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# CLERICAL INTEGRITY.

BY

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AUTHOR OF "THE BIBLE; IS IT THE WORD OF GOD?" ETC.

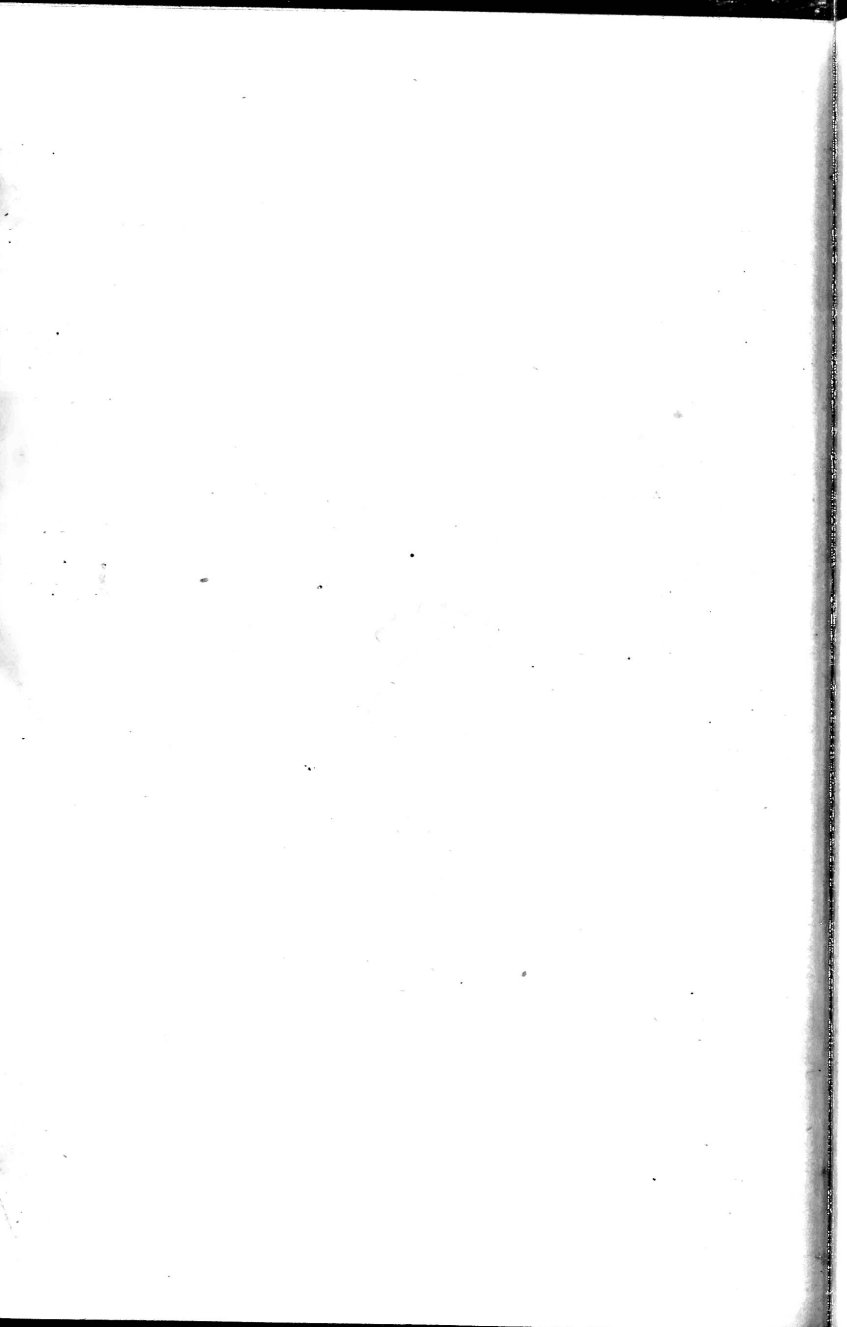


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THE *Record* of the 27th May, 1872, notices, with animadversion, the encouragement which Mr Voysey has received from some of his clerical brethren, whose names are published among his avowed supporters, and who retain their position in the ranks of the Church of England, while thus manifesting their sympathy with the free utterances of one who holds and inculcates a line of doctrine so conflicting with that to which they themselves stand officially committed. No doubt the position of these gentlemen, if they are in accord, broadly, with Mr Voysey in his views, and that of all similarly situated, is one which every friend to consistency must deeply lament. They profess to fight under banners the devices on which they no longer respect. They have to lead their followers by a way other than along the "old paths" hitherto venerated. Their trumpets give forth uncertain sounds, or what assuredly cannot be recognized as the regimental calls. If the freethinking laymen are out of place, who, for the sake of appearances, swell congregations to which in heart they do not belong, much more so are those clergy who have habitually to enact beliefs at violence with their real sentiments. The *Record* does well to call for integrity of profession on the part of the recognized ministers of the Church of England. It sees no advantage in having possession of the persons of the clergy without their operative souls: while, on

the other side, those who feel that the inner men are with themselves, naturally desire to see the outer men openly associated with their convictions. No one, therefore, is satisfied with the anomalies of a position so false as that pointed to, while the subjects of the disorder themselves, can scarcely find satisfaction in the self-examination which at times must press itself upon them.

The only cure that can be offered, where self-cure is not effected, is to unmask the real character of the professions made and abused. A recent pamphlet by a beneficed clergyman, entitled "Clerical Dishonesty," wherein the writer assumes that the ordination vows pledge the utterer to nothing seriously binding on him, is one among many evidences that such an exposition, though dealing with much that must to most minds be self-evident, is not a task altogether supererogatory.

The distinction between the two parties who are in question—the orthodox anglican and the free-thinker, is one concerning practice rather than principle. The free-thinker avows that his belief is one not formulated for him, but arrived at under his proper convictions. He is under no compulsion but that of his own exercised mind and conscience. The other party profess to enjoy a like liberty, but are far from really possessing it. There was a time when the whole Christian world found themselves under the dominion of a priestly body, from whom they had to accept their creed in all its material characteristics. The mould was made for them out of which they were to be cast, all in the same shape. Some freer and more enlightened spirits, after a course of centuries, objected to the thralldom and its results. The mould they saw to be a piece of human machinery, designed to effect conformity to other human minds, but not securing, what was professedly aimed at, conformity to the divine mind. That they conceived to be exhibited in a certain book, and by that book, and that alone, they claimed to guide their

ways. These, accordingly, made their protest, which in effect was, that the Bible was the sole, sufficient, and perfect rule of faith, by which each, according to his apprehension, was to govern himself. Nor was it conceded that even the Bible stood on a platform beyond the reach of judgment. The Protestants chose to exercise their discernment thereupon, and excepted from its pages, as apocryphal, a considerable portion of its hitherto received contents. Now if the movement represented a real freedom, the very book itself, evidently, stood in the utmost jeopardy. The process of excision might advance until nothing was left of the work but its binding. There are many in fact, at this moment, who would gladly expunge from it much that it asserts, and who would question the genuineness of whole sections of its writings. It is clear that the principle avowed was one that could not be maintained. To abide by a revealed faith, by something outside of human thought or experience, a recognized vehicle for the faith was obviously necessary; and beyond proclaiming the vehicle, and stamping it with the signet of authority, practically it was found necessary, also, to educe from it the creed to be followed. All this the Church of England has done for herself in her Articles and other formularies. The liberty to each to shape his faith according to his convictions is gone. The Romish mould, it is true, has been removed; but the Anglican mould has been substituted for it.

A variety of subordinate protests and dissents have ensued, as an inevitable consequence. Whenever the restraint upon the convinced and dissatisfied mind became unbearable, and sufficient numbers joined to form a new section, there was a departure from the parent stock, or a split among the already divided members, as when Protestantism came originally out of Rome. The elements for these divisions have continually multiplied, and several very decided offsets are now visibly ripening for independence in the bosom of the original in-

stitution. The difficulty is an inherent one, never to be surmounted. The revealed creed cannot be ascertained, or maintained, without descriptive bounds. The Anglican mould has therefore been repeatedly cast away for the adoption of some one of the hundred minor Protestant moulds that have appeared to approach nearer to the ideal truth aimed at.

Some years ago a notable effort was made by some fervent spirits to establish a basis of Christianity without a formal creed. I refer to those currently known as the Plymouth Brethren, though the designation is not one of their own adoption. They said, let community of faith be our sole requisition for fellowship. The proposition was, however, far from realizing an entire liberty of conscience, seeing that the faith itself had to be defined, and the possession of it ascertained. Still it was the best attempt that circumstances allowed of towards freedom of thought in the avowal of a revealed religion. For some years this party stood together in happy communion without a formulated creed, but liberty of thought over the accepted vehicle of the faith led to its unavoidable result. On one important subject in particular, the ascription, constructively, of a sinner's position to Christ, and the consequent character of his alleged sufferings, independent views in a certain quarter prevailed. From another quarter these were denounced as heretical. And then a fresh term of communion was introduced. One "Article of Religion," if not thirty-nine, was prescribed, and all who held the reprehended views, and even all who tolerated those who held them, were ejected, and the broken fragments of the party exist to this day in a state of irremediable disunion.

It may then be accepted for a certainty that what is to be upheld as a revealed faith can only subsist by means of an organized system. The book conveying the faith has to be acknowledged, and its recognition made sure. After which the characteristics and bounds

of the faith, as ascertainable out of the revelations of the book, have to be precisely described. The work, accounted a divine one, has, inevitably, to poise and support itself on humanly devised props and foundations. Can such an unseemly partnership be based upon any true reality? Man's portion therein is most apparent. That attributed to the Almighty is what has to be severely questioned. Whatever their views on this momentous point, the clergy of the Church of England stand bound to assert the divine origination of the incongruous and ever-failing system.

Then there is the status of the clergyman himself. He professes to be an ambassador for God. Is he sure of his credentials? Has the Divinity, who is accessible equally to all, chosen out a select few on whom to confer special power and obligations? Such is in truth the theory; but how are these elected ones separated to their work and held together?

Again, it is apparent, if the thing designed is ascribable to God, the whole apparatus for its realization is palpably of man. The calling of the clergy is ordinarily taken up at the outset of life as is any other calling. It has its pecuniary and social advantages, with prospective temptations, conferring wealth, dignity, and power. Certain formulæ are prescribed, passing which the ambassador for God comes forth fully equipped with his human testimonials. Whether the Divinity has complacently endorsed these is of course a question. But, whatever his own consciousness may be, the individual himself has, henceforth, and for ever, to assert his divine appointment and heavenly mission. What a standard has he adopted by which to test, in all sincerity, himself and his appointed work!

And thus we really get back to Rome. The freedom of the Protestant movement becomes swamped in the method taken to give it realization. The articles, the creeds, the formulated services, the organized ministry,

are all required to ensure to the machine its appointed action. Seeking for God in his asserted word and work, we everywhere fall in with the human agency.

Nor is the operation attended with anything like success. The object is to ascertain the truth as coming from Divine revelation, and then to secure conformity to this truth. For this purpose, all the stated definitions are given, and the appointed teachers tested and banded together. And the result of all is failure. The Church of England, in its ministers and congregations, represents every shade of opinion, from the type of Rome to the utmost bounds of liberalized Deism. Are the tests so loosely drawn as to justify such latitude? Judicial decisions would certainly warrant a reply extensively in the affirmative, but will the appeal to the conscience endorse such a conclusion, especially in the instance of the free-thinkers?

The author of the pamphlet on "Clerical Honesty" appears to flatter himself that the bonds are of this imperfect nature, or have been made so by the prevailing laxity with which they are put to use. He confines himself to the actual questions and answers which occur when the candidate offers himself for ordination, without attempting to define the tenets then supposed to be avowed. The candidate, he thinks, may be permitted to express the hope that "the Holy Ghost" has moved him to take up his office; that he has been truly called thereto "according to the will of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the due order of the realm;" that he "unfeignedly believes all the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testament," as much, at least, as do some of the questioners; that he will read the same to the assembled church, however painful it may be to him to do so; that, "by the help of God," he will "gladly and willingly" perform all his appointed duties, with whatever repugnance to his mind and conscience: that he will "fashion" his life to "the doctrine of Christ," "the Lord being his helper;" and that he



will "reverently," and "with a glad mind," obey his clerical superiors, and conform himself to their "godly admonitions."

After this follows the ordination of the priesthood, or, as the writer prefers to read the term, the presbytery, in which very much the same ground is gone over, except that here the doctrine of "eternal salvation through faith in Jesus Christ" is expressly required of him in his ministrations, and that he receives a commission to forgive, or refuse, forgiveness of sins, which the writer hopes may be considered to mean no more than transgressions against ritualistic order, "involving no question of morals."

On one of these points the writer confesses that his conscience stands wounded by the pledge to which he has been subjected; and that is the expression of his "unfeigned belief" in the whole of the canonical Scriptures. The details given of the process of creation, for example, he has the evidence of his enlightened senses are untrue, and there is much more, no doubt, of that stamp, in these pages, which the knowledge of the day must make it impossible for him to receive. He laments, then, for himself, and his clerical brethren, the being "compelled to read as God's word what we know well God never said." The admission is an important one, and in fact concedes the whole question. If a clergyman can surmount such a difficulty as this, to what stretch of elasticity may he not bring his ministrations? When can we be sure that his belief and his tongue are in real unison? That many are guilty of such a compromise, in no way affects the character of the evil, save to enhance it.

The ordination service is the Church's safeguard for the maintenance and promulgation of her doctrines, and the pledges then exacted are by no means of a loose and insufficient sort. It binds the candidate to the whole contents of the Scriptures, not as he may choose to understand them, but as interpreted for him by the

Church herself, and commits him to matters of faith at least as difficult of acceptance as the account of the creation, or any other of the representations made in the record at variance with physical facts.

The service opens with the Litany, containing these well known protestations.

“O God the Son, Redeemer of the world: have mercy upon us miserable sinners.

“O God the Holy Ghost, proceeding from the Father and the Son: have mercy upon us miserable sinners.

“O holy, blessed, and glorious Trinity, three persons and one God: have mercy upon us miserable sinners.

“Spare thy people whom thou hast redeemed with thy most precious blood.

“From the crafts and assaults of the devil; from thy wrath, and from everlasting damnation, good Lord deliver us.

“By the mystery of thy holy Incarnation; by thy holy Nativity and Circumcision; by thy Baptism, Fasting, and Temptation, good Lord deliver us.

“By thine agony and bloody sweat; by thy cross and passion; by thy precious Death and Burial; by thy glorious Resurrection and Ascension; and by the coming of Holy Ghost, good Lord deliver us.

“Son of God: we beseech thee to hear us.

“O Lamb of God: that taketh away the sins of the world; have mercy upon us.

“O Christ, hear us.

“Christ have mercy upon us.

“O Son of David, have mercy upon us.”

The doctrine of the Trinity, the incarnation of the second person of this triune Godhead in the form of Jesus of Nazareth, all the circumstances associated with his alleged birth, vicarious sacrifice, and resurrection, are here openly paraded as the faith of the recipient of the ordination, and of all concerned with him in this appointed service. When he himself speaks

of being moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon him his office, he acknowledges the existence and functions of the divine emanation, so designated, which is alleged to have proceeded from the other two persons of the Trinity, the Father and the Son. When he describes himself to be acting "according to the will of the Lord Jesus Christ," he is referring to the teacher of Nazareth, now translated to heaven and ruling there as a divinity ; and when he declares he will fashion his life to "the doctrine of Christ," in glad submission to the admonitions of his seniors, he avows all that the Church maintains to be involved in this doctrine—the condition in himself of a lost sinner, heir of the wrath of God, and saved from that wrath by the outpouring of the blood of the Nazarene teacher. He also proclaims, through the means of the Litany, his belief in the being, power, and attributed operations of the devil.

We have the expression here of all that characterizes what is known as orthodoxy, and no essentially unorthodox person can minister to such a system without violation to his estimate of truth. The *Record*, justly, and warrantably, calls upon all such to abandon their false positions, and not to weaken the community to the support of which they stand pledged by a fictitious adherence. A party to an engagement is not warranted in straining the document to free himself of his obligations. He is bound to understand what is expected of him, and to do it faithfully. Mental reservations, undisclosed to the other side, form no part of a genuine transaction. The Church of England has carefully and fully announced her doctrines through an extensive range of formularies, and they are not to be misunderstood, in their broad features, by any intelligent mind seeking to apprehend them. The clergyman is engaged to propagate these doctrines, and it is impossible that he can deflect therefrom, materially, without being conscious of the divergence. He professes to have been called of God to his ministrations, and has

engaged to discharge them with unfeigned mind, gladly and willingly. Under no other conditions would the Church have accepted his services; and when he finds that he cannot, with a free conscience, meet the conditions, the path of duty should be clear to him. He should not flatter himself that he is doing good in the measure that he is advancing his true sentiments. A sermon can have little power which is contradicted, out of the same mouth, in the liturgy. He is but confusing truth with untruth, schooling his hearers in subtleties, and bringing them down to his own level of conscious inconsistency.

GREAT MALVERN,  
*June 1872.*

