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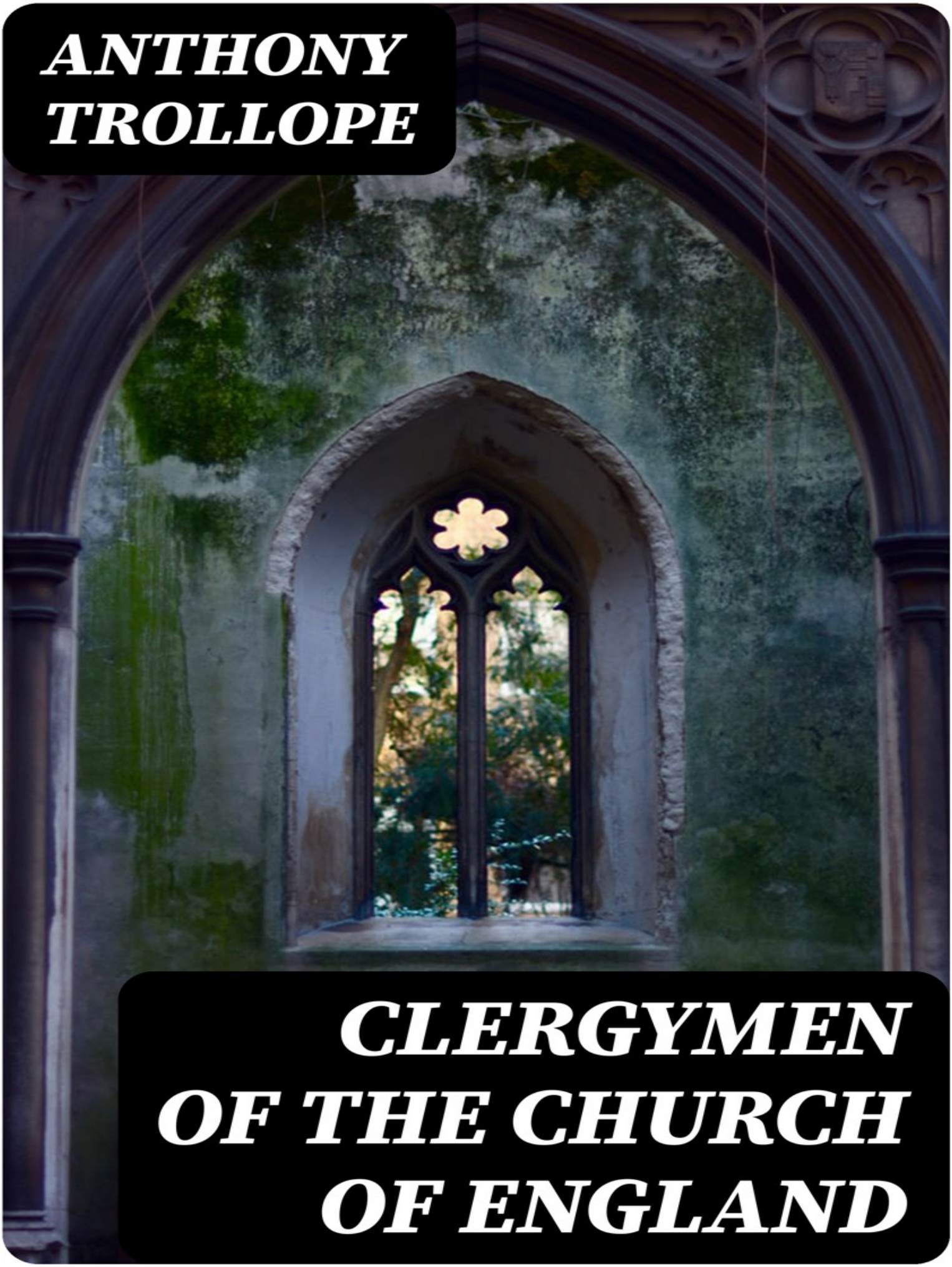

CLERGYMEN OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

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Clergymen of the Church of England

EAN 8596547206903

DigiCat, 2022
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CLERGYMEN OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

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I.

THE MODERN ENGLISH ARCHBISHOP.

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The old English archbishop was always a prince in the old times, but the English archbishop is a prince no longer in these latter days. He is still a nobleman of the highest rank,—he of Canterbury holding his degree, indeed, above all his peers in Parliament, not of Royal blood, and he of York following his elder brother, with none between them but the temporary occupant of the woolsack. He is still one before whose greatness small clerical aspirants veil their eyes, and whose blessing in the minds of pious maidens has in it something almost divine. He is, as I have said, a peer of Parliament. Above all things, he should be a gentleman, and,—if it were always possible,—a gentleman of birth; but he has no longer anything of the position or of the attributes of a prince.

And this change has come upon our archbishops quite in latter times; though, of course, we must look back to the old days of Papal supremacy in England for the prince archbishop of the highest class. Such careers as those of Thomas à Becket or of Wolsey have not been possible to any clergymen since the days in which the power of the

Pope was held to be higher on matters ecclesiastical than the power of the Crown in these realms; but we have had among us prince archbishops to a very late date,—archbishops who have been princes not by means of political strength or even by the force of sacerdotal independence, but who have enjoyed their principalities simply as the results of their high rank, their wealth, their reserve, their inaccessibility, as the result of a certain mystery as to the nature of their duties,—and sometimes as the result of personal veneration. For this personal veneration personal dignity was as much needed as piety, and was much more necessary than high mental power. An archbishop of fifty years since was very difficult to approach, but when approached was as urbane as a king,—who is supposed never to be severe but at a distance. He lived almost royally, and his palace received that respect which seems, from the nature of the word, to be due to a palatial residence. What he did, no man but his own right-hand chaplain knew with accuracy; but that he could shower church patronage as from the east the west and the south, all clerical aspirants felt,—with awe rather than with hope. Lambeth in those days was not overshadowed by the opposite glories of Westminster. He of York, too, was a Northern prince, whose hospitalities north of the Humber were more in repute than those of earls and barons. Fifty years since the archbishops were indeed princes; but now-a-days we have changed all that. The change, however, is only now completed. It was but the other day that there died an Archbishop of Armagh who was prince to the backbone, princely in his wealth and princely in his use of it,

princely in his mode of life, princely in his gait and outer looks and personal demeanour,—princely also in the performance of his work. He made no speeches from platforms. He wrote no books. He was never common among men. He was a fine old man; and we may say of him that he was the last of the prince archbishops.

This change has been brought about, partly by the altered position of men in reference to each other, partly also by the altered circumstances of the archbishops themselves. We in our English life are daily approaching nearer to that republican level which is equally averse to high summits and to low depths. We no longer wish to have princes among us, and will at any rate have none of that mysterious kind which is half divine and half hocus-pocus. Such terrestrial gods as we worship we choose to look full in the face. We must hear their voices and be satisfied that they have approved themselves as gods by other wisdom than that which lies in the wig. That there is a tendency to evil in this as well as a tendency to good may be true enough. To be able to venerate is a high quality, and it is coming to that with us, that we do not now venerate much. In this way the altered minds of men have altered the position of the archbishops of the Church of England.

But the altered circumstances of the sees themselves have perhaps done as much as the altered tendencies of men’s minds. It is not simply that the incomes received by the present archbishops are much less than the incomes of their predecessors,—though that alone would have done much,—but the incomes are of a nature much less prone to produce princes. The territorial grandeur is gone. The

archbishops and bishops of to-day, with the exception of, I believe, but two veterans on the bench, receive their allotted stipends as do the clerks in the Custom-house. There is no longer left with them any vestige of the power of the freehold magnate over the soil. They no longer have tenant and audit days. They cannot run their lives against leases, take up fines on renewals, stretch their arms as possessors over wide fields, or cut down woods and put acres of oaks into their ecclesiastical pockets. They who understand the nature of the life of our English magnates, whether noble or not noble, will be aware of the worth of that territorial position of which our bishops have been deprived under the working of the Ecclesiastical Commission. The very loss of the risk has been much!—as that man looms larger to himself, and therefore to others also, whose receipts may range from two to six hundred a year, than does the comfortable possessor of the insured medium. The actual diminution of income, too, has done much, and this has been accompanied by so great a rise in the price of all princely luxuries that an archbishop without a vast private fortune can no longer live as princes should live. In these days, when a plain footman demands his fifty pounds of yearly wages, and three hundred pounds a year is but a moderate rent for a London house, an archbishop cannot support a semi-royal retinue or live with much palatial splendour in the metropolis upon an annual income of eight thousand pounds.

And then, above all, the archbishops have laid aside their wigs.

That we shall never have another prince archbishop in England or in Ireland may be taken to be almost certain. Whether or no we shall ever have prelates at Canterbury or York, at Armagh or Dublin, gifted with the virtues and vices of princely minds, endowed with the strength and at the same time with the self-willed obstinacy of princes, may be doubtful. There is scope enough for such strength and such obstinacy in the position, and our deficiency or our security, —as each of us according to his own idiosyncrasy may regard it,—must depend, as it has latterly been caused, by the selections made by the Prime Minister of the day. There is the scope for strength and obstinacy now almost as fully as there was in the days of Thomas à Becket, though the effects of such strength or obstinacy would of course be much less wide. And, indeed, as an archbishop may be supposed in these days to be secure from murder, his scope may be said to be the fuller. What may not an archbishop say, and what may not an archbishop do, and that without fear of the only punishment which could possibly reach an archbishop,—the punishment, namely, of deprivation? With what caution must not a Minister of the present day be armed to save him from the misfortune of having placed an archbishop militant over the Church of England?

The independence of an archbishop, and indeed to a very great, though lesser extent of a bishop, in the midst of the existing dependence of all others around him, would be a singular phenomenon, were it not the natural result of our English abhorrence of change. We hate an evil, and we hate a change. Hating the evil most, we make the change, but we make it as small as possible. Hence it is that our

Archbishop of Canterbury has so much of that independent power which made Thomas à Becket fly against his sovereign when the archiepiscopal mitre was placed upon his head, though he had been that sovereign's most obedient servant till his consecration. Thomas à Becket held his office independently of the king; and so does Dr. Longley. The Queen, though she be the head of the Church, cannot rid herself of an archbishop who displeases her. The Queen, in speaking of whom in our present sense of course we mean the Prime Minister, can make an Archbishop of Canterbury; but she cannot unmake him. The archbishop would be safe, let him play what tricks he might in his high office. Nothing short of a commission de lunatico inquirendo could attack him successfully,—which, should it find his grace to be insane, would leave him his temporalities and his titles, and simply place his duties in the hands of a coadjutor. Should an archbishop commit a murder, or bigamy, or pick a pocket, he, no doubt, would be liable to the laws of his country; but no lawyer and no statesman can say to what penalties he can be subjected as regards the due performance of the duties of his office. A judge is independent;—that is, he is not subject to any penalty in regard to any exercise of his judicial authority; but we all know that a judge would soon cease to be a judge who should play pranks upon the bench, or decline to perform the duties of his position. The archbishops, as the heads of the endowed clergymen of the Church of England, are possessed of freeholds, and that freehold cannot be touched. It is theirs for life; and so great is the practical latitude of our Church, that it may be doubted whether