

**A SKETCH OF THE HISTORY OF  
ERASTIANISM, TOGETHER WITH  
TWO SERMONS ON THE REALITY OF  
CHURCH ORDINANCES AND ON THE  
PRINCIPLE OF CHURCH AUTHORITY**

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A Sketch of the History of Erastianism, Together with Two Sermons on the Reality of Church Ordinances and on the Principle of Church Authority by Robert Isaac Wilberforce

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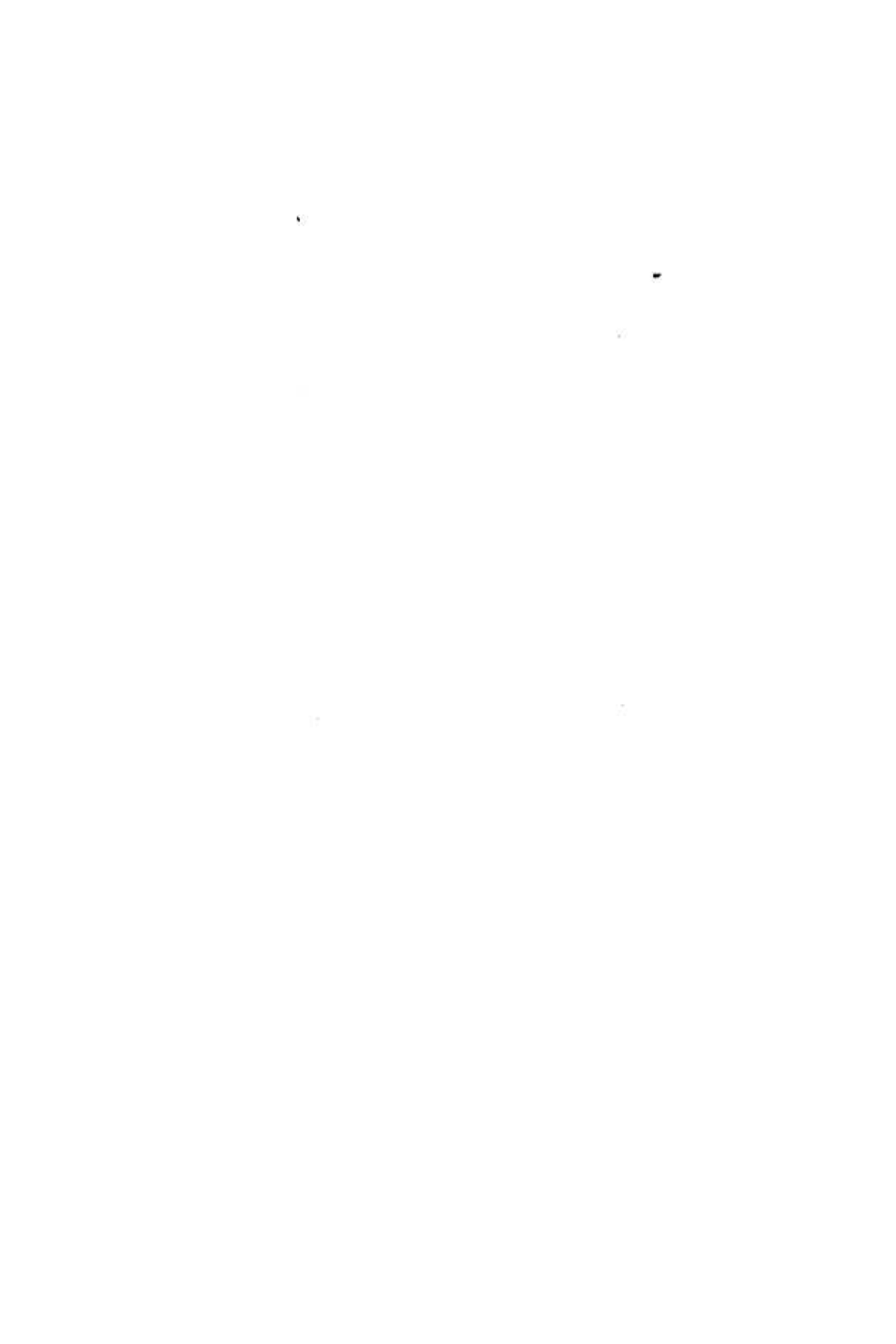
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**ROBERT ISAAC WILBERFORCE**

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OF THE  
HISTORY OF ERASTIANISM.



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TWO SERMONS  
ON  
THE REALITY OF CHURCH ORDINANCES,  
AND ON  
THE PRINCIPLE OF CHURCH AUTHORITY.



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A

HISTORICAL SKETCH

OF

THE SYSTEM OF ERASTIANISM.

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RELIGION addresses itself so directly to the inner nature, and is so much concerned with the feelings and duties of individuals, that men are apt to attach inferior interest to its public concerns and collective character. And yet there are occasions when these likewise require attention. The Christian faith was originally proclaimed as the germinant principle of a society: and it cannot be otherwise than important that it should be perpetuated among ourselves under conditions not inconsistent with its original constitution and organic laws. This is matter of especial concernment to the clergy, who are bound by solemn engagements to "minister the Doctrine and Discipline of Christ," not only "as this Church and realm hath received the same," but likewise "as the Lord hath commanded." And obvious circumstances make the subject peculiarly interesting at the present day.

Under this feeling it is that I propose to make some remarks on the History of Erastianism. By Erastianism I understand that system of opinions and that course of action, which deprive the Church of Christ of independent existence, and resolve it into a function of the civil government. It is the more needful to consider the nature of this system, because by many it has been supposed to be involved in an admission of the Royal Supremacy. Hence it has often been supposed that the Church of England designed to surrender her liberty to the temporal power, and that the clergy are inconsistent when they assert their independence. But the characteristic features and essential principle of Erastianism can hardly be understood, without some knowledge of the circumstances which have led to its prevalence. For this purpose we must go back to those great events which convulsed Europe during the sixteenth century. I propose, then, to consider—first, what principles of Church authority were engendered either here or abroad by the Reformation; secondly, how these principles gave birth to the system of Erastianism; thirdly, what effects have followed from its predominance.

## CHAPTER I.

THE EPISCOPAL SYSTEM, OR THE THEORY OF  
CHURCH AUTHORITY DURING THE AGE FOLLOW-  
ING THE REFORMATION.

To conduct this inquiry with advantage, we must first consider in what Church authority consists. It resolves itself into two parts—the first relating to persons, the second to things. Since the Church is a society, it belongs to Church authority to give men commission to exercise public functions—the function, *i. e.*, of ministering Sacraments and Sacramentals. This power depends—first, upon ordination; and, secondly, upon the continuance of the commission bestowed in ordination. Thus arise Orders and Mission. Again, it belongs to Church authority to settle what persons shall be allowed to partake in the ordinances thus administered, *i. e.*, to regulate admission to communion. And further, among those who have commission to minister, some must be selected who shall be presented to the authorizing power for employment in this or that place. This is the right of patronage. So that the exercise of Church authority has reference to Orders, Mission, Communion, and Patronage.