

REMARKS ON CHURCH RATES AND THE ROCHDALE CONTEST

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Remarks on church rates and the Rochdale contest by J. E. N. Molesworth

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J. E. N. MOLESWORTH

**REMARKS ON CHURCH
RATES AND THE
ROCHDALE CONTEST**

DEDICATED BY PERMISSION TO THE BATH CHURCH
OF ENGLAND LAY ASSOCIATION.

REMARKS
ON
CHURCH RATES
AND THE
ROCHDALE CONTEST,

ADDRESSED TO ALL ENGLAND, AND ESPECIALLY TO
MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATURE.

BY J. E. N. MOLESWORTH, D. D.

VICAR OF ROCHDALE.

"He had a right, if he pleased to appeal as he did (and as on my suggesting the *weakness of the cause* which it *shewed* he asserted he would do) to the *passions* of the people. He takes his course, I take mine. I will appeal to the REASON AND RELIGIOUS PRINCIPLES of the people, not to their *passions*."

Vicar of Rochdale's address to his Parishioners.

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DEDICATION.

To the members of the Bath Church of England Lay Association.

GENTLEMEN,

In dedicating these pages to you, I have had in view two purposes, of which, if you consider one more personally complimentary, you will, I am sure, find the other more important to the cause you have espoused. First I desire to offer a sincere, though humble, testimony to the *noble lead*, you have taken, and to the indomitable zeal (though under adverse circumstances) you have displayed in defence of Your Church. In this however I dare not praise you but as a faithful Churchman. I cannot offer you other commendation than that which ("*unprofitable servants*" as we are) a gracious Master in *mercy* concedes to us, when we have only done that, which it is "*our duty to do.*" My commendation is only comparative. Some do their duty less, and some more. But EVERY Churchman, be he Layman or Clergyman, is bound to *defend his Church*.

Secondly. I wish to direct public attention to your example, for the purpose, not only of encouraging them to follow your footsteps, but also of awakening them to a sense of the *yet greater* exertions, which, from the aspect of the times, and the doings of our enemies, it may be expected that the insulted laws, and persecuted Church, may need from all faithful, and religious men, who hold the chief truths of the Gospel.

For several years the Government has contemplated with helplessness, or indifference, if not with complacency, the clamour, the collections, the conspiracies, of the enemies of the Church, to obstruct the course of long established Law, and to intercept, by force, or fraud, the time honoured tribute by which England proclaimed herself a CHRISTIAN NATION; and her many Churches, kept in repair by *national* support, have held out to every poor man the blessed invitation of the Evangelical Prophet—

"Ho! every one that thirsteth! come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money."*

Harassed by her enemies, deserted by her professed Protectors, the Church has meekly appealed to the Legislature and the Government to uphold her in her obedience to the Law; but she has appealed in vain. She has been met on the one hand with coldness, "heavy blows, and great discouragement." Into offices if not of ecclesiastical, at least enabling the officers to act against the Church and all religion, *bitter and reckless enemies* of the Church have been introduced, merely to satisfy political partisans; and even in the *commission of the peace* are placed (nay preferred) the opponents of the *Law* of Church rates. On the other hand Church rate abolition societies, and other societies raising subscriptions, and carrying on in all parts of the kingdom schemes to injure the Church, have multiplied. The forbearance (may I not almost say *apathy*) of Churchmen has emboldened them. Organized opposition to the law is openly carried on—funds are supplied—Clergymen are dragged into the turmoil and brutality of polls, and expected to perform the duties of a returning officer, in circumstances which might puzzle even a barrister—Churchwardens are plagued with litigation and expence of every kind.† This cannot go on. If the

* ISAIAH, c. LV., v. 1.

† Take, as a specimen, this hand bill recently issued at Rochdale, "CHURCH RATE.—The Anti-Church rate Committee are informed that certain Persons are going about attempting to impose upon the Public a paltry and shabby Tax, under the name of a CHURCH RATE, and even threatening Legal proceedings, if it is not paid. The public are hereby informed that NO CHURCH RATE HAS BEEN GRANTED, and none can be legally demanded; and all who prefer honest voluntary payments to the unjust exactions of the Act-of-Parliament-Church, are advised to refuse Payment of this illegal Tax. Pay no attention to threats. If proceedings be commenced against any party for non-payment of this Vicar-made rate, they are requested to make the circumstance known to the Anti-Church rate Committee.—Rochdale, Nov. 13th, 1840.—WRIGHTLEY, PRINTER, YORKSHIRE-STREET, ROCHDALE."

It may serve to show the friendly disposition towards the Church of our Queen, entertained by her ministers and their supporters; when it is known that the printer of this, and most other abusive placards against the Vicar and the Church, has recently been appointed Postmaster of Rochdale.

legislature will not interpose, the Church must defend herself. *Associations* for her *destruction* must be met by *Associations* for her *defence*. Let the conspirators against her be assured that, though they may annoy the Vicar of Rochdale, may excite deluded multitudes in populous towns to afford them partial triumphs, and annual saturnalia of blasphemy and profanation in God's House; though they may, by their Committees, their subscriptions, and political cabals, overawe or purchase a feeble or reckless Cabinet—THE PEOPLE OF ENGLAND WILL NEVER DESERT THEIR NATIONAL CHURCH. They are already roused; associations such as yours with more *decided* organization, *larger funds*, and *more general* support, will rise up to meet the assailants with their own weapons, and confront the conspirators till they compel either them to desist, or the Government and legislature to interpose, and remove the necessity for these conflicts. The demand for such a movement among the Laity has arisen in London and elsewhere; and the time has arrived when the peaceful can no longer discourage it, nor the cautious refuse to support it. On the heads of the agitators of *political* dissent be the consequences of provoking it. The example you have set, that the Laity as well as the Clergy constitute the Church, and are in duty bound to uphold it, affords good proof that you will not only not be wanting to greater emergencies, as they arise, but that you will lead others to "go and do likewise." With respect, and earnest sympathy in the great object of your association;

I remain,

Gentlemen,

Your Faithful Servant, and Fellow-labourer,

J. E. N. MOLESWORTH.

PREFACE.

I have reserved my observations on the Rochdale contest till the meeting of Parliament, both hoping that, after the excitement of the contest was over, the "still small voice" of reason might be heard, and desiring, that the legislature might be urged to interpose, and put an end to the conflicts. I ask no man more, than I am ready to do. I ask him only to *obey the law*—and, if we differ upon the *policy* or *equity* of a law, to submit our different views to the decision of the *proper tribunal*—the *Legislature*. I am always ready to yield cheerfully to that decision, and equally ready, to oppose the decision of mob dictation, and vindictive or pettifogging litigation, and conspiracy.

While the matter was before only the Parish, I touched as little as possible on the *equity* or *policy* of the law of Church rates, because that was a point for the decision, not of the *Parish*, but of *Parliament*. As I now appeal to *Parliament*, I enter freely into the *equity* and *policy* of that Law, supporting my opinions by such arguments as I think fit. If, in those arguments, I give pain to any *conscientious* dissenter, I shall be sorry. But I cannot, from fear of so doing, sacrifice the *cause of truth*. If that cause

be in danger, no matter whether through wickedness or weakness, through treachery, or ignorance, it must be vindicated without respect of persons. If a man set up either dishonest, or absurd pleas, the dishonesty, or absurdity must be exposed without ceremony, and in plain terms.

I wish to be clearly understood, when I use the general word, dissenter—as being sensible of the distinction between the *political* agitator, and the *sincere*, though mistaken dissenter—but I cannot always, in my notices of the plea of *conscience*, verbally mark that distinction. I respect conscience even in error, but I cannot spare to expose the error. I also guard against the misrepresentation of those who, to excite resentment against me personally, instead of meeting my arguments, falsely state that I represent the opponents of Church rates *generally* as *infidels* or *revolutionists*. I do no such thing. I describe them as *leagued* with infidels and revolutionists, against a Christian Church; and the triumph they desire, as one which would be a triumph to infidels and revolutionists. This ought to induce them to pause, and suspect whether the triumph can be one, at which a *christian* and a *patriot* ought to aim.

I have shunned allusion to individuals, unless where defence from personal slander rendered it unavoidable; and even then I have said as little as possible.

Personal calumny has been profusely showered on me, especially in reference to my conduct during