

**A LECTURE ON
TRADITION,
PP. 2- 60**

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A lecture on tradition, pp. 2- 60 by R. D. Hampden

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R. D. HAMPDEN

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Walker. 'Vox: 104:
D. From the author. Mar 7-1839. 344.

A
LECTURE
ON
TRADITION,

READ

BEFORE THE UNIVERSITY,
IN THE DIVINITY SCHOOL, OXFORD,

ON THURSDAY, March 7th, 1839,

WITH ADDITIONS,

BY

R. D. HAMPDEN, D. D.

REGIUS PROFESSOR OF DIVINITY, ETC.

LONDON:

B. FELLOWES, LUDGATE STREET.

1839.

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according to my office, moderate, if I might be patiently and candidly heard, between the disputants on each side of the questions involved in this great argument. And, at any rate, I would satisfy my own conscience, by not leaving unsaid, what I conceive may be useful, in order to a right understanding of the matters in dispute.

Though, too, I may state nothing original on the subject, and the substance of what I shall advance may be familiar to several here present, yet it may do good, to "stir up the pure minds" of some, by putting them in "remembrance" of what they know; whilst I more particularly address myself to those who have yet to sound the depths of this controversy, and endeavour to confirm them in their hold of a fundamental principle of our Church. For it is to the junior part of the University that the labours of this Chair, originally designed for the Inceptors in Arts, are now practically devoted. For their needs, I feel myself especially called upon to consult. For their benefit, (for, none of us hold his place in the world, be it what it may, but for some special providence, and some wise and benevolent design of God in regard to it,) I may humbly trust, I have been permitted to discharge the duties of this office now for the space of three years, "through evil report and good report,"—amidst much discouragement, and yet much encouragement,—under the burthen of the unmerited suspicion and dislike of some, and yet cheered and supported by the good-will and in-

dulgence and respect of others,—depressed at times with fears of my own incompetence to the arduous work set before me, and yet refreshed by the promises of Divine Grace on all humble and hearty endeavours, and, in particular, by that comforting assurance, “Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.”

Let me not be supposed, however, to allude to these circumstances of trial, in the way of reproach, or resentment, or complaint. If there has been enmity exerted, and indignity received, it were well at least, could those unhappy feelings of our fallen nature, which such circumstances call forth and foster, be subdued and silenced by that great law of Charity, without which, all our earnest contentions for the Faith, are as nothing,—and by the paramount obligation of us all, to promote with one heart and one mouth the welfare of our common Zion. And may God grant us the right mind to learn from such occasions as that to which I have been referring, the hard lesson of Christian humiliation before Him, the Searcher of hearts; and enable those, between whom offences have arisen, to say, in the true spirit of the Apostle Paul, “Brethren, I beseech you, be as I am, for I am as ye are; ye have not injured me at all.” I only advert to the peculiar circumstances of my case, in order to point out distinctly, that I am influenced by no personal or party feeling in addressing myself

to the subject now before us,—that I desire simply to discharge a duty providentially imposed on me, by stating, to the best of my judgment, the truth, on a subject demanding our especial consideration at this time, and on which the junior members of the University will naturally look to me for an expression of my views. God forbid that I should ever employ this Chair for any mere selfish purpose, or any purpose but that of the Christian edification for which it was instituted. I am not come here to censure or to praise any one. The fundamental constitution of the University has appointed the Regius Professor of Divinity a judge of heretical opinions. So far as I am personally concerned, I have nothing to regret, but much rather to rejoice, that this charge is not laid upon me; however strenuously I must object to a suspension of the ancient constitution of the University in regard to the office itself, and the assumption of a power not conceded by our Charters and Statutes, and the establishment of a precedent, so insignificant in its effect, and yet so dangerous to the future repose of this place. I desire, for my part, to be no man's censurer; as I am answerable for no man's error but my own. But principles and opinions, every one is entitled to discuss; and in matters of Theology especially am I entitled, or rather indeed required, to do so, by the prescription of my office. And I would take this opportunity of observing, that far more effectual service would be done to the

cause of Truth and Religion,—those high convictions and professions of duty, by which men apologize to their own hearts and the world for their severities of judgment or conduct, would be more fully answered,—if, in questions of Truth, the *person* were altogether left out of consideration, and opinions, and arguments, and statements, were simply examined on their own merits. Misrepresentation and calumny, and, at any rate, all just ground of offence between man and man, would thus be avoided; and controversialists would be less exposed to the delusion of regarding themselves mere friends of Truth, whilst they are rather advocates of a cause, or a side, or a party, against an opponent.

It may seem strange, at the first view, that we should at this time be debating a fundamental principle of the Reformation itself,—that after nearly three centuries of happy experience of a Church-system established on the basis of Scripture-authority, we should be inquiring into the Authority due to Tradition in the Church of God, and wrangling about boundary-lines which it was one great business of the Reformation to ascertain and fix*. No principle so broadly and positively separates our Church from that of Rome, as the limit placed by our Reformers to the authoritative source of Divine Truth. And yet it is now eagerly asked, what is the nature and use of Tradition;—as if we had yet to settle

* Note I.

the terms of difference between Rome and ourselves,—as if the wisdom and piety of our forefathers had not already decided them for us. Still stranger is it, that controversy should be going on among ourselves, among members of the Church of England itself, and not only members but ministers of that Church, as to the estimation in which our Church holds Tradition,—a controversy in the presence of our Article declaring the sufficiency of Scripture to salvation, and excluding every thing not contained in Scripture from being required of any man as necessary to salvation. But the strangeness of all this disappears, when we look to the freedom of discussion which our Church allows,—to the waywardness of the human mind,—to the love of contradiction,—to the tendency of men to obviate error, or supposed error, by insisting on some principle the most opposite to that which they would impugn,—the tendency again, to contract statements of a truth into the most precise form, or to take advantage of the absence of extreme precision, to interpret a given statement according to some peculiar view. These, and other natural principles of human conduct, acted on by the force of circumstances,—situated as our Church is in relation to that of Rome on the one hand, and the various Protestant Communions on the other,—must be expected to produce alternations of opinion within the Church itself, on such points more especially as belong to its distinctive character. And as our Church,

from its very moderation, may seem, when viewed from the opposite extreme either of ultra-protestantism, or of ultra-catholicism, to approximate to the other;—or again, from that very moderation, is liable to be claimed by either of the extremes as agreeing with it in principle;—it is not to be wondered at, that, in such a position, we should be subject to agitations from within, even on questions deeply affecting our existence as a Catholic, and yet Reformed and Protestant, Church. May we hope and pray, that, by the Divine blessing, this agitation of the waters may result in their purification; and that the Church, as a tree of God's planting, may both firmly stand the shaking of the tempest without, and present a heart of oak to the gnawings of the canker that would consume it within.

I have referred to the moderation of our Church,—its distinctive character, as it is separated from the extremes to which it may appear to approximate. I need not state that, at this period, the prevailing disposition, or rather the tendency of that energy which is most busily working among us, is to represent the Church in its points of resemblance to Roman-catholicism, and throw it into strong contrast with the spirit of Protestantism. Thus it is, that we find the subject of Tradition now so studiously brought into notice, and elaborate arguments drawn from the stores of ancient controversy, adduced to prove the traditionary derivation of the doctrines of the Church, or the