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PLAIN STATEMENT

OF THE

FACTS OF THE CASE

AS BETWEEN

THE ESTABLISHED CHURCH

AND THE

LIBERATION SOCIETY.

WRITTEN ESPECIALLY FOR THE INFORMATION OF WORKING MEN.

BY

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Organizing Secretary to the London Working Men's Council for Church Defence.

“FACTS ARE STUBBORN THINGS.”

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THE ESTABLISHED CHURCH

AND THE

LIBERATION SOCIETY.

DISESTABLISHMENT and DISENDOWMENT are two words representing a subject which has of late years engaged a very considerable amount of public attention. The subject to which they refer is to be found, in one shape or another, more or less, in every newspaper which circulates amongst us, and the various phases of this subject are discussed—generally with a great deal of warmth—in connection with most political and religious matters. Although many persons are to be found who have something to say upon the question of Disestablishment and Disendowment, there are very few who really understand what they are talking about; and it is a singular fact, that the persons who talk the loudest, and profess to understand the most, are in reality those who possess the least real knowledge of the subject. And many persons—intentionally in some cases, unintentionally in others—have thrown a false light upon the question at issue, and the result is that “confusion has become worse confused,” and, where simple ignorance originally existed, compound ignorance is now to be found—that is to say, ignorance which thinks itself knowledge. This being the case, it is necessary that a simple, unvarnished statement of the facts of the case should be placed before the public at large, in order that those thousands of persons who have neither the time, the opportunity, nor the inclination to study the question in its purely controversial form, may have it in their power to learn briefly the chief points of the subject, in order that they may be qualified to form an opinion respecting it. We will endeavour, therefore, to put the matter in as simple and easy a way as possible, and at the same time to state the case from a calm unprejudiced point of view.

In looking at our country as she at present exists, we find in our midst a very large number of persons professing the worship of the Almighty, and these are divided into various bodies or denominations, each body carrying out its services in a more or less different way. There are Church of England people, as they are called, Methodists of various shades of opinion, Independents, Baptists, and others too numerous to mention. All these, while disagreeing in minor points, worship the same God, and read the same Bible, and it might reasonably be supposed that they would at least live at peace with each other, and direct their whole energies to the service of God. That this is by no means the case, we shall presently see. A Society has been formed, having its head-quarters in London, with many branch societies in connection with it throughout the country, which is known by the name of “The Society for the Liberation of Religion from State Patronage and Control;” or, as it is more commonly called, “The Liberation Society.” This Society is composed of large numbers of Non-conformists (com-

prising persons who profess Christianity, together with those who utterly repudiate it), and they are banded together for the purpose of bringing about the Disestablishment and Disendowment of the Church of England. In other words, they desire to destroy the connection between the Church and the State, and to take away the property of the Church and apply it to other purposes.

Let us first take **DISESTABLISHMENT** into consideration. The Liberation Society declares that the State has no business to interfere with religion; that the State has no right to favour one Church or body of Christians over other Churches or bodies, by establishing it, or putting it above others; and they assert, further, that the existence of an Established Church is "a violation of religious liberty and religious equality." Now these things seem very fair and proper, and many persons will no doubt think "exactly so." But let us analyse them, and examine them closely.

Firstly: If by the "State interfering with religion" we are to understand that the State, that is to say, the Government, has no business to control a person's religious convictions, or to force him to conform to any particular creed, we are quite prepared to admit the truth and justice of the proposition. But what, we ask, has this to do with the Church of England? We appeal to the common sense and honesty of every Englishman, no matter what may be his religious views, to say if "the State" *does* interfere with religion in this way. And if it does not, what right has the Liberation Society to imply that it does?

Secondly: Whether the State has or has not the right to favour one denomination of Christians by "establishing" it, is a matter of opinion. But it has nothing whatever to do with the Church of England, and the Liberation Society is therefore only misleading people by implying that it has. Let us suppose a case. We will imagine that in England, for example, there is no Established Church in existence, and that the Government is about to *select one out of many religious bodies* to become an Established Church. We will suppose that the State does select one of these sects, and *establishes* it, preferring it to the others because of its greater antiquity, the numbers of its people, the learning of its ministers, and its general pre-eminence over the others. Would the others, even in such a case as this, have any very great cause for complaint? And, indeed, something similar to this really happened in America a few years ago. Two hundred delegates met at Philadelphia to prepare a memorial to be presented to Congress, praying that body to *establish* one of the religious denominations of the country *in connection with the State*. This, we must remember, was *in the United States*. The whole thing fell through, however, in consequence of the bickering of the various sects—all eager for the post of honour! Let us enquire how it really is with the Established Church in this country: is she "an Act of Parliament Church?" does she owe her existence to the State? We most unhesitatingly answer, No. It is not generally known, but it is nevertheless most emphatically true, that the Church of England has existed in our land ever since the very earliest times of Christianity; indeed, some historians assert that St. Paul himself founded the Church of England. At any rate, the Church was planted in

England in apostolic times, and *that Church has continued from then until now*, through many and various forms of civil Government, up to the present day. So that, so far from the State having founded the Church, the Church in reality existed before the State, and the State and the Church have grown up together, side by side, through long ages, until they have become so intertwined that it is most difficult to see how their union could be severed. This being the case, what becomes of the Liberationist statement about the "State having no right to set up one religious body above another?" May we not fairly put it down as a piece of mere "clap-trap," designed to catch the ears of the unthinking multitude, without possessing the least particle of solid foundation? And it is a very curious fact that this much-abused Church existed in this country for nearly *one thousand five hundred years*, imparting to generation after generation of Englishmen and Englishwomen religious instruction and comfort, before Dissent, or any other form of Christian worship, was known or thought of! It may be as well to take this opportunity of correcting an error into which many persons fall, viz., that of supposing that the Church of Rome was the Church which existed in England before the time of the Reformation, and that the Church of England was not founded until then. This is a very great mistake, for the Church of England was quite a separate body, and at the time of the Reformation she simply discarded some erroneous doctrines which had crept in; but her individuality remained undisturbed, in the same way that a ceiling, after some cobwebs which have accumulated upon it have been swept away, is still the same ceiling, and not a new one.

Thirdly. The Established Church is said to be "a violation of religious liberty and religious equality." We ask, in what way? It must be remembered that there are three kinds of Established or State Churches. 1st. The *State enforced* Church, such as existed, for example, in the Papal States, where the Church was crammed down the throats of the people, as it were, conformity being compelled, and no other form of religion tolerated. 2nd. The *State paid* Church, in which the Church is supported out of the taxation of the country. 3rd. The *State recognised* Church, such as we have in England—a very different thing from either of the others we have referred to. Now, let us ask ourselves the question, putting away all prejudice or partiality, and weighing the matter in a straightforward honest way, in what point does this *State recognised Church of England* violate religious liberty? Does the Church compel conformity to herself? No. Does the Church or the State in any way punish persons who do not conform? No. Is a man looked upon with any less respect or favour by the law of the land because he is a Dissenter? No. Is he treated with injustice by a magistrate or judge because he is a Dissenter? No. Is he held back from any worldly honours or position if he does not conform to the Established Church? No. Are not all forms of religion tolerated in England? YES. Cannot Dissenters of any denomination build Chapels, and worship in any way they please? YES. Can they not baptize, marry, and bury in their own places, and with their own rites and ceremonies, without being interfered with in any way whatever? YES. Does not the law protect them and their property from

insult and injury, in the same way that it protects Churchmen? YES. In plain English, do not Dissenters have fair play in every sense of the term? YES. Then, let us ask, is there any just cause of complaint against the Established Church, or is there any reason why she should be continually abused and pulled to pieces? It is perfectly certain that these things have only to be put before the people in a fair, candid way, for the injustice and inconsistency of the outcry against the Church to be clearly seen. There is another point in connection with this question of religious equality, which will serve to show the shallowness of the phrase. If the Liberation Society and its friends really desired to possess what they term "religious equality," they would act upon an altogether different basis. Instead of seeking to *Disestablish* the Church, they would try to get *Established themselves*. In homely language, they have "taken hold of the wrong end of the stick." For a true and proper desire for equality consists in wishing to *raise yourself*, not in endeavouring to displace others, and the fact that the Liberation Society proposes to pull down the Established Church instead of raising Dissent, shows most unmistakably that its so-called desire for "equality" is in reality nothing of the kind, but simply a wish to drag something down, instead of building anything up.

DISENDOWMENT.

There are very few subjects upon which so much misapprehension exists, as that of the property which is held by the Church of England. The most erroneous notions prevail concerning this property, and many people with no small pretensions to education and intelligence hold the most absurd and incorrect ideas upon the subject. This may be accounted for in several ways, and chiefly because, in the first place, much of the property of the Church has been in its possession for a very great number of years, so that its origin is not in all cases easily traced; and in the second place, because for a long time there have been people (who must know that what they assert is utterly false) whose living has been obtained by working upon popular credulity, in spreading masses of falsehoods and misstatements respecting the Church, from one end of the country to the other. The time has come, however, when the working classes will no longer be left to hear these untruths without hearing also a full and explicit refutation of them; and it may be emphatically stated that the Church has nothing whatever to fear from "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth," being told concerning her.

" Right must triumph at the last,
So round and round we run;
Truth must ever come uppermost,
And justice shall be done."

The idea—a very wide-spread one—that the Church of England is supported out of the taxation of the country, is most thoroughly erroneous. The real fact is that the Church does not receive *one single penny* from the State, in any shape or form. Nor is this an assertion

that cannot be proved to the very fullest extent. If the Church is paid by the State, let the Liberation Society show the working men of England *where the money comes from*. Here is a very simple and easy test. Each year the Chancellor of the Exchequer for the time being presents to the House of Commons a financial statement—the Budget, as it is called. Now this Budget is an account of the national receipts and expenditure for the year. Under the head of expenditure we find so much money for the Army, so much money for the Navy, so much for the Civil Service, and so on. How is it that we see *nothing for the Church*? There can be no trickery in the case: millions of money are not paid away without an account being given. *Where is the money that the Church receives from the State?* Must it not be as clear as daylight to every sensible man and woman that the solution of this seeming mystery lies in the fact that *the Church does not get anything at all from the State, for if it did, the account would most certainly appear*? Anyone, therefore, who imagines that in paying taxes he contributes to the support of the State-recognized (not *State-supported*) Church of England, is thoroughly mistaken, and reflection and enquiry will rid him of his error.

But, it is said by the Liberation Society, the Church of England is the National Church, and, therefore, its property is the property of the Nation. It is indeed the glory of the Church of England that she is the National Church, and by that we mean that she is the Church of the whole people—open to every one, ready to receive all, without money and without price. Not the church of a sect, of a party, but the church of the Nation at large—held by high and low, rich and poor, extending north and south, west and east, on Welsh mountain and on Kentish cliff, midst northern hills and southern valleys, in village and in town, always the same! But to say that the funds at the disposal of this National Church are the property of the Nation at large, for other purposes than those of religion, is about as just as asserting that the money belonging to depositors in our National Savings Banks belongs, not to the depositors, but to the nation!

A few words as to the origin of church property may be useful. The whole of the parochial endowments, and the parish churches, may be truly said to be the voluntary gifts of persons—many of them long ages ago, for the purpose of keeping a church and a clergyman in the parish for ever. And in the same way that a private individual may now build and endow a church or a chapel (as many persons do), were the old parish churches of England built and endowed. In many parishes, the salary of the clergyman is paid by tithes, that is to say, a portion of *the produce* of the land—now in most cases commuted or converted into a money payment. A very great deal of misapprehension exists with reference to tithes. Many persons suppose that they are a tax upon the land, but this is a very great mistake, and has been shown to be so by very many eminent lawyers. *Tithe is in no sense a tax*. It is legal transferable property, which has been held for hundreds and hundreds of years, and it is in no way a burden upon the farmer, for when a farmer pays tithe, *he pays so much less in rent*, and if tithes were to be abolished to-morrow, the farmers would not be a single penny better off, for they would have to pay increased rents. Two points to sup-

port these remarks with reference to tithes must suffice in this instance. 1st. A very large proportion of tithe property, that is to say, money payments as tithes, are held by *laymen*, and the amounts are duly paid to them without murmur. Many persons could be named who hold tithes—for example, the Duke of Bedford, the Duke of Somerset, and others. Who ever hears of any complaint being made of having to pay tithes to these layholders? And does not the mere fact of private individuals holding tithe property show that it is not in any sense a tax or State payment? 2nd. Blunt old William Cobbett, who certainly will not be accused of any undue partiality towards the Church, disposed of the whole tithe question in these few plain, straightforward words:—"I must say that tithes are not in themselves a hardship at all. If I did not pay to the parson I should to the landlord, and he would have it if the parson had it not."

In order to put this question of Disestablishment and Disendowment in a still plainer manner, let us compare assertion with reality, fiction with fact, as follows:—

FICTION.

It is said that,

The Church of England is a "State-made Church."

The Church of England was founded at the time of the Reformation, by Henry VIII.

The Church of England is 'a violation of religious liberty and religious equality.

The Church of England is a "State-paid Church."

The property of the Church of England is "national property."

FACT.

The truth is that,

The Church of England was never brought into existence by the State; indeed, the Church existed in reality before the State had any being.

The Church of England was founded more than *a thousand years* before that time. No new Church was founded in the time of Henry VIII.; the Church which already existed was *reformed*, not created anew.

If so, how is it that we find hundreds of Dissenting Chapels, their proprietors possessing full liberty, and enjoying the protection of the law just as much as the Church of England does?

The Church of England does not receive a SINGLE PENNY from the State, and its property was never at any time given by the State.

The property held by the Church has been given to *the Church*—never to the State. It has been given by private individuals, and is held by exactly the same right as that according to which Dissenting bodies hold property.

Let us sum up the whole matter by asking ourselves one plain, simple question, as regards Disestablishment and Disendowment—WHAT GOOD WOULD IT DO? This is the real great issue, and we should look at the question calmly, and let no consideration but that of a desire to arrive at the truth influence our decision. This is a mighty and important question, which is not to be settled by a few clap-trap phrases and high-sounding terms. 1st. *Would Disestablishment and Disendowment do any good to the Church?* No. People who talk about the State bondage and fetters in which the Church is placed, really know nothing at all about the Church. The "fetters and bondage" are a myth; they are like ghosts—much talked about, but never seen or

felt. And again, to what reasonable man will it seem clear that the Church would be better off if she were disendowed? In other words, who is there that will declare a man, or a Church, or a Society, better off if his or its means of support is taken away? Is it not sheer nonsense to say that the Church would be better off without her income than with it? 2nd. *Would Disestablishment and Disendowment do any good to the nation at large?* Would any Englishman be more free, more religious, more happy, than at present? Would the working classes have better wages, better dwellings, better prospects? Would food be cheaper and coals less dear? All these are practical points, and points which concern the well-being of the people. But he must be a bold man who will dare to assert that the overthrow and spoliation of the Church would do any good in any of these things. 3rd. *Would Disestablishment and Disendowment decrease crime and pauperism, and do good to the cause of religion?* We most firmly declare that it would not. Whether the Church of England—which has given a Church and a clergyman for every Englishman, be he rich or be he poor—which has mapped out the whole of our land into parishes, so that every man, woman, and child is in *some* parish, and has a claim upon *some* clergyman—which has educated *more than three quarters* of the children of the country, and under whose influence England has become a great, a mighty, and a prosperous nation; whether the Church which has done and is doing all these things is to be destroyed, and her power for doing good crippled, is a question which is left to Englishmen to decide. It is a question which goes far beyond all narrow sectarian or party limits. It concerns the great mass of the nation, and by the working classes will it be settled. The question of Disestablishment and Disendowment is one which, above all others, concerns the working classes. If it can be shown that the Church of England has failed in her work, that she inflicts injustice upon any one, and that the nation would be better off if she were removed, then Disestablishment and Disendowment may fairly be considered. But the Liberation Society has never attempted to prove any of these things, and it never will, for it knows that any attempt to do so would be a miserable failure. It is utterly impossible in a short paper such as this to show the question in the lengthy and interesting way that it may be, and is in other places, put forward. There are two sides to every question, and it is hoped that enough has been said to show working men that there is a strong Church side to this question, and that the arguments of the Liberation Society are utterly worthless when brought face to face with plain, honest facts.

“Oh! rather give me commentators plain,
 Who with no deep researches vex the brain;
 Who from the dark and doubtful love to run,
 And hold their glimmering tapers to the sun.”

Crabbe.





