all down to a miserable level of poverty.

This is the scheme of reform which I venture to put before you as the most effective, if not the only way, in which the objects which we have most at heart can be successfully combined. The problem of how to give the Church the power of adapting herself to the needs of the nation without severing her connection with the State, can I believe only be solved by some such generous and bold policy as I have here sketched. It must proceed upon the principle that to the Church belongs the function of governance, to the State the power of sanction and the responsibility of veto. I need not here weary you with details of the machinery which would be necessary in order to ensure the harmonious co-operation of these two principles. There would, I believe, be no practical difficulty in arriving at a *modus vivendi*, a concordat, if there was a real desire to do so. What we have to fear is rather the timidity which shrinks from all change, the lukewarmness which will not take the trouble to think or act, the worldliness which in its inmost heart desires to keep the Church weak and submissive. But now, if ever, is the time for action. From all sides comes the cry for reform. The constituencies are pressing it upon us. There is a danger that the

nostrum of the political agitator, or the death dealing potion of the professional Erastian, may be mistaken for the waters of life. They may revolutionise, they cannot reform. We, the Catholic party, are the only people who can reform the Church, for we are the only people who combine tender reverence for the past with quick sympathy for the present. We alone supply the continuity of thought and of method necessary to an establishment. We only can adapt that thought and method to the fierce needs of modern life. It is for these reasons that I have ventured to press upon your consideration as the truest and most necessary form of Church Defence a Reform which shall be broad in its basis, extensive in its range, Catholic in its method, and which I believe would prove to be practical and reasonable in its operation.









