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“The Honour Due.”

A SERMON

PREACHED AT

ST. NICHOLAS CHURCH, LIVERPOOL.

ON MAY 26, 1878.

AND AT

ST. MARY MAGDALENE'S CHURCH, PADDINGTON,

ON JUNE 23, 1878,

ON BEHALF OF THE

Society for Promoting the Employment of Additional Curates,

BY

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A SERMON.

“Them that honour Me, I will honour.”—1 Sam. ii, 30.

FOR many years past the ordinary popular notion about the Church of England has been that it is a great, wealthy, endowed Corporation, endowed with public money entrusted to it by the State, for the purpose of attending to the moral and religious welfare of the English nation. Of this notion part is, as we may say, *founded on fact*, but the major part is totally erroneous. I admit expressly that it is *founded on fact*, but we all of us know that no misrepresentations are so utterly misleading as those which have a little bit of fact at the bottom of them with a large superstructure of imagination reared above.

Let me then, this morning, try to take this notion to pieces, and show you in a plain popular way what the fact is on which it is based ; next, as well as I can in a short space, what is the mistake which the common notion involves; and then also what bearing the true history of the Church of England in times past has upon the duty of English Churchmen in time present. All mistakes are dangerous things, and lead to mischief. Mistakes about public matters are of course especially dangerous, because they lead us to make mistakes about our public duties, and then the whole community suffers harm. And this is so most of all in days like ours, when the course of public administration is less and less determined by the knowledge of the few, and more and more guided and controlled by the impulse of the many. As things now are, *every* man contributes his share to the ultimate direction of the Government. Never, therefore, were errors as to facts so mischievous. Never was it so important that every man should be truly and accurately informed.

The notion, then, which I refer to, is that the Church of England is a public Corporation, holding public funds in trust for the religious and moral welfare of the nation at large; that the nation at large entrusted the Church with these funds, and therefore has a claim upon them; that these funds were then parcelled out by the Church among her various parishes throughout the country, and thus form what are called the endowments of the Church; and that herein lies the chief difference between the Church and what are called the voluntary societies of Dissenters.

Of this notion, as I said, part is true, but most is false. The true part is that the Ministers and parishes of the Church are for the most part provided for by endowments; but when you come to the process by which they became endowed the picture is the reverse of a true one. Did ever such a thing happen as for the State or the Government to say—"We will set apart certain property for the Church as a Body, to lay out in supporting its clergy and in distributing it over its various parishes?" No such thing ever happened. No such thing was ever dreamed of as to England and the Church in England. What really happened was that individuals, all down the history of the country, individual landowners,—sometimes nobles, sometimes kings and princes—but, in the main, the landowners at large throughout the country, centuries upon centuries back, and through century after century, built each his church upon his own land, and then endowed that particular church with a charge upon his land called tithe—or sometimes with land in lieu of tithe—for the support of its own clergyman, and then the State which enforces the observance of all legal contracts, enforced the observance of *these* contracts. So, bit by bit, as the number of these parishes gradually increased by the successive action of voluntary givers of these voluntary endowments, the England of old times came to be gradually filled up by parishes. Thousands upon thousands of our parishes were thus in existence before the Norman Conquest, and as far back as

twelve hundred years ago the Government—if I may speak of a time before England was united under one government—wishing to stimulate voluntary liberality granted the rank of Thane to any landowner who could show upon his land a church of a certain stability and dignity of character. It was on much the same principle as when now, if a certain individual is mainly or exclusively instrumental in the building or endowing of a new church, he is often allowed a certain number of turns of presentation, or the perpetual presentation as the case may be. Thus, bit by bit, in thousands of cases, estate after estate became a parish, became provided with its church and with its clergyman. But in each case it was a voluntary transaction, just as if anyone of us were to charge his property with a payment to a school or a college or a hospital, or as if a Dissenter were to charge his estate with an annual payment to a particular chapel. And just as the law would see that all such payments were duly made, so the law (on the whole) has protected these endowments for our parishes and bishopricks. It is in this way partly, that the great diversity in the incomes of our clergy has arisen. For some the endowment was ample, for some it was meagre. In some cases the value of the endowment has greatly increased, in others not. I said “partly” because a far more influential cause of the inequality lay in the enormous seizure of the endowments in the sixteenth century, which has in a vast number of cases permanently impoverished so many of those benefices known as “Vicarages.” But whether well endowed or ill endowed, the *origin* of the endowments was as I have said—voluntary contributions—only that in most cases the origin was so long ago that persons have drifted into the notion that the property was public property to start with, and granted to the Church as a public Corporation from public sources.

Why do I make this long statement? I do it for two reasons: partly because it explains to us how it is that the country is so unequally provided with churches and clergy, giving the *true reason* and removing false impressions—and next

because it sets before us, Englishmen of to-day, *our own duty in the matter*, which is that if we do our part as our ancestors did theirs, then the spiritual needs which have grown up in our age will be provided for by our voluntary liberality as those of former days were by theirs. They did their part, of free-will, not looking for State aid, excepting to protect the endowments they provided. They provided for the population as it then stood, leaving us the benefit of what they gave and, may I not add, the priceless benefit of their example that we in our days should do likewise for the population as it has since become. How are we to do like them? I answer, by our own voluntary contributions, not looking to State aid, except in this—that we all insist so far as the political influence of each one of us goes, that the State should give, and should continue to give, the same legal protection to our gifts and endowments, whether new or old, that it does to all dispositions of property, whether for a secular institution, a Dissenting chapel, or a parish church.

I am here to-day to ask your help for one of those great Societies which have sprung up of late years in order to fill up some part of the great gap which exists in our Church work,—to supply some of the great spiritual needs which have arisen in our own age and generation.

The ancient voluntary endowments of our parishes, the ancient supply of parishes and parish churches, were sufficient for their time, *i.e.* for the population as it then existed, and if as population grew, a gradual step by step expansion, sub-division of parishes and provision of new endowments had gone forward, then the church arrangements for the country would have kept pace with the need, and now in our day we should only have the need of the moment to make good. As it is we have more. There is the large leeway to make up which accumulated during the earlier years of the past half-century before the need began to be observed. Let me give you an example by way of contrast. Look at the Diocese of Norwich. Norwich Diocese, in old

times, was the manufacturing district of England. What Lancashire is to the nineteenth century, that Norfolk was to the fifteenth and sixteenth. Now, the men of that day had furnished Norwich Diocese with no fewer than 1,121 parishes,* the second largest number of parishes in any Diocese in England, the Diocese of London then having only 613 parishes. What the population of Norwich Diocese then was, I am not able to state. At present it is about 660,000. Now turn to the Diocese of Manchester, which in the nineteenth century answers to what Norwich was in the sixteenth:—how stands it there? Manchester Diocese has about *two millions* of souls; and with all the exertions of recent years—and very great they have been—its equipment of parishes and parish churches—does not yet exceed 450; *i.e.*, the Norwich of three hundred years ago had $2\frac{1}{2}$ parish churches for every 1 that the Manchester Diocese has now. Or take the Diocese of Chester, with its *million and a half* of souls and 420 parishes. I need not weary you with statistics or travel over the huge populations of Staffordshire and Yorkshire and Durham. Neither do I wish to speak in the way of fault-finding. The need has come upon us so rapidly, that we can scarcely wonder at the result; and we all know that good and self-denying Christian people abound who are doing all that individuals can do to remedy the evil. But I am quite sure that the most part of us have very little idea how enormous the needs are—how entirely they have outgrown the possibility of being met by the liberality of the few—how impossible it is that they should be met except by the combined exertions of us all. It is the general prosperity of the country that has created the need; and as it was the general voluntary liberality of Churchmen of old which provided for the

* This rests on the authority of a return made by the Bishops of all the Dioceses in England in the year 1603. As little, if any, "church extension," had gone on during the latter part of the sixteenth century, this may be taken as representing the state of things in the early part of it, and perhaps during the later part of the fifteenth.

needs of their day, so it must be again. The general voluntary zeal of our own day—*every one* helping according to his means—can alone meet the case.

My brethren, I have been speaking to you thus far of dry facts and figures; but to those of us who have ears to hear, and hearts to feel, and consciences to be roused, these facts and figures are the very voice of God speaking to our hearts and consciences. These millions of whom I speak—two millions in Manchester Diocese, a million and a half in Chester, and I know not how many more throughout the crowded north—these are the wealth-producers; these, and such as they, are those by whose agency the gigantic increase in this country's wealth and strength has been increased. Go back only forty years, and the population of the country was between thirteen and fourteen millions. It is now over *twenty-three* millions, an addition of nearly ten millions—a whole nation, in fact, in this short period—and all these souls have to be trained for eternity. My brethren, none know better than you do how completely the prosperity of England rests upon these her toilers; none, therefore, know better than you do the debt *to* them in respect of higher things which the educated, the cultivated, the Christian portion of the community owes them. It is theirs to work and toil: ours to humanize, to moralize, to Christianize them. Such is the law which God, Who creates nations, imposes on the communities which are His workmanship. And, as I said before, in these facts and figures I hear the very voice of God speaking to our Church and nation. God has given England, during the last forty years, gigantic wealth: but God's gifts carry with them corresponding responsibilities, and to us these responsibilities come *first* in the shape of duties to these added millions of our population. To make God and His religion known to those whom God has added to our nation, and through whose labour God has made us rich,—this, this, believe me, is the first form of that duty, that tribute, that *Rent*, if I may be allowed to call it so, which God looks for at our hands as the acknowledgment to Him for what He has

given to us. What next? My brethren, we have to do with a jealous God, and one Who rules the kingdoms of men, and Who will not clear the guilty. "Them that honour Me I will honour," is His word; and verily God's word is kept.

How does God keep His word? There is a difference between nations and individuals. With individuals God deals partly in this life, partly in the life to come. Nations have no future life: their chastisements and their rewards are here, and they are inevitable. God has so constructed societies and nations that their sins *must* find them out and that speedily. Should the England of our day fail to rise to her duty, her punishment is sure, and the way in which it will come is plain. Look at all these millions—a nation in themselves—with education now all but forced into their minds, with political power put into their hands, which the faculty of organization, which the habit of working in concert develops—look at them, and suppose them left without religion, without that mastery over their passions and desires which religion only brings, without the sense of a hereafter or a God, but *with* all that restless craving for this world's good which intelligence stimulates, and I say there, ready to hand, is the weapon by which God will punish our neglect. The instrument by which God has given us our wealth will be the instrument by which God will punish our sin. Do you want examples? The world is full of them, and we are surrounded on all sides by the visible results which follow when nations suffer their populations to grow up apart from God and from religion. See Paris, burning by the act of its own masses. See Berlin, where not one in a hundred is known ever to enter a church, honeycombed with Socialism, and the revolt against all existing order. See even America beginning to tremble at its dangerous classes. As yet, amid surrounding warnings, the storm reaches us not. Let us be wise in time, and use the opportunity permitted to us.

The Society whose cause I plead to-day sustains in part,

or entirely, nearly seven hundred assistant curates, working mainly in the mining or manufacturing districts and it is specially worth mentioning that of these nearly five hundred are engaged in what are called "mission districts," that is, portions of existing parishes which will ultimately form new parishes, with their own district parish churches and complete parochial organizations. The Society is therefore in the fullest and most exact sense of the word a Church-extension Society, not merely supplementing the labours of existing clergy and the work of existing parishes, but also sowing the seed of future parishes, and thus providing for the extension and permanence of our time-honoured, and I trust, never-to-be-abandoned parochial system. But when I speak of these seven hundred clergy whom it contributes to maintain, I am too painfully conscious how little this is in comparison of what is wanted. Hundreds of cases of need refrain from making themselves heard of through despair of being helped from the limited means it has to administer; and yet, this being so, there are still *three hundred actual applications* more than can be aided. Do not think either that these three hundred applications come from parishes which do not, or would not do their part in helping themselves. On the contrary, they offer in the aggregate £20,000, a year towards the stipends of the curates whom they *would* employ could the Society, aid them with equal grants. But alas! the Society has not the £20,000 a year with which to meet them, so that the £20,000 a year which would be forthcoming from local sources in aid of the Church's needs is left unfruitful.

My Brethren all this is very sad, and it is very full of foreboding. But where is the blame? Busy as most of us are, not *knowing* these things, as is the case with many, it seems harsh and unreal to lay the blame on individual Christians and Churchmen at large. Yet, if the matter is to be mended, it can only be by the great multitude of individual Churchmen each doing his part according to his or her part, according to the means which God has given. It really *is* everybody's duty. Everybody shares in the

country's well-being. Everybody will suffer in a national chastisement. Everybody *ought* to give heed to such facts as these, and every one ought to lend a hand to what is a common duty. Ah! I know nothing which strikes home more painfully to the heart of a clergyman as he goes from church to church in the well-provided parishes and sees the crowded congregations apparently devout, and blessed with every means of grace, and then asks himself how came all these good people by their spiritual advantages? Do they *cost* them anything? And then the answer comes—No. They are enjoying the fruits of other people's self-denial, of the gifts and endowments of men and women now with Christ in Paradise, and who in their day did their part to provide the means of grace for others besides themselves. How many of us provide *neither* for themselves *nor* for others, but contentedly accept what was done by our fathers in the faith, and never think of making any effort in our turn. And then the thought strikes home, so keen and chill—what is all this but spiritual selfishness—unconscious it may be, but none the less real and deadly—and if in earthly things we all look on selfishness as cutting men off from all that is best in life, what must not be the retribution which awaits the spiritual selfishness of enjoying, *to oneself and for oneself* all means of spiritual help—*at the cost of others*, and then taking no heed of the spiritual Lazarus at our gate, full of the spiritual sores of a spiritual famine which even the smallest return for what we have received might heal. Ah, yes! There is no selfishness so deadly as this religious selfishness. May God deliver us from it! God grant that when we go hence we may not meet the doom which awaits the spiritual Dives, but may be among those who rich in spiritual privileges have done their part to see that the spiritually needy have also had the opportunity of being fed with the Bread of Life, visited in their spiritual sickness, and clothed with the garment of His righteousness by Whose Name we are called! It is the honour due to God, Who says, "Them that honour Me I will honour."—Amen.



