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A SPEECH

IN

THE HOUSE OF LORDS,

AUGUST 1, 1833,

ON

A BILL FOR THE REMOVAL OF CERTAIN DISABILITIES FROM
HIS MAJESTY'S SUBJECTS

OF

THE JEWISH PERSUASION.

WITH

ADDITIONAL REMARKS ON SOME OF THE OBJECTIONS URGED
AGAINST THAT MEASURE.

BY

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*Reprinted, by permission of His Grace, during the progress of Lord John
Russell's Bill for removing the remaining Disabilities of the Jews.*

LONDON:

B. FELLOWES, LUDGATE STREET.

1848.

LONDON :

R. CLAY, PRINTER, BREAD STREET HILL.

S P E E C H

ON THE

J E W S' R E L I E F B I L L.

AUGUST 1, 1833.

MY LORDS,

FEELING myself bound in conscience to support this Bill, I feel myself also called upon not to give a silent vote, lest I should be open to misconstruction. Misconstruction, perhaps, I shall, at any rate, encounter from some ; but I feel myself bound, as far as I can, to guard against it at the hands of the considerate and candid. I will not occupy your Lordships' time by protestations of the sincerity of my attachment to Christianity. Such protestations receive, in general, but little credit ; and deserve but little, unless they are borne out by the general conduct of those who make them ; and if they are, I consider them to be superfluous. I will take leave to observe, however, that, setting aside all considerations of duty, it is not likely that a Christian clergyman should be indifferent to the security of the Christian religion—that a prelate of the Establishment

should be indifferent to the safety or the credit of the Establishment,—or that a Member of this House would be willingly accessory to the degradation of the Legislature.

I shall offer a very few observations on a part, and a part only, of the objections which have been taken to this Bill. And I shall confine myself to the consideration of *objections*, because it must be admitted, I conceive, that if these are removed, the Bill ought to pass. The presumption is evidently in favour of it; and the *onus probandi* lies entirely on those who oppose it. The general rule, indeed, is, that the presumption is in favour of any *existing* institution, and that the burden of proof lies on those who call for a change. But in the case of all restrictions and disabilities, I consider the rule to be reversed, and the burden of proof to lie on the other side. Disabilities, restrictions, burdens, pains, and penalties of various kinds, may sometimes be necessary; but no one will contend that they are good in themselves. I conceive, therefore, that it is not incumbent on those who advocate this Bill, to point out, in the first instance, the advantage of the relief which it proposes to give; but rather to meet the objections that are brought against it; because, if no sufficient reason can be shown for continuing them, it is clear that these and all other restrictions (their only warrant being that of necessity) ought to be removed.

Now, the objections which I have heard, not

in this particular debate only, but on other occasions also, to the removal of the disabilities imposed on the Jews, may be divided into two classes,—those of a purely political character, and those of a religious character. The first class of objections has reference to the Jews, not as a certain body of religionists, but as a distinct Nation, looking forward with a confident hope to an ultimate return to the Land of their fathers, and having habits of thought, and feelings of patriotic attachment so exclusively confined to their own Race, as to render them incapable of mingling as good citizens on equal terms with any other. On that class of objections, I shall say nothing on the present occasion; being desirous of addressing this House as seldom as possible on questions purely political. I shall confine myself to the second class of objections, which has reference to the peculiar religious tenets professed by the Jews.

It is urged that persons who not only do not acknowledge, but who renounce and deny—and some say vilify—the great Author of the Christian religion, ought not to have any voice in the legislature of a Christian country. On this point arises a question, which I own I find it very difficult to answer. The Legislature of this country,—I mean the two Houses of Parliament,—is not confined to what may be called the Civil Government,—the imposing of burdens which all must bear, and the enacting of laws which all must obey,—but extends to the Government of

the Established Church also, even in matters purely ecclesiastical. It is, in fact, at present the only ecclesiastical government; since Convocation has long been in a dormant state in England; and in Ireland does not exist even in that state. Whoever, therefore, is admitted to a seat in the Legislature, is admitted to a share in the government, not only of the State, but also of the Church; and that, not only in respect of its temporalities, but also of purely ecclesiastical affairs. If, therefore, the question be asked, "What right can a Jew have, under any circumstances, to legislate for a Christian Church?" I know of no answer that can be given to that question, except by asking another: What right has a Roman Catholic to legislate for a Protestant Church; or a Presbyterian for an Episcopal Church? What right, in short, has any man to legislate, in ecclesiastical matters, for any Church of which he is not a member? This anomaly appears to me to exist in all these cases alike. The Jews, it is true, are much further removed from us than any sect of Christians; but it does not follow that they are more likely to make innovations in our religious institutions. They never attempt to make proselytes, nor to introduce into Christianity any admixture of Judaism; nor is it likely they would attempt, in any way, to interfere with the doctrines or institutions of any description of Christians. Christians, on the contrary, of different persuasions have often interfered in the most violent manner with each other's faith

and worship. The Presbyterians did, we know, at one time, when they gained the ascendancy in this country, eject from every parish in England the Episcopalian clergy, and were in turn ejected by them; and I need not remind your Lordships of the many and violent struggles between Roman Catholics and Protestants in this and in many other countries. In fact, the nearer approach to each other in point of faith between different denominations of Christians than between Christians and Jews, instead of diminishing, increases the risk of their endeavouring to alter or to overthrow each other's religion. Although, therefore, I cannot, in the abstract, approve of Jews being admitted to legislate for a Christian Church, or of the ecclesiastical concerns of any Church, being, in any degree, under the control of such as are not members of it, I cannot on that ground consent to withhold civil rights from the Jews, when Roman Catholics and Dissenters have been admitted into Parliament; since, in the case of the Jews, the anomaly is not greater, and the danger is even less. The nearer any class of men approach to ourselves in their faith, the more likely they are to interfere with ours.

If, indeed, an erroneous faith be regarded in the light of a sin against God, and if we were authorized to visit this sin with civil disabilities, we might then look to the greater difference in faith of the Jews, than of any Christians. I trust I may dismiss, without argument, the notion of our having a right to punish men on account

of their religious opinions, either with a view of forcing them to renounce those opinions, or of inflicting retribution on them for erroneous belief. Often as that principle—which is, in fact, that of persecution—has by many been implied in their practice—no one, I imagine, will be found, in the present day, to defend it in the abstract. If, indeed, we were to admit the principle of punishing religious error, then, as I have said, the greater error of the Jews might be consistently assigned as a reason for harsher and less indulgent treatment of them than of any sect of Christians. But the only ground which any one will distinctly avow as authorizing penalties and restrictions imposed on any class of religionists, is that of *self-protection*—to guard ourselves either against religious corruption, or against some alarming civil danger. And in this point of view,—looking to self-protection and not to punishment,—it is plain, that the nearer any persons approach to us in religion, the greater the danger, when there is any to be apprehended, of admitting them to an equality of rights with ourselves. We know that the Roman Catholics have persecuted the Protestants, and the Protestants, in their turn, the Roman Catholics:—in short, we know that the various sects of Christians have done more, in molesting each other's faith and worship, than any Jews or Pagans have done against Christianity.*

* Were it possible for any one to doubt the existence in the present day of such feelings and principles as I have here alluded

When, therefore, it is said, that although not an exclusively Protestant, we have still an exclusively Christian Legislature, I cannot but confess that a Christian Legislature, as such—simply as Christian—does not necessarily afford religious, or even personal security to a Christian. The most merciless persecutions, we know, have been (it is with shame and sorrow I speak it, but it is notorious) those inflicted by Christians on each other. From the mere circumstance, therefore, of being under a Legislature exclusively Christian, I can derive no security; and, what is more, I am certain that your Lordships think with me in this: for, there is no one of us, professing Protestantism, who would not prefer living in Turkey or Persia, where

to, he might but too easily satisfy himself by simply looking to the amount of calumny, insult, and execration, which have been, on party-grounds, within the last few years, (or even, months) heaped on some, not only members, but prelates, of the Established Church, not more by the avowed enemies of that Establishment, or of the Gospel itself, than by persons professing the deepest veneration, and the most fervent zeal, for both.

Not that this is any just ground of uneasiness in those who have been so assailed. The example, and the warnings, of their great Master, ought to have prepared them to regard it as a blessing “when men hate, and persecute, and speak all manner of evil of them falsely, for his sake.” But a proof is thus afforded that the *name* of Christian furnishes no security that the *spirit* of the Gospel will be manifested; since it appears but too plainly that those who thus revile and calumniate every one who will not cooperate with their party, would not have been likely, any more than those who lived three centuries ago, to confine themselves to mere words, if their power were, in these days, equal to their will.

he would be allowed, on paying a small tribute, the free exercise of his religion, to living under an exclusively Christian government in Spain or Portugal, or any country in which the Inquisition was established. The mere circumstance, therefore, I say, of our having a Christian Legislature, is not of itself any ground of security. But, on the other hand, there is not necessarily any danger, or any incongruity, in persons of any religious persuasion, different from that of the Church of England, legislating upon matters distinct from religion.

With respect to strictly Ecclesiastical affairs—to matters which do relate directly to religion, I admit that there is an incongruity in admitting any one, whether Christian or not, to have a share in the government of a church of which he is not a member; and I take this opportunity of declaring my opinion upon that point to be, that the purely ecclesiastical concerns of the Church, as distinguished from the secular, ought to be intrusted to the care of some persons, whether called Commissioners, or by whatever other name, appointed expressly for that purpose, and who should be members of that church. But with respect to civil concerns, I do not see that we are justified in excluding from a share in making the laws which they are to obey, or in imposing the burdens which they are to bear, any set of men, whatever their religious tenets may be, until it can be proved that they are likely to abuse their power.

It has been urged, however, that, over and above all considerations of self-protection, the Jews are

under God's curse—that they are suffering a Divine judgment—from the effects of which we must not attempt to rescue them. It is true that they are, nationally, under a judgment. I look on that nation as an extraordinary monument of the fulfilment of prophecies, and as paying the penalty of their rejection of the Messiah. But we must be very careful how we, without an express commission, take upon ourselves to be the executioners of Divine judgment, lest we bring a portion of these judgments on ourselves. We are not to act on the will of the Lord, according to our own conjectures as to his designs; but according to the commands He has expressly given us.* If we justify the exclusion of the Jews from a participation in those civil rights which the rest of us enjoy, on the ground that we are thus fulfilling the judgment of Divine Providence, we must remember

* The last clause of our 17th Article seems to have been added in reference to such as might attempt to justify their own conduct, however immoral, by a reference to the decrees of Providence, on the plea that whatever takes place must be conformable to the Divine will. To “do the will of our Heavenly Father,” must mean, to do what He, by the light of Revelation or of Reason, announces as *required* of us: otherwise, all men alike, whether virtuous or wicked, would be equally doers of his will. And where his will is *not* thus announced to us, our duty often leads us even to act in opposition to it. For every one would say that a child, for instance, does his duty, in tending a parent on the bed of sickness, and using all means for his restoration; though the event may prove it to have been the will of God that his parent should die. Pilate, on the other hand, was, in a different sense, fulfilling the will of God, while acting against the dictates of conscience.

that on the same plea the infernal cruelties committed by the Romans and their allies, at the destruction of Jerusalem, might no less be justified. For these also were judgments prophetically denounced against the Jews. Nay, more; the Jews themselves would, on this ground, be justified for the very crime with which they are now upbraided, the crucifixion of Jesus; for this, also, was in accordance with prophecy, and in conformity with the Divine will.

God's will we are sure must be done, and his purposes accomplished, without any need of our aid or consent: but we shall not stand acquitted before Him, on the plea that we are fulfilling his designs, if we presume, uncommissioned, to execute the judgments He has denounced. If it be the will of God that the Jews should always be wanderers upon the face of the earth, we may feel assured that they will not long find a resting-place. Whatever the prophecies respecting them do really point to, we may be sure will come to pass. But it is plain, from their having been actually received by some nations to a participation of civil rights, that their perpetual exclusion from such rights can have been no part of those prophecies. And certainly we have received no commission to exclude them. Their religious errors we cannot but condemn; but we must carefully guard against confounding together the two questions:—as to the right of punishing men for their religious errors, however great,—and as to the right of defending ourselves against the conse-

quences of those errors. To claim the former, is the very spirit of persecution.

And if there be any such persons as persecuting Christians in this country, I scruple not to say that I differ more from them, in point of religion, than I do from the Jews themselves. The former believe, indeed, that the promised Messiah has arrived; but they believe in such a Messiah, as in truth never has appeared: they assign the name and the titles which belong to the true Jesus of Nazareth, to a phantom of their own imagination. Their Messiah is not that meek and humble Jesus who told Pilate that his kingdom was not of this world—who repressed the mistaken and intemperate zeal of his disciple, when prepared to fight for him, by bidding him put up his sword into his sheath;—who prayed for the pardon of his murderers;—and who, when his followers would have called down the fire of heaven on those who rejected Him, rebuked them by saying, “Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.” I maintain, then, that it is only on the ground of self-protection that we can be justified in imposing, or in continuing (which is the same thing) any restriction on any class of religionists.

But independent of the consideration of any apprehended danger, we are told that we ought to look to the scandal—the indecorum—of admitting to form part of a Christian Legislature those who scoff at the Christian religion, and treat the Founder of it with scorn, as an impostor.

Now, if any Jews openly insult our religion, they

deserve not merely to be withheld from civil privileges, but to be punished; and under the existing law, they would be liable to punishment for molesting the worship of their neighbours. But if no such charge is established against them, it seems to me that the scandal lies on the other side. For we ought to consider that this is not a Bill to entitle a certain number of Jews to a seat in Parliament, as Jews; but to remove the restriction which prohibits Christians from electing, if they think fit, a Jew for their representative. Is it not, then, a greater scandal, that we should think it necessary for the safety of Christianity to impose this restriction,—a restriction not so much on the Jews, as on ourselves—to prohibit the people, if they choose it, from returning Jews as their representatives? I do not place the question on the rights of the Jews; nor on their moral or intellectual qualifications, to which such high testimony has been borne by those of their opponents who have more knowledge of them than myself, but I place it on our own rights. For if any Jews are returned to Parliament, it must be by the choice of a great majority of Christian constituents. I own it does, therefore, appear to me to be a scandal rather on our own faith, to consider it so frail and brittle as not to bear touching—to proclaim that Christianity is in danger unless the hands of Christians are tied to preclude them from the election of Jews.

I am not discussing the question whether Jews are the fittest persons to be returned to Parlia-

ment; but whether Christians should be left free as to that question, or should be prevented from electing them if they think fit. This Bill, it should be remembered, differs materially, in this respect, from that by which the disabilities of the Roman Catholics were removed; because, by the latter, many persons, being already Peers, were by that Bill at once admitted to Parliament. That will not be the case in this instance; because no Jew can set foot in Parliament until he has been freely elected by a Christian constituency.

But, as I have already stated, I do not think that the Jews, any more than the Roman Catholics, or any Dissenters from the Established Church, ought to be admitted to legislate, as to matters purely religious, for that Church. I think that everything relating to the spiritual concerns of the Church should be intrusted to a Commission, or to some Body of men, members of that Church, having power to regulate these concerns in such a manner as may be most conducive to the interests of religion, and to the spiritual welfare of the people. I cannot but think that the members of the Established Church ought to have the same advantage, in this respect, as the Methodists, Quakers, Moravians, and other dissenting sects; who are allowed to regulate the strictly religious concerns of their own religious communities, respectively, without any interference in respect of these concerns, on the part of persons of a different church. But no objection on this score can fairly be allowed to operate against the claims of the Jews, more than

against various denominations of Christians; to whom the same objection applies with equal force, and whose claims have been already admitted. And I cannot but think, therefore, that Jews ought not, in fairness, to be excluded from all share in imposing the burdens which they are required to bear, and in enacting the laws to which they are to be subject, unless a much stronger case than any that I have yet heard can be made out for that exclusion.

In a note recently (in December, 1847) written by the Archbishop, granting permission for the reprint of the preceding speech, and the accompanying remarks, his Grace observes—that both parties are apt to regard the question as being, “Whether a Jew generally, or such and such a particular Jew, be a fit person to sit in Parliament, or to represent such and such a particular constituency;” the real question being, “Whether this point shall be left to be decided in each case by each constituency, or shall be decided for them by the legislature;” and that a similar fallacy prevails with regard to questions about religious disabilities universally; “Which religion is the truest?” being often confounded with, “Shall a man be allowed to adhere to that which *he* thinks true, or be compelled to profess what *we* think true?”

ADDITIONAL REMARKS

ON THE

JEW'S' RELIEF BILL.

It was alleged on the opposite side, that the case of the Jews and that of the Roman Catholics are not parallel, inasmuch as, 1st, The claims of the Roman Catholics were conceded under the pressure of urgent *necessity*, and no such case of necessity had been established in the case of the Jews: and 2dly, The Jews are not claiming any rights or advantages *formerly enjoyed* by them in this country, and of which they have been deprived by positive enactment; but were never in possession of what they now petition for.

All this I readily admit. And I was so far from contending that there is a political necessity for granting the claims of the Jews, that I expressly stated the reason why the burden of proving a necessity ought to lie *on the other side*. Can it be maintained that a restriction, disability, or inconvenience of any kind, affecting any class of our fellow-subjects, is a good in itself, and ought to be imposed or continued, *without* any necessity?

And yet, if this be *not* maintained, it follows, inevitably, that he who in any case opposes its removal, is bound to prove its necessity.

To refuse a concession as long as we *can*, and at last to yield, reluctantly, under the pressure of unavoidable necessity, is a course which may sometimes be excused, but which I should have thought would hardly be reckoned a matter of boast. It is not surely the course most dignified in the giver, or most conciliating to the receiver of a boon.

Nor, again, did I rest the claim of the Jews on the plea of their having formerly enjoyed the advantages they now crave. On such a plea indeed they could hardly claim common humanity, from most nations of Europe. I looked not to the treatment they have actually received, but to what I thought they *ought* to have received. They come forward, not as men claiming to be restored to what has been taken from them, but as fellow-creatures and fellow-subjects. And they apply to *us*, whose religion teaches us to imitate the Samaritan in the parable, who regarded every one as a neighbour whom he had an opportunity of serving; and to treat men, not, necessarily, as we have been *accustomed* to treat them, but as we would have them treat us, if we were to exchange situations. Now I think if *we* were living in the midst of a people professing some other religion, we should think it reasonable to be admitted to all civil privileges, as long as we left others unmolested in their worship.

But the Jews, it was further urged, are the descendants of those who crucified our Lord; and

as they still regard Him as a false prophet, they are not to be put on a level with the Roman Catholics, or any denomination of Christians.

This argument was expanded and dwelt on, and placed in every different shape in the course of the debate; and constituted, indeed, the principal part, in quantity, of what was urged in opposition to the Bill. But no attempt was made to show why, if religious differences are at all to be made the ground of civil disabilities, and are to be estimated by their intrinsic importance, and not by their political tendency,—why, if that is to be done, the line should be drawn in this particular place more than in another:—why, if the admission of Jews to civil rights is inconsistent with the character of a *Christian* country, the admission of Roman Catholics is not equally inconsistent with that of a *Protestant* country; and so with the rest. Roman Catholics regard the Pope as holding ecclesiastical authority over all Christians; while Protestants regard his power as usurped, and its tendency as corrupting: these again regard the Reformers as venerable martyrs, while the Romanists hold them pernicious heretics. And many other such points of disagreement exist. Yet it has been decided that these different descriptions of men may live on equal terms as members of the same civil community. It is in vain to say that the Jews differ *more* from Christians than Christians from each other. That does not answer the question, why the line should be drawn at that precise point.

The whole argument, indeed, turns on the con-

founding together two distinct considerations ; the intrinsic *magnitude* of each difference, and the peculiar bearing and tendency of each *kind* of difference. For example, every one knows that during great part of the last century, many worthy and pious members of the Church of England advocated the claims of the House of Stuart, and aimed assiduously at the restoration of that family. These principles must have been, in the eyes of any loyal subject of King George, (though a member of the same Church,) incompatible with their fitness for civil office. Yet if he had chanced to meet with any of these persons in a foreign country, there is no reason why he might not have joined in their religious worship, provided they would consent to keep clear of political questions. Yet he could not have joined in religious worship with Christians of other persuasions, whose loyalty, and consequent fitness for civil offices, he would never have disputed.

Roman Catholics, Quakers, Anabaptists, Unitarians, &c. cannot all be right in their religious belief; yet all are eligible, by our present laws, to a seat in Parliament; while any one, not possessing a certain amount of *property*, is disqualified even from being a voter. Now, no one surely would say that the possession of a certain amount of property is intrinsically more important than rectitude of religious faith. Every one would admit, in this case, the principle,—the admission of which in fact decides the present question,—that it is the *kind*, and not the *degree*, of agreement or discrepancy, that is in

each question to be looked to; and that it is for the civil community to regard merely political qualifications or disqualifications.

It was urged, again, that there is no ground for complaining of injustice or intolerance in our precluding any but Christians from civil rights, inasmuch as every master of a family assumes the right of requiring all the members of his household to profess the religion he thinks best; and requires, if he judges it proper, that his servants should attend family-prayers. And certainly every man has this right in his *own house*; nor have any of his servants, or of those who may wish to engage in his service, any rights at all, relatively to his family, except what he may choose to grant them. He may determine what he thinks fit, not only as to the religion, but as to the stature and personal appearance of his servants. The argument is conclusive, if we admit (and not otherwise) that these islands *belong* to the king, or to the King and Parliament, in the same manner as the house or land of any individual belongs to the owner. But no one, I apprehend, will, in the nineteenth century, openly maintain this. And that the above argument proceeds on such a supposition, is a sufficient refutation of it. The King and Parliament are now, at least, universally admitted to be the governors, not the *owners*, of the country. And even the most absolute monarch in modern Europe, professes to govern, not (as a master does his servants) for *his own* benefit, but for that of his people; and to impose no burden, privation, or restriction,

on any class of his subjects, except what is counterbalanced by the general good of the community.

It would not have been worth while therefore to notice such an argument, but that it has, if rightly applied, great weight on the opposite side.

Every one, it is admitted, should be allowed to do what he will with any thing that belongs to him ; provided he does not molest his neighbours. It would be unjust for any of *them* to interfere with the management of his household, on the ground that he does not lay down such rules for it as *they* think best ; and to impose restrictions on him, compelling or forbidding him to take into his service men of this or that class or religious persuasion. Now let it be observed that this is precisely the kind of interference *which at present exists*, and which it was the object of the Bill to put an end to. It did not go to *compel* the King to take Jews into his service, or electors, to return them to Parliament ; but to remove *prohibitions*. We may think that a Jew is not the fittest person to hold offices under the Crown, or to sit in Parliament, or to be a servant in a gentleman's family ; but *that* is a point for the Crown,—for the electors,—for the master,—to consider. He who would withdraw the matter from their discretion, and limit their choice, by maintaining a restrictive law, which says, “you *shall not* appoint such and such persons,” is evidently interfering with their general right to appoint whom they please ; and is consequently bound to show that some danger to the community is likely to ensue from leaving them at liberty.

The argument drawn from the Babylonian and other ancient States having employed Jews in civil capacities, without finding them disloyal, or experiencing any disadvantage from their national attachment, or their peculiar opinions and customs, was met by the reply that the case of those ancient Jews is not parallel to that of Jews in the present day; the former having not been guilty of the sin of rejecting the Messiah, but being professors of the only true religion then revealed.

This objection was urged by a member of the House, for whose judgment I have great deference, whom I never differ from without real regret, and with whom I have been so happy, in almost every other instance, as to agree.

But though I acknowledge the truth of what is alleged in the above objection, I cannot admit that it has *any bearing on the question*.

This, I am aware, may be easily *said*, of any thing. And a mere unsupported assertion that a certain argument does not bear on the question, affords some degree of presumption that it *does*; and that it is not easily refuted; since its irrelevancy, supposing it were irrelevant, would otherwise, one would suppose, have been pointed out.

My reason then for saying that the above objection is irrelevant, is that the whole question turns on the *discrepancy* likely to exist between the Jews and those of another religion; and that, modern Judaism is not *more hostile* to Christianity, than ancient Judaism was to heathen idolatry. The

religious opinions and observances of the Jews, in the days of Daniel for instance, do not appear (it has been urged) to have unfitted them for the civil service of Babylonian or Median princes. And as no one will contend that Daniel, and the rest, were less at variance, in point of religion, with the idolatry of Babylon, than the modern Jews are with Christianity, it is inferred (and surely with great fairness), that these last are as fit for civil employments under Christian princes, as their ancestors, under Pagan.

If the question were, what judgment ought to be formed in a religious point of view, of the ancient and of the modern Jews, respectively, we should of course take into account the important distinction which the advent of Christ places between the two. But in a question respecting civil rights and disabilities, this distinction is nothing to the purpose. To allege that the ancient Jews at Babylon professed a true religion in the midst of falsehood, and that their descendants adhere to an erroneous religion in the midst of truth, does not impair the parallel between the two cases, in respect of the present argument, so long as it is but admitted (which no one denies) that the Jews are not now led, by their religion, to entertain a greater repugnance for Christianity than their ancestors did for Paganism.

In answer to the argument that other European nations have, without any evil result, admitted Jews to civil rights, it was strongly and repeatedly urged

that we ought not to be led by foreigners, and that it is more becoming the dignity of the English nation to set an example to others, than to follow theirs.

Undoubtedly, if merely because other countries had adopted any measure we were required to do the same, without either considering the reasons for it, or judging by the results, this would be justly censured as servile imitation. But nothing of this kind was ever proposed. To observe the results of an experiment tried by our neighbours, and to profit by another's experience, has usually been regarded as characteristic of *wise* men: and if *Englishmen* have not hitherto adopted such a course, it is high time that they should. We have at least a proverbial expression among us relative to a class of persons who will learn from nothing but their own experience; but the title that proverb applies to them is not one of dignity.

But let it at least be conceded that we are not to be precluded, *for ever*, from adopting any measure, merely because our neighbours have adopted it. Else our dread of following the lead of other nations, will compel us to pursue an unwise course whenever they may chance to pursue a wise one. And let some moderate limits be set to the interval which must elapse before we may be allowed, without incurring the charge of political plagiarism, to tread the same path which we have seen others tread with safety.

The dread of thus compromising our dignity, in the case of the alteration of "the style," made us submit for a whole century to an ever-increasing

inconvenience, lest we should be suspected of obeying the Pope. And if a similar feeling had been allowed to operate at the time of the Reformation, we should have disdained to appear imitators of Luther. But surely, in these days at least, we may venture to adopt a wise measure as soon as we perceive it to be so, without fear of our conduct being imputed to any other motive.

Lastly, an objection was urged which appeared to me more worthy of consideration, and which I am inclined to think had more weight with the most discerning portion of the opponents of the Bill, than any other. The Legislature, it was said, by removing this, practically the last, barrier, that excludes any one from office on religious grounds, might be understood by the people to have manifested an indifference to religion, or a contempt for Christianity. The passing of the Bill might be interpreted as a deliberate public declaration that the rulers of this Country consider religious differences as of no intrinsic importance. And far as such a thought may have been from the minds of those who advocated the measure, they cannot (it was urged) prevent the nation, and the world at large, from drawing, however unreasonably, that inference.

Those who urged this objection, did not, if I rightly understood them, imply that they would have advocated the *introduction* for the first time of laws (supposing there had been none before) for imposing civil disabilities on the Jews. But they

felt, I apprehend (and such certainly is my own feeling) that the *continuance* of a law may sometimes be advisable, even when its enactment would not have been :—that its abrogation does not necessarily place us in the same situation as if that law had never existed; and that the effect of such abrogation is not always merely *negative*, but may be understood to convey a positive declaration of the sentiments of the Legislature (sentiments often liable to be misunderstood) as to each subject in question.

All this I am ready to admit. And it is a consideration which should never be lost sight of; inasmuch as it dictates an additional caution against unwise enactments, especially in matters pertaining to religion; since there is so much difficulty and danger in retracing our steps. For example, there was a danger (though one which we were undoubtedly bound to encounter), in removing the penalties imposed on such as should deny the doctrine of the Trinity; lest this repeal should be understood (and probably it was so understood, by many weak brethren) as a declaration that the doctrine of the Trinity is of no consequence.*

* The custom, now almost disused, of stating in the *Preamble* of a Bill, the reasons and designs of the framers, might be, I think, in some cases revived with good effect. Besides other advantages, which it would not be to my present purpose to enumerate, those incidental and undesigned effects on the public mind which I have been alluding to, might then be in great measure obviated.

But though I admit the existence of such a danger in the present case, I do not admit that it ought to operate, even in the smallest degree, as an *objection* to the proposed Bill; because the danger in question exists *in a much greater degree as the law now stands*, than it would, if the Jewish disabilities were removed.

If indeed the laws excluded from office all who are not of *the established religion*, the objection would stand good against the relaxation of those laws. There would then be good ground for urging,—what was urged at the time—the danger of men's understanding the Legislature to have proclaimed their indifference about religious opinions. Not that this objection against removing religious restrictions would not have been, in my mind, greatly outweighed by other considerations: but still I should have admitted it to be a fair and valid objection. I consider however the objection to be much stronger,—the danger much greater,—when *some* restrictions on religious grounds are removed, and some retained, than if *all*, without exception, were removed. For the Legislature does, now, admit that *religious differences may be a just ground for civil disabilities*; and yet it takes no account of any differences among those who do but profess Christianity. We lay ourselves open therefore to the inference, that we regard it as of little or no consequence what faith a man holds, provided he will acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah.

Suppose the Bill in question passed, which

would virtually remove, in this country, *all* disabilities connected with religion ; it may be hoped that men of common sense and candour will understand immediately, and the rest, in time, that we have adopted, not such a monstrous conclusion as that religion altogether is a matter of no consequence : but this ; that it is a matter between each man's own conscience and God ; that no one's religious opinions, so long as he does not molest his neighbours, ought to interfere with his civil rights ;—and that, as *men*, we should employ our conscience to sit in judgment on ourselves, not on our brother, whose religious errors, however great, and scruples, however foolish, should not prevent us, as civil *legislators*, from treating him as a good *citizen*, so long as he shows himself qualified and disposed to act as such.

Such, I say, is the principle on which I think we should, before long, be understood to have acted. But on what principle can we be said to proceed *now* ? How are we, as the law at present stands, to guard against the danger of being understood to proclaim the *indifference of all forms of Christianity* ? One sect of professed Christians admit the fallibility in religious doctrine, of the Apostles themselves, and hold them inspired merely as to their declaration of the divine mission of Jesus Christ : another class refer to the Holy Scriptures, and to nothing else, as the source of religious infallibility : another hold the perpetual inspiration and infallibility of their own Church ; and others maintain the inspiration of Swedenborg or of South-

cote, or of the followers of Mr. Irving. And numerous other differences of no less moment are to be found, unhappily, among professed Christians. "Yet all these," the people may say to the legislature, "all these you have pronounced, by admitting to office every professed Christian, to be matters of no consequence. And though men of any of these different persuasions, however erroneous, may, conceivably, be impressed with a sincere sense of religion, he who is indifferent about all these points, and, like Gallio, 'cares for none of these things,' must be indifferent to religion altogether. That abstract *general* Christianity, which is no particular kind of Christianity, and which pronounces the unimportance of all points on which any Christians have differed, can be only a very thinly-veiled Deism."

What can we answer to such a charge? Can we say, we do not declare the intrinsic unimportance of religious differences, only, we will not allow them to be taken into account in questions concerning civil rights? This would be a most reasonable, and, to all right-minded men, satisfactory answer, if *all* religious distinctions whatever were thus waived in reference to civil concerns. But the one last remaining barrier, which, on that ground, is so earnestly maintained by some,—the restriction affecting the Jews—precludes us from taking our stand on this, the only just and consistent principle. We are thus placed—as those frequently are who adopt half-measures—in a false position; and debarred from occupying the post

which is really defensible. We cannot evince our regard for religion, either on the one hand by drawing the line (as formerly) between what we regard as the true and all others, since we have now admitted to civil rights the members of various churches; nor again, on the other hand, by drawing the line between religious and civil concerns, since we exclude Jews avowedly on religious grounds. We are left therefore to attempt drawing the line between the admitted and the excluded, with reference to the *degrees* of religious difference; to the comparative *importance* of each religious error. And while any class of men are excluded from civil advantages, avowedly on the ground of the *importance* of their religious errors, we must never expect to convince the world that we do not regard as *unimportant* the errors which we do *not* make a ground of such exclusion.

It appears evident therefore to me, that the danger apprehended from the overthrow of this one remaining religious barrier,—the danger of being understood to proclaim indifference as to religious truth in the minds of our legislators,—is a danger which exists in a much greater degree as the law now stands, than if we were to legislate *throughout* on a consistent and intelligible principle; and that to remove that last barrier is essential,—precisely because it *is* the *last*,—as a safeguard against that very danger.

The above heads comprise the substance of all that I remember to have heard alleged—all, I

mean, of an argumentative character—in opposition to the proposed Bill. And on the most careful and unbiassed re-examination of those arguments, it appeared to me, for the reasons I have assigned, that those of them which are properly applicable to the present question, do in reality lead to an opposite conclusion to that which they were employed to support.

THE END.









