

# CHURCH REFORM

No. I.

## OUR DIOCESES AND BISHOPS.

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I VENTURE to invite public attention to a subject of pressing importance. That subject is "Church Reform." I want to see that subject examined, sifted, and considered by all who love the Church of England. If we wish our Church to live, and not die, it is high time to begin thinking about "Church Reform." There is no time to be lost. Let us look the question in the face like men, and do our duty.

The Church of England is in danger! This cry has been raised so often that many have ceased to listen to it, because often raised without cause. But the fable of the boy who was always crying, "Wolf! wolf!" has an end as well as a beginning. The wolf did actually come at last, and the sheep were scattered or destroyed. I know well that the men who look through telescopes with blind eyes, are numerous and influential in the Church of England. I cannot flatter myself that they will listen to me. But will begin by supplying them with a catalogue of our dangers, and I challenge any man to deny their Existence.

(1) We are in danger, first of all, from *the undying enmity of the Church of Rome*. That Church has never forgotten or forgiven the English Reformation. For three hundred years she has never lost sight of one great object, viz., to recover the lost jewel which fell from her diadem in the sixteenth century. Sometimes openly and sometimes secretly,—at one time by political agency, at another by ecclesiastical,—Rome has been steadily working out her plans. She means to have these islands under her feet once more, if she can; and her prospects never seemed brighter and more encouraging than they do at this day. Absolute supremacy is her aim. Many of our Statesmen and theologians are helping her, and playing her game. Rome will never rest till mass is said at St. Paul's, and Lambeth Palace is once more an appanage of the Vatican.

(2) We are in danger from *the unreasonable dislike of the bulk of English and Scotch Dissenters*. This restless body seems unable to forget the unjust treatment it received in days gone by. The tyrannical dealings of Archbishop Laud and his school two centuries ago, and the needlessly stringent Act of Uniformity, are bearing bitter fruit. Nothing, I believe, will satisfy the ma-

majority of Protestant Nonconformists but the destruction of the English Establishment. They proclaimed this plainly in scores of contested elections for Parliament in 1868.—“Only vote for Mr. Gladstone’s supporters,” they cried, “and you will soon have no more tithes to pay!”—It is my firm belief that they mean what they say. Notwithstanding the fullest liberty and toleration, they, most of them, *hate* the Establishment, and will never rest till they have pulled it down.

(3) We are in danger from *the alarming progress of infidelity*. A large school of writers has risen up in the last forty years, which almost monopolises the periodical press, and is gradually sapping the foundations of Christianity all over the land. Many of the cleverest newspapers of the day seem to regard all creeds as “equally false or equally true!” Week after week the country is deluged with smart articles, in which creeds, and dogmas, and doctrines are quietly sneered at or held up to scorn, and the uselessness of all churches and ministers is openly taught or indirectly insinuated. Articles like these are greedily devoured by myriads of our fellow countrymen. The slightest attempt to uphold sound Scriptural doctrine, and expose false systems of religion, is denounced by many public writers as “narrow-minded, bigoted, uncharitable, and illiberal.” To men of this line of thought an Established Church, which has Creeds and Articles, is nothing less than a nuisance and an abomination. “Down with it! down with it!” they cry, “even to the ground.”

(4) We are in danger from *the wide-spread alienation from the Church of England of the working classes in most of our large towns*. It is vain to ignore the fact. In London, Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham, Leeds, Sheffield, and other great cities, there are hundreds and thousands of hard-headed working men who are completely outside the ordinances of Christianity. They do not pretend to keep Sunday holy. They are practically no man’s parishioners. They go to no place of worship. They read, and think, and talk, and congregate, and build up each other’s prejudices. They are always criticizing the conduct of ministers, and sneering at churches and chapels. These may well be called “the dangerous classes.” Not one in a score of them would lift a finger to prevent the Establishment being destroyed tomorrow.

(5) We are in danger from *the evident political tendencies of leading statesmen*. Men of all parties seem disposed to do away with privileged classes and privileged institutions, and proclaim loudly that free trade and perfect equality are the only true wisdom in everything here upon earth, whether civil or ecclesiastical! It is impossible not to see that the Established Church of England will not long be allowed to enjoy the privileged position she has hitherto occupied. She is sure to be assaulted before long. She will soon be put in the crucible. Like municipal Corporations, Universities, and public

schools, her day of trial will come. Whether she will be able to stand the coming attack is a problem which remains yet to be solved.

(6) We are in danger from *our own internal divisions*. Our Church at this moment is made up of four distinct parties. I say advisedly, of four parties, and not of three. There are within our pale, Romanizers, Rationalists, and Evangelicals. Everybody knows these three classes. But there is a fourth party besides, made up of the “no party” and “moderate” men, which is the largest and strongest of all! This party is made up of the men who are colourless and quiescent except at any great crisis, and then they almost invariably oppose the Evangelicals!—These “unhappy divisions” are an immense source of weakness. They absorb an enormous quantity of strength which ought to be reserved for external foes. But there they are; and whether they will ever be healed is a very grave question. Certain it is that no Church can last long in which such totally different and conflicting doctrines are taught. You cannot possibly reconcile the creeds of the opposing parties. If Romanism and Rationalism are right, Evangelicalism is entirely wrong. “A house divided against itself cannot stand.” Unless we can procure more unity than we now have, our candlestick will certainly be taken away.

(7) We are in danger from *the growing indifference and disgust of scores of our best Churchmen* in the upper and middle classes. I speak what I know. Thousands of our holiest and most devoted lay Churchmen are beginning to doubt seriously whether the Church of England is worth preserving, unless some great changes can be effected. They are weary of finding that diametrically opposite doctrines are taught in her pulpits, and that in one parish they are instructed how to be Romanists, in another how to be Rationalists, and in a third how to be Protestants!—They are tired to death of hearing Bishops continually “charging” and exhorting with astounding many-sidedness and impartiality, and apparently regarding all parties within the Church as equally right!—They complain that there is a plethora of “charges,” and a dearth of real “action.” “Hope deferred maketh the heart sick.” These laymen ride at single anchor. They begin to talk loudly and ominously of the need of a “disruption” and a “Free Church!” Without some reform the Church of England in many districts is in danger of dying for want of Churchmen.

(8) Finally, we are in danger from *our utter want of Church organization*. With twenty thousand clergymen and millions of professing Churchmen, we have no regular machinery by which Churchmen can combine, confer, consult, or co-operate, and no representation of lay Churchmen whatever. Colonial Churches, Scotch Presbyterian Churches, the American Episcopal Church, the Wesleyan Methodist body, all these are organized and able to act on any emergency. The Church of England alone, like a huge stranded whale, lies helpless and shiftless, and her parochial clergy are practically like the ministers of Independent congregations!

Such is my catalogue of the dangers which surround the Church of England. It is a formidable list; but I fear it is a thoroughly correct one. It is impossible, I believe, to exaggerate the perils of our position. I say deliberately that I wish to frighten people and make them act. We are on the edge of a precipice. Mr. Gladstone, or any other Prime Minister, has only got to move a string of resolutions in Parliament, proposing that the English Establishment shall be dealt with in the same manner that the Irish Establishment was dealt with, and I firmly believe that his proposal would be largely supported. The Romanists, the Infidels, the extreme Dissenters, the masses in our large towns, the farmers and labourers in many rural parishes, would give him every possible help. The extreme Ritualists, who long for the separation of Church and State, would offer no resistance. Whether the Church of England can hold her own and repulse the attack of such a formidable combination is a very serious question. I believe she can, if Churchmen will awake, and open their eyes, and do their duty. But, at all events, the state of things demands the immediate attention of every thinking Churchman.

Now, can nothing be done to strengthen our position? Are there no weak points in our lines? Are there no external reforms, re-arrangements, and re-adjustments which the times demand and the crisis requires? I want to have these questions sifted and examined, and I propose to ventilate them in a series of papers on "Church Reform." I trust I never forget that no external arrangements, however perfect, and no ecclesiastical organization, however complete, can ever compensate for the want of "sound doctrine." But I think we need reminding that Church order and Church organization are subjects which are not ignored in the New Testament, and that no Christian is justified in neglecting them. They are not the essence of the Gospel, but they ought not to be despised by those who love the Gospel.

I admit that our first help is in the Lord our God; and that an outpouring of His Spirit is the greatest need of our day. But I dare not forget that God "helps them that help themselves." Even St. Paul in the storm was not ashamed to "cast overboard the tackling" of the ship with his own hands, and to "throw the wheat into the sea." If we must go into action, and must fight for the very existence of the Established Church, let us see if we cannot clear the decks first, and get the good old ship into fighting order.

I believe, for one, that it is not too late to do much for the strengthening of the Establishment. There are some glaring anomalies which might be rectified, some flagrant abuses which might be corrected, if men would only resolve that the thing should be done. I shall venture boldly to point out what I mean, and to make some practical suggestions. Whether the reforms I am about to suggest can be *effected*, I am not prepared to say. I only know that they ought to be *attempted*. If I can only set men thinking about them, I shall be abundantly satisfied. Let men call me an enthusiast, and a revolutionary

firebrand, if they please, for propounding my theories. Better a thousand times that the humblest Churchman should raise an alarm, than fold his arms and see the Church “dying of dignity,” and, like the Royal George at Spithead, going down at her anchors.

I will open the whole subject *by making suggestions about Bishops and dioceses*. We want a complete reform of our Episcopal system. At present that system is thoroughly unsatisfactory. Our dioceses are not what they ought to be. Our Bishops are in a wrong position. The whole result is that our ecclesiastical machinery works feebly, and the wheels scarcely turn round. Too much spiritual government is a bad thing no doubt; but it is worse to have no government at all.

(1) I submit, in the first place, that *our dioceses, as a rule, need division and subdivision*. At present they are far too large. It is physically impossible for our Bishops to exercise a proper oversight over their respective charges. The consequence is that they cannot, and do not, thoroughly know their clergy, cannot look after their work, cannot enter into the details of their labours, cannot advise, encourage, check, or restrain them, cannot find time for doing anything thoroughly, and are constantly absorbed in a huge tangle of Gibeonitish business. I can see very little resemblance between an English Bishop, as things are now, and a Bishop such as the New Testament describes! I am certain that the present position of an English Bishop is one which St. Paul and St. Peter would neither understand nor commend. Indeed I know no surer way to bring Episcopacy into contempt, than to give a minister of Christ an English diocese as it now is, and then expect him to do the duty of an Apostolical Bishop. Of all classes of men in the present day, there are none so truly pitiable as conscientious English Bishops. They have an enormous amount of work expected from them, and have neither brains, nor bodies, nor time to do it. To suppose they can find leisure for reading deeply on any subject, for investigating new heresies, for reasoning with refractory ministers, for delicately handling difficult cases, and for “giving themselves to the Word of God and to prayer,” is simply absurd. If they had as many eyes as Argus, as many arms as the fabled Briareus, and as many feet as a centipede, they could never do their work thoroughly, so long as they have each only one mind. They are completely overworked; and, consequently, they are obliged to let alone many things which they do not like, but cannot prevent.

(2) I submit, in the second place, that *no English diocese should ever exceed a county*, and that the larger counties, such as Yorkshire, Lancashire, and Middlesex, should each form at least three or four dioceses.\* Such subdivision seems absolutely necessary, if the office of an English Bishop is to

\* Huntingdon, Rutland, and Westmoreland might perhaps form exceptions to this rule.

be discharged efficiently. Every *county* likes to have its own Lord-Lieutenant, its own Sheriff, and its own Bench of Magistrates; and every county ought to have its own Bishop or Bishops. It is nonsense to talk of diocesan synods and diocesan organization, until such huge dioceses as London, Winchester, Exeter, Chester, Manchester, Lichfield, Lincoln, and Norwich are broken up. At present in such unwieldy dioceses there is practically very little real "episcopacy." To all intents and purposes, in a large English diocese the Church of England consists of a scattered body of Independent ministers ministering to Independent congregations. And this we complacently call Episcopacy! This is the system which we expect Presbyterians to admire! So long as our dioceses remain undivided, there can be no real practical "oversight." There will always be a great gulf between the Bishop and his clergy, which no quantity of archdeacons and rural deans can possibly bridge over.

(3) I submit, in the third place, that our Bishops would be far more useful *if, as a body, they had no seats in the House of Lords*. Let four or five of them be elected to sit there by representation, but let the rest be allowed to reside always in their respective dioceses. Such an arrangement would save a good deal of expense, and enable Bishops to devote themselves entirely to their own proper work. It would keep them from intermeddling in politics, and take away all excuse for selecting them for office on account of their political opinions. The notion that English Christianity would suffer damage, if the Bishops were withdrawn from the House of Lords, appears to me entirely devoid of foundation. I have read the debates in Parliament with considerable attention for twenty-five years, and I am unable to see that the Church of England derives much benefit from its Bishops being temporal peers. On the contrary, the complaint has been made,—and with no little show of reason,—that in the debates and divisions of the Upper House the Bishops are often present when they ought to be absent, and absent when they ought to be present! The little good that they do in the House of Lords certainly does not outweigh the harm that is done by absence from their dioceses, and by an expensive sojourn in London. At any rate there seems no necessity for more than five Bishops, at most, being in Parliament.

(4) I submit, in the fourth place, that *the power of our Bishops is at present far too autocratic*. They would be happier and more useful if, like constitutional monarchs, they could do nothing without the advice of a Council. Such a Council might consist partly of clergymen and partly of laymen, some to be nominated by the Bishop himself, and some to be elected by the Churchmen of the diocese. As things are now, I know no one hardly, except a Roman Dictator or a Russian Czar, who is such a thoroughly irresponsible autocrat as an English Bishop! No one has such absolute official power as he

has, and no one is so entirely non-accountable to anybody but himself! I believe that no mortal man is fit to have such power.\* The result is that bold and rash Bishops often do too much in some special direction, and make immense mistakes, while timid and cautious Bishops do nothing at all, from the very fear of doing wrong. A Council such as I have described would immensely lessen the anxiety of too much responsibility, and immensely increase the firmness with which episcopal action would be taken in any great emergency. If any one fancies there is anything peculiarly novel in this suggestion, he is mistaken. In the year 1641, a Committee of the House of Commons, of which Hyde was chairman, proposed a scheme of Church Reform, in which this idea of “a Council” was a leading element. Those who wish to examine this scheme will find it in Stoughton’s *Church of the Civil Wars* (Vol. II., p. 526).

(5) I submit, in the fifth place, that if English dioceses were properly diminished in size, *a salary of £2,000 a-year, with a residence, would be sufficient for each Bishop*. An additional £1,000 ought undoubtedly to be assigned to those prelates who are elected to represent the Church of England in Parliament. For the other Bishops, excepting the two Archbishops, an income of £2,000, with a house (not a palace) would surely be sufficient. Give a Bishop a million of souls in his diocese, 800 or 1,000 clergymen to look after, and a seat in the House of Lords, and he is not one bit overpaid with £5,000 a-year. Give him, on the other hand, 200 or 250 clergymen at most, a single county at the utmost to superintend, and no other work but that of his diocese to take up his time, and I firmly believe that he would be quite as well off with £2,000 a-year as he is now with a much larger income. The true measure of a man’s income is the extent of the demands made upon it. Double the number of English Bishops, and halve their dioceses, and there is no difficulty in halving their incomes, especially if you take them away from the House of Lords.

(6) I submit, in the last place, that *the present mode of appointing a Bishop to an English diocese is thoroughly bad and unsatisfactory*. The plan of allowing a Prime Minister to select any one he pleases, too often from mere political reasons, and to thrust him upon the Churchmen of two or three counties as their chief pastor for life, whether fit or unfit, without allowing them voice, or choice, or expression of opinion, has been tried too long. It is high time to lay it aside for ever. However suitable to the days of the Tudors and Stuarts, it is out of date in 1869. The subject, I know, is a delicate and difficult one. I have not the least desire to see each diocese electing its own Bishop, and the Churchmen of each diocese divided into two sharply-cut

\* The absolute irresponsible power which a Bishop now exercises over a. curate is very unsatisfactory. I do not think it wise and right to give any man so much power. It may be sadly abused.

parties at every vacancy. I would far rather see some such system as that of the diocese presenting three names to the Crown, and leaving to the Crown the final selection. In such cases a fair representation of opinion might always be secured to a minority by allowing the cumulative vote, and permitting each Churchman to cumulate his three votes upon one name only. The plan I venture to suggest is rather like that which the House of Commons Committee of 1641 recommended, in the following words:—"Upon every death, or other avoidance of a bishopric, the King to grant a *cong e d'elire* to all the clergy of the whole diocese, they to present three of the presbytery, and the King to choose and nominate whom he chooseth of them."

Such are the suggestions which I venture to throw out for the complete reform of our episcopal system. To many, I have no doubt, they will appear absurd, chimerical, revolutionary, impracticable, impossible, unnecessary. Be it so. I only ask all thinking Churchmen to read, mark, consider, and inwardly digest them.

Of the *necessity* of some such reforms as I have indicated, I feel no doubt whatever. Even Henry VIII. proposed at one time to have twenty-five additional Suffragan Bishops, at Bedford, Berwick, Bridgewater, Bristol, Cambridge, Colchester, Dover, St. Germain, Guildford, Gloucester, Grantham, Hull, Huntingdon, Isle of Wight, Ipswich, Leicester, Marlborough, Molton, Nottingham, Penrith, Southampton, Shaftesbury, Shrewsbury, Taunton, and Thetford.\* What would he and his far-sighted advisers have thought if they

\*The recent revival of the powers of this Act, by the appointment of a Suffragan Bishop of Lincoln, to act as a kind of Episcopal curate, is, in my judgment, to be regretted. It may be that I do not fully understand what a Suffragan is meant to do. But so far as I do understand, the whole system of Suffragan Bishops appears to me objectionable.

1. It establishes two classes of Bishops in England, one having great and autocratic power, and the other having very little power at all.

2. It helps to defer that which is the only remedy for the defects of our Episcopal system: viz., the complete subdivision and rearrangement of our present unwieldy dioceses.

3. It staves off that which I am persuaded is the great obstacle in the way of an increase of the Episcopate: viz., the removal of four-fifths of the Bishops from the House of Lords.

4. It is a very expensive plan, considering the little good it does. If a Suffragan Bishop is to be paid a proper salary, why not make him a regular first-class Bishop at once, with full and complete episcopal powers?

In short, the objections to the "Suffragan" plan appear to me far greater than the advantages. It does not meet the wants of the day. Will the Bishop of Lincoln give his "Suffragan" full and complete and absolute episcopal authority,—to manage, settle, and decide everything, without consulting him?—If he will not, the plan is a stop-gap and makeshift arrangement. If he will, why not bring in a Bill to subdivide the diocese of Lincoln for ever?

The following extract from an article in the *Times*, of Wednesday, 22nd of December, 1869, is worth reading:—

"What is a Suffragan? Is he simply an episcopal curate, with the rough work to do, and neither the responsibility nor the honour of full episcopal authority? Is he merely to perform



had foreseen our present senseless position? The mere fact that our population has increased fivefold since the reign of Queen Elizabeth, and that we have only two more Bishops now than we had then, is a fact that alone speaks volumes! To go on as we do now is to bring Episcopacy into contempt in the eyes of all Presbyterians and Independents throughout the world. It is as good as saying that Episcopacy is only a name, a sham, a mockery, a delusion, and an unreality. Railways and telegraphs and penny post no doubt enable a Bishop to do things that he could not do in 1569. But they do not counterbalance the enormous increase in our population.

Of the *usefulness* of diminishing dioceses and multiplying Bishops I feel no doubt whatever. Things cannot go on worse than they do now, and they might, by God's blessing go on infinitely better. Anything is better than sleep, torpor, and stagnation. A flood of Episcopal Hildebrands in every part of England might of course do much harm and cause many collisions. But I would rather see a lively struggle for God's truth commenced and fought out within our pale, than see the Church fall to pieces from the dry-rot of disorganization, torpidity, and inaction.

Of the *practicableness* of such reforms as I have indicated I feel no doubt

ceremonies, and do a certain amount of official routine? The spectacle of a number of persons thus restricted in their powers will scarcely add to the impressiveness of the Episcopal Bench; yet we find it difficult to conceive how they can be anything more important. So long as the real Bishop has the responsibility and the ultimate authority, people will always look on the Suffragan as little more than a necessary official. Of course the spiritual acts he performs will be as effectual as those of his superior; but there is something even here in which people will not be satisfied to lose the services of the Bishop who has duly passed the antiquated ordeal of Bow Church. The human mind, but particularly the ecclesiastical mind, has a great regard for authority, and this can never be transferred from an actual member of the Bench to such an unintelligible creation as a Suffragan. Above all, a Suffragan Archbishop of Canterbury is as inconceivable as a Suffragan Pope. But we should like to know other particulars. What will be the relation of the Suffragan to a successor in the See? Who will pay him? Is Dr. Wordsworth, for instance, going to reduce his income by one or two thousand a year to pay an episcopal curate, and will it still be possible for him to discharge with equal efficiency his own share of the duties of the See? If so, some questions which have been asked respecting the possible redistribution of episcopal revenues will receive a striking answer from the Bishops themselves. We cannot, in short, but feel that this is an experiment, respecting the prospects of which very little is known, and we rather regret that the Archbishop should have given it the sanction of his example. The Bishop of Lincoln is to try it, and it will be wise to see how it works in his diocese. For this reason it is, perhaps, as well that the actual appointment within the See of Canterbury should be delayed.. There will be time for observation, and, perhaps, for mutual reflection. The duties, the position, the incomes of Suffragans ought to be more clearly provided for, before the new episcopal order is formally introduced among us. If we have come, in short, to such a pass that Bishops and Archbishops must have Suffragans, it will be a great question whether the time has not come for a general reconsideration of our ecclesiastical arrangements. ”

If public opinion will only take the matter up, and the public voice will speak out, the thing may be done. A few wise, bold, and persevering Churchmen in the House of Commons might do wonders. There are no financial difficulties. We want no grant of public money. We only want a redistribution of funds which the Church already possesses. Once let the country be convinced that the operation is necessary and useful, and, in spite of the patient's reluctance and desire to be let alone, the operation will be performed. The Irish Church at this moment is a great lesson to the world. Driven into a corner by hard treatment, and obliged to organize, whether they like it or not, Irish Churchmen are working out their great problem with a steadiness and energy which deserve our admiration. If they had only taken up self-reform as energetically ten years ago, the Irish Establishment might have stood to this day.

“Trojaque nunc staret, Priamique arx alta maneres.”

English Churchmen would do well to remember this. Let us not put off Church Reform till it is too late.

In conclusion, I wish it to be distinctly understood that in making the suggestions of this paper, I disclaim all idea of casting reflections on our present Bishops. Nothing is further from my intention. Many living English prelates are zealous, hard-working, conscientious men. Some of them, in the matter of gifts and graces, would do honour to any Church. Considering their enormous difficulties, I marvel that they do as well as they do. But all of them are occupying positions in which *they can neither do justice to themselves, their dioceses, nor the Church of England*. It is their misfortune much more than their fault. They are running a race in which they are completely overweighted. They have duties devolved on them which they can only discharge in the most hurried and perfunctory way. To expect the Bishop of such a diocese as Chester, Manchester, Exeter, Lichfield, Lincoln, or Norwich, to oversee his charge thoroughly, efficiently, and completely, and to be the mainspring of Church work in every parish, is simply expecting impossibilities. It is expecting what a man with only one body cannot do, or if he tries to do it he kills himself. It is from a strong desire to increase the usefulness and happiness of our Bishops that I advocate a wholesale diminution of the size of our dioceses.

From the Episcopate, I propose to pass on to the consideration of Convocation, the Cathedral bodies, the public worship of the Church of England, the ministry, and the position of the laity. In all these points I see sources of much present weakness, and in all I see great room for useful reforms. About each and all of them I hope to make practical suggestions in future papers.

That “the only wise God” may give to all Churchmen wisdom and boldness in this dark day, and may make us “men of understanding” “to know what

should be done, and men of action to do it, is my daily prayer. In that prayer, I humbly entreat my readers to join.

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