

Discussions.

[*The contributions contained under this heading are comments on articles in the previous number of the CHURCHMAN. The writer of the article criticized may reply in the next issue of the magazine; then the discussion in each case terminates. Contributions to the "Discussions" must reach the Editors before the 15th of the month.*]

"THE ETHICS OF DISENDOWMENT."

(*"The Churchman," September, p. 651.*)

I AM glad to accept much of what Chancellor Smith says in this article as supplementary to mine on the same subject in the CHURCHMAN for July. His statement of the principles which govern all interference by the State with the property of religious and charitable institutions cannot be other than helpful at the present time, as well to those who are in agreement with me on the main point as to those who are not. At the same time, his article contains so much criticism that I am bound to offer a reply, lest any reader should suppose, as Chancellor Smith evidently supposes, that there is no more to be said for my case.

The Chancellor agrees with me in holding that "Disendowment is not necessarily wrong . . . because it would cripple the Church"; but he adds that I am "mistaken in assuming that those who ground their opposition to it on its baneful consequences regard those consequences as determining its ethical complexion." As a matter of fact, I need appeal no further than to the correspondence columns and leading articles of the newspapers of the last six months to find my justification. Over and over again one has read that it behoves all loyal Churchmen to fight against Disendowment because the Church would suffer by it; over and over again one has read of the imperative need for instructing Church-people as to what its effects would be; and as no slightest hint has been given in the context which would suggest that any further investigation is called for, one cannot avoid the conclusion that most of the writers are unaware that the necessity for it exists. Dr. Smith thinks that the attitude is correctly described by the colourless word "non-moral." I cannot agree with him; to my mind "immoral" is not one whit too strong.

But I did not pretend that this form of apology has no rivals, and I offered an alternative one for consideration. Yet even this alternative argument (I fear I cannot follow Chancellor Smith in calling it a syllogism!) was offered only as the one "usually" adopted. By what right, then, does he say that I put it forward as "exhausting all that can be said on the subject"? Another instance of misrepresentation occurs three pages later, where I read: "Mr. Russell actually compares the Disendowment of the Church to the compulsory acquisition of private land for a public purpose" (p. 655). Anyone who should take

the trouble to refer to my article would be surprised to find how completely I am innocent of such iniquity. I quoted compulsory sale (p. 534) to illustrate the principle that "in no case are rights of property absolutely and eternally independent of State revision," and I claimed that the same *principle* must be admitted in connection with ecclesiastical endowments. Can this fairly be called a comparison? But perhaps I need make no further comment on such details as these.

The fact is that Chancellor Smith deals with the question which I raised as if it was simply a legal matter, and as if nothing more was needed than the decision of a court of law. I did my utmost to put it on a different and, as I conceive, a higher footing. I said that it was a matter of conscience; and I pointed out that, to take refuge from the ruling of conscience behind a decision of the law courts, was precisely the offence for which Archdeacon Grantly, in *The Warden*, merits and receives the contempt of all upright men.¹ I admitted that I was not competent to pronounce an opinion on the legal aspect of the question; but this, as I regard the controversy, is of small moment, since the legal aspect is of secondary importance. This difference of treatment is so great as to render much of Chancellor Smith's criticism ineffective.

Thus, after asserting that, in refuting the argument which I quoted, I have merely knocked down a ninepin of my own setting up, and have ignored the existence of other and more stable ones, he proceeds to state in what respects the argument should be altered. The endowments, he says, belong to the Church of England, not because they were given to it in the past (and so, it is implied, my consideration of the original purpose of the benefactors was beside the mark), but because it "can show a title to them of many centuries"—a title which, by the second principle quoted (pp. 653, 654), is "indefeasible, however irregular or unlawful the origin of the possession may have been." This alteration is, of course, an important one to a lawyer; but my proposal is not intended to appeal to the mere lawyer, nor yet to the man who has put his conscience into the lawyer's custody. It is no affront to the lawyer to be reminded that legal and moral codes cannot be equivalent; and I do not hesitate to say that, when the matter is considered in the realm of conscience, the alteration of the argument has slight effect. An example will make my meaning clear. A man, we will suppose, has for a long time possessed a property, but for some reason he becomes convinced that a part of it ought all the while to have belonged to someone else. His lawyer, however, says to him: "Never mind; whatever may have been intended at first, your ownership has been recognized for so long that it cannot now be legally disputed." I will ask Chancellor Smith this question: Does he suppose that a man with a Christian conscience would be satisfied with advice of that sort? For my part, I am sure that he would say:

¹ Need I say that this, and not any comparison of a sinecure warden with "our hard-worked Bishops and clergy" as Dr. Smith thinks, was the point of my allusion to the book?

"It is not my legal title that I am anxious about; that may be as secure as you please; but something more is needed to set my mind at rest"; and I have no doubt that the Chancellor will agree with me. That is sufficient for my argument; for it means this—that if there is really any question in our consciences as to the original intention of the Church's benefactors, it is nothing to the purpose to say that our legal right to their gifts is by this time secure.

This leads to another point in dispute. Is there really any such question in our consciences? Chancellor Smith observes that no one but myself has ever heard of any Nonconformists putting forward the demand which I attributed to them, and he is shrewd enough to suspect that those who do so exist only in my imagination. Let us see. A few months ago one of the best-known Nonconformists in the country wrote the following words about himself and other Free Churchmen: "We find serious fault also with her monopoly of those ancient cathedrals which seem to us part of our national inheritance."¹ If my critic will take the trouble to understand what these words mean—I do not say, if he will grant their claim, but only, if he will understand their meaning and examine what is implied—he will find that they rest upon the very theory which I tried to make explicit, namely, that "the various Nonconforming bodies are co-heirs with the Church of England of the earlier Church, and hence they are entitled to some share in those gifts which the devotion of our Christian forefathers bestowed." The Chancellor's tribute to my imaginative powers was hardly warranted!

The third and fourth principles which Dr. Smith discusses are more relevant to the subject as I presented it. It is obviously reasonable to ask under which subsection of (3) any State action of the kind that I contemplate will be justified. And the answer is easy: It will come under (d). If the action is taken for the reasons which I set forth, and in order to follow the dictates of conscience, it will certainly promote the general good of the community. This possibility receives scant consideration from Dr. Smith; he tells us, without a word of explanation, that no loyal Churchman would admit it. But this, it scarcely needs to be said, depends entirely upon the attitude adopted towards what I called the Nonconformist claim. And the use of the word "loyal," brought in as a catchword where it can only prejudice the investigation, comes very near to being a prostitution.

The important principle (4) remains. Not merely does Dr. Smith find this claim to exist in my vivid imagination only; he also hurls at me the statement that (with certain exceptions) seceders have no right to demand anything at all. But, before asserting that "Mr. Russell seriously propounds the exact contrary," he should have faced the question whether we can regard Nonconformists as seceders *in this connection*. That they have seceded from the Established Church no one will deny; but if my proposal is to be considered fairly, it must be

¹ Rev. F. B. Meyer. See "Church Unity," p. 54.

recognized as involving this—that we must regard the early endowments as devoted, not so much to the Established Church, as to the religious life of the nation. The Established Church happened to be the sole representative of that life then; the Free Churches share with it the representation now; and unless Nonconformists can be shown to have no place in the national religious life, it is impossible to quote this principle (4) as, in any way relevant to the discussion without assuming the very point at issue—namely, that the early endowments were intended for the Church of England *as such*. Yet the application of principle (4) (which, to anyone but the legalist relying on “title,” simply begs the whole question) is the only argument offered by Chancellor Smith against the claim which I advanced.

A short reference must be made to two other matters. I added the footnote with regard to tithes, because without it the statement of my opinion on secularization would have been incomplete. But I could not then enter upon the discussion of such an intricate question, nor can I do so now; I need only say that Dr. Smith’s conjecture as to my view is incorrect. At the same time, I beg readers of the *CHURCHMAN* to remember that whatever theory we may hold about tithes cannot in any way affect our decision on the main issue before us.

Lastly, Chancellor Smith has shown that I was wrong in saying that a policy of concurrent endowment has never been urged by Churchmen. I am by no means sure that the offer which was made in 1869 would be regarded by Nonconformists as evidencing a desire to understand their point of view in its entirety; and, in any case, our beliefs as to tithes are such that the Chancellor is hardly likely to agree with me as to what was or was not “an equitable readjustment.” But rather than confuse the main issue by examining such points at length, I will gladly withdraw this part of my paper. It must not, however, be supposed, because a scheme of concurrent endowment was rejected more than forty years ago, that Free Churchmen are necessarily opposed to such a revision of early endowments as would give full consideration to their principles. I have shown that the desire for such a revision is felt; and some steps, at any rate, could be taken at once towards meeting it. After all, if we support this policy, it will not be in the last resort because we hope thereby to purchase peace, but because we are persuaded that it is just.

C. F. RUSSELL.

“AUTHORITY IN RELIGIOUS BELIEF.”

(“*The Churchman*,” *September*, p. 673.)

In this article the writer questions the claim of the “average Englishman” to decide for himself what he shall believe. This claim, he says, “arises in theory from the inferences that religion is human in its origin, and that revelation has not taken place”; moreover, it is

contrary to the teaching of St. Paul, "that we are not sufficient to think anything out for ourselves."

Now, the average Englishman may accept the statement of St. Paul as we find it in his Epistle relating to his own ministry—that he was not sufficient of himself to account anything as from himself, but his sufficiency was from God. Thus, he will admit the "historical fact of revelation" while at the same time he claims the right "to think out for himself" even "authoritative" declarations emanating from God. Indeed, he is bound so to do if he wishes to find out their particular bearing on himself and his life, without which they can be of no value to him. Much more, then, has he need to think out the doctrines presented to him in formularies emanating from men, such as the doctrines of "Sin and Atonement, of Baptism and Communion," each having various interpretations even within the Church. He may at least claim the choice from among them of those which satisfy most fully all his faculties and aspirations.

The general consideration of the question ends, and must end, in the conclusion that our final assent to or rejection of such doctrines lies with our free will. At the same time, in particular cases the influences which lead to this decision differ widely from one another—whether, *e.g.*, these doctrines are presented to a grown man for the first time, or have been learned in his youth, and his belief in them has been shaken or destroyed.

In the latter case, any "authority" which he deems to have misled him will certainly no longer have any weight with him. But his doubts must be met in the full understanding of the sphere in which they have arisen, and in full sympathy with him in his inquiries.

In either case the most that can be brought about by force of argument or authority is the mere intellectual assent, which cannot by itself bring Christ into his heart, and, indeed, is liable to become an obstacle in the way of reaching that end.

Questions, then, arise and seem worthy of the utmost and unbiased consideration :

1. Whether it is advisable, or not rather futile, to bring in "authority" as an inducement to a grown man to accept any particular interpretation of God's Word or deduction from it, except the one authority of its fruits shown in the life of the believer.

2. Whether it is not dangerous to teach the young doctrines which admit of dispute, since, receiving them as absolute truth and afterwards discovering their fallibility, they run the risk of giving up with them their entire faith in Christianity. Or whether it is not safer, and more conducive to their spiritual life and its maintenance in the world which they are entering, to confine their religious teaching to the acts and words of our Lord and the fact of His dwelling within them as their ever-present Friend and Helper if they do but obey His voice within

them, and to the natural—*i.e.*, the spiritual—development of this fact in themselves and their relations to others.

F. A. LE MESURIER.

“AUTHORITY IN RELIGIOUS BELIEF.”

(“*The Churchman*,” September, 1911, p. 673.)

I should like to be permitted to traverse some statements in the paper by the Rev. C. Lisle-Carr, which appears in your current number. His objection to the Bible as a supreme authority is, that so many communities appeal to the Bible, and yet so many of them differ. But this is a mistake. These conflicting communities differ about matters upon which the Bible gives them little or no authority. They differ about forms and forms of service, and Church order and government, about which the Bible says but little. Hence their differences are not owing to the Bible, but to their own conceptions.

On the other hand, when we turn to the matters upon which the Bible speaks freely and clearly, namely, the Christian verities, we have solid and substantial agreement between the leading denominations, as witnessed at the Keswick and the hundred and one Conventions the world over. Yea, more. When we turn to the genuine Roman Catholic saints and mark their authentic utterances, we find ourselves one with them. And in a memorable instance, to which I wish to draw attention, Joan of Arc, in her last hours, was asked if she would appeal to the Church, and she replied: “I appeal to the Scriptures!” And so she died, as many a Protestant has died.

WM. WOODS SMYTH.



Notices of Books.

INTRODUCTION TO THE LITERATURE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT. By James Moffatt, B.D., D.D. Edinburgh: *T. and T. Clark*. Price 12s.

A book of this kind defies review. It is easy to lightly commend. For massive learning, for patient research, for careful arrangement, for completeness of detail, the highest commendation is deserved. The writer has certainly succeeded in his effort to know something of what others are thinking. His catena of names is overwhelming. But he makes it clear that his bibliography is not gathered from a library catalogue. The books have been taken down from the shelves and read. But the book is no mere conspectus of authorities; there is a vast amount of independent thinking and independent arrival at conclusions. To some extent, at least, it demands an answer. It often raises serious problems in single sentences: it dismisses them as briefly; no discussion of them can be as brief. The book has already become the text of a series of trenchant articles in the *Expositor* from the pen of Sir William.