

A Narrative of Events
Connected with the Publication of the
Tracts for the Times.
With Reflections on
Existing Tendencies to Romanism,
and on the
*Present Duties and Prospects of
Members of the Church.*

By William Palmer, 1803-1885

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To
The Right Reverend Father in God
Richard, Lord Bishop of Oxford,
&c.

My Lord,

In thus submitting to your Lordship the humble results of an effort to separate Church principles from certain tendencies, which, to the grief of all true Churchmen, have recently manifested themselves, I am encouraged by the remembrance of the desire which your Lordship has evinced on several occasions to discriminate between the advocacy of orthodox and Catholic principles, which has been the privilege of many in this place, and any exaggerations or unsound tendencies with which it may have been occasionally combined.

The spirit of equity and of discretion in which your Lordship has, on several occasions, stated, that your 'fears arose for the most part rather from the disciples than the teachers,' seems to render it peculiarly fitting, that a work which is calculated to show the justice of those apprehensions, and of the distinction by which their expression is accompanied, should be inscribed to a Prelate, to whom Divine Providence has given an especial interest in the theological movement now in progress, and to whom every member of the Church must feel deeply grateful, for the mode in which the demands of duty in most critical times have been met. I forbear to say what might be added on this subject, sensible that any words of mine would but imperfectly express the general sentiment of gratitude and respect.

I could have much wished, that a task which has been undertaken with reluctance, and only under a sense of urgent necessity, should have fallen into other and worthier hands. Strengthened, however, by the advice of many wise and eminent men, I venture thus firmly, but, I trust, in no spirit of unkindness, to draw a line between principles which many in this place and elsewhere have maintained, and certain novel theories and doctrines which seem fraught with danger to the cause of truth.

Dedication

I have the honour to be,
My Lord,
Your obedient and grateful humble Servant,
WILLIAM PALMER.

Preface.

It is the design of the following pages to clear those who uphold Church principles from the imputation of approving certain recent tendencies to Romanism. It is hoped that a plain statement of facts, avoiding controversy altogether, may conduce to the removal of mistakes on a point of so much importance. It seems a duty to truth, not to countenance, even by silence, what we feel to be erroneous and mischievous; and although it may sometimes be difficult to express our sentiments in regard to such matters, without a feeling of apprehension that our words may cause offence to some of our brethren; we must still endeavour to discharge this duty, however painful and difficult, in a spirit of steadfast reliance on the Divine assistance, of recollection and humility as regards ourselves, and of charity towards those from whom we are obliged to differ; and I truth that such feelings have not been wholly absent during the preparation of these pages.

I am aware, that some respected friends are of opinion, that it is unnecessary at present to draw any line of demarcation between our principles and those of the *British Critic*; that the views of this periodical, and of its supporters, are not generally identified with Church principles—or that it will be found impossible to persuade the public at large that there is any line of demarcation between them. These objections seem to refute each other; but they shall be separately considered.

It may be, then, that some good and fair-minded men in this place and elsewhere, make such distinctions as we should wish. But is this generally the case? How few, for instance, are aware, that some of the principles advocated in the *British Critic* are displeasing to the authors of the Tracts, and to the great body of their friends! I apprehend that such distinctions are generally unknown, and if no line of demarcation is publicly drawn by the advocates of Church principles, it will be altogether impossible that they should not be identified with what they themselves disapprove.

With regard to the other objection—the alleged *impossibility* of separating Church principles, in the public apprehension, from Romanizing tendencies, I must admit that it may be difficult to persuade those who are opposed to Church principles, that they do not lead to Romanism; but it does not seem that there would

be so much difficulty in setting the public right on a mere question of *fact*, i.e. whether such and such men are in reality favourable to *Romanism*—whether they intend to promote its interests—whether they actually receive its tenets or no.

I think it may be very possible to prevent mistakes on such a question from becoming prevalent, or, at least, permanent. All that seems necessary in this case is, a sufficient degree of openness.

We only want an *explicit* statement of men's views; plain and open speaking; avowals of what is our actual belief; praise where we think it due, and censure where any (be their merits in some respects ever so great) have deserved reproofs. This candour will restore mutual confidence; will reassure those whose minds have been disturbed and unsettled by novel theories, will encourage the timid, strengthen the weak, recall fugitives, give a safe and firm rallying-point to all who are willing to uphold Church principles.

I now proceed to offer a few remarks on the contents of this pamphlet. It seemed advisable, in the first place, to place on record some account of the views on which the movement at Oxford, in 1833, was commenced, in order to show that our objects were wholly unconnected with party, or with any tendency to Romanism. A few other subjects of interest have been touched on, partly to afford desirable explanations, and partly to afford illustrations of principles and feelings. Such a selection from facts, documents, and correspondence in my possession, as could be made, consistently with the sanctity of private intercourse, is offered in corroboration of the statements which it has been deemed expedient to make.

Our movement in 1833 consisted of two branches.

Our Association speedily expanded itself throughout all England, and was responded to in Scotland and Ireland. But it speedily came to an end; after producing several important and beneficial effects, as regarded the security of the Church, and the State. I hope that I shall not be understood to represent these effects as having been amongst the *objects* of our movement of 1833. That movement was solely for the purpose of defending the Church herself in her spiritual capacity against the prevalent spirit of Latitudinarianism, and of reviving her salutary principles; but effects which we had not contemplated, and which, indeed, it would have been folly to have speculated on, followed from our movement.

The other branch of this movement was the publication of the Tracts. This was the more immediate province of my colleagues, as will be seen in the following pages. I readily admit the far greater importance of this effort, which under the management of a few eminent men, assumed a character of permanence, and has produced great and lasting effects on the Church.

It may be thought, perhaps, that unnecessary advantages will be given to opponents of Church principles by the admissions which are made in this pamphlet, of faults and indiscretions on the part of some friends. But surely such an objection will not be urged by those who exercise freely the right of pointing out defects in our ecclesiastical system. A scruple which is not felt in regard to the Church herself, cannot consistently be advanced for the protection of any class of her members. I hope, however, that no uncandid or unfair use will be made of these admissions. I am content to appeal to the better feelings of our opponents.

With especial reference to those who have recently deviated so far from all sound Church principles, and from the doctrines even of the Tracts for the Times, and of their authors, I would hope, that the following pages will be found to express no sentiments inconsistent with good-will, and charity. It has been necessary to refer to the *British Critic* in illustration of their views. An unwillingness to direct public attention to the errors of *individuals*, has induced me to refrain from adducing many objectionable passages from other publications.

With reference to the quotations from the *British Critic*, I think it necessary to direct particular attention to the statement in page 154,¹ that the object has been only to establish the general character and tendency of a system; and that no opinion is meant to be expressed as to the exact nature or amount of impropriety in each particular passage adduced. Had any such opinion been attempted, this pamphlet must have been greatly enlarged.

In the following pages, a hope is expressed, that the *British Critic* may before long be placed under some different management; but on further consideration, I fear that little advantage can be anticipated from such a change. The injury which has been inflicted by the periodical cannot be repaired by any mere change of management. A permanent evil has been done. Henceforward every advocate of the Church of England will be involved in most serious difficulties: his Romish opponents will always be able to quote against him the concessions and the doctrines of this periodical. I am convinced that extensive use will be made by Romanists of these concessions, for the purpose of proselytism; and even supposing the *British Critic* to recover the confidence of the Church, the danger will be in some degree enhanced, because the doctrines advanced in former numbers will only acquire new weight and consideration. These remarks are submitted with deference to better judgments.

I trust that in speaking of recent theories of "Development," a sufficient distinction has been drawn between the views of an eminent and much respected writer, and those of other men.² I would not be understood to offer any opposition to the former, when rightly understood; but there is much vague and dangerous theory elsewhere

afloat on the subject. The continual cry of the *British Critic* for “development,” “progress,” “change,” “expansion of ideas,” the actual and fearfully rapid progress of individual minds, the unsettlement of principles and notions openly avowed; all is calculated to create very serious uneasiness and alarm. Such impetuosity and recklessness seem better fitted to revolutionize than to reform. We shall, I trust, be always ready most earnestly to support rational and well-considered plans for increasing the efficiency of our ecclesiastical system, and for removing all proved defects; but we should remember, that hasty and unnecessary alterations may only involve us in difficulties even greater than those which may now be felt.

In the latter part of this pamphlet will be found a brief statement of some of the leading Church principles, with a view to mark the difference between them, and the errors of Romanism on the one hand, and of ultra Protestantism on the other. In so brief a sketch, many features of interest will necessarily have been unnoticed; but I trust that enough will have been said, to remind the reader of the general character of the Church system.

I have now to offer the expression of deep gratitude to many respected and valued friends for their support and encouragement, and for the valuable suggestions which I have received from various quarters. They have tended materially to relieve anxieties which the peculiar circumstances of the time had excited; and I shall always feel thankful for the assurance which they have afforded, that real and substantial agreement in all great principles is generally combined with a most cordial attachment to the National Church, and with a resolution to maintain her distinctive principles with as much zeal against any approaches to Romanism, as against tendencies towards the opposite class of errors.

Notes

1. Chapter 3, p. 41 in this present edition. *Ed.*
2. Newman had not then published his work on “Development,” to which these remarks do not apply.

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