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ON

CLERICAL DISHONESTY:

A REFUTATION OF CHARGES

AGAINST

REV. CHARLES VOYSEY.

BY

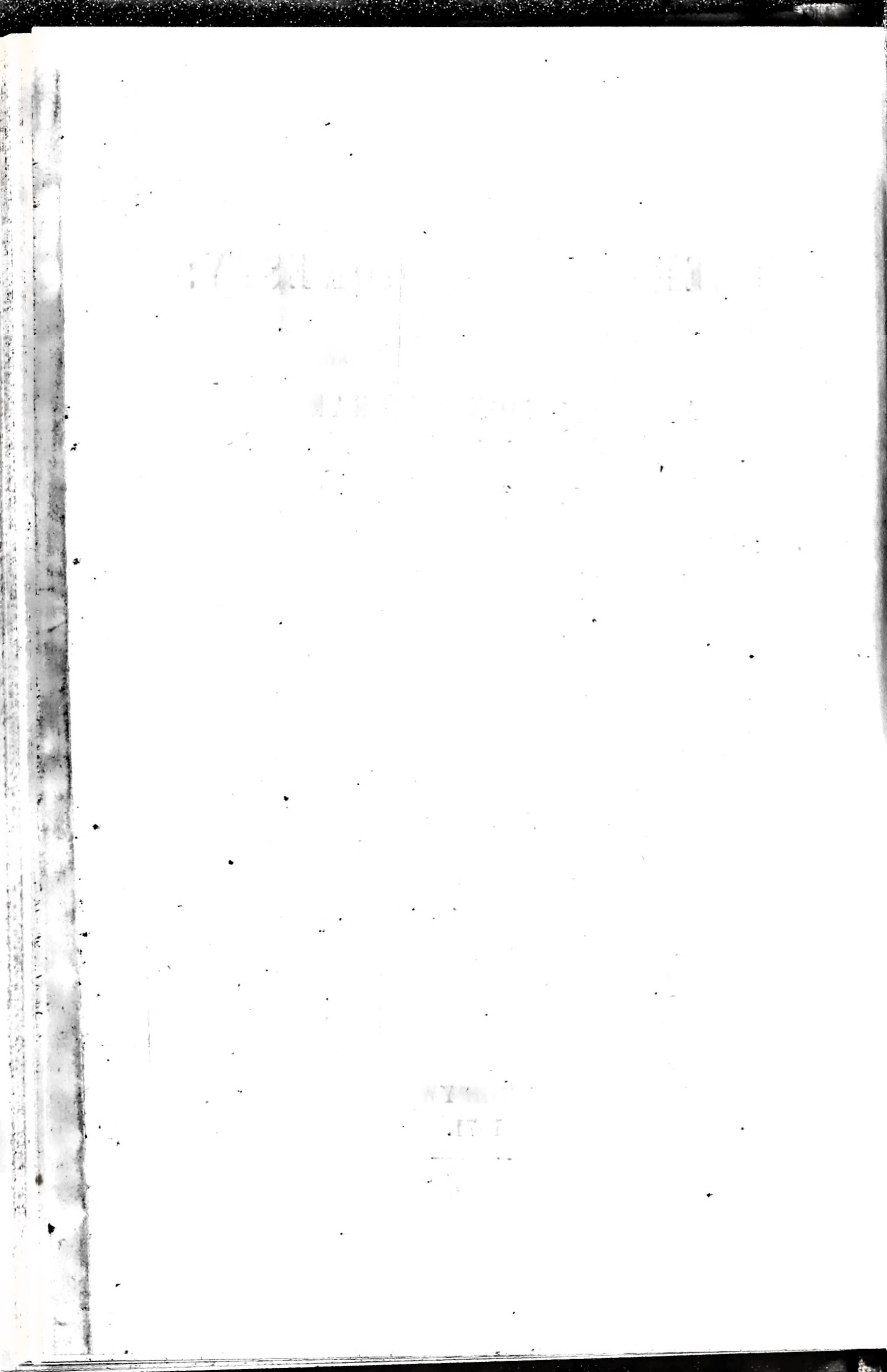
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## PREFACE.

I TRUST that the learned reader into whose hand these pages may fall will defend me from the charge of unbecoming condescension in going out of my way to correct a small editor. That gentleman happened to be exactly in my way when I was about something of far more importance than a criticism of his utterances. He was a convenient peg for the fixture of my theme, and I had evidently the right to use him.

My theme is no part of the controversy between rational and irrational theology: whether the Broad-Churchmen are right or wrong in their views of the manner and the measure in which God has revealed, and is revealing, his truth to man, is here not at all the question. The reader is welcome to assume and to say that the Divines of the rational school are ignorant and illogical, inconsistent and unbelieving, unphilosophical and heterodox, or anything equally disgraceful. The only thing that I shall call him to account for affirming is—that we are dishonest. If you choose to say that, I shall insist on your proving what you say. A deep thinker once remarked, "What a pity that lying should be a sin, because it is so easy!" This charge of dishonesty against the thinking clergy of the Church of England, and of other communions in which Tradition

is trembling before Truth, is both easy and popular. Nothing tells better or pays better in your *Times* or your *Telegraph*. The charge has surely now been long enough made, without a syllable of evidence. The scribes who make it will confess, that I have taken some trouble to do what they find it so glib and easy to leave everywhere undone—namely, to state their case in the fairest and fullest manner, by examining those solemn and only engagements by which we clergy of the Established Church are bound in our Ordination, and which these anonymous writers so unreasonably and cruelly accuse us of violating.

## POSTSCRIPT.

The manuscript of this paper has been a month in the hands and at the disposal of others. The only reason why it has not appeared sooner is, that they have not been able to see, as I see, the importance of the *Unitarian Herald*; so that its publication may be taken as a victory of editorial dignity.

T. P. K.

## ON CLERICAL DISHONESTY.

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THE Editor of the *Unitarian Herald*, in the number for July 7, 1871, comes out in a leading article, in his largest type, overflowing with priestly unction, and flatuous with pharisaic pride, that easiest and happiest frame of true religion, which thinketh itself righteous, and despiseth others. The article is headed, "THE REV. CHARLES VOYSEY." The pious editor laments, as he has a perfect right to do; that Unitarians have eagerly opened their pulpits to Mr Voysey. His regret has deepened since he read Mr Voysey's full statement of his religious history, and he observes, "We feel bound to repeat our conviction that Mr Voysey's statement only makes his case worse than had been generally supposed, and that his course has been such as ought to be greeted, by all who feel the paramount claim of clerical honesty, not with honour, but with open reprobation." He shows, by Mr Voysey's own statement, that that gentleman "had given up orthodoxy before he took orders at all." He rejects his justification of his decision to enter the Church by the prevailing and notorious laxity in interpreting the import of subscription to her articles: "Mr Voysey treats the whole question as if it was merely one of a fresh college subscription, entirely ignoring the solemn professions of ordination. At his ordering as deacon, at his ordination as priest, and, ten years later, on his having to read himself into his living,

he had to face the most solemn professions and vows, perfectly different from the mere formal subscriptions of his University course." He goes on to acquit Mr Voysey of being influenced by pecuniary motives ; but he is convinced that he was unconsciously swayed to do an immoral act by a sense of the dignity of being a clergyman of the National Church, and he treats him as one of those who "suffer themselves to be blinded by this feeling, so that they never dare to look the morality of their position fairly and honestly in the face."

I was not prepared for a confession like this on the part of either of the editors of this little *Herald*, who are, both of them, in the front rank of Unitarian clergymen. That wealthy body, of whom they are leading ornaments, must have ways, that I should never have suspected, of making even such men feel the indignity of their apparently high position, when they can attribute to the prospect, by which Mr Voysey along with so many others of us was led astray from the path of morality, such a blinding dignity!—the dignity of rustic seclusion and oblivion in a world mad with money-worship, and rapidly growing richer, round about all these lucky Voyseys, with their certainty for life of £100, or sometimes £160, a year, and the additional dignity of a large family!

Let that peep at Unitarian conceptions of dignity pass. We have before us a definite charge of dishonesty and immorality against Mr Voysey in presenting himself from a mean motive as a candidate for orders in a shaky state of orthodoxy, and in "entirely ignoring the solemn professions of ordination." The charge, I would say, is definite in general, if that is a phrase permissible: there is no mistake about what the pious editor means; but like all the most poisonous and malignant slanders, it is thoroughly indefinite as to particulars. Not an atom of proof

is brought forward in support of these most reckless accusations! "Proof?" quoth the editor, "who ever demanded proof of my utterances in my large-type article?" Proof, indeed! if I think it my duty to disseminate a little calumny about clergymen's motives, how is it possible to bring proof? How am I to get hold of a man's motives, and exhibit them to the readers of my paper? They must, of course, take all that on the evidence of my sanctimonious self." The pious editor is right: we cannot demand that he shall produce this mean motive, "the lower consideration," lower than greed of money, "which mingles with their higher motives." Let that pass also for the present. We proceed to the other immorality of "entirely ignoring the solemn professions of ordination."

Here we have a charge of which some proof can be demanded and produced. Fortunately, the professions of Mr Voysey's ordination are on record. We shall go through them in order, and consider first their solemnity, and secondly, the honesty or dishonesty with which they were faced, and with which they have been ignored or respected by Mr Voysey. (a) The first question, after the taking 'the Oath of the Queen's Sovereignty,' which was put to him at his first ordination, was this:—"Do you trust that you are inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon you this Office and Ministration, to serve God for the promoting of his glory and the edifying of his people?" His answer was, "I trust so." The question was a solemn one. What proof can our editor bring forward that the respondent had not seriously and prayerfully weighed its solemnity, or that he did not really 'trust so?' "Oh," says the editor, "he was not orthodox, that is, his intellectual conceptions of religious truth were no longer those which had been instilled into his boyish mind: he no longer believed either in a God-Devil or a Devil-God, such as are set

forth in much of what is called orthodox theology." But if he sincerely thought that those changes which his views of God's will and character had undergone were the inward motions of the Holy Ghost, which rendered him fitter than before to promote God's glory and to edify his people, even if that sincere thought was a sincere mistake, there could hardly be dishonesty and immorality in his answering 'I trust so.' The question had no bearing at all upon his intellectual conceptions of fact or dogma, nor did he profess in his reply anything more than a trust which, as the editor will not deny, may be honestly felt even by a man not quite orthodox.

(b) The next question was as follows: "Do you think that you are truly called, according to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the due order of this Realm, to the Ministry of the Church?" The answer was, "I think so." What proof has our pious editor that he did not really think so? "Oh," quoth the editor, "a man truly called according to the due order of the realm to the ministry of the Church, means a man whose theological opinions are those of the Bishops, and Mr Voysey knew this; wherefore the truthful answer from his lips would have been simply—I do not think so." That Mr Voysey knew this is a knotty point to prove. Let us suppose that Mr Voysey, in pondering this, was aware of the notorious fact that bishops contradict each other in their opinions about the first thing which the Church does for a child in baptism, and about the doctrine taught to a child at the beginning of the Catechism, and about what is generally necessary to salvation, a conflict of orthodoxy at the very threshold of Churchmanship, whose flat contradictions have had since to be appeased by the highest tribunal of Church law, by making both contrary sides equally orthodox! And suppose, farther, that Mr Voysey had asked himself—how many Episcopal opinions does due



order require me to hold?—and how am I to find out what the opinions of bishops really and unfeignedly are? And suppose, again, that in his perplexity he had lighted on this most luminous passage in the Ordination of Priests, “are you determined to teach nothing, as required of necessity to eternal salvation, but that which you shall be persuaded may be concluded and proved by the Scripture?” Suppose all this, and you may depend upon it he had well studied the matter thus—then, if he felt that he was honestly purposing to qualify himself in the spirit of that future vow for his second ordination, he might sincerely say that he thought himself called in due order to the ministry of a deacon. Nothing that can be said or hinted by ill-natured editors can throw more light on the obligation to teach the opinions of this doctor or of that, contracted by us in our first ordination, than what is shed by that glorious engagement which we take in our second. There are few things definite in what is called orthodoxy either Trinitarian or Unitarian; but the obligation of a clergyman of my Church as to what he is bound *not to teach*, is defined with all the rigour of science. All that is indefinite and inconsistent with itself will pale away from our formularies like perished ink; all that is rigorous and scientific will year by year become blacker, more well-defined, and more indelible. The paling process has long been accomplished in the Church’s third article, of which none but theological experts can now see the once stupendous import; and in the longer seventeenth article, which to our recent Protestant fathers was the battle-ground of burning strife, the process is well-nigh completed. We see nothing there but a few bleaching bones of controversies long dead and all but buried out of sight; and even reverend Unitarian editors, aching and angry with their defect of dignity, have learned to be ashamed of taunting us with our degrading bondage to Calvinistic atrocities.

(c) The third question put to Mr Voysey at his first ordination was—"Do you unfeignedly believe all the Canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testament?" To this he answered by the book, "I do believe them." The honesty of the reply was exactly equal to that of the question. Our editor is awfully impressed with the solemnity of this business. He belongs to a denomination of Christians which has always been the foremost and boldest in denying the truthfulness, scientific, historical, and moral, of hundreds of pages in these canonical books: he dares not say before the most uneducated man, or even woman of his own communion, that he unfeignedly believes them all. Yet he is captivated with the dignity and solemnity of the scene, where the bishop in his spotless robes, armed with the plenitude of parliamentary power, extorts from the quivering consciences of the anxious youths before him a quibbling answer to a quibbling demand. The pious and sympathetic editor imagines himself adorning the province of that high functionary, and hears in fancy the grand sonorous tones with which he could roll out syllable by syllable that interrogation—"do you unfeignedly believe them all?"

The editor knows well that God, by His own revelations of truth to man in this and the last century, has made it impossible for any student to prepare himself for orders in any university, Catholic or Protestant in the world, so as to be able to say without painful evasion, and unworthy violence to verbal truth, that he unfeignedly believes even the first page of the canonical scriptures. The bishop, who is forced by an Act of Parliament of darker days to put this question, does not even pretend to believe that God made a water-tight firmament on the second day, dividing the waters above it from those below. He knows that that old *firmamentum* or *solidamentum*, which to Job was hard and "strong, and as a molten

looking-glass" of polished metal (Job xxxvii. 18), and which is described by Josephus in his first page of the "Antiquities," as a crystal which God fastened and hammered like carpenter work (such is the plain meaning of his Greek word), around his creation to separate heaven from the whole world, that this old fixed firmament is nowhere now, having been shivered to atoms by shots of thought through the first telescopes. Three hundred years ago it was perfectly true to every bishop, priest, and deacon in England, except to three or four heretical mathematicians, whom they heartily cursed for their infidelity, that God made all that stupendous sapphire vault in one day; and the vault was there in its solid majesty and marvellous beauty, the transparent floor through which Moses and the elders saw God's feet from the summit of Sinai, there to be seen with the stars of God stuck in it. And it is no less certain at this day to every clergyman and educated layman, that there is not, and never was, any such thing, and that Jehovah did not make a firmament, nor any definite division between earth and heaven, on the second day. If the reader is curious to see exposed the miserable and bungling quibbles to which theologians have been driven by their despair or their dishonesty, in defending the letter of the first page of the Bible, I refer him to my little tract—"Where is the firmament which God created on the second day?" Who doubts that the chancellors and bishops who put together our ordinals and articles would have handled me more roughly for writing that tract than our bishops have handled Mr Voysey? And all England would have applauded their treatment of such a blasphemous heretic, for his denial of the clear unquestionable testimony of the first chapter of the Word of God, about so plain a thing as the firmament.

If there were only a score of propositions in the canonical scriptures like this one about the firmament,

which bishops no more than other educated men unfeignedly believe, it would be worth my while here to enumerate them; and laying them before the Churchmen of England, I would say: Are you content that your Act of Parliament should continue for centuries to force your learned and godly bishops, in the most important of all their episcopal functions, to ask this question of those young candidates: 'Do you unfeignedly believe all the Canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments?' Would it not be at least more decorous in the presence of hostile critics of your church, to allow them to bracket the twenty passages which neither you nor they pretend to believe—and to demand from the youths an unfeigned faith in all the rest? Would there be anything inconsistent with common honesty, to say nothing of solemnity, in such a change of your law? Why should it be required of your young ministers to believe even a score of propositions which you and your bishops well know by the teaching of God Himself to be untrue, however honestly they may have been believed by good men of old? You may reply, that the bishop is not compelled by law when he puts that question, to say that he unfeignedly believes every proposition in the Scripture himself; and you may remark, that you see no reason why the youngsters should make a wry face at swallowing what the bishop, once in their position, managed to get down. And with that wise observation, and a little chuckle at your own wisdom, good people of England, you are very likely to rest content! But I cannot help wishing that you had a little more compassion on young and tender consciences, and a little more fear of tampering with the love of truth pure and undefiled.

I say, if there were just twenty such passages, I would copy them out for once in order; but there are in fact hundreds of them, in which to every educated Christian mind an unfeigned belief is simply impos-

sible. Biblical criticism, like astronomy and geology, is a science of which our Protestant fathers of the Reformation knew next to nothing; they accepted the Pope's Bible, as they accepted his creeds, without suspicion that either his priests or their predecessors, the Jewish priests, had ever tampered with the sacred documents. It may be that our editor, if pressed for proof of his charge against Mr Voysey of dishonesty in taking Holy Orders, would be compelled to rest mainly on this assertion, without expressed reserve, of belief of all the Scriptures. And he has a right to press it; but certainly no more right against Mr. Voysey than against every living clergyman of our church who is fit to be called an educated man. "Very true," quoth our editor, "it is true against you all; you all were dishonest in your answer to that question, and the only honourable course open to you was to enter the ministry among us Unitarians: we are not so tight in such matters; and you would then all have been honestly established, as we are, to be prophets of the Lord." To this I reply by quoting from the same leading article—"After the same hard fashion is the travestie of Biblical criticism by which he is deliberately trying—under the careful cover of merely attacking verbal inspiration and the doctrine of Christ's Godhead—to undermine the reverence of men for the Bible, and their discipleship to Christ." It is evident that the man who wrote this (I know not who he is) has often something to say about the Bible, the force and value of which to the heads and hearts of his hearers require to be supplemented by a reverence for the Bible, as distinct from their reverence for truth and righteousness. They sound like the words of one whose business it is to make influence and profit out of such mere book-reverence; and I hold the mission and the spirit of such a teacher, at least to thinking men, to be those of an arrant priest. The teacher- or preacher-craft that de-

mands as the condition of its useful action in grown men a reverence distinct from that due to truth and righteousness is simply priestcraft, more or less dignified and respectable. If this editor means to say that Mr Voysey is deliberately trying to undermine men's reverence for truth and righteousness, or their discipleship to Christ as the Great Master therein, I pronounce the charge to be a deliberate and a most priestly calumny, and I defy him to prove one word of it. And my impression is, that by betaking ourselves to such a fountain of honour as this editor for our prophetic qualifications, we should jump out of the frying-pan into the fire, and find his little finger thicker than the church's loins. Your true priest is none the less an arrant priest because he happens to be a nonconformist, whether with or without dignity.

We proceed with our search for Mr Voysey's immorality in the solemn professions and vows of ordination. (*d*) The next question put to him was this: "Will you diligently read the same unto the people assembled in the Church where you shall be appointed to serve?" He answered, "I will." Can the pious editor prove that he did not honourably keep that promise? I have no doubt that he kept it at the cost of grievous pain to himself, such as many of us feel and bear without complaining; the pain of continual insult, in being deemed incapable of selecting for ourselves a passage of Scripture to read at any one service all the year round to our people—and the pain of being compelled to read as God's word what we know well God never said. For example, I was compelled last Sunday to read the impudent charge of malice and murder which that baleful arch-pope Samuel brought (1 Sam. xv.) against God. "Samuel said unto Saul, thus saith the Lord of Hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, (centuries ago). . . . Now go and smite Amalek and utterly destroy all that they have and spare them

not ; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass." I am very sure that holy Samuel said all that, and equally sure that, when he said it, his holiness was fibbing stupendously. I was also compelled to read in that chapter, "The Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent ; for he is not a man that he should repent." "Then came the word of the Lord to Samuel saying, it repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king." "And the Lord repented that he had made Saul king over Israel." Can any of the bishops unfeignedly believe all this, even on the word of two Samuels, soapless and saponaceous?

Next comes the statement by the bishop of a deacon's duties, followed by the question, "Will you do this gladly and willingly?" Mr Voysey answered, "I will do so, by the help of God." Is our wise Editor in possession of any evidence that Mr Voysey ever for one day neglected to fulfil these duties? Let it be observed that in the bishop's complete statement of them, not a word is said about its being a deacon's duty to be of the same opinion with bishops, not even if they be editors ; nor is he required to enquire or to know anything in general or in particular about their opinions.

(e) The next question is, "Will you apply all your diligence to frame and fashion your own lives, and the lives of your families, according to the Doctrine of Christ ; and to make both yourselves and them, as much as in you lieth, wholesome examples of the flock of Christ?" Mr Voysey answered, "I will so do, the Lord being my helper."

Does the penetrating Editor find anything dishonest or immoral in this reply of the wicked Voysey? Or does he know, or can he coin, any scandal about that gentleman's family which can keep in countenance his own abominable and public slander of him?

(f) Once more : the bishop demands, "Will you

reverently obey your Ordinary and other chief Ministers of the Church, and them to whom the charge and government over you is committed, following with a glad mind and will their godly admonitions?" Mr Voysey answered, "I will endeavour myself, the Lord being my helper."

No more questions or professions; the ordination of the deacon followed immediately. If the Unitarian Editor cannot find a justification of his accusations against Mr Voysey in the matter of this final profession, it is clear that he will find it nowhere in this solemn service of the first ordination. Before we press the argument farther, it seems best to run rapidly over the vows and professions of the second ordination, as we shall then have the whole matter before us, and give this groaning Editor a wider chance of shelter.

In this, after some due formalities and a collect, the epistle, Ephesians iv. 7. . . is read, wherein are enumerated the gifts to men of him who led captivity captive, in the shape of church ministers, which are described as Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors, and Teachers. No priests! let that be well weighed. No priests! yet surely, if the Church of England had intended to assert priesthood, in the old Pagan and Jewish sense of sacrificers, mediators, conjurers, necromancers, and pardoners, she would have chosen a passage of Scripture for the ordination service of priests, in which at least the old word priest occurs. Then follows either the gospel Matt. ix. 36, or that John x. i., in neither of which is mention made of any functionary but the shepherd. Next comes the bishop's address, most beautiful and impressive, on the duties of the office about to be assumed; but neither priest nor priesthood, nor anything priestly, no, not a single syllable, defiles the Christian purity of the long allocution. "We exhort you, that ye have in remembrance into how high a dignity, and to how weighty an office and charge ye are called; that is to say, to



be Messengers, Watchmen, and Stewards of the Lord." That is the whole definition of the office. The address being at an end, the first interrogation of the ordinal is uttered thus,—and mark I pray you the redoubled solemnity and awe which enchain the eyes of our pious and admiring Editor—(g) "Do you think in your heart that you be truly called, according to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the order of this United Church of England and Ireland, to the Order and Ministry of Priesthood?" Ah! poisoning word, you may say, forced after all into the teeth of that vanquished Protestant shepherd! Ah! mark of the Beast, for centuries more stamped on a web so beautiful! Hush, Hush! 'Tis but a harmless word; it comes without evil meaning; it is nowhere defined in all the Church's formularies; you know priest is merely presbyter! Woe! Woe! You may quibble on priest and presbyter; but that fatal priesthood will be claimed as the print of the cloven foot on a page otherwise so glorious!

The reply of Mr Voysey was—"I think it!" Will our Editor say that he did not think it? Will he point out a syllable of the eloquent address he had just heard, to which he did not assent, with all his heart and soul? There is no stipulation in it that the candidates were to come to bishops for their learning or opinions: they were bid to seek both will and ability from God alone in the study of the scriptures; not a syllable uttered about creeds or articles, either parliamentary or editorial! Of course Mr Voysey, cordially hating the word priesthood, had to content himself with the non-natural translation of it into eldership, or presbyterate, and he was thankful to have no definition more offensive proposed to him; nor was he ever called upon to undertake the office in the old Judæo-Pagan meaning.

(h) Then follows the glorious propounding of

that profession and vow which is the Magna-Charta of our protestant Broad-churchmanship, the passport of immunity from all tax and all homage to priest-craft, preacher-craft, professor-craft, and editor-craft of every hue, dignified or undignified. "Are you persuaded that the holy Scriptures contain sufficiently all Doctrine required of necessity for eternal salvation, through faith in Jesus Christ? And are you determined out of the said Scriptures to instruct the people committed to your charge, and to teach nothing, as required of necessity to eternal salvation, but that which you shall be persuaded may be concluded and proved by the Scripture?" The answer of this wicked Voysey was, "I am so persuaded, and have so determined, by God's grace." The dishonest wretch! Does he not well deserve to have suffered the loss of his bread and the spoiling of his goods, by his wilful error and obstinacy in honouring the sacredness of that vow so much more than what in his conscience he believed to be traditions of the elders, and inventions of men, in creeds and articles, in acts of councils and parliaments, and in systems of theology?

(i) The Bishop next proceeded thus:—"Will you then give your faithful diligence always so to minister the Doctrine and Sacraments, and the Discipline of Christ, as the Lord hath commanded, and as this Church and Realm hath received the same, according to the Commandments of God, so that you may teach the people committed to your Cure and Charge with all diligence to keep and observe the same? The candidate answered, "I will do so, by the help of the Lord."

We proceed rapidly with what remains.

(j) *The Bishop*.—"Will you be ready, with all faithful diligence, to banish and drive away all erroneous and strange doctrines contrary to God's word; and to use both publick and private monitions

and exhortations, as well to the sick as to the whole, within your Cures, as need shall require, and occasion shall be given?" *Answer*.—"I will, the Lord being my helper."

Observe in (*i*) and (*j*) the important restrictions, "according to the commandments of God," and "contrary to God's word."

(*k*) *The Bishop*.—"Will you be diligent in Prayers, and in reading of the Holy Scriptures, and in such studies as help to the knowledge of the same, laying aside the study of the world and the flesh?" *Answer*.—"I will endeavour myself so to do, the Lord being my helper."

(*l*) *The Bishop*.—"Will you be diligent to frame and fashion your own selves and your families, according to the Doctrine of Christ; and to make both yourselves and them, as much as in you lieth, wholesome examples and patterns to the flock of Christ?" *Answer*.—"I will apply myself thereto, the Lord being my helper."

(*m*) *The Bishop*.—"Will you maintain and set forward, as much as lieth in you, quietness, peace, and love, among all Christian people, and especially among them that are, or shall be, committed to your charge?" *Answer*.—"I will do so, the Lord being my helper."

In all the above Mr Voysey pledged himself neither to believe nor to teach any truth, but what he should find by study of the scriptures.

(*n*) Finally the Bishop demands.—"Will you reverently obey your Ordinary, and other chief Ministers, unto whom is committed the charge and government over you; following with a glad mind and will their godly admonitions, and submitting yourselves to their godly judgments?" *Answer*.—"I will so do, the Lord being my helper."

This differs from (*f*) at the close of the former ordination, in being a vow of submission to the

godly judgments as well as godly admonitions of superiors.

The vows (*f*) and (*n*) are the only ones from which the Editor can attempt to justify his charge of dishonesty against Mr Voysey. It is certain that the latter did not submit to the admonition of his Archbishop, when his Grace advised him not to publish his sermons. The question presents itself here, is there any point, or is there no point, at which a clergyman may without clerical dishonesty disregard the admonition of his bishop? I think there is one, and only one point, the point of conscience, at which this dishonour can be evaded; and at that point only when the clergyman openly appeals from the admonition to the judgment of his superiors. If the clergyman, having, under the pressure of sovereign conscience, felt it his duty to disregard an admonition, publicly and manfully appeals from bishops admonishing to bishops in judgment according to the law of the land, with a determination to fulfil his ordination vow by submitting to that judgment, he may be unwise and foolish in his procedure, but I contend that he is neither dishonest nor immoral; and the man who anonymously charges him with dishonesty and immorality, for so working out the reconciliation of his conscience and ordination vow, is a slanderer.

Nothing can be clearer than this, that in all our ordination vows, we reserve our right of appeal to conscience, holy scripture, and the law of England. The popular notion is that we are under a kind of military bondage to a certain shadowy figment made up of dead men, and called the Church, whose word of command we obey without appeal, or any consideration of reason or consequences. The truth is, that we contract no allegiance to dead men at all, nor to any church but the living church of this Realm, of which bishops and dignitaries are a very insignificant fraction, as to numbers and final authority.

The vulgar, who have never examined for themselves to what we are bound by our ordination vows, will applaud the calumny of the Unitarian editor. That he knows well; and I affirm that his article is all the more malignant for the certainty of its success among the ignorant crowd. The career of Mr Voysey has been truth, manliness, and honour, from beginning to end.

The effect intended to be produced by this leading article is that, besides the guilt of subscribing the thirty-nine articles, and using the liturgy of the Church, which Unitarians can hardly help ascribing to those of us who are not under the bondage of the old traditionary theology, there was a special dishonesty in Mr Voysey's presenting himself for ordination, when he was convinced that much of what his boyhood had been taught was erroneous, a dishonesty in what he did and said in that ordination service. We have confessed the painful difficulty to which every educated candidate for orders is compelled by a law, once reasonable, but now alike cruel to the bishops and their clergy, to submit concerning unfeigned belief of all the Scriptures. Passing that, Mr Voysey said nothing that in his conscience he did not believe; he bound himself there in the professions and vows of that special service to no theory or dogma; he engaged himself to acceptance of no statement of divine truth beyond what he should himself conclude from the study of the bible; he placed himself under no obligation that he intended to evade; nor did he make a single promise which he did not purpose and persevere, like an honourable man, to fulfil. He believed that he could better serve both God and man by contending for what he found to be the truth, inside the church, than out of it; he hoped that he might nobly be, as others had been, the instrument under God of extending Christian charity and free enquiry in theology; he never

gave a pledge that he would not try to extend them; and he made his effort, not wisely perhaps for himself and his family, but certainly not after the fashion of this small editorial attempt to calumniate him, meanly, anonymously, sophistically. He printed with his name what he preached, like a brave man; he gave reasons for his opinions which honestly satisfied his judgment and his conscience; he fully allowed to others the liberty of either answering or prosecuting him; he fought his battle before his judges with arguments which have yet to be confuted, and he has loyally submitted to their judgment.

Let me now say a word about the dishonesty of Broad-churchmen in general. Few people choose to talk about theology; of that few the majority agree that we are dishonest men, if we remain in our benefices. Just so among Roman Catholics, few choose to think or speak on religious questions; but nearly all agree that Protestants are dishonest men, in pretending to hold the Catholic creeds, while they rebel utterly against the Catholic church. A devout Romanist is shocked and amazed at our hypocrisy and dishonesty in saying every Sunday, "I believe One Catholic and Apostolic Church." To his conscience this appears an immoral and insolent abuse of the plainest terms of human speech. We laugh at his horror justly: we know that we employ the words in their literal and grammatical meaning. We mean what we say, and say what we mean. The creed propounds no definition of the word church, nor of the terms Catholic or Apostolic; we have a right to restrict the term church to a denotation which excludes all the compelling authority of their Popes, their Fathers, and their Councils. They call this trifling and quibbling with sacred truth: we justly call it an accurate and scientific use of words. The vulgar can never see, what is the foundation of all

logical precision of language, the difference between what we call the denotation and the connotation of a term.

In books of rigorous science all mere connotations of words are thrown away—each term is used with a fixed denotation, determined by definition, and all that is required for truth and honesty in a writer or a speaker, is that he uses the same term always with the denotation to which his clear definition binds him.

The Broad-Churchman insists, as he has a right to do, upon rigorous denotations of terms in the bond of creeds and formularies which he has subscribed: all vague connotations he throws away in the true spirit of science, for his theology is the theory of God's revelations of Himself to man, that is, theological science, not monkish quibbles and legendary moonshine. In this spirit Mr Voysey has a right to read the Church's bond; and the counsel for the prosecution were compelled to confess, facing the logic of the case, that he had nowhere either affirmed what the church's bond denies, nor denied what it affirms. The court of Privy Council is not a tribunal of theological science: to that high court Mr Voysey has submitted in all that is practical, as he was bound to do; but mentally, and practically too, in the field of action from which their judgment does not exclude him, which is simply that of an unbeneficed presbyter of the Church of England, as legally eligible to a bishopric as the best of them, he appeals to the higher tribunal of theological truth, which, as sure as the tide is flowing, will finally reverse every decision of every Privy Council which is not rigorously scientific. The majesty of English thought, serenely enthroned on the broad foreheads of our men of science, can patiently wait along with Mr Voysey, till Privy Councils can afford to sit and speak every day in their noblest robes of philosophic accuracy. They cannot often wear in court at present anything

purser than the ermine of legal equity, which determines by a fine analysis, to which none but the most learned lawyers can attain, the resultant, for a given time  $t$ , of settled rights, of popular ignorance, and of human progress.

For my part, in reading the church's formularies in both the liturgy and articles, I find no difficulty in taking every sentence in a meaning literal and grammatical, yet perfectly rational, nor have I ever pledged myself to read them irrationally or nonsensically. I reject no definition which is precisely given in them, no fact plainly asserted in them, nor any inference explicitly drawn in them; yet I find it perfectly easy, by confining the terms undefined to a strict and simple denotation, to read every word, without a quibble of any kind, into sense and science. Something of this mode of honestly construing our formularies may be seen in the tracts by "A Country Parson," in Scott's series, entitled, "The Creeds and the Thirty-Nine Articles, their Sense and their Non-sense." If any of those scribblers in papers, little and big, who are so fluent in their abuse of Broad-church dishonesty wish to catch the Broad-churchman *in delicto*, I advise them to study that book. The successful exposure of the dishonesty there perpetrated, will be of more value to the priests and the Pharisees than a score of tirades in barren generalities, and prate about principles neither granted, postulated, nor proved.

Something should be added, in an examination of the ordination services, on the grand Finale of priest manufacturing. So long as the people of England compel their bishops to employ that old popish formula in ordination, they have no right to complain of any deluge of ancient priestcraft and superstition that may cover the land. No embankment raised against it is of any value, while that floodgate is left open. In spite of the protestant character of



our articles, and even of our ordination services up to this all dominant conclusion, our High-churchmen have mostly the best of the argument to a popular audience about the prayer-book, in affirming that priestly privilege and power in the Anglican communion are precisely what they are in the Catholic, both Greek and Roman.

From Broad-churchmen, who spurn with scorn unutterable the insinuation that they have ever accepted from a bishop the power either to forgive or to retain the sin of any man against his Maker, it may fairly be demanded, how they read in a literal and grammatical sense without a quibble this most portentous formula: "whose sins thou dost forgive they are forgiven, whose sins thou dost retain, they are retained." I reply for myself, that I read it by taking as much liberty with the letter as the High-churchman takes. He reads it thus—and he has a perfect right to do so, till the people of England bar out his popish connotation by a strict definition—"whose sins against God's laws thou dost forgive, they are forgiven by God; whose sins against God's laws thou dost retain, they are retained, *i.e.*, unforgiven, by God." It is simple and unambiguous. Now I read it thus: "Whose sins against the church's laws, (in matters of ritual, creed, and external order involving no question of morals) thou dost forgive, they are forgiven by the church; whose sins against the church's laws thou dost retain, they are retained by the church." This is equally literal and grammatical with the other reading, and equally unambiguous. I have received from the bishop who ordained me this power both of forgiving and retaining. For example, I can forgive any man whom I consider to be in a proper frame of mind his sins against church law in matters of fast or festival. Suppose that he has eaten bacon on a Friday, or the last of his wife's stock of mince-pies on Ash-Wednesday;

suppose that he has gone to the Methodist Chapel ; suppose that he is not quite sound about the non-human paternity of Jesus Christ, and has the presumption to say that St. Luke in his cautious phrases and his genealogy was evidently infirm in his orthodoxy on that point—then, if that man presents himself as a god-father, and is indistinct in his answer about the Creed, it is in my power, by virtue of my ordination, to forgive him such sins against mother-church ; and if I know him to be a moral and religious man, I can thoroughly absolve him, and he will be as good a god-father as the Pope himself can make. I can also retain sins against the church's laws. I can turn an unworthy man away from the font or from the communion table: if he has utterly neglected the religious training of his child, I can punish him by various means, such as delaying for three years the privilege of confirmation. I am as proud of my power of absolving and of retaining sin as any priest alive. But I am not such a lunatic as to fancy that I can forgive a man his sins against God's moral and physical laws. If he is a drunkard who beggars himself and his family, or is injured in that state by his own cart-wheel, or shattered by delirium tremens, however orthodox and truly penitent he may be, neither my absolution, nor that of all the bishops and priests on earth, can diminish by one feather's weight the amount of penalty and retribution which God will surely for that sin lay upon him in mind, body, and estate.

Here let it not be pretended that in my reading of the ordination formula I am making a distinction unwarranted by the church, between sins against God's moral laws, and sins against laws of her making. Is there any doubt, that when our prayer book was put together there were priests enough in our church, as there are in all Roman Catholic lands, inclined to impose on penitents far heavier penance for violation

of church-law in matters of fast or festival, of church-going or schismatical proclivity, than for drunkenness, lies, and dishonesty? If there is no such doubt, my distinction is both a valid and a weighty one.

Few things in theology are so amusing as the attempts of high-church Divines who shrink from the impious claims of pardoning power made by the full-blown priest, to establish a claim of something less, yet awfully important, as the clerical contribution to God's work in forgiveness of the penitent. Dr. Goulburn, prebendary of St. Paul's, is here inimitable. In his office of Holy Communion, 4th edition, 1865, he profoundly remarks: "of course, it cannot be disputed that truth is truth, whoever speaks it; any true disciple of Christ, without being an ordained minister, may raise the drooping spirit of another by pointing him to the evangelical promises which assure pardon to the penitent and believing, and which the faithfulness of God stands engaged to fulfil: but the minister alone can proclaim with authority the message of reconciliation. Others may *tell* it, may point it out in scripture; he alone can *pronounce* it—such is the significant word employed in our rubric."

"*How charming is Divine-philosophy!*" And how lucky our Church of England, in having dignitaries of Dr. Goulburn's power, and bishops like Dr. Wilberforce, discerning enough to choose the Goulburns for their examining chaplains!

CROFT RECTORY, NEAR WARRINGTON.

*July 10, 1871.*