

out in Professor James's application of the method were due in large measure to the meagre and ambiguous witness of the Christian life around him. It is for us Christians of the twentieth century to see to it that his successors are set free from his disabilities.



Endowments and Disendowment.

BY THE REV. C. F. RUSSELL,
Fellow of Pembroke College, Cambridge.

N EARLY sixty years ago was published "The Warden," by Anthony Trollope, the first of the six famous "Barsetshire" novels. Modern lovers of Trollope—and it is to be hoped they are not few—will not need to be reminded of the story; but those who are not acquainted with it may be told briefly that it relates the mental and social conflict through which an elderly clergyman passed as his conviction grew that he was not honourably entitled to the large income attached to his sinecure as Warden of a Charity Hospital. Mr. Henry James has described the book as "simply the history of an old man's conscience."¹ In striking contrast is the attitude adopted by the Warden's son-in-law, a worldly-wise Archdeacon, who "did not believe in the Gospel with more assurance than he did in the sacred justice of all ecclesiastical revenues."² This gentleman hears that there is a flaw in the legal action which has been initiated against his father-in-law, and his subsequent advice to the old man shows us to what extent he is really aiming at justice. "All we are to do," he tells him, "is to do nothing."³ "Can't you see that if we tell them that no action will lie against you, but that one may possibly lie against some other person or persons, that we shall be putting weapons into their hands, and be teaching them how to cut our

¹ In his "Partial Portraits." Quoted in introduction to "The Warden" in *Everyman's Library*.

² "The Warden," chap. v.

³ *Ibid.*, chap. ix.

own throats ?”¹ When the Archdeacon is at last convinced that it is his father-in-law’s determination to resign, he exclaims : “Eight hundred pounds a year!—eight hundred and eighty with the house—with nothing to do. The very place for him. And to throw that up because some scoundrel writes an article in a newspaper ! Well—I have done my duty. If he chooses to ruin his child I cannot help it.”²

Let us turn from this novel to a very different book of our own day. In 1907 Dr. P. T. Forsyth delivered at Yale the Lyman Beecher lecture on preaching, and in the epilogue to the lectures in their published form we find these words :

“ [The Church’s] idea of justice has become a byword. Ecclesiastical justice is sport for the Philistines. The justice of a church court or of ecclesiastical politicians is a matter of mockery. In the great churches—the Catholic, Orthodox, or Established—men of personal honour and uprightness lose the sense of social justice as soon as a question arises which threatens the interest of their Church. They are perfectly sincere, and equally incapable of grasping the just thing.”³

In the first part of this quotation, Dr. Forsyth is speaking of the whole Catholic Church ; but his subsequent reference to the Establishment presses the accusation home to ourselves. Whether or not we hold that he is mistaken in his view, at least we must admit that his words are not due to political excitement or to religious controversy ; they express his sincere and deliberate conviction, and must be understood as representing a considerable section—if not the greater part—of the thoughtful Nonconformist opinion of the day.

It is sometimes startling as well as unpleasant to see ourselves as others see us ; yet valuable lessons have occasionally been learnt as the result of the painful experience. And it is because the present writer is profoundly convinced that both Anthony Trollope’s delineation of his strong-minded Churchman’s mode of reasoning and Dr. Forsyth’s unflattering charge are unhappily true, that he ventures to bring forward some considera-

¹ “The Warden,” chap. ix.

² *Ibid.*, chap. xviii.

³ “Positive Preaching and Modern Mind,” p. 372.

tions on the subject of the endowments and the possible disendowment of the Church of England.

It will be well at once to clear the ground in one direction by saying that the writer fully shares the general apprehension that any scheme of disendowment would impose some grievous hardships upon the Established Church. These hardships would probably be temporary and external only ; at any rate, we cannot with certainty speak of them as permanent and essential, for there are many grounds for thinking that the Church's recovery would be both steady and swift. But, still, the statement with this qualification is undoubtedly true. The immediate visible effect of disendowing would be to plunge us in serious difficulty.

While, however, the writer is bound to admit this, he cannot associate himself with those who see in these prospective circumstances a final proof that disendowment must be wrong. The fact is that such troubles might be the result either of a right or of a wrong course, and in themselves they prove nothing. If a man is in unlawful possession of large estates, it always involves hardship for him to be called upon to relinquish them. This illustration is not intended to compare the endowments of the Established Church with property which is fraudulently held ; that would be to beg the whole question ; but to point out that the entailing of hardship is a mere accident in morality, and is found to characterize right conduct as often as wrong.

Yet, strange as it may seem, it is not difficult to find Churchmen who content themselves with this plausible but illogical defence of existing conditions. "Disendowment would cripple the Church, therefore it must be resisted" is their apology in brief. But the answer to the question, "Would disendowment hurt us?" must not be construed as the answer to the question, "Is disendowment wrong?" The two are distinct, and the inquiry must proceed at least some way further yet.

If a serious opposition is attempted, and not merely the immoral one which has just been exposed, it usually takes the

form of the following argument (in which the clauses are lettered for reference) :

(*a*) The endowments of the Church of England were given to it in the past ; (*b*) therefore they are its lawful possession in the present ; (*c*) therefore it would be an act of robbery to deprive the Church of them now or in the future.

The validity of this proof is supposed by those who rely upon it to be self-evident ; and it must be conceded that a superficial examination of it may well lead to the belief that it is unanswerably convincing. But when we have reached this pleasant state of mind, we are surprised to find that, somehow or other, the argument does not in point of fact convince everybody, as of course it should. In spite of its self-evident validity there are many persons who do not agree that it would be an act of robbery to deprive the Established Church of some of its endowments ; and if we seek to minimize the significance of this fact by remarking that such persons are financially interested in the dispute, and are therefore unable to judge fairly in regard to it, we are pained to find that our words recoil upon ourselves, and that we are equally debarred from a place on the judgment-seat.

We cannot, then, ignore this divergence of opinion as to the conclusiveness of our reasoning. And this divergence is, in itself, of importance. If an induction from certain facts commends itself to a body of scientists, they may be inclined at first to assume that it is true. But if it is found that another body of scientists, the number and importance of whom are comparable with those of the first, disputes the truth of the induction, while they are admittedly as fully acquainted with the facts and as well qualified to judge of them as the others, then that very fact will cause the original group to withdraw their uncompromising statements, and to reserve their decision, while they admit that the argument on which they had relied may not after all be as sound as they had formerly supposed it to be. It is, therefore, one of the salient facts to be noticed in our inquiry, that a large body of persons whose religious principles and motives we have

no right to question, and for whom many Churchmen are forward to assert their fraternal feelings, do not regard disendowment as evidently and necessarily dishonest; and our discovery of this, if it does nothing more, should make us apply to our argument the strictest investigation that we can.

The result of such an investigation is, that we find that neither of the conjunctions "therefore" in the argument is justified. The truth of clause (*a*) does not necessarily carry with it that of clause (*b*); and the truth of clause (*b*) does not necessarily carry with it that of clause (*c*). This is not to say that clauses (*b*) and (*c*) are in themselves untrue; but that, if they are true, their truth must be established on other grounds. Let us turn our attention to these points.

It is needful that we should beware of taking the word "disendowment" in a narrower sense than that which it properly bears. Many writers, when they use the word, mean by it the twofold process of taking from the Church of England some or all of its endowments and applying them to secular purposes. This use of the word cannot be upheld. It is, no doubt, the case that most schemes of disendowment are of such a sort, but there is nothing to hinder the word from being used when the new objects to which the money is to be devoted are not secular but religious. Throughout this article the word is used without any assumption as to the nature of those objects.

Yet, even when the word is taken in this unduly narrow signification, it has been pointed out by Professor R. C. Moberly that in the event of a scheme for Disendowment following upon, or being joined with, one for Disestablishment, it cannot fairly be denied that the past connection of State and Church, which existed when the endowments were made, gives the former the right to claim, to some real (though it may be slight) extent, a joint ownership of them.¹ At the same time, inasmuch as it

¹ "If . . . the union [of Church and State] is at last to be dissolved, ought not the State, as in the case of a dissolution of partnership, to claim at the least some, perhaps undeterminable, mixedness of ownership with the Church?"

"I cannot but think it well worth while to put this case, not only because some such feeling has a place, in fact, in many minds, but also because I am

was admittedly the intention of previous benefactors of the Church that their gifts should be employed for religious purposes, we shall probably agree with Moberly when he concludes that the State would be wrong if it should seek to justify on the ground of that mixed ownership any scheme for diverting the Church's endowments to secular ends.

If, however, we use the word "disendowment" without necessarily implying the secularization of Church property, it appears at once that its possibility does not depend upon the English Church being previously or simultaneously disestablished, but must be considered alone and on its own merits. And now we meet the Nonconformists' plea, which may be summarized as follows: "In past centuries, the Church of England was the Church of the whole nation in a way that it is not to-day. It was, practically, the only Christian religious body in the country. Those persons, therefore, who wished to devote their property to the extension of the kingdom of God found only one organ of religious activity to receive their benefactions. We cannot, then, deduce from the way in which they bestowed their gifts any more definite conclusion than that they wished to endow religion. If we assert that in every case the desire was consciously present to endow the Church of England, as distinct from other bodies which might thereafter come into existence, we are asserting what we cannot prove. Now, the Established Church to-day is not alone in representing the Church of the past. The various Nonconforming bodies are co-heirs with it of the earlier Church. And hence they are entitled to some share in those gifts which the devotion of our Christian forefathers bestowed."

Such is the claim; and it may be freely confessed that if it were to be recognized, the difficulty of effecting the redistribution of the Church's endowments that is asked for could hardly be exaggerated. But this difficulty must not blind us to the

persuaded that there is in it some element at least of truth, which it would be perilous for us to ignore" (Moberly, "Problems and Principles," pp. 193, 194).

cogency of the appeal. In particular, the claim of Nonconformists to be co-heirs with us of the religious heritage of the past, on which the whole case rests, is one which can be set aside only by those Churchmen who assume that episcopacy is essential to the existence of the Christian society. It may, perhaps, be said that the claim, as a whole, could not be maintained in a court of law. On such a point, the writer has no desire, as he has no competence, to express an opinion. He is content to observe that it will be an evil day for the Established Church when it elects to take refuge from the ruling of its conscience behind a decision of the law courts; and thereby proclaims that in such a matter as this it desires only to take Trollope's Archdeacon Grantly for its model, and to aim, like him, at nothing save a legal victory.

It does not follow, then, that because the Church's endowments were bestowed upon it in the past they should now be regarded as of necessity its own. At the least, the opposite contention is arguable. And with regard to the second fallacy in the ordinary Churchman's defence of the endowments, it is sufficient to say that in no case are rights of property absolutely and eternally independent of State revision. For example, every time that a compulsory sale of land is effected for a public purpose, and the price paid is not within the final decision of the owner, personal rights of property are compelled to give way to public ones. Of course, it goes without saying that any interference of this kind must be rigidly justified on weighty public grounds, if it is not to become mere persecution by the State. But it remains true that the right of the State to interfere with property on particular occasions must be admitted, and hence it is not permissible for us to say off-hand that any scheme for the disendowment of the Church of England is necessarily dishonest, and does not even require to be argued, even if it should first have been proved that the whole of the ancient endowments justly belong to the Church to-day.¹

¹ Cf. Moberly, *op. cit.*, pp. 179, 180. And see also the following (p. 190): "Any suggestion that a dedication once for all to God's service makes God so

The present writer is willing to admit that in his opinion the appeal which he has put into the mouth of the Nonconformists embodies a just and reasonable principle. If it should ever come to be generally accepted, such a readjustment of ecclesiastical endowments would raise, as has already been said, a large number of most difficult questions. Clearly, the Church could not, in such a settlement, be called upon to give up its recent endowments in the same way as its earlier ones. For many years, the permitted existence of Nonconformity has enabled us to say that recent Church endowments were intended for the Church, and not for other bodies, with a certainty which, as we have seen, we could not feel in speaking of more distant centuries. To these, Nonconformists can no more lay claim than the Church of England, on the other hand, can lay claim to a share in the funds subscribed by the former for the purposes of their own denominations last year. Thus, it would first be necessary to fix such a date that all endowments made thereafter should not be liable to revision.¹ This in itself would be an exceedingly difficult matter. And when it had been settled, we should be faced with a harder problem still—the proportional redistribution to-day of endowments made before that date. Moreover, it will not have failed to be noticed that if the case for redistribution can be made out now, a new adjustment will be demanded whenever the relative positions of the different religious denominations alter. We are not concerned to discuss the solutions of these problems here, but it may at least be said that there is no reason to suppose that they would be found insoluble. And it must be emphasized that, even if they were

the owner (in the human sense) of a property that it cannot, without sacrilege, be diverted from divine use for ever, suggests (I own) nothing to me so directly as the warning word 'Korban.' This statement of principle, of course, leaves untouched the view expressed earlier in this article, and held by Professor Moberly himself, that the State would, on other grounds, not be acting equitably in the present case if it should appropriate the Church's endowments to secular objects.

¹ The year (1818) of the first Church Building Act has been suggested in something like this connection (*cf.* "The Radical Programme," p. 163), but this date is not early enough to satisfy the conditions authorized above.

far more intricate than they would seem likely to be, we ought not, for that reason, to hold back from the task of confronting them, if the moral motive to such a course should once have been recognized.

Such questions as these need not detain us ; and, indeed, the writer has little expectation that his view will commend itself to many Churchmen. But, at any rate, he claims to have established his thesis that the defence of the Church's endowments is not the easy, self-evident thing that it is often supposed to be. There are, after all, two sides to the question. The anti-Church opinion, as it is called (as if he could ever be an opponent of the Church who calls upon it to be, at all costs, just!), can, at the least, be argued. We have no right to denounce the supporters of disendowment as obviously dishonest and insincere.

Professor Moberly, to whose "Considerations upon Disestablishment and Disendowment" reference has so often been made in this paper, was opposed to both the one and the other. He wrote : " Even upon the hypothesis of disestablishment . . . I am by no means yet convinced that it is nationally right to disendow." But he immediately added : " I am open, indeed, to be convinced."¹ Is such impartiality of investigation, such determination to be guided by right principles and not by self-interest, more common to-day than when "The Warden" was written? It would not be easy to prove that it is.

As a recent example of the sort of logic that is considered good enough for this controversy, a passage may be quoted from the *Record* newspaper of August 26, 1910. Commenting upon the letter of Mr. John Morgan, of Aberystwith, to the *Times* of August 19, in which he had proposed such a scheme of concurrent endowment for Wales as has been put forward here (in the event of the Church in Wales being disendowed), the *Record* made the following remarks :

"Of course, if it were certain that the endowments of the Church are to be confiscated in any case, then, no doubt, there is something to be said for

¹ "Problems and Principles," p. 210.

applying them in part to the religious work of other Churches, instead of to purely secular uses. But even in that case there is surely strength in the plea that the endowments of Nonconformity should be subject to the same revision. This point is well put by another correspondent of the *Times*, who urges that, as Mr. Morgan would divide Church endowments between the Church and Nonconformist bodies in the proportion of ten to fifteen, Nonconformist endowments should be divided in the same proportion, Nonconformity taking ten and the Church fifteen. Viewed in this light, Mr. Morgan's proposal for concurrent endowment will not look quite so attractive."

Such a reply to Mr. Morgan is only made possible by ignoring the essential facts on which his suggestion may be presumed to rest. In the first place, it ignores what has been noticed already, that inasmuch as the endowments of Nonconformity do not date from such early times as those of the Church—and it is only in regard to the early endowments of the Church that the real need for adjustment exists—the former are clearly not liable to the same revision as the latter. And, in the second place, even if they were, it is evident that the essence of the redistribution proposed does not consist in taking away three-fifths of all endowments all round, but in redistributing them in such a way that Nonconformists should have half as much again as the Church; so that whatever we may think of the proposal, it is simply misrepresentation to suggest that "the same revision" of Nonconformist endowments would mean that they should be "divided in the same proportion, Nonconformity taking ten and the Church fifteen." Can we be surprised if our reputation for ecclesiastical justice is low? Will such a mode of dealing with the question lead Dr. Forsyth to withdraw his charge?

It will be urged, at this point, if not before, that even if the Church of England were to express her willingness to consent to a scheme of concurrent endowment, it would not now satisfy the Nonconformists. This was, indeed, the *Guardian's* comment on Mr. Morgan's letter,¹ and in the following issue of that paper (September 2) a further letter appeared in which that gentleman himself said: "I confess that Nonconformist

¹ "Concurrent endowment is one of the 'might-have-beens' which it would need an entire revolution of current opinion to bring back into the category of the feasible."—*The Guardian*, August 26, 1910.

opinion is overwhelmingly opposed to my proposal." But what is the explanation of this state of things? Is it not that Non-conformists have always found the Church of England ready to stigmatize any scheme of disendowment as dishonest, and have thus learnt long ago that their sole chance of obtaining any revision at all of the old endowments lies in uniting their demands with those of secularists? But who would dare to say that they would still insist upon secularization if they found—what they have never yet found—the Church itself ready to admit the force of their argument, and ready also to unite with them in working out an equitable readjustment, provided only that the religious character of the endowed objects was maintained? The fact is, that the "revolution of current opinion," of which the *Guardian* speaks, is in reality a revolution of the current opinion of the Church, as much as of any other body, and is therefore to a considerable extent within the Church's power.

It will probably be asked by some readers why a Churchman, of all people, should write an article like this. Is not such a raising of questions with regard to our endowments the rankest disloyalty? If they must go, is it not rather the part of its sons to leave the despoiling to be done by the hands of foes, or at least by those who are not its members, and to avoid any word or deed which might add to the weight of the assault? Several answers to the question are possible. First and foremost must be the simple statement that it does not in fact betoken any want of love to our own Church to esteem its honour more highly than its financial condition—more highly, even, than its apparent effectiveness. It is to be feared, however, that the simplest expression of this truth will be condemned as pompous and grandiloquent. How should the writer dare to assume that his moral sense is more enlightened than that of others? Yet, after all, the answer is necessary, for it is the only final one to those who urge—and there are many who seem to do so—that loyalty to the Church can only be shown by keeping guard over its pockets. Such a notion of loyalty does not spring from pure or disinterested love.

Or, again, the reply may be given—and it is only the same one with an outer, in place of an inner, reference—that this inquiry is a debt which Churchmen owe to Nonconformists. On the hypothesis that there is at least some truth in the claim of the latter to a share in our endowments—and for the moment this hypothesis is assumed—it is not right that the struggle for a revision should be left to them to carry on alone. At present, the attitude of the Church of England is that of an army which disputes every inch of a territory, and yields only what it must; and this, in the mind of many of its members, for no better reason than that it finds its ownership useful. It is really remarkable that Churchmen should be willing to-day to assert the profound respect with which they regard the Nonconforming bodies, while at the same time they ascribe to them, in this particular matter, a moral sense which would disgrace a child. Does our vaunted love for them, does our sacred conviction that they, as well as we, give manifest signs of the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, leave us in the belief that they are ready to conspire in an act of robbery? Or can it be that our refusal to argue, and our delight in denunciation, arise from a doubt as to the fairness of our own claims? We owe it, then, to Nonconformists that these questions should be raised.

Lastly, it is worthy of remark that a practical policy is involved. There are many persons who will have nothing to do with principles, and are fond of asserting that an ounce of practice is worth more than a hundred pounds of theory; and it may be that they will say that all that has been urged here is abstract, and therefore of no importance. As a matter of fact, it has a very important practical bearing. It cannot be denied that the danger of a secularist scheme of disendowment is great at the present time; it will become greater in the future. Its strength is due in large part to the support which it receives from Nonconformists, who see in it their only hope. Surely, in the presence of such a danger, even if the claims of Churchmen were far more widely admitted than in fact they are, it would be

politic to concentrate our strength on the maintenance of the religious character of the endowments. We are told, indeed, that this is impracticable; that "concurrent endowment is one of the 'might-have-beens.'" But the Church has never, hitherto, expressed its willingness to unite with Nonconformists in the consideration of such a scheme, with the sincere determination to understand their point of view; and doubtless they have long ago ceased to hope for it. Yet if Churchmen were to adopt this attitude, and they had to choose between supporting either such a scheme for revision or the plans of secularist opponents of the Church, there can be no question to which side they would lean. The decision of the religious bodies of the nation on such a point would be unanimous, and it would be irresistible. That unanimity could be brought to pass by the Church of England.¹

It would be something worth striving for to preserve the endowments for the cause of Christ. It would be more worth striving for to achieve this result in a way which would bear much fruit in Christian love, and would help forward those spiritual relations apart from which there can be no thought of reunion. And, most of all, it would be worth striving for to present to the nation and to the world a great object-lesson as to the aims and ideals of our Established Church, and to show that it could practise, as well as preach, the subjection of revenue to righteousness.

¹ An exception must be made to the above statement in so far as tithes are concerned. It appears to the writer that there is a great deal to be said in favour of such a revision of these particular endowments as would include the secularizing of a part of them.

