

THE UPPER ROOM,
AND OTHER SERMONS DELIVERED
ON IMPORTANT PUBLIC OCCASIONS

BEING A FEW TRUTHS FOR THE TIMES.

BY THE RIGHT REV.
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AUTHOR OF
“EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS,” “KNOTS UNTIED,” ETC., ETC.

“If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself
to the battle?”—1 Cor. xiv. 8.

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THE RIGHTS AND DUTIES OF LAY CHURCHMEN.¹

“Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons.”— PHIL. i. 1.

THIS opening verse of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians is a very remarkable text of Scripture. I suspect it receives far less attention from Bible-readers than it deserves. Like the gold of California, men have walked over it for centuries, and have not observed what was under their feet. In fact, if some Anglican divines had stood at the Apostle’s elbow when he wrote this verse, I believe they would have hinted that he had made a mistake.

Now what do I mean by all this? What is the remarkable point to which I refer? The point on which I place my finger is St. Paul’s mention of “the saints” *before* the “bishops and deacons.” He places the laity *before* the clergy when he addresses the Philippian Church. He puts the body of the baptized in the front rank, and the ministers in the rear.

There is no room for dispute about the various readings of manuscripts in this case. Here, at any rate, the Revised Version does not touch the language of the text. It was unmistakably given by inspiration of God, and written for our learning. As such, I see in it the germ of a great truth, which demands special notice in the present day. In short, it opens up the grave subject of the *rights and duties of the lay members of a Christian Church*.

There are three questions which I propose to examine in this paper:—

I. What was the position of the lay members of a Church in the days of the Apostles?

II. What has been the position of the laity of the Church of England for the last 200 years?

III. What ought we to aim at, in the matter of the laity, in order to strengthen and reform the Established Church of England?

I approach the whole subject with a deep sense of its delicacy and difficulty. I disclaim the slightest sympathy with those revolutionary counsellors who want us to throw overboard Creeds and Articles and Formularies, and turn the Church into a Pantheon, in the vain hope of buying off invaders. I desire nothing but scriptural and reasonable reforms, and I know no reform so likely to strengthen the Church of England as that of placing her laity in their rightful position. One of the best modes of promoting effective Church defence in this day is to promote wise Church reform.

¹ The substance of this paper was originally preached as a sermon in Winchester Cathedral on April 2, 1886.

I. *What, then, was the position of the lay members of Churches in the days of the Apostles?* Let us imagine ourselves paying a visit to the baptized communities at Rome, or Corinth, or Ephesus, or Thessalonica, or Jerusalem, and let us see what we should have found, and what Scripture teaches about them. In this, as in many other matters, we have a right to ask, “What light can we get from the New Testament?”

This is an inquiry which deserves special attention, and I am much mistaken if the result does not astonish some persons, and make them open their eyes.

I say then, without hesitation, that you will not find a single text in the New Testament in which the ordained ministers *alone* are ever called “the Church,” or ever act for the Church without the laity uniting and co-operating in their action.

Are the deacons appointed? The twelve recommend it, but “the whole multitude” choose (Acts vi. 5).—Is a council held to consider whether the heathen converts should be circumcised, and keep the ceremonial law? The decision arrived at is said to come from “the apostles, and elders, and brethren,” with “the whole Church” (Acts xv. 22, 23).—Are inspired Epistles written by St. Paul to particular Churches? In eight cases they are addressed to “the Church—the saints—the faithful brethren”—and in only one case (the Epistle to the Philippians) is there any mention of “bishops and deacons” in the opening address.—Does St. Paul send instructions to the Church about the Lord’s Supper, and about speaking with tongues? He sends them to “them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus”—not to the ministers.—Is discipline exercised against an unsound member? I find St. Paul giving directions to the saints at Corinth, without mentioning the ministry: “Put away from among yourselves that wicked person” (1 Cor. v. 13).—Is a man “overtaken in a fault” to be restored to communion? St. Paul tells those who are “spiritual” among the Galatians to do it, and does not refer it to their ministers. (Gal. vi. 1).—Is an Epistle written to the Christian Hebrews? Not a word is said about “rulers” until you come to the last chapter.—Does St. James write a General Epistle? He addresses the “twelve tribes,” and only names “teachers” in the third chapter.—Does St. Peter write a General Epistle? He writes to the whole body of the elect, and says nothing to the “elders” till he arrives at the last chapter, and even then he is careful to remind them that they are not “lords over God’s heritage.” As for the Second Epistle of St. Peter, and the Epistles of St. John and St. Jude, they never touch the subject of the ministry at all.

Now let no one mistake me. That there was to be a distinct order of men to minister to the Church is, to my eyes, most plainly taught in the New Testament. St. Paul, we are told, “ordained elders in every Church” (Acts xiv. 23). See 1 Cor. xii. 28; Eph. iv. 11; 1st and 2nd Epistles to Timothy; and

Titus. But that “the Church” in any city or country meant especially the laity, and the ministers were only regarded as the “servants of the Church” (2 Cor. iv. 5), seems to me as clear as the sun at noon-day. As for a Church in which the clergy acted alone, settled everything, decided everything, judged everything, and managed everything, and the laity had no voice at all, I cannot find the ghost of the shadow of such a thing in the Acts or Epistles of the New Testament. On the contrary, while St. Paul tells the Thessalonians to “esteem their ministers very highly,” it is to the laity, and not the clergy, that he addresses the words, “Warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak” (1 Thess. v. 13, 14). I trust that Churchmen who remember the Sixth Article of our English Church will not fail to observe this.

Before I go any further in this paper, I think it right to say a few words in self-defence, to prevent possible misunderstanding. If any one supposes that I wish to exalt and exaggerate the position of the laity at the expense of the clergy, and that I think lightly of the ministerial office, he is totally mistaken. In a deep sense of the value of the Christian ministry, as an ordinance of Christ, and a necessity in a fallen world, I give place to no man. But I dare not overstep scriptural limits in this matter. I cannot refrain from saying that a sacerdotal ministry, a mediatorial ministry, an infallible ministry, a ministry of men who by virtue of episcopal ordination have any monopoly of knowledge, or any special ability to settle disputed questions of faith or ritual—such a ministry, in my judgment, is an innovation of man, and utterly without warrant of Holy Scripture. It is a ministry which has been borrowed from the typical system of the Jewish Church, and has no place in the present dispensation. The Christian minister is a teacher, an ambassador, a messenger, a watchman, a witness, a shepherd, a steward, and is expressly authorized by the Epistles to Timothy and Titus, where his duties are clearly laid down. But there is a conspicuous absence of New Testament proof that he is a sacrificing priest.

In saying this I do not stand alone. The learned Bishop of Durham, in his exhaustive work on Philippians, uses the following language:—

“The kingdom of Christ has no sacerdotal system. It interposes no sacrificial tribe or class between God and man by whose entreaties alone God is reconciled and man forgiven. Each individual member holds personal communion with the Divine Head. To Him immediately he is responsible, and from Him directly he obtains pardon and draws strength” (p. 174, ed. 3).

Again, he says: “The sacerdotal title is never once conferred on the ministers of the Church. The only priests under the gospel, designated as such under the New Testament, are the saints, the members of the Christian brotherhood” (p. 132, ed. 3).

This is sound speech, which cannot be condemned. First published in

1868, it has stood the test of eighteen years' criticism, and its principles remain unanswered and unanswerable. To these principles I firmly adhere, and I press them on the consideration of all English Churchmen in the present day.

I leave the subject of the lay members of the apostolic Churches at this point, and commend it to the attention of all who read this paper. It is my conviction that the prominent position occupied by the laity in these primitive communities was one grand secret of their undeniable strength, growth, prosperity, and success. There were no sleeping partners in those days. Every member of the ecclesiastical body worked. Every one felt bound to do something. All the baptized members, whether men or women, if we may judge from the 16th chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, took a direct active interest in the welfare and progress of the whole ecclesiastical body. They were not tame, ignorant sheep, led hither and thither at the beck of an autocratic shepherd. The best regiment in an army is that in which officers and privates take an equal interest in the efficiency of the whole corps. It is the regiment in which the officers trust the privates and the privates trust the officers, as they did when they fought through that eventful night at Rorke's Drift in the Zulu war. It is the regiment in which every private is intelligent, and behaves as if the success of the campaign depended on him. It is the regiment in which every private knows his duty, and is honourably proud of his profession, and would fight to the last for the colours, even if every officer fell. Such a regiment was a primitive Church in apostolic days. It had its officers, its bishops, and deacons. It had orders, due subordination, and discipline. But the main-spring and backbone of its strength lay in the zeal, intelligence, and activity of its laity. Oh that we had something of the same sort in the organization of the Church of England!

II. The second thing which I propose to do is to examine the *position of the laity of the Church of England during the last two centuries and at the present day.*

Let us begin with a definition. *When we talk of the laity of our Established Church, what do we mean?* We mean, of course, all within her pale who are not ordained to any ministerial office. We mean the *people* of the Church, in contradistinction to the *clergy*. How immensely important a body they are, it is needless to say. It would be a waste of time to dwell long on such a point. Without the lay members, a Church can hardly be said to exist. No doubt the old saying is true, "Ubi tres, ibi ecclesia." But a general without an army, a colonel without a regiment, or a ship captain without a crew, are not more useless and helpless than a Church consisting of clergy without laity. In the Church of England, at any rate, there is at present no lack of laymen. There are probably 500 laymen in proportion to each clergyman. In

point of numbers alone, therefore, apart from all other considerations, the laity are a most important part of the Church of England. Now I contend that the position of our lay Churchmen at this moment falls very short of the New Testament standards, and is therefore very unsatisfactory. I hold it to be a canon and axiom of the Christian faith, that the nearer a Church can get to the pattern of Scripture the better she is, and the farther she gets away from it the worse. It is vain to deny that in the actual working machinery and administration of our Church, in its arrangements, plans, schemes, and normal organization, the lay members have comparatively no place at all! Do the bishops meet in solemn conclave at Lambeth Palace to consider the state of our Zion? There is no place for the laity.—Does Convocation hold its annual debates? There is no representation of the laity.—Does the bishop of a diocese make his annual arrangements for the work of his See? Has he any difficult problem to solve about discipline or the best mode of dealing with some criminous clerk? He has no council of laymen.—Has a vacant living or incumbency to be filled up? The appointment is made without the slightest regard to the opinion of the parishioners. I state simple facts. I defy any one to deny their correctness.

Of course I shall be reminded that the laity are represented in our Church by the churchwardens, who are elected every Easter, and summoned annually to the visitation of the archdeacon or bishop. I have not forgotten this at all. I only ask, in reply, whether churchwardens are not, as a rule, appointed with very little regard to spiritual qualifications? I ask whether their annual attendance at visitations is not ordinarily a mere ceremony and form? How many churchwardens know anything about a visitation, except that they go to a certain town, hear a charge about some dry subject which very possibly they do not understand, perhaps dine with the other churchwardens, and then go home? How many churchwardens accept office with the least idea of taking a constant active interest in all the Church's affairs? How many of them are expected to know anything about the Church's doctrines, ceremonies, government, difficulties, schemes, or plans?—They are often most excellent men, and capable of doing excellent service. But practically little or nothing is expected of them, and little or nothing except secular and financial business is ever given them to do. The man who thinks that the office of churchwarden completely fulfils the New Testament idea of the laity's position in a Church must have taken leave of his common sense. That there are exceptional churchwardens who really do great things for the Church I am well aware. But they are such brilliant exceptions that they only prove the truth of my rule. If all churchwardens would do their duty always, as some churchwardens do their duty sometimes, the Church of England would be a far stronger Church than it is.

Of course I shall be reminded again that lay Churchmen occupy a prominent place in Church congresses and conferences, and fill a very useful position on the committees of religious societies. I am quite aware of this, but it is entirely beside the question. All these are purely *voluntary* agencies, which form no part of the Church's authorized and normal machinery. It is the organized system of the Church that I am looking at, and not the gratuitous service of exceptional lay volunteers.

But someone, again, will remind me that the House of Commons represents the laity of the Church of England. Surely the less we say about that the better! The man who talks in this way must have read history to very little purpose, or has been asleep for 200 years. We are not living in 1686, but in 1888. The pleasant old theory that Church and State are co-extensive and identical has long since vanished into thin air, and is a thing of the past. The House of Commons is a powerful body, no doubt, and "monarch of all it surveys." But it is no longer an assembly of none but "Churchmen." Moreover, it is notorious that there is no subject the House of Commons cares so little to discuss as religion, and that there are no religious interests which fare so badly in its hands as those of the Church of England.

But unhappily this is not all. There is something more behind. The laity of our Church are not where they ought to be in the direct work of Christ, and the furtherance of Christianity in the land. A mischievous habit of leaving all religion to the parson of the parish has overspread the country, and the bulk of lay Churchmen seem to think that they have nothing to do with the Church but to receive the benefit of her means of grace, while they contribute nothing in the way of personal active exertion to promote her efficiency. The vast majority of church-goers appear to suppose that when they have gone to church on Sunday, and have been at the Lord's Supper, they have done their duty, and are not under the slightest obligation to warn, to teach, to rebuke, to edify others, to promote works of charity, to assist evangelization, or to raise a finger in checking sin, and advancing Christ's cause in the world. Their only idea is to be perpetually receiving, but never doing anything at all. They have taken their seats in the right train, and are only to sit quiet, while the clerical engine draws them to heaven, perhaps half asleep. If an Ephesian or Philippian or Thessalonian lay Churchman were to rise from the dead and see how little work lay Churchmen do for the English Church, he would not believe his eyes. The difference between the primitive type of a lay Churchman and the English type is the difference between light and darkness, black and white. The one used to be awake and alive, and always about his Master's business. The other is too often asleep practically, and torpid, and idle, and content to leave the religion of the parish in the hands of the parson. Each is baptized. Each uses means of grace. Each hears sermons, and professes himself a Christian. But the Churchmanship of the

one is utterly unlike that of the other. When this is the case—and who will deny it?—there must be something painfully wrong in our organization. If the Philippian lay Churchman was right, the English lay Churchman cannot be right. We are weighed in the balances and found wanting. The very language in common use is a plain proof that there is something sadly wrong. The “Church” now-a-days means the “clergy;” and when some young man proposes to be ordained, his friends tell you that he is “going into the Church,” as if he had not been in the Church long ago!

With every desire to make the best of our Church and its constitution, I cannot avoid the conclusion that in the matter of the laity its system is at present defective and infra-scriptural. I cannot reconcile the position of the English lay Episcopalian in 1888 with that of his brother in any apostolic Church eighteen centuries ago. I cannot make the two things square. To my eyes, it seems that in the regular working of the Church of England, almost everything is left in the hands of the clergy, and hardly anything is assigned to the laity! The clergy settle everything! The clergy manage everything! The clergy arrange everything! The laity are practically allowed neither voice, nor place, nor opinion, nor power, and must accept whatever the clergy decide for them. In all this there is no intentional slight. Not the smallest reflection is implied on the trustworthiness and ability of the laity. But from one cause or another they are left out in the cold, passive recipients and not active members, in a huge ecclesiastical corporation,—sleeping partners, and not working agents in an unwieldy and ill-managed concern. In short, in the normal action of the Church of England, lay Churchmen have been left on a siding. Like soldiers not wanted, they have fallen out of the ranks, retired to the rear, and sunk out of sight.

Now, what is *the true cause of this anomalous state of things?* It is one which may easily be detected. The position of the English laity is neither more nor less than a rag and remnant of Popery. It is part of that “*damnosa hæreditas*” which Rome has bequeathed to our Church, and which has never been completely purged away. Our Reformers themselves were not perfect men, and the characteristic jealousy of Queen Elizabeth prevented their perfecting the work of the English Reformation. Among other blots which they left on the face of our Church, I must sorrowfully admit that neglect of the interests of the laity was not the least one. To make the clergy mediators between Christ and man,—to exalt them far above the laity, and put all ecclesiastical power into their hands,—to clothe them with sacerdotal authority, and regard them as infallible guides in all Church matters,—this has always been an essential element of the Romish system. This element our Reformers, no doubt, ought to have corrected by giving more power to the laity, as John Knox did in Scotland. They omitted to do so, either from want of time or from want of royal permission. The unhappy fruit of the omission

has been that gradually the chief authority in our Church matters has fallen almost entirely into the hands of the clergy, and the laity have been left without their due rights and powers. The effect at the present day is that the English laity are far below the position they ought to occupy, and the English clergy are far above theirs. Both parties, in short, are in the wrong place.

What are *the consequences of this unsatisfactory state of things*? They are precisely what might be expected— evil and only evil. Departure from the mind of God, even in the least things, is always sure to bear bitter fruit. Lifted above their due position, the English clergy have always been inclined to sacerdotalism, priestism, self-conceit, and an overweening estimate of their own privileges and powers. Fallen below their due position, the English laity, with occasional brilliant exceptions, have taken little interest in Church matters, and have been too ready to leave everything ecclesiastical to be managed by the clergy. In the meantime, for three centuries the Established Church of England has suffered great and almost irremediable damage.

Seldom considered, seldom consulted, seldom trusted with power, seldom invested with authority, the English lay Churchman, as a rule, is ignorant, indifferent, or apathetic about Church questions. How few laymen know anything about Church work in their own diocese! How few care one jot for Convocation! How few could tell you, if their lives depended on it, who are the proctors of their diocese! How few understand the meaning of the great doctrinal controversies by which their Church is almost rent asunder! How few exhibit as much personal interest or anxiety about them, as a Roman spectator would have exhibited about the fight of a couple of gladiators in the arena of the Coliseum! How few could tell you anything more than this, “that there is some squabble among the parsons; and they don’t pretend to understand it!”— This is a melancholy picture; but I fear it is a sadly correct one. And yet who can wonder? The English laity have never yet had their rightful position in the management of the Church of England.

You may lay it down as an infallible rule, that the best way to make a man feel an interest in a business is to make him a “part of the concern.” The rule applies to ecclesiastical corporations as well as to commercial ones. The Scotch Presbyterians, the English Nonconformists, the American Episcopalians, the Colonial Episcopalians, all realize the importance of this principle, and take care to carry it out. The Church of England alone has lost sight of this principle altogether. The laity have never been properly employed, or trusted, or considered, or called forward, or consulted, or placed in position, or armed with authority, as they ought to have been. The consequence is that, as a body, they neither know, nor care, nor feel, nor understand, nor think, nor read, nor exercise their minds, nor trouble their heads much, about Church affairs. The system under which this state of things has grown up is a gigantic mistake. The sooner it is cut up by the roots and turned upside

down the better. If we want to remove one grand cause of our Church's present weakness, we must completely alter the position of the laity. On this point, if on no other, there is great need of Church reform.

III. Let us, in the last place, consider our own immediate duty. *What ought we to aim at, in the matter of the laity, in order to strengthen the Established Church of England?*

When I speak of aims, I shall have to come to practical details, and I shall not shrink from saying precisely what I mean. Grant for a moment that we have at length discovered that our lay Churchmen are not in their rightful position.—What is the remedy for the evil? What is the change that is required? What ought to be done?

The answers that some men make to these questions are so puerile, weak, and inadequate, that I am almost ashamed to name them. They tell us coolly that the laity may become lay-agents and Scripture-readers,—though even this at one time, I remember, was thought a shocking innovation. They may even exhort and give little addresses—may teach Sunday schools and be parochial visitors—may manage Reformatories and Houses of Refuge—may attend Committees, and superintend Church finance! My reply is, that all such suggestions are ridiculously below the mark, and show woeful ignorance of the Church's need. I marvel that sensible men can have the face to make them. Oh, mighty condescension! Oh, wondrous liberality! We will let laymen do rough work which could not be done at all without them, and which they have no need to ask the clergy's leave to do! If this is all that people mean when they talk of enlisting "lay co-operation," I am sorry for them. Such doctoring will not heal the wounds of our Zion. Such reforms will not win back the lukewarm sympathies of our laity, and make them the right arm of the Church of England.

The reform I plead for in the position of our laity is something far deeper, higher, wider, broader, more thorough, more complete. I plead for the general recognition of the mighty principle, that *nothing ought to be done in the Church without the laity*, in things great or in things small. I contend that the laity ought to have a part, and voice, and hand, and vote, in everything that the Church says and does, except ordaining and ministering in the congregation. I contend that the voice of the Church of England ought to be not merely the voice of the bishops and presbyters, but the voice of the laity as well, and that no Church action should ever be taken, and no expression of Church opinion ever put forth, in which the laity have not an equal share with the clergy. Such a reform would be a return to New Testament principles. Such a reform would increase a hundredfold the strength of the Church of England. What the details of such a reform ought to be, I will now proceed to explain.

(a) The unit with which we ought to begin, if we would raise the position

of lay Churchmen to the standard of the apostolic times, beyond doubt, *is the parish*. From one end of the land to the other we should try to establish the great principle, that every clergyman shall continually consult his lay parishioners.

If he does not like to have anything so stiff and formal-sounding as a “parochial council,” let him at any rate often confer with his churchwardens, sidesmen, and communicants about his work. Especially let him do nothing in the way of changing times and modes of worship, nothing in the matter of new ceremonials, new decorations, new gestures, new postures, without first taking counsel with his lay-people. The church is theirs, and not his; he is their servant, and they are not his: they have surely a right to be consulted. Who can tell the amount of offence that might be prevented if clergymen always acted in this way? No people, I believe, are more reasonable than lay Churchmen, if they are only approached and treated in a reasonable way. Above all, let every parochial incumbent make a point of teaching every communicant that he is an integral part of the Church of England, and is bound to do all that he can for its welfare,—to visit, to teach, to warn, to exhort, to edify, to help, to advise, to comfort, to support, to evangelize; to awaken the sleeping, to lead on the inquiring, to build up the saints, to promote repentance, faith, and holiness everywhere, according to his gifts, time, and opportunity. He should educate his people to see that they must give up the lazy modern plan of leaving everything to the parson, and must be active agents instead of sleeping partners. On this point, I grieve to say, the Methodists and Dissenters beat Churchmen hollow. With them, every new member is a new home missionary in their cause. Never will things go well with the Church of England until every individual member realizes that he has a duty to do to his Church, and keeps that duty continually in view.

I begin purposely with this point. I am certain it is a vital one, and lies at the root of the whole subject which we are considering. Best of all, it is a reform which may be commenced at once, and needs no Act of Parliament to start it. It needs nothing but a determination on the part of the rectors, vicars, and perpetual curates of England to bring the matter before the communicants of their respective parishes, and to incite them to come forward and do their duty. They have the matter, I believe, in the hollow of their hands. The laity, I believe, would respond to the invitation, if they once realized that the health of the Church was at stake, and that there was work for them to do. In truth, it is our day of visitation. In our Established Church it will never do to try to man the walls with officers, and let the rank and file sit idle in their barracks. Clergy and laity must learn to work together. We must have not only an apostolical succession of ministers, but an apostolical succession of laymen, if our Church is to stand much longer.

(*b*) The next point which demands our attention, if we want to raise the

laity of the Church to a scriptural position, is the absolute necessity of giving every parish and congregation *some voice and vote in the appointment of its ministers*. I make no apology for taking up this defect in our present system, because it is directly handled in the Church Patronage Bill which is being brought before Parliament. I own that I care little for some of the provisions of that Bill, and I doubt much if they would work well, supposing they passed the fiery ordeal of Lords' and Commons' Committees. But there is one clause in the proposed measure which is most praiseworthy, and I hail it with deep satisfaction. I refer to the clause which would enable the inhabitants of any parish to offer objections to a clergyman being placed over them, for a certain time after his name is made known. I regard this as emphatically a move in the right direction. I am not anxious to see patronage concentrated in one set of hands. Much less am I anxious to see clergymen elected entirely by the parishioners or congregation. But I do think that the people should have some voice in the appointment of ministers, and that they should not be left to the mercy of an incompetent patron, and not allowed to make any objection to his choice. We all know that a *si quis* must be read before an ordination, and I contend that a *si quis* should be required in every case before an Institution.

Our present system of appointment to livings entirely ignores the laity, and often proves a grievous abuse. Clergymen are constantly thrust upon unwilling parishes and disgusted congregations, who are entirely unfit for their position, and the people are obliged to submit. The parishioners are consequently driven away from church, and the Establishment suffers irreparable damage. It is high time to give up this system. Let every patron be required to send the name of the clergyman whom he wishes to nominate to a vacant living, to the churchwardens, one month before he presents the name to the bishop. Let the name of the proposed new incumbent be publicly read out in church like banns, and affixed to the church doors, on three or four Sundays consecutively, and let any one be invited to object if he can. Let the objector be obliged to satisfy the bishop and his council that there are good reasons, whether doctrinal or practical, for his objections, and let the bishop and his council have power, if satisfied, to refuse the patron's nominee. Of course such a safeguard as this might often be ineffectual. The objections to the nominee may often be frivolous or incapable of proof. But at any rate a *principle* would be established. The laity of a parish could no longer complain that they are perpetually handed over to new parsons without having the slightest voice in the transaction. One right the laity even now possess, I remind them, which I heartily wish they would exercise more frequently than they do. They may effectually prevent young men being ordained who are unfit for orders, by objecting when the *si quis* is read. Well would it be for the Church of England if the laity in this matter would always do their duty!

(c) The third and last reform in the position of the laity which we should

aim to obtain, is *the admission of lay Churchmen to their rightful place in the administration and management of the whole Church*. I entirely agree with two of my Right Rev. Brethren, that we greatly want a National Church Council, composed of bishops, presbyters, and laymen.

Such a council ought not to possess any legislative powers, or to interfere in the slightest degree with the prerogative of the Crown or the Royal supremacy. There ought, therefore, to be no great difficulty in obtaining legal powers for its formation, and it ought not to be regarded with jealousy when formed. Its main object should be to bring the clergy and the laity face to face, and to enable them to consider all matters affecting the Church's welfare, and, if necessary, to bring them under the notice of Parliament. Its main advantage would be, that when it brought anything before Parliament which required legislation, it would be able to say, "Here is a matter about which the clergy and laity of the Established Church are agreed. In the name of that Church we ask you to take it up, and make it the law of the land."

I am afraid it is vain to hope for any large measure of Convocation reform. Ancient and venerable as the Synods of Canterbury and York undoubtedly are, I think no one will say that they truly represent the Church of England. Even if they adequately represented the clergy, it is certain that they do not represent the laity. This alone is an immense and intolerable defect, and completely prevents the laity, as a rule, taking any interest in the proceedings of Convocation. They feel that they are left out in the cold, and have neither voice, nor vote, nor place, nor part in the discussions, either at Westminster or York, even when the subjects discussed concern themselves most intimately. We need not wonder that they do not like this. According to the word of God, they are "the Church" as much as the clergy. They have quite as much at stake in the Church's welfare. They are often as well-educated, as intelligent, as well-informed, as spiritually-minded, as able to discern "things that differ" in religion, as any clergyman. The words of the judicious Hooker are worth remembering: "Till it be proved that some special law of Christ hath for ever annexed unto the clergy alone the power to make ecclesiastical laws, we are to hold it a thing most consonant with equity and reason, that no ecclesiastical laws be made in a Christian commonwealth, without consent as well of the laity as of the clergy." (Hooker, Book viii. chap. 6.) The simple fact that the lay people have at present neither voice nor place in the English Convocation, is enough to show that it is an institution totally unsuited to the age, and behind the times.

Of course I do not forget that a house of laymen has been called into existence in the province of Canterbury, with the express purpose of acting as a consultative body, and an assistant to Convocation, and it has been resolved to form a similar house of laymen at York. No doubt the formation of

these two bodies is a great step in the right direction. It is a public acknowledgment that the time has come when lay Churchmen must be asked to take a more active interest in the affairs of the Established Church, and that their past torpid position, as sleeping partners in the great ecclesiastical concern, can no longer be maintained. For this tardy recognition of the rights and duties of laymen I am very thankful. A great principle has been established, and I trust the clock will never be put back.

But though I lay no claims to infallibility of judgment, I must respectfully express a doubt whether these new Houses of Laymen meet the wants of the day, and are anything more than a temporary makeshift. I might say something about the extreme difficulty of getting a really representative House of Laymen to meet at York! But I will not dwell on this. I will only point out three objections which appear to me not easily answered.

(a) In the first place, these Houses of Laymen will have no legal status, unless they are formally authorized by the Crown and Parliament, and will be nothing more than voluntary debating societies. Convocation, on the contrary, is one of the oldest legal institutions in the realm. How these two bodies are to work together under these conditions is not very clear. It is an attempt to unite iron and clay. It is sewing a new patch on an old garment.

(b) In the second place, the mode of forming, composing, and electing these Houses of Laymen appears at present far from satisfactory. If they are to consist of laymen elected by the various diocesan conferences, they certainly will not be a fair representation of the laity of the Church of England. For one thing, the constitution of diocesan conferences is not uniform, and differs widely in different dioceses of England and Wales. For another thing, it is notorious that in most dioceses very few lay Churchmen attend a diocesan conference, and most of them ignore it altogether.

(c) Last, but not least, it does not seem quite clear what these Houses of Laymen are to be allowed to discuss. The idea which has been propounded, that they are never to open their mouths about "questions of faith and doctrine," is to my mind most objectionable. It is unreasonable to suppose that intelligent English laymen, men of light and leading and intellectual power, will ever submit to be practically muzzled, and forbidden to speak of any but temporal matters.

Such prohibition, in my opinion, is sure to lead ultimately to friction and collision. If you call in the laity to aid in the administration of the Church, you must trust them, and give them liberty of speech.

It is very possible that answers may be found to these objections, though at present I fail to see them. I am thankful for the avowed expression of a desire to call in the help of the laity, and make use of their opinion on Church matters. But I have a firm conviction that no movement in this direction will ever do much good, until we have a real National Council, composed of the

30 bishops, and some 60 presbyters, and 120 laymen, elected from the 30 dioceses of England and Wales, and including laymen of the middle class, as well as of the upper ranks of society. But I believe that the best and ablest lay Churchmen will never join a mere voluntary assembly, in which their discussions and decisions would be utterly destitute of any authority, and their resolutions would carry no weight.

Above all, we want a Council in which bishops, presbyters, and laymen, shall sit together and consider subjects face to face. The clergy would then have an opportunity of finding out what public opinion is, and discovering that they are not infallible. The laity would have an opportunity of showing the clergy what is really going on in the world, and introducing practical business-like wisdom into their councils. This plan would be of immense advantage to all parties.

I leave the rights and duties of lay Churchmen at this point. I have no time to pursue the subject further. I am conscious that I have advanced opinions which are distasteful to some minds, and startling because of their novelty. But I have yet to learn that the reform in the position of the laity which I have suggested is not most desirable in the abstract, and most imperatively demanded by the times. Between Liberationists, Romanists, and Agnostics, the good ship of the Church is on a lee shore, and the breakers are in sight. Clergy and laity must co-operate, if the ship is to be saved. It is no time to prophesy smooth things, and look through telescopes with blind eyes, and cry "Peace, peace! Let us sit still."

(a) "Sacriligious reform!" some will cry. They think it downright wicked to let the laity have anything to do with spiritual matters. They wish them to be nothing but Gibeonites, hewers of wood and drawers of water for the clergy. They talk gravely about Dathan, and Abiram, and Uzzah putting his hand to the ark, and Uzziah taking on himself to burn incense in the temple. To such men I reply, "Look at the Irish Church, and learn wisdom." If Disestablishment comes,—and many far-sighted men say it is sure to come at last,—you will be obliged to cast yourselves on the aid of the laity, whether you like it or not. Even if it does not come, you will never be really strong, unless you place the laity in their rightful position. As to the vague talk about sacrilege, it is all nonsense. Touch the idea with the Ithuriel spear of Scripture, and it will vanish away.

(b) But "it is a dangerous reform," some men will cry. "The laity will take the reins into their hands, and lord it over the consciences of the clergy." Such fears are simply ridiculous. There is far more real danger in letting the laity sit idle, and giving them no active interest in the Church's affairs. I have a better opinion of the laity than these alarmists have. The new ecclesiastical machinery may work awkwardly at first, like a new steam-engine, when its joints are stiff, and its bearings hot. The laity may not understand at first what

they have to do. But give them time, give them time. Show them that you trust them, and make them see what is wanted, and I have no doubt the laity would soon settle down in their place, and work with a will. Remember how admirably the Irish laity set their house in order after Disestablishment, and have more faith in English laymen.

(c) “But it is a useless reform,” some men will finally cry. “The laity are unfit to advise bishops, or sit in Church councils, or give an opinion about the fitness of incumbents.” I do not believe it for one moment. The lay members of our Church may not be critics of Greek or Hebrew, or deep theologians, compared to many of the clergy. But many of them have quite as much grace, and quite as much knowledge of the English Bible. Above all, they have, as a rule, much more *common sense* than the clergy. No man can be ignorant of that who knows how our best laymen conduct themselves on the committees of our great religious Societies. The observation of Lord Clarendon about the clerical body is, alas! only too true. After long experience, he declared his conviction that “clergymen understand the least, and take the worst measure of human affairs of all mankind that can write or read.” I fear, if he lived in the present day, he would not give us, as a body, a much better character. Nothing, I firmly believe, would be such an advantage to the Church as to leaven all its action with a judicious mixture of the lay element. The true cause of half the Church’s mistakes in these latter days has been the absence of the laity from their rightful place.

The greatest peril of the Established Church in this day consists in the favourite policy of total inaction which pleases so many, and their inability to see that we are in danger. “A little more sleep! a little more slumber! Why cannot you let things alone?” This is the reply continually made when Church reforms are spoken of, and pressed on men’s attention. “Why should we fear?” they cry. “There is no real danger.” Will any one tell me there is no INWARD danger, when the real presence, and the Romish confessional, and ecclesiastical lawlessness, and Home Rule, are quietly tolerated on one side, and the atonement, and Christ’s divinity, and the inspiration of Scripture, and the reality of miracles, are coolly thrown overboard on the other? Will any one tell me there is no OUTWARD danger, when infidels, Papists, and Dissenters are hungering and thirsting after the destruction of the Establishment, and compassing sea and land to accomplish their ends?—What! no danger, when myriads of our working classes never enter the walls of our Church, and would not raise a finger to keep her alive, while by household suffrage they have got all power into their hands! What! no danger, when the Irish Church has been disestablished, the Act of Union has been trampled under foot, Protestant endowments have been handed over to Papists, the thin edge of the wedge for severing Church and State has been let in, and the statesman who did all this is still alive, and thought by many to be infallible. No danger,

indeed! I can find no words to express my astonishment that men say so. But, alas! there are never wanting men who, having eyes see not, and having ears hear not, and who will not understand.

The Established Church of England is in danger. There is no mistake about it. This is the one broad, sweeping reason why I advocate Church reforms. There is a “handwriting on the wall,” flashing luridly from the other side of St. George’s Channel, which needs no Daniel to interpret it. There is a current setting in towards the Disestablishment of all National Churches, and we are already in it. We are gradually drifting downwards, though many perceive it not; but those who look at the old landmarks cannot fail to see that we move. We shall soon be in the rapids. A few, a very few years, and, unless we exert ourselves, we shall be over the falls. The English public seems drunk with the grand idea of “free trade “in everything, in religion as well as in commerce, in churches as well as in corn. A portion of the daily press is constantly harping on the subject. And shall we sit still and refuse to set our house in order? I, for one, say, God forbid! Shall we wait till we are turned out into the street and obliged to reform ourselves in the midst of a hurricane of confusion? I, for one, say, God forbid! The experienced general tells us that it is madness to change front in the face of an enemy. If we believe that danger is impending over the Church Establishment, let us not wait till the storm bursts. Let us gird up our loins while we can, and attempt Church reforms.

1. I now commend the whole subject to the prayerful attention of *the clergy*, “Consider what I say, and the Lord give you understanding in all things.” Oh that I could blow a trumpet in the ear of every rector and vicar in England, and awaken him to a sense of the Church’s danger! The horizon is very black. I believe it is our time of visitation. It is no time to fold our arms and sit still. Is our Church going to live or die? If we would defend her, we must “set in order the things that are wanting,” and aim at Church reforms.

2. I commend the whole subject to the minds of all thoughtful *lay Churchmen*. I invite you to assist us in maintaining the Church of our forefathers, the old Protestant Church of England, and to come forward and take up your rightful place and position. It is your best policy to do so. Except clergy and laity close their ranks and work shoulder to shoulder, we shall never hold the fort, and win the day. It would be your happiness to do so. You would find a rich reward for your soul in activity for Christ’s cause in this sinful world, and being general fellow-helpers with your clergy. Think what an immense blessing one single layman like Lord Shaftesbury may be to the land in which he lives. Think what England might be if we had a hundred more lay Churchmen like him. You would soon find out the enormous luxury of doing good, and being useful to your fellow-creatures. Just now

you would give new life to the Church of England, render her, by God's blessing, invincible by her foes, and hand her down to your children's children, "Fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners" (Cant. vi. 10).

NOTE.

I commend to all readers of this sermon the following extract from a leading article in the *Guardian* newspaper of January 5, 1870. From such a quarter, testimony to the importance of the "Position of Laity" is doubly valuable:—

"We have shown, we trust, that we are far from insensible to the dangers that might possibly arise from the admission of the laity to a larger degree of authority and influence than they now enjoy in the Anglican communion as known within these isles. Let us now glance for a moment at the strength of the case on behalf of the claims being urged by the laity.

"Under the patriarchal system, the *regale* and the *pontificate* were united. The head of the family was at once king and priest; and the idea that some sacrifices could only be offered by a king was so widely spread that Athens, after becoming a democracy, retained for this end a King-Archon, and Rome in like manner a *Rex sacrificulus*. This union is to some extent still preserved in Tibet, in China, and in most countries under Mahometan rule. In Palestine we know that the two authorities were dissevered; the royalty ultimately falling to Judah, and the priesthood to Levi. Subsequently we read of Saul, Uzzah, and Uzziah being punished for usurpation of offices not intrusted to their care. Yet, when we reflect on the great pains bestowed by David in the matter of ritual, on the deposition of Abiathar by Solomon, on the action of pious monarchs such as Josiah and Hezekiah, and on the position of Zerubbabel and his descendants after the captivity, it must surely be acknowledged that the lay influence under the Mosaic dispensation was immense. One of the famous Jesuit commentators (either à Lapide or Maldonatus) does not hesitate to admit that in the Jewish polity the State was superior to the Church. In the time of our Lord at least one-third of the Sanhedrim consisted of laymen.

"When we turn to the infant Church Catholic, almost the earliest step taken by the community is one involving the action of the laity. The seven deacons were chosen *by the whole multitude*. And if various readings cause some difficulty respecting the Council of Jerusalem, yet the confirmation of its decision *by the whole Church* is a recorded fact. Evidence of the continuation of a line of thought and action consistent with these commencements is supplied by Dr. Moberly from the works of great and saintly doctors, a

Cyprian and a Chrysostom, and from the *Acta* of early councils held at Carthage, at Eliberis, at Toledo, and among our own Anglo-Saxon ancestors. At the Councils of Pisa and of Constance, a prominent place was assigned to Canonists and other doctors of law who were simple laymen. Moreover, the great universities of Europe, though lay corporations, having received from the Church as well as from the State commissions to teach theology, were constantly appealed to for opinions both on questions relating to the faith and on cases of conscience. The reference concerning the lawfulness of Henry VIII.'s marriage to these famous bodies is the best known instance in our history, but it is by no means a solitary one. In the fourteenth century, such judgments, especially those proceeding from the University of Paris, had been very numerous; and so much weight was attached to them that they almost supplied the place (says Palmer) of the judgments of Provincial Synods.

“Nor have the laity achieved merely small things in the way of theology. It is true, as might have been expected, that the formation of dogma, necessitated by heresy, has been for the most part the work of bishops and presbyters, an Athanasius, a Leo, an Augustine. But not only have masterly apologies for the faith and works of Christian literature proceeded in great numbers from laic pens, but laymen have also, at certain times and places, shown themselves superior in their zeal for purity of doctrine to that portion of the Church which, as a rule, constitutes *Ecclesia docens*. A notable example occurs in the history of Arianism. Certain bishops of semi-Arian tendencies found it impossible to infuse into the laity of their flocks the heretical poison which they themselves had imbibed. It was a layman, too, who first called attention to the heresy of Nestorius. In our own time, the lay members of ecclesiastical Conventions in the United States have not unfrequently exhibited a more moderate and conservative tone than their clerical brethren.”