

**A LETTER TO LORD
HENLEY, ON THE
DEFICIENCIES OF HIS PLAN
OF CHURCH REFORM**

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BY

R. M. BEVERLEY, Esq.

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A LETTER.

MY LORD,

IF I were to commence this Letter by congratulating your Lordship on the partial cure of a mental cataract, whereby you are now enabled to see men as trees walking, I should be paying you too high a compliment; for if I am to view you as a *Spiritual Christian*, discussing ecclesiastical matters, I can see nothing but darkness in your plan of Church Reform. But should it be that you appear before the world in the character of a shrewd diplomatist, endeavouring to save the revenues of the Priesthood, by such contrivances as you think an oppressed nation will tolerate, I am not unwilling to give you some credit for dexterity; though even here there is only manifest such dexterity as an Aristocrat usually displays when he undertakes the strange task of reform. A person moving in the higher ranks of society, understands nothing whatever of the wishes and feelings of the people, and had your Lordship written and printed your pamphlet in the moon, and descended with six editions all ready for our sphere, you could not have published a work more entirely ignorant of the feelings of Englishmen. A vague rumour has reached your Lordship's ears that the Church of England is rich and unpopular—that

these are revolutionary days: with these two facts, added to a moral knowledge already stored in your mind, that it is wise always to concede before concession comes too late, you have published a plan of Church Reform, which is nothing more than a plan for giving concentrated energies to the evils of a State-Religion. Your Lordship also speaks throughout your pamphlet in that style which is natural to an habitual Tory, and a place-man. It has hitherto been the custom for Conservative Lords and Squires to consider every concession to popular rights a gracious gift from superiors to inferiors, this custom is not obliterated in your mind, and you evidently suppose that none but honorables and right honorables are to be consulted in the disposal of Church Property: forgetting that honorables and right honorables are now but the mouth-pieces of the people, who do not care one farthing for the stately *plans* of Aristocratical politicians—*Reforms* it is impossible to call them. If you wish to know what the people think on the subject of Church Reform, you may turn to my 'Letters to the Archbishop of York.'—(Letters, by the way, which your Lordship has carefully perused and made use of, without quoting them.)—If you want to describe what the Aristocracy think upon the subject, for ought I know your pamphlet may express their sentiments, but the Aristocracy have now lost their weight: they are but dust in the balance.

As, however, it has been carefully announced, that your Lordship is an evangelical member of the Church of England—it will be important to address you in that Character, that the Christian world may see the darkness still hanging over the eye sight of even the best members of the Establishment, and so be able to judge from them what the state of error must be in the worst.

In my 'Second Letter to the Archbishop of York' I had termed the Church of England 'the Incorporated Sect,' a title, which, because it most truly describes the Establishment, filled the Clergy with indignation: your Lordship, however, finds nothing repugnant to the Gospel in this notion of Christ's Church, and consequently,

in page 16, you quietly term the Establishment "one vast Corporation": a most portentous and monstrous idea of a Christian Church! and yet the whole object of your pamphlet is to keep up this vast Corporation in all its splendour, doling out its riches in more equal portions, but keeping every sixpence "for the service of the Sanctuary." (page 4.)

And not only does it please your Lordship to contemplate the Establishment as a Corporation, but it is manifest that you think it has a prescriptive right to be the sole dispenser of Religion—nay, that Religion cannot be said really to exist any where but in this Corporation; which excessiveness of bigotry I would set down to a party-style of speaking peculiar to the Clergy, who in the pulpit talk of their sect as a little paradise,—had I not frequently heard it set forth in *private* as well as in public, by the Evangelical Clergy and their followers, that there is no Religion but in their Church. In the following passage it is clear that your Lordship considers Religion amongst the Dissenters either as the worship of Heathens, or sheer Atheism. "In populous cities thousands are growing up from infancy to manhood who never hear the word of God: it was computed a few years ago, that in a circumference of eight miles, in a population 1,152,000 inhabitants, more than 963,000 never could attend public worship **IN THE ESTABLISHMENT:** and though Churches have been built since that time, yet has the population proportionably increased. In one diocese out of 110,000, the attendants at Church amounted to 19,069, and the communicants to 4,134, about one in seven only attending Church, about one in thirty-eight only attending the Lord's table. **THUS ARE WE STILL IN EFFECT AN UNCHRISTIANIZED LAND**—the deepest ignorance and irreligion prevail," &c. &c. (preface, page vii.) Not to go to Church, therefore, is not to be a Christian, and in proportion as people will go into the Churches of the Establishment, in such a proportion does Christianity flourish! But why, my Lord, may not a Dissenter be a Christian? Why, in this droll calculation, are all the Independents, Baptists, Methodists,

and Primitive Methodists omitted, who, I will be bold to say, are, in the district you allude to, in the proportion of four to one compared with the members of the Establishment? Why are they not so much as even supposed to exist? Simply because your Lordship, in genuine Corporation feeling, has never once allowed yourself to consider Independents, Baptists, or Methodists as Christians, and by the habitual train of thinking notorious in the Incorporated Sect, can see Religion no where but in tithe-houses. It will be in vain for you to appeal to your private intercourse with Dissenters, (which of late has been rather brisk,) as a proof of your tolerance or even of your love, where they are concerned, for here, inadvertently, the true thought of your heart has been displayed; and bigotry stands unveiled in all its beauties. But it is still plainer somewhat further on, where, in an agony of monopolizing terror, you inform the King, "that in England and Wales there are at least three millions of Protestant Dissenters. It appears from a return, recently published in a work of high reputation, that the Dissenting places of worship in Wales, at present amount to 1428, while those of the National Church are only 829. The causes of this FRIGHTFUL and GROWING DEFECTION are well deserving of the most serious inquiry." (x.)—"My heart's desire, therefore, and prayer to God for Israel is, that those stumbling blocks, which now keep so large a body of our countrymen out of the pale of the Church, should be deeply, impartially, and patiently considered, &c...after such consideration and revision, and without making one unrighteous or unscriptural concession, the Church will no longer number as opponents, or as strangers, men like Howe, Owen, Baxter, Calamy, Doddridge, Law, Watts, Henry, Lardner, Hall. Such men are the salt of the earth, no system can be entirely wise or safe which excludes them from its bosom." (xiii.) Surely this must make even a Stoic smile, to see how coolly your Lordship takes it for granted that the truth, the mathematical truth of Religion, is in the Establishment, and that all without the pale is a miserable Siberia for poor wretches who have banished themselves thither, unable to

bear the sight of fair truth surrounded by stumbling blocks. But surely the Gospel can be preached out of a tithe-house! Surely there is not an innate tendency in the human mind to rush into the arms of Bishops and Archbishops, Deans and Archdeacons! And by what process of reason can it be supposed, that all the Dissenters will hurry into the precincts of the Incorporated Sect as soon as your Lordship's plan of Church Reform shall be executed? Did it never occur to your Lordship, that men always will have different opinions on such matters? Or is it written in Heaven, legible in the rising sun, and inscribed amongst the stars, that all people, nations, and languages are bound to become members of the Church of England? Can you, in a sane state of mind, really believe that the form of Church Government now visible in the Establishment, or as it shall be visible when it shall have undergone your Lordship's emetics and emenas, is so incontrovertibly the Church which Christ established, as to make it impossible for a Christian, in the possession of his senses, to keep out of the Corporation, so purged and purified? I will frankly confess, that so far from seeing any thing "frightful" in this "defection" from your sect, I look upon it as a beauty of the times in which we live, a fair sign of the Christian faith being nearly fledged, and well-nigh ready not only to start forth into vigour in this our land, but to sail on eagle wings through all the world, to carry the everlasting Gospel without the dead weight

* Lord Henley has some confused notion of this fact, but it is curious to observe the arrogance with which he alludes to it. "It would be vain to hope that under the present dispensation of events, the dissent even of many pious and scriptural men, can ever be entirely eradicated. The evils of DISCORD and SCHISM must remain, as thorns in the side of the Church, during the whole course of her militant state on the earth." (page xli.)

Here the noble logician takes as an axiom that the Church of England is the true Church of Christ, and that all Dissenters are Schismatics, and with this to begin with, the metaphors of nettles and thorns follow as a matter of course. However, considering the good things which "beloved Church" hath got for her portion, her slumbers have been tolerably comfortable till within the last two years—the thorns seem to have given her very little pain, whilst the roses have made her pillow—but it is possible to

"Die of a rose in aromatic pain."