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THE  
CHURCHMAN

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ART. I.—THE CHURCH AND THE STATE.

“My kingdom is not of this world.”—JOHN xviii. 36.

“The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ.”—REV. xi. 15.

THE relations of Church and State, like those of spirit and matter, of soul and body, of metaphysics and physics, of religion and science, have exercised the faculties of the wisest thinkers among mankind, and have given rise to theories and tenets the most diverse and the most contradictory. In the treatment of every one of these subjects there have been some who have laid a disproportionate stress on the supersensuous at the expense of the sensuous, and others who have so unduly exaggerated the natural as almost or altogether to lose sight of the supernatural. The hermit of old regarded the body as nothing but an encumbrance to the soul, as an evil thing incapable of being employed for good purposes. In his judgment it was not merely to be brought into subjection, after the example of the Apostle, but was to be reduced to a state of impotence and inutility. His exact converse, the materialist of the present day, looks upon the body as the only real part of our entity, and considers the soul a mere product of the cerebral tissues. And the mass of mankind have, consciously or unconsciously, adjusted the relations of soul and body in an infinite variety of ways between these two extremes. It has fared in like manner with the problem of Church and State. The mediæval Popes claimed the absolute supremacy of the ecclesiastical over the civil power in matters political no less than in matters religious. If they could have had their way, they would have abolished the secular rulers, and would throughout Christendom have swallowed up the State in one gigantic Church organization, absorbing into itself all temporal as well as spiritual authority. The modern Nonconformist,

however unlike the mediæval Pope in other respects, is one with him in his repudiation of any attempt to adjust the claims of Church and State. He does not, it is true, seek to accomplish the impossible, and to efface the State, but he would effect a complete divorce between it and the Church. Strange to say, he arrives at precisely the same practical conclusion as the secularist, who, standing at the opposite pole, despises religion altogether, and regards it as a baneful superstition. But, while their judgment is the same, they have formed it by entirely different processes of reasoning. The Nonconformist regards the State as, from an ecclesiastical point of view, an unclean thing, and stigmatizes as unholy any alliance with it on the part of the Church. To the secularist, on the contrary, any connection between Church and State is degrading to the State, and, as a citizen, he is anxious for its severance.

There is no doubt that the relations of Church and State, like other human arrangements, have at different times been grievously misdirected; and this misdirection has led to untold suffering and disaster. But the evil results of the abuse of an institution are no valid argument against its proper use. As reasonably might we eschew fire on account of the ruin produced by conflagrations. *Corruptio optimi pessima*; the more beneficial a thing is to mankind, the more fatal are the effects of its perversion. Conversely, therefore, the discovery that the misapplication of a principle produces consequences of a peculiarly baneful character furnishes of itself some ground for suspecting that the right application of the principle is of momentous importance. May not this be the case with reference to the union or connection of Church and State?

We cannot arrive at true notions respecting this union without first forming correct conceptions as to what the Church is, or ought to be, and what the State is, or ought to be, and also as to what are the proper functions of each. It is, in fact, owing to mistaken conceptions on these points that the relations between Church and State have been mismanaged in the past, and are in some quarters viewed with suspicion at the present time.

When we speak of the Church in connection with the State, we clearly do not mean the whole Catholic Church, the mystical Body of Christ. That Church consists of Christians who have passed away from this world centuries ago no less than of those who are now living. Any organic relation between it and such a transitory, sublunary institution as the State is manifestly impossible. Neither do we mean the entire Church militant for the time being here on earth. For that is diffused over the whole face of the globe, whereas the

State is strictly confined within territorial limits. What we mean by the word "Church" in this connection is, to use the phraseology of our Nineteenth Article, a congregation of faithful men possessing the characteristics mentioned in that Article, and located within the geographical area of the State. In theory, and according to right principle, all Christians so located ought to be in communion with each other, and to be members of one ecclesiastical organization.

In defining the State there is no similar need to guard against misconception. The State is clearly the whole body of the inhabitants of a country acting together in their political capacity. If all things were as they should be, this whole body would be Christian. The Church and the State, in fact, in a given country, would consist of the very same aggregate of individuals, viewed in the first instance in their spiritual and ecclesiastical aspect, and then in their temporal and civil organization. This is the condition of things contemplated by the famous preamble of the Statute of Henry VIII. prohibiting appeals to Rome (24 Henry VIII., c. 12), which reaffirms the position laid down in earlier histories and chronicles, that the realm of England is an empire governed by one supreme head and king, unto whom a body politic, compact of all sorts and degrees of people, divided in terms and by the names of spirituality and temporality, is bound to bear, next to God, a natural and humble obedience. But this identity of constituent parts, as the Statute goes on to expound, does not imply any identity of functions. The temporality, or the State, is charged with the preservation of the people in peace and concord, the protection and regulation of their property, and (as is being more and more recognised in modern times) the general promotion of their physical and intellectual welfare. The spirituality, or the Church, on the other hand, is entrusted with the maintenance of Divine worship, the instruction of the people in the mysteries of revelation, and the dissemination among them of those right motives and principles of conduct towards God and man which are the fruits of Divine life implanted in their hearts. In other words, the State deals with matters external and visible, the outward conduct and earthly well-being of the people; while to the Church is committed the charge of internal and invisible concerns—the thoughts and springs of conduct, and the well-being of the people in its spiritual and eternal sense.

Now, it is easy to see that, with man constituted as he is, these provinces of the Church and the State are incapable of being treated as absolutely independent, or of being walled off from each other by an impassable barrier. In the worship of

the Church there is a material as well as a spiritual element, and in the enlightenment and instruction of the hearts and consciences of men the employment of physical means is necessary. We have, as St. Paul says, our treasure in earthen vessels, and recourse must be had to the mammon of this world to assist in preserving and dispensing it. Moreover, the Church in all ages has not merely inculcated the Divine principle of love to one's neighbour, but has founded and carried on voluntary institutions for giving practical effect to that love by ameliorating the temporal condition of mankind in modes which the State at the time did not regard as falling within its province. At the same time, inasmuch as outward conduct depends much more on the condition of the heart than on external coercion, the State cannot be indifferent as to the nature and extent of the spiritual teaching which the Church administers to its citizens. The Church and the State can, therefore, never be wholly independent of one another. Disestablish the Church as absolutely as you please, yet she will be obliged to have occasional recourse to the civil tribunals for the protection of her property and the enforcement of discipline upon recalcitrant ministers or members of her community, and even to the civil legislature for laws enabling her to deal with her buildings and revenues in the manner required by shifting circumstances.

The history of the Nonconformist bodies in this country affords notable object-lessons on this point. Fifteen years ago a Chancery suit<sup>1</sup> was instituted to obtain a declaration that the minister of a Congregational chapel at Huddersfield was disqualified, on account of his opinions, from exercising the office of pastor in the chapel. In deciding the question, a Chancery judge had to determine what was the precise meaning of the doctrines of the universal and total depravity of man, the predestination of the elect, and the everlasting punishment of the wicked, as laid down in the trust deed of the chapel, and whether the minister complained of had in his writings used language inconsistent with those doctrines. Again, Nonconformists have continually obtained from Parliament Acts modifying or altering the trust deeds of particular chapels. Moreover, the State, on its side, can never concede absolute and unrestrained freedom to the Church. It must, for instance, always exercise a control as to the amount of land which it will permit to be held by a religious body in its midst. It ought in its courts to redress any injustice in respect of office or emolument which a minister or member of the Church has experienced at the hands of the Church authorities

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<sup>1</sup> Jones v. Stannard.—*Times*, February 2, 1881.

in violation of the laws of the Church herself. It has the further right to repress any religious proceedings which would be injurious to the physical or moral welfare of the citizens. It is true that such proceedings are not easily conceivable on the part of the Christian Church at the close of the nineteenth century. But the principle would clearly apply if we can imagine an attempted revival of some of the licentious religious ceremonies of ancient Paganism. It would also apply if a body of Christians were to conceive the idea that they were in conscience bound to hold their worship and proclaim their faith in the open thoroughfare to the prejudice of the ordinary traffic. Moreover, if in the name and under the cloak of religion a misguided community, in their places of worship and schools, were to preach doctrines and inculcate principles offensively subversive of order and morality, the State would be justified in taking repressive measures; and it would be quite unreasonable to object to such measures as an infringement of religious liberty. The existence of a close relationship between Church and State in times past has been due to a keen appreciation of these axioms, while the mistakes so lamentably made in connection with that relationship have been caused by ignorance of the proper mode of translating the axioms into practice. The Church, unable by exhortation and argument, which are her proper weapons, to retain the whole body of the people within her community, has called upon the State to coerce, by temporal punishments and inflictions, the understandings and consciences of those who have dissented from her teaching. The State, recognising the importance of religion as a bond and bulwark of the body politic, has considered itself justified in applying this coercion to the thoughts and opinions of its citizens. We at the close of the nineteenth century have no difficulty in seeing that, in doing so, the State stepped out of its province and violated the principle of religious liberty. That principle, however, like the cognate principle of political liberty, was, until recently, but very imperfectly understood. In our country in the present day both of these principles are fully realized and acted upon; but we are apt to overlook the fact that both are justified on the same grounds, and are subject to limitations arising from the same considerations. In forgetfulness of this we are now in danger of running into the opposite extreme from our forefathers, and of claiming for religious liberty a latitude and license altogether beyond the bounds of reason and sound philosophy.

The true view is surely this: The kingdom of Christ is not of this world; its weapons are not carnal. The Church has no right to exercise physical compulsion upon the hearts

and consciences of men. Nor does this right belong to the State, since the thoughts and unexpressed opinions of its citizens lie outside its province. Where, therefore, there is a National Church in union with the State, there should be perfect liberty to dissent from it; and such dissent should not be visited with any temporal punishment, nor with any civil disability, except so far as the interests of the State as a whole clearly require it. (The insertion of this exception is, as we have already seen, necessary. It alone can be regarded as justifying, at any rate in the past, if not at the present time, the requirements laid down two hundred years ago, that the Sovereign of this country must be a Protestant and a member of the Church of England.) But the existence of Dissenters in the country does not render unjust or oppressive the maintenance of a National Church—or, in other words, the recognition by the State of one Church as the exponent of the religion of the aggregate nation—any more than the existence of conscientious Republicans and Anarchists in our midst renders it harsh or inequitable to continue the monarchy as our national form of government. Nor is it unrighteous for the State, if it so thinks fit, to tax for the support of the National Church those of its citizens who dissent from her equally with the members of her communion. We may very reasonably regard such taxation as inexpedient, and we may regard with satisfaction the fact that since the abolition of compulsory church rates in 1869 it has altogether ceased in this country. But if the State as a whole considers it desirable, in the interests of the nation, to spend a portion of the public money in the support of a particular form of religion, those who dissent from that form are no more wronged by its action than the taxpayers who conscientiously object, let us say, to the maintenance of warlike armaments are wronged by being required to contribute to the support of the army and navy. The remedy of the dissentients in each case lies, not in adopting the *rôle* of martyrs, but in converting the body of the country to their own view of the subject.

The union of the Church with the State will continue as long as it is considered expedient in the interests of the one and the other. In spite of some signs to the contrary, it may be safely affirmed that the present trend of political feeling is in favour of its maintenance. The State is being more and more influenced in its actions by Christian principles, and it is more and more inclined to undertake and carry on as national institutions measures for the temporal benefit of the people which in former ages have been left to private philanthropy—that is to say, to the domain of the Church. But,

however far the State proceeds in this direction, one work of paramount importance to the earthly welfare of its citizens—the maintenance, namely, of a loving and self-sacrificing spirit in their breasts, must ever remain outside its province, and must be left to the power of religion. Since the promotion of this work is essential not merely to the well-being, but even to the very existence of the State, nothing can be more natural than that the State should desire to have a hand and voice in it; but it can only do so by continuing its connection with the Church. On the other hand, it is not for the Church to stand aloof from any institution or any individual seeking to be associated with her, if the terms and conditions of the association are such as she can, consistently with her fidelity to her Divine Lord, accept. If other terms and conditions be insisted on, she must, of course, at all costs reject them; and in that case the responsibility for any harm or evil which may arise from the failure to associate will rest, not with her, but with the body or individual seeking to impose the unjustifiable conditions.

What, then, are the terms upon which the union of Church and State can be maintained without sacrifice of principle on either side? The only essential principle which the State need insist upon is that it should have a veto over the management and administration of Church affairs; and the only essential principle which the Church requires to safeguard is, that she should be required to do and submit to nothing which is contrary to the law and teaching of Christ. It is obvious, however, that if these are the two correct border-lines within which the relations of a State-recognised Church to the civil power can be adjusted, the relations of Church and State in England at the present day might be substantially altered in favour of the Church, without the severance of her connection with the State; and the fact that so considerable a number among the members of the State and of the State Legislature are not Churchmen renders some change in these relations both just and expedient. In the appointment of Bishops, a veto on the part of the Crown as the executive of the State must be retained so long as the Church is established. But, subject to that veto, the choice of them might be handed over to the Church, provided we are able to solve the very difficult problem of finding a satisfactory body to whom the selection of them might be transferred. So with the laws of the National Church. Parliament must always retain a right of veto; but, subject to that right, the power of making and altering ecclesiastical laws might be relegated to the Bishops and representatives of the clergy and laity of the Church chosen by a satisfactory method of election. In the same



way, the ultimate decision in ecclesiastical litigation must always rest with the Crown, as representing the supreme judicial authority of the State; but the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council is not necessarily the best exponent of that authority.

It is, in short, in an amendment, and not in a dissolution of the relations between Church and State, that the path of true progress lies. The ideal set before us is that state of things in which the kingdom of Christ, "not of this world" in its origin—"a stone cut out without hands"—shall have overcome and absorbed into itself all the kingdoms of the world, so that they have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ; and the time shall have arrived when all "the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into" the new Jerusalem, which is the Church, the Lamb's bride. This ideal requires for its complete realization two conditions—the Christianization of the whole world, and the unification of Christendom. As in the case of other ideals, there may be, and there have been, mistaken attempts to attain to it; and it requires for its fulfilment a spiritual as well as a visible accomplishment. But past failures are no reason for abandoning the quest of the true standard, and the need of the presence of the spiritual element is no ground for neglecting the visible side of the organization. The severance of Church and State, if invested with its logical consequences, means that the State—or, in other words, the nation in its corporate capacity—knows nothing of duty to God and nothing of worship, and, if it recognises the Christian Church at all, recognises disunion as the normal and legitimate condition of Christians. The connection of the Church with the State, on the other hand, means that the State regards duty to God as the foundation of human society and morality, and worship as an essential part of that duty. It means, further, that the State recognises Christianity as the true religion, and unity, not polychurchism, as the Christian ideal. Can we for a moment doubt which of these attitudes it is right for the State to adopt? Can we doubt that it is our duty as patriotic citizens to do all in our power to maintain the State in connection with the Church, and as loyal Churchmen to use our utmost endeavours to adjust the connection upon terms which, while rendering to the State its due, shall also secure to the Church her full rights and privileges?

PHILIP VERNON SMITH.

