

**THE COMEDY OF ENGLISH  
PROTESTANTISM: IN THREE ACTS;  
SCENE, EXETER HALL, LONDON;  
TIME, THE SUMMER OF 1893**

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The Comedy of English Protestantism: in three acts; scene, Exeter Hall, London; time, the summer of 1893 by A. F. Marshall

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**A. F. MARSHALL**

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Jas. C. Carberry  
 Feb. 17<sup>th</sup> 94  
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# Comedy of English Protestantism:

IN THREE ACTS.

SCENE: EXETER HALL, LONDON.

TIME: THE SUMMER OF 1893.

EDITED BY

A. F. MARSHALL, B.A. OXON.

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"For how can she constrain them to obey,  
Who has herself cast off the lawful sway?"  
—DRYDEN'S *"The Hind and the Panther."*

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1894.

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It was the brilliant suggestion of a well-known Broad Churchman: "Let us assemble a Grand Council in Exeter Hall, London, with a view to restoring all the sects in Great Britain to the embrace of their mother, the Church of England." The first idea was that each of the sects should send its delegate, and that each delegate should take for his watchword, "Reunion." Yet there was one grave inconvenience in the way of such a council—that there were more than two hundred sects in Great Britain; and it was felt that if two hundred delegates were to be all talking together in Exeter Hall, each one expatiating on his own theology, there would need to be a commanding personage in the chief chair of the assembly, to preserve the harmony and the amenity of disputation. This difficulty was, however, astutely got over by limiting the number of delegates to seven; these seven to

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act as delegates for the entire kingdom—their representative value to be as follows:

1. The *Rev. Sebastian Stole* was chosen delegate for the Ritualists.
2. To *Canon Courtly* were confided the interests of the Low Church party.
3. *Dr. Wylde* was the approved counsel for the Latitudinarians, better known perhaps in these days as Broad Churchmen.
4. The Wesleyans selected the *Rev. Walter Sterling* as the representative of the various Methodist communities.
5. *Captain Banner* was the appointed orator for the Salvation Army.
6. The Home-Made Sects had an eloquent advocate in *Mr. Moore*, the well-known author of "Variety in Doctrine, the Surest Evidence of Real Unity in Belief."
7. The Imported Sects secured the championship of *Pastor Dort*, the efficient minister of the Arminian Chapel, Land's End.



ON the morning of one of the most beautiful days in May all these delegates were on the platform of Exeter Hall; and it is needless to record—all England must have heard of it—that the hall was densely crowded in every part; many clergymen being unable to find chairs, and one venerable archdeacon being seen to contend with a Salvationist as to the prior claim to a front seat in the gallery. Within a very few minutes, however, it became obvious that the vast concourse was not composed of grave, deliberative theologians; a large number of persons having made their way into the hall who were not particularly attached to any religion, and who would be not unlikely to disturb the harmony of the Council by observations which would be more spontaneous than reverent. Yet this admixture was a natural accident of a great meeting.

As the clock struck ten, the President, Professor Chaos, moved slowly and with dignity into an arm-chair which was placed just in front of the organ; and, silence being commanded, the huge audience calmed down, with mingled cheerfulness, apprehension, and even awe.

*The President* (addressing the audience with much solemnity). You will agree with me that it is a sublime object for which we are met here to-day. Unhappily divided as we are in this country, by reason of the glorious freedom of the Protestant faith—through the very Scripturalness, I may say, of that liberty of private judgment which was won for us by the Reformers in the sixteenth century—we are, nevertheless, all one in our belief in Christ, and in our belief—

(A voice from the gallery: "That every one, except yourself, is wrong.")

*The President*. I must really beg that there may be no unseemly interruptions. Legitimate comment is one thing, but mere frivolity

is out of place on this grave occasion. ("Hear, hear," from a few of the audience.) I was saying, when I was interrupted, that we are all united in our belief in Christ; and I was about to add that our differences are in the main unimportant; or, if important, they are only rendered so by the perfectly natural tenacity with which each person clings to his own opinions.

This question of the important and the unimportant is, I am aware, beset with some difficulty. It is objected: How can we *know* what is important or unimportant, when we have only our own private opinion to guide us—our own interpretation of the Scriptures to enlighten us? I consider this objection to be specious. There is but one sovereignly important article of the Christian faith, and that is Redemption through Christ; while, in regard to the nature of the Sacraments, of Church Authority, of the Christian Priesthood, or indeed of any of the so-called dogmas of the Catholic Creeds, there must be the widest possible margin for personal proclivity, for private disposition or aspiration. Our differences, I