

**THE CORRUPTION OF THE
CHURCH. AN ORATION
DELIVERED
AT THE PRINCE'S HALL ON
MAY 25TH AND JULY 4TH, 1891**

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The Corruption of the Church. An Oration Delivered at the Prince's Hall on May 25th and July 4th, 1891 by Alfred Williams Momerie

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ALFRED WILLIAMS MOMERIE

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Constance ^{Stowe} ¹⁸⁹²
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1892

NOTE BY THE PUBLISHERS.

The Publication of this work was undertaken at our own suggestion. After the Oration at Prince's Hall we found a wide-spread desire existed that it should be published at once in book form. Hence its appearance.

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263, Oxford St., W.

The Revd. ALFRED W. MOMERIE, M.A., D.Sc., LL.D.

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BIOGRAPHY OF THE
REV. ALFRED WILLIAMS MOMERIE.

(Reprinted from "Men and Women of the Day," June, 1891.)

The Rev. Alfred Williams Momerie, M.A., D.Sc., LL.D., sometime Fellow of St. John's, Cambridge, Professor of Logic and Metaphysics at King's College, London, and Morning Preacher at the Foundling, was born in London, March 22nd, 1848. His father was a dissenting minister, and the great hope of his life, destined never to be fulfilled, was to see his only son following in his steps. From his mother, who was refined and intellectual in no ordinary degree, but not robust in health, Dr. Momerie inherits his brilliant intellect, bright, vivacious charm of manner, and highly-strung, sensitive temperament. For some years he was educated at home with a tutor, and also later on at the City of London School. His home was a happy one, although the Puritanical rule of his parents was rather strict and repressive. Eventually he was sent to New College, Finchley Road, to prepare for the ministry, where he studied German and Hebrew under Professor Nenner, and learned from him the groundwork of those broad ideas of which he is now such a brilliant and fearless exponent in the Church of England. From New College he went to Edinburgh University, where he spent four years, studying with great industry under (amongst others) Fraser, Tait, and Blackie. As an undergraduate at Edinburgh he won two scholarships. It was whilst he was still a boy that a chance discussion on Ferrier's lectures on Greek philosophy gave him the first impulse towards his favourite study, and led eventually to his going to Cambridge, whither he proceeded on leaving Edinburgh, where he took a first-class in Philosophy.

He had been at Cambridge but a year, when he received the Degree of Doctor of Science from his old University, and soon after took his B.A. He remained at Cambridge three years, steadily working at his favourite study, and coming out senior in the Moral Science Tripos. Before he became Fellow of his College he was ordained Curate of Leigh, in Lancashire, by the late Dr. Fraser, Bishop of Manchester ; exchanged the class-room for the pulpit, and before many weeks were over, people were flocking from far and near to listen to the brilliant sermons delivered with such ease and fluency by the clever young Doctor of Science, who looked far too boyish to carry such grave Academic honours. But Dr. Momerie was not intended by nature for a curate. Parish work, he always candidly confessed, was not in his line, and by the end of the year, we find him in priest's orders, and engaged in the more congenial work of University Extension Lectures—subject : English Literature—in Leigh, Kendal, Knutsford, Nottingham, Liverpool, and Southport. Whilst lecturing at Kendal it was said he stopped all the gossip of the place. When little over thirty he was appointed to the Chair of King's College ; and within the last three years, or about 1887, he received the honorary degree of LL.D. of Edinburgh.

From 1881 to 1884 he was afternoon Lecturer at St. Peter's, Cranley Gardens ; and during the past eight or nine years he brought out a volume of sermons every year. The "Origin of Evil" is now in its sixth edition ; "Defects of Modern Christianity," in the fourth ; "The Basis of Religion," which formed the subject of his sermons when he was Select Preacher at Cambridge, is in the third ; whilst of the last and most remarkable of the series, "Church and Creed," the first edition of 1,500 copies was sold out in five weeks. In 1884, he was appointed Morning Preacher at the Foundling, and his fame spread so rapidly that the Chapel was soon crowded to inconvenience every Sunday ; whilst the funds of the Institution gained about £1,000 per annum from the contributions of strangers alone. In May of last year, 1890, Dr. Momerie resigned his post, one of his reasons being that no man can preach every Sunday and preach

well. His resignation had nothing whatsoever to do with his broad views.

Not the least remarkable of Dr. Momerie's many unique characteristics is his almost too great contempt for conventionalism. That it has stood in the way of his advancement in the Church, quite as much as his breadth of view in matters theological, cannot be denied ; and that this is so is a matter of regret to some of his best friends, many of whom would like to see him wearing his intellectual honours with more sedateness, even at the expense of a portion of that vivacious brilliancy which makes him such a favourite in society. But it is hard to beat down hereditary tendencies ; and, being half Welsh, half French, Dr. Momerie is likely to remain unconventional, even should Fate have a Bishopric in store for him. His mother was both a brilliant talker and an accomplished letter writer, and from her her clever son inherits his charm of manner, his keen sense of the ridiculous, and the magnetic fascination he seems to exercise upon ten, at least, out of every dozen persons whom he meets.

As regards his work in the future, Dr. Momerie intends to lecture in London and America upon the mischievous effects of Ecclesiasticism ; and, as time goes on, to develop the subject in detail. He has already rationalised religion as far as it can be rationalised by one man ; and, with the exception of a few feeble attacks made upon him in Church papers (*High and Low*), not one of his views has been refuted. This fact points either to unacknowledged agreement or inability ; and there is, probably, a little of both one and the other in the remarkable immunity he enjoys. One thing is clear. Men far less dangerous than he (from the orthodox Churchman's point of view) have been got rid of ; he remains, as he has said himself, "A troublesome son it may be ; but still a son of the Church." What he may become is very much in his own hands ; and those who do admiring homage to the great gifts of intellect that he possesses, are glad to know that he has faith in himself. This consciousness of power is one of the surest stepping-stones to greatness ; without it, a man

goes somewhat slowly along the path to fame ; with it, there is scarcely a limit to what he can achieve.

As regards Dr. Momerie's literary style it may be summed up in one word—admirable. He is never obscure even when treating of the most profound subjects ; and, if he has a fault, it is that he is too concise.

The broad section of the Church of England owes much to the courage of Dr. Momerie ; but he has adherents and admirers amongst all parties ; and for this reason, that he is one of the very few men in the Church, or out of it, for whom the positive and negative aspects of truth (positive in the metaphysical foundation, negative in his sceptical contempt for ecclesiasticism) have equal attraction ; and it is this faculty in him, combined with his intense sympathy with everything that has to do with human nature and the formation of character, that causes him to be, not infrequently, both misrepresented and misunderstood. Dr. Momerie fortunately, or perhaps, unfortunately, is many-sided. He can make allowance for the wild passion that lapses into crime, and the tender forbearance that forgives without question. He has the keenest appreciation for those bright flashes of humour which make life less of a burden ; but those who underrate the serious side of his character do him great injustice, and especially do those do so who turn his very versatility into a weapon against him.

One of Dr. Momerie's most recent contributions to theological literature is an able paper in the *Forum* (New York) upon the "Drift of Religious Thought in England," and, in the lucid and epigrammatic style peculiar to him, he shows that, in spite of the tendency to retrograde in the Church of England, it is being forced by circumstances towards rationalism, the goal which, in his opinion, all churches must reach, or perish.

It is satisfactory to know that his success does not depend upon the fickle fancy of "society," nor upon his receiving so-called "promotion" in the Church of England. He will, probably, be greater without either the one or the other, and his work will be appreciated by posterity whether it is recognised by a Prime Minister, or ignored.

The Corruption of the Church

AN ORATION

DELIVERED AT THE PRINCE'S HALL ON MAY 25TH AND
JULY 4TH, 1891,

BY

ALFRED WILLIAMS MOMERIE,

M.A., D.SC., LL.D.,

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Metaphysics in King's College, London.*

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