

PRINCIPLES FOR CHURCHMEN

A MANUAL OF POSITIVE STATEMENTS
ON SOME SUBJECTS OF CONTROVERSY

WITH AN

*EXPLANATORY INTRODUCTION ON THE PRESSING DANGERS
WHICH BESET THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND*

BY THE RIGHT REV.

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"LIGHT FROM OLD TIMES" ETC.

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CHURCH AND DISSENT.

DISSENT from the Established Church of England is a great fact. However much men may disagree about its cause or its cure, the good it does or the harm, one thing is perfectly certain, dissent is a huge standing fact. The intelligent foreigner who visits England with his eyes open, cannot fail to see hundreds of places of worship which are not parish churches, and upon inquiring he hears that their attendants do not belong to the Church of England. The collector of statistics, who makes notes about everything, will tell you that there are scores of religious denominations in England beside the Episcopal, and that their members may be numbered by millions. In short, English Protestant Dissent is a great fact, and it is useless to deny its existence. I propose in this paper to say a few plain words about it.

Let me clear the way by explaining why I myself prefer Church to Dissent. I will answer that question as briefly as possible, by giving some practical reasons why I am, and always have been, a Churchman. I am quite aware that these reasons are not what some would give. I have not any sympathy with persons who maintain that there can be no church without a bishop, and no acceptable worship without a liturgy. But for all that, I have reasons for my Churchmanship which entirely satisfy my conscience, and I will tell my readers what they are.

(1) I prefer the Church's *standard of ministerial soundness* to that of the Chapel. Our standard is that admirable confession of faith, the Thirty-nine Articles. Every Churchman has a *legal* right to demand that his clergyman shall preach and teach nothing contrary to these Articles. I know no human standard better. What is the Chapel's standard? That, in many cases, would be found a very difficult question to answer. In no case could a better standard be found than the Articles.

(2) I prefer the Church's *form of government* to that of the Chapel. Episcopacy, no doubt, is very badly exhibited at present in our huge overgrown dioceses, and needs a complete reform. But Episcopacy, in my judgment, is infinitely better than Presbyterianism, or Congregationalism, or the anarchy of Plymouth Brethrenism. I might add that I see far more for it in Scripture.

(3) I prefer the Church's *mode of worship* to that of the Chapel. The Prayer-book, no doubt, is not a perfect book, and has some blemishes. But I infinitely prefer Prayer-book prayers to extempore prayers. Above all, I prefer the large quantity of Scripture regularly read in our services to one or two arbitrarily-selected chapters.

(4) I prefer the Church's *system of fixed, settled, and independent endowments* to the voluntary system of the Chapel. Pew-rents in many cases, I dare say, produce very large incomes, and in new districts they may be a necessary evil. But after forty years' observation of Dissent in rural districts, I am satisfied that the very worst mode of paying the ministry is the voluntary system of the Chapel.

(5) I prefer *the territorial system* of the English Church to the congregational system of the Chapel. No other system ensures the supervision of every soul in a district of England, but that which assigns to every minister a territory.

(6) I prefer the Church's *system of admission* to full Church membership, to that of the Chapel. The Church, in the main, throws people on their own responsibility, and bids them "examine themselves" whether they repent and believe. Most other religious bodies appear to require a public profession, satisfactory to, and endorsed by, the existing members. I have seen enough, and too much, of the working of this latter system to like it, or to believe it does good.

Such are the six reasons why I think it much *better* to be a Churchman than a Dissenter. I could enlarge on every one of them at great length. But time and space make it impossible. They are reasons which may not satisfy all my readers. Be it so. I only say that in the long run of years they will be found worth attention. The man who hears a good sermon at Chapel some Sunday, and then tests the comparative merits of Church and Dissent by the excited feelings of a single day, or a few weeks, will doubtless say, "I see no difference between Church and Chapel." The thoughtful man, who carefully notices the *working of systems*, in a series of years, is the man to whose verdict I appeal.

Once more I request my readers not to misapprehend or misrepresent me. Let them remember I do not say that it is wicked to be a Dissenter, or that no Dissenters can be saved. I do not deny that many Dissenters are better than many Churchmen, and that it is better to go to an orthodox Dissenting Chapel than to a Parish Church where the clergyman is a Papist or a sceptic. I only say that, when the Gospel can be heard both in Chapel and Church, I greatly prefer Church to Chapel.

I respect many Dissenting ministers extremely. I admire their gifts, their graces, and their zeal. I have no doubt that they do a great deal of good and save many souls. I never forget that English Dissent was mainly created by the abominable bigotry or shameful neglect of English bishops and clergymen. I always steadily refuse to unchurch Dissenters, to deny the validity of their orders, to ignore their sacraments, or to hand them over to the "uncovenanted mercies" of God. I am always glad to meet them on common ground, and to co-operate with them whenever I can. But I never say that it

is *just as good* for an Englishman to be a Dissenter as to be a Churchman, because, as an honest man, a Bible reader, and a close observer of human nature, I do not believe it.

But some one may like to know how I account for the large quantity of Dissent which undoubtedly exists. Why, if the Church of England possesses so many good points and excellences, why are so many English people nonconformists? Is there anything radically unsound or unscriptural in our Articles, Creeds, or formularies? I answer boldly, Nothing at all. Our great confession of faith, the Thirty-nine Articles, may safely challenge comparison with any confession in the world. Our Prayer-book, with all its imperfections, is a matchless manual of public worship, and is growing rather than declining in favour with mankind. Is there any abstract dislike to bishops and liturgies and surplices in the British mind? I believe next to none at all. Give the average Briton the pure Gospel of Christ in the pulpit, a holy, conscientious minister to preach it, a hearty, lively service to accompany it, diligent week-day pastoral work to follow it, and the vast majority of Englishmen are content, and want no more. We must go further than this to discover the cause of Dissent.

My own solution of the problem is short and simple. I believe that the first seeds of Dissent were sown by the narrow intolerance of the Church in the days of the Stuarts. The wretched attempt to produce uniformity by fines and penalties and imprisonment “drove wise men almost mad,” and made them say, “Can any good thing come out of a Church which sanctions such things?”—I believe, secondly, that the utter deadness and apathy of the Church in the last century did even more to drive men and women out of our pale than the intolerance of the Stuarts. Bishops who scandalously neglected their dioceses, and were everything that bishops ought not to be,—parochial clergymen who did nothing for souls, preached no Gospel, and lived terribly worldly lives,—these unhappy representatives of our Church filled the country. These were the real founders of Dissent, and caused half the chapels to be built in the land. I declare my own firm conviction, that if the bishops and clergy of the last century had done their duty, and understood their times as well as many do now, an immense proportion of English nonconformity would never have existed, and John Wesley and his companions would never have seceded from the Church of England. We reap what our forefathers sowed, and it is no use to complain. In short, English Church apathy has created English nonconformity, and to speak angrily and contemptuously of those whom we ourselves have made Dissenters is, to say the least, most unjust. That old saying is too much forgotten, “*Schismaticus est qui separationem causat, non qui separate.*”

The precise amount of good or harm which English Dissent has done, or is doing, is a wide and difficult question, and much may be said on both sides. I shall only say a few words in order to strike the balance.

On the one hand, I have not the slightest sympathy with those who regard Dissent as always evil, and only evil, and would hand nonconformists over to the "uncovenanted mercies" of God. I believe this to be an entirely untenable position. I shall never hesitate to declare my conviction that in thousands of parishes Dissenters have done an immense amount of spiritual good. They have supplied the Church's "lack of service." They have brought to Christ myriads who were perishing in ignorance and sin. They have taught the elements of Christianity to multitudes who would otherwise have died without God and without hope. These are facts which it is impossible to deny. I may be excused for regretting that the good work they have done has not been done within our own pale, and by our own soldiers. But the work has been done; and I hold with the great Apostle of the Gentiles, "If Christ is preached I rejoice, yea, and will rejoice" (Phil. i. 18). Above all, I cannot forget that remarkable passage in the Gospel, when John said to our great Master, "We saw one casting out devils in Thy name, and he followed not with us: and we forbade him, because he followeth not us. But Jesus said, Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me. For he that is not against us is on our part." (Mark ix. 38, 39, 40.) In short, when I look at the mass of infidelity, heathenism, and immorality which exists in the world, I must and will thank God for the work done by Trinitarian Dissenters. The enemy is coming in upon us like a flood. I welcome any volunteer who fights on our side, however strange and rough his uniform may be. Human nature is like a wreck on a sandbank. I welcome any oarsman who will help to launch the life-boat, and rescue souls from a watery grave.

On the other hand, it is vain to deny that the inconveniences, not to say the evils, arising from English Dissent, are very many and very great. The divisions of Christians are always an immense source of weakness to the whole cause of Christ in the world. An enormous amount of time, money, and energy is wasted on separate machinery and organization, which would be saved if we were one united body. We supply the infidel with an argument which it is extremely difficult to refute. "When you can agree among yourselves," he says, "it will be time enough for me to believe." Collisions are continually arising between Church and Chapel, and especially in small parishes, where either party thinks its interests are in danger. The common cause of Christian education takes damage all over the country from the morbid fear of many that distinct religious teaching will injure their own particular denomination. Above all, the senseless bitter crusade of Liberationists against the Establishment, which, if successful, would almost pa-

ganize some of the rural districts, and do its promoters no good, is rapidly creating a breach between Episcopalians and their rivals, which will never be healed. All these, I say, are evils, grievous evils, and I pity the man who has not eyes to see them, or seeing them does not long to devise means by which they may be lessened or removed.

This brings me at last to a very serious point in the whole subject. Can nothing be done to improve the relations of Church and Dissent in England? The present state of things is painfully unsatisfactory. The divisions of Christians who hold such an immense amount of truth in common about the Bible, the Trinity, the Atonement, the work of Christ, and the work of the Holy Spirit,—about repentance, and conversion, and faith, and holiness, and heaven, and hell, and resurrection, and judgment,—these divisions, I say, are scandalous and deplorable. They are enough to make an angel weep. They exist and stare us in the face, while Romanism and infidelity abound on every side and ignore both Church and Chapel. Englishmen who profess to believe and read the same Bible are wrangling about modes of worship, while myriads around them seem to think there is no God to worship. Can nothing be done to ameliorate the existing condition of things, and bring us closer together? I will offer a few plain suggestions from the standpoint of a Churchman.

1. For one thing, we should always remember that we must draw *a broad line of distinction between Dissenters and Dissenters*. If we suppose, for example, because some wild men are incessantly telling the public “that the Established Church is a Babylon which ought to be destroyed,—or that all the Prayer-books ought to be burned,—or that the union of Church and State is an adulterous connection,—or that all clergymen ought to be stripped of their endowments and turned into the streets,—or that Anglican ministers are mere serfs and slaves who are paid out of the taxes,”—if, I say, we suppose, because *some* Dissenters talk in this way, that *all* Dissenters agree with them, we are quite mistaken. I believe, on the contrary, that the vast majority of serious God-fearing nonconformists have no sympathy with this kind of language, and thoroughly dislike it. Although attached to their own chapels, they have no wish to quarrel with the Church, and are willing to “think and let think.” The empty tubs always make most noise. We must not condemn all Dissenters on account of the extravagant words of a rabid minority.

2. For another thing, we should *cultivate the habit of treating Dissenters with kindness, courtesy, and consideration*. Let us not deal with them as the Jews did with the Samaritans. I am firmly convinced, after studying Dissent carefully for about forty years, that many Dissenters are what they

are from downright ignorance of the real nature of the Church of England. Cradled and nursed in the midst of nonconformity, taught from their earliest years to see all religion through the spectacles of the Chapel, trained from their youth to read nothing but non-episcopalian literature, accustomed every Sunday to hear nothing but a Methodist, or Baptist, or Independent sermon, they often know nothing whatever of the Church of England, its worship, its history, its theology, or its claims to attention. In short, they are almost entirely ignorant of the communion from which they keep aloof. And when you add to all this the painful fact that perhaps the only parochial incumbent whom they have known, has sometimes not adorned his profession, and has seemed to be a man determined to know everything except "Jesus Christ and Him crucified," we really must not be surprised at the prejudices of Dissenters, and must make great allowances. In short, we must deal gently with them, and not forget the circumstances under which their position was first taken up.

3. For another thing, we must not waste time and energy on the pleasant but quixotic idea that we can ever bring about a *wholesale reunion of Church and Dissent*. I am sorry to throw cold water on the charitable plans of some of my brethren. I freely admit that nothing is impossible. But of all improbable and unlikely things, I see none more improbable and unlikely than a fusion and amalgamation of Methodists, Independents, and Baptists with the Church of England. Whatever may happen in isolated cases, it is not reason to suppose that trained and educated Dissenting ministers, as a rule, will ignore their own orders, and seek to be re-ordained. Nor is it reason to suppose that their congregations would follow them. And unhappily this is not all. Our own internal divisions place an insuperable barrier in the way of reunion. We do not approach the subject with clean hands. So long as our own beloved Church of England is infected with semi-Romanism on the extreme right, and semi-unbelief on the extreme left, and cannot cure or expel these diseases, so long, we may depend on it, our Nonconformist brethren will never embark in our ship. So long as the principles of the Reformation appear in peril, so long the disciples of Owen, and Doddridge, and Gill, and Dr. Coke, and Robert Hall, and Angell James will never re-enter our pale.

4. For another thing, if we would improve the relations of Church and Dissent, *we ought to co-operate with Dissenters whenever we can*. It is vain to deny that there is much common ground on which we can work together without the slightest compromise of principle; and I contend that we ought to be always ready to occupy that ground in a brotherly spirit, and not to stand aloof, and turn the cold shoulder on possible allies. The great con-

trovery with infidelity,—the cause of Scriptural education,—the maintenance of a holy Sunday,—the improvement of the dwellings of the poor,—the grand temperance movement,—the translation and circulation of the Bible,—all these are points about which I advise every Churchman to work with Dissenters whenever he can. I, for one, rejoiced heartily in the constitution of the Committee for the revision of the authorized version of the Scriptures. That Committee, we should remember, contained not a few Dissenters as well as Churchmen. I thank God for it. It was a step in the right direction. If men can unite for revising the translation of God's Word written, why should they not unite for distributing it? I myself never expected very much from this Revision Committee. I never thought it would do either so much good or so much harm as many expect; though I have no doubt it will make the meaning of some texts of Scripture more plain. But if it does nothing else, it has proved one thing. It has proved most assuredly that Churchmen and Dissenters can work together, and respect one another. I grant that this is not union, but it is a long step towards it.

I bring my suggestions to a close here. I have touched them briefly, though they admit of expansion, and I only give them as seeds for thought. Some may perhaps think them small, and trivial, and useless. Be it so. The oil which is dropped on the machinery is a small thing, but without it the mighty steam-engine would never work. The water which trickles on the saw of the marble-cutter is a small thing, but without it the great block would never be cut through. We should never despise "little things." Load after load of earth, tipped over the end of the railway embankment, gradually brings the sides of the valley together. Attention to the suggestions I have made would, in my opinion, do much to improve the relations of Church and Dissent.

My general advice to all Churchmen, as to the best mode of dealing with Dissenters, is short and simple. Be kind and charitable and courteous to them. Remember they have been, as a rule, called into existence, and made what they are, by the neglect and sin of our own Church, and do not be in a hurry to condemn them. Do not quarrel with them. Avoid all controversy with them about their peculiar opinions. It does no good. It never wins them. It gives them an advantage. They live in a free country, and have as much right to have an opinion as ourselves. If they do real spiritual good, if they preach Christ, if they save souls, thank God for it, and do not pretend to ignore it. Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, "Forbid him not:—he that is not against us is on our part" (Mark ix. 39). But never for a moment admit that, as a system, Dissent is *as good* as the Church of England, and that it is *all the same* whether a man is a Churchman or a Dissenter. If you do so, you seem to me to make a great mistake.

My general advice to Churchmen who are tempted to become Dissenters is equally short and simple. Do not be in a hurry to leave the Church of England! You may live, perhaps, in a parish where your position is very difficult. But do not be in a hurry. Stand firm. Stick to your own Church. Use your common sense. Distinguish between faults of administration and faults of principle. Your old house may have faults, but do not quit it hastily. You may go further and fare worse. Do not expect perfection here upon earth. The wheat and the tares will grow together till the harvest. Think twice before you leave the Church of England. Episcopacy, a Liturgy, the Articles, the Territorial system, are not things that ought to be lightly esteemed.

It is a cheap and easy remedy to secede from a Church when we see evils round us; but it is not always the wisest course. To pull down a house because the chimneys smoke, or the windows do not fit,—to chop off a hand because we have cut our finger,—to forsake a ship because she has sprung a leak, or has some few unsound planks,—all this, we know, is childish impatience. But is it a wise man's act to forsake a Church, because things in our own parish, and under our own minister, in that Church are wrong? I answer decidedly and unhesitatingly, No!

It is not so sure as it seems that we mend matters by leaving the Church of England. Every man knows the faults of his own house, but he never knows the faults of another till he moves into it, and then perhaps he finds he is worse off than he was before his move! There are often smoky chimneys, and bad drains, and draughts, and doors that will not shut, and windows that will not open, in No. 2 as well as in No. 1. All is not perfect among Dissenters and Plymouth Brethren. We may find to our cost, if we join them, in disgust with the Church of England, that we have only changed one sort of evil for another, and that the chimney smokes in chapel as well as in church.

Let me conclude by expressing an earnest hope that we shall always resolve to honour the "grace of God," wherever we see it. In whomsoever we find "Aliquid Christi," let us respect him, even though he does not belong to our own communion. In high esteem for the orders and worship of our Church I give place to no man. In my own way I am as "High" a Churchman as any one of my readers. But we travel towards a world in which possession of the grace of the Holy Ghost will be the one thing needful, and Episcopacy and a liturgy will be of no use to us if we have not been washed in the blood of Christ. Let us remember this on earth, and honour the grace of God, whatever be the denomination of the man who possesses it, and whatever kind of Dissenter he may be. After all, "the Kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy

Ghost.” “In Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love” (Rom xiv. 17; Gal. v. 6).