

CHURCH REFORM.

No. III.

CATHEDRAL REFORM.

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CATHEDRAL Reform is the next subject to which I invite the attention of my readers. Next to Dioceses, Bishops, and Convocation, there is perhaps no point in our ecclesiastical polity which demands such immediate attention as this.

In handling this subject, I must frankly confess that I am at a loss for a word which will adequately describe the operation which the case requires. To speak plainly, mere “reform” does not appear to me to be the thing needed. What is wanted, in my judgment, is a complete “reconstruction” of our Cathedral establishments.

I desire to approach the subject with a deep sense of its delicacy and difficulty. I know I cannot stir an inch here without treading on the toes of somebody’s feelings. I am more than ever afraid of being thought a revolutionary leveller of ancient things. But it is no small relief to my mind that at any rate I am not the first Churchman who has agitated the question of Cathedral Reform. For thirty-five years and more the public attention has been directed to this weak point in our ecclesiastical system. From the days of Bishop Blomfield and the first Church Commission, after the Reform Act, our Cathedrals have been talked about, pointed at, held up to public notice, reconnoitred, nibbled at, fired at, denounced, or assaulted. It seems allowed by common consent, that in their present condition they are the weakest and most vulnerable part of the Church of England.* Even their best friends admit they might be improved. Such being the case, I may fairly ask my readers to give me a patient hearing while I discuss the question of Cathedral Reform.

* At the Norwich Congress in 1865, Lord Harrowby used the following remarkable words: “I have come here to raise some doubts as to whether you can make Cathedral Establishments what they confessedly never have been yet,—very strong parts of the Established Church of this country. We have this remarkable fact always to appeal to, that those who set great value on Cathedral Establishments, are always obliged to appeal to what they might be, and not to what they are, or even have been. I will defy any one to put his finger on any of our Cathedrals since the time of Augustine, that has contributed largely to evangelisation.”—*See Authorized Report of Norwich Congress*, pp. 97, 98.

The late Bishop of Salisbury said to the Cathedral Commissioners in 1852, “Cathedrals are at present the weakest instead of the strongest part of the Church.”—*See Authorized Report of Norwich Congress*, p. 85.

I discuss it, be it remembered, not as a Dissenter, but as a Churchman; not as an enemy to the Church, but as a friend.

The reasons why our Cathedral establishments need a complete reform may all be resolved into one. That one is the total inconsistency of the “theory” of Cathedrals with the practical “working” of Cathedrals. The original intention of them was good; the idea was most admirable; the design was most praiseworthy. The facts of three centuries prove that they are an entire failure, and that their whole system ought to be changed. Let me try to explain what I mean.

What is *the theory* of a Cathedral establishment? It is something at first sight most attractive, most beautiful, most picturesque, most lovely, most wise, most edifying, most likely to do good. Let the principal town of every diocese have a magnificent church, which in architecture and arrangements shall as much surpass all other churches as a bishop surpasses a presbyter!—Let the services of this church be a model to the whole diocese, and let the public prayer and praise and preaching be a pattern of the highest style of Christian worship!—Let the management of the church be confided to some grave, learned, and eminent clergyman called a Dean, assisted by five or six other clergymen called Canons!—Let these Canons be picked men, famous for deep theological learning, or great preaching power, or wisdom in council, or spirituality of life!—Let such a choice body as this Dean and Canons be in intimate and friendly connection with the Bishop, be his right hand and his right eye, his counsellors, his help, his sword, his arrows, and his bow!—Let the Cathedral body, so constituted, be the heart, and mainspring, and centre of every good work in the diocese!—Let its members be well paid, well housed, and have no excuse for not residing in the Cathedral Close the greater part of each year!—Let the influence of the Cathedral body, as a fountain of spirituality and holiness, be specially felt in the Cathedral city!—Let its active usefulness be seen in the energetic management of every sort of diocesan machinery for spreading the Gospel at home and abroad!—Let Deans and Canons be known and read of all men as “burning and shining lights,” the very cream and flower of Churchmen, and let the Cathedral city in consequence become the ecclesiastical Athens of every diocese, the stronghold of Church influence in the district, and the nursery of theological learning!—Such, I suppose, is the theory of an English Cathedral establishment. Such were the intentions of those who permitted the continued existence of our Cathedral bodies at the period of the Reformation. Beautiful, indeed, was the theory! Excellent were the intentions! If the one had been really carried out, and the other had been really fulfilled, the Church of England would perhaps not be in the dangerous position that she occupies at the present day.

Now what are *the facts* about Cathedral establishments? What says the experience of three hundred years?—These are painful questions; but they must be answered. The answer is short and simple. Cathedral establishments,

as a rule, have never fulfilled the intentions with which they were founded. As a rule they have proved an entire and dead failure. Humbling as the confession may seem, they have, on the whole, done far more harm than good to the cause of Christianity in England. Let me show seriatim what the facts are.

(1) It is a fact that for three centuries Deans have generally been selected without the slightest consideration for their fitness for high office, the interests of the Church, or the opinion of the Bishop of the Diocese. Too often the appointment has been a mere political job, a reward for electioneering services, or a compliment to some influential family in the county. Prime Ministers have seemed unable to regard Deaneries as anything but “comfortable sinecures,” with plenty of pay and little work, and have disposed of them accordingly among their friends and clients. The public have gradually settled down to a belief that this is the normal state of things, and that comparative idleness is the inseparable accompaniment of the headship of a Cathedral. They expect work from a Bishop, but they expect none from a Dean! The result is, that when a Dean *does* work, everybody rubs his eyes, is astonished, amazed, delighted, and surprised. A sensation is felt like that of discovering a new pleasure!

(2) It is a fact that, as a rule, the Canons of a Cathedral never enter office with the slightest idea of work. They regard their three months of residence as an annual holiday, a time of repose and recreation, a season for resting on their oars.* The very last thing that enters their minds is to make their annual visit to the Close a period of labour and toil. Too often they justify the reply which Sydney Smith is said to have given, when asked to define the duties of Deans and Chapters:—“To the best of my knowledge,” he said, “the duty of the Dean is to give dinners to the Chapter, and the duty of the Chapter is to give dinners to the Dean.”

(3) It is a fact that the relations between the Bishop of a diocese and the Cathedral body are, very frequently, anything but harmonious. Instead of being a Bishop’s right hand, the Dean has often been a thorn in the Bishop’s side. Instead of being helps to the Bishop in doing the work of the diocese, the Canons have often been a hindrance, a wet blanket, and a stumbling-block in his way. Worst of all, of all the churches in his diocese, there is none in which the Bishop has generally so little power as the Cathedral.

(4) It is a fact that the Christian worship of a Cathedral, as a general rule,

* The present Bishop of Carlisle said at the Norwich Congress in 1865, “As a rule, a clergyman who holds a stall in a Cathedral, which requires three months residence, will hold a parochial benefice as well, and the latter will almost inevitably become the principal subject of the Canon’s thoughts, and the distant parsonage will be the Canon’s home. The ‘residence’ will be regarded as a visit, and any desire or power of performing special Diocesan work will be almost neutralized by the transitory character of the Canon’s connection with the Cathedral.”—*See Authorized Report of the Norwich Congress*, pp. 77, 78.

is the very reverse of a model of perfection., You may sometimes hear excellent voices in the choir, and occasionally the singing is very good. But often, far too often, the whole service is cold, chilling, dull, slovenly, and irreverent.* If a man wants his soul stirred by common prayer and praise,—if he wants his conscience roused and his mind informed on spiritual matters,—if he is labouring and heavy laden and wants to find rest,—if he longs to know more about Jesus Christ and the Gospel,—about the last place of worship such a man ever thinks of going to is a Cathedral!

(5) It is a fact that the Cathedral establishments are of little or no use in the working of English dioceses. If a zealous Bishop wishes to promote the cause of education,—to awaken an interest in the cause of foreign missions,—to evangelize the overgrown parishes of mining or manufacturing districts,—to assist the overworked clergy of large cities, who are the men that he gets to help him? Certainly, as a rule, not the Dean and Canons of his Cathedral! Some of them may occasionally lend a hand, no doubt. But these are rare and bright exceptions. If a Bishop wants much diocesan work done, the very last quarter to which he turns for aid is the Cathedral.

(6) It is a fact that Cathedral establishments have done very little good in Cathedral towns. Be the reason what it may, their influence, as a rule, has not been healthy, edifying, or profitable. This is an unpleasant subject, and one which I would gladly leave alone. But “it is reported commonly” by no mean judges, that in no English towns does the Church of England stand so low as in Cathedral cities. In none is there so much bitter Nonconformity! In none is there so much intense dislike to the Establishment! In short, in no part of this island does the Church of England annually pay away such an immense sum to her ministers as she does in every Cathedral town, and in no part does she show such a wretched return for what she expends. The worst item in our Church’s diocesan balance-sheet is the Cathedral! It may be very beautiful, but it certainly is very dear. Its theory sounds excellent, but its practice has proved nothing at all. A huge ecclesiastical machine has been erected, but when erected it will not work.

(7) In the last place, it is a fact that our Cathedral Establishments, as a rule, have failed to supply the Church of England with a constant succession of able theological writers. Many excellent people cling fondly to the idea that this is the special vocation of Cathedrals, and that in this point of view they are a success. They tell you complacently that “Cathedrals at any rate produce a generation of learned divines.”—They regard them as quiet havens

* At the Norwich Congress in 1865, the Rev. R. Seymour said, “The allegation is, that if a religious layman, sojourning in some of our cities, goes to the Cathedral, he finds there a lower provision of spiritual things, a less rubrical service, and even in some cases a less perfect musical service, than is to be found in some of the parish churches of the same diocese; although the materials out of which the parish priest has to form and mould his service, are not to be compared for a moment with the great resources of a Cathedral.”—*See Authorized Report of Norwich Congress*, p. 84.

where high-souled students, unfit for the rough work of parishes, repose in calm security, and annually send forth richly-laden fleets of books on all subjects, doctrinal, practical, controversial, critical, exegetical, linguistic, and historical, for the confusion of the Church's foes, and the edification of the Church's friends. They look on Cathedral Closes as theological arsenals and magazines, where clerical Vulcans are incessantly forging literary arms of matchless temper, for the use of the Church's sons. But, unhappily, facts tell a very different tale! The pleasant ideas of these worthy people are nothing better than castles in the air. Out of the hundreds of Deans and Canons who have lived in the last three centuries, with some brilliant exceptions, comparatively few have left any mark on their generation with their pens. Out of the myriads of theological works now lying on the shelves of our libraries, comparatively few valuable volumes have been written in Cathedral Closes. Out of the scores of living Deans and Canons in the present day, not many count for much in Paternoster Row. Longman, and Rivington, and Macmillan, and Murray, know nothing of them.—There is no getting over these facts. As a matter of experience, Cathedral Establishments do not help forward theological learning. They ought in theory, but they do not in practice. The plain truth is, that human nature is a strangely compounded article. Straiten a clever man in circumstances, and drive him into a corner, and he will often pour forth in print "thoughts that breathe and words that burn." Give him £1,000 a year and a comfortable residence under the walls of a Cathedral, and you often cut the throat of his literary powers, and break his pen. Some of the best works even of our best Deans and Canons were written before ecclesiastical honours were bestowed on them, and not after they anchored in a Cathedral Close.

I write down these facts with sorrow. I admit freely that we never had an abler set of Deans, on the whole, than we have at the present day. I am quite aware that the energetic exertions of some Heads of Chapters have galvanized some Cathedral bodies into a spasmodic vitality which they never exhibited before, since they were formed. But it is all too late. The disease has gone too far. The mischief is too deep-seated. There is no place left for Deans and Canons, as they are, in our present Church system. Our Cathedral establishments are like a ship which has run aground at high water in a spring tide. The tide has left her. She will never float again. Their theory has clean broken down. The public has lost faith in them, and the exceptional activity of a few Chapters will not revive that faith. The facts of three centuries of working are dead against them. Their occupation is gone. They are past mending and patching up. There remains nothing for them but a thorough, sweeping, reconstructive reform.

Now what can be done with our Cathedrals? How can they be made really useful, and adapted to the want of the times? These are, undeniably, hard questions, and questions which have puzzled wiser heads than mine. I can

only make suggestions. I am not a destructive, at any rate. I will not urge that there is nothing about Cathedrals, Deans, and Canons in the New Testament. I do not condescend to use such claptrap arguments. They are as pitiable as the cry of the Socinian, who asks you to show him the word “Trinity” in the Bible. I repeat, I am no destructive. I have no sympathy with those who would treat Cathedrals as John Knox treated Abbeys—dismantle and pull them down like rookeries, that the rooks may fly away. I see no necessity for such a line of reform. I am for utilizing every old institution that can be utilized, and I object to throwing anything away. I believe that our Cathedrals may be utilized, and become a means of strengthening the Church of England. I therefore throw out the following suggestions, and commend them to the consideration of thinking men.

(1) I suggest, in the first place, that *the offices of Deans and Canons, as they fall vacant, should cease altogether*, be suppressed, and done away.—With regard to Deans, common sense dictates that the plan of interposing a highly-paid clergyman, with independent autocratic authority, between a Bishop and the door of his own Cathedral, is an entire mistake. Moreover, if the Crown makes a bad appointment, the Dean is useless, or thwarts the Bishop. If the Crown makes a good appointment, the present system of the Church provides no work for the Dean to do; and he is wasted, and thrown away.*—With regard to Canons, the plan of appointing a clergyman to a high Cathedral office for life, and then only requiring him to fill his place for three months in the year, is simply stupid, ruinous, and indefensible. No man can ever be expected to do a Cathedral any service on such conditions. Before a Canon has had time to warm his house, and return calls, and respond to invitations, and accept and reciprocate hospitalities, his term of residence is up, and lo, he is gone! Could any human ingenuity contrive a plan more calculated to bring Cathedrals into contempt? “An enemy must have done this.” The whole existing system of Deans and Canons is so incurably objectionable and faulty that the Church would be far stronger without it.

(2) I suggest, in the second place, that *every Bishop who has a Cathedral in his diocese, ought to be the Dean*, the head, the chief, the sole manager and superintendent of his own Cathedral. The chief pastor of every English diocese ought to have absolute authority within the walls of the chief Church within its pale, and none should have power to interfere with him. Let the Bishop have the opportunity of exhibiting to his clergy a real pattern of Church prayers, Church praise, and Church preaching, by possessing a Cathedral in which to exhibit it. Then, if anything goes wrong, the Church will

* Of course I do not advocate the suppression of the Deanery of Christ Church, Oxford. As an old Christ Church man, I hope my glorious old College may be governed by a Dean as long as the world stands. A man may be an excellent Bishop of a diocese, and a very bad Head of a large College, and *vice versa*. By all means let the Deanery of Christ Church, as a separate institution, live and not die.

know who is to blame. Let the Bishop have the power of using his Cathedral for any purpose whatever which is conducive to the interests of the Church in his diocese,—for meetings in behalf of Home and Foreign Missions,—for gatherings of schools, for conferences about Church matters,—for any object, in short, which requires a large building. The present system, by which the Dean is lord paramount inside the Close, and the Bishop can do comparatively nothing within the walls of his own Cathedral, is a preposterous anomaly, and ought to be swept away.

(3) I suggest, in the third place, that in lieu of the present Canons *each Bishop, when he becomes a Dean, shall appoint two Chaplains to carry on the worship of the Cathedral*, who shall hold office during his life, just like curates, and no longer. To secure the choice of the best men for this post, let these two Chaplain-Canons each have a salary of at least £750 a-year, with a residence. Let them hold no other benefice or cure whatever, but give their whole time to the Cathedral, under the Bishop's direction. To assist these two senior Chaplains let the Bishop appoint two minor Chaplains with a salary of £300 each, and a residence. If these four clergymen, properly selected, and always resident, with a picked staff of organists and singers and choristers, did not soon make Cathedral worship a very different thing from what it is at present, I should be greatly surprised. Above all, to secure proper superintendence of the whole body, I would assign the deanery house to each Bishop as his residence, and let the existing episcopal palaces be sold.*

Such are the simple suggestions which I make for the reconstruction of the Cathedral establishments. Men may laugh at them, if they please, as visionary, impossible, and absurd. Be it so. If we sit still and let our Cathedrals alone, we shall see in a few years, if the world lasts long enough, greater changes than these,—changes effected by the rude hands of foes, changes which will make us thankful if any part of our Cathedral system survives at

* The suggestion of some Cathedral Reformers, that in every diocese the four Archdeacons should be the four Canons of the Cathedral, and should thus be always resident at the Bishop's right hand, does not appear to me a wise one. In my judgment it is open to the following grave objections:—

(1) If our dioceses were properly subdivided, there could not be more than two Archdeacons in each. The result would be that either Archidiaconal duties or Cathedral duties would be neglected.

(2) It seems very undesirable that an Archdeacon should have no parochial duty. This must be the case, if he is to pay proper attention to the Cathedral.

(3) An Archdeacon holds his office for life. In the event of a new Bishop being appointed, there might be a very inconvenient want of harmony between him and his Archdeacons about the arrangements of the Cathedral.

The plan that I have ventured to sketch out, appears to me far more useful and far more likely to work well. To my eyes it seems a primary principle in any Cathedral reform, that in future all Cathedral officials, except the Bishop, shall give their whole time and mind to the Cathedral. This an Archdeacon-Canon could not possibly do.

all.

One thing at any rate would result from the reforms which I have indicated. There would be a very considerable surplus of income remaining from our Cathedral property, which by good management might be utilized, and rescued for ever from the claws of political Philistines. After making every allowance for a large provision for the repairs of the Cathedral fabrics, for lighting, warming, cleaning, and keeping in order, for the payment of organists, singers, and choristers on a liberal scale, for keeping up the Cathedral schools—after all these deductions, there would remain a considerable residue of Cathedral income which might be most usefully applied to other purposes. By saving the whole of the Dean's income and the income of two residentiary Canons, by the rent or sale of two canonical residences no longer needed, by the sale of the Bishop's palace no longer required when he resides in the deanery—in all these ways an annual surplus would be left, of no small importance, which might do no small good, if properly employed. About the best way of employing that income I feel no doubt at all.

(a) First and foremost, the surplus of Cathedral income, after reform, should be applied to the increase of all the small Church livings in the Cathedral city. At present the Incumbents of these churches are notoriously underpaid, and the whole position of the Church of England in the towns suffers accordingly. Let the stipends of these livings be made really liberal and sufficient, and it would be an immense blessing to the whole diocese. You would thus make it worthwhile for clergymen of commanding gifts and powers to accept posts in Cathedral towns, and, having accepted them, to stay there. You would probably surround the Bishop of every diocese with some of the ablest men in the district within a mile of his own door, and make the Cathedral towns no longer a weak part of our Church, but a strong and commanding one.

(b) In the next place, let some of the surplus become a fund for pensioning off aged and superannuated ministers of small livings. The want of something of this kind in the Church of England is a very serious evil. Scores of aged and worn out clergymen would gladly retire from posts which they can no longer fill, if there was a proper provision made for their declining years.

(c) After this, if any surplus remains, let it be applied to meet the expenses of increasing the episcopate. It is evident that you would not secure a Bishop to every English county, and three or four to some counties, by merely cutting down episcopal incomes to £2,000 a year. There would still remain a deficiency which would need to be supplied from some quarter. I see no quarter from which the supply could be obtained so easily as from the surplus income which would remain after reforming our Cathedral bodies. It would be a genuine application of Church funds to Church purposes, to which none could object. Whatever my readers may think of my schemes of Church Reform, I beg them to remember that I would never ask a single farthing from

the State. All I would ask of Parliament is permission to rearrange, readjust, reconstruct, and to reform ourselves.

I only hope that in everything which concerns the welfare of our Church we may all open our eyes to our dangers and not set to work too late! No doubt, as Napoleon once said in a critical action, "It is not too late to win a battle." But there is no time to be lost. If we do not mind what we are about, we shall soon find ourselves in the hands of politicians who will leave us no Cathedral establishments to reconstruct, and no Church property to redistribute. The Brennus-like argument, "væ victis," has been used rather unpleasantly in 1869. If we love the Church of England and desire its continued existence—if we would strengthen it for conflict and take away occasion from its many assailants—if we would stop the mouths of its accusers and enable it to speak boldly with its enemies in the gate,—if this be the case indeed, let us gird up our loins like men, and grapple with the question of Church Reform. And among many reforms, there is none which I believe is more necessary than a complete reconstruction of our present Cathedral establishments.

I cannot conclude this paper without disclaiming most emphatically the slightest intention to be disrespectful to the existing Deans. Nothing could be further from my thoughts. As a body, they are men above par, and deservedly respected. It is "the system" of Cathedral establishments I find fault with, and not individual Deans.

Several of the Deans are men in advanced years, whom I know, love, and honour. They have "served their generation" well, and have fairly earned a position of dignified retirement. Long may they live to enjoy it! But this does not affect my argument. If the Church had been rightly managed and organized—if Cornelia had known how to display her jewels to the best advantage—these "old men eloquent" would have been Bishops long ago.

Some of the living Deans are men in the prime of life—scholars, and ripe ones too—clergymen of gifts, and intellects, and capacities, and powers, which would fit them for any post in the Church. But, as Deans of Cathedrals, they are positively wasted and thrown away, like buried talents. I could name more than one Dean who might have "turned the world upside down," if he had been allowed fair scope and a field for his energies, but now, "cribbed, cabined, and confined" within the limits of his decanal duties, he "wastes his sweetness on the desert air," and stands like an engine laid up on a siding. In short, when I think what some of our younger Deans could do, and what pitifully trifling work they have got to do, I feel grieved, vexed, and ashamed. The disproportion between their powers and their sphere of duty is simply ridiculous, and disgraceful to the Church of England. It makes one think of a lion turned into a barn to catch mice, or a 600-pounder firing at sparrows, or a locomotive dragging a child's perambulator, or an elephant harnessed to a bath-chair!

No! I believe the machine of our Cathedral bodies is worn out, and can never be made to work satisfactorily again. Whether there is something in human nature which makes the success of a Cathedral impossible,—whether the design, though inherently good, has been marred by mal-administration,—whether there is something in the English mind which is peculiarly hostile to the Cathedral system,—all these are questions which I cannot pretend to settle. The great fact still remains, that Cathedral establishments are the weakest part of the Church of England, and the fairest mark for any enemy to attack. Surely it is the part of wise men to look this fact in the face.

The Cathedral system has been weighed in the balances for three centuries, and found utterly wanting. My opinion is that it is high time to reform it entirely by sweeping it away and thoroughly reconstructing it.*

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* In concluding this paper, I think it only fair to say that I have read with attention the papers and discussions about Cathedrals in the Report of the Norwich and York Congresses. I have considered carefully the opinions there given by the present Bishop of Carlisle, the present Bishop of Bath and Wells, the Dean of Canterbury, and others. They are all apparently favourable to our Cathedral Establishments, with some reforms, being kept up as they are. I must say that their arguments appear to me entirely inconclusive. If nothing more can be said for Cathedrals than these able men have said, I am more than ever convinced that my own views are just and right.

One common suggestion, viz., to graft a theological training school on every Cathedral establishment, appears to me open to very grave objections.

1. We have quite enough theological training institutions already. They certainly do not require to be multiplied.

2. Theological institutions, at best, are of very questionable usefulness. It is far better that men should be trained at Oxford and Cambridge, amidst men preparing for every profession, than be shut up amidst theological students, and receive a purely “class” education. In our dilapidated condition some theological Colleges are a necessity. But they are a medicine, and not diet.

3. The tendency of all theological Colleges is to create and increase party spirit. The student naturally takes up the tone of the Bishop, the principal, and the diocese. What we should come to if we had a theological institution in every Cathedral town in England, I dare not imagine.