

**PROPOSED SURRENDER OF THE PRAYER-  
BOOK AND ARTICLES OF THE CHURCH  
OF ENGLAND. A LETTER TO THE LORD  
BISHOP OF LONDON, ON PROFESSOR  
STANLEY'S VIEWS OF CLERICAL AND  
UNIVERSITY "SUBSCRIPTION"**

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Proposed surrender of the Prayer-book and Articles of the Church of England. A letter to the lord bishop of London, on professor Stanley's views of clerical and University "subscription" by William J. Irons

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PROPOSED SURRENDER OF THE PRAYER-BOOK AND  
ARTICLES OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.



A LETTER

TO THE

LORD BISHOP OF LONDON,

ON

PROFESSOR STANLEY'S VIEWS

OF

CLERICAL AND UNIVERSITY "SUBSCRIPTION."

BY

WILLIAM J. IRONS, D.D.

PREBENDARY OF ST. PAUL'S, AND INCUMBENT OF BROMPTON, MIDDLESEX.

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# A LETTER,

ETC.

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BROMPTON, *Whitsunide*, 1863.

MY DEAR LORD,

IF twenty years ago, soon after a few of the clergy had asserted their "claim to hold all Roman doctrine,"\* a proposal had been made to abolish Subscription to the English Formularies, it would surely have been thought to indicate very grave disloyalty to our Church. And now, when others have asserted the right to unfettered "free-thinking" within her pale, and endeavoured to vindicate that right in our Courts of Law, can we help being struck at the intrepidity of the demand to sweep away at once the sober restraints of orthodoxy to which Churchmen have been so long accustomed?

Your Lordship has been openly addressed, as we are all aware, in behalf of this "Relaxation of Subscription;" but as our Bishop—so deeply interested in the welfare of the whole Church—I venture to believe that you will do justice to opposite views, and in offering them to your attention, I rely on that broad-minded charity to various schools among us, which has marked your Lordship's administration of this diocese.

\* See Mr. Oakeley's Pamphlet with that title.

Dr. Stanley's position.

The eloquent advocacy of Dr. STANLEY on the other side is, indeed, no slight advantage to the cause of those who would now supersede the Prayer-book by "modern thought." In urging the surrender of all Subscription to our Formularies, he can speak, in his position, with a *prestige* and power to which I can have no claim. His testimony as to the tone of mind now prevailing in Oxford, or among the younger clergy of the last few years, it is not for me to impeach,—I must leave that to the Bishop of Oxford;\* but certain of his deductions from very limited facts, I may be permitted, I think, to call in question at once. As one who, without belonging to any party, has had the happiness of much friendship with all—as a Churchman, I may add, who has kept steadily to the old Prayer-book from very early childhood till now—I have had large opportunities for many years of knowing the heart and mind of my brethren the clergy, ten thousand of whom not long since responded to an appeal which I and others had been invited to make to them; and I confess that I am amazed at Dr. STANLEY's supposition that Subscription is regarded as a "grievance" (p. 23), a "perjury" (p. 24), an "absurdity" (p. 20), or an "imposition" (p. 7) by any considerable number among us. Allowing for some irritable minds here and there, the generality have seemed to me to have the deepest appreciation of the "quietness and confidence" which have been, in the main, secured for our Church by the present laws,

\* See his Lordship's Speech in the House of Lords, May 19.



which simply bind the clergy to say that they *believe* the Prayers which they use, and the Articles which they adopt as their "standard."

Thus much I have felt compelled to say at the outset, because the opposers of Subscription assume that their clients are so numerous that to refuse their demands may be to endanger the Church herself. True, they generously disclaim all designs "to revolutionize the Church of England" (p. 6 of *The Letter*). This is well; but I am far more assured by the belief that their power, as yet, is not so formidable as their intentions. And with this preface, I would pass to the subject-matter of Dr. STANLEY'S *Letter*.

The point of departure taken for the discussion is the REVOLUTION of 1688, and the attempt then made at what was called "Comprehension." It is even suggested that the "High Churchmen" of those days agreed that the "very being of our Church was concerned" in abolishing "Subscription," and substituting for it a general declaration of conformity. The several attempts at "Comprehension" almost seem to be referred to as substantially one, and are recommended to us as if originated by enlarged and exemplary views of the Church's calling. But, equivocations apart, (which would be wholly unworthy here), will this be gravely maintained? Did the "Comprehension Scheme" of 1674 receive no opposition from the Church? or will not every one own that it was frustrated by the

resistance of the Bishops? Would Dr. STANLEY really say that the Scheme (not "Act") of 1689 was founded on a philosophy which would now command assent? I suppose that he must say it, or how could he refer to it as our rebuke and pattern? Yet it was, as he will not deny, a political effort directed against the Roman Catholics; and the reluctance of the clergy (even under all the pressure of the occasion) to fraternize with Nonconformists, defeated the measure,—some of the principal Commissioners who had to manage it, such as the Vice-Chancellor of Oxford, the Prolocutor of Convocation, and the Bishop of Rochester, openly withdrawing from it. I really can hardly conceive of a more unfortunate appeal to history. To represent the clergy of all parties, and especially "High Churchmen" (p. 33), as approving, on liberal principles, of the proposed "Comprehension," and covertly to suggest that "Subscription" was alien from the spirit of those enlightened days, is, to speak gently of it, quite "unhistorical"—(if I may so apply a now familiar term); nor can I forbear to point to the fact that even Dissenters were required, by the Act of 1 William and Mary, cap. 18, to "subscribe" a declaration that "the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament were given by Divine Inspiration." The parallel breaks down at every point. Of course, if any one really thinks that England is now in great danger (as in Sancroft's days) from the Popish encroachments of the CROWN, such an one is free to argue as Dr. STANLEY

does. If any suppose that a Papal reaction among the populace is the present peril (as it was thought to be in Burnet's days), let them by all means fly to the "remedial" measures of that era. But for a philosophical historian to quote, with admiration, Halifax or Nottingham, or refer to certain "High Churchmen" with approval, can but cause a smile.\*

It was a popular beginning of this subject, doubtless, to invoke the memories of 1688 and the "Toleration Act," in order to recommend to English people this proposal to destroy "Subscription;" yet it was dangerous. For to have pursued the subject fairly from this point would hardly have assisted the views of the abolitionists. The course of history would very soon have brought them to the great *Arian* conspiracy of 1772, the next noticeable effort to set aside the Articles of the Church. This, however, is altogether avoided, as if it were unknown to Dr. STANLEY; and he quickly goes back to the Reformation, and even to the times of the Primitive Church, to find arguments against "Subscription" in the abstract, (as well as against our special Anglican form of it,)—and, must I not say, to get out of the way of WHISTON, and the "Feathers' Tavern"? Let us, then, be generous, and forgive the allusions to 1688, and forget all that followed, and endeavour to examine on its merits the substance of the "*Letter*."

\* The term "High Churchmen" is, of course, quite ambiguous:—"At the instance of High Churchmen," p. 33.—Yet the learned Editor of Beveridge records that prelate's "staunch opposition to Comprehension."