

**THE REPEAL OF THE PUBLIC
WORSHIP REGULATION ACT: A
LETTER TO THE RIGHT HON. LORD
CAIRNS, P. C., LL. D., LORD HIGH
CHANCELLOR OF ENGLAND**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649280704

The Repeal of the Public Worship Regulation Act: A Letter to the Right Hon. lord Cairns, P. C., LL. D., lord high Chancellor of England by Frederick George Lee

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Cover @ 2017

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FREDERICK GEORGE LEE

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SECOND EDITION.]

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THE REPEAL
OF THE
PUBLIC WORSHIP REGULATION ACT.

Rev. Canon Bright D.D.

A LETTER

TO THE

RIGHT HON. LORD CAIRNS, P.C., LL.D.,

LORD HIGH CHANCELLOR OF ENGLAND.

from the Author.

BY

THE REV. FREDERICK GEORGE LEE, D.C.L.,

VICAR OF ALL SAINTS', LAMBETH.

"In some cases, and this is surely one, it not only becomes, but behoves a nation to retrace its steps. Further progress upon a wrong and dangerous way may suddenly end in destruction."—*Edmund Burke.*

LONDON:

THOMAS BOSWORTH, 198, HIGH HOLBORN, W.C.

1877.

L. E. B. 59 e. 2

PREFATORY NOTE.

BEFORE this Letter is read, its Author desires to state publicly to those who may honour him by its perusal that the distinguished Statesman to whom, by his lordship's kind permission, it is addressed, is in no degree responsible for any statement or opinion expressed in it.

ALL SAINTS' VICARAGE HOUSE, LAMBETH.
Eastertide, 1877.

In Preparation, by the same Author, A SECOND LETTER to the LORD CHANCELLOR ON "THE ROYAL SUPREMACY AND JURISDICTION AS EXISTING IN THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND."





THE
REPEAL OF THE PUBLIC WORSHIP
REGULATION ACT.

MY LORD,

NO enactment of an ecclesiastical character passed during the last two hundred and thirty years has been more thoroughly revolutionary in its leading principles than the "Act for the better Administration of the Laws respecting the Regulation of Public Worship," passed, at the urgent request of the Episcopal Bench, in the summer of 1874. Even the roughness and rudeness of Puritan violence, and the bitter anti-episcopal animus displayed by the Parliaments of 1643 and 1644, embodied in the various "Ordinances" then, from time to time, put forth,* wrought no such total subversion of ecclesiastical principles in the National Church as the recent Act under consideration. Nor did any members of the degraded school of Tillotson, Burnet, and Hoadley, fifty years and more afterwards, ever dare so to innovate upon ancient laws and customs. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that, over and above the persons against whom the Public Worship Regulation Act was especially directed,

* These "Ordinances," so called, ran thus—"The Lords and Commons, in Parliament assembled, taking into their consideration . . . do hereby ordain," etc.

—the so-called “Ritualists,”—the main body of old-fashioned High Churchmen,—traditional followers of Andrewes, Montagu, Land, Cosin, and Sancroft,—dislike it more and more as they begin to realize its true character and appreciate its formidable powers. For the new Act does not alone concern those who have been most active in the much-needed restoration of reasonable order and common decency to our churches and their services, but it actually touches every member of the Church of England, lay as well as clerical, who believes in Historical Christianity, and regards the National Church as a true portion of the One Family of God, and who sees the difference between things temporal and things spiritual. It gives power to the Judge of the New Lambeth Court to deal with questions of doctrine, (indirectly it may be, but yet most efficiently;) and, while it has completely destroyed the legal value of the parson’s freehold—no mean nor unimportant practical matter—and rudely uprooted his independence of position, by placing all he does in conducting divine service, guided by directions in the Prayer Book neither exhaustive nor clear, at the mercy of any three residents* in

* Colonel Bagnall, of Shenstone Moss, in Staffordshire, recounts, in the following words, what took place at an interview with which he was favoured by the Archbishop of Canterbury in reference to the “Case” at Wolverhampton: “The Archbishop was kind enough to receive him, and he told him just simply and truly every fact connected with the Case. He said there were two large congregations who were perfectly satisfied with the ministrations of Mr. Bodington and his curates; that these people had built these churches, and were sustaining them; that the feeling in the town was on the side of

his parish, it has also abrogated the old and valued pastoral relations (based on the old Common Law of the Church and Christian charity) between all the bishops and the clergy of the second order,—relations as valuable as they were useful and salutary. For, however much a diocesan bishop may dislike or mistrust any decision of the New Court, he is wholly unable either to reverse it, modify it, or prevent its actual enforcement. By the Public Worship Regulation Act the bishops of the present day, one and all, are as much subjects of Lord Penzance as, in Henry VIII.'s reign, were Cranmer and his co-prelates of the unscrupulous "Lord Vicegerent in matters ecclesiastical"—Thomas Cromwell. So that just as the Government Local Board has a President, and the Police Force a Chief Commissioner, so has the National Church a lay ruler and Judge in the person of Lord Penzance. The polite taunt of a Whig Roman Catholic that "the English clergy are only Her Majesty's moral policemen" thus becomes neither unreasonable nor unjust;—a taunt to be henceforth borne and not complained of. In

Mr. Bodington; that the Case was taken up by three inhabitants—three clerks in the service of the Great Western Railway; and he asked him whether it was right that on the representation of those three persons, however excellent they might be in their private life, the priests and congregations of those churches should be vexed and harassed in the way in which they were about to be. His Grace said to me, '*It does not matter a bit who the people are so long as they declare themselves to be members of the Church of England.*' He said, 'Well, your Grace, I see an immense amount of trouble in store for the Church of England, for you may depend upon it we shall never submit to tyranny.'" (Loud and long-continued applause.)

fact, "prelacy," as the Puritans phrased it, is practically abolished; all the Anglican bishops having unwittingly made themselves subservient to the new legal State officer, whom Parliament, at their express desire, has formally created.

It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that, after the machinery of the Public Worship Regulation Act has been more carefully examined than was the case two years ago during its hasty passage through both Houses of Parliament, even its authors—the bishops of the Church of England—begin to doubt its inherent worth and practical advantage. For it promises, My Lord, to unsettle much and to settle nothing. "Laws not founded on right and justice," wrote Lord Bacon, "will not command respect;" and certainly the clergy of the National Church,—with the sole exception of a noisy but least influential faction, to whom it is a godsend,—have not spoken of it with either respect or patience. The mutterings of a year ago are louder now and more continuous: for the simple reason that the complex ins and outs of the measure, tortuous and sinister enough in themselves,—thanks to Dr. Isambard Brunel, who drafted it,—have been recently exposed and made manifest by keen literary criticism. A considerable minority of the bishops, whom the Archbishop notoriously concussed into inaction, are now reported to regret the passing of the enactment. At all events, the Bishop of London has formally declined to put it into operation either at St. Alban's, Holborn, or St. Ethelburga's, Bishopsgate Street; while the Bishop of Rochester evidently feels a little sore, as well he may, at being expected to act as a mere bailiff in the Court of the New

Lambeth Judge: a dignity to which, moreover, (omitting other names) it is obvious that neither the Bishops of Lincoln, Lichfield, nor Ely can ardently aspire.

Few can be surprised, therefore, that an agitation for the repeal of the Act has now commenced,* and this with considerable prospect of eventual success. When, several months ago, certain working men from St. Alban's, Holborn, were honoured by an interview with his Grace the Archbishop of

* From a pile of American and Canadian newspapers the following extracts are given, as showing the interest which daughter churches of our home communion take in the subject:—

“To permit a non-Christian Parliament,” writes the *Church Journal*, of America, “to legislate for the Church of England, with no reference to the Convocation Synods, would be equivalent to allowing Russia to pass laws for the States. This cannot be.”

The *Church Chronicle*, published at Halifax, Nova Scotia, has the following:—

“Archbishop Tait, either smitten with judicial blindness, or so surrounded by toadies and interested persons as not to see the real facts, invented a ridiculous craze called the ‘alienation of the laity,’ and in order to remedy that which did not exist, he forced through Parliament the iniquitous Public Worship Act—iniquitous, because advantage was taken of the known determination of High Churchmen not to make reprisals, but to let Low Churchmen break the law in peace if they chose. By this Act, three persons of the parish, no matter who or what they may be, by simply declaring themselves members of the Church of England, can bring their clergyman before Lord Penzance, the ex-Judge of the vile Divorce Court, to whom the Bench of Bishops have abandoned their lawful authority, and he, administering what he calls the ‘law’—that is to say, the *Purchas* Judgment—can suspend clergymen from the exercise of their office, and otherwise punish and disgrace them.”