

**A LETTER TO HIS  
GRACE THE DUKE  
OF WELLINGTON**

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A letter to his grace the Duke of Wellington by Vaughan Thomas

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**VAUGHAN THOMAS**

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MY LORD DUKE,

MUCH has been urged against *the reasonableness* of the Academic ordinance, which requires Subscription to the Thirty-nine Articles from boys of twelve years old and upwards. The objection has been often met by the observation, that boys of twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen years do not often come to Oxford, the good sense of their parents, and the altered practice of the times, having had the effect of keeping them longer at school, or under private tuition, whereby the requisitions of the Statute in these particulars have passed into desuetude, and have become, in a very great degree, irrelevant and effete. But waiving the benefit of this observation, and coming at once to the point at issue, I shall, in the Letter which I have now the honour of addressing to your Grace as Chancellor of Oxford, deduce the reasonableness of the original Requisition of 1581, from the exact and comprehensive course of preparatory study, which was by authority ordered to be pursued in schools in respect of those articles of faith, which the schoolboy was afterwards to be called upon to subscribe if he entered this University.

To such an argument it may not be deemed an unsuitable introduction, if I first make a few distinctions upon the subject of this Subscription—not with the view, or even the wish, to circumscribe the large and extensive meaning of the word or the deed; but to set forth as clearly as I can my own view of this act of signing. To subscribe is not to swear by any sort of oath *promissory*, or *assertory*, either that the subscriber will for ever hereafter teach and preach, maintain and defend, the Articles—or that he at that time asserts and pronounces them, *arbitrio suo*, to be agreeable to the word of God: no oath of any sort is taken or implied by Subscription; neither does the act imply any declaration of conviction after personal examination and enquiry, or any expression of an opinion or judgment, as the result of an actual survey of all the particulars subscribed in all their parts, principles, and relations. Such acts and declarations as these are reserved for those of maturer years and longer standing: none before they take their Bachelor's Degree are called upon to pronounce their judgments, and make distinct and explicit avowals of their conscientious convictions, that the Articles of our Church are in meet accordance with the revelations of God's will, or (in the words of the established formula) that they are agreeable to the word of God. Subscription, then, has neither the sanctity of an oath, nor the rigid form of a precise and specific declaration; when dispassionately con-

sidered, it will be found to amount to a formal notification that the subscriber is a member of the Established Church ; it is moreover an indication of willingness on his part to comply with University and College ordinances as to Church and Chapel ; it is a sort of general voucher of conformity during the individual's residence at Oxford, an implied promise that he will neither disturb the peace nor destroy the fellowship which should subsist between the members of Christian communities, by any heretical pravities of heart or any wilful perversities of understanding. Without presuming to speak for others, I have thought it right to prefix my own views of Undergraduate Subscription. But I cannot let the opportunity pass, without protesting against the false inferences which have been drawn from the different views of this act of Subscription, which have been taken by different persons who have written in defence of it ; for it seems to have been inferred by some of our opponents in this controversy, that because new modes of defence are adopted, old ones are abandoned ; because additional arguments are used, or different opinions expressed, or various ends assigned to Subscription at Matriculation, there is inconsistency or contradiction between the methods pursued, and the objects proposed, by the different advocates of the Academic practice. I wish to anticipate and prevent such inferences by the declaration, that in resorting to the present proof, I do not intend

to surrender, weaken, or diminish any of the rest ; on the contrary, it is my wish to give more strength to what was strong before, and to throw additional light upon what some continue to call obscure ; or rather, speaking controversially, I have felt myself obliged, by the operations of the adversary, to descend from the higher to the lower ground of this question, and to meet him upon the field of his own choice. I am to prove the reasonableness of Undergraduate Subscription from the new objection which has been made against it ; I am to shew, that, though the Matriculation Statute assign a very early age as that from which we are to date an Undergraduate's competency to subscribe, there was reason and prudence in such an assignment, as it was but a continuance of that course of youthful discipline, and religious training, which used to begin with a boy's first years ; which formed or furnished the subject-matters of his studies in every stage of his ascent through the school ; which had become familiar to his heart and understanding by the time he had reached the top of it ; and which did but receive his formal profession and public acknowledgment when he came to the University, it having been previously embraced by his faith, fixed in his memory, and become obligatory upon his conscience, by the elementary and catechetic instructions of the schoolmaster.

In confirming these representations, I think that it may contribute something to the plainness of my



statements, and something to the conclusiveness of my inferences, if I divide my argument into two parts, consisting, as it does, of two sorts of subjects; 1st, of historical facts, relating to the education of youth in the Elizabethan age; and, 2dly, of parallelisms between the matters taught in those days catechetically at school, and the matters propounded dogmatically in the Thirty-nine Articles. To the first part I shall assign the information I have collected from accredited sources, and principally from Strype's invaluable labours; whilst the second will be made up of miscellaneous matters theological, extracted from the Catechism then in use in the upper part of schools, for the purpose of shewing that they are the same, or of similar import with the theological matters of the Articles of Religion as agreed upon in the Convocation of 1562. To which parallelisms will be annexed a sort of synoptic or tabular representation of the titles of the Articles; and opposite to each title, will be inserted a series of references to the several passages in the Catechism which hold the same language, or teach the same doctrine. By such a juxta-position, and tabular view, it will be made to appear with greater prominence, as well as facility, not only that the Catechism and Articles agree, and that the former is an exposition of the latter, but that in those days of peril from the fury of the Papist, and the vain imaginations of the Puritan, the greatest attention was paid to the training up

of the youth of the country in a large, exact, and sound knowledge of all those great doctrinal and disciplinarian truths of the Christian Religion, which were so fiercely assailed; they were taught all those principles, and proofs of principles, which would *stablish, strengthen, settle* a boy's childhood both in the things which pertain to the internal and to the external constitution of his Church.

To the affectionate zeal and pastoral watchfulness of Cranmer<sup>a</sup> are we indebted for the first Protestant Catechism for the instruction of youth; for though, upon the establishment of Dean Colet's *Schola Catechizationis* in 1512, Erasmus assisted in the drawing up of an *Institutio Christiani hominis* for the use of the Catechumens, it was reserved for the Archbishop to accomplish what the Dean would not have been unwilling to undertake, that is, to frame a compendium of anti-popish instruction for the edification of youth in the true faith. It was not, however, before 1553, six years after the publication of Cranmer's Catechism, that Edward the Sixth gave the sanction of royal authority to the larger Catechism which goes under his name, and which is of importance to the matter under consideration, as having furnished to the eminent scholar and divine, Alexander Nowell, Dean of St. Paul's, the basis, or rather the general form and method of his celebrated course of catechetic instruction; for he not

<sup>a</sup> Strype's Cranmer, p. 1--227.

only adopted the general disposition of King Edward's Catechism, as a conference between *maister and scholer, magister et auditor*, but declared in his Preface, with evident allusion to its prototype, that he had adopted *eodem ordine multa quæ sunt ab aliis quibusdam antea perscripta*. King Edward's Catechism is prefaced by an injunction *geven by the Kyng . . . to all scholemaisters and teachers of youthe . . . that the yet unskillfull and yong age havynge the foundations layed both of religion and good letters, mai learn godlines together with wysdome*. The Preface concludes with a command to Schoolmasters, *that ye truly and diligently teach this Catechisme in your schooles after the other brief Catechisme which we have alreadye set forth*, (the Catechism set forth in King Edward's first and second Common Prayer Books of 1548 and 1551.) Of this larger Catechism, by King Edward appointed to be taught in all the schools of the country after the Church Catechism, I have only farther to observe in proof of its comprehensiveness, that it occupies forty octavo pages of Bishop Randolph's Enchiridion, and for readier access is accompanied by a table of contents; it is, in fact, a large body of divinity comprised under four heads, the Law, the Gospel, the Sacraments, and the Lord's Prayer. Such then was the foundation, or rather prototype, of the greater Catechism which Dean Nowell was called upon by Archbishop Parker and the Convocation of 1562 to prepare for the use of schools, and which after