

THE
CHURCHMAN

MAY, 1887.

ART. I.—CHURCH PATRONAGE BILL.

SINCE we drew attention in our January number to this Bill very considerable progress has been made through the complicated stages which must be passed before it can become an Act. The Bill, as our readers will remember, was thoroughly revised by a Select Committee of the Lords last session, and was at the opening of this session again brought forward by the Archbishop of Canterbury, and promptly received a first reading. The critical stage of the second reading came on February 28th, and was marked by an important debate, which ranged generally over its leading proposals. The debate was adjourned to the 3rd of March, which day again was signalized by some interesting speeches, especially a most important one from the Premier, Lord Salisbury; and the Bill was read the second time, with an understanding that the provisions on which discussion had most turned should be dealt with in Committee. This was accordingly done, with very marked results; and the Bill was reported on March 22nd. Several amendments were either withdrawn or negatived on that occasion, one other of some consequence, to which we shall draw attention by-and-bye, was slipped in without debate on the motion of Lord Cowper; and the Bill went forward to its third reading, with some slight corrections, chiefly verbal, on April 1st; and was on that day finally passed, and will now go down to the House of Commons.

He would be a bold man who should take in hand to predict what will become of it there. Were this a normal session, we might reasonably hope to see this valuable instalment of Church Reform secured to us by legislative enactment. Doubtless this is a new Parliament, and it is always unsafe to argue from the tone and tendencies of one Parliament that its successor's works and ways will be similar. But we shall be surprised, looking at the composition of the Parliament of

1886, if it does not prove itself more friendly to any just and well-considered project for the Church's good than did that of 1880; for the Parliament of 1885 was too summarily dissolved to have had time to touch the business. And the last House of Commons but one spent a good deal of time over the question of Church Patronage; had before it in 1884 no less than three Bills dealing with it; had referred them to a Select Committee; received its report with an evident goodwill towards legislation; and was prevented giving effect to its purpose by the dissolution of 1885. But unfortunately the session, now already getting prolonged into its third month with much weariness, is not normal at all, and seems likely to produce little or nothing beyond the necessary measures for carrying on the general concerns of the country and two Irish Bills. We shall probably have reason to be thankful if we can by August flatter ourselves that Ireland no longer stops the way, and that our legislators have their hands free to do something for the good of Great Britain next year.

However, the Church Patronage Bill as it left the Lords presents several particulars, especially when we compare it with what it was when the Archbishop presented it in February, which invite remark.

We may observe, in the first place, that it is a good deal shorter and simpler than it was; and this improvement has been secured by the wholesale excision of seven long and complex sections of the Draft Bill; those, namely, which provided a constitution and functions for a Diocesan Council of Patronage. It was to this very feature that we stated in January our strong objections, and we regard its disappearance with unalloyed satisfaction accordingly. Our article, in which the Bill in its earlier form was reviewed, received kindly notice from Lord Grimthorpe on February 28th, though we can hardly admit the accuracy of his description of that paper as "adverse to the Bill." On the contrary, we maintained, and maintain, that Church Patronage has become encrusted with deplorable corruptions and scandals which cry aloud for legislative remedies. We thought, further, that the proposals of the Archbishop would effectually take away these evils, and that they deserved, accordingly, the vigorous support of all who wish well to the Church and nation. But we expressed strong misgivings about the proposed Diocesan Council of Patronage—a novel institution in England, at any rate, and one that seemed to us quite uncalled for. What appeared to us to be wanted was mere removal of abuses in our existing system of Church patronage, not the invention of new forms of patronage which might, more or less, super-

cede the present ones. And what we ventured to express our desire to see is accorded very nearly as we wished it in the Bill which has finally secured the unanimous approval of their Lordships, or, at any rate, has been eventually enacted *nem. con.* so far as they are concerned.

Surprise has been expressed that the Bishops parted so cheerfully with the Council of Patronage. It looks as if they felt in a manner bound to provide some safe quarter for the reception of advowsons which their proprietors desired to dispose of, and had noted the dissatisfaction with which the suggestions of Mr. Rylands, Mr. Leatham, and others had been received when attempts at legislation were made in 1884. And no one can wonder in these days, when the motives of the Bishops in any public action they take are so mercilessly criticized and so often misconstrued, that they should be desirous, whilst asking Parliament to enact what would vastly enlarge their powers, to shelter themselves behind a representative body of advisers. It ought to be satisfactory to the Bishops to find, as they did, that the laity, as represented in the House of Peers, prefer to trust them without the Council; and to have to observe, as they must, that the action of the House in disincumbering the Bill of the Council and all pertaining to it appears to meet with general approval out of doors. The Bill as it now stands is levelled directly at the scandals complained of; it will, we trust, do away with donatives, the sale of next presentations, bonds of resignation, the secrecy which has shrouded the traffic in benefices, and other minor evils; it will give parishioners a recognised right to protest against grossly unfit appointments; it will restore to the Bishops that effective check over improper exercise of patronage which he has by ecclesiastical theory already, and ought to have always had, in fact; and beyond these necessary reforms, and one or two other minor and incidental improvements, will do nothing to disturb our existing arrangements.

There are, however, some particulars even in the Bill as it now stands which appears to us to deserve further consideration. The first of the grounds on which the Bishop is to be entitled to refuse institutions to a presentee runs thus:

That at the date of the presentation a period of more than two years has not elapsed since his admission to deacon's orders.—Section 9.

The corresponding clause in the Draft Bill of February, section 17, made the two years to run from Priest's Orders. We are unfeignedly sorry for this alteration, which is quite in the wrong direction. It is the more surprising that this should

have been made because in the debate on the second reading there were strong expressions of opinion that the two years' interval was insufficient. The Bishop of London in particular urged this—a prelate whose enormous responsibilities and great knowledge of men render his judgment weighty,—and his speech was followed by another in the same sense by the Bishop of Chichester, the oldest and perhaps the most experienced of all the present occupants of the Bench. As the Draft Bill stood, the presentee would have been as a rule at least three years in Holy Orders. Their Lordships have cut down the three to two, whilst the counsellors most entitled to be listened to advocated an extension to five or six. We hope this mistake will be rectified in the Commons, for a mistake we are convinced it is. A very young clergyman ought not to be allowed to occupy a position which requires qualifications scarcely ever to be found in the very young. There is no one result of the existing system of purchase which has been more often complained of than the facilities it is found to afford for placing a young man with command of money in preferment which is beyond the reach of men who have served the Church nobly for years. The proviso that a presentee should be at least five years in Holy Orders would have done something to abate a galling sense of injustice in some good men's minds, and would, moreover, have given some of them somewhat better chances of promotion than they now have.¹

Another alteration which deserves attention is in that section, the 12th, which enables a Roman Catholic patron to nominate. In the Draft Bill the presentee of a Roman Catholic patron had to be approved by the Council of Presentation. When that novel institution was got rid of some other precaution had to be devised, and their Lordships now propose to enact that such a presentee shall satisfy the Bishop that he is “a *bond-fide* member of the Church of England.” We confess to some misgivings about this proviso. What is meant by “a *bond-fide* member of the Church of England”? The Latin description has associations which do not recommend it. The “*bond-fide* traveller,” *e.g.*, figured in another well-known Parliamentary enactment, and has proved a puzzling and somewhat slippery personality. The reason of the precaution that has been inserted in the Patronage Bill is, of course, to be found in the fact that the presentee of a Roman Catholic patron might be expected sometimes to be in Roman orders; and at the same time if he posed as a “gentle convertite,” there might be suspicions under the circumstances as to the sincerity and the

Some remarks bearing upon this subject will be found in the “Chichester Diocesan Calendar” for this year. An extract from it appears in our March number, p. 333.

permanence of his conversion. But we are unable to see without further explanation that the Bishop would gain through the proposed clause any additional security for loyalty beyond what is afforded by the papers, declarations, and subscriptions enacted by law already from those who are admitted to a benefice. If the three articles of the 36th Canon will not protect the Church against the treachery supposed, we do not know any safeguard of the kind that will do so. We should have preferred, if it be deemed necessary, to take special precautions in this particular class of cases, that some special testimonials or certificates should be demanded, such (say) as would show five years' faithful service in Anglican cures. To empower the Bishop to require this would fix a definite duty on him instead of the somewhat vague responsibility involved in the clause as it stands. And we should hope that our Ecclesiastical Courts, decrepit as their condition is, and must be, until our rulers take the long-expected reforms of them in hand, might yet pluck up energy enough to deal effectually with manifest treason in the Church. On the whole, we should not be sorry if this clause about Roman Catholic patrons were to disappear. It is true that the present law, which hands over the presentation where a Roman Catholic was the advowson to the Universities, has been found to admit of evasion; but we are by no means sure that the new proposal is an improvement.

The only other provision to which it seems necessary to ask attention is that contained in the 14th clause as it stands altered on Report. Lord Cowper moved, and Lord Selborne seconded the change, which was, rather to our surprise, agreed to without discussion. The clause, as it stood, enabled the Bishop to declare a benefice vacant if the incumbent had been a lunatic for two years and not discharged from treatment, and provided for an allowance to be made for such incumbent's subsistence where the revenues of the benefice would admit of it. The new clause enables the Bishop, on complaint of three parishioners, who are to represent that their incumbent has been incapacitated for three years "by continuing bodily or mental infirmity," to issue a commission under the Incumbents' Resignation Act of 1871, and to oust the invalid from his benefice and home. It is a harsh-looking proviso, especially as we do not observe in the amended clause any arrangement such as the original section contained for the subsistence of the disabled priest. Is this the way to treat a man who has perhaps spent all his best years in faithful service? The Pluralities Act of 1885 gave the Bishop greatly enlarged powers of securing that the pastoral duties shall be adequately met; and we think that we might wait to see how that Act

works before new legislation of this kind is tried. The present clause seems hardly in place in a Patronage Bill. It looks like compulsory retirement without half-pay.

These, however, are but minor blemishes, if allowed to be blemishes at all. The Bill is salutary in aim, and we think it will prove effective in operation. We trust it will pass, and secure for those who have framed it, and those who have lent a helping hand in perfecting it, the hearty thanks of Churchmen generally. We may now look with reasonable confidence to see the Church freed from a set of abuses which were not indeed widely spread, but seemed to be deep-seated, and were certainly deeply hurtful.

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ART. II.—NEW TESTAMENT SAINTS NOT COMMEMORATED.—DORCAS.

A WELL-KNOWN writer has called attention to the example which we have in the chapter of the Acts of the Apostles which contains the brief history of Dorcas, of "the variety of the gifts which are bestowed upon the Christian Church." "Four characters," he says, "exceedingly diverse, are brought before us in this ninth chapter: Paul, a man singularly gifted, morally and intellectually, with qualities more brilliant than almost ever fell to the lot of man; Peter, full of love and daring, a champion of the truth; Ananias, one of those disciples of the inward life whose vocation is sympathy, and who by a single word, 'Brother,' restore light to those that sit in darkness and loneliness; lastly, Dorcas, in a humbler, but not less true sphere of divine goodness, clothing the poor with her own hands, practically loving and benevolent."¹ Of these four characters two are those of recorded and two of unrecorded Saints, and we are thus reminded that the less prominent characters in the inspired narrative are not only necessary to give completeness to the portrait of the Church, as the one Body of Christ, but are introduced for the instruction and encouragement of those to whom humbler gifts and lower ministries are committed.

1. It may be useful to dwell a little on this thought of diversities of gifts, as it is suggested to us in the case of Dorcas. She is the first woman mentioned by name in the history of the Church, after the Day of Pentecost, and she has furnished

¹ Rev. F. W. Robertson, Sermons, 4th series, xiv.