A candid and respectful letter to the rev. W. Tiptaft ... in answer to his fourteen reasons for leaving the Church of England

by

William Tiptaft
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A

CANDID AND RESPECTFUL

LETTER

TO THE

REV. WILLIAM TIPTAFT,

LATE VICAR OF SUTTON COURTNEY, BERKS;

IN ANSWER TO

HIS FOURTEEN REASONS FOR LEAVING THE

CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

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BY THE

REV. PETER HALL, M.A.

CURATE OF ST. EDMUND'S, SALISBURY.

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"Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you."—1 Pet. iii. 16.

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&c.

Reverend Sir,

Although you will not consent to address a Bishop of the Church of England with the title he derives, not from his rank in that Church, but from his seat in the Council of Peers, I trust I shall incur no offence in addressing a Minister, once ordained into the same Church, by the epithet applied in common to its highest and its humblest officers; and that you will submit to be designated by others, as I observe that you still designate yourself.

That the Letter, in which you recently laid your complaints against the Church of England, and your resignation of its emoluments, before the first ecclesiastical authority in the Diocese, should have been promulgated to the discredit of that Church, by one who had once reposed beneath its shelter, is a circumstance which every member of the community you have abandoned, must conscientiously deplore. I was grieved to see even the columns of a newspaper employed in a service so ungracious. Had the matter, however, rested here, I, for one, should have scarcely thought it worth while to place a quarrel, of local and temporary interest only, upon more permanent and public record. But when I saw the same Letter, not only issued in the more pretending form of a distinct publication, but offered at a merely nominal price, in the hope of an "extensive circulation," I must con-
fess, an unpleasant suspicion of the motives and designs for such a course, involuntarily urged me to remonstrance. It is not usual, when we part, even in anger and disgust, from old and dear acquaintance (and I trust the acquaintance you now forego was once dear to you), to proclaim their failings to the world,—to expose their errors to open shame and scandal,—to "make a public example of them;" but rather "to put them away privily,"—to smother both our disapproval and our displeasure, and to pray in secret for their amendment.

One might have hoped, indeed, that the circumstances of the Church of England, at the passing moment, were such as to plead, at least for leniency, at the hands of her fiercest adversaries. Beset at once by the assaults of dissent, of fanaticism, and of infidelity, she has little to expect on earth, but from the justice of her righteous quarrel, and the fidelity of her ministers and adherents. In "the fiery furnace of affliction" she must prepare, both individually and collectively, to be tried; but she knows that God is faithful, who will neither suffer "the gates of hell to prevail," nor abandon his people to "the hour of adversity, and the power of darkness."

But on another, and a more important consideration, I am happy and thankful, beyond expression, for this avowal of your hostility: and if, indeed, we are to take your announcement as authoritative, that the objections you here urge, comprise not only the principal causes of your own dissatisfaction, but "some of the most important reasons for conscientious dissent" on the part of seceders in general from the Church of England; I do not hesitate to acknowledge my opinion, that the purity of her doctrines and constitution is more triumphantly vindicated, and the perverseness or frivolity of too many of the pretences which have separated her children from her bosom, more effectively established, by the accusations of an adversary, than could have been expected from the
soundest arguments or highest eloquence of her defenders.

Not that I would have you imagine, Sir, I am prepared to pronounce the Church of England faultless in every particular, the most minute and unimportant. The Church of Christ, the Apostolic Church, are titles replete with sanctity and reverence; and I do not suppose that, in their full, and strict, and heavenly import, they are applicable to any congregation, exposed to the corruptions of humanity, on earth. Still, "in all those things that of necessity are requisite" to the maintenance and propagation of Christianity, I do believe that the Church of England not only surpasses every other establishment since the days of the first converts, but is not likely, in the ordinances of her faith and worship, to be ever improved hereafter. Other points there are, connected with her discipline and administrations, on which all men, of modest zeal and sincerity, are beginning to agree, that alterations may be effected for the better; and if her Ministers remain but true to themselves, and to the holy cause they have espoused, I see no reason to despair that her bulwarks may be yet established in complete security and peace.

I shall now proceed to answer specifically, and with as much distinctness as brevity of language will allow, your several topics of dissent. That any reasoning will henceforth bring conviction to a mind, which has naturally weighed the whole subject with repeated deliberation, is more than can be fairly anticipated: should the remarks I have to offer tend, in any degree, to intercept what you have ventured to pronounce "the cause of Truth," but what I am no less confident in characterizing as the cause of Error, the labours of him who now comes forward, the humble but zealous advocate of his brethren in the ministry, will but add another to many former proofs, how humble are the instruments the Almighty sometimes
condescends to employ in the dissemination of His will among mankind.

I. Your first, and perhaps your most material objection, is urged against our Baptismal Service, especially as performed on infants. You do not allow that remission of sins, regeneration of the Spirit, incorporation into the Church of Christ, and adoption into the family of His children, take place on those occasions. You deny that "God has ever promised such benefits, during such a service, any more than at any other time." It must be borne in mind, that no one is admitted to this solemnity, but on the distinct pledge of faith, repentance, and amendment: and I think you will hardly doubt the benefits of Christ's mediation on the fulfilment of these conditions. But we have fortunately far more definite grounds than this to rest upon. The union of the outward visible sign with the inward spiritual grace in Baptism,—of water and of the Spirit,—is distinctly stated by our Lord, in his conference with Nicodemus, to constitute the second birth,—the first step of entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven. The baptism of John was indeed a ceremony of purification, preparatory to the arrival of the Messiah,—"a baptism unto repentance;" but the baptism of Christ was a sacrament of spiritual efficacy, on the full revelation of his mission,—"a baptism with the Holy Ghost and with fire." We are here dedicated, not only to God the Father, in tender of obedience; to God the Son, in acknowledgment of his intercession; but to God the Holy Ghost also, in token that our souls and bodies are thenceforth sanctified by the offer of his grace. We find St. Paul studiously asserting this distinction; and, on hearing that the Ephesians had not been made acquainted even with the existence of the Holy Ghost, having been baptized only "unto the baptism of John," he addresses them in these emphatic words:—"John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto
the people, that they should believe on Him which should come after him; that is, on Christ Jesus. And when they heard this,” continues the inspired historian, “they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.” And though the Church of England does not profess, that either at baptism, or at the subsequent “laying on of hands,” her disciples, in these latter days, receive, besides the ordinary operations of the Holy Ghost, the further gift of tongues or prophecy; yet, that with “the washing of regeneration,” is also conferred the “the renewing of the Spirit;” that “as many as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ;” that “by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body;” that they who “repent, and are baptized in the name of Christ,” receive “the gift of the Holy Ghost”—thus much we devoutly believe, and return our thanks to God for every new example of his mercy.

To enter freely and amply into this inquiry, would demand a long and patient discussion. But while, in my private capacity, I speak with boldness as the champion of a public creed, I must beg, Sir, not to be misinterpreted upon a topic of so much delicacy and importance. By regeneration, must be understood what the Church of England understands by that term: we mean a second and spiritual birth, and nothing more; the bestowal of endowments, to be gradually cultivated and improved, and not already matured in strength and vigour. We believe, that baptism finds us “children of wrath,” “heirs of disobedience,” “dead in trespasses and sins;” that it makes us “children of God,” “heirs of immortality,” alive to the impressions of holiness and virtue. But we be-

1 With respect to the use of the cross in baptism, it may be enough to say, that the Church attaches no inward efficacy to that sign; that it is merely bestowed as a badge to denote the servant of Christ, “sealed on his forehead” with the emblem of his profession. The sacrament we consider quite complete without it; and in the case of private baptism of the sick, the sign is not made till the return of
lieve that, after baptism, we are still but "babes in Christ;" that our own perverseness may resist and quench the Spirit; that, to our former sins forgiven, may be added a new abundance of iniquity; that "the temples of the Holy Ghost" may be defiled: that, as children of God, we may yet prove disobedient; as members of His Church, yet reprobate: that, in short, we have only the means of salvation put within our reach; that by a course of progressive holiness, in "fear and trembling" only, we can "make our calling and election sure."

You will observe I have been speaking, hitherto, of baptism in general: in alluding to that of infants in particular, I must venture one remark. Although we acknowledge the duty of assimilating our Church, in points of faith and doctrine, to the precise pattern of Christ and his Apostles; and, in matters of discipline, as near as may be to the same standard; yet, in some respects, of secondary consideration, we do not hesitate to introduce arrangements, consonant to the spirit, though not precisely defined by the letter, of the Gospel. Other foundation we acknowledge not, but that which is already laid, which is Jesus Christ; even upon this foundation we "take heed how we build;" and I hope, under Providence, we have no need to fear the issue, when "our work shall be made manifest."

But there seems, Sir, every reason to suppose, that Infant Baptism was instituted by Christ himself, and practised by his immediate ministers. We know that circumcision, the type of baptism, was never delayed after the eighth day; and we know that the Jewish baptism of heathen proselytes was extended to all ages indiscriminately. With these prejudices in its favour, we find the custom not prohibited by our Lord in his universal charge to his apostles: and that health, and the prospect of life, allow that solemn service to be publicly completed.
they baptized whole families and households is no less authenticated, than that the practice was universally observed in the ages immediately subsequent. You deny that there is "any authority in Scripture for persons to come forward to make the promises and vows of repentance and faith in the name of an infant." Now, there is a very remarkable authority for a very similar proceeding at the hands of our Lord himself; and a most beautiful illustration it affords of the merciful indulgence of the Gospel to the unavoidable infirmities of humanity. The friends of the paralytic at Capernaum, unable to force a passage through the crowded entrance to the room where Christ was surrounded by his disciples, let down the couch of the sick man from the roof, and entreated that he might be healed. The usual conditions of faith and repentance, the mental debility of the patient, in this instance, incapacitated him from offering. But our Saviour saw he was in custody of those, who would not leave his soul to perish; and he took their promises for his. "When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee." Neither will I by any means admit, that "experience has fully proved the absurdity" of these professions. Sponsors may forget their vows; the children may be never taught their obligations: but both are, no doubt, equally registered in the book of God; and whatever allowance may be made for the ignorance of the latter, the former, if they have neither seen to it themselves, nor impressed the calls of religion and humanity upon the parents, must, assuredly, in neglecting the welfare of their charge, increase their own condemnation.

II. In the objections you make to that affecting and sublime composition, the Service for the Burial of the Dead, you appear to me to have selected a passage by no means subject to animadversion, and to have overlooked those which have awakened the scruples of many. The main object of this service is to read a
lesson and a warning to survivors: they are reminded that the "dead" are only "blessed" when they "die in the Lord;" they are taught to look forward beyond the grave,—not only on their own behalves, but for their departed kinsfolk and brethren, who lie entombed around them,—in sure and certain hope of the "resurrection to eternal life;" and though mourners at that trying hour must, indeed, be weaned from the seductions of this life, if they can truly join in thanks for the removal of their departed friend, even out of the miseries of a wicked world; yet I look in vain for the slightest impropriety in an acknowledgment, that, while the body is committed to the earth, the spirit is returned into the hands of Him who gave it.

III. Having vindicated the rite of Infant Baptism, I have no occasion to discuss the merits of the Church Catechism, in which you limit your remarks to the answers upon that topic.

IV. The order of Confirmation is a necessary consequence of Infant Baptism; and embraces not merely a renewal of former promises, but an avowal of personal responsibility in future, after the vicarial professions incurred by sponsors in our behalf at baptism. It is a ceremony perfectly consonant both with reason and with Scripture, and productive of the happiest effects at a period of life, which confessedly requires, more than any other, the cautions and admonitions of religion. As to the refusal of "spiritual persons" to "submit" to it, I am grieved to be compelled to own, that we see the character of spirituality too frequently assumed by minds not much addicted to submit to any order of moral or salutary restraints.—The offer of spiritual strength, and forgiveness of sins, which may or may not have been accepted, is sufficiently elucidated under the head of "Baptismal Regeneration."

V. There are some things in the service for King Charles's Martyrdom, not exactly conformable to the humility of a devotional disposition; and a want of the
general correctness and discretion exercised in other portions of the Liturgy, seems to be here evinced, in something like a desire to identify the conduct of an earthly potentate with that of One, who can have no proper parallel among men. That this service should be deemed, for other reasons, an abomination in the sight of those, who arrogate to themselves the title of the “Saints on Earth,” will excite no surprise, when we remember that it was by similar pretenders in the former age of puritanical fanaticism, by the Cromwells and the Harrisons, the Lilburnes and the Bradshawes, that the republican court of regicides was principally constituted. For my own part, I love and respect the memory of Charles. Though a feeble monarch, I believe he was an honest man; and he did, what patriots of all ages will talk unconcernedly enough of doing,—he laid his head upon the block for his country and his religion. Should the days unhappily recur, when similar sacrifices become necessary, I hope the devotion of the elder Charles will be applicable to many martyrs.

VI. As a gentleman of education, Sir, and probably of literary culture, I am surprised to hear you object to the application of the epithet “religious” to the reigning sovereign. It is very little in the style of the Liturgy of our Church, to flatter any man; least of all, the rich in this world’s goods. The term religious is applied to the king, as head (under the King of kings, and Lord of lords) of our religious establishment: just as the word civil is applied to a judicial or municipal magistrate. Had you objected to the epithet gracious, which immediately follows, your objection would have been so far borne out, as the same title had been applied, in a different sense, but a few lines before, to the Deity himself. The word, however, is nothing more than a compendious expression of the old form “by the grace of God,” and is attached, in that signification, both to the king and queen.

VII. The administration of the Lord’s Supper is