

ENGLISH CHURCH REFORM, 1815-1840

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English church reform, 1815-1840 by William Law Mathieson

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PREFACE

A WRITER of English history at the present day may consider himself fortunate if he has not been anticipated in more than the outline of his task ; and this degree of originality may, I think, be claimed for the following work. The legislation of 1836-1840, which placed the Church of England on its present basis, has of course been described, but not with the fullness and particularity which its importance deserves. The best account, so far as I know, is given by Canon Perry in that excellent survey, "The Student's English Church History," but it is necessarily a mere sketch. Mr. Warre Cornish has devoted two volumes to "The English Church in the Nineteenth Century"; but his treatment of reform at this period is even less detailed than that of Canon Perry. "The Political History of England" barely alludes to what one of its writers calls "a veritable revolution in the financial and disciplinary administration of the Church"; and Sir Spencer Walpole dismisses the subject in some ten pages.

Ecclesiastical reform in England was a product of the industrial revolution ; for it was the result, though not the original object, of a movement which had originated in the early years of the century, when Churchmen had awakened to the necessity of recovering the ground they had lost owing to the rapid increase of population in the manufacturing districts. The Parliament of that day was quite willing to assist in building

churches, and did so at various times from 1809 to 1824 to the amount of two and a half million pounds. But when the House of Commons had been thrown open to Dissenters and Catholics, and had been liberated from aristocratic control, these supplies were not likely to be continued—at all events, until the discipline and financial resources of the Church had been thoroughly overhauled. Peel's attitude did not differ from that of Lord Grey: "We can do nothing for you if you will do nothing for yourselves." Conforming to this view of the subject, the narrative opens at the Peace of 1815; and from this point I have traced the growth of a feeling hostile to the Church which culminated in 1832, and was then the most cogent plea for remedying its abuses.

I may here refer to an aspect of the Oxford Movement which has received but little attention. It was a question much debated by the leaders whether they should combine and agitate against the threatened inroad of liberalism or should content themselves with providing an antidote in the shape of Catholic theology; and I have sought to bring out more clearly than has yet been attempted the part played by the "Associationists" as opposed to the Tractarians. The letters of Newman and of Rose are essential to a proper understanding of this conflict as described, some years later, by Palmer and Perceval; and, though both were published more than thirty years ago, they have not yet been used for the purpose.

At the present day, when the problem of administrative reform is again before the Church, and a report on the subject has been drawn up by the Archbishops' Committee of Inquiry, some of the questions discussed in this book may have a practical interest.

To the Carnegie Trustees for the Scottish Universities, who have assisted me in publishing, I tender my cordial thanks.

EDINBURGH, *September 1923.*

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

	PAGE
Religious parties ; the Evangelicals	1
Their slow progress up to 1800	2
Pharisaical spirit ; lack of culture	4
The clergy in general ; low standard of duty	6
High Churchmen ; Nonjurors	7
Horne, Jones, and Stevens ; Hutchinsonians	8
Archdeacon Daubeny	11
Marsh's attack on the Bible Society, 1812	12
National Education Society founded	14
Growth of Evangelicalism after the Peace	15

CHAPTER I

THE PRE-REFORM CHURCH, 1815-1832

✓ The Church popular in the eighteenth century	16
✓ Fails to expand with the new industrial population	17
The grievance of tithes	19
Plurality and non-residence	22
Clergy Residence Act, 1803 ; its failure	24
Bishop Watson's proposed reform	25
✓ The Church and the democratic movement, 1819	26
Durham clergy at issue with the people	28
✓ Anglicanism and social subordination	31

	PAGE
✓ The clergy and secular knowledge	33
Bishops and the sacramental test, 1828	36
Their attitude towards Catholic relief, 1829	38
Parliamentary reform	39
Lord Grey's Bill, 1831	40
Attitude of the clergy	42
Two bishops for the second Bill, twenty-one against	46
Bishop Bathurst	47
Bishops Copleston and Blomfield	48
Anti-episcopal demonstrations; "Mrs. Partington"	50
Attempts to influence the bishops	52
Their speeches in the debate of April 1832	53
Twelve for the third Bill, fifteen against	56
Lyndhurst's motion; the twelve reduced to four	57
The Bill passed; five dissent	58
The Establishment despaired of	58

CHAPTER II

REFORMERS AND ANTI-REFORMERS, 1832-1834

Joshua Watson's proposed Commission	59
Archbishop Howley's Tithe and Plurality Bills	60
"The Extraordinary Black Book"	62
Beverley's "Letter to the Archbishop of York"	64
Bishop Sparke and the living of Wisbeach	65
Projects of reform; <i>Blackwood's Magazine</i>	66
Professor Burton; <i>British Critic</i>	67
Lord Henley's "Plan of Church Reform"	68
Pusey on "Cathedral Institutions"	70
Arnold's comprehension scheme	71
Proposed revision of the Liturgy	73
The ecclesiastical situation in Ireland	75
The Irish Church Bill; debate in the Lords	76
Church defence; Hugh James Rose	80