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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK REASONS WHY A CHURCHMAN MAY WITH GREAT JUSTICE REFUSE TO SUBSCRIBE TO THE BRITISH AND FOREIGN BIBLE SOCIETY ***

Transcribed from the 1817 J. Keymer edition by David Price, email ccx074@pglaf.org

**REASONS
WHY
A CHURCHMAN
MAY WITH GREAT JUSTICE
REFUSE TO SUBSCRIBE
TO
THE BRITISH
AND
FOREIGN BIBLE SOCIETY.**

YARMOUTH:
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1817.

PREFACE.

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As this small tract seems destined for a more extended circulation, than was at first intended, from the author's being strongly solicited that it might be made more public, it may in some degree be necessary to explain his motive for its original publication; lest it should seem to have been solely brought forward, with a view of entering into the controversy respecting Bible Societies. Which was certainly far from the case, because he is of opinion, that though controversies will, when conducted in an argumentative, dispassionate, and manly manner, draw out and confirm the truth; yet, if conducted otherwise, they more frequently tend to confuse others, but very rarely to convince the parties engaged. His motive, therefore, was very different. Being minister of a populous parish, and observing, what he conceived to be, an

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unwarrantable interference in it, to assist and forward the views of the British and Foreign Bible Society, though it was contrary to his known and expressed wishes; he was, in a manner, compelled to give his reasons to his parishioners, who were churchmen, why he objected to that society; and to shew that his objection did not arise, as the general insinuation is, because the Bible was circulated, but because there was a society established, which, to churchmen, afforded greater means of circulating it; and which, also, held forth greater advantages and security to the Established Church. His object was to keep the members of the Established Church steady in their obedience to it; and to put them on their guard against the invitations of the Bible Society, which would only distract them. He has concisely told them his reasons for forming this opinion, and has furnished them with a reasonable excuse for not subscribing.

The author will now merely repeat, that, had it not been for the solicitations of many of his friends, this tract would have been confined to the use of his parishes. He wishes, therefore, to observe, that, as that was his first intention, and as he has not been in the habit of writing for the press, he hopes he shall receive indulgence for its imperfections. His desire was, that it might be useful to those for whom it was at first intended; and he trusts it will be equally so, when more widely diffused.

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REASONS, &c., &c.

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FROM the increased activity which has of late been shewn by the advocates for the British and Foreign Bible Society, and the reflections which have been cast upon those who do not choose to join them, it seems necessary to set this subject in its true light; and to shew that the refusal to unite with them, is not, as they have falsely said, because those who refuse are against the circulation of the Bible; but because they foresee danger likely to be incurred by it; and because there is another Bible Society, which was established above 100 years before their's, and which holds out to its subscribers, particularly churchmen, superior advantages; and, therefore, a person may be thoroughly justified in the preference of the one Society, and the rejection of the other.

Before, however, the subject is entered upon, it may be necessary to say, that these observations are intended to be addressed particularly to churchmen; and to that class of churchmen, who have had neither leisure nor opportunity to attend to the consideration of such subjects; but who yet may be desirous of knowing the merits of them, if brought forward in a concise manner. They are not intended to cast any reproach on the dissenters, nor to adopt the arrogant and dogmatical style of the Bible Society, and say, that because a person thinks differently, he is therefore deserving of every reproachful epithet, he is unmindful of the eternal welfare of the poor, and guilty of a total dereliction of his duty. This style is by no means adapted to the temper or disposition of the writer of these observations, who wishes to urge what he says, in a clear and candid manner, void of all anger, bitterness, or clamour. He being well convinced, that, if reason and sound argument will not bring conviction to a man's mind, anger or vehemence of expression will never effect it. For a good cause only requires to be fairly stated to insure approbation; whilst a bad cause, being fearful of not obtaining any support, strives to snatch it by violence and declamation.

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The chief arguments urged by the advocates of the British and Foreign Bible Society, are the general circulation of the Bible; and the love and harmony which an union of churchmen with dissenters must, they say, naturally inspire. It will not, however, be difficult to prove, that neither the one nor the other can be exclusively claimed by them. That they cannot appropriate the former solely to themselves; nor has the latter been at all proved by recent occurrences. To prove that the circulation of the Bible does not exclusively belong to the British and Foreign Bible Society, it needs only be said, that there is another Society for that purpose, called the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. It is asserted by some, that these two Societies will not interfere with, nor oppose, each other. But how can this be proved, when, by the strong recommendation of the one, and the total silence as to the other, subscriptions are drawn to the one, which might very materially assist and increase the powers of the other, seems inexplicable. If merely the distribution of the Bible were the sole effect to be produced, and no other consequence to be apprehended, there could be no possible objection to either, and it might not signify through which channel it was carried. For the Bible is the work of men divinely inspired, and contains every thing which a Christian ought to know and believe to his soul's health; and therefore, no book can be more proper, nor more useful, nor deserve to be more freely nor more widely circulated. But though it is a book which is so proper, so useful, and deserves to be as freely and as widely circulated as possible, and though it contains every thing necessary for a Christian's salvation, yet there are in it some parts which are not so easy to be understood; but require the assistance of fit and proper persons to point out to the unlearned the proper meaning of those passages. The explanation, however, of these difficult passages will vary, according to the religious notions of the person, to whom the application for assistance is made. And as it is well known, that the Socinian, the Independent, the Anabaptist, the Methodist, and other sects, all think they derive the tenets of their respective religions from the Bible, it is surely of importance, notwithstanding the ostensible object of the two Societies is the same, for a churchman to consider whom he assists in the explanation of the Bible, and what channel he

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authorizes for its distribution; lest, whilst the letter of the Gospel is distributed, the spirit of it should be completely altered.

The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge certainly, holds forth superior advantages to a churchman: First, Because it is a Society which consists entirely of churchmen; Secondly, Because Bibles can there be procured at a cheaper rate; Thirdly, Because those Bibles are more useful; and, Fourthly, Because it furnishes Prayer Books and Religious Tracts.

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First, It is a Society which consists entirely of churchmen. A Society formed of persons professing the same system of religion, can have no other view than the promotion of that religion. There will be no variety of interpretations in essential points, no confusion occasioned among the unlearned by different comments. The churchman will explain the difficult and doubtful parts, if applied to for an explanation of them, in the way prescribed by the best church commentators. But, if not applied to for that specific purpose, will rather recommend an attention to those parts of Scripture, which point out the way to salvation, and which are so clear and plain, that he who runs may read his duty. He will circulate the Bible, because he firmly believes it will best promote his religion, and that his religion prescribes the best mode of obtaining eternal salvation. There can, therefore, be no danger in a churchman subscribing to this Society, because the views of all the members of it must be the same. On this account, then, this Society must be considered as the most proper channel through which a churchman should distribute the Bible: and it does seem surprising, when the Church of England is more effectually served by an union of churchmen with churchmen, how any one of that persuasion can hesitate to prefer it.

Secondly, It is the best, because it procures Bibles at a cheaper rate. The comparative advantage of the two Societies in this respect, have been so clearly brought forward by Mr. Norris, in his Appendix to the Practical Exposition of the Bible Society, that this shall be taken from it. A 12mo nonpareil Bible is allowed to the Subscribers for Promoting Christian Knowledge for 3s. 3d.,^[5a] but the British and Foreign Bible Society expects from its subscribers 4s. 6d.^[5b] for the same edition. In purchasing, therefore, six Bibles, a subscriber to the former would give 19s. 6d., but a subscriber to the latter would give £1. 7s. If a parochial subscription should be made, the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge offers superior advantages. Because it offers two-thirds of the collection to be returned in books, valued at the reduced prices; whereas, the British and Foreign Bible Society only offers one half; and therefore, if the collection amounted to £18, the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, selling their Bibles for 3s. 3d., and allowing two-thirds of it to be returned in books, which would be £12, would furnish 73 and nearly 74 Bibles; whilst the British and Foreign Bible Society, selling their Bibles for 4s. 6d., and only allowing one half to be returned in books, would, for the collection of £18, only furnish 40 Bibles. The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge would therefore allow for the same collection 33 or nearly one half more Bibles than the British and Foreign Bible Society; as, therefore, this Society affords Bibles at a cheaper rate, and as the distribution of them is the main object of both Societies, that Society must clearly be the best, which affords the largest opportunities of doing it.

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Thirdly, It is the best, because it provides Bibles which are more useful. It has been before observed, that there are passages in the Bible which may admit of doubtful and different interpretations. Surely, then, that Society is to be esteemed the best, which affords the best comments on those difficult passages. The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge furnishes Bibles with these notes and comments. And there is now publishing by that Society, a most useful and explanatory Family Bible, under the management of Dr. Mant and Mr. D'Oyley, which is furnished to the subscribers at a very cheap rate; and which, if it were possible, it would be desirable so far still to be reduced in price, as to allow it to be in general circulation. For, the more the Bible is explained by fit and able commentators, the more useful it is rendered. Bibles, therefore, with notes and comments, are the most useful; and as that Society provides them, it is clearly the best channel through which a churchman would wish to distribute a Bible.

Fourthly, It is the best, because it provides Prayer Books and Religious Tracts. When we consider that there is at present hardly a town, or even a village, which is not visited by illiterate teachers, who expound the Bible with more confidence than the most able theologian, it surely becomes doubly necessary, if we would preserve the poor of the Establishment in the religion of their fathers, to provide them with a safeguard against false interpretations. At one time it was argued by the advocates of the Bible Society, that the Bible alone was the religion of the Protestant, and ought to be alone distributed. But those persons who were desirous of preserving the present Church Establishment, and amongst those, particularly Dr. Marsh, made every effort to increase the distribution of the Prayer Book. And when we consider that it contains devotional exercises in the true spirit of the Scripture; that it is heard constantly at church; that it is designed equally for the closet; and that no churchman can join in the service of the church without it; surely it must be confessed that the Society which provides these is the best. It may be said, that there is a Society formed for the distribution of Prayer Books and Homilies, and that a churchman, subscribing to the British and Foreign Bible Society, may procure Prayer Books to accompany his Bibles from that; but surely the Society which unites both in one must be preferable to that which provides only one. Great benefit is also to be derived from Religious Tracts. They are useful helps, and sure and certain guides. That is, certain as far as human intellect can guarantee them, as to the doctrine of the Church of England. For no Tract is allowed to be issued by this Society, without undergoing the strictest examination of the most learned and orthodox men. Which must undoubtedly be, to those churchmen who do not pretend to be wise above what is written, nor wiser than any that have gone before, nor above

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being guided, a very great recommendation. From what has been observed, it will, it is to be hoped, be allowed, that the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge holds forth superior advantages to the churchman; when it is considered, that it is composed of churchmen only; that it furnishes Bibles with notes and comments; that it sells those Bibles at a much cheaper rate; and that it provides Prayer Books and Religious Tracts.

The British and Foreign Bible Society is composed of churchmen and dissenters. The dissenter of every denomination is admitted into it, and allowed to have at his disposal an equal number of Bibles with the churchman. And if there be, as every dissenting minister must acknowledge, some parts of the Holy Scriptures, which the poor and unlearned cannot understand without assistance, and the Bible be distributed by such a variety of persons, professing different religions, and consequently affording very different explanations, what confusion must be occasioned! How must the poor be tossed about by such various and strange doctrines! The British Critic for November, 1815, in the remarks upon Mr. Gisborne's letter to the Bishop of Gloucester, says, "As the most absurd and fatal errors which ever disgraced the Christian Church, have every one of them been deduced from a perverted interpretation of the Holy Scriptures; to place Bibles for distribution in the hands of those who preach such doctrines, and who can prove to the satisfaction of their deluded hearers, that such doctrines are derived from Scripture, is to increase the progress of error; and every such Bible becomes a curse and not a blessing to its possessors. Most dangerous, therefore, is it to the souls of the lower orders, by an union of churchmen with such men as hold forth these fatal perversions, to supply them with arms for their own destruction, and to give them influence sufficient to use them with success. We do not say that all dissenters are thus inclined; many, especially of the older sort, are good and worthy men; but the daily increasing numbers of furious fanatics are unhappily more than sufficient to warrant our assertions." A churchman must believe, that, in the Established Church, Christianity is to be found, both as to its doctrine and discipline, in its purest form: and he must also believe, that the further the doctrine of any sect recedes from this standard, the further must it degenerate into error. And the more the sectaries are increased, the more will the Established Church be endangered. It may be said, that if the doctrine and discipline of the Church be founded on the Bible, why should it be alarmed at the extended distribution of that Bible on which it is founded? That the doctrines and discipline of the Church are founded on the Bible we are proud to acknowledge, and ready to demonstrate; but that Independency, Quakerism, Antinomianism, and Unitarianism are also referred to by their several teachers to the same source, no one would attempt to deny. When, therefore, by our co-operation, we enable these sectaries to distribute the Holy Scriptures to a vast extent, we enable them to undermine the Established Church, by the means of those very Scriptures on which it is founded. The sectary gains an influence over the poor, by the opportunities afforded him by this Society. And every churchman who subscribes his guinea to it, must suffer his subscription to go to promote the views of the dissenter, whatever they may be, as well as his own: it must go towards the furtherance of whatever plan that Society may suggest.

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Some persons have attempted to apologize for their belonging to this Society, by saying, that their object was to watch over and prevent any bad consequences which might otherwise happen from it. But surely this is a most senseless notion; that, because it is a Society which may be productive of much mischief, they will add to the means which will promote it. Nature will be nature; and a man, conscientiously attached to his religion, will, if means are afforded him, find opportunities of employing them towards the accomplishment of his purpose, though ever so much watched. It therefore plainly appears, that the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge is far preferable to churchmen for the distribution of the Bible than the British and Foreign Bible Society; not only from the great advantages before mentioned, but because much danger to the Church Establishment may be incurred by the latter, but cannot by the former.

With regard to the other argument urged by the advocates for the British and Foreign Bible Society; *viz.* The love and harmony which, by such an union of churchmen with dissenters, will be inspired. This may be proved to be as unfounded as the other. Did this love and harmony only refer to social acts, to kindness between man and man, it would certainly be a most desirable object. For, as far as the calls of society demand, or humanity can claim, so far should such an union be strongly recommended. Distress ought to mark the object, and not the sect. And if that object be worthy, or in real distress, whether churchman or dissenter, he ought to be comforted and relieved. But surely, with regard to every religious transaction, each ought to be perfectly distinct. Let the dissenter have as free and complete a toleration as possible, and an undisturbed opportunity of observing and obeying the rites and precepts of his religion; but let not the churchman contribute his means to assist the dissenter in the extension of his religion, at the hazard of supplanting his own. Whatever ideas may be afloat in the world, that all religions are to be equally encouraged, and that there are no safeguards, no protection to be granted to any one in particular, let not a churchman harbour such. It may be wise and prudent for a dissenter to adopt such sentiments, but perfectly unwise and imprudent in a churchman.

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The union of all sects and denominations of Christians to distribute the Word of God, has an imposing sound, and is well calculated to seduce the unwary, and to deceive the good. But, to form a complete and safe union in any scheme, it is absolutely necessary that all the consequences of such an act should certainly tend to the promotion of mutual intention and interest: and such can certainly not be said of the union here mentioned, because the purposes and interests of the various parts of it totally differ. So far then from the Bible Society producing any union, it sows widely the seeds of discord. It has already divided the national Church; and what is the spirit which animates it, may be seen by the variety of pamphlets circulated by its

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abettors, and by the variety of speeches made at every Auxiliary Meeting.

Whatever conciliation it may have effected amongst dissenters, it assuredly has had a contrary effect amongst churchmen. For there has not been, for a considerable time, a measure brought forward which has created such a division amongst them. A division, which, if continued, may, and most likely will, be productive of the most fatal consequences to the Established Church. A Society, which will instigate and cause such violent and unbecoming animadversions, as are made not only from churchmen to churchmen, but from the clergy of a certain diocese to their diocesan, ^[12] must hold forth and threaten the most alarming and dangerous consequences. It has already had the effect of creating a division amongst the members of the Established Church, but has not diminished the number of the dissenters. It therefore may with truth be said, that the British and Foreign Bible Society cannot with justice appropriate to itself the merit of either exclusively distributing the Bible, or of inspiring universal love and harmony. A churchman may, therefore, fairly refuse to subscribe to it, without deserving to be reproached as an enemy to the distribution of the Bible, as being a bigot, or being regardless of the spiritual welfare of the poor. He may say, "I love and revere the Bible as much as any person can do, and am as ready to associate for its distribution; but I wish, whilst I am promoting this laudable work, to perform at the same time my duties as a churchman. And, therefore, as the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge consists entirely of churchmen; will provide me with Bibles at a cheaper rate: such as are more useful, from their notes and comments; and will also provide me with Prayer Books and Religious Tracts, I shall prefer that; because no harm can thereby happen to the Established Church; and because I shall thus be enabled to do my duty as a Christian, and at the same time my duty as a churchman. Whilst, by uniting in the distribution of the Bible, through the hands of sectaries of every description, I should consider myself, by promoting their means of conversion, in every convert who was made, or in every intention formed by them for drawing persons from the Established Church, not only an assistant, but an accessory."

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These are certainly very fair and reasonable objections to a churchman's subscribing to the British and Foreign Bible Society. If there were no other Society formed for the distribution of the Bible, the case would be different. But since there is one, which offers superior advantages, and which affords him an opportunity of performing the duties of a churchman, at the same time that he is performing the duties of a Christian, there is abundant reason for his rejection of the one Society, and his adoption of the other.

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There is one other plan proposed by the British and Foreign Bible Society, which requires to be shortly noticed; *viz.* The pennies collected from the poor. If the representations of Mr. Gisborne are correct, as to the flourishing state of the Auxiliary Bible Society, that their revenue amounted in 1815 to £124,019. 7s. 7d.; that £26,687. 16s. 5d. was expended for the foreign department; that there was left for home consumption annually the sum of £97,331. 11s; 2d.; that, in addition to this income, there are exchequer bills to the amount of £33,822. 3s. 8d., besides funded property to the amount of £10,000 more: with such an immense sum, an unappropriated surplus of £43,000 and upwards, and an income for home consumption of £90,000 and upwards, it may be fairly asked, for what Christian purpose are the poor to be taxed a penny a week, in support of a Society whose income exceeds its expenditure? What reason can there be to tax the paupers of this kingdom to supply foreign nations with Bibles? There is no poor family in the kingdom, to whom 4s. 6d. is not, at the end of the year, a real object, in the purchase of clothing for children, payment of rent, or procuring food and fuel. To deduct such a sum, therefore, from a poor family, is a cruel, a wicked, and an unchristian act. If the poor cannot claim a Bible gratuitously, for what reason is £90,000 taken every year from the pockets of the rich? It is greatly to be feared, that the real purport of this vexatious impost has a more mischievous tendency; and though there are some who have united in this scheme, more from error in judgment, than from badness of intention, yet there are others, whose aim and ambition it is to puritanize the whole community, and to raise the fabric of enthusiasm upon the ruins of Church and State. ^[15]

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FINIS.

Printed by J. Keymer, King-Street, Yarmouth.

FOOTNOTES.

[5a] That edition of the Bible is now sold by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge for 3s.; and therefore, the advantage is still greater than here represented.

[5b] It has been asserted, that the Bible Society affords to its subscribers these Bibles at 3s. 9d.; but as the poor do not receive them till they have paid one penny weekly for a whole year, to them it is not allowed at less than 4s. 4d.; and there are instances, where they have not received them even for that. Whatever indulgence, therefore, the rich subscribers may receive, the poor are not in the least benefited. And the price is far above that allowed by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, as may be seen by the note above.

[12] The Bishop of Lincoln.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK REASONS WHY A CHURCHMAN MAY WITH GREAT JUSTICE REFUSE TO SUBSCRIBE TO THE BRITISH AND FOREIGN BIBLE SOCIETY ***

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