

My lord, I think it not difficult to indicate what is the probable cause of that conduct, and it is only by ascertaining the cause that we can, perhaps, apply the remedy which may remove those injurious consequences. Society in this country is now established upon the principles of civil and religious liberty. (Cheers.) It is impossible, and certainly in my opinion, it is not desirable to resist the complete development of that principle. (Cheers.) Well, then, at the same time you have a church established by law—that is to say, a national church—and there is an apparent inconsistency in the principle which you have adopted as the foundation of our social system and the existence of the established church, because the principle of civil and religious liberty has placed legislative power in the hands of great bodies of the people who are not in communion with this church, and they have used that power during the last twenty-five years with caution, with great deliberation at first, but, as time advanced, with greater boldness and with greater energy, till within the last few years they have made an avowed attack upon the church, conducted with great ability and with great courage. Well, that being the case during the last quarter of a century, you have had an apparent want of sympathy between that which by your constitution is the national church and the great body of the nation, and that is a state of affairs which is no doubt highly to be deprecated. Well, twenty years ago, when this inconvenience was first very generally felt, ardent churchmen—as sincere churchmen as ever lived—thought they had found a solution for the difficulty by terminating the union between church and state. They said, “Terminate the union between church and state, as the whole of the nation is no longer in communion with the church, and you will put an end to the dissatisfaction that peculiarly, and to a considerable extent, prevails.” No doubt that was a very plausible suggestion, and one that has been accepted by ingenious and able minds; but if examined into, it will be found to lead, in my opinion at least, to results very different from those which were anticipated by its advocates—results not only unsatisfactory, but, I think injurious to the country—(cheers)—because, my lord, it cannot be supposed for a moment that the civil power in such a state will tolerate an *imperium in imperio* or allow a great corporation in possession of great property—for that property is considerable in amount, though if distributed it may not offer adequate remuneration to those who labour in the church’s service—the civil power will not permit a great corporation in possession of this vast property to act in independence of the state, and therefore, there is no concealing it from ourselves, in the end there would be another spoliation, and the church would be left without the endowments and estates which she at present possesses. (Cheers.) The principles of divine truth, I admit, do not depend upon property, but the circulation of the principles of divine truth by human machinery requires property for its organisation—(cheers)—and the church deprived of the means by which the divine instruction which it is its duty to afford to the people is secured, would, of course, lose immensely in its efficiency. But in the case of the Church of England it is not merely a question of the loss of its property, it is also a question of the peculiar character of that property, because the property of the church is territorial property—(cheers)—it is property so distributed through the country that it makes it, from the very nature of its tenure, a national church, and the power of the church does not depend on the amount of the property it possesses, but, in a very great degree, on the kind and character of that property it possesses. (Cheers.) I say then

that the Church of England deprived of its estates would become merely an episcopal sect in this country, and it is possible in some might become an insignificant one.

But that is not the whole or perhaps the greatest evil that would arise from the dissolution of the connexion between the church and state. In the present age the art of government becomes every day more difficult, and no government will allow a principle so powerful as the religious principle to be divorced from the influence by which it regulates the affairs of the country. What must happen? Very obviously what would happen would be this—the state of England would take care, after the church was spoliated, to enlist in its services what are called the ministers of all religions. The ministers of all religions would be enlisted by the state, and the consequence of the dissolution of the alliance between the church and the state would be equally disastrous to the churchman and the nonconformist. It would place the ministers or all spiritual influence under the control of the civil power; it would in this country effect a revolution in the national character; it would have, in my opinion, a most injurious effect on the liberties of the country; and I cannot believe that, after the thought and discussion that have been devoted to this subject for the last twenty years, since it was first mooted by ardent and sincere men, there can be among those who have well considered it any great difference of opinion, but that all men, I would say, the churchman, the dissenter, the philosopher, would shrink from a solution of the difficulty we feel with regard to the present state of the Church of England which would be effected by means so injurious as those to which I have adverted. (Cheers.) Well, then, what would you do? I maintain you have only one alternative—if you do not favour a dissolution of the tie, the union between church and state, you must assert the nationality of the Church of England. (Cheers.)

I know it may be said, “Assert the nationality of the church in a nation where there are millions not in communion with that church!” These are words it is easy to use, but, practically, what would be the consequence of a mere phrase? Well, that is a point that requires a moment’s grave consideration, and, in the first place, it is expedient to ascertain what is the character of those—I will acknowledge it—millions who are not in communion with the church. They consist of two classes—of those who dissent from the church, and those who are indifferent to the church. But those classes are very unequally divided. Now, my lord, the history of English dissent will always be a memorable chapter in the history of this country. (Cheers.) It displays many of those virtues—I would say most of those virtues for which the English character is most distinguished—earnestness, courage, devotion, conscience; but one thing is quite clear, that in the present day the causes which originally created dissent no longer exist—(cheers)—and what is of still more importance, there are now causes in existence which are opposed to the spread of dissent. I won’t refer to the fact that although many, I believe the great majority of the families of the descendants of the original Puritans and Presbyterians have merged in the Church of England, there is no doubt—no man can any longer conceal from himself that the tendency of this age is, not that all creeds, churches, and consistories—I don’t say that, mind you—I don’t say that all creeds, churches, and consistories should combine, but I say that all churches, creeds, and consistories, should cease hereafter from any intercommunal hostility. It is a tendency which it is impossible for

them to resist, and therefore, so far as the spread of dissent, mere sincere religious dissent is concerned, I hold it is of a very limited character, and there is nothing in the existence of that which should prevent the Church of England from asserting her nationality. (Cheers.) The difficulties experienced by the Church of England are also experienced by dissenters, without the advantage which the church possesses in its learning, its discipline, and its traditions.

I now come to the more important consideration—the second division of the English population that is not in communion with the Church of England. And here I acknowledge that at first the difficulty seems great, because here you do count them by millions. But, in the first place, observe that these are not dissenters from the church—these are not millions who have quitted the church, they are great masses of the population who have never entered into communion with the church. The late Archbishop of Canterbury, a most amiable and pious man—(cheers)—and by no means deficient in observation of the times, passed many of the last years of his life in great anxiety and perplexity about the anomalous position of that national church of which he was the primate. I was myself a member of the committee, formed of members of the two houses of parliament, who had to confer together upon the conduct which should be taken in the Lords and Commons by the friends of the church upon some momentous questions, in which the interests and character of the church were concerned, and the Archbishop of Canterbury was our chairman. In every instance where we had to confer together the late Archbishop always counselled surrender, and surrender without conditions. Fortunately there were other opinions upon that committee, and I am glad to say that in every instance the late Archbishop of Canterbury was outvoted. It so happened that in all these cases, when they were brought before the houses of parliament for decision, it was proved that the opinion of the Archbishop had been erroneous, and that he had miscalculated the feeling in favour of the church which existed in the country, because the decision in the houses of parliament, and especially in the House of Commons, was only a reflection of the feeling of the country. The year before the Archbishop died he did me the honour of seeking a conversation with me, and the object of that conversation was that he should explain the course which he had taken with regard to these questions, in which he admitted that, so far as recent occurrences were concerned, he had been mistaken. “But,” said he, “although I may have formed an erroneous judgment, though I admit you and your friends were right in your view of the case, still I went upon a great fact—my conduct was based upon the great fact which no one can deny, and it is this—that the population has outgrown the church. No one can deny that.” I don’t deny it, but I draw from that fact a conclusion exactly opposite to that of the late Archbishop of Canterbury: my inference is the very reverse to the one which he drew, and the conduct which he consequently recommended.

If, indeed, the Church of England were in the same state as the Pagan religion was in the time of Constantine—if her altars were piling before the divine splendour of inspired shrines—it might be well indeed for the church and the ministry of the church to consider the course they should pursue; but nothing of that kind is the case. You have to deal, so far as regards the millions who are not in communion with the church, and whom I will describe—distinguishing them from the dissenters—as those who are indifferent to the church—you are dealing with millions of the