

**A CHARGE, DELIVERED TO THE
CANDIDATES FOR ORDINATION: AND A
SERMON, PREACHED AT THR GENERAL
ORDINATION, IN THE CATHEDRAL
CHURCH OF CHRIST, OXFORD**

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A Charge, Delivered to the Candidates for Ordination: And a Sermon, Preached at thr general ordination, in the cathedral church of christ, Oxford by Samuel Wilberforce

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SAMUEL WILBERFORCE

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A

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CANDIDATES FOR ORDINATION;

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PREACHED

AT THE GENERAL ORDINATION,

IN THE CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF CHRIST, OXFORD,

DECEMBER 21, 1846.

BY

SAMUEL, LORD BISHOP OF OXFORD,

CHANCELLOR OF THE MOST NOBLE ORDER OF THE GARTER.

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TO THE
PRIESTS AND DEACONS

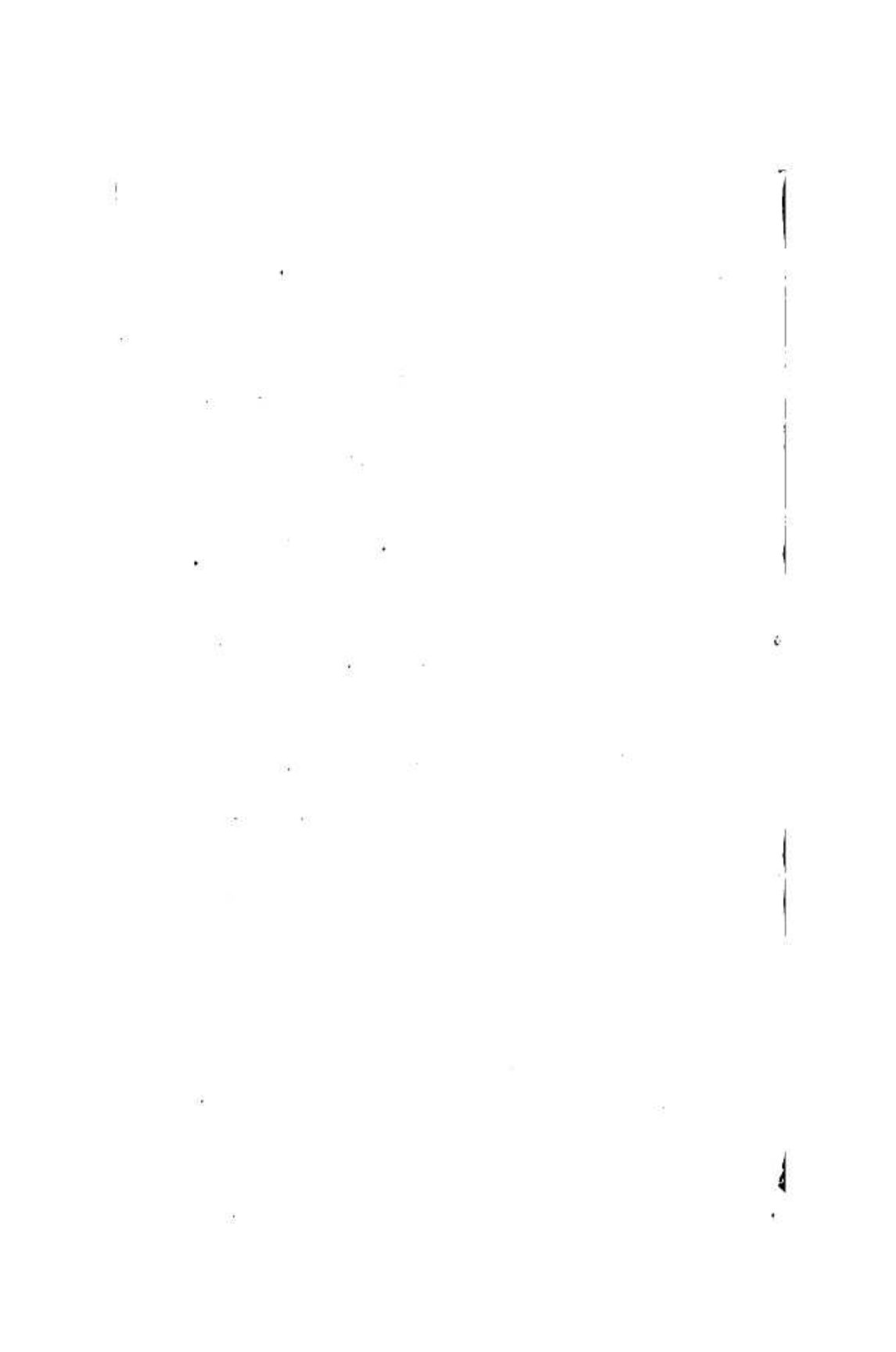
SENT OUT BY HIM
TO THE WORK OF THE MINISTRY,

DEC. XXI, MDCCCLV,

This Charge and Sermon

ARE INSCRIBED,
BY THEIR FAITHFUL FRIEND AND BROTHER,

S. OXON.



A

CHARGE,

&c.

DEAR BRETHREN IN THE LORD,

DURING the last three days, we have all had our attention turned to various parts of that great subject—the Ministry of Christ's Church. Within this chapel, as well as in the more formal examination by which we have been occupied, it has been my desire and endeavour to bring especially before you the spiritual character of your future office, with the necessary consequences of its perilous risks, and its exceeding blessedness. And this I have done in the firm conviction, that great as is the importance to yourselves and the Church, of your being well furnished with the pre-requisites of a liberal education, and some measure at least of theological knowledge, there is one condition of yet higher necessity, and that is the possession of a true living faith in Christ our Lord, both for your own

salvation, and for all the work of His ministry to be committed to you. An ignorant Clergy are a reproach to any Church, and must injure its efficiency; but an ungodly Clergy threaten the removal of its candlestick, and the extinction of its life.

I would, therefore, before I proceed to a few detailed suggestions, once more beg you to reflect a while upon this momentous subject. The first question which it will be my duty to put, before God and His Church, to every one of you who apply either for priest's or deacon's orders, brings it practically before us. Of those who seek the office of a deacon I must enquire, "Do you trust that you are inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost?" Of those who seek the priesthood, "Do you think that you be truly called according to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ," "to take upon you this office," and you must answer as before your all-seeing Judge, "I trust so"—"I think it."

My brethren, this question is an awful one to put—an awful one to answer. Your reply must be spoken deliberately; with the full foreknowledge that it must be rendered; with every opportunity for self-examination; after solemn prayer; in the presence of the Church; before the jealous God who smote of old with sudden death him who stretched out his uncommissioned hand to stay but the material ark; before the heart-Searcher whose invisible stroke swept instantly away those who "lied not unto man, but unto God."

For yourselves and for others it is of the greatest moment that you answer not this question carelessly or wrongly: for others—for who can fix limits or ends to the disastrous issue to souls for which Christ died, and to the whole Church, of the commencement of a faithless, indolent, unfruitful ministry? for yourselves—for the error is by all human means one which cannot be repaired. Your words cannot be unsaid; your vows cannot be read backward. Your ministerial character is indelible; the only reparation of which the case admits is, that you hereafter rise up to the requirements of the office you have so unhappily assumed. And though the might of God's Grace has wrought these conversions, yet who may venture to speculate upon being the subject of such undeserved mercy? Who will stake knowingly on such a hazard his own or his brethren's salvation? And, after all, such cases are not the rule, but the exception. As the rule, the ministry continues in its leading character as it commences. There is, of course, a growth in every living ministry—a growth from the weak uncertainty of infancy to the confirmed strength of perfect manhood—a growth in knowledge, comprehension, power, skill, insight, faith, and love: but whilst there is growth on all sides in a living ministry, growth is not in the dead. The increase of corruption is there the only change. This is, indeed, the enemy's sad mockery of growth—the development within each false ambassador of Christ of the character of an Antichrist—