

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_churchman\\_os.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php)

and the weather, the connection between sun-spots and the magnetism of our earth has at any rate been clearly established.

G. T. RYVES.



#### ART. V.—THE CHARGE OF THE BISHOP OF MEATH.

*Our Country and our Church.* A Charge delivered to the Clergy of the Diocese of Meath at his sixth Visitation, October, 1882, by the Most Rev. Lord PLUNKET, D.D., Bishop of Meath. Dublin: Hodges, Figgis, and Co.

IN regard to the Church of Ireland, her position and prospects, no man has a better right to speak than Lord Plunket, the Bishop of Meath. The Charge which he delivered at his recent Visitation deals not only with the concerns of the diocese of Meath, but with the leading social and religious features of the recent agitation in Ireland, considered chiefly, of course, in their relation to the Protestant Church. In bringing before our readers those portions of the Charge which, in a hopeful vein, weigh the evil and the good of disestablishment and disendowment, and give the outlook of the Church as she stands, we pass by the comments which have been made upon the Charge in political or party columns, and we also omit any allusion to statements recently made, both on this side the Channel and on that, about the probable effect of Mr. Gladstone's policy, and of lawless agitation, upon the scattered parishes of the Church, and upon the Church as a whole. It is our purpose, out of the deep interest which we take in the Church of Ireland, that the honoured Bishop should speak for himself. Certainly, as regards ourselves, we have no desire, to point a moral, in any way whatever, at the expense of the Irish Church.

In the diocese of Meath there are, at present, 79 parishes, with a "Church population" of 13,000 souls. According to a Parliamentary Report in the year 1802, of the 92 incumbents then holding livings in the diocese of Meath, 47 (that is a clear majority) did not reside within their parishes; of these, 19 were pluralists, who resided in other parishes, and did their duty in Meath by proxy. Again, in the year 1802, there were 12 benefices without churches, and 54 without glebe-houses. In 1882 all the members are residing in their parishes.<sup>1</sup> There is now no incumbency

<sup>1</sup> "If we include four clergymen temporarily absent from ill-health and two who, from the want of a suitable residence within the parish, are obliged to reside beyond its limits, but within easy reach of their duties."

without at least one church; and in place of 54 parishes without glebe-houses, as in 1806, there are now only 8 in that condition. It is a satisfaction also to know that since the date when Alexander Irwin reviewed the work of church-building and restoration that had up to that time been accomplished, all the principal parish churches in the diocese of Meath have been renovated, and some new ones built, at a cost in all of not less than £20,000. The Bishop thankfully bears witness to increasing tokens of vitality among both the clergy and the laity of the diocese; and he makes mention of many pious and charitable efforts, signs of an ungrudging and cheerful liberality. "It certainly is reassuring to find," adds the Bishop, "that notwithstanding the decrease in our Church population which emigration and the deterrent influences of the present agitation have brought about, the number of those confirmed this year has exceeded by thirty that of the year 1879. In such a fact we have, I think, a very significant proof that our Church in this diocese is alive, and that even amid the exceptional difficulties of the present time her ministers, with God's blessing, are showing themselves faithful to their sacred trust."<sup>1</sup>

Turning now to the national questions discussed in Lord Plunket's Charge, we find, at the outset, a reference to the ordeal of the last three years. "During that period," says the Bishop, "our country and our Church have had to pass through a severe and unexpected ordeal":—

---

<sup>1</sup> "Our diocese," says the most reverend prelate, "is at all times a poor one. It contains no large towns, and scarcely any factories or commercial establishments, while much of its thinly-peopled grazing tracts are owned by landlords who reside for the most part, and spend their money, elsewhere. It is, therefore, encouraging to find that the amount paid in for the support of the ministry in our 79 parishes during the past year is somewhat over £6,000. But there is an even more cheering fact which I gladly notice. The Report of the Committee of Missions and Charities for the Eastern Division alone of this diocese (including 40 parishes) has just been put into my hand, and I see that over and above this sum above-mentioned as forthcoming for distinctly parochial purposes, there has been also contributed by these parishes for extra-parochial objects a sum of more than £1,000 during the past year. Of this amount £603 has been given for extra-parochial charities of a diocesan character, such as the Meath Protestant Orphan Society, the Meath Education Fund, and the Meath Mission to Roman Catholics; £47 to Home Missions extending beyond the diocese, such as the Irish Society and the Scripture Readers' Society; £57 to the Bible Society and the Jews' Society; £129 to Foreign Missions, such as the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, the Church Missionary Society, and the Spanish and Portuguese and Mexican Church Aid Society. Lastly, a sum of £262 is given to charities and works of mercy, such as the Dublin Hospitals' Sunday Fund, the Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, the St. Patrick's Home for Nurses to the Sick Poor, and other similar agencies." Evidently in the diocese of Meath there are to be found many who, like the churches of Macedonia, do not regard a time of "deep poverty" an unfit time for the "riches of their liberality."

When last I addressed you it was a time of comparative quietude and hopefulness. Since that date we have been enduring the throes of a social revolution. So, alas, has it ever been with this our unfortunate native land. Possessing within itself many elements of prosperity, it would yet almost seem as if Ireland, humanly speaking, were doomed by its geographical position and political surroundings to become of necessity the prey of agitators. Too near England to be a separate kingdom, and too far to admit of a complete oneness in feeling and interest between the two countries, Ireland has been used by England's enemies from time to time as a convenient seed-plot for disaffection. From among the Irish people themselves, from France, from Spain, from Rome, from America have periodically started up hordes of malcontents, and adventurers, and visionary theorists, and religious enthusiasts, each in their turn heralding some new form of spurious patriotism, and each working thereby on the imaginations and feelings of the Irish peasantry—a peasantry naturally generous, moral, religious, and brave, but unstable, alas, as water, and pliable as the reed that is shaken by the wind. Nor is this all—for contending political parties in our own Imperial Parliament have not seldom aggravated these complications by bidding for the Irish vote, and by making weak concessions for party ends to the popular clamour. Again and again have we thought that at last we had reached the beginning of better days. Again and again we have been bitterly disappointed.

The present phase of agitation cannot be regarded as less formidable than its predecessors. It has not, perhaps, been attended with such dangerous and widespread outbreaks of violence as have characterized some former seasons of disturbance; but it has been marked by individual deeds of cowardice and brutality, the very thought of which makes the blood run cold. Above all, it has been the means of disseminating principles that cut at the root of all probity and morality. The master-principle of the movement, in short, is *Communism*, and the master-motive whereby its adherents are gained over to its ranks is *cupidity*.<sup>1</sup>

Into the political principles which connect themselves with such a subject the Bishop did "not invite" his listeners to enter. But the events which he had been describing involve something more than merely political issues. They concern the fundamental principles of religion and morality. They affect, moreover, most nearly the interests of the Church—not merely her financial security, but her spiritual obligations towards the country.

In the presence of such a crisis, his Lordship remarks, it is well to look first for some encouragements, some special reasons for thankfulness:—

Had we been called upon to face a land-league agitation at the time when our clergy, as ministers of a State-protected Church, received their

---

<sup>1</sup> We may be excused for referring, in regard to this matter, to the articles in these columns (*THE CHURCHMAN*, vol. iii.).

tithes from the poor, or even when they drew their tithe-rentcharge from landlords, some of them in very needy circumstances, how intolerable would have been our position, both as regards the obloquy and outrage we should have had to endure, and the cruel straits to which we should have been inevitably reduced. Now, however, the very disaster which seemed most to threaten our downfall, has been overruled for our good. Our separation from the State has taken away one at least of the handles whereby our enemies were wont to bring us into disrepute; and our dissociation from all connection with the land, whether as receivers of tithe or rentcharge, has saved us from those fresh complications which an agitation such as the present would at that time have brought about. Time, too, has been given us to complete our financial organization before being confronted by the present distress.<sup>1</sup>

Secondly, the Bishop touches upon special incentives to action. The Church of Rome has allied herself for the purpose of what seemed an immediate advantage with a Radical contingent, which will go far, in the opinion of many, to involve her in ultimate ruin:—

Her priests, with some noble exceptions, have held out brotherly hands from time to time to a motley crowd of agitators, who laugh to scorn the fundamental principle of "obedience to authority" that underlies her whole system, and, as a natural result, many of her people have gradually become enamoured of that very spirit of communism, which, upon the Continent, is at the present time being used to humble her to the very dust.

The Church of Rome has raised a spectre, and will find it hard to lay it.

---

<sup>1</sup> In a preface to his Charge, Lord Plunket points out that the advantages to which he had referred, as following in the train of disestablishment, consisted in their extrication from certain difficulties attendant on a form of agrarian and ultramontane agitation peculiar to Ireland. He says:—

"In addressing the clergy of my diocese I felt myself bound in honesty to recognise certain advantages that have, in my opinion, accrued to our Church, by reason of her separation from the State. These advantages I look upon as very real gains; and I am willing to go further, and avow my conviction, that in balancing the gains and losses of disestablishment, the gain to our Church on the whole will be found to outweigh the loss. But while so saying, I do not wish it to be supposed for a moment that I therefore regard our disestablishment as having been an unmixed blessing. On the contrary, it was just because I painfully realized the many discouragements which disestablishment had brought in its train, that I deemed it right to call the attention of my fellow-Churchmen to some of the encouragements which should be placed in the opposite scale. That we have much to dishearten us cannot be denied. Notwithstanding every effort, our Church has not as yet been able to make adequate provision for the support of her ministry. The income that can be offered to a clergyman is miserably small, and, what is worse, it depends mainly upon the precarious, and at times capricious, church-offerings of his parishioners. It follows of necessity that the independence of a clergyman's position is often seriously imperilled, and his means not seldom cruelly straitened. Nor has he now, as in former days, a reasonable prospect of some better provision for his declining years."

The coalition between the Ultramontane and the Radical element in Ireland cannot long endure. Churchmen may well be assured that God has a special work for them to do in the land; and a stirring watchword is given them by the Bishop: "Hold the fort!" Let not the pastor who has the charge of but a few sheep in the wilderness think his labours thrown away. Every parish is a post of honour given by God. "These isolated lights shining in dark places are witnesses for Him, and He has entrusted to our Church the solemn responsibility and the honourable duty of seeing that they shall not be extinguished. Every church throughout the land wherein the pure doctrines of our Church are taught, and the means of grace duly provided, is a centre around which our own people can rally and find safety from the snares of surrounding error. They are centres, too, wherein the evangelist can sally forth and spread the truth in the regions round about.

"The duty of endeavouring to win over our Roman Catholic fellow-countrymen," continues the Bishop, "should engage our prayerful attention more than ever at the present emergency:—

"I do not mean," says the Bishop, "that this season of distraction and turbulence is one, in which, humanly speaking, such efforts are likely to be attended with immediate fruits. But if it be the case that a change in the religious feelings of the Irish peasantry, such as I have ventured to foreshadow, is impending in the future, if a spirit is beginning even already to manifest itself which, in its further developments, may tend to shake the allegiance of many to the Church of Rome, and if the danger then to be feared will be lest not a few, repelled by the pretensions and the dogmas of Vaticanism, may be tempted to rush headlong to the brink of infidelity, how important it is that their minds should have been accustomed beforehand to a knowledge of the fact that there is an alternative to adopt, a more excellent way to follow; that there is an ancient Church in this land which traces her lineage to the times of St. Patrick and St. Columba; a Church which for seven centuries from that date was untrammelled by any foreign yoke until the fatal day when, at the Synod of Cashel, Ireland's Ecclesiastical and National Independence was surrendered to an English invader armed with the authority of a Papal Bull; a Church within whose bosom her sons can enjoy to the full that liberty of conscience and judgment to which God invites them, without, at the same time, renouncing their obedience to Him Whose service is perfect freedom; a Church which disowns and rejects all that is new and false in systems of man's invention, without at the same time breaking loose from all that is old and true in the traditions of the past; a Church which takes Holy Scripture for her only rule of faith, the Holy Spirit for her only Interpreter and Guide, and Christ Jesus for her only Head! It is, I say, of vital importance that the claims and history of this Church, even of the Church to which, through God's mercy, it is your privilege and mine, brethren, to belong, should be continually kept before the eyes of our Roman Catholic fellow-Christians; and, above all, that no oppor-

tunity should be lost of circulating throughout the length and breadth of this land that Holy Bible to which our Church fearlessly appeals as witnessing the purity of her faith, and which she believes is able to make wise unto salvation all those who are only willing to receive its message into their hearts!

In taking leave of this vigorous and timely Charge, which we earnestly commend to the consideration of all who, like ourselves, are keenly interested in the welfare of the Church of Ireland, the true Church of St. Patrick, we venture to assure the most reverend Prelate that his words will be read on this side the Channel with sincere sympathy and the heartiest good wishes. In the midst of discouragements and difficulties, the Churchmen of Ireland have done, these last twelve years, right noble work. According to Lord Plunket's watchword—"*Hold the Fort!*"—may they still hopefully labour, in the love of Christ, "for their Country and their Church."



#### ART VI.—CATHEDRAL STATUTES.

THE lamented death of the Archbishop of Canterbury has not only removed from the Church of England a ruler of rare judgment and ability, who long ago gained the confidence and the affections of the vast majority of Churchmen in this country, but it has also deprived the Cathedral Commission of a Chairman whose well-balanced and judicial mind was greatly needed among a body already materially weakened by the death of Sir Henry Jackson and by the resignation of Lord Coleridge.

We cannot conceal from ourselves that it is no easy matter for the Prime Minister to select, from the Episcopal Bench, a successor to Archbishop Tait, who has been incomparably the ablest and the most trusted Primate within the memory of the present generation.

An inquiry into the state of the cathedral churches in England and Wales is no novelty. In November, 1852, a Royal Commission was appointed to inquire into the subject, and the Commissioners reported at great length in 1854 and 1855. Some of the recommendations contained in their three Reports have been embodied in legislation; but much more remains to be done before we can clear away the dust and the cobwebs of ages, which now obscure and impede the utility of those grand foundations that form so prominent a feature in our ecclesiastical system.

The first Commission to inquire into the state of the Esta-