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THE BISHOPS
AND THEIR RELIGION:

TWO LETTERS ADDRESSED TO
THE LORD BISHOP OF RIPON,
AS PRESIDENT OF
THE CHURCH CONGRESS AT WAKEFIELD.

BY THE
REV. MERCER DAVIES, M.A.,

Author of "The Bishops and Their Wealth," &c.



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I.

A LETTER

TO THE RT. REV. THE LORD BISHOP OF RIPON,

President of the Church Congress at Wakefield, October, 1886.

CHISWICK,

September 18th, 1886.

MY LORD BISHOP,

In case your Lordship should not have seen my small Pamphlet recently published, on "The Bishops and Their Wealth," I beg leave to forward a copy for your Lordship's acceptance, and at the same time to request your very careful and impartial perusal of its contents. I do this at this season especially with a view to the approaching Congress over which your Lordship is about to preside.

I am quite conscious that in these pages I have brought a very serious impeachment against the Episcopal Body: but I beg to assure your Lordship that I should not have published such a work if I had not felt strongly that these were matters of the deepest importance to the welfare of the Church at

large: and I do not think that I have used a single expression here which goes beyond the limits of Truth and justice. I have seen some observations in reply to this Pamphlet, both from some of the Bishops, and also in the public Press; but nothing that appears to me to go to the root of the matter. Your Lordship, I think, will fully acknowledge the broad principle that the Ministry of Christ's Church ought never to be an object of worldly gain or advantage; and yet that it is a notorious and unquestionable fact that a very large proportion of the Clergy do make this sacred Office a means of selfish and personal aggrandizement; and that the Bishops themselves are to a large extent subject to the same charge. Whilst this is the case,—whilst it even reasonably *appears* to be the case in the eyes of the world, the inevitable result, as I have said, must be to bring discredit upon the Church, and upon the great message of the Gospel itself.

But I will not detain your Lordship further. I leave the matter in your hands, trusting that your Lordship will not omit the important opportunity which is now presented to you, to ROUSE THE CHURCH to her great duty of self-reform. I believe indeed that if your Lordship shall do your duty faithfully on this occasion, you cannot fail to offend very seriously many of your brethren on the Bench, as well as a large portion of the Clergy generally. But I feel sure also that if you should unhappily shrink from fulfilling this painful and difficult task, you will still more

grievously offend One whose anger will be more terrible than that of all the Bishops and Powers of this world together.

I have the honour to be,
 My Lord Bishop,
 Your Lordship's very obedient Servant,
 MERCER DAVIES.

II.

SECOND LETTER
TO THE LORD BISHOP OF RIPON.

September 27th, 1886.

MY LORD BISHOP,

As I have not received any acknowledgement from your Lordship of my letter of the 18th inst, enclosing a copy of my Pamphlet on "The Bishops and Their Wealth," I conclude that your Lordship dissents from my view of the matter so decidedly as not to think it worth while to reply; or at any rate that you do not intend to face the difficulties which would lie before you, if you brought these matters prominently before the notice of the Congress.

As therefore the time is short before the meeting of this Assembly, I proceed without further delay to state more fully the grounds on which I think it is

imperatively necessary that this subject should be taken in hand, especially by those who are chiefly responsible for the well-being of our Church, for its purity, its fidelity, and its efficiency. And I may say at once that I intend, so far as I am able, to press these remarks not only upon your Lordship's attention, but upon the attention of the Public generally ; and for this reason, namely, that so far as my experience goes, in modern times at least, whatever reforms have been effected in the Church of England, have generally been forced upon her by the pressure of public opinion, rather than originated by the spontaneous action of her own Rulers, or by their own instinctive sense of justice and righteousness : this being especially true in all matters touching the funds of the Church, and the revenues received by its Ministers.

I. My Lord, I say broadly and boldly in the first place that I think the Bishops and Clergy generally do not adequately "realize the situation," do not understand the grave position in which the Church now lies,—her dangers and her necessities. This is a sentiment, indeed, which has been often expressed, in reference to various evils which have been charged upon the Church. I do not however propose here to enter upon all these complaints which have been made against her, but to confine myself chiefly to one or two points. The question of Church Reform, as a matter of necessity, is to be included in the various subjects of discussion at the forthcoming Congress ; Church

Reform, as a distinct subject of itself, and also in reference to various matters of church work and progress. But I venture to say that these various topics do not go to the root of the question : to repeat a phrase which I have heard, "No tinkering up of the Church in minor matters will now be satisfactory." No, my Lord: it is her very foundations that are giving way, and need to be renewed. And there are two points especially in which I think it is clear that this bold assertion is fully justified.

The first and great foundation of any Church, or any religious community, is its Faith. A Church without a clear and strong faith can have no true common life, no lasting bond of union; can never flourish or contend successfully against its enemies, or against the world. And I say there is now a great want of faith, of religious belief, in the Church of England. The religion of the Church of England is supposed to be based upon the Bible, and upon the Bible as being substantially the Word of God. But it is clear that a very large proportion of those who profess to belong to this Church, or who are legally assumed to belong to it, do not really believe in this theory: very many of them do not hesitate to avow their disbelief; and a still larger number, who nominally profess to believe it, show plainly enough by their lives and conduct that their profession is merely superficial and illusory. I do not deny that there are some persons who do earnestly hold this

belief: I could point to some individuals of the present age, some who have passed away, and some perhaps still living, men of high character and intellect, who have sincerely believed in this truth, and whose faith and example are entitled to carry much weight in the judgment of the world. But still, looking at the world in general, it is a fact which I think will not be denied, that the number of those who sincerely, earnestly, intelligently, and of their own independent judgment, receive this Volume as a Divine Revelation, is comparatively very small indeed.

As to the great question of what may be the causes of this prevailing want of faith, I will not attempt to discuss this at length in this place: there are, no doubt, many distinct causes operating with different classes of society: but the point with which I am here concerned is the *fact* that there is a widespread amount of unbelief abroad; that such unbelief must practically undermine the effect of all other work in the Church: and further, that this unbelief extends,—strange as it may seem,—even to the highest dignitaries of the Church itself! My Lord, do you challenge this bold assertion? Will the Bishops generally challenge it? If so, I shall be prepared to support it by evidence of a very powerful character, and such as I think will surprise both the Church and the world. But for the present, I will content myself with quoting some words which I confess rather startled me when I first read them, three years ago;

but which I have now come to think are very near the truth. This is what a Member of Parliament wrote to me with reference to some documents that I had laid before him :—

“I take the moral of your Correspondence with the Bishops to be that most thinking and sensible men,—even Bishops !—no longer really believe that the bible is in any true sense ‘the word of God.’”

(Sept. 19, 1883.)

If there is any reasonable ground for such an opinion as this, then certainly I think it becomes an imperative duty on the part of the Rulers of the Church to grapple earnestly with this great question without delay. I think they should endeavour to ascertain, as far as may be possible, what is the degree of authority truly belonging to these ancient records of which our Bible is composed; what amount of obedience is due from us to their precepts. And I may add that there is one important duty which in the present day is probably better understood than it was in earlier times; namely, that in all these enquiries into the principles of our Religion, we should seek,—not, as was too often done in those days, chiefly for arguments to support and establish the faith which was already received, the *orthodox creed*,—but that we should look simply and honestly for the TRUTH, and be prepared to embrace it unreservedly, whatever we may find it to be. This, more than anything else, will restore to us the confidence and the sympathies of all intelligent men, all true men of science: and this

alone, I am sure, will bring us to the knowledge and favour of Him who is emphatically, the God of Truth.

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II. But there is another matter of the highest importance to the interests of the Church of England, which vitally affects the efficiency and success of all her work : and it is one in which again some degree of the truth is generally recognised, is too plain to be altogether ignored ; but in which our Rulers apparently do not see the whole truth, in its full extent.

My Lord, in order that the Church should be able to carry her message to the world with due effect, it is most obviously necessary that the world should have reasonable confidence in the bearers of that message ; it must have confidence in their personal integrity generally, and it must be satisfied that they themselves sincerely believe in the message which they preach. Now what is the state of things in regard to this matter at the present time ; and especially with regard to the Bishops ; do they possess the confidence of the people generally ? Do they enjoy the respect which is due to their high office ? It will not be denied, of course, that their private and personal character is generally free from reproach ; they are known to be active and laborious in the discharge of their duties ; they are not now-a-days charged with being immoderate in their mode of life, nor overbearing in manner ; they are, in short, free from some of the grave faults which were imputed to many members of their Order, even within the last two or three genera-

tions. But still, while all this is admitted, the question is whether in the judgment of the public, they realize that very high position which is implied in their name and office. This is the point which I think lies at the root of the question, as I have also said in my former Pamphlet. Are we to look upon the Bishops from a worldly point of view, simply as officers of a State Establishment, "successful members of their profession"? Or shall we take them for what they profess to be, Ministers of Christ, successors of the Apostles, charged with the highest of all missions, to proclaim a message of salvation to a perishing world? My Lord, judging from what we see, I think that the Bishops themselves, and the class of men from whom they are drawn, men of letters, men of University distinction, men of good family, do practically look at the position in the former aspect; and those who do so look at it appear to be generally pretty well satisfied with the result. But *the People*, the men who are not bishops, and not likely to be bishops, they look at it in the other light: they look at them as Ministers of God, they judge them by this standard: and this, as I have said before, I think is the true standard. And tried by this standard, they are found wanting; they are not what they ought to be; they do not come even reasonably near to their profession. "Your facts (as another correspondent writes to me,) are startling, and certainly go to show that the Heads of our

Church are not of the stamp or likeness of their great Master. There cannot be a doubt that the Church is losing the confidence of the people." These are indeed mild words in comparison with some that I could quote, letters from men of eminent position and high character, which have impressed these facts very deeply on my mind during the last few years. And as to the public Press,—not to speak of coarser displays,—even in the more respectable portion of it, which does not indulge in scurrilous abuse, even here the tone of a great deal that is written, the taunts that are veiled with a thin garb of propriety or politeness, show a deep-seated feeling of distrust and disrespect ; a feeling that the Bishops are not sincere in their religion ; that they are, after all, men of the world, as careful and as fond of the good things of this world as anybody else. And while this is the case, while there is any reasonable ground for such sentiments on the part of the public, I say that the Church cannot do its work effectually. The Bishops may preach, and the Clergy may preach, most eloquently ; but the people will not believe what they say ; they will look upon it all as a professional performance, which the performers go through simply because they are paid,—and often very well paid,—for doing it. My Lord, I believe *this* is the feeling of the public to a large extent : and I venture to say that, even if it is in some cases erroneous, yet it is certainly not without a large measure of justification. And further, that it will never be eradicated

from the minds of the people till the Bishops and Clergy have learned to be content with a more moderate recompence for their labours in preaching the Gospel.

III. There are some other matters in my former Pamphlet which I think are of much practical importance, remarks which your Lordship at any rate has not attempted to answer, but which it is unnecessary to repeat here. There is however one point which I have there mentioned only very briefly, but which is of so serious a nature that I must say a few more words upon it.

I have said that a Bishop in the present day is placed in a false position ; in a position such that it is almost impossible for him to be faithful, and do his duty ; and that this is therefore a very perilous position. Perilous !—My Lord, it is so perilous that I believe there is no class of men in the kingdom who stand in greater peril for their souls than the Bishops themselves. Listen to me, my Lord, if indeed you have any faith in these declarations of the Bible. That Book tells us that it is a very hard thing for any rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven ; not, of course, because there is anything sinful in the riches themselves, if they have been honestly acquired ; but, I suppose, because they carry with them so many temptations, they have such a strong power in drawing away a man's heart and soul from his Maker, and binding it down with the fetters of this world ; and also because they impose such very heavy responsi-

bilities upon him: "for unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required." And if there is this danger and difficulty for rich men generally, you will hardly say that the difficulty is less in the case of Ministers of the Gospel. Rather must it be ten times harder for a Bishop who is very rich to enter the kingdom of Heaven, than for any other rich man. It is not impossible; for he may be liberal, and spend his money wisely. But what if he keeps his money to himself? What if, with his fifty thousand pounds in his pocket, he sees hundreds and thousands of his fellow creatures, of his own spiritual children, those who are committed to his fatherly care, pining, starving, suffering, in untold distress, and not through their own fault: if he knows that scores of his own fellow-workers in the Gospel, poor Incumbents, poor Curates, are struggling and starving on their miserable £100 a-year, or even less: if with all this before him, all this which he knows well enough, or ought to know, he still holds his hand, shuts his eyes, and hardens his heart: then, my Lord, where is the Christian Minister, the Shepherd of the flock, the servant of Jesus Christ? Who will give that man a hope of going to heaven?—All this applies strictly to the man whose wealth is derived even from his own private or family property. And if this is true, there are indeed but few out of that list of deceased prelates who are not condemned hereby. But the case of those who have grown rich out of the funds of the Church

must, as I have said, be much worse: and there can be no doubt that very many of those named in that catalogue come, some more, some less, under this heavier condemnation.

Let us look at the case of one of the richer dioceses such as London. Now the work that needs to be done in such a diocese as this, and that needs specially the hand and the brain and the heart of the Bishop to do it, all this, I am sure, as the Bishop himself would say, is at least ten times as much as he could do, however active and indefatigable he might be. I will not specify details of the work here; though I am prepared to go more fully into that matter, and hope to do so before long, if time is spared me. But it will be found by any one who comes to look into it, that this expression is quite within the mark: there is ten times as much as any single Bishop could do; and consequently, there is need of at least ten Bishops to do it all properly. Now the revenues of that See are stated to be £10,000 a year: and I say therefore that if this sum were properly subdivided, it would suffice to maintain ten men of real, Christian, character, to carry on this great work of the Church. Not ten lofty Prelates; not ten Peers of Parliament; not ten men looking out for the great prizes of their "profession"; but ten men such as Bishops ought to be; men of simple life and manners; men of sufficient learning, experience, and ability; and above all, men who themselves believe in the Gospel which they preach.

And if all this might be done, done without any difficulty, without injustice to any man, then I ask, what is the responsibility of that man, whoever he is, who stands in the way and forbids it? All the supervision which might have been exercised, but which is now omitted, because "he has no time for that"; all the scandals which he might have corrected by his personal influence and authority; all the doubts and difficulties of faith and doctrine which he might have solved; all the social evils which it is the special function of Christianity to remedy: all these things,—and the list is inexhaustible,—all this which might have been done, but which is now left undone, must surely be laid at the door of him who absorbs those large revenues of the Church, as if they were his own private property. Does not such a man stand in a perilous position, if there is indeed such a thing as future responsibility, if we are to answer at all for the things we have done or left undone in this mortal life?

But I think there is a greater source of peril even than this. The great spiritual danger of the Bishops' position, as I have before said, is that it makes them too much men of the world, brings them too much under the influence, the power of the world. Now the plea which is commonly urged for having Bishops and dignitaries of considerable wealth and high social position, is that they may be able to speak to the upper classes on terms of equality, with more

influence and authority than would be exercised by clergymen of smaller means. A very poor notion indeed of personal influence or spiritual authority is implied in this argument. But does the system succeed as a matter of fact? Do the Bishops speak boldly and faithfully to the members of the upper classes individually, to all who are nominally or legally members of their own Church? Do they tell them plainly of their faults, of their vices? Of their selfishness, their covetousness, their cruelties, their debaucheries? Do they exercise Church Discipline towards them, even cutting off from the communion of the Church all those who live in wilful and known sin?— Yet this is their sacred and bounden duty; this is a duty, wherein if they fail, *you know* very well, my Lord, what is the consequence. And it will not be superfluous to repeat the words of the Prophet:—

“ So thou, O Son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me.

When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity: but his blood will I require at thine hand.”

Ezek. xxxiii., 7, 8.

This is the responsibility cast upon them; and it is one from which no Bishop can escape by pleading, as the Bishop of London might possibly do, that he had not time to perform all this work; because he might have at least nine other Bishops to share it with him: he cannot lay it upon his parochial clergy; for if they

neglect the duty, it is his business to admonish them, and see that they do it. No: whatever may be the pleas with which he quiets his conscience for putting off this important part of his Ministerial duty, I venture to say that the real cause is plain enough. He is so much a man of the world himself, he mixes in social intercourse with these men, he receives their hospitality, receives even their contributions for the Church, and is altogether on such friendly terms with them, that he could not venture to give them offence, such mortal offence as would often follow upon his faithful, plainspoken rebukes. It would indeed, as anybody can see, be a most unpleasant task for him to undertake: no Bishop would think of doing such a thing, unless he were indeed a man of most undaunted moral courage, of most unswerving fidelity. He must be a very Baptist to do it. But such a man is not found among them that wear soft clothing, and are in Kings' houses. And therefore I say that the work is for the most part wilfully left undone. It is unfaithfulness to their Master, deliberate, repeated, continual, unrepented of.—Is not this a position of peril, my Lord?

But I pause. In a very few days, you will yourself prove or disprove the truth of my impeachment. These matters which I have now brought before your Lordship, are, as I am sure you will not deny, matters of vital importance to the highest interests of the Church of England; matters which ought to be most seriously discussed at such an opportunity as is now at

hand. But, as I have said before, if you, the President, were to speak the truth faithfully and fearlessly on this subject before your assembled brethren, you could not fail to give deep offence,—certainly to a great number of them; your position as a Bishop would become not only disagreeable, but almost intolerable. Here then, in what is perhaps the most critical hour of your whole life, you may prove yourself. You see your duty to God on the one hand: you feel the power of the world on the other. Can you shake off its chains? Can you deliver your soul from its bondage?

I certainly think your Lordship will feel the difficulty of the situation: I sincerely sympathize with you therein, even though my pen, like a surgeon's knife, is opening the wound: I think you will agree with me that it is a false position in which the Bishops ought never to be placed; and that the sooner they are extricated from it, the better.

My Lord, THE TRUTH SHALL MAKE YOU FREE.

I am, My Lord Bishop,

Your Lordship's very humble Fellow-Servant,

MERCER DAVIES.

35, Fisher's Lane, Chiswick.

TABLE, showing the Names of the Bishops of England and Wales, deceased, from 1856 to 1885; with the amount of Personality proved at their death.

Consecrated.	NAME.	SEE.	Re-signed.	Died.	Years of Bishopric.	Nominal Income of See.	Amount of Personality.
						£	£
1827	Hon. Hugh Percy	Carlisle ...		1856	29	4,500	90,000
1830	Jas. H. Mook...	G. and B. ...		1856	26	5,000	140,000
1824	C. J. Blomfield	Chest: Lon:	1856	1857	32	10,000	60,000
1824	Chr. Bethell ..	Bangor ...		1859	35	4,000	20,000
1831	Edw. Maltby ...	Chich: Dur:		1859	28	8,000	120,000
1813	Geo. Murray ...	Rochester...		1860	47	5,000	60,000
1837	Thos. Musgrave	Heref: York		1860	23	10,000	70,000
1840	Henry Pepys ...	Worcester		1860	20	5,000	50,000
1856	Hon. H. M. Villiers ...	Durham ...		1861	5	8,000	20,000
1826	J. B. Sumner ...	Chest: Cant:		1862	34	15,000	60,000
1845	Thos Turton ...	Ely ...		1864	19	5,500	40,000
1839	Geo. Davys ...	Peterboro'		1864	25	4,500	80,000
1848	John Graham ...	Chester ...		1865	17	4,500	18,000
1860	J. C. Wigram ...	Rochester...		1867	7	5,000	45,000
1843	John Lonsdale...	Lichfield ...		1867	24	4,500	90,000
1849	Samuel Hinds...	Norwich ...	1857	1868	8	4,500	—
1848	R. D. Hampden	Hereford ...		1868	20	4,200	45,000
1864	Francis Jeune...	Peterboro'		1868	4	4,500	35,000
1836	C. T. Longley...	Rip: Cant:		1868	32	15,000	45,000
1854	W. K. Hamilton	Salisbury ...		1869	15	5,000	14,000
1831	H. Philpotts ...	Exeter ...		1869	38	5,000	60,000
1860	Hon. S. Waldegrave ...	Carlisle ...		1869	9	4,500	20,000
1848	J. P. Lee ...	Manchester		1869	21	4,200	40,000
1842	A. T. Gilbert ...	Chichester		1870	28	4,200	12,000
1847	Lord Auckland	B. and W.	1869	1870	22	5,000	120,000
1841	T. V. Short ...	St. Asaph...	1870	1872	29	4,200	14,000
1845	S. Wilberforce	Oxf: Winch:		1873	28	7,000	60,000
1826	C. R. Sumner...	Wirchester	1869	1874	43	10,000	80,000
1840	Con. Thirlwall	St. David's	1874	1875	34	4,500	16,000
1841	G. A. Selwyn ...	N.Z.: Lichf:		1878	37	4,500	16,000
1856	Chas. Baring ...	G.&B..Dur:		1879	23	8,000	120,000
1856	A. C. Tait ...	Lon: Cant:		1882	26	15,000	35,000
1849	Alf. Ollivant ...	Llandaff ...		1882	33	4,200	30,000
1857	Rob. Bickersteth	Ripon ...		1884	27	4,500	25,000
1865	W. Jacobson ...	Chester ...		1884	19	4,500	65,000
1853	John Jackson ...	Linc: Lon:		1885	32	10,000	72,000
1868	C. Wordsworth	Lincoln ...	1885	1885	17	5,000	85,000
1869	Geo. Moberly ...	Salisbury ...		1885	16	5,000	29,000
1870	Jas. Fraser ...	Manchester		1885	15	4,200	85,000
1873	J. R. Woodford	Ely ...		1885	12	5,500	19,000

From "The Bishops and their Wealth"

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