

THE
LIBERATION SOCIETY:

ITS POLICY AND MOTIVES.

Speech of

EDWARD MIALL, ESQ.,

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LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

Frequently as I have stood up to address my fellow countrymen upon the subject before us this evening, and deeply as I have usually felt my responsibility on these occasions, I do not know that at any former period of my career I ever felt so deeply and so oppressively the responsibility of addressing myself to such an audience as this, as I do tonight. I see here, and I cannot but recognise it with admiration and with gratitude, such a representation of intelligence and moral power, that if it were only possible to put forth its energies into active operation in favour of the principles that it has received tonight with approbation, this society would soon become strong to accomplish the work which it has undertaken to perform. I tremble lest, by the tone I may adopt, or by any phrase that may drop from my lips, I may interfere with that impression which I hope has already been produced. I cannot but feel that, in addition to the responsibility which devolves upon me in connection with this assembly; the society itself to which your attention has been attracted, by its own earnest prosecution of its work, and by a singularly concurrent state of circumstances, has arisen to such a conspicuous position, that we can scarcely speak in its name or on its behalf with too much prudence and precaution, lest the words used to stimulate our fellow countrymen to further action should be contorted by the enemies of this cause to the detriment of the object which we seek to accomplish. I thank you most heartily for the expression of enthusiastic sympathy that you have already given to the society whose objects have been placed before you. I thank you for myself personally; for, believe me, we have not risen to the position which we now occupy without very strenuous effort—without many scenes of dreary and unrewarded toil—without frequent and bitter disappointment—without meeting oftentimes with indifference where we had a right to calculate upon hearty support—without obloquy, continually showered down upon our fair name — and not without all those methods of

4

opposition which are employed by men when they are attempting to bolster up a cause that in their consciences and their hearts they believe to be inconsistent and incompatible with the true principles of the Christianity of the Gospel. If you will permit me to occupy your attention for a short period, I wish to put before you, in simple and unexciting terms, with all the clearness and logical accuracy of which I am capable, precisely the policy which this society intends to pursue, and the great motives by which it is actuated in seeking to give a practical effect to that policy. Happily, we can afford to be perfectly communicative and open. We are not laying up for any surprise. We would not, even if we could, affect that mystery which usually ripens into something like a *coup d' état*. Our intentions, if we could carry them into effect tomorrow—but not with the sympathy and approbation of the great majority of the educated and intelligent portion of our countrymen—our intentions we would leave incomplete until such time as we could complete them in concurrence with the views of those I have named. Our sole object is not to change the machinery which we believe to be working so much mischief in the country, but to change the spirit by which that machinery is worked; and our end will not be answered by merely effecting an alteration in the external framework of Church and State until we have first of all effected an alteration in the convictions and in the sympathies of our fellow countrymen that shall lead to the other alteration of which I have spoken.

We are often asked—not so much by our friends as by those who are in controversial antagonism to us—What is your object? What do the members of the Liberation Society seek to do? Well now, in a very few words I will endeavour to describe that object as clearly as I possibly can. It is political, or at least, it is an object which has a political aspect when viewed from a certain point. It is also religious, when viewed from the standing ground of religion. Politically, we are seeking to prevail upon file legislature to put an end to all inequality in its dealings with loyal subjects of the realm in consequence of their religious belief and practice. Religiously, we are seeking to persuade our countrymen and parliament to put exclusive trust in the force of spiritual motives and spiritual agencies for the accomplishment of spiritual purposes. These two aspects must not be regarded as two different objects, but only as different aspects of the same object. When we have succeeded politically we shall also have succeeded religiously; and when we can succeed religiously, we shall also have succeeded politically. It is impossible that as citizens we can claim our position of equality before the law with respect to our religious belief, without at the same time accomplishing that end which we, as Christians, must ardently seek, namely, that spiritual purposes shall always be pursued with spiritual motives,

5

and by spiritual agencies alone. Popularly, we may describe our ultimate object as the separation of the Church from the State—and if I do not on this occasion resort to that special description, it is not that I may avoid a phrase that I think will excite the fears, and stir up the terrors of those who do not quite comprehend the full force of that phraseology; but to put things to which we attach importance in a somewhat different language from that in which they have been usually and properly described, may often clear away from the minds of those who do not study these subjects, some of those objections which simply arise out of a misunderstanding of words, and which, whenever they are encountered, by a clear and perhaps novel statement of what is intended, instantly vanish away, as into thin air.

In attempting to describe the general policy of the “Liberation Society,” I shall first treat it on its political side. It is of the utmost importance that we should first of all come to a thorough understanding of this—that the Church of England, considered as an establishment, is a political institution, and may and must be treated as such. I do not mean, by this descriptive epithet, to derogate in the slightest degree from the spiritual pretensions of any of the parties connected with the Church Establishment. I do not make the slightest reflection upon the clergy, whether of one or other of the existing ecclesiastical parties. I say—this is the machinery which the nation is supposed to have chosen whereby to work out the religious purpose which the nation deems to be important. Therefore, it is a political institution for religious purposes, just in the same sense in which the army and the navy are political institutions for the purpose of national defence. So the Church of England—and it is very important that we should remember this—regarding the articles of its faith, its liturgy, its sacraments, its offices, and its rubrics, as constituting its established and essential elements—never had an existence apart from the State. Historically speaking, it was born of the State; it is a creature of the State; it derives all its rights from the State; it has entered into whatever it regards as its inheritance, not on account of any inherent fitness or qualification, but because it has been—for political purposes, and by a legal process—introduced by the State into these same possessions. So that when this Church, as it very frequently does, speaks to us respecting its present rights, and argues as though it had an inherent independence which it suspends for a certain while only, in order to accomplish certain high purposes, we have a right to point back to its history, and to say, that the Protestant Episcopal Church of this country never had an existence separate and apart from the State—that it is in all respects the creature of the State; and that, therefore, those who deal with this Church as a political institution, simply deal with that in which every citizen in this country has a right to busy himself.

6

We are often asked, How is it that you, who are dissenters from the Establishment, who receive toleration the most ample, who are continually obtaining fresh and fresh immunities for yourselves—how is it that you are not content with looking after the welfare of your own respective denominations, but will be meddling with the affairs and interests of a church to which you do not belong? My answer is plain: “We do so simply because it is the Church of England, and we are Englishmen.” If we are asked: “How is it that you, who repudiate legislation in regard to religious matters, are continually urging those who think with you to proceed towards the legislature with measures intended to affect the religion of others?” My answer would be: “We do no such thing, at least in the sense in which you would have your words to be understood.” We go to parliament it is true; our main business consists in moulding and shaping, as far as our influence extends, the decisions of the legislature touching religion. But what we seek is not fresh legislation, but simply to undo the legislation which already exists. We do not want to legislate for other people’s consciences, but we want to put an end to those laws in existence which affect our own consciences. If we could only prevail upon parliament to do away with all that which constitutes the union between the Church and the State, our end would be answered. We should stand upon a perfect equality with the Protestant Episcopal Church in this country; and if that church, in consequence of the greater truth and force of its doctrines, or of the greater personal earnestness and faith with which they were preached, could only obtain a moral and spiritual ascendancy over the Nonconformists, it would be one which so far from calling forth our jealousy would only provoke our emulation. We could bid them God speed, and rejoice in their success; and we should be tempted to believe, perhaps, that however our own mental conclusions may have gone contrary to those of the Church respecting some modes of ecclesiastical discipline, that the very success which had attended their efforts, and the very earnestness and faith that had been put forth for the attainment of that success, would be a strong argument in our minds that the Church system was far nearer to the mind of God than we had been accustomed to give it credit for.

Now, when I speak of the union of the Church with the State, there is a large number of persons who seem to have in their minds an idea that the Church and the State are united by some particular act of parliament, and when that has been repealed that then the separation will be accomplished. There has lately been sitting a committee of the House of Lords, which has summoned different witnesses—one or two of them connected with the Liberation Society,—apparently with the simple view of making out this case: That we who are agitating the question of Church Rates do not regard that question as all-important in itself;

7

that as a mere matter of pecuniary taxation it is paltry and indifferent; that we are fighting this battle as one of principle; and that when we have got the abolition of Church Rates, that is only a part of our plan; and that we intend to go on to something else—to the separation of the Church from the State. This is, with all deference to their lordships, a very ignorant way of putting the truth. Why, we have been separating the Church from the State for the last thirty years, and we have done more than half that work already. The union of the Church with the State consists in all the acts of parliament affecting the political position of the Church of England. It consists likewise of those fights of inheritance, pecuniary and honorary, into which the Church of England has been introduced by the authority of the State. It consists moreover of all those customs that have the force of law; all those legal decisions, all those exclusive privileges and powers by which the Church, as an established church, differs from the other denominations by which it is surrounded. And in those things which constitute the ties—the interlacing ties—binding together the Church and the State, we have during the last thirty years been able to make great alterations. The first movement in separating the Church from the State was the abolition of the Test and Corporation Acts. The next was the passing of the Catholic Emancipation Bill. Then there was the establishment of civil machinery for the registration of births, marriages, and deaths; and we have since had marriage laws passed giving to Dissenters the right to be married by their own ministers, or if they prefer it, to be married by the registration officer. The burial laws have been amended. We have obtained the abolition of Church Cess and “Ministers’ Money” in Ireland. We have obtained the secularisation of the “Clergy Reserves” in Canada. We have obtained admission for Dissenters at Oxford,—and at Cambridge to all degrees up to that of master of arts. We have had Testamentary and Divorce Courts established, taking away from the Ecclesiastical Courts a large proportion of the business by which they were maintained. Every one of these acts was to some extent the separation of Church and State. So it is now. The one object we have in view is to put an end’ to all inequality in the dealings of the State with loyal subjects in consequence of their religious belief. We are acting simply the part of good citizens. We wish to establish universally the principles of justice, and when we have obtained one thing, of course we shall go on to obtain another; because those who object to this or the other act, in consequence of its injustice, will have the same reason to object to any act which is an embodiment of injustice towards any portion of her Majesty’s subjects. Politically speaking, it is a matter of necessity that we should go on. It is an incorrect description of our object to say that we are taking Church Rates as a step to something further. It *is* something farther. Every

8

step we take is something further towards our object, and we shall never cease from this object, I hope, until the end has been accomplished which we have set before ourselves, viz., to use our political influence, to the best of our ability, to put an end to all inequalities arising out of religious differences. When we have put an end to these inequalities, then there will be no connection between the Church and the State.

I am ashamed, at this time of night, to go into particular illustrations, but I must advert to one or two. Take, for instance, the question of Church Rates. It is a little question in itself, but it seems to be *the* question upon which those who are opposed to the principles we are endeavouring to promote, seem to think it wisdom to take their stand. We seek to abolish that rate. Why? Because we believe it to be unjust,—because we think that to employ the force of law for the purpose of compelling the whole community to support the religious ordinances and worship of a small part of the community, or at least of a section only, is a principle in itself *prima facie* and palpably unfair. “Not at all,” say the archdeacons, sixty-three of whom have guaranteed the perfect conformity of the ancient Church Rate law with all the principles of justice and religion. How? By this simple proposition. That every man who builds, or purchases, or rents a house, builds, purchases, or rents it, subject to the liability to the ancient law of Church Rates. There needs not sixty-three archdeacons come from their chapter-houses to tell us that. We know that every man who builds, purchases, or rents a house, does so under certain liabilities, not simply to Church Rates, but to any tax which the legislature may impose. But, because a house is built under the liability to the window tax, is that any reason why the inhabitant of the house, whether he is there as owner or as tenant, should not use his utmost endeavours to get rid of that which presses upon him with great inconvenience, and perhaps with great injustice? Take an illustration. All publicans are liable to have soldiers billeted upon them where there is not the ordinary barrack accommodation. They all take public houses, and build them, subject to this liability. Only suppose what would be the laughter of the whole country, if when they went before the legislature to complain of the injustice of singling out them from amongst their countrymen to have soldiers billeted upon them, the army should complain that the power of billeting soldiers upon public houses had existed from time immemorial; that it would be spoliation to deprive the army of it; and that every man and every publican who attempted to get rid of this liability, under which he took his public house, was, in fact, guilty of moral and political dishonesty. Such arguments would never be permitted—would never be employed; for there is not impudence enough in the army. Whatever there may be of iron, there is not sufficient brass in the army, to expose them—

9

selves so thoroughly to the ridicule of the country, in consequence of the absurd nature of the pretensions they put forth; but for the ecclesiastical establishment there is nothing too ridiculous. It does appear to me that these pretensions, put forth by the archdeacons in favour of Church Rates as the ancient property of the Church, are the most contradictory pleas ever put forth in support of any absurdity. Take it in another way. They say that it is the common law that all the inhabitants of the parish should contribute to the support of the parish church. It is said that the debt exists before the rate is made; that those who do not pay the rate are simply repudiating their own debts; and we are told by the House of Lords, as the ultimate appeal of justice, that it is the common law of the country that the inhabitants of every parish have a right to refuse the rate if they like; that it is the common law that you should be bound to furnish what is necessary for the repair of the parish church; and that it is at the same time the common law that you need not do it unless you like. These are the absurdities that attach to the pretensions put forth by the archdeacons to blind the eyes of the people to the injustice of the case.

They say that the only reason why the House of Lords will not recognise the abolition of the Church Rates is because it is taken up by the Liberation Society; that it is one of our projects connected with greater plans. I would only just submit to them that we should like to fight the battle with the Establishment upon that ground. We could not choose a better one for our purpose. We have, in addition to all the arguments that we can present, that natural sense of impatience under oppression which all people feel when a partial tax is laid upon them. We have on this question the machinery of agitation we never could have possessed in connection with any other. We can go before the clergy, and all the parishioners, when they are going to make a rate, and we can enter at any length we please upon the elucidation of the principles upon which we object to a Church Rate. We can propose *anti-ecclesiasticism* in almost every vestry in the kingdom; and we can propose it, too, to those who are not insensible to the force of arguments addressed to their pockets. For the sake of putting an end to the discordance, the bitterness, the social disruptions that are caused by the agitation of this question, we are anxious to clear it out of our way; but if our opponents like to select this as the battle-ground upon which the contest between them and us, in regard to the Establishment, will be fought, we will accept it with all our hearts; and we say they cannot give a greater momentum to our movement than by such a decision, whereas they probably could not, for a time, more embarrass us than if they were to silently acquiesce in the passing of Sir James Trevelyan's Bill, leaving us without any

10

great question upon which we could hang the threads of our arguments.

One more illustration and I have done with this part of the subject, I allude now to parochial burial grounds, where no provision is made by the application of the present law regarding cemeteries, for the burial of the dead without regard to their ecclesiastical differences. Every clergyman of a parish claims a right, in which he supposes he is backed by the law, of excluding the burial ground from the ministrations, at the consigning of our dead to their sepulchre, of all ministers but those who are in connection with the Establishment. We pay the rates for these grounds; and even if Church Rates were abolished there could be no insuperable objection to paying a rate for the places which are necessary, and ornaments which are decent, in regard to places of sepulture. We should no more think of objecting to keeping the parochial burial ground decently ornamented, than we should to contributing towards a cemetery. But Ave say that as we have to pay our proportion, so we must have justice in the use of that for which we pay, Why are we to be excluded from calling in ministers to afford comfort, consolation, and instruction at the time of committing to the tomb the mortal remains of those whom we have loved. It is simply a question of political justice; and we, in getting rid of the law which confers the exclusive right upon a clergyman, do but get rid of an injustice existing in the law of the realm, and to that extent we are furthering the end for which we profess to work.

All these things must be recognised as simple illustrations of the principles we have in view—to prevail upon the state in all their dealings with their subjects to put an end to any inequality that may exist between one subject and another in consequence of religious faith and practice. In effecting our object we must necessarily be political, because it is political work that has to be done. I hope and believe that the motive by which we are influenced is religious, but all the efforts which we can put forth must of necessity be political. We are called “Political Dissenters.” Of course we are. How can it be otherwise, when it is a political church we want to put an end to? But it is curious to see how Dissenters themselves of a timid sort run away from a stone cast at them on account of their political tendencies by men who positively have a political office, who sit as bishops and barons in the House of Lords to attend to political things as political Churchmen. They distinguish nicely and conscientiously between political and religious Dissenters. We might return the compliment and say we wish we could find any distinction between political and religious Churchmen. But we cannot; for all religious Churchmen are political. I do not say that all political Churchmen are religious; but I will say this, that all the political

11

Churchmen employ politics with a view to their religion, and we who support the Liberation Society are called political Dissenters because we wish to get rid of the application of politics for the advancement of religion. I hope I need not profess before this audience that our motives are mainly religious. For my part, although I know the obloquy to which I expose myself, I will say this, that if the mere political advantages to be gained by a separation of the Church from the State were the only ones to be anticipated from the effectuation of our object, I would not have so far consecrated my time and my energies to this work as I rejoice to say I have done. We wish to deliver the Church from the degradation of being managed in Church matters by men of the world; we pity from the bottom of our hearts the bondage in which they are placed whose chief ecclesiastical officers are appointed by the minister of the day; and we pity still more the deprivation of sentiment which must have been produced by a system which could bring about the co-existence in the same mind of an earnest desire for the promotion and advancement of evangelical principles and at the same time an entire subservience to the dictation of men who not only do not sympathise with them ecclesiastically, but who theologically are not perhaps known to sympathise with any religious principles whatever. That our friends in the Church should be greatly humbled and ashamed that by their past historical career they have been delivered over into the hands of worldly and political men, and that their dearest interests both as a congregation and as a church should be made the play and sport of those who are simply playing the game of party—that they should be humbled in the very dust—we could only regard as the natural course of things; but that they should glory in their shame—that they should positively stand up, and with all the earnestness imaginable contend for this as God's appointed method of carrying on the affairs of His kingdom, indicates such a total depravity of sentiment, produced by the constantly benumbing influence of a worldly system, as excites in my mind a more earnest desire to put an end to the system, for the sake of putting an end to its depraving effects upon the minds of good men, than almost any other argument that could be employed. I desire above all things to put an end to the source of sectarian hostility, and to the bitterness of ecclesiastical contests; and if we succeed in the object we have in view, one instrumentality would suffice to effect that for which five or six are now often employed. I contend that the position of the Church of England, in relation to the State, is one of the main sources of the religious bitterness and discord that exist in this country; and I say that if it were separated from the State, there is nothing which the Church could not do; and the reason why her power is paralysed and benumbed is because she is obliged to work with instrumentalities incompatible with the kingdom of Christ. So

12

long as the Church goes on relying upon a mere worldly instrumentality for the effectuation of spiritual purposes, God will not reward her efforts with that success to which she might attain; and if she do not alter her course and her reliance upon temporal instrumentalities be not withdrawn, the day will surely come when her influence will altogether, as a social and spiritual regenerator of society, dwindle into nothing, and the very denominations and sects which she now despises will overwhelm her, in consequence of her own folly in not seeking a thorough development of her own inherent virtues and powers.

**SOCIETY FOR THE LIBERATION OF RELIGION
FROM STATE PATRONAGE AND CONTROL,
2, SERGEANTS' INN, FLEET STREET, E.C.**

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THE SOCIETY'S OBJECTS,

(as defined by its constitution.)

THE abrogation of all laws and usages which inflict disability, or confer privilege, on ecclesiastical grounds, upon any subject of the realm,

The discontinuance of all payments from the Consolidated Fund, and of all Parliamentary grants, and compulsory exactions, for religious purposes.

The application to secular uses, *after an equitable satisfaction of existing interests*, of all national property now held in trust by the United Church of England and Ireland, and the Presbyterian Church of Scotland; and, concurrently with it, the liberation of those Churches from all State-control.

WHAT THE SOCIETY HAS DONE.

Of the Parliamentary grants for religious purposes which the Society has assailed, the *Regium Donum* in England has been withdrawn. "Ministers' Money" in Ireland has been extinguished. A Bill abolishing the Edinburgh Annuity Tax has been twice read a second time by a large majority, and may be expected shortly to pass.

The University of Oxford has been opened to Dissenters, and their right to take academical degrees at Cambridge has been recognised. The office of Principal in the Scottish universities has also been thrown open to other than members of the Estab-

¹⁵lished Church. These important changes are being followed up by a Bill throwing open the use and management of the ancient Grammar Schools to all classes of the community, without any sectarian distinctions—a measure which has become absolutely necessary since the Lords Justices have decided that Dissenters are not eligible as trustees of educational charities, the foundation deeds of which require that the schoolmaster shall be “an honest and discreet person,” who shall instruct youth in “all godly learning.”

The recent satisfactory changes in the laws regulating the interment of the dead—by which Dissenters have been brought nearer to an equality with the members of the Establishment—have been effected mainly by the Society’s instrumentality. Still further to secure that equality, it is now intended to bring in a Bill giving in certain cases, to other than ministers of the Church of England, the right of officiating in the parish churchyards.

The Society’s strenuous exertions for the abolition of Church Rates have been signally successful. As the result of the legal advice and practical suggestions gratuitously afforded, and the wide circulation of suitable publications, rates have ceased to be made, or to be collected, in numerous parishes, and the number of such parishes is constantly increasing. The parliamentary returns show that the rates have been, during the last five years, reduced in amount by at least £50,000 per annum. The Bill for the entire abolition of the exaction was carried through the House of Commons in 1858, and though rejected by the Upper House, it received the support of no fewer than sixty-two peers. In the recent session it was supported by undiminished majorities, as well as by the Government, and it is believed that its adoption by both Houses of Parliament is now not far distant.

The Society’s electoral influence has also been considerable. It has stimulated registration, has repeatedly communicated with electors in most of the constituencies, and has sought to promote the return of suitable candidates. These efforts have been put forth with much effect at the last three general elections.

J, Andrew, Printer, 3, Cromford Court, Market Street, Manchester.

