

**CHRISTIANITY
INDEPENDENT OF THE
CIVIL GOVERNMENT.
LETTERS ON THE CHURCH**

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Christianity independent of the civil government. Letters on the church by Richard Whately

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RICHARD WHATELY

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NEW-YORK:

HARPER & BROTHERS.

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P R E F A C E

TO THE

A M E R I C A N E D I T I O N .

THE accompanying prefatory remarks are intended to introduce to the AMERICAN reader a work, first published in England, of much interest and importance to the statesman as well as the theologian; whose pages will be found to contain very valuable information on topics of discussion connected with the ESTABLISHED CHURCH, worthy the attention of every intelligent man, and which, with full anticipation and earnest confidence of a favourable reception, we respectfully recommend to the notice and mature consideration of our brethren.

The subject of ECCLESIASTICAL REFORM in the CHURCH OF ENGLAND has long engaged the attention and occupied the thoughts of very many of the best and ablest writers in that country; and, though a diversity of opinion may and does exist on this, as on other points of controversy, we feel assured that those who read these LETTERS ON THE

CHURCH will concede to their author the just and deserved acknowledgment that he has very ably and philosophically executed the task he has undertaken.

Who this individual is we certainly know not ; he avows himself an **EPISCOPALIAN**, and such we have reason to believe him to be ; but whether he be an *English* or an *American* **CHURCHMAN** we have not the means satisfactorily to ascertain ; his nationality, as well as individuality, or identity, is, in our opinion, problematical, and must remain undetermined : the contents of his book, however, will sufficiently compensate for the deficiency of information on this head, and fully establish his claim to the reputation of a powerful and dispassionate writer.

The reason, moreover, which has influenced us to undertake the republication of these letters, we may further state to be simply this :—

Much ignorance, as well as prejudice, prevails in our country with regard to the *political* and *ecclesiastical* state of affairs in England ; and erroneous opinions exist also there respecting the system of **CHURCH GOVERNMENT** in this. These subjects are well discussed and favourably considered in the present work, and the advantage, therefore, may be mutual, if these letters are duly weighed, and the interests of our holy religion are regarded as paramount to every other consideration.

Though religious toleration is freely and fully enjoyed in **AMERICA**, there are many of our trans-

atlantic brethren who are totally in the dark on this subject, and know not the nature of the protection which the *STATE ought* to afford to **RELIGION** ; while, on the other hand, because no religion is, or rather, all religions *are*, equally recognised and protected by the **CONSTITUTION**, it is no uncommon opinion that **AMERICANS are**, consequently, a nation of **ATHEISTS** and **INFIDELS** ; a fallacious and mischievous conclusion, most powerfully refuted by our author *incognito*, whose views on the **VOLUNTARY SYSTEM** of support accorded to ministers of the gospel in this country of freedom and independence will be found to be no less correct and satisfactory.

The plan which our author has pursued in the principal discussion of these letters is this :—

In the *first*, on the **JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN CHURCHES**, he considers the character of Christ's church in general, and especially that branch of it of which the English Episcopalians profess to be members ; points out the difference between the Mosaic and the gospel dispensations ; between the two kingdoms of God, or churches established respectively among the Israelites and the disciples of Jesus Christ ; from which he comes to these important conclusions, that the law and the gospel are completely contrasted in respect of the sanctions which support them, the penalties being under the one temporal, under the other those of a future state ; that the former kingdom of God was of this world, the latter not of this world, but spiritual ;

that the employment of secular coercion belongs to and implies a government that is of this world, and, consequently, is (in matters pertaining to Christ's kingdom, that is, in religious matters) inconsistent with the character of the gospel; that treason, sedition, and rebellion against civil government may be, and always might be, lawfully repressed by civil authority; that religious offences are crimes of that stamp, under a *theocracy*, and a theocracy only; that God is, under both systems, the sole judge of such offences, on which punishment can justly be inflicted by none but himself, or persons expressly deputed by him to do so; that the kings and other rulers were thus commissioned by him under the old dispensation, whose penalties were temporal; while under the new, from the nature of its penalties, no man is or can be commissioned to inflict them; and, lastly, that while among the Israelites, their church and state being one, the rulers had necessarily (as vicegerents of him who was both God and king) the civil and ecclesiastical authority combined, but that under the gospel, on the contrary, all claims of the church, as a church, to temporal authority, or of the state to spiritual, all interference of the one in civil and of the other in purely ecclesiastical affairs, is clearly prohibited, both by the character of the institution and by the express declaration of its Divine author.

In the *second* letter, on the CONDUCT OF CHRISTIANS, he examines how far the church of Christ has, at various times, conformed to or lost sight of

these principles ; and determines that, to whatever church we turn our attention, with a view to this point, whether we look to its past history or its present situation, in all, or nearly all, Christians have enacted and approved, if not such laws as imply downright sanguinary persecution, yet religious restriction and coercion of some kind or other, the enforcement of rules and infliction of civil penalties, not for the temporal peace and comfort of society, but for the benefit of the soul of the individual, and for the glory and advancement of true religion.

THE AUTHORITY OF THE CHURCH is the subject of the *third* letter, from whence the writer proceeds, in the *fourth*, to the ALLIANCE OF CHURCH AND STATE, of which he disapproves, deeming it unjustifiable, and coming to different conclusions from those arrived at by Bishop WARBURTON, who, as well as PALEY, has also written upon this subject. "Let all endeavours," says our author, "be used, indeed, to make every individual member of the church a member, and a worthy member, of the state likewise. Such an alliance, if it is to be so called, of church and state, has no warmer advocate than myself ; but whether this be brought about or no, let the two corporate bodies, even though composed of the same materials, be kept distinct and independent. Let Christ's kingdom be *in* this world, but not *of* it."

ON RELIGIOUS ESTABLISHMENTS AND TOLERATION, the subject of the *fifth* letter, our author's views are