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# SOLEMN PROTEST,

BEFORE

## THE CHURCH AND NATION,

OF THE

REV. ARTHUR A. REES,

*Late Minister of Thomas Street Episcopal Chapel, Bath.*

AGAINST HIS

## VIRTUAL EJECTION FROM THE MINISTRY

OF THE

## CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

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"Doth our law judge any man before it hear him, and know what he doeth?"  
John vii. 51.

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# SOLEMN PROTEST.

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It is neither to avenge myself nor to criminate others that I thus appear before the public ; but, first, that I may give correct information to enquirers as to the real cause of my removal from the ministry of Thomas Street Chapel ; secondly, that I may solemnly protest, before the Church and Nation, against that arbitrary exercise of power which has twice dissevered me from my flock ; and, thirdly, that I may justify, to every true Christian, the step I now purpose to take.

I had been quietly labouring for twelve months as Curate of the parish of Sunderland, in the county and diocese of Durham, when I received a letter from the Bishop enquiring whether, in two occasional sermons I had lately preached in the neighbourhood, I made certain statements which were laid to my charge. In my reply, I denied the statements as expressed in his lordship's words, but admitted that I had said something like them, and defended what I uttered on scriptural grounds. [See Appendix.] At the same time I acknowledged that I had done wrong in not pronouncing the blessing after sermon in the very words of the prescribed form ; for of this, too, I was accused.\* His lordship, however, was not satisfied with my answer, and threatened summarily to revoke my licence, unless, after the receipt of further information, he should see cause to change his mind ; but through the interposition of my incumbent, who wrote strongly in my favour, the Bishop relented, and after the interchange of several letters between us, in which I made some concessions, and he gave some advice, his lordship concluded the correspondence with a letter which thus commenced :—

“ *Auckland Castle, Jan. 28, 1842.*

Rev. Sir,—It is so accordant with my feelings to alter an unfavourable opinion, and *recall an intended censure*, that I have perused your letter with unmixed satisfaction. You have thereby confirmed Mr. Webb's assurance that you were open to conviction and candid in acknowledgment of error ;† and I join with him in

\* The words I used were these—“The peace of God, &c. keep the hearts and minds of *all his true people*,” &c.

† I acknowledged no error in *doctrine*, but only in being *indiscreet*, because I preached to a *strange* congregation in the same strain in which I preached to *my own*.

hoping, that when you have had more frequent opportunities of reflection, and your judgment has become more matured, you will prove a valuable accession to the ministry."

This was the *last* letter I received from his lordship, *whilst I was any longer curate of Sunderland*; and, therefore, any *subsequent* communications from him possessed no more legal authority than the correspondence of a private individual. The force of this remark will be seen anon.

About six months after this, the Rector expressed his dissatisfaction with my preaching, and some weeks subsequently, intimated the propriety of my resigning the curacy. But I shall subjoin a brief account of this event, in the words of the editor of "*The Sunderland and Durham County Herald*."

"THE RECTOR OF SUNDERLAND AND THE REV. A. A. REES.

An extraordinary interest, and we may add also a general feeling of regret and pain, has been excited in this town by the dismissal of Mr. Rees, one of the curates of Sunderland, from a situation in which he has been remarkably laborious and useful.

Mr. Rees has filled the curacy which closed on Sunday evening last for a period of two years; his ministerial exertions, during the whole of that time, have been warmly approved by the parishioners and eminently beneficial to them—and from first to last, so far as we can judge from the information which has reached us, he has been the instructor, the spiritual physician, and the friend of his flock

In the spring of this year, Mr. Rees delivered a course of sermons on repentance, faith, and the Divine sovereignty.\* Mr. Webb, the rector, attended the latter discourses, and we understand he afterwards called upon Mr. Rees, and objected to some of the doctrinal statements therein contained. A friendly discussion took place, but as is usual in such controversies, neither party was convinced of error. Soon after, however, Mr. Webb intimated the propriety of a separation, and forwarded to Mr. Rees a note giving him three months' notice to vacate the curacy. So soon as this communication reached the ears of the people accustomed to sit under his ministry, they of course deeply regretted the circumstance, and sought by every proper means to prevent an estrangement so much to be de-

\* It is a mistake that I delivered a *course* of sermons on these subjects, but it is true that the sermons to which Mr. Webb chiefly objected were on the subject of the Divine sovereignty. I must also add that Mr. Webb could not have heard me preach more than *ten times* in all.

plored. They accordingly forwarded a petition to the rector, signed by *fourteen hundred* parishioners—the following is a copy:—

“ *To the Rev. W. Webb, Rector of Sunderland.*

We, inhabitants of Sunderland and the neighbourhood, humbly express to the Rev. Wm. Webb, rector, our earnest and heartfelt desire that the Rev. Arthur Augustus Rees may be retained in his present position as Curate of Sunderland, being forcibly convinced that his labours have resulted to the glory of God, and under the conviction that greater benefits may flow from his unwearied exertions for the salvation of souls.”

The petition, I need not say, was unsuccessful.

When the period of notice was elapsed, I preached my farewell sermon; but, on account of domestic affliction, I was compelled to remain three months longer in the town, during which time I regularly attended the services of that chapel as a hearer, in which I had been wont to officiate; and I appeal to all who know me whether I did not conduct myself with quietness and propriety. It is indeed true that I invited *a select number of my special friends* to meet me in *my own parlour*, at stated times in the week, for prayer and exhortation, and that the Bishop objected to this proceeding. But surely when it is considered that I was *obliged* to remain in the town, and that my former hearers were perpetually coming to me for advice, it will not be thought, by any true minister of the Church, that in this quiet and private manner, I could refuse to act as I did. Besides, at this time, let it be well remembered, I was only a private person.

After my farewell sermon, the desire of thousands to retain me amongst them was so strong, that they proposed to purchase me a chapel if I would preach in it, either with or without a licence; because, however, I was not then, *as I am now*, virtually ejected from the ministry of the Church, but only from the Curacy of Sunderland, I felt it my duty to refuse the offer to preach without a licence, but said, that if the Bishop would license me, I would gladly accede to their wish. An account of this also, I shall subjoin, in the words of the same editor.

“ **THE REV. A. A. REES AND THE BISHOP OF DURHAM.**

Our readers are already aware of the removal of Mr. Rees from the curacy of Sunderland, and also of the circumstances attending that removal. Many of them, too, well know that for some time past great exertion has been making by some of the

friends of this popular and devoted clergyman, to obtain for him a building, in which he might still prosecute the onerous duties of his sacred calling, and still be extensively useful to his fellow-townsmen. The Scotch Church, in Monkwearmouth, having been recently offered publicly for sale, negotiations were entered into for the purpose of obtaining it for Mr. Rees, and it was deemed expedient (previous to the completion of those negotiations) to ascertain whether the Bishop of Durham would grant his licence to that gentleman. The following is a copy of the memorial addressed to his lordship on the subject:—

‘To the Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of Durham. The memorial of the undersigned inhabitants of the parishes of Sunderland, Bishopwearmouth, and Monkwearmouth, sheweth, That the Rev. Arthur Augustus Rees has, for the last two years, been one of the curates in the parish of Sunderland, and has gained the esteem and affection of your memorialists, by the zeal and ability with which he has discharged his official duties. That Mr. Rees’ ministry is distinguished by its scriptural simplicity and power, and has been attended by large congregations, including many who were not in the habit of attending the service of the Church, and that many profess to have derived from it much spiritual advantage, and give evidence by their reformed lives. That your memorialists are strongly of opinion, that it would tend greatly to the religious and moral welfare of the parishes in which your memorialists reside, if Mr. Rees’ services could be continued in the neighbourhood. That with this view, some of your memorialists have entered into preparatory negotiations for the purchase of a building situated in Monkwearmouth, and formerly used by a congregation connected with the Church of Scotland, but which negotiations depend for their further progress on your Lordship’s approval. Your memorialists, therefore, request the favour of your Lordship’s direction, and would respectfully ask your Lordship to inform them whether, in the event of the above-named building being purchased, your Lordship will grant a licence to enable Mr. Rees to preach therein, in connection with the Established Church.’

This memorial was signed by the large number of 7,364 persons, many of whom are of the highest respectability and strongly attached to the Church of England; and there is no doubt if it had remained for signature two or three days longer, that number would have been nearly doubled.”

This petition too was unsuccessful, for the Bishop not only refused to license me to the chapel, but also declared that he

would not license me to any charge in his diocese. The editor's remark on this adverse result is as follows :—

“ We regret to have to record this decision ; but it appears to us clear, that Mr. Rees being now virtually expelled from the Church, he ought to attach himself to some other denomination of Christians, with whose views ‘ his doctrines and manner of preaching ’ more entirely coincide. It has not yet come to pass in England, that a Bishop’s licence is necessary to enable a clergyman to preach—Mr. Rees can exercise the sacred office of the ministry without his lordship’s permission ; and whilst we deplore this unfortunate rupture between the Bishop and one of his curates, we trust that the usefulness of Mr. Rees will not be thereby hindered.”

But as some may object that this editor is evidently not favourable to the Church, and consequently is not impartial, I think it right to add the remark of the editor of a *rival and Church paper* on my removal from Sunderland :

“ This devoted young Minister of Christ, during a period of two years, laboured with extraordinary faithfulness and zeal in the parish of Sunderland. From the earnest and powerful character of his preaching, he drew together immense congregations, and was rendered the instrument of very extensive spiritual good. His removal from such a large field of usefulness is most deeply lamented by his friends.”

Since, however, in the minds of *some*, the opinion of *any number of laymen* as to the qualifications of their minister weighs *nothing* against the judgment of *a single clergyman*, it is necessary to inform such that, at this time, several of the most approved of the clergy in the neighbourhood went in a body to Mr. Webb with the view of procuring my reinstatement in the curacy, but in vain.

When I heard of the Bishop’s refusal, I wrote to his lordship to enquire, whether if I sought employment in another diocese he would countersign my testimonials. His reply was as follows :

“ *Auckland Castle, Jan. 25th, 1843.*

As to signing any testimonial which may hereafter be presented to me in your favour, I cannot bind myself one way or the other. Something may depend on its form, as well as the character of those who may sign it. I may add, that much would depend on your conduct [it must be remembered I was now a private person], which, if I am rightly informed, is not very regular at present.”

His lordship refers to the meetings I held in my own parlour.

It will thus be seen that *at that time* his lordship was not determined to drive me into my present course.

About this period I happened to go to Newcastle, and being requested by the incumbent of St. John's to take his Wednesday evening lecture, I was glad to comply with his request, not imagining that the Bishop would deem this occasional lecture such a grievous offence as he has. This was the *only* sermon I preached in his diocese after my resignation of Sunderland. As soon as circumstances would admit, I came on a visit to Bath, where I resided four months without officiating more than three times; and I appeal to all who know me, whether I did not conduct myself with quietness and strict propriety. Soon after my arrival in this city, I received another letter from the Bishop acquainting me with his determination not to countersign my testimonials because I had preached at Newcastle contrary to his injunction; for whilst the correspondence of which I have spoken was going on, and *previous* to his writing the *last* letter, which "*recalled his intended censure,*" his lordship had prohibited me from officiating in any church but that to which I was licensed. In my reply, I reminded him of the "recall of his intended censure," which, of course, I concluded to mean the prohibition above-mentioned, and *assured him, that had I known I should be violating his express injunction, I would not have preached at all*; but to this letter I received no answer, and therefore I inferred that his lordship was satisfied with my explanation.

During my residence in Bath, I made *full fifteen applications* for employment, including one to the Bishop of Chester, who had once expressed himself interested in my case, but, for some cause or other, I succeeded in none. At length, however, I took the duty of two clergymen for about two months, and at the termination of that period, when many were able to judge for themselves of my preaching, through the unsought interposition of a friend, the sole charge of Thomas Street Chapel was offered to me by the Rev. S. H. Widdrington, Rector of the parish of Walcot, in this city.

I then immediately applied for testimonials to my late incumbent and two other of my personal friends, but, to my *astonishment* (for when I left Sunderland neither myself nor my acquaintances had the least conception of such a result), I received from Mr. Webb the following reply:—



"London, October 9th, 1843.

My dear Mr. Rees,—I am very ready to certify my belief of the sincerity of your character, and to give testimony to your zeal and devotedness in the ministry, according to your own views of the gospel; but, I confess, that with my views, and looking at past events, I do feel a difficulty in signing the usual form of testimonial in your case.

*All I can say at present is*, that I *may* communicate with the Bishop on the subject and let you know the result. At the same time let me add, that I shall always have the greatest pleasure in assisting you in any way consistent with the conscientious difference which existed between us.

I remain, my dear Mr. Rees, very truly yours,

WILLIAM WEBB."

When this was known at Sunderland, some of my clerical friends there had a personal interview with the Rector to induce him to change his mind, but in vain. I am happy to state, however, that several other incumbents voluntarily offered to sign; so that out of *eight*\* who privately knew me, my late Rector alone refused. About this time, moreover, Mr. Webb went to London, and there providentially fell in with two of my most intimate friends, the one the incumbent of St. Philip's, Pentonville, and the excellent author of "*Spiritual Life Delineated*;" the other the incumbent of St. Jude's, Glasgow, and the worthy compiler of "*The Voice of the Glorious Reformation*," who both remonstrated with him on his refusal; but he was unmoved, nor would he, in compliance with my earnest request, state his *specific reasons* for refusing; and I am bound to add, that a few days ago, when I was in London, the incumbent of St. Philip's assured me, in the presence of Mr. Basil Marriott, of this city, that in his interview with Mr. Webb, the latter had nothing to say against me.

In a short time after, Mr. Webb sent me word through a mutual friend, that whilst it was a point of conscience with him not to sign, yet he should be sorry if the Church of England should be deprived of my services.†

- \* The Rev. D. DAVIES, Rector of Gateshead.
- The Rev. H. W. WRIGHT, Incumbent of St. John's, Newcastle.
- The Rev. THOMAS DIXON, of South Shields.
- The Rev. B. KENNICOTT, Perpetual Curate of Monkwearmouth.
- The Rev. W. WEBB, Rector of Sunderland.
- The Rev. F. JAMES, of Monkwearmouth.
- The Rev. Mr. CLAYTON, of Newcastle.
- The Rev. W. H. BULMER, of Deptford. Bishopwearmouth.

It is but right to state, however, that from peculiar circumstances, the competency of the three last to sign was questioned.

† Need I remark on the inconsistency of this message? for if Mr.

I had nothing then to do but to procure three signatures, without that of the Rector, and to send them to the Bishop of Durham for his counter-signature. Accordingly I did so, but in a few days I received a letter from his lordship's secretary, informing me that the Bishop felt it inconsistent with his duty to affix his signature.

Mr. Widdrington then wrote to his lordship, expressing his entire satisfaction with both my principles and conduct, as far as he knew them, and requesting him again to consider my case; but the Bishop was unmoved. I also wrote a strong but respectful appeal, to which his lordship replied, "That if I had followed his advice, given in February of the last year, I should have spared him the pain of refusing." The advice here referred to was this:—"That I should retire a while, and place myself under the guidance of some judicious clergyman, who might draw me off from my overstrained views of 'the truth as it is in Jesus.'" This advice, be it well remembered, was given when the Bishop of Durham had no *legal* authority over me, and, consequently, I could not be contumacious in neglecting it. I wrote to him once again, reminding him of this important fact, and *entreating him to reconsider the extremity to which he was reducing me*, and I concluded by requesting that if he still determined not to sign, he would state his *specific* reasons for refusing. But to this letter I received no reply. My only alternative now was to try and procure signatures and counter-signatures from other sources, which, after some difficulty with the Bishop of London, I obtained; so that I had now the signatures of *six* approved incumbents, with the counter-signatures of two Bishops.\*

These testimonials were immediately sent to the Bishop's Secretary, at Wells, but no notice was taken of them for several weeks.

Meanwhile I was exercising my ministry in public and in pri-

Webb conscientiously thought that I preached contrary to the doctrines of the Church, surely he ought not to be "sorry if the Church should be deprived of my services."

\* The six signing Incumbents were as follows:—

The Rev. W. H. WRIGHT, of Newcastle.

The Rev. THOMAS DIXON, of South Shields.

The Rev. B. KENNICOTT, of Monkwearmouth.

The Rev. THOMAS WATSON, of Pentonville, London.

The Rev. H. W. JONES, Rector of Loughor, Glamorganshire.

The Rev. D. DAVIS, Vicar of Cannington, Somersetshire.

The two counter-signing Bishops were the Bishop of London, and the Bishop of St. David's.

vate, in the chapel and district allotted to me ; in what manner, I shall leave others to testify. [See Appendix.] I had removed my family into the neighbourhood, and had been preaching three times a-week, for more than four months, to an increasing and very attentive congregation, *every individual* of which was a purely voluntary hearer, because the chapel had just been purchased from dissenters, and I was the first episcopally ordained minister who officiated in it ; when, like a thunder-stroke, both on Mr. Widdrington, myself, and many hundreds of the people, and without one note of warning, a letter came to the Rector from the Bishop of Salisbury, the acting Bishop of the diocese, strictly charging him to take care that I should not officiate *a single day longer* in any church or chapel in his parish. The confusion and deep distress produced by this sudden blow amongst several hundreds of my congregation may be more easily imagined than described.

The reason which his lordship assigned for this prohibition was, that the testimonials were not countersigned by my late Bishop.

I then immediately repaired to London, where I had a personal interview with the Bishop ; the result of which was, that he declared he could not license me to Thomas Street Chapel, without the consent of the Bishop of Durham ; but he intimated that if I had followed the latter's advice, by retiring a while for the purpose before mentioned, this painful event would not have happened. *This most clearly proves, when compared with the Bishop of Durham's last letter to me, that the real reason for his refusing to sign is, that I applied for employment before he conceived I had been silent long enough.*

And now what remains to be done ? If I cannot be licensed in *this* diocese, I cannot be licensed in *any*, because the same obstacles will everywhere be opposed. I must, therefore, either shut my mouth, and become a private member of the church, or else, on the broad ground of British toleration, I must preach the everlasting gospel "with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven" in a sphere where a mere private difference of opinion will not subject either myself or my people to the sudden and violent disruption of the closest ties which the mutual affection of a pastor and his flock has formed between them ; and I appeal to every true christian, whether the latter course is not the one to be pursued ;—*yes it is, and I shall pursue it.* But before I take this serious step, I hereby make my SOLEMN PROTEST before the Church and Nation ; first,—against that arbitrary exercise of power which has thus dissevered me from my flock,

and driven me to adopt this course,—not because of any moral delinquency,—not because of false doctrine,—not because of violation of church discipline,—but, by the Bishop of Durham's own repeated confession, because I would not comply with his private advice, namely, to retire a while, *with my wife and family*, for no other reason than that I might change my views, so as to agree—I do not say with the doctrines of the Church, *for with those I affirm they do agree*,—but with the Bishop of Durham's private interpretation of them. Secondly,—I protest that I shall not be a dissenter on *principle*, but by *compulsion*, for I was conscientiously a minister of the church.

Let this, then, perpetually stand both as my protest and apology: my protest against the Bishop of Durham's virtual expulsion of me from the church ministry, and my apology for the step I shall now take.

And now what more shall I say? Farewell, Church of England! not thy doctrines, for I love and shall preach them still, but thy misgovernment and bad administration; not thy truest children and most faithful friends, for with them I shall still be united in the universal Church of Christ; not thy wholesome discipline, but the *hand-foot-and-tongue-captivity* which some of thy rulers impose. Hail liberty of conscience, controlled by the Book of God! hail liberty of action, restrained by the law of Christ! hail liberty of speech, directed by the Word of Truth! Church of England, farewell! for though I was born in thee, and nourished on thy breast, yet now that I am grown up, and within thy walls, have “begotten others in Christ Jesus, through the Gospel,” yet, at length, thou hast cast me off. Church of England, farewell!

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## APPENDIX.

*Testimonial of the Rev. S. H. Widdrington, Rector of the parish of Walcot, in the city of Bath, to the Rev. Arthur A. Rees, late Minister of Thomas Street Chapel, in the said parish and city.*

*“Northfield House, Feb. 13, 1844.*

My dear Sir,—I do most cheerfully bear testimony to the zeal and energy with which you carried on your ministry, specially among the poorer population; I found you, on all occasions, ready to render me, as Rector of the parish, all becoming deference and respect. You acted up to every pledge you gave me when we formed our engagement, and I found you, in all respects, such as you described yourself to be.

In taking leave of my parish, you will carry with you the

regrets of many to whom you ministered, as well as my own most affectionate wishes for your welfare.

Your affectionate Brother in the Ministry,  
 SYDNEY H. WIDDRINGTON."

*Extracts from the Bishop of Durham's letters to me, whereby the real ground of his Lordship's disapprobation of my preaching may be seen.*

"Auckland Castle, Jan. 19th.

I do not hesitate to say, that the doctrine of so very few professing Christians being ultimately saved is at variance with the whole spirit of the doctrine of our Church. She may, for the wisest reasons, not have expressed a formal opinion upon a point in which the limits of soberness and humility may be so soon transgressed; but the whole tenor of the Liturgy points against such a doctrine, as well as the conclusion of the 17th Article, and the Homilies on Salvation, as I understand them. But why do I talk of authorities respecting the doctrine of our Church, when the notion which you have unfortunately imbibed is at once opposed to common sense and common justice? Is it possible any reflecting man can, after fully weighing all the consequences of such a position, bring himself to believe that the Almighty Father of the universe, has brought the vast majority of his creatures into existence, only for the purpose of consigning them to everlasting punishment?

You quote, however, Matthew vii. 13, 14. Has it never occurred to you, that throughout the New Testament, especially in the discourses of our Lord, and in this very sermon on the mount, are many passages *more peculiarly* applicable (some *exclusively*) to the condition of things and persons of our Saviour's own time, than in after periods of the Gospel? So *that the passage you quote* may refer, and, I believe, does refer, to *the comparative numbers of those who embraced and who rejected the Gospel at its first preaching.*"

"Auckland Castle, Jan. 28th. 1842.

What I would observe is, that the *greater part* of the sermon on the mount, is addressed especially to the disciples only, and made applicable to their peculiar situation. *This throws light* on Matthew vi. 25—34, and v. 38—42, which unless they are considered in reference to the duties and circumstances of the Apostles and first teachers of the Gospel, cannot be so well explained. But I am far from insisting on the undeniable accuracy of my interpretations, although, having now been studying the Scriptures for half a century, I may feel somewhat confident respecting the principle I have laid down."