THE RELIGIOUS BASIS OF THE FREE CHURCH POSITION

F.B MEYER B.A.

LONDON: NATIONAL COUNCIL OF THE EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCHES
THOMAS LAW MEMORIAL HALL E.C. MCMIII.

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PREFATORY NOTICE

THERE seems some reason for publishing a lecture which was originally delivered in Leicester years ago, but which now appears with many revisions and additions.

To Green's History of the English People I am primarily indebted, but many other writers have been laid under contribution.

I never expected, when these pages were first prepared, that I should ever have the chance of following, however afar, in the steps of those of whom they speak ; but with all my heart I thank God for the opportunity.

F. B. MEYER.

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AMONG the phrases expressive of the various types of life in the religious world, none is more familiar than the term *Political Nonconformist*. It is perhaps less frequently employed now than formerly, but we all resent it on behalf of those to whom it is applied ; and in the present crisis we are all being forced into the political arena by the attitude of those who seem absolutely unable to appreciate the religious convictions by which our fathers were animated, and to which we will be true till death. The Political

Nonconformist is one who sees grave political objections to the union between Church and State; protests against the injustice of giving one form of religion the prestige of State countenance and patronage to the detriment of the rest; and makes full use of political machinery and party organisation to secure the severance of the union and bring about perfect religious equality.

Without doubt the present liberty of the Free Churches from crippling disability and glaring injustice is due to the efforts of those who were prepared to deny themselves the ease, retirement, and general goodwill which had otherwise fallen to their lot, and to venture out on the stormy seas of the political world, incurring odium and dislike, misre-

presentation and loss, in their struggle for their rights as Nonconformist citizens. Their assertion of the great principle that no one should suffer disadvantage and inconvenience as a member of the commonwealth on account of religious convictions and opinions cost them dear. But their names shine with undimming brightness in our annals and upon the foundation-stones of the New City of Free Religious Life which is being reared on the results of their sufferings and labours.

There has always been a large body of men in the Free Churches who have no aptitude for the political arena, who are unfitted for political agitation, but whose Nonconformity is as deep-seated, as resolute, and as unflinching as that of the most ardent

political Nonconformist who ever stood on the platform of the Liberation Society or argued for our rights within the walls of St. Stephen's. In their adherence to the principles of the Free Churches, in readiness to bear social ostracism and loss, in unwavering determination to die in the last ditch rather than give in, these would yield the palm in no point to their more polemical brethren, whom they respect and support; but their resistance to the institution of a State Church is founded more on the religious than the political aspects of the question. And it is their position which we desire to state in the following articles.

Many of these have no invincible objection to the use of a Liturgy,

though to hear some speak, one would suppose that this was the only difference between the Established and the Free Church. But the Wesleyans, the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion, and many among the Congregational Churches, do not hesitate to employ the Liturgical form of prayer, and feel that they have an equal right with the members of the Established Church to the noble prayers, confessions, and responses which are the equal heritage of the whole Church.

There is no need to speak in other than respectful and appreciatory terms of the service which the Church of England has rendered to the English people. Who can speak or think, except in terms of loyal appreciation, of its thinkers, like Chillingworth,

Butler, and Barrow; of its saints, like Jeremy Taylor, Berridge, and Ken; of its evangelists, like Grimshaw, and Charles of Bala; of its missionaries, like Martyn and Heber, Wilson and Hannington; of its martyrs, like Saunders, Ridley, and Hooper. But our appreciation does not invalidate our fundamental and conscientious objections. We cannot do other than remain outside her pale. Our very appreciation of what is good in her shows that we are not blinded by bigotry or warped by prejudice, and casts into yet stronger relief the strength, and depth, and importance of our objections.

The main ground of our objection to the Church of England must now be stated. It does not arise from the use of a Liturgy, which some of us

may prefer. It is not altogether on the ground of her union with the State, which galls and frets us with its injustice and injury to the cause of Christ; yet if that connection were broken to-morrow it is not likely that one Free Churchman would change his position. It is not in her maintenance of an episcopal method of government, which may be a matter of convenience, unless indeed the theory of Apostolical Succession is insisted on. No, their fundamental and sufficient reason is found *in their religious and conscientious objection to the Book of Common Prayer.*

In our next we shall proceed to show that from the first, in the compilation of that Book, there was a compromise which holy and earnest men could not tolerate.

OUR OBJECTIONS TO THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER

THE objection of Free Churchmen to the Book of Common Prayer is deep and resolute, not, however, primarily and chiefly because of its liturgical form of service, but because many of its fundamental principles, practices, and doctrines are in their judgment totally irreconcilable with the Word of God.

We object to the Baptismal Service, in which a child is signed with a cross, and concerning which it is taught in after days to say that in baptism it was made "a member of Christ, a child of God, and an

inheritor of the kingdom of heaven." We agree with the late Bishop of Liverpool when he said on one occasion: "I see continually fresh reason for dreading the doctrine that all baptized persons are regenerate. . . . I see it interfering with every leading doctrine of the Gospel. I see it ultimately producing in some minds a mere sacramental Christianity, in which Christ has not His rightful office, and faith has not its rightful place."

We object to the use of the word "priest," which evidently means something more than presbyter, or than the common priesthood of all believers, because the offices of absolution and the administration of the communion are withheld from those who are only

in deacon's orders. In our judgment this perpetuation of a human priesthood, and the preference of one believer over another in the absolution of sin and the breaking of bread, is contrary to the express teaching of the New Testament.

We object to the Athanasian Creed, which affirms that all who do not hold its theological niceties and subtleties shall without doubt perish everlastingly; because salvation or damnation do not, in our judgment, depend on being able to pass a theological examination, but in the belief of the heart and the confession of the lip to Christ. It is union with the Son of God which saves a man, and rejection of Him that destroys. In fact, the Athanasian Creed is like the armoury of an

old castle the walls of which are hung by the rusting relics of past battlefields, with which we have only an antiquarian interest.

We object to the Burial Service, which pronounces over the grave of the libertine and drunkard the same words of triumphant hope as are uttered over the body of the martyr or the saint.

We object to the office of the Visitation of the Sick, which empowers the priest to absolve the dying man from all his sins. What right has any mortal man to use those awful words which occur in that service : " By His (Christ's) authority committed to me, I absolve thee from all thy sins, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost " ?

We object also to the acknowledgment of the Sovereign as the head and chief governor of the Church, and to the principle which underlies the publication of the Book of Common Prayer for the use of the Church *as by law established.* This connection of Church and State, which phrase involves State patronage and control, the regulation of the affairs of the Church by the State, the close alliance of ecclesiastical and civil power, the creation of Prelates by the *congé d'élire* seems to us subversive of the supreme rights of our Lord, and contrary to the teaching of Scripture.

We do not dispute the good faith of large multitudes of godly and conscientious clergymen, who, without doubt, feel able to reconcile these

principles and statements with their consciences and their views of Scripture. We are not ruthless Vandals who desire to witness the downfall and destruction of the Established Church. We are glad to admit the learning of her bishops and scholars, the industry and devotion of her clergy, the Christian consistency of thousands of her members, but for ourselves we would rather be counted as the offscouring of all things, and spend our years in poverty and neglect, than give, in any form, our adherence to the Book of Common Prayer as containing nothing contrary to the Word of God.

The following declaration is now demanded: "I, A B, do solemnly make the following declaration: I assent to the Thirty-nine Articles

of Religion and to the Book of Common Prayer, and of the ordering of bishops, priests, or deacons. I believe the doctrine of the Church of England as therein set forth to be agreeable to the Word of God, and in public prayer and administration of the Sacraments I will use the form in the said book prescribed, and none other except so far as shall be ordered by lawful—authority."

This is a declaration that none of us Free Church ministers could sign. We certainly do not believe that all the doctrines set forth in the Book of Common Prayer, woven into the fabric of its rubrics and underlying many of its services, are agreeable to the Word of God; and in this we are but following in the steps of the Nonconformists of 1662, who forsook

their benefices and emoluments and went forth to obloquy, privation, and persecution, because they could not conscientiously accept the Book of Common Prayer.

In their protests against the Book of Common Prayer we are at one with those noble confessors of truth, who shine as brilliant constellations on the dark sky of a licentious and godless age, and whose story we proceed to tell in following chapters.

"To thine own self be true—
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man."

THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER: A COMPROMISE

THE history of the Book of Common Prayer is extremely interesting, and a true understanding of its composition will enable us the better to understand the momentous exodus of 1662, from the protests of which the Free Churches of the present day have largely, though not exclusively, sprung. And nothing is so calculated to establish our people in the principles of Free Churchism as an intelligent view of the nature and reasonableness of the protest which our forefathers made, and passed down to us to maintain.

Shortly after Henry VIII. had broken with Rome, Cranmer, who had been recently raised to the See of Canterbury, issued a book called "Henry's Primer." It contained a number of prayers, translated into English from the Roman Missal, and prepared for each hour of the day, from that of morning prime. This Primer was the first rough draft of our English Prayer-book. Among other things it contained: a general Confession of Sins, an Instruction how to pray, a Litany in English, in which Invocations to the Virgin, the angels, and the saints were retained, Matins, and Evensong, together with several of the Psalms.

In 1535, the year after it was published, it was re-edited, with the king's special authorisation, and edi-

tion after edition quickly issued from the press.

For long, however, this Primer was used only in private; whilst the Latin service, as employed in the Roman Catholic Church, was retained in public worship, the only exception being of the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Communion, which were given in our English mother-tongue.

The irregularities in the public service, however, at last so greatly grew, that it became clear that one complete service book must be compiled and issued for use throughout the entire realm. This was finally resolved upon in the reign of Edward VI., when a Commission was appointed, consisting of six Roman Catholic bishops and six of the most

learned of the Reformed clergy, under the presidency of Archbishop Cranmer, to prepare a new Prayer-book for general and private use. This was finished, passed in Convocation, and received the final sanction of Parliament in 1540.

With the truest wisdom, the Commissioners shrank from the attempt to compose an original liturgy, and chose rather to use, so far as was possible, the treasure bequeathed to them from the past. They retained, therefore, what was best in the Romish Missal and Breviary. They introduced large quotations from the Primer already referred to. They interpolated also some ancient liturgies, collects, and offices which had survived, and had been in use in various of the older cathedrals, as

Salisbury. Many of these were translated by Cranmer himself into the noble English which still rolls its majestic rhythm through so much of the Book of Common Prayer.

To this crowning service of Cranmer the permanence of King Henry's Reformation was largely due. In its inception it was more an outburst of royal petulance than of religious principle: but when the Reformers gave to the English people the right and power of taking an intelligent share in the worship of their Maker, instead of being compelled to listen to the ministrations of priests speaking in an unknown tongue, the whole nation appreciated the meaning of the break with Rome, and appropriated the priceless heritage which had fallen within its reach.

Henceforth the clergyman was only the leader in the common devotion of the entire congregation. The simplest peasant could join in ascriptions of praise and entreaties for pardon. Whatever might be the incompetence or inconsistency of the minister, there was enough devotion and scripture in the Prayer-book to slake the thirst for God in every longing soul.

No wonder that the new Prayer-book was hailed with universal delight. Its use had been appointed to begin on Whit Sunday, but in some places men would not wait so long, and introduced it at Easter. There was a fascination in the sound of the native tongue in the house of God which drew multitudes everywhere to hear it. The churches

were thronged. The popish books of devotion almost immediately fell into disuse, and were soon after ordered to be abolished and destroyed.

This Prayer-book, however, in many of its phrases was too strongly tinctured with Roman Catholicism, and too clearly countenanced belief in the literal presence of Christ in the Communion to please the Protestant and Reforming party. It was, therefore, revised in 1551, and made more thoroughly Protestant than it was before, or has been since. This revision is known as the second Prayer-book of Edward VI. But both this and the former one were swept away by the Roman Catholic revival under Queen Mary.

One of the first acts of the reign

of Queen Elizabeth was the nomination of a Commission to make a final revision of the Prayer-book. The nation was disgusted with the excesses of the Reactionary party. The leading Protestant divines who had fled to Geneva during Mary's reign were more than ever determined to keep the Church on Protestant lines. It is not to be wondered at, then, that after due consideration they recommended the Queen to adopt the second Prayer-book of Edward VI., which, as we have said, was more thoroughly Protestant than the first, or than it is in its present form.

But the Queen would not sanction the proposal without some changes. It was too Protestant for her taste. Politically she was Protestant; but, personally, if she had any leanings at

all, they tended to the other side. Her main desire, however, was to maintain a balance between the two great parties which divided her realm. To please the one, she ordered images to be flung into the fire. To please the other she ordered certain expressions in the new Prayer-book, which seemed ultra-Protestant, to be modified. Her first object was to discover a compromise which should comprehend within the Church the more moderate men of each of the two great parties. And out of that compromise the Prayer-book came into its present form.

THE PURITANS

WHEN Queen Elizabeth died, and James I. succeeded to the throne, great hopes were entertained by the Puritan party that large concessions would be made to their conscientious objections to the Book of Common Prayer, as it then stood. On one occasion, whilst head of the Scottish realm, he had even addressed a remonstrance to Elizabeth asking that the Puritan party might be treated more leniently, and their demands considered favourably.

During his progress through England, to be crowned in London, he received the petition of nearly one

thousand ministers—hence called the Millenary Petition—praying for relief from their grievances; and in answer he summoned a conference at Hampton Court Palace on Thursday, January 12, 1603. The courts of the palace presented on that day a somewhat unusual appearance. The High Church party was in great force. Rochets, lawn-sleeves, and square caps indicated the ecclesiastical predilections of their wearers, whilst the Puritans were represented by four plainly attired men, who were, nevertheless, of the highest standing.

It must never be forgotten that the Puritans were not in the first instance Free Churchmen. They were a strong and numerous party within the pale of the National

Church, who had serious objections to many items in the Book of Common Prayer, and who aimed to make it more Protestant, and to purify the Church of Romish error.

It is established beyond controversy that already there were small gatherings of sectaries, as they were called, in various parts of England, notwithstanding the severe measures for their extirpation set on foot by bishops and magistrates. They were forced into that position of alienation from the National Church partly because of the very error in that Church against which the Puritan party contended, and partly because of their opinions on Church government and baptism. They were the precursors, therefore, of the powerful bodies of the Congregationalists

and Baptists as they exist to-day. They not only became the allies of the Puritan clergy, but originated a stream with which the mighty current of the Puritan protest and exodus in after days necessarily associated itself. But the Puritan party was in its first intention a movement within the National Church for the purifying of its Rubrics and Ritual.

We must not picture the Puritan Churchman of those days as a gloomy fanatic. He was well able to sympathise with the culture of that golden age, when Shakespeare wrote his splendid dramas and Spenser sang. Milton may be fairly quoted as the truest and completest type of that early Puritanism ; alive to all that was beautiful in art or brilliant in culture ; familiar with classic

literature, and open to all the impressions of the new worlds of the Renaissance, of Discovery and Enterprise, which were opening on all sides. Free from all moral reproval, approved of all honest men, equally at home in the light touch of "L'Allegro" and the majesty of the "Paradise Lost," a true knight in the celestial temper and purity of his spirit, devoted to the love and service of God, and to that lot, however mean or high, towards which time led him and the will of heaven.

Dr. Reynolds led the Puritan party in the Hampton Court Conference, and touched on one point after another to which his brethren and he objected in the Book of Common Prayer. They were an-

swered by Whitgift, the primate, by Bancroft, the Bishop of London, and others. Much sharp disputing and angry recrimination followed. At last, after two or three days of debate, King James declared that, after listening to the exceptions taken by the Nonconformists, he had found them "very slender"; he did not feel himself bound to make any further alterations in the public liturgy, and he enjoined on all his subjects to conform to it.

Disappointed, browbeaten, and conscious of the strong forces that were confronting them, the little group of protestors withdrew from the Conference and communicated the result to those whom they represented; and in the issue it was resolved that, while not withdrawing

from the Church, they should refuse compliance to rites and observances to which they entertained conscientious objection.

Can we doubt which side these men would have taken, if their lot had been cast in these days, when, to all intents and purposes, in hundreds of schools, agreement with that same Book of Common Prayer is demanded as a condition of headmastership? We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, who expect us to worthily maintain their great traditions.

THE ACT OF UNIFORMITY

IT was in the next reign, however, that of the first Charles, that the Evangelicals suffered most. His tool and obsequious servant was Archbishop Laud, who constituted the Courts of Star Chamber and High Commission, which were created for the purpose of hunting up and stamping out all recusancy on the part of the Puritan clergymen and their following. These Courts, which violated the first principles of freedom, were irresponsible save to himself.

Everything that force, favour, or ingenious wit could devise was done to Romanise the Church. Dr.

Leighton, who opposed the set of the stream, was deprived of his ears, slit through his nose, and branded with the letters "S S" (Sower of Sedition). Clergymen were prosecuted and driven from their benefices, some for restraining the practice of bowing at the name of Jesus, some for declaring against popish saint-days, some for omitting the use of the cross in baptism, one for preaching for more than an hour on Sunday afternoon. They were whipped through the streets at cart-tails, immured in stifling prisons with the lowest criminals, banished to remote lands, while thousands fled across the seas to Holland and New England.

In spite of all, however, the spirit of an indomitable Puritanism spread,

and threatened to carry before it, not Laud only, but King and State and the established order of the realm. At last it found a voice in Hollis, Eliot, Pym, Hampden, and Cromwell—names which will never cease to thrill and nerve the hearts of Englishmen to high purpose and noble endeavour.

What followed is too well known to need detailed repetition. Suffice it to say that, in the first shock, the edifice which Archbishop and King had so laboriously reared toppled to the ground. Laud died the death of a traitor to the rights and liberties of Englishmen, and Charles was beheaded at Whitehall.

Then came the Commonwealth, during which complete tolerance was observed in the Church. Inde-

pendent and Presbyterian ministers held many of the livings of the Establishment. A very wide liberty was permitted in all religious questions, even Quakers, Baptists, and Jews being permitted to worship God according to the dictates of their consciences.

When Charles II. was restored to the throne of his fathers, great hopes were cherished that he would not enforce all those points in the Prayer-book which had made it so distasteful to the Puritan party. And these hopes seemed destined to be realised, for in his proclamation he announced his desire that all notes of discord, difference, and separation should be utterly abolished from his realm ; and that liberty should be enjoyed by tender con-

sciences. "No man," he said, "shall be disquieted or called in question for differences in matters of religion."

One of Charles's first acts was in a line with these professions. He appointed several of the Puritan ministers royal chaplains, amongst whom were Calamy, Reynolds, and Baxter. These men pressed for a scheme of comprehension. They entertained no special objection to Episcopacy. They would not have refused the Book of Common Prayer if certain alterations could have been made in it to relieve their consciences of its more offensive portions. To discuss the possibility of such a scheme Charles summoned a Conference to meet at the Old Palace of the Savoy, situated on the banks of the Thames,

once the residence of John of Gaunt, then in possession of the Bishop of London.

It was attended by the Archbishop of Canterbury with twelve bishops on the one side ; whilst on the other were eleven Nonconformist ministers, chosen either by Reynolds (Bishop of Norwich), or by Calamy.

The Puritans were cited to raise their objections to the Book of Common Prayer, which were answered from the other side. But it was a heartless juggle, a farce of which the issue was only too clearly determined beforehand. The High Church party would not abate the smallest jot or tittle of their position. In vain did Manton and Calamy argue and entreat that they might be allowed to dispense with the surplice,

the cross in baptism—that they might not be obliged to pronounce every child they baptized there and then regenerate. In vain did they beg to be exempted from the obligatory use of the absolution in the Visitation of the Sick, and from reading Bel and the Dragon alongside of Holy Scripture. The more the Puritans scrupled, the more did the Bishops insist.

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S DAY, 1662

THE Savoy Conference ended in the victory of the Bishops at every point. The Puritans retired, disappointed and disgusted. The Bishops then made some few alterations in the Prayer-book, but not in the Puritan favour; added forms of prayer for the anniversaries of those very religious kings, Charles I. and II.—in our opinion unmitigated scamps; appointed some new holidays and saints' days, and arranged some more lessons from the Apocrypha. It was the opinion of Burnet and Baxter that these alterations only made the Prayer-book more objec-

tionable. But in this state it was sent up to Parliament. It led to several debates; but at length, by a majority of six votes, it was adopted, and an Act passed requiring every one who wished to conduct public worship or hold a benefice to obtain episcopal ordination, if he had not been episcopally ordained; enjoining him to declare his unfeigned assent and consent to everything contained in the Book of Common Prayer; and insisting on his solemnly declaring that it was unlawful to take up arms against the king on any pretence whatever.

This was the famous Act of Uniformity, by which it was further provided that any one who failed to comply with its conditions on or before St. Bartholomew's Day, the

24th of August, in that same year, 1662, should be *ipso facto* deprived of his living, and prohibited from preaching any more.

This Act entirely changed the whole position. Before it, men might remain in the Church who were openly opposed to certain points in the Prayer-book, and who were using every means in their power to have them altered. After it was passed, men who felt that the Book of Common Prayer was in certain points inconsistent with Scripture could not retain their position in the English Church unless they put their hands to a declaration which was directly opposite to that which they believed to be the truth. And since the Prayer-book is unchanged, and the Act of

Uniformity unrepealed, it is still impossible for those of us who feel that there are points in the Prayer-book which are contrary to Scripture to enter the pale of the Church.

The Act received the royal assent on the 19th of May ; it was to take effect from the 17th of August, the Sunday before St. Bartholomew's Day ; but the revised Prayer-book was not printed till the beginning of August, leaving a space of only a few hours for conveying it through the country. Even in our own day such wanton haste in the smallest legal matter would be regarded as a serious indignity ; but what must have been the case at that period, when few papers were published at all, none of them more frequently than twice a week, and when the roads were

always bad, and sometimes impassable? Bishop Burnet says: "The matter was urged on with so much precipitancy that it seemed implied that the clergy should subscribe implicitly to a book they had never seen; and this was done by too many, as the Bishops themselves confessed."

With what bursting hearts did many of those who were then holding livings in the Church of England anticipate the 24th of August in that year! How many a father would feel his eyes fill with tears as he looked at the prospect of penury for his helpless offspring! How many a pastor would flinch with an anguish which no words could describe from the separation which was soon to sever him and his flock!

The secession of the Free Presbyterian Church in our time is justly regarded as a noble instance of how men prefer truth to interest. But St. Bartholomew's was a severer test; for the power enlisted against the Puritans threatened to exterminate them altogether. But there was no alternative. They were good men, and behind them stood conscience, which, like an impassable wall, forbade their retreat. The test before them—at least before those of them who had time to inspect it—admitted of no subtlety or evasion which it was consistent with their high character to adopt. They were not required to approve a part of a system, nor even the system as a whole, but to declare their unfeigned assent and consent to all and every-

thing. Failing in their adhesion, they would lose station, honour, usefulness, emolument, and even subsistence, for the time fixed for compliance was just before the yearly tithes would be due, and the refusal would thus sacrifice a year's income, and their houses would be turned to aliens and their inheritance to strangers. But the Act set forth so many conditions, and prescribed them so absolutely, that no alternative remained.

THE SUFFERINGS OF OUR FOREFATHERS

NO day in the annals of the Church in modern times ever witnessed such an amount of pathetic and earnest Christian preaching as the Lord's Day before the feast of St. Bartholomew. The deepest solemnity pervaded these last utterances. The whole fervour of Puritan piety blazed up in these last farewells. The preacher stood above suspicion. The hearer gave emphasis to every word of the voice he was to hear no more. Whole audiences were bathed in tears. The fire of religion fed its flames on the very elements which were employed to quench it. And then nearly two thousand rectors and vicars, or about

a fifth of the English clergy, were driven from their parishes and their homes, because they would not conform.

And who were they who thus went forth, destined for the next six-and-twenty years to be treated, by a profligate court and haughty monarchy, as troublers of the realm and the offscouring of all things? They included men like Thomas Goodwin and John Owen; Matthew Poole, the Commentator; Thomas Manton, and Joseph Caryl; Howe, with his lofty intellect and seraphic fire; Flavel, with his power of sustained fellowship with God; Alleine, who had been described as hardly inferior to the Apostle Paul in the abundance of his labours for the unconverted; and Baxter, whose

"Call to the Unconverted" and "Everlasting Rest" still send pulses through men's hearts.

There had been no time to concert together; and there was no opportunity of raising a sustentation fund for the relief of the poorer ones. Very few were in the position of Philip Henry and Dr. Owen, who had private resources; most of them were like Mr. Lawrence, of Bonchurch, who, when urged that he had eleven good reasons for conforming—in his wife and ten children—replied: "There is one reason which outweighs the whole; whoso loveth wife and children more than Me, is not worthy of Me. We must learn to live on the sixth of Matthew: 'Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what

ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on.'"

In the following year the Conventicle Act was passed, which prohibited Nonconforming ministers from preaching to more than five persons over and above the family in whose house the service was held. Two years afterwards, by the Five Mile Act, they were forbidden to conduct schools, or receive pupils, or come within five miles of any corporate town.

Our space forbids to tell of the heartrending sufferings and privations through which these faithful men passed. Many hundreds of them had neither house nor bread. Several of them were compelled to support themselves by menial toils, as ploughmen and shepherds. They went

from one building-place to another, jeered at by players, hooted by the mobs, pursued by a crowd of informers who made a trade of detecting their private meetings. Alleine died, at thirty-five, of his sufferings in Taunton Gaol. Vavasour Powell, the Apostle of Wales, spent the eleven years that followed the Restoration in prison till he perished in the Fleet. John Bunyan spent a dozen years in Bedford Gaol. Richard Baxter was consigned to the common prison with the following elegant words of Judge Jeffreys : "Richard, thou art an old knave. Thou hast written books enough to load a cart ; and every book is as full of sedition as an egg is full of meat. By the grace of God I'll look after thee."

But if their sorrows abounded, their consolations also abounded. One of them tells how, as he was sitting by the roadside, faint and hungry, two silver pieces caught his eye in the ditch, and he was filled with joy and thankfulness, feeling that God was not unmindful of him. In the case of another, as he was sitting in tears, his children crying around him for bread, an unknown messenger left at his door a sack of flour. The people, who were faithful to their old ministers, suffered hardly less. It is calculated that a sum of £12,000,000 was wrung from them as fines, and that at least 5,000 perished miserably in prison, till, in 1672, Charles ordered all penalties against Nonconformists to be discontinued.

THE ISSUES OF ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S DAY.

THE exclusion of the Puritan ministers from the Church of England was, in the words of Mr. Marsden, a melancholy triumph. Religion was almost extinguished, and in many parishes the lamp of God went out. The places of the ejected clergy were supplied with little regard even to the decencies of the sacred office ; the voluptuous, the indolent, the ignorant, and even the profane, received episcopal orders, and, like a swarm of locusts, overspread the Church. And had it not been for a small body of respectable clergymen, who had been educated

among the Puritans, but who had retained their livings, it was the opinion of those who lived in those evil days that every trace of godliness would have been clean put out, and the land reduced to avowed and universal atheism.

Many of our ablest writers have indicated the sad and disastrous entail which the Act of Uniformity has bequeathed to all subsequent generations. A heritage of alienation and heart-burning, of oppression and resentment, of religious intolerance and strife.

To take one instance, specially cited by the good and catholic Dr. James Hamilton. At the Reformation all Churches were on a level, and all Reformed Churches recognised each other's ministry. Latimer

was a bishop, and Cranmer an archbishop, but they felt that the men ordained by Knox and his co-presbyters in Edinburgh, by Calvin and his co-presbyters in Geneva, were as truly Christ's ministers as the men whom they had themselves ordained at Lambeth or Worcester; and, notwithstanding many efforts to the contrary, this for a long time continued to be the position of the Church of England. But the Act of Uniformity altered all this, because it recognised as ministers of Christ those alone who had received the mystic touch of the bishop.

This figment of clerical caste, of exclusive prelatical orders, of apostolical succession, is as imperious as caste itself in raising walls of separation between those who otherwise

would recognise each other as brethren beloved. It is only a figment, a chimera, an idol of the imagination. There is no real spiritual difference between the episcopally ordained and the non-ordained, between cleric and laic, between priest and deacon, except in so far as the one may be humbler, purer, devouter than the other.

It is remarkable that the Anglican clergy who refuse to acknowledge their Free Church brethren as ministers of Christ are similarly disowned by the dignitaries of the Roman Catholic Church because their orders are invalid, and their right to be in the apostolic succession cannot be sustained. And, best of all, the grace of God is gloriously independent of the channels which men have so

diligently cut for its flow. If a ploughman have God with him, he can preach with signs following; whilst all the hands of all the Roman or Anglican bishops in existence cannot communicate to an unspiritual, unholy man the power to win one soul.

But if the issues of St. Bartholomew's Day were harmful to the life of the Church of England, they have been in the highest degree favourable to the cause of religious liberty. At the Restoration that cause seemed hopelessly lost. Only the Independents and a few despised sects upheld the right of the individual conscience to worship God after its own choice. The great bulk of the Puritan party were as eager as their opponents in desiring uniformity of worship

throughout the land. Fortunately, however, the great severance of St. Bartholomew's Day, which drove the Puritans out of the Church of England, forced them into a general alliance with sects which till then they had hated almost as bitterly as the bishops themselves.

A common persecution soon blended all these Nonconformists into one, and for the first time the Church found herself face to face with a large organised body whom threats could not cow nor persecution quell.

SCHISM

THE Act of Uniformity drove from their churches and livings two thousand earnest and godly men, who were prepared to forfeit all that they held dear rather than give their unqualified assent and consent to the contents of the Book of Common Prayer. That Act was followed by others. The Conventicle Act prohibited the exiled clergy from preaching to more than five persons over and above the number of the family in whose house worship was conducted. The Five Mile Act forbade them to go within five miles of any borough or place where they had been wont to minister. Everything that malignant

hatred could devise to impose pain and penalty was inflicted on these faithful men.

If the fires of Smithfield had been lighted again, here was stuff that would have burnt well. The fidelity which patiently bears years of privation and wrong will bear comparison with that which carries a man through the one brief spasm and agony of martyrdom. It is probably easier to rise once to the height of a mighty occasion, when all the world is looking on, and expecting us to act worthily of a great cause, than to stand firm against the slow fire of repeated and prolonged trial. The fortress of conscience, which will withstand the sudden assault, is sorely put to it by the mine of the sapper and the

famine of the beleaguering siege. We claim, then, for these noble men the martyr's crown, and that they realised the highest type of Christian heroism ; not that they burnt at the stake or sealed their testimony with their blood, but that they stood firm as the chill waters rose inch by inch to their heart, and that they drank the bitter cup, not at one fierce gulp, but by sips that spread its bitterness through all their days.

In the light of such facts, how absurd does the charge sometimes made against us appear—that we are schismatics ! Do not be afraid of that ugly word. Look quietly at it. A man with stout nerves may find the white bole of a very ordinary tree where nervous people scream at a ghost. It is a Greek word, meaning to rend or

tear. But who rent or tore the Church in 1662—who divided the seamless robe? Surely not the two thousand ejected ministers. They would have been prepared to remain within the Church, doing their best, as the Evangelicals now, to remodel it from within. And that they were compelled to take up a position outside her borders, in apparent isolation and antagonism, was due to those who imposed disabilities which they were beforehand certain would be distasteful and impossible. By the Act of Uniformity and their consequent legislation Charles and his advisers deliberately forced the Puritans from the Establishment, and rent them from the fabric, as a man might tear a fragment from a robe.

Can you accuse of schism the younger members of a family who are forced to leave the old homestead because they cannot accept the restrictions laid down by their elder brothers and sisters — restrictions which were not included in the will on which they hold the property in common, and of which their parents had no cognisance ?

But in point of fact the term *schism* is not applicable when the majority from whom the minority divide has deteriorated from the ancient standards of the faith, and has instituted tests which, though suited to their own corrupt condition, are out of harmony with the original source from which they all sprang. To dissent from those tests, and stand by the ancient compact, to be

willing to forego all rather than sin against conscience, is, in the famous words of Thomas Binney, Dissent but not schism.

Schism means rivalry, bitter feeling, hard thoughts and words and acts—and certainly none of these were manifested by the persecuted Puritans, though they were in plentiful evidence among those who pursued them with relentless hate.

The fact is that schism is a sin against the Unity of Christ, against His spirit and temper, against His little ones, and they are not schismatic who suffer patiently and pray for those who despitefully use them, but they who violate the grace and tenderness and forbearance which should characterise the followers of the Lamb of God.

CONCLUSION

BY the enlightened legislation of the last century, most of these disabilities have been removed ; but it is very strange to find ourselves, at the beginning of the twentieth century, called upon to fight over again this old battle, and to face again the spirit of priestly aggression which our fathers had to withstand. Surely it is the Armageddon of prophecy. Once more the spirit of priestly aggression lifts itself against the liberty with which Christ makes us free. The issue is now being presented in connection with the elementary schools, and the training of the young ; and we have to con-

tend not only for our own right to worship God according to our consciences, but for the purity and simplicity of the earliest conceptions of the Gospel imparted to the young.

As the Education Act now stands, the priests of the Anglican and Roman Catholic Church may have the exclusive right in hundreds of schools, which are supported from the public rates, and will be able to inculcate their own views of religion on the children of the parish. Some of them have avowed their intention of using this right to the uttermost, and with the view of turning little Nonconformists into little Anglicans. In this we cannot acquiesce. For the sake of our country we must suffer, as our fathers suffered before

us. It was their solemn duty to withstand the royal edicts, because they clashed with the sacred duty of conscience, and duty to God must always stand first. We have no alternative than to do the same, and follow in their steps at all costs.

The sufferings which some of us may endure in the distraint of our goods, because we will not voluntarily render an obnoxious and unjust rate, are not worthy to be compared with those we have noticed of our ancestors in the great past; but let us emulate their courage, patience, and gentleness towards those that do us wrong, that through faith and patience we may save our fatherland, and become followers of those who now are inheriting the promises.

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