

PLAIN WORDS ON THE PROTESTANT DECLARATION MADE BY THE KING OF ENGLAND

Church Association Tract 297

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It is only a very brief while since the Crown of England passed over from our late Sovereign, whose memory we still hold dear, to that of her Royal son, whom we welcome as King Edward VII. This event has brought to the front the terms and conditions on which the English Crown is held, and these terms have stirred up a great deal of controversy among a certain portion of the King's subjects, a controversy which is far reaching in its nature and importance.

The Reformation of 350 years ago made this country and nation a Protestant one among the nations of the world; but it was not at first made sufficiently clear that the Crown of England could only be held by a Protestant. Experience taught our forefathers that if this country was to retain its Protestant character, and to remain true to the principles of the Reformation, it must be made impossible by Statute for a Romanist to sit upon the throne. Before the passing of the Act that settled the succession to the Crown, at the beginning of the reign of William and Mary in 1688, the Throne of England had been occupied by three Sovereigns who had been more or less under Papal influence, and had imperilled the national safety. Charles I. was married to a Romanist, and had a Romish Chaplain at court, and was accordingly under Papal influence throughout his reign. His son Charles II. who came to the throne after the Commonwealth was really a Papist in disguise though pretending to be a Protestant. On his death-bed it is recorded that he admitted this, and received "absolution" from a priest. James II., his successor, was an avowed Papist. On his accession he gave a pledge to preserve the laws inviolate, and to protect the Church. This pledge was welcomed by the whole country with enthusiasm. But his subjects soon learned to their dismay that the word of a Catholic king, surrounded by Papal advisers, was not to be relied on. The King claimed the right to dispense his subjects from obeying Acts of Parliament, and filled the bishoprics, deaneries and colleges with avowed Papists. Judges and officers in the Army were chosen on the same grounds, and Father Petre, the King's confessor, was the "power behind the throne." So exasperated did the Nation become at the King's perfidy that they invited over William, Prince of Orange, with his wife Mary, to defend the Protestant Religion, and the Laws and Liberties of the Kingdom. On their arrival the Constitution was re-established upon the basis of a Protestant occupying the throne, who should not marry a Papist, nor in any way hold communion with the Church of Rome. In any of these events, his subjects would be absolved from their allegiance, and the Crown would be forfeited and would pass on to the next in succession "*being Protestant.*"

This condition has all along been held to be so important, that every Sovereign, since the Revolution in 1688, has been called upon as a primary duty to make an open and honest avowal of Protestant principles and a repudiation of the Romish tenets and practices which had been secretly held by Charles II., and had caused such incalculable misery and strife and bloodshed in the following reign. This was essentially a precautionary measure for securing the Liberties of the Nation. It thence-forth became a title-deed to the Crown.

When therefore King Edward VII. met his first Parliament in the House of Lords, he was required to make and afterwards subscribe the Royal Statutory Declaration against leading dogmas of the Roman Catholic Church, including Mariolatry, Transubstantiation, and the Sacrifice of the Mass, and also against "any evasion, equivocation, or mental reservation whatever," which a Dispensation from the Pope might be presumed to authorise. This oath was administered to the King by the Lord Chancellor. The words of this important Statutory Declaration, as made and signed by King Edward on February 14th, 1901, at the opening of Parliament, are as follows:—

"I EDWARD, do solemnly and sincerely, in the presence of God, profess, testify, and declare that I do believe that in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper there is not any Transubstantiation of the Elements of Bread and Wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, at or after the consecration thereof by any person whatsoever; and that the Invocation or Adoration of the Virgin Mary or any other Saint, and the Sacrifice of the Mass, as they are now used in the Church of Rome, are superstitious and idolatrous. And I do solemnly, in the presence of God, profess, testify, and declare, that I do make this declaration and every part thereof in the plain and ordinary sense of the words read unto me, as they are commonly understood by *English Protestants*, without any Evasion, Equivocation, or mental Reservation whatsoever, and without any dispensation already granted me for this purpose by the Pope, or any other authority or person whatsoever, or without any hope of any such dispensation from any person or authority whatsoever, or without thinking that I am or can be acquitted before God or man, or absolved of this declaration or any part thereof, although the Pope or any other person or persons or power whatsoever should dispense with or annul the same or declare that it was null and void from the beginning."

Now this Royal Declaration against Popery is said to be offensive to the King's subjects who belong to the Romish Church. Cardinal Vaughan, the head of the Romish Church in this country, alleged in a circular to every Roman Catholic chapel in his diocese, that "Roman Catholics have been made unhappy and their heart has been pierced in its most cherished convictions by the recent renewal of what Cardinal Wiseman described as the National Act of Apostasy repeated at the accession of each succeeding Sovereign during the last two hundred years." In this circular we are told that language like that of the Declaration is an "anachronism" and the Cardinal speaks of it as "a blasphemous formulary" and of the making it "as an outrage committed against our Lord Jesus Christ," and His "Immaculate" Mother; "an injury committed against His Divine Majesty," and a "gratuitous insult" to all Roman Catholic subjects. One of the Irish Members of Parliament spoke of it as the "foulest insult ever designed against the creed of millions of His Majesty's subjects." A formidable and deliberate attempt is now being made to so far alter and tone down the words as to remove the very barrier which they were designed to set up, viz., to exclude a Romanist from the English Throne. In the House of Lords, Lord Salisbury has even consented to concede to the Papal party a Joint Committee of the Two Houses of Parliament, to consider what alteration could be made in the text of the Accession Declaration of the Sovereign against the idolatrous and superstitious Sacrifice of the Mass. There is, therefore, grave danger lest we lose our dearly bought Protestant liberties. It is high time that all who believe that our National prestige and temporal prosperity are bound up with our distinctive Protestant character, which history conclusively proves, should bestir themselves at this juncture in such a manner that our representatives in Parliament, and the Members of His Majesty's Government, may feel that they must hold their "hands off" from any attempt to upset the Protestantism of the Throne.

If Protestants are in a Roman Catholic country, are they not required to submit to the laws and regulations of that country? They may not like some of the enactments of the Vatican, but how absurd would the position be considered, if *e.g.*, those who belong to the Reformed Church in Spain were to cause a stir upon the expression of his personal faith by the Sovereign, and to demand that its requirement should be erased from the Statute book. In what country in the world is a Roman Catholic allowed more freedom for the enjoyment of his religion than in this Protestant country? And if Protestants chose to point to the language of Roman Catholics not as expressed by private individuals, but in their authorised standards, it could easily be shewn that the language used in the Declaration is mild compared to the anathemas hurled against all who differ from their own creed. One is inclined to say to the Romish objector, that he had better sweep his own doorstep clean before he attempts to find fault with ours.

What other language could be proposed that would be agreeable to Romanists, so long as the substance and kernel of the offence remain. The real offence is that a Romanist may not wear England's Crown. Further, apart from the Declaration, there is a requirement that the Sovereign, before Coronation, should solemnly swear to maintain the Protestant Reformed Religion in this

country. That too must go, if we concede the fitness of a Roman Catholic to become Sovereign of this realm.

There are those who in the name of “charity” would wish us to overlook past facts of history when our country was under the heel of Rome. The dark past has gone, they say, and we do the Romanists of the present day a great wrong in maintaining a suspicious attitude towards them. When Rome repents of and forsakes her evil ways, then but not till then, can we afford to forget the past. *The Church Times*, the organ of the extreme High Church party, describes the Protestant Oath taken by the King at the opening of Parliament as belonging “to a period when the anti-papal spirit was aroused by the events of the times,” and says that “it is now become obsolete, and no one outside the ranks of fanaticism desires to see it revived.”

The Editor of the *Life of Faith* very tersely says that “the events of the times” is “a fine euphemism for the cruel wrongs and persecutions inflicted by Rome on our Protestant forefathers.”

A leading article in a recent number of *The English Churchman* very forcibly says “the extreme gravity of the position into which the powers of the Vatican have driven His Majesty’s Government will, it is to be hoped, be speedily realized by loyal Protestants throughout the Kingdom. The concession made to the Papacy at the outset of the new reign is pregnant with evil portent. If Roman Catholic sensibilities are to dominate the policy of the responsible advisers of the Crown, free-born Englishmen must demand to know the reason why; for they treasure beyond all price the civil and religious liberties won for them by the very men who drew up the Bill of Rights, the Declaration, and the Coronation Oath; and they must refuse to place those liberties in jeopardy, to propitiate—even for an hour—the implacable enemies of the land of the Reformation and the Revolution.”