

THE
CHURCHMAN

SEPTEMBER, 1887.

ART. I.—THE GLEBE LANDS BILL.

THIS is one of several useful but unpretending measures that, having been carefully revised and passed by the Peers, are now waiting in vain for a first reading in the House of Commons. It is "intituled" "An Act to Facilitate the Sale of Glebe Lands," and it may be briefly described as intended to extend to incumbents the powers conferred upon life-owners by Lord Cairns's Settled Estates Act. The object of both measures is to enable the man in possession, under certain restrictions, to sell his land as freely as an absolute owner, provided that the purchase-money is invested in specified securities for the benefit of his successors. The present Bill also contains provisions for increasing the number of Allotments available for the labouring classes, of which more anon.

The process by which glebe land may be sold under the Bill is as follows:—First, the incumbent must find a purchaser and negotiate with him as to the price to be paid, or he may desire the Land Commissioners to sell on his behalf; notice of the intended sale must then be given to the Bishop and patron, and either or both of these, as interested parties, may state to the Land Commissioners any objections they may entertain to the proposed transaction. If no such objection is made the sale proceeds, and the incumbent can give an indefeasible title to the purchaser; if objections are made and the Commissioners concur in them, a veto is placed upon the sale; if, however, they are of opinion that the sale would be for the benefit of the benefice, and that the objections made ought not to prevent the sale, the latter can be completed without the consent of the Bishop or patron. This method of sale, however, only applies to glebe which is in the nature of endowment, as the parsonage-house, outbuildings, garden and

such land as is necessary for the convenient enjoyment of the house cannot be sold, and the opinion of the Commissioners in respect of these matters is to be conclusive.

When the Commissioners do not concur in the objections made by the Bishop or patron, they are bound to state in writing the reasons for their action in allowing the sale to proceed.

The purchase-money is to be paid to the Commissioners, and is to be applied by them, in the first place, in defraying the costs of the sale and reinvestment, in the redemption of land tax and other permanent charges upon the benefice, or in the purchase of land adjacent to the parsonage; and the residue is to be invested, in the name of the Governors of Queen Anne's Bounty or the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, in Consols, Railway Debentures, or the securities of the Metropolitan Board of Works and other Municipal Corporations.

From the above outline of the procedure prescribed by the Bill, it will be seen that the sale of glebe is facilitated chiefly in two respects: (1) the Bishop and patron have no longer an absolute veto on the sale, and (2) the costs do not fall exclusively upon the incumbent for the time being; and the working of the new system may be explained by showing how it would have affected a recent transaction of the kind under consideration.

The glebe attached to a living in the South of England consisted of six detached portions, varying in extent from one to three acres, none of them being adjacent to the parsonage. They were, in fact, islands in the estate of a large landowner, and both he and the incumbent were anxious to effect an exchange of these odd lots of land for a field conveniently situated near the house. The Bishop and patron concurred, and the negotiations were carried on in the simplest and least expensive manner possible, only one valuer being employed, by mutual consent of the two parties interested, and yet the charges amounted to £40 1s. 9d. When it is added that the annual value of the land in question was only £8, it will be seen that the rent for five years was sunk in the transaction, and it is obvious that but few incumbents could afford to benefit their successors at their own expense in this way.

Under the proposed Act the exchange could be effected in the manner of sale of the old and repurchase of the new glebe; the costs would be much less, and would be paid out of the purchase-money instead of falling upon the incumbent. In fact, it is probable that the Act would be more useful in facilitating the exchange of glebe than in any other way. At present such exchanges are often prevented by the fact that the glebe with which the incumbent wishes to part is adjacent

to the property of A, while the land he wishes to acquire is the property of B, and so direct exchange is impossible, while under the Act he could sell to A and purchase from B.

An interesting Parliamentary return has recently been published, showing for each benefice the extent and annual value of the glebe, and the parish in which it is situated; and the extent to which its exchange or sale is desirable may be gathered from the following statement respecting the Diocese of Chichester, which may be taken as a specimen of the rest of the kingdom. Here we have 271 livings with glebe, and in 47 of these the land is not situated in the parish attached to the living, but in some other often distant parish, and in several cases even in another county. In most of these cases it is probably desirable to get rid of the extra-parochial glebe, and there are also numerous parishes in which the glebe is scattered about in detached portions. The explanation of this takes us back to the time of the Conquest, or even to the Heptarchy. The odd bits of land here and there represent the rector's share in each successive enclosure from the down or forest, when, like other freeholders, he claimed his allotted portion. Taking the extra-parochial and scattered glebes together, it would probably be found that in at least one parish in five sale or exchange is desirable, a proportion that would give some 2,500 benefices on behalf of which the Act might advantageously be put in operation. A compact glebe, near the house, is of more value than half as much land again if inconveniently situated, for "three acres and a cow" are as desirable for the parson as for his humbler neighbours.

So far we have been considering the consolidation and adjustment of the glebe land, but a further question arises as to whether it would be wise to sell the farms, the rents of which form the endowment of many livings, especially in the Midland counties, and which are in an increasing number of cases now without tenants and thrown upon the incumbents' hands. How serious is the problem here presented for solution may be judged from the fact that there are in the Diocese of Peterborough alone 147 livings endowed with 200 acres of land and upwards. In the discussion on the Bill in the House of Lords, more than one of the Bishops expressed hesitation in sanctioning the alienation of land from the Church, in view of a possible rise in value as the population of the country increases. In support of this contention the obvious consideration may be adduced that if all the glebe land had been exchanged for a fixed rent-charge, in the reign of, say, Queen Elizabeth or Queen Anne, a most serious loss to the Church would have been the result. But it is now at least equally likely that the balance of gain and loss would be the other way, as

for some time, while rents have been falling, fixed payments, as represented by Consols and Railway Detentures, have been rising in value. The problem is, however, too complicated to be solved without the fullest investigation, and would involve a review of the whole currency controversy, and even a discussion as to the possibility of the present Free-Trade Policy being reversed; and the subject may be dismissed with the consideration that each incumbent must judge for himself as to sale, while to the exchange of glebe no objection of this kind can apply.

Besides facilitating generally the sale of glebe, the Bill provides for local authorities becoming purchasers of the land offered, with a view to parcelling it out in small plots and letting it to labourers and artisans. These provisions will have the sympathy of all clergymen who know the value of such allotments, and what a boon they are to the working classes; and in any case the clauses may do good and cannot do harm to Church interests, as the land is not to be taken except at a price for which the incumbent is willing to sell. But it may be doubted whether in more than a very small number of cases will it be found that the local authorities are disposed to become purchasers. The President of the Local Government Board, in introducing the Allotments Bill, stated that as many as 643,318 allotments are now in occupation, while the agricultural labourers only number 800,000, and of these some are bachelors, and others widowers living in lodgings and having no object in cultivating an allotment. It is evident from these official figures that the demand for allotments has been greatly exaggerated, and that, in fact, in some four parishes out of five, at a low estimate, the supply equals or exceeds the demand. Again, an allotment is of no use unless it is near the cottage of the cultivator, and it is only occasionally that the glebe happens to fulfil this condition; and when it does, it is more than likely to be near the parsonage, and consequently precisely the part of the glebe least likely to be sold—and, be it observed, the Bill contains no compulsory powers for enforcing sale. Once more, the local authorities can only buy when the rent received from the cottager-tenants is likely to cover the interest of the loan required to buy the land; and if there is any doubt as to this, the Boards of Guardians, who would be the authorities in rural districts, will probably decline to run the risk of becoming landowners.

The return of glebe lands before referred to, enables us to form a rough estimate of the effect of these considerations. There are in all 10,005 benefices with glebe, the annual value of which is £908,281. Now let us suppose (1) that allotments are needed in one parish in five; (2) that in one parish in four

the glebe is conveniently situated for the purpose in question; (3) that one incumbent in six is willing to sell; and (4) that one Board of Guardians in four is willing to buy. Then we have our 10,005 parishes where the operation of the allotment clauses of the Bill is possible reduced to 2,001 by consideration (1); further reduced to 500 by (2); to 83 by (3); and to 21 by (4). If this estimate is even approximately correct, it will hardly be disputed that it would be better to confine the Bill to its professed object of "facilitating the sale of glebe," and leave the provision of allotments to the more comprehensive and more trenchant measure lately introduced by Mr. Ritchie on behalf of the Government.

A. M. DEANE.



ART. II.—EXTRACTS FROM THE DIARY OF A
COUNTRY PARSON.

JAMES HANNINGTON.

"Admiranda popularitas vitæ Jesu!"—BENJEL.

IT is never very difficult to bring vague and sweeping charges of neglect of duty against any large body of men. Some of their number are pretty certain to deserve the scourge—otherwise they would not be human. And even if the Corporation which is to be assailed should chance to have done its duty to the best of its ability, inasmuch as the great sea of pain and passion never ceases to pulsate, and is sure now and again to overleap the dykes which have been erected for the preservation of the painfully reclaimed fields, there will never be wanting occasion for the dissatisfied to point out that the said Corporation has shamefully bungled its business, and that the sooner it may be replaced by something more efficient the better for everybody concerned.

Perhaps no body of men has suffered more in our own day from vague and sweeping statements than have the clergy of the Church of England. It is the tendency of the age to consider the claims of the many and various religious bodies with an almost indiscriminating charity. The political position of the Church of England, however, and the keenness of the contest over Disestablishment has almost torn Charity out of the banners of her opponents. While they look at most other denominations through glasses of a rosy tint, the telescopes which they direct at the Establishment are critically focussed enough, even if they are not lensed with bilious yellows and greens. Nothing is too hard to lay to the charge of the clergy. They are aristocratic, and out of sympathy with the people;