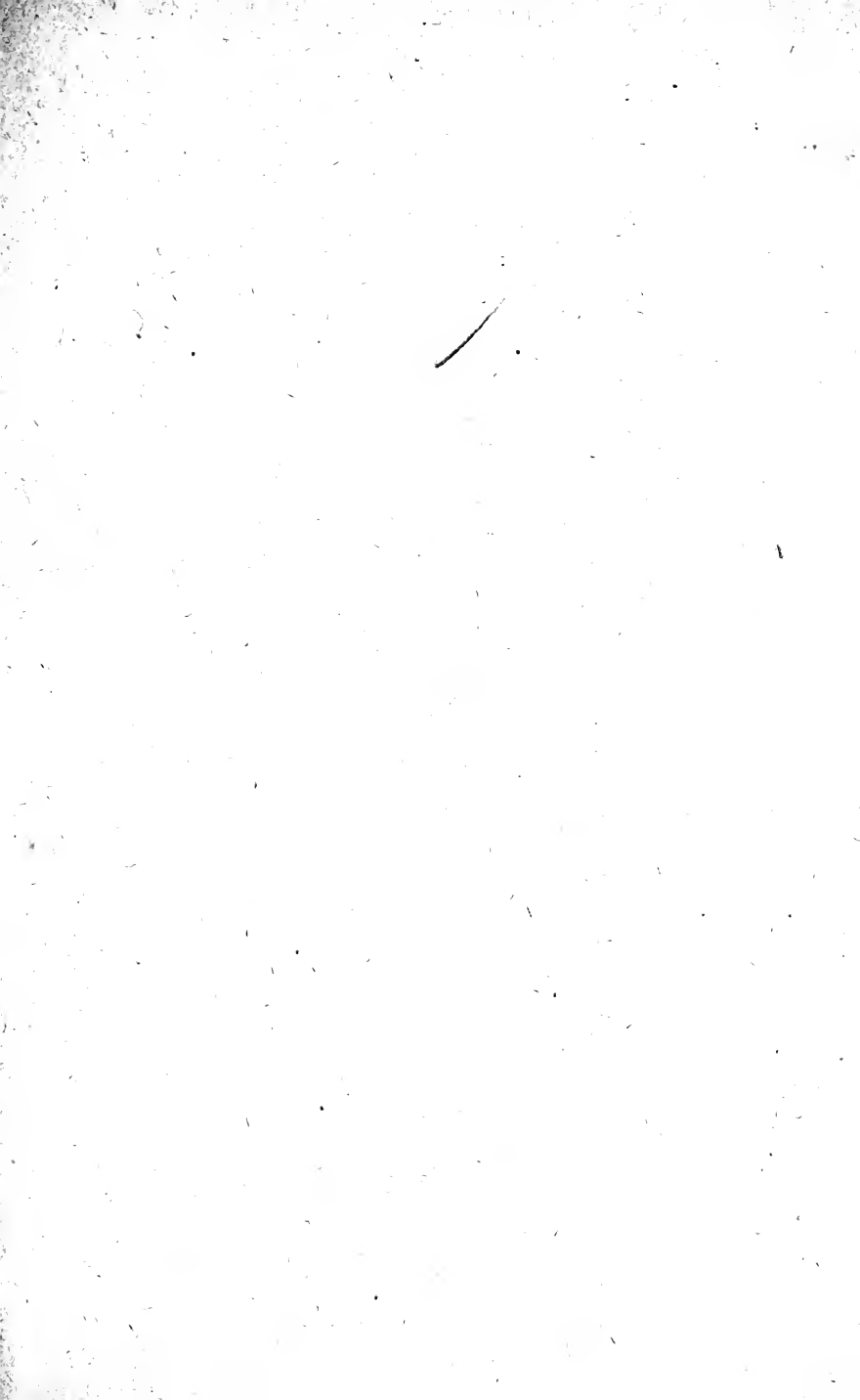


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THE RIGHTS AND DUTIES OF THE LAITY.

# A CHARGE

DELIVERED

IN WORCESTER CATHEDRAL,

AND AT

STRATFORD-ON-AVON,

AT HIS

SIXTEENTH GENERAL VISITATION,

MAY 13TH AND 14TH, 1872.

BY

RICHARD BRINDLEY HONE, M.A.,

ARCHDEACON OF WORCESTER.

WORCESTER:—J. COOMBS, HIGH STREET.

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PRICE SIXPENCE.



## A CHARGE.

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MY BRETHREN OF THE CLERGY AND LAITY,—

Never, as I believe, was there a time, within the recollection of the oldest amongst us, when there was so great necessity as at present for strengthening the position of the National Church, for correcting ascertained defects, and for devising the most effectual means of qualifying her for the exercise of a beneficent influence on the largest scale.

Amongst important subjects intimately affecting her welfare, and claiming immediate attention, are the place which the Laity are entitled to occupy, and the duties which they ought to fulfil, in relation to her interests ; and I cannot think that any apology is needed if these are made the subjects of my present Charge.

Allowing for justifiable causes of absence from my Visitation, I ought to be heard by upwards of 300 of my Brethren of the Clergy, and by double that number of Churchwardens, gathered from all parts of a large and populous Archdeaconry, and possessed of considerable influence,—a great opportunity of usefulness which I desire to be enabled to turn to profitable account.

In what relations the Laity should stand towards the Synods of the Church,—whether they ought to be invested with a controlling power over the selection of the pastors of their several parishes,—whether, and to what extent, and by what means, provision should be made for their being consulted before alterations are made in the manner of conducting the services in their parish

churches,—these are questions which, at the present moment, are demanding, with increasing importunity, the grave and intelligent consideration of every loyal and consistent member of the Church of England, with a view to their speedy settlement, on wise and safe principles.

In venturing to address you on subjects at once so important and so difficult to deal with, I am not presumptuous enough to suppose that I can prescribe their proper solution; and my desire and aim will rather be to commend them to your own thoughtfulness, and to urge that they are not likely to admit of a long postponement, and that they are liable in the end to be treated unwisely, if left to be entered upon with an enforced precipitancy.

May it please the great Head of the Church to endue us, her members, with a right judgment, and to prepare us to take our own proper part, whatever that may be, when either counsel or action are required of us! The day may perchance arrive much earlier than many of us at present expect.

The questions which now appear to press most strongly for our anxious forethought, and on which I now proceed to address you, are, as I have already intimated, the rights and duties of the Laity, in relation to CHURCH COUNCILS, CHURCH PATRONAGE, and CHURCH SERVICES.

I. And first, of Councils or Synods. The Church is far from being in a quiescent state. Measures affecting her welfare are in progress, or under discussion, without intermission, in Parliament and in the two Convocations. The circumstances of her relation to the State are brought under the eye of the Legislature; and action, often touching her in tender places, is taken, in almost every session of Parliament. A few words may suffice to suggest how momentous some of these subjects are. There is the increase of the Episcopate, the formation of new Dioceses, the reconstruction of the constitution of Cathedral bodies, the reform of the Ecclesiastical Courts, the remodelling of the Convocations of Canterbury and York, Parochial Councils, Subdivision of Parishes, Clergy Discipline, Amendments of the Act of Uniformity, the



Laws relating to Marriage, and a multitude of other subjects, all made questions of the day, upon which legislation is sought. No one would be rash enough to suppose that any single year will pass, for a long time to come, without Parliament, and the Convocations also, being occupied with matters which concern the whole Church, and which will affect her seriously, whether for good or evil.

The measures submitted to the consideration of Parliament are, many of them, conceived in a most friendly spirit, with a pure desire to enlarge the sphere of the Church's usefulness, to strengthen her hold upon the hearts of the people, and to equip her for the most effectual fulfilment of her own proper work, in the service of her Master, Christ. Other measures are framed in jealousy and hostility, sometimes openly avowed and sometimes awkwardly disguised under a pretext of friendly intentions.

But in no case have the Laity been consulted. Every proposal that touches the Church is of interest to the Layman, and many of the Bills debated in Parliament are of vital importance to him. But nothing is referred to his consideration. He is constrained to be a passive spectator of all that is going on. There is no organization by which he can make known his judgment or his wishes. He has no representatives anywhere. It used to be said that the Laity have a powerful representation in Parliament, but the hollowness of that suggestion is now universally admitted. It is owned that no one member of the House of Commons was elected by his county or borough because he was judged to be the fittest representative of Churchmen that could anywhere be found.

It may be said that Laymen can use the right of petitioning, as citizens of this country. But petitioning is not in good repute, owing to the fraud and delusion by which names are procured.

But whether this mode of representing an Englishman's desires to Parliament be still of value, or be almost devoid of significance, it remains equally true that the Laity, as such, have no means of

turning it to account, in as much as there is no organized body through which their desires can be expressed. The Laity, as such, can scarcely be said to have declared their minds, on ecclesiastical subjects, since those days, in the distant past, in which they were integral parts of an Anglo-Saxon Council.

This was a matter of comparatively little consequence so long as Parliament consisted wholly of Churchmen. Still less was it important while the legislature gave no attention to questions affecting the interests of the Church, and while the Convocations of the Clergy transacted no business, and therefore took no steps which could, directly or indirectly, influence the course of legislation. But all this is changed. Parliament is not an assembly of Churchmen. The Convocations of the Clergy, using their newly restored life, are exercising a perceptible influence over public opinion, and over the proceedings of the legislature; but the Laity have no legally constituted representative assembly, through which to declare their minds.

This seems in itself unjust; and surely the Church stands at a great disadvantage while thus deprived of the counsel and action of her lay members!

Some nineteen years ago, at my third Visitation, I thought it right to plead for the admission of the Laity into the existing Synods of the Church. In the Convocation of the Province of Canterbury, at that time, there were many other members who desired that a place might be found in that assembly for representative Laymen. The subject has never since been allowed to sleep; and one of your own Proctors has been a principal means of keeping it alive, and recently of procuring a careful examination of it by a Committee, of which he was the Chairman.

But further reflection has long since satisfied me (and the conviction is only strengthened by the Report of that Committee), that the difficulties in the way of effecting such a change in the structure of the Provincial Convocations are of the gravest character, involving practically the destruction of an ancient and

constitutional council, and the virtual substitution of another differently framed.

But further, such a transformation, unless accompanied by a provision scarcely less subversive of the original institution, would leave the Church under her acknowledged present disadvantage of having two independent Provincial Synods, whose decisions, without objectionable compromises, might often be at issue with each other.

What the exigencies of the Church of England appear to demand is the revival of one council for the whole Church, leaving intact the old Provincial Synods of the Clergy (which are a part of the constitution of the country), except so far as they might be made more efficient by reforms consistent with their original character. The Convocations of the Clergy might still find their appropriate work to do; and they would be ready to go on, fulfilling their proper functions, if perchance the projected National Assembly should on trial be found wanting.

The voice of a great National Council, composed of Clergy and Laity, would secure a measure of attention and confidence which no purely clerical council will ever be able to command; and moreover, such joint deliberation, and concurrence in action, might consolidate the whole body of the Church, producing an enthusiastic unity where now there is too much of coldness and indifference. It might, with God's blessing, renew the youth of the Church, and enable her to put forth fresh strength for God's services and glory, and for the welfare of the people of this land. The Legislature might be expected to listen with favour to the representations of such an assembly, and to ratify its schemes for purely Church purposes, so long as they did not trench on the rights and liberties of the people. It is not beyond the reach of hope that, within prescribed limits, the right of making canons, binding upon members of the Church, might be conceded to such a body. One great advantage might confidently be expected, namely, that Parliament would not legislate in the supposed interest of the Church without having first ascertained, at least

indirectly, in what light the subject was regarded by the representative ecclesiastical council.

Should such a Synod be framed, in answer to the desire of many loyal members of the Church, it can scarcely be doubted that its constitutional basis would be identical in principle with those of the Synods of the Church in Ireland, in the Colonies, and in the United States of America. In these, the common principle prevails of voting by Orders, in the last resort,—the Bishops, Clergy, and Laity, apart,—so that the veto of either Order sets aside any proposed resolution or canon; and the sanction of a majority in each division (it might be a majority of two-thirds in each), if claimed according to a known rule, is requisite to the validity of any acts of the Synod. The necessity of securing so great an amount of concurrence as would be expressed by three distinct majorities, might sometimes retard the progress of useful measures; but on the other hand, it would serve to prevent hasty legislation, and to give additional weight to such decisions as had been made under these conditions.

If our eyes and ears are open, we must be aware that a great and increasing number of the Laity not only complain of, but resent, the practical suppression of what they hold to be their rights, and the denial to them of any opportunity, in a corporate capacity, of advancing the interests of the Church; and that the consequence is, not only a loss of valuable services, but a smaller share of affection and devotedness to the Church than might otherwise be secured.

Feeling as I have now expressed myself, I listened with unmixed thankfulness to the words of our Bishop, at his last Visitation, when he was sustaining by argument what he had previously advanced in his Primary Charge.

After speaking of the “vital importance of engaging the counsel and help of the lay members of the Church, in all church affairs, whether of legislation or administration,” he declared it to be his firm belief that “no greater benefit could be given to our Church, or to the best interests of the nation, than to put the

course of church legislation on an improved footing, such as may approve itself to the practical good sense of our people, and win their confidence. Happy for us the day," he added, "if the good providence of God so order it, when we may have a body fairly representing the Church, and in which, not as a matter of concession, but of right, the Laity shall have their due place; to which shall be entrusted the task of regulating by authority all matters touching the Church, within well defined limits, as also preparing, with due care, measures which lie beyond those limits, for discussion and final decision by Parliament. Who can doubt," he asked, "that the action of such a body, well and wisely constituted, would provide us, at no distant day, with measures corrective of many evils by which we are now vexed, giving increased stability and efficiency to our Church, and furnishing us with fresh power to carry the saving health of the Gospel far and wide among our people?"

I make no apology for conveying these weighty words once more to your ears.

Very valuable essays and speeches on this subject have been put into circulation by the *Association for Promoting the Reform of Convocation*. It is true that the avowed aim of that Association is the amalgamation and reconstruction of the two Provincial Convocations; but the able papers to which I refer plead strongly for the establishment of one great National Assembly, comprising the Bishops, the Clergy, and the Laity, some of them not mentioning the Convocations at all, and therefore of course, not treating them as the only germ out of which the new council should spring.

To such a Synod, were it now in active life, might wisely be left the treatment of those other questions, affecting the Laity, of which I have still to speak, and with respect to which, as things now stand, there is a wide-spread and increasing dissatisfaction amongst intelligent churchmen, which will probably exact, ere long, a favourable settlement of its demands.

II. I come then to what is commonly denominated Church

Patronage, but for which I would bespeak your more serious consideration by describing it as the solemn and responsible trust of providing for the spiritual charge of the people of this land, in their several parishes, by the appointment of clergymen to undertake the care of their souls. It is the duty, as much as the right, of selecting, when a benefice is vacant, an ordained minister of Christ, who shall thenceforward live amongst the people, and be to them what the Church so beautifully describes as a "Messenger, Watchman, and Steward of the Lord, to teach and to premonish, to feed and to provide for the Lord's family, and to seek for Christ's sheep that are dispersed abroad."

It is a great responsibility. Our minds cannot fathom its depths. But patrons might learn to appreciate it more justly if they could be induced occasionally to read thoughtfully that exhortation in the Ordination service, from which I have now made a brief quotation.

It must be acknowledged that this duty is fulfilled with conscientious forethought by many patrons, public and private. But there is no security for such care being taken; and there is no redress where it has been utterly disregarded. In some cases, pecuniary considerations alone prevail. And beside all this, it may be the affliction of a parish, at the will each time of a single person, and he probably not a resident, to be visited with an alternate succession of conflicting theological and ceremonial systems, confounding and distressing the simple people, if not working greater mischief amongst them.

To many of the Laity, this uncontrolled exercise of patronage is acutely painful. In proportion as care of their own souls, and scriptural knowledge, and value for the avowed doctrines of the Reformed Church, have spread amongst them, they have grown more sensitive with regard to the appointment of those who are to minister amongst them, and more anxious when a vacancy occurs. Every fresh step towards what is called "greater liberty" for the clergy, every fresh relaxation of old rules, either conceded, or in practice assumed to be lawful, only strengthens their sense of being

wronged, so long as they are left, unprotected, to submit to whatever appointment it may be the pleasure of the patron to make.

The precise nature of the control which it would be wise and just to place at their command will raise a difficult question, whenever this subject comes to be dealt with ; and its day appears to be at hand.

Many will agree with me that it should not be an immediate and absolute veto, or a virtual transfer of the patronage, but rather a check held in reserve, rarely used, and the mere existence of which would generally prevent any occasion arising for its being called into action. It might be a right of appeal to the Bishop, guarded and limited as to the grounds on which it is exercised, and used, if at all, between the presentation and the institution of a new incumbent, a definite time being appointed to elapse between some public notification of the presentation, and the act of institution.

But a better method of treatment may be devised by more competent persons ; and I only wish to urge that the absolute and unrestrained exercise of the rights of patrons cannot be much longer maintained, under the circumstances in which the Church at present stands.

On one point I must speak, in order to provide against any misconstruction of my meaning. Of all modes of appointment to the cure of souls, popular election appears to me to be the worst, in as much as it places the whole power of selection in the hands of those who, from a variety of causes, are the least competent to use it with advantage to themselves or others.

III. Another subject, which will not bear much longer postponement, and which will require equally cautious and delicate handling, is the Layman's claim to be consulted before alterations are made in the accustomed manner of conducting the services in his parish church. He urges that when the services in all churches were of one general character, differing chiefly in the degree of thoughtfulness and devoutness which pervaded them, or by the

musical portions being a little more or a little less in quantity, there was no ground for his wishing to be consulted ; but that now, when sudden and great transformations are possible, his consent ought first to be obtained. Such is his plea for a right to be heard. It finds utterance in Parliament. It is the parent of proposals for the establishment of parochial councils. The proper response to it may not yet have been discovered, but it can scarcely be doubted that either the ground of complaint must be removed, or the right of control conceded.

Now I believe that it may be said, without fear of contradiction, that it is a general characteristic of the Clergy to be anxiously considerate of the feelings, and even of what may seem to them to be the weaknesses, or prejudices, of their parishioners ; and that they often waive the gratification of their own predilections, in things indifferent, rather than give needless offence. Sometimes also, they have to use a wise discretion, as between the parishioners themselves, of whom some may persistently urge the adoption of changes which would be repugnant to the feelings of others. To this christian wisdom and forbearance on the part of the parochial Clergy, it is owing that peace and goodwill between minister and people prevail in most of the parishes in the land.

But it is equally certain that alterations are sometimes made without any such consideration of the wishes and judgment of the people, to the discouragement of many, and to the banishment of some from their parish churches.

To the irritation thus produced must be attributed the desire, extensively felt, to put some restraint upon the absolute discretion in such matters now lodged in parochial Clergy. That restraint may ultimately be found in its being made unlawful to introduce any alterations, except they be absolutely required by the Rubric, without permission from the Bishop,—and in the Bishop being authorised to institute an enquiry in the parish, if he see occasion for doing so, and to judge and decide, finally, whether the proposed alteration, being in itself lawful, would also be expedient under the circumstances of the parish. I would hope that the remedy



will not come in the form of a Parochial Council elected by the ratepayers, for that would set many a parish in flames, and would often be fruitful of far more mischief than could spring from the grievance it is intended to avert or correct.

Perhaps the consent of the Churchwardens would be all that need be required, subject to a reference to the Bishop.

My object, however, is not so much to discuss the method of procedure, as to intimate that the question is ripening for a settlement and is even impatient of delay ; and that either the boundaries, within which variations may be made in the services, must be distinctly defined, or else that some means of control must be yielded to those for whose sake our liturgical services are provided.

I believe that Voluntary Parochial Councils, composed of Communicants, are working excellently in many parishes, to the comfort and relief of the Clergy ; but it is obvious that the requisite elements of an efficient council of Communicant Laymen are wanting in a much greater number, and that in such cases some method of indirectly ascertaining the minds of the parishioners is all that at present can be attempted.

I have now endeavoured to represent, and, to some extent, to discuss, certain claims of the Laity which are entitled to be listened to with respect. I trust that their importance and urgency may have been acknowledged by many, and that we may have taken at least a few steps forward in preparation for the day when legislation can no longer be delayed, and it may be our duty to use such influence as we possess in promotion of measures not hasty, nor crude, much less conceived in a hostile spirit, but prudent, beneficent, and just.

It might be expected that after having advocated a restoration to the Church of a great Synodical Council—combining Bishops, Clergy, and Laity, and in which each of the three constituent elements should be invested with co-ordinate powers, in the last resort ; and wherein, perhaps, other safeguards against imprudent action might be provided ; I should proceed to take account of Diocesan Synods and Conferences, composed also of Clergy and

Laity, such as have recently been called into existence in some of our twenty-eight Dioceses. But, obviously, the proper sphere of action for such a council must be its own Diocese ; whereas the subjects of our thoughts to-day have been neither Diocesan nor even Provincial questions, but interests common to the whole Church, requiring a uniform treatment, the which it would be hopeless to expect from twenty-eight minor Synods.

Trusting that you may be disposed to give further consideration, at your leisure, to the suggestions which I have now thought it right to offer, I cannot conclude without adding a few words for the special consideration of my brethren of the Laity, both those who are now present, and any others who may happen to read my charge.

I have spoken of the just claims of the Laity to have a voice in the councils of the Church, in the administration of patronage, and in the regulation of the services,—unless, indeed, in the two latter instances, some protection from what they complain of as a wrong can be provided by other means.

But I would also remind them that they have duties to perform, and that the circumstances of the times demand of them, with a peculiar urgency, that they be faithful and zealous in their fulfilment.

i. They have duties to Christ our Lord, to live by faith in Him, and in the fear of God. Oh, that there were more of deep heartfelt religion, Christ's religion, amongst the people ! The scantiness of it, and our internal divisions, are the two great and lamentable sources of our weakness, at a time when we specially need to be strong. May God help us !

ii. The Laity owe a duty to the Church of England, being members of it ; to stand by it, to uphold it, to strengthen it, and to repel the hand of the destroyer. They may do this, in perfect consistency with a determination to strive for the correction of everything that is defective in her system or administration. There is a *Church Defence Association*, already well established, which they will do well to support, and which puts upon its banner "reform," as well as "defence." It is also, I hope, not inconsistent

with my duty to suggest that the time is come in which the maintenance of the Church should have precedence of all party considerations in politics, and when the Churchman, whatever his political principles may be (and happily all parties are represented amongst us), should refuse his vote to any candidate for his suffrage who will not pledge himself to offer firm resistance, in Parliament, to the avowed enemies of the Church.

iii. The Laity have also duties to fulfil in their own parishes,—to uphold that which is good, to promote the work of Christ amongst the people, to discountenance vice, to be examples of a christian life. The intelligent and educated have a further call to use their talents in teaching the ignorant. Then, there is the parish church to be kept in repair, its internal comfort and seemliness to be maintained, and the churchyard to be treated with reverent care ; and although it be true that the latter points are the special charge of the Churchwardens, yet, assuredly, they cannot fulfil their duties without the sympathy and aid of the parishioners in general.

But from man, let us look upward, to our Father in heaven !

Our struggles for progress, the invitations we are receiving into fresh fields of usefulness, the yearnings of many for changes on which momentous issues depend, our elements of weakness, and our exposure to aggression,—all combine to make this a time of much anxiety, and of special need for the loving care and guidance of Almighty God. How appropriate for such days is the prayer of that Collect in which we ask that the “ continual pity ” of the Allwise may “ cleanse and defend ” His Church ; as well as that of another Collect, in which we offer our “ supplications and prayers for all estates of men ” in His holy Church, and ask that “ every member of the same, in his vocation and ministry, may truly and godly serve ” the Lord, by whose Spirit we acknowledge that “ the whole body of the Church is governed and sanctified.”

May our hearts often carry such petitions before the Throne of Grace, and infuse life into them by fervent desires ; and may our prayers bring down upon us corresponding blessings, to the glory of our Lord and Head, and to the welfare of his people in this land !



