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"The Giant of Voluntaryism,"

OR

MR. SPURGEON

IN THE HOUSE OF LORDS:

BEING AN EXTRACT FROM A SPEECH OF

THE LORD BISHOP OF OXFORD,

ON THE IRISH CHURCH QUESTION,

Delivered June 29, 1868,

With some Comments thereon, and

on Mr. Spurgeon's reply.

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PREFACE.

This Pamphlet is not published with any ill-feeling towards Mr. Spurgeon, or Dissent. The Bishop of Oxford's exposure of Mr. Spurgeon being, in the opinion of many, one of the most telling blows that has been dealt at what is called "The Voluntary System," in modern times, it is only fair that Churchmen and others should have their attention called to it, at the present crisis. If those who are of this opinion will do what they can to circulate this pamphlet, it is hoped some good may be done.

Look on this Picture!

The Bishop of Oxford said:—

“THE argument of Voluntaryism is a very favorite one; and a very remarkable statement has recently been made, on this subject, to which I would wish to call your Lordships’ attention—made not by the Noble Duke, but by one to whom a great many look up—I mean Mr. Spurgeon. (Hear, hear.) Mr. Spurgeon has written this letter concerning it. I have the greatest sympathy for him—he had a sharp attack of rheumatic gout in the leg (a laugh), and could not, therefore, attend the Meeting, but he wrote this letter. He says:—‘It is in no spirit of opposition to the Irish Clergy’—no, my Lords, nobody has any enmity to the Irish clergy when they propose to disendow them (a laugh)—everybody has the most wonderful feeling of interest in them, regard for them, anxiety for their welfare, and so has Mr. Spurgeon. (“Hear, hear,” and laughter) He says:—

‘It is in no spirit of opposition to the Irish clergy that I would urge upon the House of Commons to carry out the proposed Resolution, for I believe them, as a body, to be among the best part of the Episcopal Clergy, and to hold evangelical truths most earnestly. But because they are the best of the clergy, they should be the first to be *favoured with the great blessing of disestablishment*. (Cheers and laughter.) They will only be called to do what some of us have for years found a pleasure and advantage in doing—viz., to trust to the noble spirit of generosity which true religion is sure to evoke. (Cheers and laughter) *They little know how grandly the giant of Voluntaryism will draw the chariot when the pitiful State dwarf is dismissed*, (Loud cheers and laughter.)”

And on this!

The Bishop of Oxford continued;—

“Now, my Lords, allow me to set before you the other side of the picture—not by another writer, but by the same writer, viewing the same question from another aspect. In ‘An Epistle addressed to the members of the Baptized Churches of Jesus Christ,’ Mr. Spurgeon thus writes:—

‘Beloved Brethren,—An exceedingly great and bitter cry has gone up unto heaven concerning many of us. It is not a cry from the world which hates us, nor from our fellow-members whom we may have offended, but (alas that it should be so!) it is wrung from hundreds of poor but faithful ministers of Christ Jesus who labour in our midst in word and doctrine, and are daily oppressed by the niggardliness of churls among us. (Hear, hear.) Hundreds of our ministers would improve their circumstances if they were to follow the commonest handicrafts. The earnings of artisans of but ordinary skill are far above the stipends of those among us who are considered to be comfortably maintained. (Hear, hear.) We are asked repeatedly to send students to spheres where £40 is mentioned as if it were a competence, if not more, and those who so write are not always farm-labourers, but frequently tradesmen, who must know what penury £40 implies.’ [Is that the provision the Irish clergy are to have?] ‘I speak not without abundant cause. I am no retailer of baseless scandal. I am no advocate for an idle and ill-deserving ministry. I open my mouth for a really earnest, godly, laborious, gracious body of men, who are men of God, and approved of His Church. Are these for ever to be starved?’ (Loud cries of Hear, hear.)”

“Now, my Lords, it is because I do not wish to see the Irish clergy reduced to such a state, that I protest against their being left to this specious protection of voluntaryism. (Hear, hear.)”

Comments.

It is not often that a Dissenting preacher enjoys the somewhat unenviable notoriety of amusing and instructing, by his folly, so grave and reverend an assembly of seniors as the House of Lords. But such notoriety has fallen to Mr. Spurgeon, of the Metropolitan Tabernacle, as may be seen by the foregoing extracts. To most minds these extracts will sufficiently speak for themselves, without the need of note or comment. But as some minds are more of an admiring and a confiding than of a reflecting turn, and as Mr. Spurgeon has ventured to defend his folly, a few words of comment on the extracts, and the defence, may be useful to some; and not altogether out of place.

1. Let us look at one side of this picture first. Here we have Mr. Spurgeon, not making a speech, in which, under excitement, he might say more than he intended, and not be prepared to stand to it afterwards; but taking up his pen, and deliberately writing a letter. And mark the occasion and object of the letter. It is to apologise for his absence from a meeting, held in his own chapel, for the avowed purpose of helping Mr. Gladstone and his followers to deprive the Irish Church of its endowments. While the Irish clergy themselves, and multitudes who sympathise with them, are bewailing this attack upon their property, on the ground that it will be an injury to the Church, an injury to religion, and, above all, an injury to the Protestant faith, in its contest with the powerful and aggressive policy of the Church of Rome, Mr. Spurgeon's sympathy assumes an entirely different form. With the air of a patronising Pope he tells the Irish clergy that "he believes

them to be among the *best part* of the Episcopal clergy," and that on this account they ought to submit cheerfully to "the great blessing of Disestablishment,"—an operation which will make them, in every respect, *better*, INFINITELY BETTER, *than they were before*. And mark the grounds upon which, in the midst of so much lamentation from other quarters, he predicts this *bright future* for them! If they will only "trust to the noble spirit of generosity which true religion is SURE to evoke," they will see "*how GRANDLY the GIANT of VOLUNTARYISM will draw the chariot when the pitiful state dwarf is dismissed!*" In writing thus to brethren in distress, Mr. Spurgeon cannot be regarded as using mere heartless terms of high-flown rhetoric, but as giving vent to the gushing tide of his own encouraging experience in the sect to which he belongs—for he adds that he and *many others* have, "for years found a pleasure and advantage," in riding in the chariot so majestically drawn by the great and bountiful giant. If words have any meaning, Mr. Spurgeon wishes the Irish clergy to understand—as the result of his own experience and knowledge, and as a cheering prospect to them in their sorrow—that endowments, of whatever kind, are but as a pigmy in power, and influence, and blessing compared with the voluntary system,—that whatever endowments may have done in founding, and supporting, and extending the operations of Churches, the voluntary system has done, is doing, and will do *infinitely more*, as much more as a giant is more powerful and influential than a dwarf. This, and nothing short of this, is the meaning of his words, if pushed to their full extent of encouragement and comfort. Voluntaryism is not only *as good* as endowment, but a *great deal better*. If the Irish clergy have, many of them, *fair incomes* now, they may rely upon *better incomes* when the dwarf Endowment is dismissed. If they have comfortable parsonage houses *now*, they may expect better ones *then*. If their Churches are not all *now* in the best state of repair, they may be confident of their being restored *then*. If there are some Incumbents with large families and small incomes

—so poor indeed as to be thankful for bundles of old clothes *now*—there will be no such anomalies *then*. If there are many poor Curates *now*, there will be none *then*. And, speaking from his own private and personal experience, Mr. Spurgeon may even comfort the Bishops with the prospect of quite as much purple and fine linen and sumptuous fare *then*, as they *now* enjoy.

Let it be well observed that all this confident boasting is based upon Mr. Spurgeon's experience of the generosity which the "giant of voluntaryism is" SURE to display, when evoked by TRUE religion.

2. And now look at the other side of this foolish but instructive picture. Here the scene is changed. In the place of a bright sun and a beautiful prospect, there are heavy clouds portending rain and storm. Mr. Spurgeon appears upon the scene no longer with the winning smiles, and the magic wand of a guide to better things, but clad in sackcloth, and with the rod in his hand! With tears streaming down his cheeks, he reads from a scroll his bitter lamentation. His words are not addressed to the world—nor to other sects who are under the patronage of the giant of voluntaryism—but to the members of his own sect, whom, in a wonderfully catholic spirit, he is pleased to call "Members of the Baptised Churches of Jesus Christ." He addresses himself to those from whom that experience has been derived which led him, on the other side of the picture, to persuade the Irish clergy to dismiss the dwarf, and to stick to the giant. And now mark what he says! "An EXCEEDINGLY great and bitter cry has gone up unto heaven concerning many of us. It is not a cry from the world which hates us, nor from our fellow members whom we may have offended." Whence then does it come—this "exceedingly great and bitter cry?" Will it be believed?—"Alas that it should be so!"—But Mr. Spurgeon—"no retailer of base scandal"—the wise—the true—the faithful—the consistent! Mr. Spurgeon is the witness—and his testimony is, that this "exceedingly great and bitter cry comes—Hear it ye clients of

this giant of voluntaryism!—from HUNDREDS of poor but faithful ministers of Christ Jesus who labour in the Baptised Churches in word and doctrine, and are daily oppressed by the niggardliness of churls among them! Observe—it is not a few cases of distress that have called forth this "exceedingly great and bitter cry,"—but "HUNDREDS" of them. The word is repeated not by the lip, amid the excitement of a flood of tears—but on the paper—written—yea PRINTED in order to be read—and, therefore, we may suppose, revised and re-considered, with a view to be correct—"HUNDREDS of our ministers (says Mr. S.) would IMPROVE their circumstances if they were to follow the COMMONEST HANDICRAFTS!" This is indeed a sad picture of those who are counted worthy to minister to "the Baptised Churches of Jesus Christ" in word and doctrine! And it is a sad picture of those Churches, for it must be assumed that, in so narrow and limited a body, "HUNDREDS of ministers" are a large proportion of the preaching power of the sect. It proves, to say the least, that the giant of voluntaryism is very capricious. While he pampers some, he starves others. While he pinches a few favoured ones playfully with the gout in the toe, he nips many others cruelly with pangs in the stomach. And yet, with this exceedingly great and bitter cry ringing in his ears, coming forth from the lips of HUNDREDS of starving ministers of his own sect, nurtured under the wing of the giant, Mr. Spurgeon has the kindness, the consistency the wisdom to exhort the Irish clergy, with the most winning and approving smiles, to give up the dwarf and take to the giant—to give up endowments, and go round with the hat, with the assurance that it will be filled!

Such is the contrast—the inconsistency—the contradiction so witheringly exposed, in the foregoing extracts, by the Bishop of Oxford in the House of Lords. The Bishop has done good service to the Church in making this exposure. It is by such exposures as these that more good is often done in establishing the truth than by volumes of argument. Facts are

stubborn things. The exceeding great and bitter cry of hundreds of starving Baptist Preachers, nurtured under a system which is held up for the adoption of the Irish Clergy, is a note of warning which cannot be mistaken. "In vain is the net spread in the *sight* of of any bird"—"Physician heal thyself"—are words of divine wisdom with which Mr. Spurgeon's but too patent folly may be met and silenced.

3. But as Mr. Spurgeon has written a letter to defend himself from the Bishop of Oxford's attack, it may be well to hear what he has to say, even if folly, rather than wisdom, continue to hold possession of him.

The one simple point in the Bishop of Oxford's charge against Mr. Spurgeon is this—If the voluntary system, according to Mr. Spurgeon's own showing, has failed and failed *disgracefully*—in supporting the limited requirements of the Non-Conformist Ministry—what folly it must be to think of casting the whole burden of the Established Church on the shoulders of such a system! And now mark Mr. Spurgeon's reply. Mr. Spurgeon says that cases of meagre support of Ministers occur in the Established Church as well as under the voluntary system—that the evil is common to both systems—and that therefore Churchmen and Dissenters have no right to cast it in each others teeth. This is what is called the "tu quoque" argument! He then goes on to employ an illustration in the following words:—

"Suppose that two farms in Ireland are put in comparison. I declare my preference for No. 2, and yet regret that it is much depreciated in value by a piece of incorrigible bog. A gentleman, who vehemently advocates the superiority of farm No. 1, hearing my two statements, resolves to make me his laughing-stock at the next agricultural dinner, and being in the full swing of oratory, exclaims 'THIS MR. SPURGEON, to whom some people look up so much, has spoken in a certain letter most glowingly of the farm which he is weak enough to admire, and yet I will read to you from a document

in which he admits that there is a horrible and irreclaimable bog upon it. Ladies and gentlemen, the absurdity is manifest even to the blind; but what a prospect is before you if his judgement is followed! what say you to universal quagmires? How would you feel if your homesteads and estates were all turned into quivering morasses, and if the fine property of his Lordship in the chair should be transformed into a vast slough of despond?"

The fallacy of this illustration is apparent. The Bishop of Oxford is not arguing for endowment *without* voluntaryism but for endowment *with* voluntaryism, of which it is well known that the Established Church makes great use. What he asks for is endowment for the maintenance of the Ministry, knowing that the rest will follow. He argues that if endowment *with* voluntaryism is not too much to meet the wants of the Establishment—a *fortiori*,—voluntaryism *without* endowment will be too little. Mr Spurgeon's illustration, therefore, must be somewhat altered. Farm No. 2—the farm Mr. S. prefers—is all bog, or nearly so, and will hardly pay for cultivation*—while farm No. 1—the Bishop's farm—has a large proportion of good, solid, productive land, with only here and there a morass. It may be all very well for a clever, enterprising man, like Mr. Spurgeon, to undertake the bog farm and make a good thing out of it, in one way or another. But when Mr. Spurgeon commends his bog farm to the Bishop, who may be supposed to know something of spiritual husbandry, he must not be surprised if he is met in the following manner—"I dare say you mean very well, but pray keep your advice to yourself. If you like your bog farm, that's your affair, and I have no wish to interfere with you. But I don't. Leave me to my own rich land and pleasant pastures, and allow me to manage my business as I think best. If you will take your own way, and leave me to take mine, we shall be all the better friends."

* Witness the cry of hundreds of starving labourers!

There is a friend and leader of Mr. Spurgeon who was once a good Churchman, or was thought to be so, who, in what most of his friends will consider his best days, wrote the following opinion of the giant of voluntaryism, with which it may not be inappropriate to conclude this comment on Mr. Spurgeon's folly and defence:—

“Of all the parts of this subject probably *none have been so thoroughly wrought out as the insufficiency of what is termed the voluntary principle*. The next step in the argument is to point to the actual amount of voluntary exertion, and to require from the adversary, as we fairly may, *the acknowledgement of its total insufficiency*. It is admitted on all hands that the religious provision of our town population is lamentably scanty. The conclusion is yet more inevitable, if we observe the internal workings of all that sectarian machinery which depends upon the voluntary principle, for we find that its general law is *to provide for those who can pay for the provision* but that its whole structure is such as to leave no room for the argument that the agency of Government paralyzes its exertions, inasmuch as *it evidently does not contemplate or tend towards supplying, on a large scale, the wants of the really poor*, it leaves indeed for them a decent margin as a subsidiary appendage, but applies its main efforts merely towards organizing *a system of which value received shall be the law*, and in which the wine and the milk are to be bought *with money and with price*. Isaiah lv. 1.”—*Vide* page 208, *State and Church*, by W. E. Gladstone, 4th edition, revised and enlarged.