

WHAT DO WE OWE TO THE REFORMATION?

by

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OUR lot is cast in days when it is the fashion to despise everything that is old. There is a morbid readiness to throw aside all things which bear about them the least mark of antiquity, and to treat them with as little respect as last year's almanacs or worn-out clothes. The only exceptions I can think of are, old lace, old coins, old pictures, and old wine! But as a general rule, old opinions and old institutions are often condemned as useless lumber, and shovelled out of the way, simply because they are old.

Now, I am not one of those who object to all changes and reform of old things. Nothing of the kind. I heartily thank God for most of the changes of the last half-century, whether political, or social, or scientific, or educational. I should not be an honest man if I did not declare my conviction that on the whole they are great improvements. But there is one subject about which I cannot take up new views, and that subject is the English Reformation. I cannot agree with those who now tell us that the Reformation was a blunder—that the Reformers are overpraised—that Protestantism has done this country no good—and that it would matter little if England placed her neck once more under the foot of the Pope of Rome. Against these new-fangled opinions I enter my solemn protest. I want no departure from the old Protestant paths which were made by Cranmer, Ridley, and Latimer, three hundred years ago. In short, about the value of the English Reformation I want no new views. I unhesitatingly affirm that the “old are better.”

I fear there is a strange disposition to undervalue the Protestant Reformation. Time has a wonderful power of dimming men's eyes, and deadening their recollection of benefits and making them thankless and ungrateful. Three busy centuries have slipped away since England broke with Rome, and a generation has arisen which, like Israel under the Judges, knows little of the days of the Protestant Exodus, and of the struggles in the wilderness. Partly, too, from a cowardly dislike to religious controversy, partly from a secret desire to appear liberal and condemn nobody's opinions, the Reformation period of English history is sadly slurred over, both in Universities and Public Schools. It seems an inconvenient subject, and men give it the cold shoulder. Be the cause what it may, the Reformation period is too often shunted on a siding, and has not that prominent place, in the education of young England, which such a character-forming period most richly deserves. The whole result is, that few people seem to understand either the evils from which the Reformation delivered us or the blessings which the Reformation brought in. To remove some of this ignorance is my aim. I want to make some of my countrymen understand that

WE OWE AN ENORMOUS DEBT TO THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION.

Let me clear the way by saying that I do not pretend to endorse the character of all the agents by whom the English Reformation was carried out, or to approve of everything which they did. I do not for a moment maintain that Henry VIII was a godly man. No! Too often he was a brutal tyrant—I do not say that the statesmen who surrounded him were faultless characters. Far from it. Too many of them made a market of the Reformation, and enriched their families by plundering abbey lands. I do not ask you to believe that Cranmer, and other Reformers, either in the days of Henry VIII, or Edward VI, or Elizabeth, were angels, and made no mistakes. I frankly admit that they did some things which they ought not to have done, and left undone some things which they ought to have done. But you must remember that God does a great deal of good work with imperfect tools, such as Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar, and Cyrus. All I do maintain is, that the whole result of the Protestant Reformation was an enormous gain to this country. And I confidently assert that England before the Reformation was as unlike England after the Reformation as black and white, darkness and light, night and day. Facts, stubborn facts, exist to prove the correctness of this assertion.

THE REFORMATION DELIVERED ENGLAND FROM AN IMMENSE QUANTITY OF EVILS.

For one thing the Reformation delivered England from gross religious ignorance and spiritual darkness.

No doubt there was a professing Church of Christ in the land when Henry VIII ascended the throne, a Church abounding in wealth, and garrisoned by a whole army of Bishops, Abbots, Friars, Priests, Monks, and Nuns. But money and clergymen do not make a Church of Christ, any more than “men with muskets” make up an army. For any useful and soul-saving purposes the English Church was practically dead, and if St. Paul had come out of his grave and visited it, I doubt if he would have called it a Church at all. The plain truth is, that it was a Church without a Bible; and such a Church is as useless as a lighthouse without a light—a candlestick without a candle—or a steam-engine without a fire. Except a few scattered copies of Wycliffe’s translation of the Vulgate, there were no English Bibles in the land, and the natural consequence was, that priests and people knew scarcely anything about God’s truth, and the way to be saved.

As to the *Clergy*, as a general rule, their religion was the merest form, and scarcely deserved to be called Christianity at all. Most of them were pitiful turncoats without a conscience, and were ready to change sides in religion at word of command. In fact, they did so no less than four times—once under Henry VIII, once under Edward VI, once under Bloody Mary, and once more under Elizabeth.

The immense majority of the clergy did little more than say masses and offer up pretended sacrifices—repeat Latin prayers and chant Latin hymns, which of course the people could not understand—hear confessions, grant absolutions, give extreme unction, and take money to get dead people out of Purgatory. Preaching was utterly at a discount. As Bishop Latimer truly remarked, “When the devil gets influence in a church, up go candles and down goes preaching.” Quarterly sermons were indeed prescribed to the clergy, but not insisted on. Latimer says that while mass was never left unsaid for a single Sunday, sermons might be omitted

for twenty Sundays in succession, and nobody was blamed. After all, when sermons were preached they were utterly unprofitable; and latterly, to preach much was to incur the suspicion of being a heretic.

To cap all, the return that Bishop Hooper got from the rich diocese of Gloucester, no barbarous and uncivilized corner of England, when he was first appointed Bishop in 1551, will give a pretty clear idea of the ignorance of the pre-Reformation times. He found that out of 311 clergy in his diocese, 168 were unable to repeat the Ten Commandments; 31 of the 168 could not say in what part of the Scripture they were to be found; 40 could not tell where the Lord's prayer was written, and 31 of the 40 did not know who was the author of the Lord's Prayer.

As to the *laity*, it is not too much to say that the bulk of them, except in the hour of trial, sickness and death, had no religion at all. Even at such seasons as those there was no one to tell them of the love of God, the mediation of Christ, the glad tidings of free salvation, the precious blood of atonement, and justification by faith. They could only send for the priest, who knew nothing himself and could tell nothing to others; and then at last they received absolution and extreme unction and took a leap in the dark.

To sum up all in a few words, the religion of our English forefathers before the Reformation was a religion without knowledge, without faith, and without lively hope—a religion without justification, regeneration, and sanctification—a religion without any clear views of Christ and the Holy Ghost. Except in rare instances it was little better than an organized system of Mary-worship, saint-worship, image-worship, relic-worship, pilgrimages, almsgivings, formalism, ceremonialism, processions, penances, absolutions, masses and blind obedience to the priests. It was a huge higgledy-piggledy of ignorance and idolatry, and serving an unknown God by deputy. The only practical result was that the priests took the people's money, and undertook to secure their salvation, and the people flattered themselves that the more they gave to the priests, the more sure they were to go to heaven. As to the grand cardinal question, "What must I do to be saved?" probably not one Englishman in fifty could have given you half as good an answer as an ordinary Sunday School child would give in our own day. Such was the IGNORANCE which was scattered to the winds by the English Reformation.

For another thing, the Reformation delivered England from the most grovelling, childish and superstitious practices in religion.

I allude especially to the worship of relics. Destitute of the slightest Scriptural knowledge, our forefathers were taught by the priests to seek spiritual benefit from the so-called relics of dead saints, and to treat them with divine honour. The accounts which those trustworthy old historians, Strype, and Fuller, and Burnet, have handed down to us about these wretched relics, up to Henry VIII's reign, are extraordinary.

At Reading Abbey, in Berkshire, the following things among many others were exhibited by the monks on great occasions, and most religiously honoured by the people. An angel with one wing—the spear-head which pierced our Saviour's side—two pieces of the Holy Cross—St. James' hand—St. Philip's stole—a bone of Mary Magdalene, and a bone of Salome.—(*Strype*, i., 390).

At Bury St. Edmund's, in Suffolk, the priests exhibited the coals that roasted St. Laurence, the parings of St. Edmund's toe nails, Thomas a Becket's penknife and boots, and as many pieces of our Saviour's cross as would have made, if joined together, one large whole cross. They had also relics whose help was invoked at times when there was an excessive growth of weeds, or heavy falls of rain!—(*Burnet's Ref.*, i., 486).

At Maiden Bradley Priory, in Somersetshire, the worshippers were privileged to see the Virgin Mary's smock, a piece of the stone upon which our Lord was born at Bethlehem, and a part of the bread used by Christ and the Apostles at the first Lord's Supper.—(*Strype*, i., 391).

At Bruton Priory, in Somerset, was kept a girdle of the Virgin Mary, made of red silk. This solemn relic was lent as a special favour to women in childbirth, to ensure them a safe delivery. The like was done with a girdle of Mary Magdalene, at Farley Abbey, Wiltshire.—(*Strype*, i., 391).

Even in the Midland Counties, superstition was just as bad as in the South of England. Strype records that at St. Mary's Nunnery, in Derby, the nuns had a piece of St. Thomas' shirt and that it was worshipped by women expecting their confinement. At Dale Abbey, near Derby, they worshipped part of the girdle of the Virgin Mary, and some of her milk! At Repton Monastery the bell of St. Guthlac was held in special honour, and people put their heads under it to cure the headache. At Grace Dieu Nunnery, in Leicestershire, they worshipped part of the coat of St. Francis.—(*Strype*, i., 396).

Records like these are so amazingly silly, as well as painful, that one hardly knows whether to laugh or to cry over them. But it is positively necessary to bring them forward, in order that men may know what was the religion of our forefathers, in the days when Rome ruled the land, before the Reformation. Wonderful as these things may seem, we must never forget that Englishmen at that time had no Bibles and knew no better. A famishing man in sieges and blockades has been known to eat rats and mice, and all manner of garbage, rather than die of hunger. A conscience-stricken soul, famishing for lack of God's Word, must not be judged too hardly, if it struggles to find comfort in the most debasing superstition. Only let us never forget that this was the SUPERSTITION which was shattered to pieces by the Reformation.

For another thing, the Reformation delivered England from the degrading tyranny and swindling impostures of the Romish priesthood.

In the last days of the Pope's supremacy in this land, the laity were thoroughly "sat upon" by the clergy, and could hardly call their souls their own. The power of the priests was practically despotic, and was used for every purpose except the advancement of true religion. Like the frogs in the plague of Egypt, they made their way everywhere, both in the palace and the cottage, met you at every turn of life, and had a finger in every transaction. They interfered by the confessional between husbands and wives—between parents and children—between masters and servants—between landlords and tenants—between subjects and sovereigns—between souls and God. Obey them and you might do anything. Resist, and you had no safety either for property or life.

One great object, which they steadily kept in view, was to enrich the Church and fill the pockets of their own order. To accomplish this end they employed many devices. Sometimes they persuaded tender-hearted affectionate persons to give money to get the souls of their relatives out of purgatory by procuring masses to be said for them. Sometimes they advised weak people to give huge sums to the shrine of some favourite saint, such as Thomas a Becket at Canterbury, in order to merit Heaven by good works. Sometimes they induced dying sinners to give vast tracts of land to abbeys and monasteries, in order to atone for their bad lives. In one way or another they were continually drawing money out of the laity, and accumulating property in their own hands. "In fact," says Burnet, "if some laws had not restrained them, the greater part of all estates in England had been given to religious houses."—(*Burnet's Ref.*, i., 378).

The other object, which they never forgot for a moment, was to keep their own power. For this purpose they claimed to hold the keys of heaven literally and really. To them confession must be made. Without their absolution and extreme unction, no professing Christian could be saved. Without their masses no soul could be redeemed from purgatory. In short, they were to all intents and purposes the mediators between Christ and man. To please and honour them were the first duties; to injure them was the greatest of sins. Fuller, the historian, tells us that in 1498 a certain Italian priest got an immense sum of money in England by obtaining power from the Pope "To absolve people from usury, theft, manslaughter, fornication, and all crime whatsoever, except smiting the clergy and conspiring against the Pope."—(*Fuller's Church Hist.*, i., 532, *Tegg's Edit.*).

As to the gross and ridiculous impostures which the priests practised on our ignorant forefathers before the Reformation, the catalogue would fill a volume. At the Abbey of Hales, in Gloucestershire, a vial was shown by the priests on great occasions to those who offered alms which was said to contain the blood of Christ. This notable vial was examined by the Royal Commissioners in Henry VIII's time, and was found to contain the blood of a duck, renewed every week.

In the city of Worcester there was a huge image of the Virgin Mary in one of the churches, which was held in special reverence. This was also examined by the same Royal Commissioners, in order to ascertain what it really was. But when it was stripped of certain veils which covered it, it turned out to be no image of the Virgin, but of some old Bishop.

At Boxley, in Kent, a great crucifix was exhibited, which received peculiar honour and large offerings, because of a continual miracle which was said to attend its exhibition. When the worshippers before it offered copper coin, the face of the figure on the cross looked grave; when they offered silver it relaxed its severity; when they offered gold it openly smiled. In Henry VIII's time this famous crucifix was also examined, and wires were found within it, by which the attendant priests could move the face of the image, and make it assume any expression they pleased.—(*Burnet's Ref.*, i., 486).

He that desires to pursue this disgraceful subject any further will find it truly handled in Calvin's *Inventory of Relics* and Hobart Seymour's *Pilgrimage to Rome*. He will learn there, that all over Europe things were shown as holy relics, so manifestly false and fictitious, that the priests who showed them can only be

regarded as cheats and rogues, who in this day would be sent to the treadmill or obliged to pick oakum. Wood of the true cross, enough to load a ship, though we know that one person alone could carry it—thorns professing to be part of the Saviour's crown of thorns, enough to make a large faggot at least fourteen nails, said to have been used at the crucifixion, though we know four must have been sufficient—four spearheads, said to be points of the spear which pierced our Lord's side—though of course it had only one—at least three seamless coats of Christ for which the soldiers cast lots, though there could only have been one—all these are only select specimens of the profane and vile inventions with which Romish priests imposed on people before the Reformation. They must have known that they were telling lies, and yet they persisted in telling them, and required the ignorant laity to believe them. I remind you that for deliverance from this miserable system of PRIESTLY TYRANNY AND PRIESTLY IMPOSITION we are indebted to the Reformation.

The Reformation delivered England from the worst plague that can afflict a nation, I mean the plague of unholiness and immorality among the clergy.

The lives of the clergy, as a general rule, were simply scandalous, and the moral tone of the laity was naturally at the lowest ebb. Of course, grapes will never grow on thorns, nor figs on thistles. To expect the huge roots of ignorance and superstition which filled our land to bear any but corrupt fruit would be unreasonable and absurd. But a more thoroughly corrupt set than the English clergy were in the palmy days of undisturbed Romanism, with a few brilliant exceptions, it would be impossible to imagine.

The parochial priesthood became unhappily notorious for gluttony, drunkenness, and gambling. "Too often," says Professor Blunt, "they were persons taken from the lowest of the people, with all the gross habits of the class from which they sprang—loiterers on the alehouse bench—dicers, scarce able to say by rote their paternoster, often unable to repeat the Ten Commandments—mass priests who could just read their breviaries, and no more—men often dubbed by the uncomplimentary names of Sir John Lack-Latin, Sir John Mumble-Mattins, or Babbling and Blind St. John. In fact, the carnal living and general secularity of ministers of religion were proverbial before the Reformation."—(*Professor Blunt's History of the Reformation*, p. 66).

I might tell you of the shameless covetousness which marked the pre-Reformation priesthood. So long as a man gave liberal offerings at the shrine of such saints as Thomas a Becket, the clergy would absolve him of almost any sin. So long as a felon or malefactor paid the monks well, he might claim sanctuary within the precincts of religious houses, after any crime, and hardly any law could reach him. Yet all this time for Lollards and Wycliffites there was no mercy at all! The very carvings still extant in some old ecclesiastical buildings tell a story in stone and wood which speak volumes to this day. Friars were often represented in these carvings as foxes preaching with the neck of a stolen goose peeping out of the hood behind—as wolves giving absolution, with a sheep muffled up in their cloaks—as apes sitting by a sick man's bed, with a crucifix in one hand and with the other in the sufferer's pocket. Things must have been at a low ebb when the faults of ordained ministers were so publicly held up to scorn!

But the blackest spot on the character of our pre-Reformation clergy in England is one of which it is painful to speak. I mean the impurity of their lives and their horrible contempt of the Seventh Commandment. The results of auricular confession, carried on by men bound by their vow never to marry, were such that I dare not enter into them. The consequences of shutting up herds of men and women in the prime of life, in monasteries and nunneries, were such that I will not defile my paper by dwelling upon them. The details will be found in Strype, Burnet, and Fuller, by those who care to look them up. Suffice it to say, that the discoveries made by Henry VIII's Commissioners, of the goings-on in many of the so-called religious houses, were such as it is impossible to describe. It is a shame even to speak of them. Anything less "holy" than the practice of many of the "holy" men and women in the professedly "holy" retreats from sin and the world the imagination cannot conceive. If ever there was a plausible theory weighed in the balance and found utterly wanting, it is the favourite theory that celibacy and monasticism promote holiness. Romantic young men and sentimental young ladies may mourn over the ruins of such abbeys as Battle, and Glastonbury, and Bury, and Tintern. But I venture to conjecture that many of these houses are more useful now in their ruined condition than they ever were in the days of affluence and prosperity. Monasteries and nunneries were frequently sinks of iniquity.

All monasteries and nunneries were not equally bad. I admit that there were religious houses like Godstow nunnery, near Oxford, which had a stainless reputation. But I fear these were but bright exceptions which only prove the truth of the rule. The preamble of the Act for Dissolution of Religious Houses, founded on the Report of Henry VIII Commissioners, contains broad, general statements, which cannot be got over. It declares "that manifest sin, vicious, carnal, and abominable living, is daily used and committed in abbeys, priories, and other religious houses of monks, canons, and nuns, and that albeit many continual visitations have been had, by the space of two hundred years or more, for an honest and charitable reformation of such unthrifty, carnal, and abominable living, yet that, nevertheless, little or none amendment was hitherto had, but that their vicious living shamefully increased and augmented."—(*Fuller*, ii., 208).

After all, there is no surer receipt for promoting immorality than "fulness of bread and abundance of idleness" (Ezek. xvi. 49). Take anywhere a number of men and women, of any nation, rank or class—bind them by a vow of celibacy—shut them up in houses by themselves—give them plenty to eat and drink, and give them little or nothing to do—and above all give them no Bibles, no true religion, no preaching of the Gospel, no inspection, and no check from public opinion, and if the result of all this be not abundant breach of the Seventh Commandment, I can only say I have read human nature in vain.

I make no apology for dwelling on these things. Painful and humbling as the picture is. It is one that in these times ought to be carefully looked at, and not thrown aside. I do not want men to pass severe judgment on our poor ancestors, and say they were all lost. We are not their Judge. To whom little light has been given, of them little will be required. But I do want modern Churchmen to understand from what the Reformation delivered us. Before we make up our minds to give up Protestantism and receive back Monasticism and the "Catholic system,"

let us thoroughly understand what the state of England was when Popery had its own way unchecked and uncontrolled. My own belief is, that there never was a change so imperatively needed as the Reformation, and that no Englishmen ever did such good service to their country as the Reformers.

But what shall we say of the modern proposal, to give up the principles of the Reformation, and to return to the communion of the Church of Rome? What shall we say, indeed! I say the man who makes such a proposal must have taken leave of his senses, or be utterly ignorant of the facts of history. Are we to return to a Church which boasts that she is infallible and never changes—to a Church which has never repented her pre-Reformation superstitions and abominations—to a Church which has never confessed and abjured her countless corruptions? Are we really to go back to gross ignorance of true religion? Shame on us, I say, if we entertain the idea for a moment! Let the Israelite return to Egypt, if he will. Let the prodigal go back to his husks among the swine. Let the dog return to his vomit. But let no Englishman with brains in his head ever listen to the idea of exchanging Protestantism for Popery, and returning to the bondage of the Church of Rome. No, indeed! We owe a debt to the Reformation for having delivered us from an enormous mass of evil.

THE REFORMATION CONFERRED POSITIVE BLESSINGS UPON THIS COUNTRY.

First and foremost we owe to the Reformation an English Bible, and liberty for every man, woman, and child in the land to read it.

With an English Bible came in the right and duty of private judgment, and the assertion of the great principle of our VIth Article, that “Holy Scripture contains all things needful to salvation,” and the only rule of faith and practice.

Of all the agencies which brought about the overthrow of Popery in this country, the translation of the Bible was the earliest and most powerful. It struck a blow at the root of the whole Romish system. Before a free Bible, and fair play for all who used it, the Pope’s champions could not long stand. The huge fabric of Popery cracked, shivered, and came to the ground like a pack of cards. With a Bible in every parish church, every thoughtful man soon saw that the religion of the priests had no warrant of Holy Scripture.

It is a striking and instructive fact, that of all the agencies which combined to win the English Reformation, hardly any called forth such bitter opposition as the translation and circulation of the Scriptures. Even in 1519, long before Cranmer began his good work, Foxe records that six men and a woman were burned at Coventry for teaching their children the Lord’s Prayer and the Ten Commandments. And the charge against the accused persons was, not the possession of a Bible, but of an English Bible, or “book of the new law in England.”

Afterwards, when the Reformation fairly began, nothing seems to have alarmed and enraged the Romish priesthood so much as the spread of English Bibles. It was this which cost the martyred Reformer Tyndale his life. He was burned because he would translate and circulate the Scriptures. The relentless enmity with which he was persecuted and finally hunted to death, by Sir Thomas More and others, tells a tale which he who runs may read. The priests knew and felt that

their game was up if the people once saw the inside of the Bible. You might as well have tried to stop the tide rising at Chepstow, or prevent Jupiter's satellites revolving round him, as to stop the progress of the Protestant cause when the laity once began to read the Scriptures. In vain Bishop Tunstall seized the book, and Bishop Bonner burned it at Paul's Cross. Its leading contents and principles ran through the land like fire, and from that period the Pope's cause in England was shaken to the centre. You that read the Bible daily and "delight in the law of the Lord," never forget you owe that Bible to the Reformation.

For another thing, we owe to the Reformation an open road to the throne of grace and the great fountain of peace with God.

That blessed road had been long blocked up and made impassable by heaps of rubbish of man's invention. Under pretence of mending and improving the road, the divines of Rome had spoiled it altogether. He who desired to obtain forgiveness had to seek it through a jungle of priests, saints, Mary-worship, masses, penances, confession, absolution, and the like, so that there might as well have been no Throne of Grace at all.

The huge mass of rubbish was shovelled out of the way by the Reformers. The doctrine of our glorious XIIth Article was everywhere preached, published, and proclaimed. People were taught that justification was by faith without the deeds of the law, and that every heavy-laden sinner on earth had a right to go straight to the Lord Jesus Christ for remission of sins, without waiting for Pope or priest, confession or absolution, masses or extreme unction. From that time the backbone of English Popery was broken. You that are walking by faith and enjoying peace with God, by simple trust in the precious blood of Atonement, never forget that you owe this priceless privilege to the Reformation.

We owe to the Reformation a true idea of Christian worship.

In the days when Romanism ruled England undisturbed, the service of God's House must have been to most Englishmen a mysterious performance, which left them entirely in the hands of the priests. If they were present at any Church service, they could only be present as sleeping partners, or passive, ignorant spectators. It was a mere formal, histrionic worship, to which the laity could only bring their bodies, but in which their minds, and reason, and spirit, and understanding could take no part at all.

This solemn farce was completely stopped by our Reformers. They laid down the great principle of our XXIVth Article, that "it is a thing plainly repugnant to the Word of God and the custom of the Primitive Church to have public prayer in the Church or to minister the sacraments in a tongue not understood of the people." They introduced into every English parish the English Bible, and English Prayer-book, English preaching, simple, plain services, and a simple untheatrical administration of Christ's two Sacraments. Of course they could not make the people Christians. But from the Isle of Wight to Berwick-on-Tweed, and from Land's End to the North Foreland, a worship was set up in every parish church which the poorest labourer might understand. You that really enjoy the simple service of our Liturgy (and when heartily and devoutly performed there is nothing like it), do not forget every 'Sunday that for this also you are indebted to the Reformation.

We owe to the Reformation a true notion of the office of a Christian Minister.

Before the eyes of Englishmen were opened by the Bible, it was a settled idea in all men's minds that the Christian ministry was a sacerdotal ministry, like that of the Jews, and that every clergyman was a sacrificing priest. The clergy were supposed to hold the keys of heaven, and to be practically mediators between God and man. The natural result was that they generally became spiritual tyrants, and were exalted to a position which was enough to turn the head of any mortal man. Placed far too high, the priests became despots. Placed far too low, the laity became slaves.

The Reformers brought the office of the clergy down to its Scriptural level. They stripped it entirely of any sacerdotal character. They cast out the words "sacrifice" and "altar" from the Prayer Book, and though they retained the word "priest," retained it only in the sense of "presbyter" or "elder." They taught the people everywhere that the clergy were not the lords of the Church, but, like Paul and Timothy, its servants (Phil. i: 1), ambassadors, messengers, witnesses, evangelists, teachers, and ministers of the Word and sacraments. Above all, they declared, as the ordination service of our Church shows, that the chief business of a Christian minister is "to preach the Word, to be diligent in prayer and reading the Scriptures, and to lay aside the study of the world and the flesh." And as to any power of the keys, and binding and loosing, they taught, as Jewell's *Apology* distinctly informs us, that it was to be exercised by preaching the Gospel to the penitent, and setting before him an open door, and by warning open sinners that, continuing in sin, they would find heaven's gates shut against them. You that know the value of a true Christian minister, and the immense superiority of the pulpit to the confessional, never forget that for clear light on this point you are indebted to the Reformation.

Finally, we owe to the Reformation a right standard of Christian holiness.

Before the days of Henry VIII it was held by all that a monastic life and vows of celibacy were the only ways to attain eminent sanctity and escape sin. Myriads of men and women were continually becoming monks and nuns, under the vain idea of becoming "religious."

The Reformers cut up by the roots this most fallacious idea by dissolving religious houses and dispersing their inhabitants. The thing was done roughly, no doubt, and the property of the abbeys and monasteries was disgracefully misapplied. But the measure was a wise one, and like a severe surgical operation, it saved health at the cost of temporary suffering. The great Scriptural principle was established, that true religion is to be seen, not in retiring into holes and corners, and fleeing from difficulties, but in doing our duty in every position to which God calls us, and manfully facing our foes. It is not by running away from the devil, and giving up the management of the world to him, but by manfully resisting the devil, and overcoming him, that true holiness is to be exhibited. The Reformers ordered the Ten Commandments to be set up in every parish church and taught to every child, and the duty toward God and our neighbour to be set forth in the old Catechism. They refused to give the slightest encouragement to the plausible notion of becoming saints by shirking the duties of our station. It is not too much to say that in process of time this new principle had an elevating and purifying effect

on the whole tone of English morals. If England, with all her many faults, has a higher standard of daily life than most countries, let us never forget that we owe it to the Reformation.

Such is the brief and condensed account of the positive blessings which the Reformation has conferred upon England. I have purposely done little more than name them, because they are not bygone things like Popish superstitions, but living privileges with which we are all familiar. We bask in the full sunshine of them. They are part of the air we breathe. They are a rich inheritance which every resident in England unconsciously, I fear, in many cases—enjoys at this day. We have neither an adequate conception of the evils from which the Reformation freed us, nor of the enormous good which it brought in. But this I am bold to assert: whatever England is among the nations of the earth as a Christian country—whatever political liberty we have—whatever light and freedom in religion—whatever purity and happiness there is in our homes—whatever protection and care for the poor—we owe it to the Protestant Reformation.

The Reformation found Englishmen steeped in ignorance, and left them in possession of knowledge—found them without Bibles, and left them with a Bible in every parish—found them in darkness, and left them in comparative light—found them priest-ridden, and left them enjoying the liberty which Christ bestows—found them strangers to the blood of Atonement, to faith, and grace, and holiness, and left them with the key to those things in their hands—found them blind and left them seeing—found them slaves and left them free.

For ever let us thank God for the Reformation. It lighted a candle which ought never to be extinguished or allowed to grow dim. And forever let us remember that the Reformation was won for us by the blood of the martyrs, quite as much as by their preaching and praying, and writing and legislation. It was forged in the fires of Oxford, and Smithfield. It cost the lives of one Archbishop, four Bishops, and 280 other men and women, who died rather than give place to Popery. Shall we in this century talk lightly of the great work which they did? Shall we hold cheaply the privileges which they won? Shall we entertain for a moment the idea of forsaking Reformation principles and going back to Rome? Once more I say, God forbid! The man who counsels such base apostasy and suicidal folly must be judicially blind. The iron collar has been broken; let us not put it on again. The prison has been thrown open; let us not resume the yoke and return to our chains.

The last thing is the danger in which the cause of the Reformation is placed at this day, by that mischievous Romanizing movement within the Church of England, which is now called Anglo-Catholicism.

Is the movement towards Rome or not? Do they really wish to suppress Protestantism, and reintroduce Popery? Hundreds of well-meaning and simple-minded Churchmen reply, No! They would have us believe the movement only aims at a more ornate ceremonial, and that they are not Romanizers at all. It is only, they say, a question of more or less flowers, more or less ornament, and more or less aestheticism and high art. It is not a question of Popery at all. With these amiable apologists I have no sympathy. I believe they are utterly and entirely mistaken.

That it is a Romeward movement and a departure from the Reformation, and that it leads to Popery, is as clear to my mind as the sun at noonday. The proofs, in my humble judgment, are clear, full and unanswerable.

(a) It is proved by the writings of the leaders. Let any honest and impartial Churchman study such papers as the Church Times, read some of the Catechisms and Manuals of Devotion, published by Ritualistic clergymen, peruse the debates of proceedings of such bodies as the Church Union, and tell us plainly the impressions these writings have on his mind. I defy him to avoid the conclusion that Ritualism is the highway to Rome.

(b) It is proved by the repeated secessions from the Church of England to the Church of Rome. Why have numbers gone over to the Pope's camp? Simply because they have found the principles of their school could land them in no other logical conclusion.

(c) It is proved by the repeated reference to the subject which Bishops have made in their Charges for years. Mild, and gentle, and conciliatory to an extreme, as these documents have too often been, it is impossible not to see that most of our Prelates detect a Romeward tendency in Ritualism. Their cautions, you will notice, are most always in one direction. "Take care, my dear children," they seem to say, "that you do not go too far in a Romish direction. You are excellent, learned, charming, delightful, earnest, useful fellows; but don't go too near the edge. Your danger, is tumbling over into the arms of Rome."

(d) It is proved by the rejoicings of the Roman Catholics themselves over the whole Ritualistic movement, and the disgust with which it is regarded by Scotch Presbyterians, real old-fashioned Nonconformists, and most English Methodists. Both the joy of the one party and the disgust of the other arise from the same cause. Both see clearly that Ritualism damages Protestantism, and helps the Pope.

(e) It is proved, above all, by the unvarying character of all the ceremonial novelties which Ritualists¹ have thrust into our Church worship. They have all been in one direction, whether of dress, or gesture, or posture, or action, or anything else. They have all been as un-Protestant as possible. They have all been borrowed or imitated from Popery. They have all exhibited one common bias and animus—an anxious desire to get as far as possible from the ways of the Reformers, and to get as near as possible, whether legally or illegally, to the ways of Rome. They have all shown one common, systematic determination to unProtestantize, as far as possible, the simple worship of the Church of England, and to assimilate it to the worship of Rome.

The Reformers found the sacrifice of the mass in our Church. They cast it out as a "blasphemous fable and dangerous deceit," and called the Lord's Supper a Sacrament. The Ritualists have re-introduced the word "sacrifice," and glory in calling the Lord's Supper a "mass."

The Reformers found altars in all our Churches. They ordered them to be taken down, and cast the word "altar" entirely out of our Prayer-book, and spoke only of the Lord's table and the Lord's board. The Ritualists delight in calling the Lord's table "the altar."

The Reformers found our clergy sacrificing priests, and made them prayer-reading, preaching ministers, ministers of God's Word and Sacraments. The Ritualists glory in calling every clergyman a sacrificing priest!

The Reformers found in our Church the doctrine of a real corporal presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper, under the forms of bread and wine, and laid down their lives to oppose it. They would not even allow the expression "real presence" a place in our Prayer-book. The Ritualists have re-introduced the doctrine, and adore the consecrated elements as if Christ's natural body and blood were in them.

The Reformers found in all our Churches images, rood' screens, crucifixes and holy places, and indignantly cast them out or prohibited them. The Ritualists are incessantly trying to bring them back.

The Reformers found our worship stuffed with processions; incense burning, flag carrying, candles, gestures, postures, flowers, and gaudy sacrificial garments, and ordered them all to be put away. The Ritualists are always labouring to re-introduce them.

The Reformers found prayers to the dead saints a regular part of English worship, and cast them out. They declared the invocation of saints, in our XXIIInd Article, to be "a fond thing vainly invented, grounded on no warranty of Scripture, but rather repugnant to the Word of God" The Ritualists now advocate praying to the saints.

The Reformers found prayers to the dead saints a regular authority and chief power in this realm in all causes ecclesiastical as well as civil. The Ritualists maintain that the Church is above the State. The decisions of the Ecclesiastical Courts are treated by them with undisguised contempt. They forget that the attempt to make Convocation independent of Parliament, in 1640, was one of the very things which cost Archbishop Laud his head, and brought on the Wars of the Commonwealth.

Last, and worst of all, the Ritualists are reviving the detestable practice of Auricular Confession. This is the practice which is distinctly denounced by the Reformers, in the Homily of Repentance, and in Jewell's Apology. This is the practice which has been tried in days gone by, and has led to such abominable immorality, that even a Pope of Rome issued a Bull against things connected with it and arising out of it in Spain. This miserable, detestable practice the Ritualists have galvanised into fresh existence, and are trying everywhere to re-introduce. Of all the mischievous, Popish revivals for which they are responsible, this is the worst.

Can anyone in his senses doubt what all this means? Straws show which way the wind blows. Ceremonial trifles show the current of religious feeling. He that looks at the catalogue of facts which I have brought forward, and then tells us that there is no tendency towards Rome, is past all argument. Even Dean Burgon, the Dean of Chichester, an unmistakable High Churchman, published a sermon on the subject called, "Romanising in the Church of England." It exposes in scathing language the Mary-worship and the unscriptural teaching about Confession and Holy Communion which disgrace the Ritualist body. It contains among scores of true and good things this notable sentence: "The only logical result of such prin-

ciples and practices within the Church of England will be to betray many unstable souls into the hands of the Church of Rome." Surely in the face of such a witness as this it is absurd to tell us that Anglo-Romanism is not the highway to Rome!

But after all, is Anglo-Romanism doing any harm to the Church of England? With all its faults and defects, does not the movement do more good than evil? Is it not better to "believe all things, and hope all things," and to leave Anglo-Romanism alone? Is it not unkind to interfere with such earnest, devoted men? These are questions which many in their simplicity are continually asking.

Some tell us that Anglo-Romanism has revived the Church, rallied the laity, infused a new spirit into the Establishment, lengthened her cords and strengthened her stakes. Some tell us that the existence of an Anglo-Romanistic party in our Church is an excellent and healthy symptom, that parties keep each other in check, and act as counter-irritants in the constitution, and that except Anglo-Romanism abides in the Church we shall not be saved. My own opinion is diametrically the reverse. I believe that Anglo-Romanism has done, and is doing, enormous damage to the Church of England, and that unless checked or removed, it will prove the destruction of the Establishment.²

We are drifting towards an internecine conflict. So long as the difference was only between different sections little harm was done. But when the struggle is between Popery and Protestantism, union is impossible. The Master Himself has declared, "If a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand." (Mark iii. 25).

Anglo-Romanism is gradually robbing our Church of some of its best members among the laity. Not a few bankers, lawyers, doctors, and merchants are dropping off and leaving the ship. Their confidence is thoroughly shaken. They cannot understand an Established Church in which the service is Popish in one parish and Protestant in another. They are becoming disgusted with the continued toleration of Popish novelties, which their own common sense tells them are as thoroughly unchurchmanlike as they are unscriptural. Some of them go off to the Plymouth Brethren, some join the Nonconformists, and some stand aloof altogether, and refuse to take any part in the Church's affairs. The life blood of the Church is being drained away.

Moreover, thousands of tradesmen, and farmers, and artisans have an instinctive horror of Popery. They may not be very intelligent or deeply read in theological matters, but they are determined not to put up with Popery. They cannot draw nice distinctions: they are apt to call a spade a spade, and to give things their right names. And if they see the slightest attempt to re-introduce Popish ceremonies into their parish churches their suspicions are aroused, and they walk off to chapel. The Churchman who allows these suspicions to be roused, be he Bishop or Presbyterian, may be earnest and zealous, but he is no true friend to the Church of England.

If anyone supposes that in saying this I wish to narrow the limits of English Churchmanship, or to confine it to one party, he is totally mistaken. I never met a sensible Evangelical Churchman who did not admit fully that the Church of England is a comprehensive Church. But though our mother has wide arms and a large heart, I am sure she never meant to embrace both Lambeth and the Vatican.

I maintain that the Church of England was never meant to comprehend downright Popery, and those who hold all Romish doctrines have no lawful place in her ministry.

My chief fears of Anglo-Romanism arise from the effect which it has on the minds of the masses of the people. They do not like it. They will not have it. They call it **POPERY**.

Shallow-minded members of the aristocracy—ill-taught ascetics—self-willed and half-instructed members of Evangelical families who want to mix worldliness with religious formalism, and to compound for the one by supporting the other—idle young ladies and thoughtless young men, who love anything gaudy, showy, sensational, and theatrical in worship, or like to show their independence by disagreeing with their parents—all these may stick to Anglo-Romanism and stoutly support it. They are like children who admire poppies more than corn, and like babies who care for toys more than food. But Anglo-Romanism does not meet the wants of the hard-handed masses of the middle classes and intelligent artisans, the brain and muscle of England. These men want food for their souls and rest for their consciences.

Only let Anglo-Romanism grow and spread for a few more years and the end will come. The Church will perish for want of Churchmen. Generals and colonels and bands of music do not make up an army, and Bishops and choristers and clergy alone do not make up a Church. The Church of England will never stand if it disgusts and drives away its congregations. Disestablishment will come as a matter of course. The Church of a minority will not be spared in England: any more than in Ireland. The voice of the people will demand our destruction; and on modern principles it will be obeyed. The Church of England once disestablished, will split into pieces or become a mere sect, like the Scottish Episcopal Church; and the pages of history will then record that she made a shipwreck of all her greatness, by the suicidal attempt to recede from the principles of the Reformation.

Whether my fears are well founded time alone will show. But I should not be doing my duty as an honest man if I did not state most distinctly my impression that we are in a most critical position, and that the future must be regarded with deep anxiety. I have a firm belief that unless Anglo-Romanism is checked, the Established Church will be broken to pieces.

The Duty of All.

1. For one thing, I advise you to resist manfully the efforts now being made to un-Protestantize England, and to bring her once more into subjection to Popery. Let us not go back to ignorance, superstition, priestcraft, and immorality. Our forefathers tried Popery long ago, and threw it off with disgust and indignation. Let us have no peace with Rome till Rome abjures her errors and is at peace with Christ. When Rome does that, and not till then, it will be time to talk of re-union with her. But till then the vaunted movement for a “Reunion of Western Churches” is an insult to Christianity.

Read your Bibles and be armed with Scriptural arguments. A Bible-reading laity is a nation’s surest defence against error.

Read history, and see what Rome did in days gone by. Read how she trampled on your country's liberties, plundered your forefather's pockets, and kept the whole nation ignorant—and immoral. Read Foxe, and Strype, and Fuller, and Burnett, and Soames, and Professor J. J. Blunt, and Froude's Life of Queen Mary. And do not forget that Rome never changes. It is her boast and glory that she is infallible and always the same. Only give her power in England, and she will soon play the old game; first soothe us to sleep, and then put out the eyes of our country, and make her, like Samson, a degraded slave.

Read facts standing out on the face of the globe. What has made Italy what she was until very lately? Popery.—What has made Mexico and the South American States what they are? Popery.—What makes Scotland, the United States, and our own beloved England the powerful, prosperous countries they are at present, and I pray God they may long continue? I answer in one word, PROTESTANTISM—a free Bible, and the principles of the Reformation.³

2. For another thing, I charge you to beware of Anglo-Romanism, and do all you can to resist it.

Resist it in little things. Resist strange dresses, sacrificial garments, the eastward position in consecrating the bread and wine, idolatrous reverence of the consecrated elements, processions, banners, incense, candles on the communion table, turning to the East, crosses and crucifixes in the chancels, and extravagant Church decorations.

Resist it in great things. Oppose with might and main the attempt to reintroduce the Mass and Auricular Confession in our parishes. Send your boy to no school where auricular confession is ever tolerated. Allow no clergymen to draw your wife and daughter to private confession. Oppose sternly, but firmly, the attempt to change the Lord's Supper at your parish churches, into the Romish sacrifice of the mass. Draw back from the communion in such churches, and go elsewhere. The laity have a great deal of power in this matter, even without going to law. They should tell the clergy their minds. They cannot do without the laity any more than officers in a regiment can do without privates. Let the English laity all over England rise in their might, and say, "We will not have the mass and auricular confession."

Resist it for Christ's sake. His Priestly and Mediatorial offices are being injured and dishonoured. They are offices He has never deputed to any order of ordained men.

Resist it for the clergy's sake. The worst and cruellest thing that can be done is to lift us out of our proper places, and make us lords over your consciences, and mediators between yourselves and God.

Resist it for the laity's sake. The most degrading position in which laymen could be put, is that of being cringing slaves at the foot of a brother sinner.

Resist it, not least, for your children's sake. Do what in you lies to provide that, when you are dead and gone, they shall not be left to the tender mercies of Popery. As ever you would meet your boys and girls in heaven, take care that the Church of England in your day is maintained a Protestant Church, and preserves her Articles and the principles of the Reformation wholly uninjured and undefiled.

3. My third piece of advice is this. Do not be in a hurry to leave the Church of England because many of her clergy are unfaithful. It is cheap and easy policy for Churchmen to shirk trouble, and run away in the hour of conflict; but it is neither manly, nor Christian, nor kind. It is a short-cut road out of difficulties to launch the long boat when the good ship is in jeopardy, and to leave your companions to sink. But it is not the line of action which becomes an Englishman. As Nelson said at Trafalgar, "England expects every man to do his duty."

4. My fourth and last piece of advice is this. Work, every one, both publicly and privately, for the defence of Christ's truth and the maintenance of Reformation principles. But work together in an organized and systematic way, or else you will do little. Associate, unite, organize, work together, keep together, and much may be done.

Things look black in every direction, I freely admit. But there is no reason to despair. The day is not lost. As Napoleon said on a memorable occasion, "There is yet time to win a battle." Come what will, let us not desert our position. Let us not please our enemies by spiking our guns and marching out of our fortress without a fight. Rather let us stand to our guns, like Latimer and Ridley, and in God's strength show a bold front to the foe. The Church of England has done some good in days gone by, and the Church is still worth preserving. If we fall in the struggle, let us fall with face to the foe and colours flying; but, like the gallant sentinel of Pompeii, who would not stir when Vesuvius was in eruption, let no man leave his post. My own mind is fully made up. I say the Church of England had better perish and go to pieces than forsake the principles of the Reformation, and tolerate the Sacrifice of the Mass and Auricular Confession. But whether she is to perish or not depends, under God, on the action of her members.

FOOTNOTES

1 In the latter portion of this tract the Editor has turned the word Ritualists into Anglo-Romans as being nowadays better understood.

[Evangelical Tracts' editor has restored "Ritualists" which is the word J. C. Ryle used.—July 2006AD]

2 The late Bishop of Hereford (Dr. Percival) appearing before the Royal Commission on Ecclesiastical Discipline (1906) said:

"I do hope that anything which can be done to stop this habit of spectacular Communion will be done, because I believe this type of Communion tends to become a debased form of worship in connection with the most solemn portion of our worship. And in connection with that I should like to do anything that can be done to stop the multiplication of the ornamental accompaniments of worship, mitres, crosses, banners, censers, vestments and decorations of all sorts, because it is the tendency of all such physical accompaniments to go from one thing to another."

"So far as possible a policy tending towards what is called home reunion, by maintaining the reformed character of our Church, by resisting this back current towards mediaevalism and Romanism, by emphasising our reliance on Holy Scripture. . . . I am afraid the policy of drifting in the other direction would be drifting towards Niagara."

3 The most remarkable sign of National progress in these latter days, is the manner in which the old Roman Catholic countries like Spain, Portugal, Italy, Mexico, and South American States have revolted against political Romanism and set up barriers against priestly interferences in National life.