

# **REASONS FOR OPPOSING THE ROMISH CLAIMS**

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Reasons for opposing the Romish claims by Henry Soames

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**HENRY SOAMES**

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*L.H. 1829*

**REASONS FOR OPPOSING**

THE

**Romish Claims.**



BY

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## ADVERTISEMENT.

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Most of the statements, printed in the following pages, were used in moving a petition to Parliament, at a meeting of the clergy of the Archdeaconry of Essex, holden at Brentwood, on the 25th of February last. After the petition was agreed upon, a desire was kindly expressed by the meeting, that the allegations which had been brought forward should be committed to paper, and published. Private opinions from justly valued quarters have since confirmed this application. The substance, accordingly, of the observations made at Brentwood, has been reduced to writing, with the authorities at length, and some additional matter.

## REASONS FOR OPPOSING

THE

### Romish Claims.

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THE ministry's late announcement of an intention to favour the Romish claims, has placed many persons in a situation somewhat embarrassing. Individuals, who have habitually declined any keen or prominent share in political discussions, but who have felt themselves occasionally called upon to express an opinion in unison with the course of national policy, now find themselves, equally unexpectedly and reluctantly, opposed to the sentiments of their governors. Especially do the clergy feel this change of situation. They have generally refrained, as becomes their profession, from intermingling in the strife of parties. They have however, with great unanimity, during a long course of years, opposed the Romish claims. Hitherto, the government has gone with them in this opposition, and, therefore, such as value not their order, have drawn from their conduct, a specious excuse for

painting them as interested followers at the nod of power and patronage.

Such reflections upon the Church are coeval with the Reformation. Those who then advocated the exploded system, represented its successor as the mere creature of state policy. The great men, it was said, are intent upon enriching themselves by plundering the Church. Hence they pretend, that the Church urgently needs reformation. A new organisation of it, they are willing to allow, for the sake of silencing popular clamours against their own grasping selfishness. Of course, a priesthood must be found, willing to receive, on terms prescribed by themselves, that portion of the Church's inheritance which policy forbids them to appropriate to their own purposes. In this degrading light, did Romanists represent our forefathers, on their separation from the papal communion. Romish books thus represent the Reformation, up to the present hour. The Reformers, we are told in such publications, were led by their lusts and interests to support a government and parliament religion; in fact, no religion at all, but merely such opinions as the ruling powers thought proper to patronise for their own unworthy purposes. As the clergy of the present day have the honour and the privilege to fill the places and to inculcate the principles of the admirable men, and holy martyrs, whose characters have been, and still are aspersed in this most illiberal, and utterly groundless manner: so, likewise, have the modern clergy to meet exactly



the same kind of obloquy that opponents have perseveringly heaped upon those of their predecessors who gloriously, learnedly, and wisely carried through the Reformation. An eminent Romish advocate has lately ventured to pronounce the clerical order insincere in signing the thirty-nine articles. By persons, not Romanists, but hostile, or indifferent to the established Church, her ministers have been repeatedly branded as mere time-servers. Nor is it in the least doubtful, that if they should now suddenly drop their opposition to the Romish claims, in deference to ministerial views of political expediency, the whole country will soon ring with sarcasms upon the suspicious facility of their conversion. If, therefore, the clergy desire to retain that influence over the public mind which is indispensable for the national welfare, they are now plainly bound to come forward, and firmly, though temperately vindicate their character for consistency. The Church of England is, indeed, indestructible, because undeniably founded upon the rock of Scripture, and organised in strict conformity with ecclesiastical antiquity. Even, therefore, were her venerable endowments unhappily wrested from her, the principles, derived from her teaching would undoubtedly remain deeply rooted in the public mind, and the ministrations of her clergy would be gratefully used by a very large proportion of their countrymen. But the credit, and consequently, the utility of any particular generation of ecclesiastics, may be materially im-

paired. A conjuncture not unlikely to bring about this great national evil, appears now to have arrived. Hence it obviously becomes the clergy, at this time, both to shun the pernicious ignominy of hastily abandoning opinions which they have perseveringly expressed, and to be ready with such apologies for the steadiness of their principles, as may not discredit liberal members of a learned profession.

The earliest connection, authentically recorded, between England and the Roman See, occurred in the year 596, when Augustine arrived in Kent, a missionary from Pope Gregory the Great. Ethelbert, then king of Kent, was *Bret-walda*, or supreme monarch of England, being the third Saxon prince who had succeeded in obtaining such an ascendancy over the petty sovereigns around\*. This powerful chieftain was induced to receive the Roman missionary, from the persuasions of Bertha, a Christian princess, whom he had married from France. The conversion of himself and his people quickly followed: an example which could not fail to have considerable weight in every part of England. For benefitting by it, the country was indeed by no means unprepared. From an early and an unascertained period, Britain had embraced the Gospel; hence it must be supposed that considerable traces of a long-established faith existed even in districts which the Saxons over-ran. In Scotland, Wales, and the Western extremities of

\* Ingram's Saxon Chronicle, 88.

England, the ancient Christian Church had never been destroyed. This venerable community, however, acknowledged not the Roman bishop's primacy; much less any dependence upon his see. It differed, besides, from the Roman Church in the time of observing Easter, and in several other usages. Rather disadvantageously for the credit both of Augustine, the Kentish Apostle, and of his employer, Gregory the Great, attempts were perseveringly made by the Italian strangers for reducing the ancient British Church to an acknowledgement of the papal primacy, and to a strict conformity with Roman ecclesiastical usages. The native Christians resolutely spurned this encroaching spirit, and refused to hold any commerce with a body of men who mingled exertions for spreading religious knowledge with a base alloy of worldly ambition. The conduct of these insular divines proves irrefragably, that at the close of the sixth century, Britain contained a venerable Church hitherto unacquainted with all alien claims to supremacy, and steadily determined to repel them.

The British clergy, however, though honourably tenacious of independence, gladly used the opening afforded to them by Augustine's mission. That eminent ecclesiastic's followers had been enabled, under the *Bret-walda's* protection, to visit most regions of the Octarchy. In effecting a permanent establishment, however, among the people to whom they preached, these foreign teachers generally failed. But their transient residence among the