

RELIGION

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Religion by G. de Molinari & Walter K. Firminger

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RELIGION.

Translated by W. K. Firminger, B.A.

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RELIGION

BY

G. DE MOLINARI

II
CORRESPONDANT DE L'INSTITUT

RÉDACTEUR EN CHEF "DU JOURNAL DES ÉCONOMISTES

*TRANSLATED FROM THE SECOND (ENLARGED) EDITION
WITH THE AUTHOR'S SANCTION*

BY

WALTER K. FIRMINER B.A.

MERTON COLLEGE, OXFORD

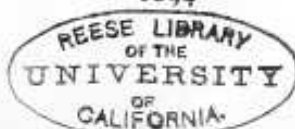


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H. SCOTT HOLLAND, M.A.

CANON AND PRECENTOR OF

ST. PAUL'S CATHEDRAL

LATE STUDENT OF CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD

THIS TRANSLATION IS

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RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED,



INTRODUCTION.



THE aim of this little volume is to establish on a scientific basis the claim of the Christian Church to an equitable treatment on the part of not only its opponents, but even its habitual supporters. The translator feels that nothing he could say in this place would in reality add to the tenor of M. de Molinari's vigorous statement. There are indeed many points on which the translator's views would harshly contrast with those of his author. Yet the serious purpose of the work and its clear enunciation of many fundamental problems (such, for instance, as the admirable chapters dealing with the relations of Science and Religion, and the existing obstacles to the movement for establishing the Church's freedom), seem to justify the translator in the task he has so unworthily fulfilled.

In his treatment of the rise of early religions, and of Christianity in particular, M. de Molinari has no doubt laid too much stress on subjective elements. Christianity may be explained by many analogies ; it indeed, to some extent, bases its claim on an interpretation of man's nature ; but Christianity taught before it explained, and we must be careful not to fall into the inviting *post hoc ergo propter hoc* fallacy.

M. de Molinari's book is, of course, a plea for Disestablishment, but hardly in the sense of the Liberation Society. In England there are, roughly speaking, three parties who claim great expectations in a measure so dreaded by Conservatives. The Secularist would disestablish and disendow in the interests of a so-called humanitarian policy ; the Political Dissenter takes his stand on a not very intelligible plea for religious equality.

Churchmen on the extreme left of the Catholic Movement desire by such a step to secure liberty for a State-ridden Church. Disestablishment now appears as inevitable; the question only remains—with which of these three parties the drafting of the measure will lie. The schemes of the Secularist, we feel confident, will no more commend themselves to the Englishman's sense of reverence than the schemes of the Political Nonconformist will commend themselves to his sense of justice. The Liberation Society has only to draft its bill in order to throw back for years a measure which can but provoke popular disgust. For, as M. de Molinari sums up the matter, "The necessary condition of religious progress is the separation of Church and State, effected not in hostility to, but in favour of religion."

But will the extreme left of the "High-Church Party" carry the day? Will the "Nonconformist conscience" consent to allow "sacerdotalism to run rampant?" To this question M. de Molinari will supply us with an unanswerable reply. If the Nonconformists are so afraid of "sacerdotalism" as to wish to place legal restrictions on its progress, all we can say is that their angry demand for religious freedom and the removal of State distinction is intensely one-sided. It is the Nonconformist, not the Churchman, who has most to fear from "Religious Equality."¹

If, however, Churchmen wish to forestall Disestablishment and Disendowment, they must be up and doing. The time for magic-lantern lectures on Church History is over; the fact of the continuity of the modern English Church with the Church of Augustine, Aidan, Theodore, Dunstan, Becket, Wolsey, Warham, and Pole cannot now be seriously disputed. The present need is not so much a correction of fallacies, or a removal of prejudices, but rather an aggressive policy unanimously carried out. Neither is the matter so complex or so difficult as would be supposed. The legal documents which bind down the free voice of Convocation are but few, and nothing could be desired which would tend to bring more discredit on the policy of the Liberationist party than a refusal on their part to co-operate with the Church in a policy of Church emancipa-

¹ Cf. Note on pp. 144-5.

tion. Here then is a step which may easily be taken, and it is only just that it should be taken. Parliamentary Disestablishment would most certainly necessitate a certain amount of ecclesiastical reconstruction. Why should not the Church be charged with this duty—a duty which she alone can adequately accomplish? Why should we step out of one State prison to be enclosed in another?

The claim of each individual on the attention of the Church is not dependent on the Church's Nationality, but on its Catholicity. This last prerogative no State enactment can destroy. We need not therefore fear Disestablishment on this score, but this consideration will, however, suffice to put us on our guard against those syncretic schemes of "re-union," the ideal National Church theory about which we have of late heard so much. Nothing can be gained by allowing the Church's intensity to simmer down into an insipid diffusiveness. M. de Molinari in various parts has dealt the theological-debating-society ideal of a National Church some hard blows. Such a Church of compromise could but be "the sovereign pattern and exemplar of management, of the triumph of the political method in spiritual things, and the subordination of ideas to the *status quo*."¹ We know the kind of man such a system must always tend to produce—"the safe man who can set down half a dozen general propositions which escape from destroying one another only by being diluted down into truisms"—the man whom the Church is said to want, "not party men, but sensible, temperate and sober, well-judging persons, to guide it through the channel of no meaning, between the Scylla and Charybdis of Aye and No."² The age, on the contrary, requires that a Church will satisfy, and not merely repeat its needs; a Church that will teach and not debate.

The first edition of M. de Molinari's work did not contain the second part which deals more exclusively with the present and future of religions. In order to render the present translation capable of appearing in the "Philosophy at Home Series," it was found necessary to omit the recapitulatory chapter which com-

¹ John Morley. *On Compromise*, p. 45.

² Cardinal Newman. *Essays, Critical and Historical*, vol. i., p. 301.

mences M. de Molinari's additional matter, and to indicate in footnotes the sources, rather than to quote at length the long catena of authorities published in the appendix to the French edition.

The translator has to thank his friends, Mr. G. F. Hill, B.A., of Merton College, Oxford, and the British Museum, and Mr. A. G. Nash of Exeter College, Oxford, for kindly reading through his proofs.

WALTER K. FIRMINER.

ST. STEPHEN'S HOUSE, OXFORD,
December, 1893.