

NONCONFORMITY
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AN ORATION
DELIVERED ON FRIDAY EVENING, APRIL 12, 1861
BY HENRY VINCENT, ESQ.
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

GENERAL SIR JOHN BURGOYNE, BART., G.C.B., IN THE CHAIR

SIR JOHN BURGOYNE, on taking the Chair, said—Ladies and gentlemen. It is extremely gratifying to be aware that every preceding meeting, whether spiritual or in the shape of bazaar or lecture, that has been held for the promotion of this great undertaking, has, by the exertions and energies, and able management of Mr. Spurgeon and his supporters, met with complete success. I would willingly hope that this, which I understand is to be the last meeting, may not be an exception.

It is now my duty to introduce to you Mr. Vincent, a gentleman whose acknowledged talent and power of employing it will be sure to give you a most instructive and interesting lecture. For my own part, in performing this task, I feel that I am acting the part of the bell at the railway station, that is about to announce the approaching departure of a train.

The train in this case will be a train of reasoning that will lead you along the path to knowledge. As Mr. Vincent will have to deal with matters of social and political, as well as spiritual import, let us hope that no collision of opinions may interrupt our progress in the right path. Mr. Vincent will now have the honor of addressing you.

Mr. VINCENT. I confess that I am moved by an unusual emotion as I stand in the presence of this vast assembly, for the occasion is one that awakens our piety and our gratitude, as we contrast the present with the past, and remember through what a cloud of martyrs and confessors we have marched to the full enjoyment of that spiritual, social, and civil freedom, which makes us, under God, the foremost people of the earth.

But tonight we have no time for apology or compliment. We are Nonconformists. We belong to that illustrious band whose history in storm and in sunshine is the history of evangelical piety, of earnest and continuous conflicts with error and oppression, of many martyrdoms, of not a few reverses, but of constant triumphs and great and growing victories.

And it is fitting that in these inaugural services, in the noblest temple ever raised by Nonconformist zeal, we should bear aloft the standard of our Nonconformist principles, and strive by God's grace and help, to raise each other to more earnest labor in the work of evangelizing the people, and of training the population of this country in a deep and undying faith in those great principles of spiritual freedom, of social progress, and political liberty, in the defense of which our forefathers suffered, that they might win for us the glorious privileges we now enjoy.

And first let me say that Nonconformity need not be presented to the churches in a sectarian aspect, or in a sectarian spirit, for if we fling ourselves back upon the earliest illustrations of its life and its power, do we not find it with more or less distinctness, affirming the spiritual character of the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

Do we not find it contending that the church of Christ is a spiritual organization to be sustained by divine grace and power? its instrumentalities to be persuasion, preaching, faith, prayer—those great instrumentalities appointed by God for the work of this world's evangelization. So that, in the very outset, I candidly declare, that though I belong to the Nonconformist body, I do not come here in any spirit of antagonism to the religious life and energy of the Church of England.

All who love the Lord Jesus in sincerity, all who believe in the free circulation of the Scriptures, all who understand that the kingdom that is not of this world should neither be petted, patronized, or upheld by the civil power—all who know that the church of Christ should be an evangelizing institution, freed from the trammels of unjust laws, and sanctifying by her presence the great cause of freedom, are Nonconformists—to whatever sect they may belong.

Now, of course, it is difficult in a single address to show the identification of Nonconformity with the growth and safety of our religious privileges—its identification also with the progress of freedom, the security of our constitutional throne, and the real liberties of the people of England, for me to enter into anything like a detailed description of the causes that first produced this peculiar manifestation of religious and ecclesiastical activity in these nations.

Suffice, then, to say that, while it may be contended that long before the arrival of the great Augustine and his splendid band of monks, Christianity had been preached in this country, and innumerable churches had been founded, churches that with more or less fidelity proclaimed the unsearchable riches of Christ—yet tonight I desire to say that, partly through the influence of heathenisms, partly through the influence of that stupendous ecclesiastical polity that grew up in the city of Rome, the English churches by degrees became corrupt.

The English churches by degrees became enslaved by priestcraft or by superstition. And though, perhaps, some churchman might dispute with me the first position that I take, I desire respectfully to maintain that those early Christians, after the establishment of the Roman Catholic Church in these islands, who contended against the superstitions of Rome, who contended against the ecclesiastical despotism of the Romish See, from men like Grostete, Bishop of Lincoln, down to immortal Wickliffe, who has been termed, not inaptly, the “morning star of the Reformation”—these men were all Nonconformists, because they refused to obey the arbitrary power of man and defended against tyranny the everlasting truths of God.

It is also obvious that a patient reading of the earlier conflicts of those who are denominated Protestants, commencing if you will with John Wickliffe, and remembering the teachings of that spiritually-enlightened priest, remembering that he rose at a time when the Holy Scriptures were not in general circulation, when they had not been translated into the common vulgar tongue—remembering that he contended that the Scriptures were the only perfect rule of faith and conduct.

Remembering that he contended that a church consists mainly of faithful men. Remembering that he protested against some of the sacraments of the Romish church, that he protested against the corruptions of the Romish clergy—the pride, the pomp, the wealth of the hierarchy.

Remembering that he aided in the sending forth of that body of evangelizing priests who, like the Puritans of an after age, went from city to city, and from town to town to proclaim that religion is, and ever must be, a personal matter between a man and his Maker—preaching the necessity for a divine regeneration in the soul, and then, with an independence and courage worthy of the highest praise, translated the New Testament from the original monkish Latin into the common English tongue.

And then laying the foundation for the power to read, and the power to think, and the power to preach—he must be regarded not only as the morning star of the Reformation, but as the father of true Nonconformity in its battle for civil and religious freedom.

History teaches us that the Christian people, enkindled into life and zeal by the teachings of Wickliffe and his followers, constituted themselves under various shades of difference as the evangelizing and religious portions of the population of this country. History tells us that they were dealt with, first by the priesthood, and then by the civil power as heretics, as seditious and traitorous people, dissatisfied with the church, dissatisfied with the government of their country.

And though, of course it is not to be denied that some of them held strong views in favor of Episcopacy, that some of them still clung to dogmas that modern Protestants believe to be heretical and dangerous. Though many of them had but imperfect views of what Christianity really is, yet they one and all endured a common scorn, or suffered a common martyrdom, not in defense of Episcopal

supremacy, not in defense of ecclesiastical injustice, but in defense of that great right that you and I enjoy this night—the right of worshipping God freely, according to our own conscience, a right which these dear and holy men and women purchased for us at the expense of their property, their liberty, and their lives.

We come, then, by a steady and irresistible progress, to the time when the Papal Church in this country was shaken in its hold upon piety and learning. We come to a time when statesmen adopted the policy that we now find popular upon the continent of Europe. Statesmen felt that the claims of the Papal chair, exercised as those claims were in a most intolerant way over weak princes, weak magistrates, and weak parliaments—statesmen discovered that the security of the kingdom, the independence of the crown, and the supremacy of the civil laws, were incompatible with the exercise in these islands of a foreign ecclesiastical government.

So that there arose in England a two-fold power—first, a spiritual protest against the religious corruptions of Rome, and secondly, a political protest, such a protest as you find now entered by the Empire of France. For you may take my word for it, that France, in the presence of the present complications in Italy, is precisely in the same condition that England was in the reign of Henry VIII, and we are close upon a combat that will put down forever the temporal power of the Pope in France and Italy.

Now we come, then, to the reign of Henry the Eighth, when, after many serious martyrdoms, there arose a stronger repugnance to the priesthood, and a greater restiveness under ecclesiastical restraint, despite the power of the court, and the power, moreover, of the priesthood itself. And this restiveness rendered a great change in our ecclesiastical institutions an absolute necessity.

I am not about to sketch the life of the Eighth Henry, except to say that it is very remarkable that precisely at that period when Martin Luther—everlasting honor to the glorious monk!—had blown the trumpet of his great revolt in the German States—it is very remarkable that Henry VIII, of all princes, should have stepped into the intellectual arena to engage Luther, to dispute with him on the dogmas of the Papacy, to write that famous treatise, *The Defense of the Seven Sacraments*, in which he attempted to prove that Martin Luther was wrong, and that the Papacy was absolutely right.

It is very remarkable, I say, that this prince, partly through personal intrigue, partly through the political complications of the time, partly through the criminality of his own passions, should have been an agent in the destruction of the external power of that Papal polity.

And though I am far from being an admirer of that bluff and burly king, I nevertheless regard the heavy blow dealt at that time by the short, sharp, cutting Act of Parliament, which declared that henceforth the Pope of Rome should exercise no legal jurisdiction within this kingdom of England—I regard that glorious blow at Papal supremacy as the great important step towards civil and religious freedom—for all history declares that Popery will slay liberty, if liberty does not destroy Popery.

But now we notice one of those painful facts that occur constantly in the history of the church of Christ. The revolution was accomplished, but the external revolution affected only the external government of the church and the external laws of the kingdom. The spiritual portion of the people looked on with joy as they saw the papal power driven back, but they soon found that under the new institution, there still existed the old leaven—for it is one thing to change the laws of a country, and another thing to change the character of the people.

And the great work always is to change the people first if you can, for there can be no permanent change in legislation unless it springs from the moral and intellectual growth of the people themselves. Attempts were made, therefore, to enforce in the new institution conformity to moderate Protestant and moderate Catholic opinions.

You had, as it were, a compromise—and I am not about to condemn the statesmen who made this compromise—I have no doubt they acted as discreetly as they could, for the times were critical, the people were ignorant and superstitious, and the change depended more upon the court, the statesmen, and the parliament, than upon the great body of the English population.

But still, the fact is none the less a fact, that the great church that arose, containing much piety, much worth, much learning, contained within its own bosom discordant elements, partly Papal, partly Protestant, and was exposed to attacks from two extremes—the Catholics assailed it on the one side, the ultra-Protestants murmured on the other, and the great institution oscillated according to the predominance of certain sentiments in the court, and the legislature oscillated now towards Papacy, and now towards Protestantism, but ever and anon resorting to unjust, oppressive, and persecuting acts—sometimes against the Catholics, and sometimes against those who were afterwards termed Puritans.

Until there dawned upon the minds of a few Christian people that oppression, whether under the name of Protestantism, or under the name of Popery, must be opposed by earnest Christian men, if they would found churches as they ought to be founded—freed from the oppressive domination of states, and purged from the corruption of pomp and of wealth.

To me it is evident that the men and the women who suffered on the Protestant side, though they were attached to Episcopacy when they died at the stake, thought less of Episcopacy than they did of the Gospel. They did not die for Prelacy—Prelacy has never had a martyr yet—never! They never died for Prelacy, and it is untrue to say that they died for Prelacy—they died for the Gospel of Jesus, and when tied to the stake, and tempted by the fiends who bound them with the offer of life, and honor and glory, if they would recant—they kissed the stake with fervor, and exclaimed in the presence of excited crowds, “None but Christ, none, none, but Christ!”

And it is obvious that though some might have preferred Episcopacy to Presbyterianism, or to Independency, yet they constitute a portion of that army of noble and devoted, and pious men and women, who laid the foundation for our Nonconformity in all its piety and its power.

Now, the Reformation, obstructed for a time, breaks out with renewed effulgence in the brief reign of Edward VI. You find then what Protestantism had been doing. Men complain occasionally when town missions are in operation, or when foreign missions are working, that no fruits from their labors immediately appear. God works in His own way. Man sows the seed, and exerts himself under the divine guidance to the utmost of his strength and his power, and in God’s own time, the fruits of this holy seed appear.

The destruction of the Papal influence, the breakup of monastic institutions, those great nests of vice and idleness, the breakup of those institutions, the bringing into the market the lands of the old religious houses, the replenishing of the fortunes of many of the aristocracy—those fortunes that had been dissipated by the wars of the Roses, the change in the notions of men who were not absolutely Christian—for you can never measure all that the church of Christ does, if you limit your view to the direct religious action of the churches.

There is an influence of a moral kind, there is an influence of a social kind, there is an influence of a political kind that extends beyond the area of the churches as they exist. And in the reigns of the Sixth Edward, which may be denominated the reign of intelligence, brief though that reign was, you not only saw the Protestant party more powerful, though it disfigured itself by one of two cruel and oppressive acts, but you saw England burst out into a love of learning.

Men and women began to leave property to found schools—schools in which the children of the middle classes could receive an education that would put them upon a par with the children of the gentry. This was the era of the free grammar schools. Your own Metropolitan School, the Bluecoat School, rose in that brief reign, and the boys carry today on their long blue coats the bright buttons of Edward VI.

Scholarship was now about to enter into a conflict with priestism—I know that nothing can destroy sin, and that nothing can destroy priestism, but the triumph of divine grace in the soul of a man. But still I believe in the power of human logic. I believe in the power of argument to tear frauds and falsehood to tatters. I believe in the universal instruction of the youth of a country, a youth made proudly aware of the glory of living under a free constitution, a youth trampling in the power of the divine spirit, religious

error beneath their feet, and walking with their heads amid the stars—glorifying in the power of science and ennobling in their lives the value of mental culture.

The period, then, of Edward VI's reign is another blow. It is, as it were a leap forwards in the direction of a wider mind, as well as a stronger basis on which to build our civil and religious liberties. And it pleased God that this growth should be no ephemeral growth. How strange it is that the growth of the individual is generally through much suffering and many tears!

I believe in the baptism of sorrow as well as the baptism of joy. I believe in the power of pain, in the sanctifying influences of tears. And some of the most devout Christians have struggled through a cloud of darkness, have been torn within by contending passions, and have been brought up out of much tribulation—brands plucked from the burning—enduring monuments of the almighty grace and power of God.

England, in her national life, has passed through precisely the same phases. We advance upon the dark reign of Queen Mary. We need not attempt to revive the passions that once swept over the country like a storm, as the memory of those sad days haunted the public imagination. And yet it is none the less true, that the tremendous reaction that then set in, might have succeeded had there been no other people in the country than time-serving men, who were ready to conform to whatever was established.

For remember in the change that took place, large numbers of the indifferent clergy conformed at once. Large numbers of the indifferent laity, and oh! those indifferent people! You can do anything with a man if he opposes you, but a man who says to you, "Well, sir, I do not care much about it, sir. My motto is this, 'Anything for a quiet life.'"

People of this kind conformed at once—they would have conformed to anything. If you were to put up Mahomedanism tomorrow, a great many respectable people would say, "Well, it is the established religion, and are you to oppose the laws of your own country?" For they seem to me to be constantly blinded on the question of duty, as though whatever was set up, whether it was a golden calf or not, humanity is bound to bow low.

But blessed be God, this may be the language of time-servers—but it is not the language of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and the church produced men and women who confronted the powers of darkness and oppression in vindication of the Gospel. And will you tell me that that cloud of women and men who went to the stake in the county of Kent, in the county of Essex, in this great metropolis—that holy band of men and women who went to the stake at Gloucester, at Oxford, at Coventry, at Derby—from one end of England to the other, numbering upwards of four hundred persons, many of them beneficed clergymen—and will you tell us that they died for Episcopacy?

No, they died for the Gospel, and they were Nonconformists! When they died, they refused to conform to the established order of things. And mind you, I do not want to flatter dissent. There have been as many good Nonconformists in the church as out of it, and you have found that those Nonconformists in the church, and then the Nonconformists out of the church have saved religion and liberty, and have been the glory of the country in which we have the happiness to dwell.

The reign, then, of Mary is the reign of Martyrdom, but it is a reign that makes men's principles of some value. It is the easiest thing in the world to swim with the stream, but duty called the Nonconformists to row against it. And I rejoice to know that the church and congregation worshipping in this magnificent temple have for a minister a man who is not only a devout Christian, but an earnest Nonconformist—a believer in the great traditions that have come down from that age of blood—those grand traditions that have made us what we are, and to which I desire, in my humble address, to direct your attention tonight.

We come then to the reign of Elizabeth—"Good Queen Bess." Sturdy woman! If I am to be misruled, let me be governed by a woman. I would submit with much more grace and much more ease. I do not wish to detract from the character of that splendid woman—strong, with massive sense—I should only like to say I should not have liked such a lady for my wife.

But she was a woman of great strength, of noble purpose, loved her country, was proud of her queenship, would govern not only the State, but the church, and on a memorable occasion, though there is a law about women ruling in the church—she ruled though—she declared pretty firmly when a bishop was rather restive on a certain occasion, “My lord,” she said, speaking with great emphasis, for she was a lady of striking language, “My Lord,” she said, “I would have you know that *I* made you what you are, and if you do not obey me, I will unfrock you.”

Thereupon, the worthy bishop, I have no doubt, was obedient enough and bowed down before her. A grand reign, but a reign in which, Protestant though the church was, this awkward question of supremacy came up. For in the days of Queen Mary, devout people fled the country to foreign cities—scattered bands of Christians—and settled at Frankfort-on-the-Main, Strasburg, and other continental cities.

And though they were Episcopalians when they left, they could not take their bishops with them—it was a great misfortune—and having left them, they learned to do without them—which was another great misfortune. They were, however, quite astonished after living at Strasburg, Frankfort, and the other cities for a short time, they were quite astonished that they enjoyed the means of grace, that their prayer meetings were vigorous, and that God was graciously present in their simple meetings.

These truths had dawned upon a few—they now dawned upon more. They could not be all of one mind. Some people want us all to be of one mind. There is only one mind in religion, the mind of the Holy Spirit within us. But in non-essentials, there is plenty of room for diversity of judgment.

In the knotty question of church government, some people like Prelacy, some Independency, some one form, some another, some Presbyterian. Let all the people enjoy the form of church government that they believe to be right, only let them pay for it themselves. Ah, if a friend of mine were here, I know what he would say. “Yes,” he would say, “you hear these people applaud! It is all very well for these people to applaud, for they know how to give money, and they know how to build temples like these.”

But he would remind me of an occasion in which a bishop preached a charity sermon, and my friend would say to me, “You know, Mr. Vincent, your voluntary principle is all very well, but it will not do for everybody. I held the plate at the door, and although the bishop had preached, the richest man in the parish only put in a shilling.”

Well, I can only say that can be paralleled by some Dissenters, who, if they have to give, always fumble in their pockets until they find a threepenny-piece, and I have heard provincial ministers mourn over the threepenny-pieces. And in the small provincial towns, there is a party known by the name of the “threepenny-piece party.” So that it is utterly impossible to find fault with any particular sect.

And we can only say this, that there is room for diversity of judgment, there is good and bad everywhere, and all that we say is that the element that stood up in Elizabeth’s days, was the same element that stood up in the days of Mary.

Back came the exiles from Geneva and dressed in all kinds of dresses. Now it never troubles me how a minister dresses. If he has any peculiar love for a gown, let him get into it. If he has not a love for a gown, let him get out of it. It does not trouble me whether he is well-dressed or badly dressed. I think far more of his doctrine than I do of his dress, and far more of his life than I do of his appearance.

Well, sirs, the exiles came back religiously rejoicing under the rule of good Queen Bess. Some of them when restored to their pulpits went in their academic Geneva scarves, and looked very odd. Some of them went in with the old surplice. Some of them went in with an old coat—a very old coat—exiles were not very likely to get rich. Conformists were more likely to have good coats.

You have, then, an attempt made to enforce unity in apparel. Strange to say, uniformity at first was not attempted in doctrine—but in apparel. There came out the Act of uniformity, an Act that offended the conscientious scruples, and that revived the old division. The church severed again, not openly. But still the division was discernible to all intelligent minds.

There were men like Whittingham, Dean of Durham. There were men of great distinction, one or two prelates, clergymen of high scholarship, and unmistakable piety who protested against the Act of

uniformity. And inasmuch as they had continued to carry out the freedom they had acquired in the foreign states, there came out Her Majesty's orders prescribing how the clergy should dress, and thus description was quaint enough.

It described their gossellers, their hoods, and their copes, and the long gowns and short gowns, and their tippetts of sarcenet. And the country divided on a strong controversy that was called in those days, the gown and surplice question.

One of the clergymen, the Dean of Durham, was cited for refusing to wear what he rudely called "the priest's rags." But you must forgive these men. They lived closely to the fires of Smithfield, and the scent was still in their noses, and therefore, they did not like anything that symbolized the past. They became new men, not defending absolute liberty, but they contended for toleration as opposed to compulsion, but your compulsory party is never satisfied.

When it has the power, it exercises it, and when it has not the power, it does not, and it hopes you will be very grateful for the concession that it makes. The worthy Bishop of London at that time cited the curates of the metropolis before him in Lambeth Palace. There was a great gathering among them. Fox the martyrologist—he was among them.

If you want to bend the little people you should always begin with the strong. For when you have broken the neck of the strong, the weak are easily managed. There was an examination of the curates as to whether they would conform to the queen's orders and sign the queen's declaration concerning dress. Fox was the first one addressed by the bishop's officer.

The venerable preacher stood forward. He drew a Greek Testament from his pocket, held it up and said, "To this I will conform, and to nothing else." And when they reminded him that he would lose all chance of preferment—that is a delicate matter—he said, "Well, I have only a prebend in Salisbury, and if you take that from me, much good may it do you."

In the midst of the excitement a door opened, there was a pedestal on the floor of the palace, and there entered from the door the Rev. Mr. Cole—it is not always that these gentlemen's names are preserved—the Rev. Mr. Cole was dressed in full canonicals, in the thoroughly orthodox way. He was ordered to stand up on this pedestal, and he stood up. The terrified curates—sixty-seven of them—looking at him in astonishment. He reminds me of one of those dummies in the front of a tailor's shop, "In this style, for 10s. 6d."

While he was thus standing, the bishop's chancellor stepped forward and said, "You godly ministers of London, the Queen's council's pleasure is, that you strictly keep the unity of apparel, like this godly gentleman that stands here. You who will subscribe write, '*Volo*,' you who will not subscribe, write, '*Nolo*.' Come, come, come, be quick, be quick, not a word, not a word."

Thirty or forty of the curates, to their everlasting honor, buttoned their coats, and walked out though they knew at what expense they did so. Who were the men who walked out? Nonconformists! and we have the authority of the bishops for saying that among them were some of the most godly, pious, and learned ministers of the Church of England, and to the credit of the assembly a very small minority signed the declaration they were requested to sign.

If you read with care, you will observe that in the reign of Queen Elizabeth there is the distinct existence of a Puritan party in the church, more or less Nonconforming, and there is the commencement of separatism, though in a very small degree, in certain districts of England. It is Nonconformity again contending for the purity of the Gospel—for freedom in non-essentials—for that same freedom that was to be fought out with greater zeal in the reign that was to come.

Elizabeth passed away. Her reign was gloriously intellectual. Hers was a court filled by wits, orators, and statesmen, while the great outburst of literary life and beauty attests that the country had sprung up from the lethargy of its old life into the light and beauty of a higher cultivation, a more refined taste, and a nobler scholarship—while in and out of the church the Nonconformist element was growing either consciously or unconsciously in the direction of a broader and more solid liberty.

We come now to the reign of James I—“Scotch Jamie.” James I was a Presbyterian in Scotland, and as he mounted the English throne, public opinion oscillated. The Catholics said, “He will never forgive the men who killed his own mother.” Presbyterians said, “He has been so well taught in Scotland that he is sure to incline towards us.”

England had grown by that time. The Separatists beyond the walls of the church were forming themselves into Presbyterian congregations. The great leader of Presbyterianism in Elizabeth’s days was Cartwright, who had graduated in the University of Cambridge. He was now preceded by Dr. Reynolds, a man eminent for his piety and learning.

There were also, I believe, a few scattered congregations of Baptists and Independents, unimportant in numbers, but earnest in principles. The king was no sooner on the throne than he allied himself heartily with the Prelatic party, because the Nonconformist element, strengthened by the Scotch power, was now confronting the varied despotisms that still continued to disgrace our Protestant faith.

The king invited a conference at Hampton Court. I need not describe it. It is a link in the chain, though, of this Nonconformist history. Several of the prelates were there—Dr. Reynolds and a few Puritans were there. The king brow-beat the Puritans—insulted them—told them that he who sought to introduce a Scotch Presbytery into England was a man not to be tolerated. He turned towards the Puritans, and said, “I’ll harrow you out of the land, or I’ll do worse.”

The reign of James was inaugurated with a strong and oppressive policy, and from this time, assaults were made with remorseless vigor upon Presbyterianism, and upon those who began to propound Independent and Baptist sentiments. It was then that the scholarship of the country began to debate the question of the Constitution, for the English Constitution enjoys this advantage, that all its ancient traditions—those sustained by common law—are all in favor of common right.

And the Puritan party, leaving the Hampton Court Conference, began to say, “How is it that we are constantly subjected to fines, imprisonment, banishment, or death?”—and the answer came to them, “Became you are not faithful as citizens, because you do not understand that you should not mingle up your church government with the policy of the crown, or the policy of the parliament, it is your duty as citizens to see that the laws do not transgress the limits within which they are entitled to act—that the laws of England are intended to protect all men in the honest exercise of their religious opinions.”

The scholars, taking this ground on scholarship alone, attracted the attention of the more earnest Christians, and these earnest Christians said, “These scholars speak wisely, for the Scriptures of truth give to us the right to worship God according to the dictates of our own conscience.” So that under the current there welled up—partly from the Universities, partly from the Lords and Commons, partly from the Presbyterian and Dissenting Meeting-houses, partly from the Nonconforming body in the church—there welled up these grand ideas that the Parliament of England, consisting of Crown, Lords, and Commons, ought not to be an oppressive body, and that every man who was loyal to the crown and obeyed the laws, ought to enjoy perfect liberty with every other man in the kingdom.

It was then that the Court party and the Prelatic party felt their danger, and they struck hands. Prelacy said to the Crown, “Believe in the right divine of bishops,” and the Crown said, “I do.” And the Crown said to the Prelates, “Believe in the right divine of kings,” and the Prelates said, “We do.” The unity was struck between them, and now, on the benches of the courtiers, in the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge, and in the printed books of the Prelatic party, the strongest perversions of Scripture took place.

“Will you not be afraid of the power of the king? as by divine law, whatever the king wills must be obeyed.” Scholarship said, “The common law knows nothing of divine right. Edward the Confessor, whose old laws are constantly quoted, did not reign by divine right, but by virtue of the common laws and customs of his kingdom.”

And then the Puritan leaders, one by one—they did not all see the light at once—lifted up the New Testament and began to confront, on Christian grounds, the maxims of despotism. And I venture to say,

my Christian friends, that when Christian men took this ground, they slew the power of despotism and laid the foundation for the liberties we now enjoy.

They contended that the right divine was in freedom. They contended that the king might not oppress the churches. They contended against the maxims of despotism. They contended valiantly though that persecution which drove away hundreds of them to the wilds of Virginia—in that sturdy bond of Pilgrim Fathers who laid the foundation for the better portion of the American Republic.

They contended through the corrupt policy of the court—when the court was a stew, when the king was acting the buffoon, when statesmen were nursing the most atrocious vices—they still contended against despotism. They defied the folly of the *Book of Sports*. They disbelieved in witchcraft which the king believed in. They would neither follow him in his crime, his folly, nor his injustice.

And when James I died, the Nonconformists of England, in spite of persecution and sorrow, were a strong power entering into closer companionship with constitutional principles and with scholarship, preparing to take the grand stand that they took in the reign of Charles I—a stand which proclaimed that despotism in this country is not immortal, and that those who put their trust in God shall never be confounded.

The reign of Charles I consummates the first great political conflict of this Nonconformist history. I have no time to enter into the details of that reign. Suffice it to say that the foolish policy of James was continued. It was still the right Divine of Kings, it was still the audacity of Prelacy, and there arose to confront it scholars like Selden, like Coke, hard-hearted Coke—old Coke upon Lyttleton, one of the keenest lawyers of his age.

There arose to confront it, John Pym, John Hampden. There arose to confront it Sir Harry Vane. There arose to confront it the Presbyterian, and the Baptist, and the Independent leaders, for by this time, the Baptist and Independent churches had multiplied in numbers. And after a long and painful struggle, in which the nation witnessed at times the imprisonment of Christians, the closing of their churches, the levying of taxes contrary to law, the forcible dissolution of parliament, the raising of monies by way of loan—the nation ultimately saw at the beginning of 1629, the dissolution of the Houses of Lords and Commons.

And from 1629 till 1639, the jails were full of the noblest, the most pious and learned of the population. Churches were closed by violence—among them that grand old Bristol church, the Broadmede church, associated with Baptist history. London suffered intensely in that time—noble men stood in the pillory—Bastwick, Leyton, and Burton. Prynne and others, had their ears cut off, their noses slit, their cheeks branded with red-hot letters. Hundreds fled to America.

It was an age of persecution and despotism, until in 1629, the parliament was revived, but dissolved in three weeks. In 1640, it met again as that “Long Parliament,” described by Macauley as “the Parliament containing the greatest geniuses for government the world ever saw.” The great body of the members were Episcopalians, but they were Nonconforming Episcopalians. They believed in Episcopacy, but they believed that Episcopacy meant the rights of the clergy, and the rights of the laity, as well as the rights of the prelates.

A few Presbyterians were there, and a few Independents and Baptists. Among the independents was that man, defamed for two hundred years, but who nevertheless stands out as the noblest product of his age—Oliver Cromwell—sitting there now for the university town of Cambridge, having formerly represented his native town of Huntingdon. You know the issue.

Prelacy had gone mad, but Prelacy was now to be banished by Episcopalians. Parliament restored the due action of the law, swept out of the law-books the ill-fated decision of the King’s Bench against John Hampden, in the case of the ship-money—liberated Pym, Burton, and Bastwick, from their long imprisonment, fined their judges.

And finally when the bishops became more unpopular, and there was a cry against them—the bishops finding they could not get peaceably to their places in the House of Lords—petitioned the king to take care of them. The king said he had enough to do to take care of himself, and that if they had any

grievance to complain of, they had better petition the House of Commons. “For,” he said, mournfully, “that is the place where they redress grievances now-a-days.”

The bishops petitioned the House of Commons. The Commons were in a polite mood. I question whether there was ever seated within St. Stephen’s chapel, a more polite parliament than the parliament then assembled. Parliament voted at once that the bishops had a grievance and that it never should be said that the bishops appealed to the parliament of England in vain, and they further voted that with the view of giving the bishops more time to attend to their spiritual duties, they should be henceforth relieved from the trouble of attending their places in the House of Lords.

This resolution was conveyed in such touching language that I am sure the prelates must have been delighted at the spiritual perception of a worldly House of Commons. For the House of Commons said it had been induced to come to that resolution out of tender concern for the interests of souls. The bishops went their way. It is reported that a few of them were overtaken by a dash of the old Adam as they went forth, and that they turned round and cast a lingering look on the flesh-pots of Egypt.

Still they went forth and you now see the folly of straining a point too far. Never strain a point too far. The prelates had strained a point too far—they cried out, “All or nothing.” That is always a dangerous thing for despotism to do. It is the only cry for free men because there can be no compromise on the question of liberty, but if the despot be wise, he will concede from time to time.

And if the Pope of Rome had been wise, he might have lived ten years longer, but the fact of refusing all concession puts him in an awkward position. You know the result—like the king of Naples, who threw a constitution out of the window when he was about to run away—the Pope is now too late.

In this country on the back of this event, the king made the miserable attempt to seize the five members of the Lower House, and it was then that the nation roused itself to advance upon the civil wars.

I have no time to sketch them except to say that the civil wars were sustained with great courage on both sides, and history attests—Macaulay tells you, and all the modern writers, that the party that saved the cause of the parliament was the godly party, the Nonconforming party. Headed by my lord of Essex, the parliamentary armies in Cornwall, Somerset, and Devon were beaten.

But what beat the king? the Iron-side regiments, and the regiments of the lovely companies under Cromwell—the Baptist, Independents, Presbyterian, and Low Church brethren. The men of godly energy were roused to action by this magnificent soldier, and at length in the face of the ruffles and flowers, and dash and gallantry of the royalists, the proud cavalier army is destroyed amidst the thunder of artillery and the rattling of musketry, and the flashing of steel on the deathless fields of Naseby and Marston Moor. The Revolution was not the work of Dissenters, but the work of despotism. The liberal party never makes revolutions. Despotism makes revolutions by its infatuated resistance to what is right.

The conservative Nonconformist element survives the death of the king, enters into conflict to prop up the irregular government, and under the brief but brilliant reign of Cromwell, the Gospel was preached with fervor from one end of England to the other. And though Cromwell did not thoroughly understand religious freedom, that is to say, he had not grown to understand that there should be no interference on the part of the State with religion, yet in the main he never interfered except to put down conspiracy.

It was the age in which Chillingworth was promulgating his Episcopalian aphorism—“The Bible and the Bible alone is the religion of Protestants.” It was the age of Owen, and Howe, and Baxter, the immortal author of *The Saint’s Everlasting Rest*. It was the age of John Bunyan, the greatest of our allegorists. An age in which the learning and piety of the people broke out with force.

But unhappily there were divisions in the Nonconformist camp. There was a party that wanted to set up the Presbytery, and this party was a powerful party. It was confronted by the Baptists and Independents, and of course by Episcopalians, and by that great intellectual exponent of Nonconformity, that illustrious scholar, whose life is at once the glory of our own country and the astonishment of the

world—John Milton—the noblest defender of unlicensed printing and unlicensed preaching, and the noblest defender of absolute civil and religious freedom who ever trod the soil England.

The commonwealth fell because it rested too much on the prowess of Cromwell. It fell through the ignorance, and the divisions, and corruptions of the people. It fell through the dissatisfied intrigues of Republicans and Presbyterians. The nation went back to her old constitution, for England is not a revolutionary country. Her tendencies, though progressive and liberal, are always conservative in the best sense.

The nation, torn by faction, and fatigued by storms, recalled the son of the late king. He came in on his declaration of *Breda*, a declaration in which he promised that none should suffer on account of conscience, and that none should be disturbed for their conduct towards his late father. It was a full and complete amnesty, with the exception of the persons of the regicides.

Now, the Presbyterian party thought that by a little conformity things might be managed. Even the noble Mr. Owen, and one or two others, thought that a partial conformity would be the best thing. But no sooner was Charles II upon the throne, than in the face of the declaration of *Breda*, on Tower-hill, and at Charing-cross, a holy band of men—though branded with the name of regicide—devout men went to the block one after another.

There was that Colonel Harrison, of whose execution there is a record kept in Bristol, written by a Mr. James, which is deposited in the library of the Baptist College. It is dated, “London—That dismal, bloody, and never-to-be-forgotten 13th of the 8th month, 1660. This sad day has the enemy prevailed to shed the blood of the innocent according to the cursed sentence of this accursed generation, for dear Harrison was about eight this morning brought out of Newgate, drawn on a sledge to Charing-cross, where by ten they had hanged and quartered him.

He went out with as cheerful a countenance as ever I saw him, and held out so to the end. His speech was very short, but very heavenly, encouraging still to own the cause of Christ which, he said, Christ would revive. He said they did not know what they did, that he was fully assured of the love of the Lord, and that the Lord would in due time own and justify him in that for which he was condemned.”

Carew, ancestor of the present Carew, of Cornwall, perished in the same way, and while the executioner was cutting up the body of Mr. Carew, someone pressed Hugh Peters, the famous chaplain to the Parliamentary army, and the executioner rubbed his bloody hands against Hugh Peter’s face, and said to him, “How do you like this, then, Mr. Peters?” for his turn for execution came next.

Peters looked at him, and said, “I bless the Lord I am not dismayed. You may do your worst.” He knelt down and prayed, and hoped that those who were present would not despise the truths of the kingdom because he was called to suffer for them. “What we did,” he said, “was under a government *de facto*. We did it in the interest of the church, and for the liberties of the people, and if the like circumstances occurred, and we were spared, we would do it again.”

And then exclaiming with fervor, “Lord Jesus, help me! Lord Jesus receive my spirit,” he laid his head on the block. “And so,” said a dear friend who accompanied him to the ladder, “the soul of our saintly brother was wafted to heaven.”

Sir Harry Vane was beheaded at Tower Hill in the same year, although he had protested against the execution of King Charles. Before he laid his head on the block, he said, “One moment and I have done,” and when he had prayed fervently, he said, “Men and brethren, this case will have a resurrection, it can never die.” And then laying his head down, he became one of the martyrs for our Nonconforming faith and for the liberties of the people.

John Milton went into private life, leaning on the arm of Elwood the Quaker. After having discharged his duties as Latin secretary to the parliament of Cromwell with incomparable brilliance, to quote the language of Macaulay, “He retired from the obscenity of that obscene age to revel in a scene so lovely, in a language so sublime, that it might not have misbecome those ethereal virtues which he saw with that inner eye, which no calamity could darken, throwing their crowns upon the pavement of

jasper and of gold.” He retired into comparative quietude to revel in the gorgeous creations of *Paradise Lost and Regained*.

The year 1662 arrived. The king and court became recreant to their promises, and soon proved to the Presbyterians their folly in trusting this wicked and weak king. A parliament more royalist than the court elected under the maddening influence of reaction, passed the famous Act of Uniformity, that Act of Uniformity that was to winnow the church and test its spirit—that was to raise up once more in the bosom of the Church of England, a cloud of witnesses—Nonconformists still.

Many of the Baptist and Independent churches were closed. The insurrection of the fifth monarchy men in London had led to a general attack on the Independent and Baptist meeting-houses, which were closed in all directions. Then the Act of Uniformity demanded implicit conformity, and on that grand day, the anniversary of the awful massacre of St. Bartholomew, that day afterwards called by Englishmen, “the black Bartholomew’s day”—on that grand day when the Act of Uniformity was enforced, two thousand ministers walked out of the Church of England, and abandoned all their preferments, unfurling the old flag of English Nonconformity.

Again you see it is the Nonconforming element. But there is something more. Cromwell’s army of fifty thousand men was dissolved by Charles, but by dissolving the army, they sent what they call firebrands throughout the country, tied to the foxes’ tails—firebrands that set the nation on fire.

These men went into the villages and settled down. The villagers affected fear of them at first. There were very few invitations to breakfast, very few invitations to tea, but by and by, somehow or other, these old soldiers prospered in worldly matters, attended to their business, had family’s prayers at home, would pray on alone if they could not pray openly, and were never to be put down.

At length the villagers and the townspeople used to nudge one another if they saw one holier than another, “Is not that one of old Nol’s soldiers?” There was not a conspiracy against Charles’s tyranny that these fellows did not pull the strings. If they saw a spark, they would blow it, and if they could not get a flame, it was not for want of will, but lack of wind. They did their best, and struggled hard in all the conflicts of Charles’s reign—and a reign it was of intolerable suffering.

There are many statements concerning Nonconformists. You will find a petition from George Fox in which he tells you that on one occasion three thousand and sixty-eight Quakers were imprisoned. Another statement places the number at four thousand two hundred. Five hundred were placed in jail in and round London. In Cheshire sixty-eight were confined in one room, and many died in prison. John Bunyan went to jail, dissenting ministers in all directions went to jail.

Then came in 1664, the Test and Corporation Acts, excluding as they did all Dissenters from all places of office and preferment. These were followed by the Five Mile Act, that levied fines and imprisonment upon any who came within five miles of the town where they had formerly held a living and preached the Gospel.

Dissenters in chains, upwards of ten or twelve millions of money levied in fines from the commencement of Charles II’s reign to the close of the reign of James II, suffering and imprisonment. Sixty thousand Dissenters passing through the jails, many dying in prison, repeated conspiracies—executions of great and honorable men—but still, still the element of Nonconformity held on, and you come to the death of Charles II, and the brief reign of James II.

It is the old story again. The attempt of the Nonconformists to aid Monmouth, constant endeavors to struggle for a higher, civil, and religious liberty, until the king, becoming Papist, endeavored to tamper with the Dissenters, under the plea that he would grant liberty of conscience. Several attempts were made to seduce the Dissenters, but the Dissenters understood what it meant, and though they had been martyred, had suffered imprisonment, and had really been driven to madness by oppression, in 1688, when the Church of England recovered her senses, and found what a faithless power the Stuart power was, Nonconformity shook hands with Episcopacy, and the great power confronted despotism once more, and the throne of James II was shaken down, and William, Prince of Orange, amid the plaudits of Nonconformists, was crowned King of England.

And this “glorious revolution” is another glory that crowns the Nonconformist cause. Scarcely, however, is James II driven away, than the old conformist and oppressive party revive their ancient tactics. The nonjuring clergy, the corrupt high-church people, began to conspire against the king’s throne.

They held secret relations with the exiled family. The party that sustained the king was the low-church party, the Presbyterians, and the Dissenters. And there arose a great writer, who may fairly be called the William Cobbett of his time—I mean Daniel Defoe, of Nonconformist notoriety—whose vigorous pen eloquently defended the throne of King William.

Nonconformity was the right arm of this revolution. There was no power in the country as ready for this great change as the Nonconforming power. William passes away. Queen Anne came. She had a dash of the Stuart blood in her, whereupon you have the old persecution. It always breaks out like the small-pox, whenever you come into the presence of a Stuart.

There were the old attempts to fine the Dissenters, and when this did not do, to bribe them by the *regium donum*, introduced by a well-known statesman who said, “If you cannot put them down by force, put them down by sugarplums,” and I am inclined to believe that the second policy is more fatal than the first.

The churches now declined in religious life, and a cloud of irreligion and sensualism darkened the land, when again the Nonconformist element broke forth anew in the church. For the Church of England has never been without a people owning God, a people understanding that Episcopacy is a secondary matter, their tests may be Episcopal, but their principles are Christian.

They uphold Episcopacy if it does not interfere with them, but allow me to say that, if Episcopacy had been as wise and liberal at the middle of the last century as it is now, there would have been fewer Nonconformists than we have now in the country.

There arose in the Church of England a body of earnest men. One of them was John Wesley, whose name we can never forget. Another, George Whitefield—holy and earnest expounders of evangelical sentiments. At first they labored in the Church, until persecution drove them forth to preach in fields and in public halls.

It was complained by some of the lazy clergy, that Mr. Wesley did a great deal of mischief, for his sermons were so long that people got to like long sermons—and those who had bought a preferment on the condition that the sermons were to be short, complained that they had been cheated out of their property, and that a man that set such a bad example ought to be interfered with.

Thanks be to God they had the courage to grow, and they grew in grace and in wisdom. Wesley and Whitefield blew the trumpet-notes of a new reformation. In 1717, when the Pretender was marching to recover the throne, the Nonconformists opposed him, and in 1745, when the Pretender was more likely to be successful, Wesley and Whitefield had awakened the country, and amongst the first people to take up arms against the Pretender were the Nonconforming people.

Well, sirs, from this time, what do you see? A growth in Nonconformity, dissent growing in evangelical life and power, the growth of dissent, and the growth of liberty. You have seen the nation leap on, till in 1825 or 1826, the Test and Corporation Act, and the other abominable laws that excluded Dissenters from power were repealed, partly through the influence of Lord John Russell.

Down they went. The Catholic Emancipation came and other great changes that disturbed the old balance of power. Then sirs, came a greater spirit of evangelization. Bible Societies were formed in which the Dissenters played a leading part, second to none in their benevolence, and activity. You have seen missionary societies formed to grasp the distant nations of the earth, in which each of the Nonconforming bodies have played an honorable and pious part.

You have seen popular schools founded for the education of the poor, and when Bell and Lancaster first propounded their scheme of popular teaching, they would have been put down if they had not been sustained by the Nonconformists of England. You have seen the Nonconformists upholding a spiritual propaganda, defending liberty, opposing the right divine of kings, and taking the lead in defending

constitutional liberty. Nonconformists have extended, by their free, voluntary agency, the power of evangelizing the people of this country. They have built hundreds of meeting-houses without asking the State to grant them a farthing of money, and they have raised them by their own voluntary contributions.

And I have no doubt, that when Sir Samuel Morton Peto, or some other member shall call attention to this magnificent temple when the debate on church rates shall be renewed, there will not be wanting those who will be inclined to say that you have set a bad example—for you only reflect upon the laziness of other people—and it is an improper thing to do this.

It is not fair that you should show that you can build temples and maintain them. It is an unkind cut at other people which benevolent people would never have done. There stands the fact. You have popularized schools, and I do not hesitate to say that conformity has resisted every reform until it was obtained by Nonconformity—and then it has followed in the wake.

Every reform it has opposed. It prophesied evil of education. It said first it would lead to sedition, atheism, and deism. And then, when it saw that we as Nonconformists were educating the children, it set up schools itself, and followed in the same direction. It declared that the voluntary principle was wrong, and yet during the past fifty years, it has built, I rejoice to say, two thousand Episcopal churches by the voluntary principle.

It drove out Wesley and Whitefield from the Church because they preached in unconsecrated places, and now, thanks in part to the exertions of my worthy friend, Mr. Spurgeon, they have not only thrown open—and I give him the credit of battering the doors—they have not only thrown open St. Paul's Cathedral, and Westminster Abbey, but you see clergymen preaching in public halls, and theatres, in imitation of Nonconformists. The Church of England cannot live without Nonconformity. Nonconformity has conquered her and she must imitate Nonconformity.

Friends, do I say this rudely? No, I say it gratefully, in the presence of my Maker, that we have been proved to be right by experience. Every step made by our opponents is in our direction, and never against us, never! From the very attempt made to compromise church rates, you see this illustrated compromise! To think of a supreme body compromising at all! This is the day of compromise!

“What will you take, gentlemen?—you are victorious—what will you take?” Nothing but liberty, absolute liberty. What! yield now?—now that the Almighty goodness has brought us to be exemplars of the spiritual power of the church? What! yield now—when we tread in the feet of saints and martyrs—in their blood-bedabbled footsteps—carrying over their graves the banner of the good old cause?

No, we will raise more loudly our prayers, more loudly our sermons—we will ring out the great fact that there shall be no power supreme in this country but LIBERTY—freedom for all sects and for all denominations.

Oh! my lords and gentlemen, you excite the smiles of children when you speak as though you had the power to confirm church rates, and you awaken the pity of men when you bewail the fact that Nonconformists claim equality with the Church of England, not in emoluments and titles, but in a common liberty.

You must yield, my lords and gentlemen, as you have yielded before. God has taken away every other power out of your hands. You can only now decide whether you will yield gracefully, generously, and justly—or whether you will sink moodily beneath the rising tide.

Remember, ours is the age in which the temporal power of Papacy is washed from its moorings. Europe rises beyond its priestly and absolute rule. The young kingdom of Italy is shaking off the power of the Papacy, marching under the leadership of Garibaldi. England is covered with chapels and schools. Half the Church of England is consciously or unconsciously Nonconformist.

Remember, my lords and gentlemen, that we are your fellow citizens, in loyalty to the throne, in obedience to all laws that governments have authority to enforce—for we draw the line—we know that we are commanded by our Divine Master to “render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's.”

Yes, my lords and gentlemen, we are your fellow citizens. In contributions to the State, the Nonconformists are surpassed by none. In voluntary activities, gifts to hospitals, missionary societies, Bible societies, reformatory institutions, ragged-schools, day-schools, Sunday schools, they gratefully challenge you to investigation and comparison.

Their men and women are to be found leading or aiding every useful enterprise. They have popularized preaching in unconsecrated places. They have reared altars of faith and prayer in fields, streets, cottages, barns, halls, and theatres. And you, my lords and gentlemen, will not be disposed to deny that their untiring devotion abolished negro-slavery—rendered the penal code more humane—ameliorated prison discipline—stimulated temperance and education—aided in the passing of the Reform Bill, and were the foremost leaders, and largest subscribers in the great movement for the Repeal of the Corn Laws.

You fear, my lords and gentlemen, that England would cease to be Christian if one sect ceased to be legally patronized! Oh! you fear this in the light of Nonconformist history! Fling, I beseech you, this dishonorable fear away! In the name of that kingdom which is not made with hands, fling this un-Christian fear away!

Help, rather, to free the Church from injustice and the citizens from wrong. Help to proclaim the era of religious equality and freedom, and the Church shall put on a new life, and enter into evangelical rivalry with all other sects. If she loses in wealth, she shall gain in power. If she declines in earthly splendor, she shall grow in heavenly beauty, and in the vigor of her spiritual manifestations.

A great writer and brilliant historian, whose memory we all revere, and whose polite and cultivated mind won the admiration of the world, has thus eloquently expressed himself—“The ark of God was never taken till surrounded by the arms of earthly defenders. In captivity its sanctity was sufficient to preserve it from insult, and to lay the hostile fiend prostrate on the threshold of his own temple.

The real security of Christianity is to be found in its benevolent morality, in its exact adaptation to the human heart, in the facility with which it accommodates itself to every capacity of the human intelligence, in the consolation which it bears to the house of mourning, in the light with which it brightens the mystery of the grave.

“To such a system it can bring no addition of dignity or power that it is part and parcel of the common law. It is not now left for the first time to rely upon the force of its own evidence and the attractions of its own beauty. Its sublime theology vanquished the Grecian schools in the fair conflict of reason with reason. The wisest and bravest of the Caesars found their arms unavailing when opposed to the weapons that were not carnal and to the kingdom that was not of this world.

“The victory which Porphyry and Diocletian failed to obtain is not reserved to all appearance for any in this age who direct their attacks against the last restraint of the powerful and the last hope of the wretched. The entire history of Christianity shows, that those we thrust temporal power upon, treat her as their prototypes treated her author.

“They bow the knee and spit upon her. They cry ‘Hail!’ and smite her on the cheek. They place a spectre in her hand, but it is a fragile reed. They crown her, but it is with thorns. They cover with purple the wounds their own hands have inflicted, and inscribe magnificent titles over the cross on which they have placed her to perish in ignominy and chains.”

Such was the language of the noble Lord Macaulay and such, my lords and gentlemen, is the faith of Nonconformists.

What more need I say? This history tells its own story! Rouse yourselves. Reverence your grand traditions. Be faithful! Bow your knee and bend yourselves in adoration before the throne of the Almighty goodness. Bear about you the marks of this ancient glory. Never sully your ancient principles. March on, knowing that until the last vestige of ecclesiastical wrong is dead, until liberty is enjoyed by all states, that you have a glorious work to do, and God shall bless you, and sanctify and make you a blessing, until the fullness of all nations shall come, and the Spirit of the Lord is poured forth in

triumphant power upon all lands, to consume all foulness, and fill the earth with light, and love, and liberty.

The Rev. C. H. SPURGEON said, without the formality of proposing and seconding, he would propose a vote of thanks, both to Sir John Burgoyne, for his kindness in presiding, and to Mr. Vincent, for his eloquent address. He hoped they would prove that they had felt his words by one and all helping to extend to others the liberty they themselves enjoyed.

He trusted the day would come when church rates should be abolished, and hoped that Mr. Vincent would be there to address them when that should take place. It would be almost as glorious a day of emancipation as the Negro slave had when he felt his fetters were dashed to the ground and he was a free man.

The resolution was carried by acclamation.

Sir JOHN BURGOYNE said it was very evident that the meetings were very sensible of the great power of Mr. Vincent's discourse from the enthusiastic demonstrations they had exhibited during the course of his speech, and he was fully justified in giving their thanks to Mr. Vincent for the brilliance of his eloquence.

Mr. VINCENT said he could only express his very earnest thanks for the kind attention of this large assembly, at the close of a series of such crowded meetings as had been held in the Tabernacle during the last two or three weeks. He begged to thank them most respectfully for their courtesy and kindness.

The Benediction was then pronounced and the proceedings terminated.

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.