

**THE POLITICAL DUTIES OF
THE MINISTERS OF RELIGION
IN TIMES OF GREAT
NATIONAL EXCITEMENT**

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The political duties of the ministers of religion in times of great national excitement by J. W. Cunningham

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J. W. CUNNINGHAM

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MINISTERS OF RELIGION.

One Shilling and Sixpence.

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MINISTERS OF RELIGION
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GREAT NATIONAL EXCITEMENT.

BY THE
REV. J. W. CUNNINGHAM, A.M.
VICAR OF HARROW.

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POLITICAL DUTIES,

&c. &c.

It is my wish to preface, especially the cautionary part of the following observations, with a few remarks which may serve to shield me from reproaches I should be sorry to incur.

In the first place, I would beg to have it understood, that the cautions contained in these remarks are not intended to refer to that portion of the higher orders of the Clergy in this country who are called to exercise their functions as spiritual lords in the Upper House of Parliament. They, from their special circumstances, have peculiar duties to discharge as politicians; and it can only be desired for them that they should exercise those functions with dignity and independence, in the fear of God, and with the calmness, candour, courage, and absence of all *esprit de corps*, which become those whose office it would seem to be to give a tone and a model to the discussions of any assembly to which they belong. And it may be confidently affirmed, that we have had, in a recent case, a specimen of this kind of episcopal address. It may be questioned by some whether the Bishops ought to have taken any part

in the debates on the Reform Bill. It may be desired by others, that, if mingled in the contest, they should have been found under the opposite banner to that preferred by a large majority of their body. But, admitting the wisdom of their taking a part; and the duty of their forming an independent opinion, acting upon that opinion, and assigning the grounds of it to the world; it will be conceded on all hands, that the statement could scarcely have been made in language and in a spirit more congenial to his high and sacred functions, than in the speech of the Primate of England.—But it is not, as I have already stated, to this class of the Clergy that these observations are meant to apply. It will be observed, that the greater part of the remarks which follow refer almost exclusively to the case of that portion of the Clergy who are not called to the official discharge of any political functions. And, at all events, it would ill become me to offer advice to those from whom it is my duty, and, I would hope, my honest wish, to receive it. The streams of good counsel cannot be expected, any more than those of nature, to flow upwards. Happy is that church or commonwealth in which a sufficient body of pure and bright water is collected upon the eminences of life to irrigate and fertilize the plains beneath.

In the next place, I would entreat not to be considered as intending to implicate in the offences to which some of the following cautions refer, any very large portion of the Clergy of the Church to

which I have the happiness of belonging. I trust that large numbers of them find, in their professional occupations, engagements which leave them neither taste nor leisure for the more dubious employments to which these cautions apply. Many of them, I am convinced, can point to the state of their parishes, as the best reply to the calumnies so injuriously lavished upon them; and if they have this reply, it is most obvious that they need no other. If they can meet every inquiry into their pretensions with language resembling that of their Master—"the naked are clothed, the hungry are fed, the ignorant are taught, the poor have the Gospel preached unto them"—every objection ought to be silenced.

Again: I must implore, especially, my brethren in the Ministry not to impute to presumption or impertinence those observations which I desire to offer, in the utmost consciousness of my own liability to error. It may be thought by some, that cautions of such a nature ought not to come from the lips of one of their own body. But, after all, who is so likely to know the dangers and faults of any particular society as one of the members of it? Not only are his opportunities of learning the real facts of the case greater; but he can, in some degree, judge experimentally of the temptations and difficulties of others by his own. "As face answereth to face in water, so the heart of man to man." And surely, if faults exist, and faults which are sure not to escape the keen eye of the public, it is desirable to anticipate their censure, by

shewing them that we are at least as keen-sighted as themselves. It is true that "it is *lawful* to be taught by an enemy;" but what is "lawful" is not always "expedient." The "flagellants," I believe, always took care to keep the scourge in their own hands.

And, once more, I must not be considered as, in any one of these cautions, taking common part with that class of broad-cast reasoners who, either in or out of Parliament, have included in their magnificent list of political aphorisms the sweeping declaration, that "the Clergy have nothing to do with politics." If this affirmation mean only that the Clergy have nothing to do with many of those points of discussion which feed the frenzy of the moment, and provoke the zeal of political gladiators in either House of Parliament, it will be seen that I have little disposition to dispute it. But in the mouths of not a few, much more is meant by this declaration. It in fact amounts to a statement, that the Ministers of Religion have no concern whatever with either the *principles* or the *details* of *any one* of the topics, great or small, moral or political, which occupy the attention of the great deliberative assembly of the nation; that, as the "cobbler is to confine himself to his last," so the Clergy are to leave the things of this world to their betters, and confine their speculations to those of the world to come. It is, however, but justice to this class of "departmental" politicians to observe, that, supposing the Clergy to acquiesce in this distribution, many of the individuals who

thus consign the future world to their administration, are most willing themselves never, either in word or deed, to make the slightest possible reference to any state of existence except the present.—It may be well, perhaps, to touch for a moment on the plan thus ingeniously suggested for the management of both worlds.

As far as respects the mechanical arts, few, I suppose, will be found to dispute the value of a division of labour. But, even as to the arts, this universally admitted principle is easily pushed too far. The Hindoo distribution of society into castes and trades has not, I imagine, accomplished much for this class of pursuits. The native of India continues, partly in virtue of it, to do that slowly and imperfectly with the hand, which is accomplished, as though by magic, under the movements of a machine. Neither has the Hindoo priest, that I can perceive, peculiarly benefited, either in manners or morals, by his absolute consecration of himself to his own super-mundane employments. It is also well known that the labourers in mechanical arts, amongst ourselves, are immeasurable debtors to those scientific persons who have set themselves carefully to consider the *principles* on which the various arts depend. And if this be true, as to the arts and physical sciences, there is no question of its being doubly true as respects the moral sciences, or those mixed pursuits which, like politics, embrace principles and objects of a more complicated nature. But when an attempt is made to