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## THE DANGER OF DISESTABLISHMENT.

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NOT long ago a lively writer in the *Spectator* taxed me with holding that Establishment was "The Church's One Foundation." I am inclined to reply, with the Schoolmen, *Distinguo*. There are circumstances under which it may be so; and I am not sure that the Church of England does not find itself in such circumstances to-day. "Let us not be ashamed to be Erastian with St. Paul," said Dean Stanley, speaking of the Apostle's appeal to Caesar.<sup>1</sup> He had seen enough of hierarchies to distrust them; he would rather be judged by Festus than by Ananias; and preferred Roman justice to the sanctified malice of priests. It has been said that one of the great merits of the Church of England is that her supreme Court of Appeal is mainly composed of elderly lawyers whose attitude towards most ecclesiastical disputes is one of slightly cynical impartiality. It is so; and long may it so remain.

It would be an immense gain to clearness of thought if people who use the word "Church" would tell us, in each case, the sense in which they do so. For no word is used more loosely; and I confess that I sense a fallacy when I hear it. Is it the Church of England that is meant? Or the Roman Catholic Church? Or Convocation? Or the Church Assembly? Or the *Guardian*? Or the *Church Times*? Or is it an abstraction?—such as the "unanimous consent of the Fathers"? Or the "Undivided Church"? Or the Six—or is it Eight?—General Councils? Or the Primitive Church? Let us make it clear to which we refer. Since the memorable vote of the House of Commons last December the Revision Controversy has entered upon a new phase. It was originally liturgical and ceremonial, though with a theological background: the disputants argued over what Hobbes calls "insignificant speech"—i.e. over ambiguous terms which can be taken in various senses—grammatical, historical, mystical and the like.

Such discussions are interminable:

"Figure and phrase which bent all ways  
Duns Scotus liked to twist 'em."

There is no sufficient reason why they should either begin or end. "This is what theologians call 'Prevenient' grace," said an Eton tutor to his pupils, speaking of Romans viii. "But the less we know of these things the better," he added. May we not say the same of the "Objective" Presence? the "Memorial" Sacrifice? the "autonomy" and "inherent spiritual authority" of the Church? These phrases recall the Provincial Letters: the grace which was at once "sufficient" and "insufficient"; the power which was at once "proximate" and "remote." Pascal's comment is—*Heureux les peuples qui l'ignorent*.

<sup>1</sup> *Essays on Church and State*, p. 371.

The issue has now been transferred to the concrete ground of politics : it is being represented as one between Church and State. Is the distinction a real one ? Is the contrast between them more than a figure of speech ?

“ An alliance between Church and State in a Christian commonwealth is, in my opinion [says Burke], an idle and fanciful speculation.”<sup>1</sup> The same may be said of their separation. An alliance and a distinction are between two things that are in their nature distinct and independent, such as between two sovereign states. But, “ in a Christian Commonwealth, the Church and the State are one and the same thing, being different integral parts of the same whole.” For the Church has always been divided into two parts, the Clergy and the Laity ; of which the latter is as much an essential part as the former. “ What is the Laity ? ” it has been asked. “ The Church,” it has been answered, “ minus the Clergy.”<sup>2</sup> The definition is at once happy and just. How much the State owes to the Church ! it is said. Yes ; and how much the Church to the State ! “ The dumb ass rebuked the madness of the prophet ” : how narrowly only a few weeks since the lay State saved the English Church and English religion from imminent peril ! It was taking a gambler’s chance to throw the Prayer Book into the melting-pot at a time when the theological atmosphere is as charged with electricity as at present. Surely no more unsuitable moment could be chosen for the difficult and delicate task of its reconstruction. “ Why can’t you let it alone ? ”

We are told to “ trust the Bishops.” In their official capacity, we do so : confidence is the basis and link of society. As legislators and judges, it is another matter : legislation is for the legislature ; the administration of justice is for the courts of law. We are reminded of the amount of prayer of which the Deposited Book is the outcome. How (it is asked), if we believe in prayer, can we fail to see in this at once a manifest answer to prayer and the evidence of the Divine Will ? The argument is unconvincing. The Bishops of Norwich and Birmingham have also presumably prayed, and done so on other lines than those of the Bishops of Durham and Gloucester. Which is Israel and which is Amalek ? Which “ has had power with God and has prevailed ” ? In his inimitable *Reminiscences of Scottish Life and Character* Dean Ramsay tells us of a certain notable Miss Carnegie, who during the Napoleonic wars was accustomed to account for the British victories by the piety of the British army : “ the British aye say their prayers before the battle.” A friend of inquiring mind suggested a difficulty : “ Canna the French say their prayers too ? ” The reply was silencing : “ Hoot, jabbering bodies ! Wha could understand them ? ”

It has been argued that, had the Church Assembly accepted the proposal to drop the rubrics in the Alternative Use which permit perpetual Reservation, “ the spiritual authority of the Church would have been destroyed.” The Assembly did not do so ; and

<sup>1</sup> Speech on the Petition of the Unitarians.

<sup>2</sup> *Life and Letters of Dr. Arnold*, Stanley, p. 360.

what action Parliament may take remains to be seen. But I am reminded of Walpole's Excise Scheme of 1733. It was unpopular; and he withdrew it. At a later date he was suspected of a design to re-introduce it in a slightly disguised form. He had no such design, he replied. "I thought the Bill a good one; and I think so still. But I am not foolish enough to oppose so strongly expressed a judgment of the House and the country. As far as I am concerned, the Bill is dead." Walpole was a strong man; and the Assembly might have been better advised had it followed his example. It acted at its own risk, and must take the consequences; there is no more to be said.

What is meant by "the inherent spiritual authority of the Church"? A Roman Catholic will give you as a reply the concrete and traditional interpretation of "Thou art Peter," and "Here are two swords." It is an intelligible, if an erroneous, answer. An Anglican can give you no answer at all. Hook's once famous sermon before Queen Victoria on "Hear the Church" will be remembered; and the Oxford divines of his time pressed the duty of doing so. Arnold dealt with it characteristically. "I am satisfied that Church authority, early or late, is as rotten a staff as ever was Pharaoh King of Egypt—it will go into a man's hand to pierce him!" The Church of England, in particular, has such authority as has been given it by Parliament; the Prayer Book itself is a schedule of the Act of Uniformity.—"The powers that be are ordained of God"; and, for us, the Church is one of them. But its authority is of the same order as theirs. Do not let us see it out of proportion. When Mr. Collins, in *Pride and Prejudice*, professes himself "ever ready to perform those rites and ceremonies which are instituted by the Church of England," Elizabeth is struck "by his kind intention of christening, marrying and burying his parishioners whenever it was required." "Can he be a sensible man?" she asked her father. "No, my dear; I think not. I have great hopes of finding him quite the reverse." Which proved to be the case.

The authority of the Church referred to in Article XX is not the *Charisma veritatis*. With regard to disputed points of theology Bishop Thirlwall, the wisest of English Bishops, said that the Bishops could not decide them; and he rejoiced that there was no authority which could. If the Churches of Rome, Jerusalem, Alexandria and Antioch "have erred, not only in their living and manner of ceremonies, but also in matters of faith," our own can scarcely claim exemption. It was said, indeed, of a late excellent but arbitrary Bishop of Gloucester, "What is the difference between the Pope and Bishop Baring?" the answer being, "The Pope never *can* be wrong; but the Bishop of Gloucester never *is*." But, probably, neither his clergy nor his colleagues would have accepted this view of the matter. Nor can the authority of which we are in search be found in General Councils: "The sea said, It is not in me." In the first place, these Councils "may not be gathered together without the commandment and will of Princes": and, in the

second, "forasmuch as they be an assembly of men, whereof all be not governed with the spirit and word of God, they may err, and sometimes have erred, even in things pertaining to God."

"Is he a Churchman? Then he's fond of power,"

says an eighteenth century poet. Diotrophes, "who loveth to have the pre-eminence," is still with us; and humility is not one of his virtues. "Is he not a humble man?" it was asked of a late well-known clergyman. "He thinks himself so," was the reply. An instance of this displeasing temper is the outcry that has been raised in the Church Press and by a section of the clergy over the refusal of Parliament to limit its functions with regard to the Revision Measure to saying "ditto" to the Bishops' Bill. This Bill was not exclusively, or even mainly, an ecclesiastical one. It involved the repeal of an Act of Parliament—that of Uniformity, 1662; and by no lesser authority than that of Parliament can this be effected. When the authority of the Pope was repudiated by the nation under Henry VIII and Elizabeth, it was not transferred to the Bishops and clergy of the National Church: nor did that typical product of post-war mentality, the Enabling Act, affect either the Supremacy of the Crown or the authority of Parliament; the Sovereign is still "in all causes and over all persons, whether ecclesiastical or civil within these his dominions supreme." This Reign of Law is our safeguard against arbitrary Bishops and tumultuous synods; against revolutionary change either in Church or State. To enthusiasts this State Control, as exercised whether in legislation by Parliament or in law by the lay courts, appears anomalous and degrading. "For my part," says Bishop Thirlwall, "I heartily rejoice that it is so. I consider it a ground for the deepest thankfulness, as one of the most precious privileges of the Church of England, that principles which I believe to be grounded in justice, equity and common sense are still the rule of judgement in ecclesiastical causes. I earnestly hope that she may not be deprived of this blessing by the misguided zeal of some of her friends, from whom, I believe, she has at present more to fear than from the bitterest of her enemies."<sup>1</sup>

The most important pronouncement which has been made on this, which is by far the gravest, aspect of the present controversy, was that of the Cambridge Divinity Professors.<sup>2</sup>

"The cry of State versus Church that has been raised in the discussions on the Prayer Book seems to us so misleading that we ask you to allow us to say so in *The Times*. The vote in the House of Commons was indeed a vote on a spiritual issue—an issue which we believe to be momentous for the religion of the people of England. But it was not an attempt to force on the Church of England a form of religion against the will of the Church. On the contrary, we are convinced that the

<sup>1</sup> Charge of the Bishop of St. David's, 1866.

<sup>2</sup> *The Times*, February 4.

majority of the House of Commons reflected the religious sense and the spiritual judgement of a large majority of Church people.

"The Revised Prayer Book is the product of diplomatic arrangements made by Bishops and other officials of the Church, in the course of which we are sure that fundamental spiritual issues were blurred. These issues are clearer to some of those who had no part in the negotiations than they were to some of the negotiators. In some of the provisions of the Revised Prayer Book the people of the Church of England scent a form of religion which their forefathers at the Reformation repudiated. They do not want it for themselves or their children. This is the really spiritual issue, and on it the House of Commons gauged the spiritual convictions of the English Church better than the majority of the Bishops and the Church Assembly hitherto have done. If we are right in our reading of the facts, the arguments that are being used to inflame the minds of Church people against State interference in spiritual concerns are as false as they are mischievous and subversive of the religious well-being of the people of England."

The "God or Caesar" alternative is irrelevant. Neither Parliament nor the courts define doctrine; the former makes, the latter interprets, law. It is, no doubt, conceivable that circumstances should arise under which disobedience to the law would be a moral duty. But such circumstances are rare. And the reason why sensible people are predisposed to take the side of the law against those who come into conflict with it on the pretext of religion is that, with few, very few exceptions, the law is right and they are wrong. The policy of the modern State is one of non-intervention. The courts are slow to intervene in the internal affairs of corporations; and there is perhaps an excessive deference paid to the pretext of conscience—however absurd both the pretext and the conscience may be. Sunday after Sunday, e.g., we have seen "Father" Lauria turn his church into a bear-garden, and fill Darwin with a mob of howling fanatics; Sunday after Sunday to keep the peace during Divine Service the police are called out by the score. All that the Bishop and the Mayor can say is, "I wish you wouldn't; I really do." The "Father" makes short work of their bleating. "I will have my way," said a clergyman of this school, "even if the church is empty." He had his way; and the church *is* empty. Better so than the scene of a weekly riot. But—"Will they not say that ye are mad?"

Few words are as misleading as "Church" and "Churchmen." The insertion of a marginal reading—"Community" and "Christian"—would clear the air. No greater misfortune could befall religion than to be identified with sectional or party interests; the Church, if she is to retain her hold on the nation, must be nothing less than the nation on its religious side. The same men and women who constitute the one constitute the other also; the accent differs, the content is the same. What is the Church of England? Not

Convocation ; not those who describe themselves as " good Churchmen " ; least of all, the Church Assembly—*Monstrum horrendum, informe, ingens, cui lumen ademptum*.—No, but all Christian Englishmen. The objection that the country is no longer Christian is the merest sophistry. If its Protestantism was not affected by the repeal of the Penal Laws against Catholics, its Christianity is even less so by the admission of a handful of Jews and secularists to citizenship. The greater absorbs the less. As a fact, since the removal of these disabilities, Parliament has given us legislation in advance of the public opinion of the Churches ; philanthropy—which, after all, has something to do with religion—has reached a higher level without than it has within the fold. While there are greater divergencies of opinion between Churchmen and Churchmen than between Churchmen and Christians of other denominations, the sect argument breaks down on its own ground. A Church rests on a broader basis. The Church of England, in particular, is established not because it teaches a particular theology, or possesses a particular succession, but because it represents the best mind and conscience of the community—the working, in philosophical language, of Reason, in religious language, of the Spirit, in the world and among men. If it ceases to do this, if it reflects a sectional mind and a denominational conscience, the sufficient reason for its establishment disappears. Only by the frank acceptance of the national, as distinct from the merely denominational, standpoint can the Church " as by law established," the Church as we and our fathers have known it, be retained. Religion would be the poorer for its loss : a time-honoured home of " true religion and useful learning "—values not lightly to be dissociated—would have passed away. Were Disestablishment brought about under existing circumstances, it would be attended by two notable results ; (1) the strengthening of the Romanizing tendencies among Anglicans, and so (indirectly) of the Roman Catholic Church ; and (2) the spiritual destitution of country districts, which would be left without adequate provision for their religious needs. Whether our rural populations could, or could not, supply these needs for themselves, it is certain that they would not do so ; and that they would be deprived of a humanizing and civilizing influence were they not supplied. " In the event of Disestablishment the person about whom I am uneasy [says Macaulay] is the working man." In every community a large proportion of the citizens are intellectually and morally minors. The State stands to them in *loco parentis* ; and it performs only half its duty if it overlooks the ideal side of their lives. The present danger is twofold : the first being the apathy of the community to ideas ; the second the chance that the position may be rushed by some sudden panic or passion, some revolutionary outbreak of fanaticism such as that which, in connection with the present unhappy Revision controversy, seems to have taken possession of ordinarily reasonable, sober and moderate men. This over, we may awake to find that we have " loosely, through silence, permitted things to pass away as in a dream."