

Conscientious Clerical Nonconformity

by

**Thomas
Binney**

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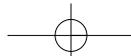
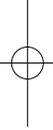
BY THE

REV. THOMAS BINNEY.

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BY THE

REV. THOMAS BINNEY.

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THE following Address was originally delivered at the institution of the Rev. R. H. Herschell, a converted Jew, as the Minister of Chadwell Street Chapel, Pentonville. This will account to the reader for the allusions in its introductory paragraphs, and indeed for the subject of it being selected for discussion; in some degree, also, for the construction of the argument.

Conscientious Clerical Nonconformity.

EVANGELICAL Nonconformity is a stand not merely for the claims of Scripture, and the supremacy of Christ—not merely for the liberty of all to consult his will, and to follow their convictions, and thus to render to Him a reasonable service; but it is a stand for the recognition of all as Christian brethren, “who hold the head;” it is a stand for mutual indulgence to secondary differences, grounded on agreement in what is supreme; it is a stand for substantial and visible unity, by being a stand for universal Christian communion—for the unrestricted intercourse of ministers and churches, in spite of the diversity of forms of discipline.* This is the spirit of evangelical dissent. It is equally opposed to imposition and exclusiveness; to the dictates of power, and the selfishness of party. It is alike intolerant to the mere human authority that would either fetter the mind or limit the affections. It acknowledges Christ as the Lord of both. It receives as true whatever He teaches. It loves as brethren all that are like Him. It bows before Him as the *only Potentate*. It cannot receive whom He rejects. It dare not disown whom He has received.

These, and kindred principles, it has often been my privilege, in common with many of my ministerial brethren, to advocate and enforce. Acting upon them, some of us are here this day. The occasion, and the service, are somewhat peculiar. After briefly adverting to one or two circumstances which it would seem necessary to notice, I propose to examine and discuss a subject, which no one, I imagine, will consider inappropriate.

The gentleman who in future will occupy this place, and speak unto those that ‘*may resort hither,*’ was by birth a Jew. He was carefully educated in the Jews’ religion; his parents and relatives not only

* ‘Dissent not Schism,’ p. 70, 8vo edition.

being ‘*devout persons,*’ according to the principles of their ancient faith, but some of them of chief account in the Synagogue. When a

very young man, he was led to examine the claims of Christianity,—or rather, to speak more scripturally, the ‘*God of his fathers,*’ who at ‘*first commanded the light to shine in the darkness, shined into his heart,*’ disturbed its repose, and revealed its corruption, and thus led him at once to see his necessities, and to inquire anxiously how they could be met. He did not find in the surviving fragments of Jewish institutions what satisfied or allayed that hunger of the heart which Divine mercy had excited within him. The desire for peace—peace of conscience—pressed upon and impelled him as with the force of an appetite. He inwardly longed, though he knew it not, for the blessings typified to the ‘*church in the wilderness,*’ by the water from the rock, and the manna from heaven. He was wishing for, and ‘*feeling after,*’ that ‘*better hope,*’ which the tabernacle and the priesthood introduced ‘*in a figure.*’ In this state of mind he sought, in his ignorance, advice and direction from a dignified Romanist. The popish archbishop held out to him the crucifix. His whole soul within him revolted. It was seeking for something congenial with itself; its very essence was stirred; all its affections were ‘*kindled together,*’ it was ‘*thirsting after God;*’ ‘*longing to know where it might find Him, that it might come even to his seat;*’ and it was met with a ‘*nehushtan*’—a piece of brass!

He narrowly escaped, however, attempts which were subsequently made to detain him. But he did escape, and coming to England, obtained the friendship of some members of the Established Church, who placed before him the simple elements of ‘*the glorious gospel of the blessed God,*’—‘*the cross of Christ*’—not the crucifix;—that ‘*which is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*’ In this truth our inquirer discovered what he needed and sought. He soon ‘*submitted to the righteousness of God.*’ He received ‘*the Apostle and High Priest of our profession.*’ He imbibed the spirit, and could appreciate the language, of one who was also ‘*of the stock of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews*’—‘*What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I*

may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the

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righteousness which is of God by faith.' And to this point, my brethren, Jew and Gentile must alike come, who are seeking '*the rest, wherewith God causes his people to rest.*' At the foot of the cross they can embrace each other, rejoicing in Him who is the '*author*' to each of '*a common salvation.*' '*For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments, contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; and that he might reconcile both unto God, in one body, by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby; and came and preached peace to us that were afar off, and to THEM that were nigh. For through Him we both have access by one spirit unto the Father.*'

Professing '*repentance towards God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ,*' our brother was admitted into the Christian church by the rite of baptism, which he received according to the forms of the episcopal branch of it. His first friends were all ministers or members of the Establishment. With such he formed many and endeared connections. In the midst of them he has spent several years; and in the course of these years has been much engaged in conducting the exercises of domestic worship, in expounding the Scriptures at such services, '*where many have often been gathered together,*' and even in attending, in a more public manner, to the moral and spiritual wants of a neighbourhood. Under all the circumstances, nothing certainly would have seemed so natural, as that he should have taken orders in the national church. To this step he was repeatedly urged. His immediate friends made arrangements for the purpose. Much lay upon the side of conformity; much to attract, if not to tempt him. One thing, however, in *his* case, was not there—'*a good conscience,*'—and for the sake of that, he dissented, and is here.

II.

After this statement, it cannot, I think, by anyone be considered improper to investigate the subject of clerical conformity to the Church

of England. Many ministers, who are said to dissent from it, never were in it, and if they had, some of them at least would not likely have served at its altars. They have grown up in their state of separation, and may be suspected, when enumerating their grounds of dissent, to be only doing what is very natural—fortifying the position in which they find themselves, without suspecting that the accident of birth, or the force and concurrence of early circumstances, might have

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made them as eager on the other side. In all churches there are of very necessity such men—men who are what they are, not from personal and independent election, not from thought, not because they voluntarily decided their position, but because their position decided *them*. Multitudes of men are standing where they do, just and merely because they could not help it; or because considerations decided their choice, which they do not like to remember or admit, or which, it may be, they do not believe. ‘*The heart,*’ we are (often reminded, ‘*is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked,*’ and there can be no doubt, that those who are loudest in the proclamation of the malady, are often its subjects without being aware of it. It is still true, however, that many, both in the Church and out of it, have fairly investigated the ground they occupy—occupy alike from original connections—and are prepared to defend it as sincerely and solidly as if it had been assumed at first from conviction. It is also true, that some Churchmen become Dissenters, and some Dissenters become Churchmen; *they* must be supposed to have examined the matter, and to have acted from reasons which they are ready to avow. And it is further true, that some among the sects have been so placed, as to have had every inducement to take orders:—to have had circumstances and influences operating upon them, urging them to enter the ministry of the Establishment; but who, in spite of them all, have been compelled to conclude that they *could not do it*. It is this case that I wish to examine. I wish to realize the position and the feelings of such a person, and to ascertain, if possible, the why and the wherefore he could not conform.

In doing this, let it be understood that I shall describe only an imaginary character; that is, I shall endeavour to associate with a

particular individual of *evangelical sentiments*, everything I can think of as likely to induce him to take orders; I shall put these things in the strongest way against his coalescing with dissenters and dissent: and I shall then inquire, if, in his case, there 'be not one other thing, just one, of power enough to compel him to act in an opposite manner to that which he would willingly find reasons to pursue. I do not know that all that I am going to mention ever met, in their combined influence, on anyone mind, and therefore I call the character imaginary; but, that each of the particulars does affect, more or less, separate persons, will be generally admitted, and hence, it must be remembered, that what fancy combines, fact furnishes, and, therefore, that the supposed case, in its several parts, is a living reality.

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Let us suppose, then, in the first place, that our anxious inquirer has no objection to the principle of establishments. Let us imagine that he could express himself honestly in such terms as these:— 'Every man ought to rise into life with an impression in favour of all the institutions of that nation into which he is born; attachment to them should be of the nature of a prejudice; he should take for granted their perfect propriety, *until he discovers what forces him to doubt it.* I am an Englishman, and as such, have imbibed from my birth a respect and reverence for the institutions of my country. They embody the wisdom of past ages. They have received the sanction of successive generations. Genius and virtue have alike and often spoken in their praise. I am not forbidden to investigate their claims, nor to admit the possibility of lofty intellects and holy men having consecrated an error; and, misled by the prejudices or blinded by the ignorance of their times, being seduced into the admiration of political blunders and ecclesiastical mistakes; still, I do feel that it is not becoming hastily to conclude that this has been the case. Modesty certainly would seem to forbid it. I am bound, I think, as a Christian Englishman, as my first duty, to be a member of the Established Church, *unless there be weighty reasons against it*—reasons that would render dissent a duty, and conformity a sin. In the mere principle of an establishment I see no such reasons. Such an institution having been common to almost all nations, would seem to have in it some-

thing congenial to the elements of our nature—to the reason and the judgment, the wants and the sympathies, of social man. Such an institution having been sanctioned by God, it would seem to be impossible that, abstractly considered, its *principle* can have anything of evil in itself; and, as the maintenance of an establishment is the only way by which a nation, as such, can unequivocally express its reverence for religion—and as it would seem to be admirably adapted for preserving the unity and uniformity of the church, if so constituted as to be sufficiently comprehensive and catholic—I do not see that the principle of the institution should prevent my adherence;—I rather feel it to attract than repel.’

In the second place, let us imagine that the individual before us is alive and awake to all the secondary, secular advantages of adherence to the establishment, and especially to those which attach to clergymen. ‘The church,’ he may say, ‘as a national institution, has its national endowment. Its ministers are a recognised body in the state. They acquire by their office an admitted and respectable standing in

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society. Some of them are on a level with nobles and princes. Many are themselves persons of distinction. All are admissible into any circle, and are qualified for this, or in general are qualified, by the education they receive and the habits they cultivate. Why should I renounce what all this involves? When I ascend the summit of one of our cathedrals, and survey its vast and valuable domain—this, I reflect, and all similar property, belongs to the public of which I am a part; it belongs to it as a means to be employed for its advantage; it belongs, for positive and pecuniary benefit, to that class which is devoted to the securing for it the advantage in question. Of that class I may be one. That class my children may enter. Doing so, I, or they, may honourably possess, for our natural lives, a portion of that which, as belonging to the public, is already our patrimony. We may rise to the level of those favourites of fortune, who are separated from the masses of common humanity by the circumstance of birth: distinctions drawn by the very hand of nature may be annihilated or passed;—or if not (for such superiority can fall to few), lesser dignities, and more limited portions of the general stock of property and rank,

may become ours; they are open to competition; they may be won by us as well as by others, and may be as honourably attained as they may be openly enjoyed. Or if *this*, even, should not be—still, last, and lowest in the scale, simply *as a clergyman*, I shall possess a certain *status* in society. I shall have access to circles from which as a Dissenter I should be for ever excluded. I shall mingle naturally with the aristocratic and the educated—the classes and the characters who are distinguished by habits of cultivation and refinement. Members of the other recognised professions will recognise *me*; and, in that which will be my own, I shall meet with many illustrious by talents, eminent for virtue. of varied information, of solid learning, of high connections, of opulent fortune. I shall move among the people clothed with a recognised legal authority. I may visit in my official or professional character; but I shall neither be supposed nor expected to be familiar with the vulgar and the illiterate, the low and the ill-bred; nor shall I be confined for friends and associates to respectable shop-keepers, second-class merchants, or to a body of ministers—pious, excellent, worthy on the whole—but including many, who never *have* been, and never *can* be companions for gentlemen. Why should I sacrifice advantages like these? I see their force; I feel their attraction; I cannot but be alive and awake to their importance. If this be wrong, I am wrong, I fear, in common with all the world—wrong

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with many in the sects themselves who are eloquent and indignant at secular inducements having any influence in the sacred profession. Even in an establishment, when plain and poor, the ministry is contemptible; none of the higher classes, and few of those born to riches and refinement, dream of adopting it. And as to the sects, the families whose circumstances confer upon their children education and wealth, seldom, if ever, furnish a minister—so that, while *they* avoid the ministry because it presents to them no secular inducements, they abandon it to a class to whom it does! Why should I be ashamed of what everybody feels?

In the third place, let us suppose that the individual in question has not only no objection to episcopacy, to uniform rites. clerical habits, and liturgical forms, but that he positively prefers them all—prefers

them from reason, from association, and from taste. Let us imagine that he considers episcopal government as not only the natural result of the common sense principle of subordination and superintendency, which reason requires for the combined and harmonious action of numbers, but that it has for its *essence*, if not for its modern accidents and attributes, the presumed sanction of apostolic appointment and the admitted practice of the primitive church. Let us suppose that he thinks the *principle* of the system, simply considered as such; receives the homage of presbyteries and conferences, of boards and unions, and missionary societies. Let us suppose, that he sees nothing in gowns and scarfs but the becoming symbols of academic honour—nothing in the surplice—nothing in the varied robes of dignified priests and mitred prelates—in purple, scarlet, linen, and lawn—nothing but what is decent and decorous, appropriate to the sober and subdued splendour of a Protestant Church, and at least *not* inconsistent with '*the simplicity of Christ.*' Let us suppose, that with the perfect consciousness of possessing the ability for extemporary devotion, and with the calm hope that he could conduct it himself in sincerity and faith, he yet shrinks from the awful and perilous thing—from an engagement which he conceives to be difficult and oppressive, just in proportion as the mind is awake to what is to be done, and the heart fitted for doing it aright. Let us suppose, that with such feelings, and as a really spiritual and devout man, he finds a rest and a refuge for his soul as a worshipper, in the employment in public of liturgical forms. And let us still further imagine here, that his tastes and preferences are mostly met by the prayers and collects of the Established Church; that their language, at once simple and

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dignified—in general calm, but at times rising into the earnest and impassioned;—their brevity, as separate exercises of devotion—their variety and comprehensiveness, considered as a whole;—their allotment to the people of much that is vocal and active in the service: let us suppose, that all this draws and attracts him towards the establishment. Nor let him be insensible to the thrilling thought, that, in her worship, his lips utter the identical supplications, breathe his wants in the very words, glorify God in the same high and

hallowed hymns, that were heard in the services of the ancient church, or have swelled for centuries in the sacred edifices where they echo still. Nor let him be indifferent to the architecture and accidents of these edifices themselves; let habits and associations sanctify, as it were, their arches and pillars, their religious light, their grave aspect. Let him have learnt to admire the massiveness of some, of some the simplicity, of others the richness, of all the effect. Let him approve also and enjoy the artificial accompaniment to the human voice, which peals from the noblest of all instruments, filling the temple with the tide of sound, and filling the heart with the tide of emotion. Let all this, and all that is of a kind with this, be supposed and admitted; let the individual in question be so deeply affected by, and so feelingly alive to it, as almost to imagine that to divest religion and religious worship of such accessories, would be like stripping nature of her robes and coronet—of the colours of earth and the stars of heaven.

In the last place, let us suppose that the person we describe has no repugnance to the mere circumstance of subscription to a creed; that the principle of requiring a solemn, deliberate, public pledge of their adherence to ‘a form of sound words,’ from the candidates for office in a particular church, has his entire occurrence; and that hence, he has, and can have, no quarrel with the establishment on the ground, abstractedly, of its requiring his assent to *articles of faith of human composition*. On this matter, let us imagine that he might be tempted to express himself with freedom and warmth, and towards some individuals in ridicule or resentment. ‘I hold very cheap,’ we will suppose him to say, ‘I hold very cheap a great deal of the modern eloquent declaration upon this subject. “The Bible, and the Bible only,” whatever may be pretended, is *not* the religion of Protestants. *in fact*; it is not the religion of either churchmen or sectaries, or at least of the church or the sects *as such*. Each, whatever it may say, provides for the preservation, propagation, and defence, not of the Bible, but of its own view of it. It is for this that it builds its

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edifices, admits its ministers, and devotes its property; and not for the purpose of simply acting, or of continuing to act, on the “exclusive authority of Holy Scripture,”—“the right and duty of private judg-

ment,”—“the privilege and obligation of a Church of Christ,” Independently and always to consult nothing but the Lord’s will. They compel themselves, and they do their best to compel others, to consult something else. The very sects—advocate, as they may, “liberty of conscience,” “freedom from restraint in religious things,” “security from imposition of creeds and catechisms,”—as soon as ever they realize tangible property, they immediately betray that they do not mean, either that their successors shall go further than they, or that they in future shall surpass themselves. They bind themselves by a penalty to inquire no more. They legally unite and attach together certain property and certain opinions; they make the qualification for holding the one, the profession of parties that they hold the other; and they constitute the secular tribunals of the nation the protectors and guardians of the true faith. If I enter the Church, I must profess a creed, and myself and my people can never depart from it, except at the expense of our building and endowments, and the loss of *caste* in that particular community; and if I enter a sect, the principle is the same, though the things in jeopardy are of less value. The Bible only, is not trusted, Go where I may, I shall find myself in precisely the same circumstances. The little church, Independent or Baptist, in the village conventicle, can no more alter its creed *and keep its possessions*, without the sanction of an Act of Parliament, than can that church, whose highest ministers mingle and act in Parliament itself. Each alike does it at its peril. I do not object to this. Inconsistent as it may be with the professed principles of certain individuals of both parties, it is not so with mine, I consider the Church to be the keeper of the Scriptures, and the Living Witness of what they contain. She is bound to exact from her ministers and adherents the full recognition of Gospel truth, of so much at least as is essential and saving; and *every church*, however mean, ignorant, or obscure, acts for itself upon this principle. On the right and on the left, I shall be required to recognise it. I am willing to do so. I cannot but feel, however, that I would rather, if I could, do so in connection with an august body, that has something about it to inspire respect, something even to produce awe—a fair right, if any Protestant community has a

right, to claim, *as a body*, a real connection with apostolic times, and a direct descent from apostolic men—I would rather recognise the

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truths of the Gospel on my admission to orders in such a church, than in taking my ministerial standing in a sect whose *credenda* as to truth may be as “weighty,” but whose “bodily presence” in comparison is “contemptible.”

Time, I find, would fail me to introduce everything I once intended, to exhibit the variety and strength of inducement which may attract an individual towards the establishment. Enough, however, has probably been said to make it obvious that what would keep out of it such a person as has hitherto been described, must be something of extraordinary power of resistance. It will be our next business to discover, if possible, this something.

III.

If so many of the dissenting reasons for nonconformity are unfelt by our supposed type of clerical solicitude, *his* nonconformity, if he ultimately declares for it, must be forced upon him from other points. As he is not repelled by the mere act of conformity, we must examine if there be anything to repel him in the terms. Whatever may be the terms of lay churchmanship—whether, *in practice*, there be any or none—the terms of ministerial conformity are known, and a solemn profession of their acceptance exacted. We shall proceed to show what these terms are, and consider briefly what they involve.

Every individual who takes orders in the Established Church, or who, as a clergyman, enters, at any time, on a benefice, is required to sign the three articles of the thirty-sixth canon; that entire canon is as follows:—

‘No person shall hereafter be received into the ministry, nor either by institution or collation admitted to any ecclesiastical living, nor suffered to preach, to catechise, or to be a lecturer or reader of divinity in either university, or in any cathedral or collegiate church, city, or market-town, parish-church, chapel, or in any other place within this realm, except he be licensed either by the archbishop, or by the bishop of the diocese where he is to be placed, under their hands and seals, or by one of the two universities, under their seal likewise; and except he shall first subscribe to these three articles following, in such manner and sort as we have here appointed,

'1. That the King's Majesty, under God, is the only supreme governor of this realm, and of all other his highness's dominions and countries, as well in all spiritual or ecclesiastical things or causes, as temporal, and that no foreign prince, person, prelate, state or potentate hath, or ought to have, any jurisdiction, power, superiority, pre-eminence, or authority, ecclesiastical or spiritual, within his Majesty's said realms, dominions, and countries,

'2. That the Book of Common Prayer, and of ordering of bishops, priests, and

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deacons, containeth in it nothing contrary to the Word of God, and that it may lawfully so be used; and that he himself will use the form in the said book prescribed, in public prayer, and in administration of the sacraments, and none other.

'3. That he alloweth the book of articles of religion agreed upon by the archbishops and bishops of both provinces, and the whole clergy in the convocation holden at London in the year of our Lord God one thousand five hundred and sixty-two; and that he acknowledgeth all and every the articles therein contained, being in number nine and thirty, besides the ratification, to be agreeable to the Word of God.

'To these three articles whosoever shall subscribe, he shall, for the avoiding of all ambiguities, subscribe in this order and form of words, setting down both his Christian and surname, viz, *I, N.N., do willingly and ex animo subscribe to these three articles above mentioned, and to all things that are contained in them.* And if any bishop shall ordain, admit, or license any, as is aforesaid, except he first have subscribed in manner and form as here we have appointed, he shall be suspended from giving of orders and licenses to preach, for the space of twelve months. But if either of the universities shall offend therein, we leave them to the danger of the law, and his Majesty's censure.'

Upon this we remark, that the prescribed and enforced form of subscription is, you will observe, singularly distinct, unequivocal, and solemn. One 'order and form of words' are to be used by the subscriber, *and no other.* He is to set down at length his Christian and surname, and to declare that willingly, and *ex animo*—that is, sincerely—with all his heart, from his very soul—'he subscribes to the three articles of the canon, and *to all things that are contained in them.*' And it is further to be observed, that this precise form is so scrupulously exacted, for the very purpose, it is said, of '*avoiding all ambiguities.*' As the subscription is that of a minister of religion in the act of qualifying for his sacred duties, imposed upon him by spiritual authority, with a view to the preservation of the Church of God from erroneous doctrine—we may fairly consider the entire procedure as partaking of the nature of a religious solemnity, and the

language as equivalent to the apostolical appeal, '*I call God for a record upon my soul.*'

Among the things subscribed in these articles are the three following:—That the king is supreme in spiritual or ecclesiastical things:—That nothing—no one thing—in the Book of Common Prayer, and of ordering (that is of ordaining) bishops, priests, and deacons, is contrary to the Work of God;—and that all and every of the thirty-nine articles are agreeable to the Word of God.

The manner in which these articles are enforced by the person recognised in the canon as the supreme governor of the Church; and the way in which he wills them to be interpreted, may be seen by the

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following 'declaration,' by which they are preceded, when received, as it were, by the clerical subscriber, from the royal hand.

'Being by God's ordinance, according to our just title, *Defender of the Faith, and Supreme Governor of the Church, within these our dominions*, We hold it most agreeable to this our kingly office, and our own religious zeal, to conserve and maintain the church committed to our charge, in unity of true religion, and in the bond of peace; and not to suffer unnecessary disputations, altercations, or questions to be raised, which may nourish faction both in the Church and Commonwealth. We have therefore, upon mature deliberation, and with the advice of so many of our bishops as might conveniently be called together, thought fit to make this declaration following:—

'That the articles of the Church of England (which have been allowed and authorised heretofore, and which our clergy generally have subscribed unto) do contain the true doctrine of the Church of England agreeable to God's Word: which we do therefore ratify and confirm, requiring all our loving subjects to continue in the uniform profession thereof, *and prohibiting the least difference from the said articles*; which to that end we command to be new printed, and this our declaration to be published therewith,

'That we are supreme governor of the Church of England: and that if any difference arise about the external policy, concerning the injunctions, canons, and other constitutions whatsoever thereto belonging, the clergy in their convocation is to order and settle them, having first obtained leave under our broad seal so to do; and we approving their said ordinances and constitutions; providing that none be made contrary to the laws and customs of the land.

'That out of our princely care that the churchmen may do the work which is proper unto them, the bishops and clergy, from time to time in convocation, upon their humble desire, shall have licence under our broad seal to deliberate of, and to do all such things, as, being made plain by them, and assented unto by us, shall concern the settled continuance of the doctrine and discipline of the Church of England, now

established; *from which we will not endure any varying or departing in the least degree.*

‘That for the present, though some differences have been ill raised, yet we take comfort in this, that all clergymen within our realm have always most willingly subscribed to the articles established; which is an argument to us that they all agree in the true, usual, literal meaning of the said articles; and that even in those curious points, in which the present differences lie, men of all sorts take the articles of the Church of England to be for them; which is an argument again that none of them intend any desertion of the articles established.

‘That therefore in these both curious and unhappy differences, which have for so many hundred years, in different times and places, exercised the Church of Christ, we will that all further curious search be laid aside, and these disputes shut up in God’s promises, as they be generally set forth to us in the Holy Scriptures, and the general meaning of the Articles of the Church of England according to them. *And that no man hereafter shall either print, or preach, to draw the Article aside any way, but shall submit to it in the plain and full meaning thereof; and shall not put his own*

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sense or comment to be the meaning of the Article, but shall take it in the literal and grammatical sense.

‘That if any public reader in either of our universities, or any head or master of a college, or any other person respectively in either of them, shall affix any new sense to any article, or shall publicly read, determine, or hold any public disputation, or suffer any such to be held either way, in either the universities or colleges respectively; or if any divine in the universities shall preach or print anything either way, other than is already established in convocation with our royal assent; he, or they the offenders, shall be liable to our displeasure, and the Church’s censure in our commission ecclesiastical, as well as any other: and we will see there shall be due execution upon them.’

I quote this entire, for though printed in the Prayer Book, it is seldom read; and it ought to be read in order to understand what clergymen subscribe to in admitting the king’s spiritual supremacy. To us, and others who have not subscribed to any such thing, the whole of the above is simply ridiculous. To a clergyman, however, it is another matter. He has distinctly and solemnly, and in the presence of God, recognized the *right* of the king’s majesty to speak to him thus. He has no alternative but to listen and obey. The only thing, however, that we wish to remark in the document is this, that it strictly enjoins the following manner of interpreting the Articles:—‘No man hereafter shall either print or preach, to draw

the Article aside any way, but shall submit to it in the plain and full meaning thereof; and shall not put his own sense or comment to be the meaning of the Article, but shall take it in the literal and grammatical sense.'

The Articles, then, admitted in the act of subscription to be *all true*, are here explained to be admitted *as true, in their 'plain, literal, and grammatical sense.'* In a similar manner, the same authority submitted to as supreme by the clerical subscriber, enjoins on him the reception of *all the canons*. The following are his words printed at the end of them. We may just intimate that they amount in all to One Hundred and Forty-one.

'We of our princely inclination and royal care for the maintenance of the present state and government of the Church of England, by the laws of this our realm now settled and established, having diligently, with great contentment and comfort, read and considered of all these their said canons, orders, ordinances, and constitutions, agreed upon, as is before expressed; and finding the same such as we are persuaded will be very profitable, not only to our clergy, but to the whole church of this our kingdom, and to all the true members of it, if they be well observed have therefore *for us, our heirs, and lawful Successors*, of our especial grace, certain knowledge, and mere motion, given, and by these presents do give our royal assent, according to

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the form of the said statute or Act of Parliament aforesaid, to all and every of the said canons, orders, ordinances, and constitutions, and to all and everything in them contained, as they are before written.

'And furthermore, we do not only by our said prerogative royal, and supreme authority in causes ecclesiastical, *ratify, confirm and establish*, by these our letters patent, *the said canons, orders, ordinances, and constitutions and all and everything in them contained*, as is aforesaid; but do likewise propound, publish, and straightway enjoin and command by our said authority, and by these our letters patent, the same to be diligently observed, executed, and equally kept by all our loving subjects, of this our kingdom, both within the provinces of Canterbury and York, in all points wherein they do or may concern every or any of them, according to this our will and pleasure hereby signified and expressed; and that likewise, for the better observation of them, every minister, by what name or title soever he be called, shall in the parish church or chapel, where he hath charge, read all the said canons, orders, ordinances, and constitutions, once every year, upon some Sundays or Holy-days, in the afternoon before divine service, dividing the same in such sort, as that the one half may be read one day, and the other another day; the book of the said canons to be provided at the charge of the parish, betwixt this and the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord God next ensuing; straightly charging and commanding all archbishops, bishops, and all other that exercise any ecclesiastical jurisdiction within this realm, every man in his place, to see, and procure, (so much as in them lieth) *all and every of the same*

canons, orders, ordinances, and constitutions, to be in all points duly observed; not sparing to execute the penalties in them severally mentioned, upon any that shall wittingly or wilfully break or neglect to observe the same, as they tender the honour of God, the peace of the Church, the tranquillity of the kingdom, and their duties and service to us their king and sovereign.'

It would thus seem that the terms and conditions of clerical conformity in the Church of England are these:—FIRST, *the admission of the Canons*, as containing the law of Ecclesiastical obedience, as expressive, moreover, of certain points of Ecclesiastical opinion, and illustrative of the spirit of the Church as a Church. SECOND, *the admission of the Articles*, everyone of them, in their 'grammatical sense,' as being 'agreeable to the word of God,' and constituting the standard of religious belief. THIRD, *the admission of the Prayer Book*, every part of it, its liturgy and offices; *and the admission of the several forms of ordination and consecration*, as containing in them 'nothing contrary to the word of God,' and accepted as the exclusive rule for the performance of all public clerical duty.

If I have not misinterpreted the terms of conformity (and if I have, I have done it by mistake, it has not been an intentional misrepresentation)—if I have not misinterpreted the terms of conformity, I frankly confess, that they appear to me perfectly terrible. Time would fail me to illustrate their character at length. It is not my purpose to attempt

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this. I intend to pass over a multitude of things which might fairly be specified, find to fix attention—the attention of the serious, the evangelical the conscientious—on only three or four at the most. In passing, however, permit me to remark, it is thought by some, that the terms include what is self-contradictory, and involve particulars, the whole of which, no individual, nor class of individuals, in the clerical body, either do or can believe. All in the Prayer Book—all in the Articles—all in the Canons—are implicitly received *if our interpretation be right*. Now the Articles involve the approbation of the Homilies, and sanction the public reading of the Apocrypha. But the Homilies stigmatize Rome as Antichrist, as 'a withered, old, filthy harlot:' while many clergymen admire it as a true and Apostolic Church, and lament that it will not recognise theirs! The Apocrypha,

again, is by others regarded as replete with imposture, absurdity, and lies; but they subscribe to its being read—I quote the words—‘for example of life, and instruction of manners!’ One article, according to the ‘plain, grammatical sense,’ asserts that Christ descended to Hell; another states that birth-sin, or what every child brings with him into the world, deserves, in the child, ‘God’s wrath and damnation.’ I inquire not at present whether these things are true, but it *is* true, that there are many of the clergy that believe neither,—believe, that is, in the ‘plain, grammatical sense of the words.’ As to election, the Calvinistic, the Arminian, or the Primitive idea, can none of them, as it seems to me, be consistently held in connection with *all* that the subscriber admits. The Calvinist surely has the seventeenth article, but the ‘offices’ continually subvert his creed. The Arminian may rejoice in the tenor of the Prayer Book, but the seventeenth article confutes *him*. The man who believes differently from both, may cherish the term as it occurs in the catechism, but he will find it difficult to make everything else harmonize with that. If subscription be attempted to be got rid of altogether, as if it bound to nothing but the Bible, because one of the articles recognises the Scriptures, and thus limits the authority of the Church, admitting plainly that it has no power to enforce what cannot be proved by them—this will stand the parties in no stead, for they have solemnly signed their names to the declaration that *all* that the Church enforces *is* scriptural.

It is not, however, my intention to rest anything on the foregoing matters; and hence, if none of them strike you as very forcible, you are welcome to suffer them to go for nothing. I introduce again our clerical inquirer, and request you to notice the points which particularly

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affect his mind. We must remind you, that we conceive of him as a pious, Evangelical Christian; Catholic in spirit; loving whosoever loves Christ; regarding the cross as ‘God’s great ordinance for saving the world;’ expecting nothing but from the Atoning Sacrifice and the Sanctifying Spirit; confiding in the divine virtue of the first, whoever exhibits it; and believing that by the second, through the word of truth, men are born again. We conceive of him, moreover, as a plain

Protestant, rejecting alike sacerdotal pretensions, and the supposed power, whether magic or mechanism, asserted by some to reside in the sacraments. This man we bring before you, as anxious if possible, to take orders; as attached to the ministry in the Established Church by his wishes and tastes, his habits and predilections; and as urged to conformity by influences from others, the persuasion of friends, and the promise of preferment; and we ask, if there be anything that offers resistance to this pressure alike from without and from within?

We shall see.

IV.

IN order to see it, we proceed to suppose, that our inquirer sets himself to study the entire whole of what he will be required to assent to and believe, to say and do:—the Articles and Liturgy, the Clerical Offices, the Books of Ordination, Homilies, Canons, Apocrypha, and all. He reads, digests, selects, compares; confused at first by the multiplicity of matters—the mysterious, the questionable, the opposite, the obscure—he presses on, and still presses, attempting to arrange the immense mass into something like shape, consistency, order. Wearied and exhausted by the prolonged effort, he at last fixes on the following points, and interrogates his conscience on the propriety of admitting them. The inquiry concentrates on these specific particulars, and the questions are virtually reduced to one. He has simply to ask himself, as a plain, honest, truth-loving man, whether he can, with a good conscience, act towards men as he will have to act, and say to God what is appointed him to say?

We suppose him in the first place to open the ‘Constitutions and Canons Ecclesiastical,’ and to take from the second to the twelfth inclusive, and to place them beneath his eye, as we do here, and to read, mark, learn, digest them.’

‘Whosoever shall hereafter affirm, that the King’s Majesty hath not the same authority in causes ecclesiastical, that the godly kings had amongst the Jews and Christian emperors of the primitive Church; or impeach any part of his regal supremacy in the said causes restored to the Crown, and by the laws of this realm

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therein established; let him be excommunicated *ipso facto*, and not restored, but only by the archbishop, after his repentance, and public revocation of those his wicked errors.'

'Whosoever shall hereafter affirm, that the Church of England by law established under the King's Majesty, is not a true and apostolical church, teaching and maintaining the doctrine of the apostles; let him be excommunicated *ipso facto*, and not restored, but only by the archbishop, after his repentance, and public revocation of this his wicked error.'

'Whosoever shall hereafter affirm, that the form of God's worship in the Church of England, established by, law, and contained in the Book of Common Prayer and administration of the sacraments, is a corrupt, superstitious, or unlawful worship of God, or containeth anything in it that is repugnant to the Scriptures; let him be excommunicated *ipso facto*, and not restored, but by the bishop of the place, or archbishop, after his repentance, and public revocation of such his wicked errors.'

'Whosoever shall hereafter affirm, that any of the nine and thirty articles, agreed upon by the archbishops and bishops of both provinces, and the whole clergy, in a convocation holden at London, in the year of our Lord God one thousand five hundred sixty-two, for avoiding diversities of opinion, and for the establishing of consent touching true religion, are in any part superstitious or erroneous, or such as he may not with a good conscience subscribe unto; let him be excommunicated *ipso facto*, and not restored, but only by the archbishop, after his repentance, and public revocation of such his wicked errors.'

'Whosoever shall hereafter affirm, that the rites and ceremonies of the Church of England by law established are wicked, antichristian, or superstitious, or such as, being commanded by lawful authority, men, who are zealously and godly affected, may not with any good conscience approve them, use them, or, as occasion requireth, subscribe unto them; let him be excommunicated *ipso facto*, and not restored until he repent, and publicly revoke such his wicked errors.'

'Whosoever shall hereafter affirm, that the government of the Church of England under his Majesty by archbishops, bishops, deans, archdeacons, and the rest that bear office in the same, is antichristian, and repugnant to the Word of God; let him be excommunicated *ipso facto*, and so continue until he repent, and publicly revoke such his wicked errors.'

'Whosoever shall hereafter affirm or teach, that the form and manner of making and consecrating bishops, priests, and deacons, containeth anything in it that is repugnant to the Word of God, or that they who are made bishops, priests, or deacons, in that form, are not lawfully made, nor ought to be accounted, either by themselves or others, to be truly either bishops, priests, or deacons, until they have some other calling to those divine offices; let him be excommunicated *ipso facto*, not to be restored until he repent, and publicly revoke such his wicked errors.'

‘Whosoever shall hereafter separate themselves from the communion of saints, as it is approved by the apostles’ rules, in the Church of England, and combine themselves together in a new brotherhood, accounting the Christians, who are conformable to the doctrine, government, rites and ceremonies of the Church of England, to be profane, and unmeet for them to join with in Christian profession: let them be excommunicated *ipso facto*, and not restored but by the archbishop, after their repentance, and public revocation of such their wicked errors.’

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‘Whosoever shall hereafter affirm, that such ministers as refuse to subscribe to the form and manner of God’s worship in the Church of England, prescribed in the Communion book, and their adherents, may truly take unto them the name of another Church not established by law, and dare presume to publish it. That this their pretended church hath of long time groaned under the burden of certain grievances imposed upon it, and upon the members thereof before mentioned, by the Church of England, and the orders and constitutions therein by law established, let them be excommunicated, and not restored until they repent, and publicly revoke such their wicked errors.’

Whosoever shall hereafter affirm or maintain, that there are within this realm other meetings, assemblies, or congregations of the king’s born subjects, than such as by the laws of this land are held and allowed, which may rightly challenge to themselves the name of true and lawful churches; let him be excommunicated, and not restored, but by the archbishop, after his repentance, and public revocation of such his wicked errors.’

‘Whosoever shall hereafter affirm, that it is lawful for any sort of ministers or lay persons, or of either of them, to join together, and make rules, orders, or constitutions, in causes ecclesiastical, without the king’s authority, and shall submit themselves to be ruled and governed by them; let them be excommunicated *ipso facto*, and not be returned until they repent, and publicly revoke those their wicked and anabaptistical errors.’

Perusing and re-perusing the above canons, we suppose our inquirer to be shocked and staggered by their sweeping anathemas. One after another utters its report, frightening with its thunder the charitable affections. Loaded as they are with ‘excommunications,’ they seem intended to inflict capital punishment—for excommunication is the highest form in which the spiritual displeasure of the church can be expressed. *Who then are the delinquents* at whom the terrible contents of these pieces are discharged? Who are the persons *whose exposure to such punishment our inquirer, if he subscribe, must*

in theory approve? These delinquents, it would appear, are just *all the inhabitants of the entire realm, except those* who are prepared to approve every jot and tittle of the English Establishment!—If *any* part of the king's supremacy is impeached;—if *any* thing in the Prayer Book is by any affirmed to be repugnant to the Scriptures;—if *any* of the articles is *in any part* said to be 'erroneous;'—if the church is denied to be true and apostolical;—if episcopacy or prelacy be represented as repugnant to the word of God;—if *any* individuals say that they belong to other churches; whether these churches are ancient or modern; whether they be that from which the English reformed, or those which profess to have reformed from *it*;—in all these cases, criminality is assumed and punishment provided; for every offender there is the same, or nearly the same, sentence—a sentence

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direct, brief, bloody—'cut him asunder.' I speak in a figure. The sword of the spirit—a thing never to be trifled with, never to be flourished in bravado or sport—the sword of the spirit is drawn from the scabbard; it glitters under the frowns and flashes of the countenance, the *angry* countenance, of holy church; and falls (or threatens it) on the hapless denier of any of her claims—the adherents of her own ancient faith—or the consistent advocates of an appeal to scripture—a principle she professes to have taught them herself. If these canons are right it is not only true, as we are taught from Oxford, and consistently taught, that the episcopal body is the 'only body in this realm that is a church;' that the Church of Scotland, and other Presbyterians, and all the sects, are not churches, their ministers not ministers, their sacraments not sacraments;—but it is also true, which Oxford, I believe, teaches *not*, that the Romanist community is alike destitute of any just claims to the honours of churchhood.

Without stopping to explore at present 'the searchings of heart' which this first prospect produces on our inquirer, we suppose him to advance, and we advance with him, and observe him as he turns his eye upon another. Having seen something 'of *the exclusive spirit of the church as a whole*, we now imagine him to contract his survey, and to limit his attention to *the official claims and character of its clergy*. If he subscribes, he is to acknowledge as scriptural 'every

thing in the Book of Common Prayer, and of ordering of bishops, priests, and deacons.' On examining these, in relation to one thing now before us, he finds he is to be made and constituted a priest by the following form uttered by the bishop:—'*Receive the Holy Ghost for the office and work of a priest in the Church of God, now committed unto thee by the imposition of our hands. Whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven; and whose sins thou dost retain, they are retained,*' &c. In consistency with this he finds the following words standing in the Prayer Book, in the Visitation of the Sick, for himself to use under certain circumstances. Addressing the sick man, he Would be required to say, 'Our Lord Jesus Christ, who has left power to his church to absolve all sinners who truly repent and believe in him, of his great mercy forgive thee thine offences: and *by his authority committed to me, I absolve thee from all thy sins,* in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.' If, like the articles, it is willed by Her Majesty that no man 'shall put his own sense or comment to be the meaning' of the form of absolution, but shall take it in the 'plain, literal, and grammatical sense,' then it

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will be impossible to deny that a peculiar and awful official prerogative is claimed to be possessed and exercised here, All doubt on our inquirer's mind, as to the absolution being *officially authoritative*, or merely declaratory of an evangelical truth, having nothing to do with mystic or mischievous sacerdotal pretensions,—all doubt on this matter would appear to vanish before the following *facts*. In making a deacon, he observes, the bishop does not confer the Holy Ghost; *that* is reserved to qualify for the mysteries of the priestly function; the consequence is, that a deacon, when he reads the regular liturgical service of the church, must omit the form of absolution, which occurs both in the morning and evening prayer; he has not received power to *pronounce* to the people 'the absolution and remission of their sins;' he may, however, *pray* for it; and, therefore, many, while they remain in deacon's orders, instead of the omitted absolution, which is put in a form to be authoritatively uttered to, or over, the people, read the following prayer for the same blessing, which occurs in the service for Ash Wednesday, and which addresses itself, of course, humbly, and

directly to God:—‘O Lord, we beseech thee, mercifully hear our prayers, and spare all those who confess their sins unto thee, that they whose consciences by sin are accused, by thy merciful pardon may be absolved, through Christ our Lord. Amen.’ The fact is, the *rationale*, or philosophy, so to speak, of the public absolution, and of the place where it occurs in the service, is said to be this:—As men under sin, and of course under the divine displeasure, cannot worthily approach to worship, unless cleansed from their disqualification; this is to be secured by the union of the people’s personal and the priest’s official act; the penitence of the one, and the pronouncement of their remission by the other. This done, they can ‘*enter with boldness into the holy place,*’ and join in the presentation of ‘*spiritual sacrifices,*’ which may now be offered, and will now be acceptable.

Again we pass on, having simply ascertained what it *is* that our inquirer discovers;—we pass on with him to the last point of observation and remark. Having seen *the spirit of the church* as a church, and *the official character* it supposes in its ministers, he now fixes on *specific expressions*, which, as a minister, he would be required to employ;—*to employ in solemn addresses to God, in relation to the members if the church individually.* Examining the office for the baptism of infants, and passing over the astounding and startling fact, that he would actually, in the course of it, have to interrogate a babe, and to receive its replies through the lips of adults, who answer for

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it; which adults promise what they have no power to perform—and promise, it may be, to do for the child, or that the child shall do, what they have never thought of doing for themselves. Passing over these things, our inquirer observes, that in a direct address to Almighty God, he has positively to assume and affirm as a fact—assume and affirm in relation to every infant he may ever baptize—*what it is utterly impossible for him to know of any.* We take the following prayer from the form for the private baptism of children, partly because it is shorter than the parallel thanksgiving in the public form, and partly because, in this case, *as there are no questions asked by the priest, and no profession of faith, or repentance, or renouncing of the world, the flesh, and the devil, made by the babe, or for it through its*

sponsors, there can be no ground for assuming the existence of the fact in question in consequence of its vicarious confession of Christ. This is said, in the Catechism, to be the reason why children are baptized at all; and there are those who regard it as a ground for hoping that they enjoy that which the rite symbolizes. But in private baptism this confession is not made, and yet the one is administered, and the other affirmed. The priest, without such confession, applies to the child the sacred sign, and then has immediately to express himself as follows, respecting its possession of the thing signified:—‘We yield thee hearty thanks, most merciful Father, that it hath pleased thee to regenerate this infant WITH THY HOLY SPIRIT; to receive him for thine own child by adoption, and to incorporate him into thy holy church, And we humbly beseech thee to grant, that as he is NOW made a partaker of the death of thy Son, so he may be also of his resurrection: and finally, with the residue of thy saints, he may inherit thine everlasting kingdom, through the same, thy Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.’

Now the *fact* assumed and affirmed in this language, and affirmed in words spoken to God, is this—that GOD *has regenerated* the child with HIS HOLY SPIRIT. It is not that the infant has become *ceremonially regenerate*; that, by an outward rite, his outward relationship to the outward or visible church is altered, and that he stands to it in a connection not recognised before. *This* our inquirer could understand. That it is *asserted* that GOD has regenerated him with THE HOLY SPIRIT, or given him, as is asked for in one of the prayers in the public form, ‘*spiritual regeneration.*’ This would appear to be regarded as occurring in connection with the application of the outward sign; for, previous to that, the blessing is spoken of as not

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possessed; immediately after, it is affirmed to have descended. In this brief interval, the greatest conceivable change has taken place in the spiritual condition of an immortal mind; the moment before the application of the mystic element, the child is in that state in which the article declares that it deserved ‘God’s eternal wrath and damnation;’ the moment after, he is another being—has another nature; words waft to God from the lips of the priest the

thrilling thanksgiving—‘he is *now* made a partaker of the death of thy Son.’ In an instant—in the twinkling of an eye—in like manner as at ‘the last trump,’ physical corruption shall be transformed into the likeness of glorified humanity—with such suddenness, in consequence of the act of an ecclesiastical official—the ‘birth-sin’ of a corrupt and carnal mind vanishes away, and it becomes ‘*the temple of the Holy Ghost!*’

In consistency with this, it strikes our inquirer that the other parts of the Prayer Book are constructed. The catechism puts into the mouth of the child the same affirmation that at first flowed from the lip of the priest;—it tells him, in explaining the nature of a sacrament, that the ‘outward sign’ is a ‘means’ of his receiving the spiritual grace; and in harmony with this, instructs him to say, that *in* baptism he obtains that, *by* which, from a ‘child of wrath’ he became ‘an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven.’ In like manner, in the order of confirmation the bishop himself reasserts the fact already referred to, and does so, like the presbyter, in language directly addressed to God. As if to manifest, moreover, that the regeneration recognised in the baptismal formulary is spiritual and real, he employs the phrase there employed in such a manner, as to show that this is the sense intended:—‘Almighty and everlasting God, who has vouchsafed to regenerate these thy servants, by *water* AND *the Holy Ghost.*’—The Holy Ghost here, cannot be something different from the same thing described in the previous ceremony in the same words; it *is*, however, something different and additional to regeneration *by water*; and it is *this higher something* that every priest of the English Establishment has to affirm, and in a manner the most solemn, as positively occurring to every infant baptised by his hands, and occurring to it *at*, and *because of*, its baptism.

Such are the things which we suppose to be selected by the individual before us, and on which he hesitates about proceeding to the priesthood. We shall now draw our remarks to a conclusion, by putting into the form of reflections, uttered by our inquirer, some of the

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thoughts which, in meditating on the above, pass through his soul, and decide for him the question of clerical conformity.

V.

‘These canons, offices, and acts,’—we suppose him to say—‘these canons, offices, and acts, if I conceive of them aright, appear to involve the three following things:—*Ecclesiastical exclusiveness—sacerdotal pretensions—and spiritual regeneration as occurring in baptism.* My impression is, that, as a clergyman, I must sanction the first in the act of subscription; realise the second perpetually in myself; and affirm the third, in so many words—in words directly addressed to God. I may certainly be mistaken. I may be mistaken as to the meaning of the formularies; or I may be mistaken in my views of evangelical truth. Right in my interpretation of the terms of subscription, and the language of the offices, the terms and the language may be right too. It may be right to be in spirit as exclusive as the canons; it may be right to pretend to what appears to be claimed by both presbyter and prelate; and it may be positively *true* that God in baptism *does* regenerate *by the Holy Ghost*. If so, and if I sincerely, and “from my soul,” believe all this, I can take orders: If not, what am I to do?

‘I do not believe. If I am right in my interpretation of the three things lying before me, they are wrong. I regard them as unscriptural. I deem them dangerous. They who think otherwise—and there are many such—can have no difficulties. Their path is plain. With a “good conscience” they can call “God for a record upon their souls,” that they approve all they assent to in subscription, and believe all that they address to *Him*. I cannot do this. Still I may be wrong—wrong in my interpretation of the canons and offices. The sense of both may be different from what they appear to me to say; and if so, and if I could be *sure* of this, then I could subscribe, without feeling that I had either incurred the Divine displeasure, or for ever forfeited my own respect. But I *must* be sure of it. I must be free from misgiving. “*Whosoever doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not if faith* (of the full and satisfied persuasion of the mind): *for whosoever is not if faith* (the offspring of such persuasion), *is sin.*”

'I wish I could be *sure* that the real meaning of what at present confronts me, is a together different from what it appears. This Would effectually smooth my path, because It would fully satisfy my

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conscience. I *might* perhaps be brought to regard the canons with little concern. It is said they were never ratified by Parliament. It is also said, however, that without this, they bear upon and bind the clerical body, because they received the royal sanction—the sanction and approval of that authority which is acknowledged in subscription as supreme by itself in spiritual things. Still, Acts of Parliament may have since passed, and, passed of course with the king's concurrence, which have altered the law in relation to the parties, or in relation to some of them, whose excommunication was once approved; and, by such laws, have not the canons lost their original rigor? Perhaps. Yet—I don't know. *This* I know, that there *are* cases in which what would be legally wrong would be ecclesiastically right, as in that of the admission into the pulpits of the establishment of Scotch and American Episcopalians.* It *may* be, therefore, that other things legally right may be canonically wrong.† Parliaments may have

* This was written before the alteration of the law which excluded the Scotch and American Episcopalians from the pulpits of the English Church—a state of things of which Dr. Hook complained, by saying, that if a clergyman admitted an American or Scottish brother into his pulpit, he exposed himself to a civil penalty; and if he did not, he was guilty of schism.

† Two facts illustrative of this supposed possibility came under my notice soon after these words were written. A clergyman in London refused to bury a child which I had baptized. The parents wished it to sleep in a grave they had in the churchyard, and I therefore went to the clergyman to request him to perform the service. He said, "he could not do it conscientiously; he dared not to violate his convictions; he did not regard the child as baptized according to the meaning of the Church." "But you know," I said, "that it has very recently been decided in the Court of Arches that lay baptism is valid, and that you have no legal ground of refusal." "I know the decision; but I cannot accept it; I must decline." "You are aware that the consequences of refusal may be very serious." "Yes, I know that; God, I hope, will support me, but I must obey my conscience." "Well, my dear Sir," I said, "God forbid that we should do anything to hurt any man's conscience. I will bury the child myself, for I can do it in a way which will entail no evil consequences on either of us." The poor man seemed greatly relieved. I could not go into the churchyard, to bury the child, because, to have opened my mouth on consecrated ground would have exposed me to a prosecution; but I went to the *outside of the rails*, near to which the poor little innocent's grave happened to be. The weeping friends stood round it. I prayed and spoke,—addressing words of comfort to the bereaved parents; and then I explained to the people who had gathered about, the reason of the singular spectacle that had attracted them. I thus saved the

clergyman's conscience, which compelled him to resist the law; but I certainly thought that either such laws should not exist, or that such men should not remain under them. The other case was worse than the foregoing. A friend of mine, who

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enacted what the church dare not acknowledge or accept. But if not—how far have such relaxing enactments proceeded? How many have there been? Where are they to be met with? What is the extent and limit of the liberty they have conferred upon Churchmen? After subscribing, could I, or could I not, acknowledge the church-state, the ministry, and sacraments, of the northern establishment? If I could *legally*, because it is an establishment—could I *canonically*, since it is Presbyterian? Could I acknowledge any of the minor Christian communities? Durst I believe—or ought I to profess it, if I did believe—or could I consistently profess it, if I did so—that Independent, Baptist, Methodist teachers, are ministers of Christ, or any such society a church of God? Whatever might be my private opinion, could I recognise in John Howe, Mathew Henry, Dr. Watts, Robert Hall, or in any such, living or dead—men *really* ministers—having a valid right to preach the Gospel, and dispense the ordinances? I fear not. But even if it were not so—even if exclusiveness is not to be professed, and need not be defended—if my heart may be free from the necessity of narrowness, still I must *act* on the repudiated principle. My hands, and my feet, and my tongue, must be bound. As a clergyman, I could have public, ministerial communion in the services of the church, with none but the members of my own order. Anyone of *them* I might legally and canonically admit into my pulpit, whatever his character, or whatever his creed; all others I must treat as intruders among holy things, though each of them, in fact, were as pure as a seraph, or as sound as an apostle. Many, I know, do not feel this. They think it right, They honestly believe all it implies. Presbyterian, Independent, Methodist ministers, are really accounted by them presumptuous pretenders to the sacred office. Instead, therefore, of wishing to encourage or countenance an enormity like this, they affirm and think, that churchmen ought, as a

had been a most useful minister in the town where he had resided some 30 years, died. He had a vault, his own property, in the churchyard, in which lay two of his children. He, it happened, had been baptized in the Church of England. The cler-

gyman, however, refused to bury him on the ground that he had been a schismatical Dissenting teacher; for, though baptized in the Church, and never formally excommunicated, he had, by being a Dissenting teacher, *ipso facto* canonically excommunicated himself. Nothing could move the man. The family had not the means of going to law; nor would they have gone if they had. There was no general cemetery in the place, or my friend's family-vault would not have been in the churchyard, nor would a stranger have been required to bury him. A grave was dug in the chapel in which he had preached,—in front of the pulpit,—and there we laid him.

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duty, religiously to guard the “great gulph” between others and themselves, and to deem it at once impassable in itself, and as perfectly agreeable to the will of God, as that which divided the rich man and Lazarus. Be it so. These men have their opinions, *and they have a right to have them*. It becomes me to think that they were perfectly conscientious in adopting them at first, and are sincere in professing and adhering to them still. *But these opinions are not mine*. I have no sympathy with what I consider their pretension and intolerance, and I shrink from a station in which I must act as if I had.

‘As to absolution (public and private), I do not see what can be said. The language of the bishop in ordaining a priest—the language of the priest to the prostrate penitent—the abstinence of the deacon from a particular part of the public service—and the abstinence of the bishop from endowing him with a singular and awful gift, and thus fitting him for fulfilling the function in question—all this can only be accounted for, as it seems to me, on the principle of admitting sacerdotal pretensions. It may be urged, indeed, that my life may pass without my ever being required to read the form of absolution for the dying. But this does not meet my difficulty. The form in public worship is not only left unaffected by this circumstance; but my subscription is to be, not merely to what I may read *out* of the Prayer Book, but to every jot and tittle that is in it. I do not believe in any priestly character as belonging to the ministers of the New Covenant. I reject the idea of official absolution. What is merely declaratory—a simple statement that God through Christ pardons and absolves all who repent; why, *as* a statement, this might be made by any individual; its power is in its truth, and its truth is independent of the lips that utter it. The absolution of the Church of England is *not* this. It is something more—something immensely more; something partaking of a mystic character, and therefore reserved to be

spoken with “authority” by one who has been qualified by a mystic gift. He that can *believe* that it is not this, let him believe it; he may conform, though he thinks as I do on the general truth. He who believes that it *is* this, and that this it ought to be—he too may conform, because in subscription he would not have to sign what to him would be a falsehood. But I—I believing that it is this, and that this it ought *not* to be—believing that here there is a positive departure in the Book of Man from the Book of God—what am *I* to do? Am I to assert, and to subscribe to the assertion, that there is not the discrepancy which I feel there is? Am I to do *that*? Who will say so?

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‘But may not the words in the Baptismal Service admit of explanation? Perhaps. To me, however, *at present*, they seem to mean just what they say. As a clergyman, I must *assert to God*, that every infant, baptized by my hands, *has been regenerated by Him WITH THE HOLY GHOST*. There is nothing hesitating, hypothetical, or equivocal about it. It is not merely the affirmation of an outward ceremonial change, but of a real and spiritual operation on the soul. In plain words then—*do I believe this? Can I say it in good faith?* Shall I, or shall I not, in the act of uttering the thanksgiving before me, possess the consciousness of doing and saying “*the thing that is right?*” The use of this form comes to be a matter to be met and settled by common morality. If the words mean what they say, and a person believes it, he may of course use them in speaking either to God or man. If the words do not mean what they say, and another person knows this, and knows what they do mean, and means *that* by them and nothing else, he may bring himself to use them too. But he who believes that they cannot be made, by any fair and equitable means, to utter any thing else but their obvious sense; he who shrinks from the use of language in divine worship, which would proceed from his own lips in one sense, and enter the ears of his auditors in another—in which he would express one thing to God, and convey another to the minds of mortals; he who, moreover, feeling bound to take the words in their “plain, literal, and grammatical” meaning, believes *that* meaning *positively to assert* what is either not known, or what is not true; he surely has no alternative but to decline doing,

what, with his views, would be at once an act of impiety and hypocrisy;—impiety and hypocrisy committed by a priest;—committed by a priest in the most solemn circumstances—while actually officiating on the floor of the temple, and lifting his voice to the divinity that fills it.

‘Still I may be wrong. I may be under the influence of mistaken views both of truth and duty. The language of the offices may be capable of being understood in some other sense from that which appears; and if so, and if I use it in that sense, I am not accountable for the false impressions others may receive from it. May it not be possible, then, to bring myself to believe that this is the case? After all, may it not be, that the terms of subscription, however enormous they may appear at first, are yet easy, or at least tolerable; and that expressions, which sound contrary to the known belief of the

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subscriber, may yet be taken in such a sense, as to justify or allow his consenting to use them? This may be. It seems, however, dangerous and delicate ground. I cannot but think, too, that the effort must be immense, the labour infinite, to explain, to the entire satisfaction of one’s conscience, the meaning of certain of the sentences before me. Still it might be done. But why *should* I do it? Why should I take such extreme pains, to get my understanding to inform my conscience, that there is nothing in the terms of clerical conformity, and nothing in the doings and sayings of the priesthood, at which it need revolt? Let me put to my soul a plain question. Should I take all this trouble under other circumstances? Should I for a moment think of attempting any such thing, if the terms in question were proposed to me by a poor and persecuted sect? If admission to the ministry of a voluntary conventicle was to be purchased at the price of using the offices of the English church, should I in that case, *with my views*, have any doubt about the meaning of the words, or set myself to find, with huge labour, some principles of mild and moderating exposition? I don’t know. I have my fears. If I really believed the scriptural correctness of the spirit and pretensions, the language and offices, of a particular community, I hope I should be able to conform or adhere to it, though obscure, and scattered, and unendowed; but, doubting,

as I do, all this, in respect to the establishment, why, *under these circumstances*, should it occur to me, or to any man, to bribe his conscience to submit to conformity? Would we do *this*, if it were not, that by entering the church we enter the world; that society at large opens to receive us; that natural tastes and preferences are gratified; that much that would be mortifying and vulgar is avoided; and that, instead of having to herd with many whom it will be time enough to know in heaven, we may move forward, in our way thither, surrounded by the regards and the respectabilities of earth?

‘I am jealous of myself. If I sincerely felt that I could assent to subscription, without exposing the act to my own suspicions, of course I should subscribe. But I am tortured with doubt. If I take orders, let me do it considerately, calmly, honestly. The terms terrify me. The act of subscription must surely be meant to intimate that the subscriber admits what he signs. I am told not. Whatever it was intended to signify at first, it now signifies anything or nothing; it binds no one. This is strange doctrine. To utter it, would seem to calumniate the clergy; but they say it themselves by indisputable

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facts. Many of them appear to have paid, in subscription, a price for the privilege of preaching in the church, the opposite of all they acknowledge at the threshold. Every party into which the clerical body is divided, is chargeable, it seems, with *dissenting* from something—from one or other of the many points to *all* of which they *all* subscribed. But is this right? Is it right, to exercise a liberty of thought and utterance which violates a solemn religious pledge? Is it right, to reduce such a pledge to a mere formula?—to make the act of qualifying for the sacred office, as little a reality as a legal fiction? Are the consequences of this publicly decent? *Such as*, that parties of God’s ministers, brethren by profession, of the same ecclesiastical stock and lineage, should come forward and charge each other with official falsehood, or official unfaithfulness? Is it seemly—is it likely to mend the public morals—for clergymen to have to memorialize the Heads of the Church, against books and men, described as the depositaries and disseminators of error—books and men, sanctioned by these Heads of the Church themselves, or sanctioned by some of

them? The one party or the other must be acting in violation of their vows and subscriptions; or all must have agreed to vow and subscribe, what none amongst them can consistently keep. In either way, the act of subscribing must have taken place *without* thought, or *against* it, or upon the principles of its *meaning nothing*.—Nothing! “to call God for a record upon one’s soul!”—Can I do this? Would it be right? No: it never can be right, sanctioned, as it may be, by cathedrals or colleges—by bodies sacred, venerable, august—it never can be right, to trifle with any thing of the nature of an oath, or to reduce to a formula what was meant for a reality. Any man who sincerely believes what he signs, though he sign the absurdities of Trent itself, is for that act accountable only to the God he swears to: but he who subscribes what he disbelieves, and who evinces his disbelief by a life in contradiction to his solemn professions—that man is answerable to earth as well as heaven—answerable to society for his pestilent example. In proportion to the eminence of the station he holds, and especially in proportion to its sacred character, is the insult he offers to public virtue. Numbers of such men, devoted by profession to the advancement of this, and exemplifying in themselves a perpetual contempt for its very appearance, *may*, certainly, impose on the ignorant, puzzle the conscientious, bewilder the simple, stagger and surprise the manly and the moral, but are not likely to breast

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and confront the current of corruption, or “to command truth” and *truthfulness* to a keen-sighted scoffer.

‘But the sects differ. They differ from each other as much as the clergy differ among themselves. I know it: and I know also, that in each sect, respectively, the views of its ministers are so uniform, as to tempt one to ascribe it, as much to the force of opinion within the sect, as to the freedom of enquiry within the men. Still, this latter is an evil infinitely less than the open contempt of solemn subscriptions. As for the former, since the different bodies are ostensibly founded *on* their differences—stand separate and distinct *because* of their known and acknowledged disagreement—this is a thing positively virtuous, in comparison of that of a number of men professing to be *one*, by common subscription to a common creed, and yet existing as

many from oppositions of opinion. If anything like this existed among the sects—if the Methodist Conference, a body of ministers who have given their adherence to one and the same system of faith: if, in spite of this, it was broken into parties, one charging the other with Popery, and that again denouncing the first as unfaithful; some being described as violating their articles, and subverting the gospel; and other some, as saying at the font what they ascend the pulpit to *unsay*; denying to man what they affirm to God; countenancing error in their official formularies, and contending for the truth in their personal capacity—if the Methodist Conference presented to the public any thing like this, no man would hesitate to pronounce at once upon its real character—no one would be blind to its openly sanctioning contempt for principle in public men; no one would believe that it could admit of defence, or that any would defend it; all would fear that a class of persons, ostensibly devoted to the interests of truth, morals, and religion, would, in fact, endanger the interests of each, by exposing to the remarks of the ungodly and profane, in their own conduct, what would seem to be either decidedly bad, or, at the very best, but equivocally virtuous.

What am I to do? I see these things—I feel them. I cannot advance to the act of subscription, as if it were a thing that meant nothing. Shameless enormities flow from this. It is both in itself an act of wickedness, and necessarily the parent of many more. To promise to do what I never purpose doing at all; solemnly to say before God that I believe, and to bind and pledge myself to his church to teach, what I neither believe nor intend to inculcate; to reduce sub-

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scription to a mockery and a jest, by reserving the liberty of contradicting after it, what *in* it I should recognise as scriptural and true;—this, to *me*, seems like deliberately entering on professional life in a way to render it, from beginning to end, an impudent, acted, living lie. “*How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?*” I will not do it. Can I then, with my views, do anything else? Is there any principle, which will harmonize with the terms and results of subscription, the feelings of one who regards as I do, ecclesiastical exclusiveness, sacerdotal pretensions, and the question of spiritual

regeneration in baptism? I fear not. To become a clergyman, I must not only sacrifice the liberty of acting as I think the gospel prescribes and prompts—the liberty of loving, and of proving that I love, all whom I believe to be “*men of God, shewing to others the way of salvation;*” but I must adopt, I think, in order to get rid of expressions that perplex me, such a mode of interpreting language—such special pleading, wriggling, and reservation—such strange and unsatisfactory admissions, to find a sense for words, or to evade it—as would not be tolerated in any straightforward business in ordinary life, or permitted to have a place in the conduct and the covenanting of worldly men. Such, unhappily, are my present impressions. The views I take of evangelical truth compel me to come to this conclusion. Others may not think and feel as I do. Holding sentiments identical with mine, they may be able to do without scruple, what I shrink from as a positive immorality. I judge them not. “*To their own Master they stand or fall.*” I envy them indeed; for with my predilections, preferences, and tastes, I would willingly advance where they advance, and serve at the altar where they serve. I cannot do it. I envy and congratulate those who can. I envy them at once their opinions and their repose—the views that permit them to do what they do, and the feelings that enable them to do it, and live. I felicitate them on their tranquillity—on their calm persuasion that they do right—their unruffled reflections in the review of their path—their enjoyment of a blessedness I can never share. “*Happy is he who condemneth not himself in the thing that he alloweth.*”

‘*With my views* I should be condemned. Masked or mitigated as subscription might be, it would often, I fear, rise before me in its true character—cover me with confusion—fill me with bitterness. Retaining my sentiments as scriptural and true; yet admitting as such, and promising to use, and actually using, language apparently the very

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reverse—what would this demand?—to what would it expose me? I must sophisticate my understanding, I must fetter my intellect. I must shut my eyes, and close my ears, to much that at present seems distinct and loud. I must call things by their *wrong* names, and that, too, where mistake may be infinitely hazardous. I must say to God,

in an act of worship, what I should repudiate to man in confidential conversation. Acts like these would be pregnant with painful and punitive consequences. I should lose, I fear, the love of truth; or the power of pursuing, acknowledging, maintaining it. I should cease, perhaps, to be affected by evidence; plain words might come to be lost upon me; if I got over some that are lying here, I seem to feel that I could get over any thing—that there would be no language I could not pervert, parry, resist, or explain away. With my views, the act of subscription would either indicate the death within me of the moral man, or it would inflict such a wound that he would soon die—die, I mean, *so far* as those things are concerned which must be lost sight of to subscribe at all, and of those which are to be done and said after subscribing; or if he lived, and continued to live, I should be daily obliged to be doing something, which would lacerate, and pain him, and pierce him to the soul. The very services of religion would be sources of anguish. Prayer itself would consist, at times, of words which I feel I can never approve, and which, ever as I uttered them, would renew my misgivings, and disturb my peace. My nature, in its highest essence, would be injured. My moral sense would be sacrificed or seduced. I CANNOT DO IT. I will not. This, too, would be “*great wickedness, and sin against God.*” It would be sin against myself. I never will consent to pay such a price for the advantages which clerical conformity can confer. I see them all. I feel their attraction. Principle as to some—preference as to others—taste, habit, association as to most—strongly induce and impel me towards them. I could wish them mine. I should be glad to secure them. I would give for them any thing consistent with honour. *It should not be heroism to refuse that.* I determine to refuse it. To all the inducements to enter the establishment, I oppose one thing, and but one. With my predilections, I have little else; but *with my opinions*, I ought to have *that—a living conscience*. By God’s help I will strive to retain it. It shall be kept by me, and kept alive. It and I must part company, if I offend it by deliberately doing what is wrong. God of my strength, preserve me from this; “*let thy grace be suffi-*

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cient for me;” “*keep back thy servant from presumptuous sin;*” with the light which Thou, I trust, hast poured into my soul, and the love with which Thou hast replenished my heart, I dare not permit myself to sanction and to say, what I feel I must, if I consent to use these forms and offices. “*A good conscience*” is to be found only in withholding that consent. I am determined to withhold it. I go nowhere unless conscience can go with me. I am satisfied to remain wherever it remains. This is my feeling; and *on account of this*—and *of this only*—I HERE RESOLVE TO REFUSE ORDERS.’

NOTE TO THIS EDITION.

THE foregoing address was published in 1839—twenty-one years ago. It has long been out of print. A new issue has been requested, and I have no valid reason for withholding my consent. My views have undergone no alteration, so far as the substance of the argument is concerned; nor is my consciousness weakened in respect to the perfect fairness with which I endeavoured to conduct it. It is thought that the book may have an interest to many to whom it will come as if just written; and that its appearance will be opportune, not only from the recent agitation of the question of the revision of the Prayer-book, but on account of the “protests” that have appeared against such revision, especially considering *who* among the clergy have been seen to unite in those protests.

I have had many letters from clergymen and lay members of the Church of England on the argument of this book. In respect to Part II. a bishop wrote:—“The reasons for attachment to the church are well and ably put.” I have been told that this section was extracted and issued somewhere as a church-defence tract; but I cannot state this of my own knowledge. I feel bound to inform the reader that a series of papers appeared in the “Christian Observer” in reply to my argument. They did not satisfy me, but they may convince other people. In a note to myself, which I accidentally find in an old copy of the Address, the stand-point of the writer and the object he aimed at are thus stated:—“I take my position on Evangelical principles.” “What I say is, that your inquirer need not (if otherwise so near to conformity) be excluded by subscription alone, at least so far as concerns the points adduced by you.” “Your line of argument is perfectly fair and legitimate. *If the ‘inquirer’ cannot satisfy his mind, of course he ought not to subscribe. But in my articles I attempt to satisfy him.*” I know not whether these papers were ever collected and published separately; nor can I tell the year in which they appeared. The author of them, I understand, has been recently writing in favour of liturgical revision—proposing to alter those very passages of the Prayer-book which stood in the way of my inquirer. I can conceive of his doing that, however, I beg to say, in perfect consistency with his previous argument in their defence, and his personal ability to accept the Prayer-book as it is.

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A week or two since I had a small pamphlet sent to me from Ireland entitled "The Assent and Consent. *What does it imply and involve? What is my position? What is my duty?* By an Irish clergyman." The writer puts what he regards subscription as involving in a very strong light; he then states his dissatisfaction with certain things in the Prayer-book, specifying among them what my inquirer selects. He does *not* think it his duty to retire from the church, for reasons which he assigns; but in answer to the question, "What is to be done?" his reply is, "I unhesitatingly answer, we must demand earnestly and loudly, and strain every nerve to obtain—(1.) *The repeal of the act of uniformity*; (2.) *the alteration of the terms of subscription*; (3.) *the revision of the Prayer-book*. Nothing less will suffice."

If any reader of this tract wishes to see the argument of it in the last form in which I had to put it forth, associated with various statements on several correlative subjects, and with certain episcopal and other utterances on ecclesiastical matters, he may consult a small volume of mine recently published, entitled "LIGHTS AND SHADOWS of Church Life in Australia; including Thoughts on some Things at Home, &c."

T. B.

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