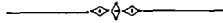


in death, faithful to the Church, whose historian he was, Luke has given us the very words of St. Paul for the guidance of all ages and of all people.

THOMAS JORDAN.



#### ART. VI.—THE TITHE QUESTION IN ENGLAND AND IN WALES.

THE Tithe Question is always with us; and it is scarcely to be wondered at if the mere triflers in politics have come to execrate the very phrase. To them it represents a troublesome and obscure business, which they don't understand, but of whose existence they have too many proofs. As a matter of fact there are two Tithe Questions, and they have practically only the remotest connection. The Tithe Question in England is one thing, the Tithe Question in Wales is another and very different thing.

The existence of a Tithe Question in England, or rather in certain districts of England, is the outcome of severe agricultural depression. No one who knows anything of the facts will be disposed to minimize the losses of landowners and tenants in the eastern, southern, and midland counties during the past few years. It is hardly possible, if it be possible at all, to grow grain to a profit in England under present conditions; and certain lands are, unfortunately, able to raise nothing but grain. In these parts the farmer has been growing poorer and poorer, and the landlord has been compelled to accept less and less rent; but while the law of averages has at the same time been reducing the parson's tithe, so that it stands to-day at 20 per cent. below what it did only six years ago, it is contended that the parson is proportionately the best off of the three, and it is even asserted that in many cases the rent-charge is the only rent the land pays at all.

It cannot be surprising, therefore, that agriculturists in their extremity cry out and ask for revaluation. They may be told, and told truly, that the Church as a whole has lost £2,000,000 per annum since the Commutation Act. They will reply that the gain has not been theirs, but that of the owners of urban and suburban property. They may be told again, and equally truly, that the Church suffered a permanent loss owing to the temporary conditions which obtained at the passing of the Act being made the basis for fixing the average value; they may argue that it is little comfort to them to be reminded in their difficulty of the sharp practice of their grandfathers, the fruits of which have long since been dissipated.

The English farmer in his difficulty is a man to be pitied, sympathized with, and listened to with all consideration. He has a claim to be heard, and, if possible, to be met, for he has suffered sorely, and, for the most part, silently and patiently. There are exceptional cases, of course, as there are in every class, that of the clergy amongst the rest, but the exceptions may be dismissed, if they themselves will allow it, and not intrude their presence and fallacious arguments on the public through the columns of the press.

On the whole no one can complain of the presentation of the case for the English tithe-paying farmer during the past few weeks. The correspondence in the *Times* and *Standard* has done not a little to clear the air. It has shown both parties that there are two sides to the question, and that legislation is not a perfectly simple matter if justice is to be done all round, so diverse are the conditions in different parts of England. It has also shown very distinctly that there is no general hostility to the Church on the part of the tithe-payers; that objection is not taken to the purpose to which the rent-charge is devoted, but to the amount which is being paid. This is a fact of no slight importance when it is remembered that the three eastern counties of Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex pay £735,000 per annum in tithe rent-charge, against £274,000, which is the whole contribution of Wales.

The attitude and spirit of the English tenant-farmers have, in fact, done much to clear Lord Salisbury's path in regard to legislation during the present Session. He can at least have no hesitation in fixing the charge upon the landlord. The Farmers' Club, at its meeting on February 3rd, was unanimous on this point, and the Farmers' Club, it may be agreed, represents those who have most felt the recent pressure. The reader of the paper on Tithes at the Club, on the occasion referred to, seems to have expressed the feeling of all present in the line he adopted, and he stated most distinctly that, in his judgment, "if the landowners would only take upon themselves the payment of the rent-charge, there would be very little complaint;" that, at any rate, while the landed interest would have very little to complain of, "the tenants would have nothing whatever."

In England, then, but very slight opposition, if any, need be anticipated to the proposal to carry out the intentions of the framers of the Commutation Act, and place the payment of the rent-charge on the landlord. There should, we imagine, be equally little opposition to the redemption of sums under forty shillings, as recommended by Mr. Stracey and others. This small tithe is an annoyance and trouble both to payer and owner, and its redemption would be at once a boon, and the removal of a cause of friction.

In Wales the position is wholly different. Originally it was pleaded that the Welsh tithe-payer was hard pressed, and could not pay the charge in full, but must be met by some remission. Remissions were in some cases conceded, in others refused. It mattered not. Earl Grey, in his account of the Commutation Act, and of the events which led up to it, has told us that "the amount of deductions (prior to 1836) varied much in different counties, and that the counties in which they were habitually the largest, were those in which the outcry against tithes had been the loudest." History has repeated itself. The good-natured, or timid, or well-to-do parson, who offered remissions, has fared no better than his less pliable brother. His weakness only made him the victim of further and more imperious demands.

The plea of poverty has long since been abandoned. It is now openly asserted by those who represent the Welsh tithe-payers, that the objection is not to the payment, but to the object to which the tithe is devoted, that conscientious scruples bid them retain in their pockets the money which is due to the parson. Conscientious scruples and self-interest are not allied in this case for the first time. The wonder of it all is that respectable politicians have not only not disavowed, but have affected to sympathize with, such hypocritical prettexts. It is urged, indeed, that a refusal to pay tithe was the only form of protest which would secure a hearing for the alleged grievances of the Welsh Nonconformist. If it be so, he can no longer say with truth that he has protested in vain. A political party has now taken up his grievance, and given it a place in its official programme, pronouncing it a grievance to be redressed at the earliest possible moment. What more does the Welsh Dissenter wait for? He has made his protest, his cause has been taken up, let him cease to retain money to which he has no shadow of claim; let him reimburse what he has so long kept back; let him pay his dues like an honest man in the future. To whomsoever the money belongs it does not belong to him.

It is an ominous sign of the decay in political morality that a great party, with a man of deep personal religion like Mr. Gladstone at its head, should have had anything but reprobation for the gross dishonesty of the Welsh tithe-payer. Mr. Gladstone himself is, I believe, the only exception to the general rule. He has declared that "he fails to justify" the withholding of the tithe on religious grounds. But the rest of the party, from Sir William Harcourt downwards, has now accepted the whole plan of campaign. Any weapon will serve apparently to harass and cripple the Church. When the unmerited sufferings of the Welsh clergy are mentioned in the House of Commons, they

evoke no sympathy from a hungry Opposition. "It is the fault and disgrace of a wealthy Church if they suffer." So might the conscience of any common thief be quieted by the reflection that the man he has robbed is reputed to have a rich relation. The Welsh Liberal members are not a particularly distinguished body, but there are men of high character and honourable life among them. Why are they silent? If Mr. Bowen Rowlands, Mr. Samuel Smith, or Mr. Rathbone had to deal with such dishonesty in private life, they would denounce it indignantly. Cannot they show themselves indifferent to possible political consequences, and, like Mr. Gladstone, repudiate all sympathy with dishonest tithe-payers? Let them depend upon it, they would not long stand alone.

What might have been looked for in politicians was to have been expected yet more from ministers of the Gospel. After all, it can only be the few who edit or write for the abominable vernacular press. Why do the rest hold their peace? They cannot suppose that a victory will be blessed, which it is sought to secure by such shameful expedients.

What is mildly called by Mr. Prothero in his pamphlet "The Anti-Tithe Agitation in Wales," republished from the *Guardian*, "a peaceful distraint," is thus referred to: "The attendant circumstances necessarily vary. Sometimes well-known Welsh hymns, like 'Caer Salem,' are sung to give the proceedings a religious character. Sometimes the clergyman or the Bishop of the diocese is burned or drowned, or both burned and drowned, in effigy. Sometimes scandalous acts of blasphemy or indecency are perpetrated." Mr. Prothero gives one instance of a travesty of the Sacraments of the Church which, out of consideration for my readers, I forbear to reproduce. A distraint to which the epithet "peaceful" is not applicable, is thus described. It is a case in South Wales:

A strong body of police accompanied the distraining agent to assist in the recovery of tithe rent-charges. At the first farm they disarmed seventeen men of pitchforks, and subsequent events proved the wisdom of the action. In each case the pitchforks could only be captured by knocking down the bearer. In one instance, a man, when disarmed of his pitchfork, drew his knife. As the agent was making his way to the next farm through a narrow lane, with a high fence on either side, he and the police were attacked by showers of stones. Their position became so serious that the police were compelled to charge the hedges, which were lined on either side by men armed with sticks. Fortunately for the distraining party, the sticks were too long, and the police were able to get under them. A short but desperate struggle followed. One policeman was felled, and while he lay upon the ground, four men beat him about the head as though he were a rattlesnake. It is doubtful whether he will ever entirely recover. Finally the rioters were routed, but they fought, as an inspector who was present told me, like savages, and did not give way till fifty had had their heads cracked.

What are Dissenting ministers thinking of to countenance, or at least not to denounce, this savagery and indecency? How can they stand up in their chapels and preach charity or the obligation of the Ten Commandments? Are they not making themselves partakers of other men's sins? The deterioration of Welsh Nonconformity is a matter of common complaint, and subject of general regret in the Principality. There could scarcely be a more startling proof of it than in the acquiescence of its leaders in the methods and morals of the tithe agitators.

Two honourable exceptions to this conspiracy of silence should in fairness be noticed, but in only one case can we give the name: the Rev. J. Hughes Parry, a Calvinistic Methodist minister at Aberdare, did, in a letter to the *Western Mail*, unburden his soul. Having waited in vain "to see whether any leading Nonconformist ministers or laymen would have the courage and honesty to enter their protest" on behalf of the Welsh clergy, he could no longer restrain himself. He conceives that nothing so unjust or illogical as the present persecution of the clergy was ever projected, and he acknowledges with shame that "it has been reserved for the Nonconformist promoters and supporters of the anti-tithe campaign in Wales . . . in defiance of the claims of morality, justice and fair play, to trample ruthlessly on the rights of men who, through no fault of their own, depend for the necessaries of life for themselves and their families on the ancient ecclesiastical system of the country."

What has been the result of this indignant and eloquent protest of Mr. Hughes Parry? Have he and his anonymous fellow-minister drawn forth a word of sympathy from their brethren among the preachers? Not one. They continue to stand alone, though their words have been read from one end of Wales to the other. The rest prefer to remain under the stigma of countenancing lawlessness, violence, and outrage, because, they would doubtless say, the cause is righteous. And so, I suppose, the end justifies the means. For the moment they have succeeded. They have made the position of the Welsh clergyman well-nigh intolerable; they have broken the spirit of many an one in his spiritual work; but "in fostering a spirit of contempt for the law, and a readiness to repudiate obligations which cannot but blunt the moral sense of the nation," they have paved the way for a bitter heritage of evil, and far-reaching results which they did not, it may be, contemplate, but which they will be utterly powerless to stave off.

Whatever else the Government does this Session, it must establish order in Wales, and secure their rights to the holders of property, even though they be clergymen. The half-heartedness and vacillation of the Government are responsible for much

in the present state of things. Consistency and moral support, to begin with, would have been invaluable. But moral support only will not avail now. Dishonesty must be punished in Welsh farmers, as in other classes of the community; and incitement to dishonesty must not pass unnoticed. The progress of the Church is undeniable. It is for the moral welfare of the Principality that the Church should not now be crippled and harassed. The contest against evil is as fierce there as elsewhere, and there are certain forms of sin which have obtained special hold in Wales. It is not for the sake of the Church which exists for the people that Disestablishment, and everything that tends to it, should be resisted, but it is for the sake of the people themselves, and the country they live in.

Let the Government take pains to understand the question, and then be bold and resolute. Then will future generations of Welshmen assuredly bless them for saving their land from the hot-headed, misguided agitators of 1890.

H. GRANVILLE DICKSON.

February 8.

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## Correspondence.



### PROSECUTIONS FOR RITUAL OBSERVANCES.

*To the Editor of THE CHURCHMAN.*

SIR,—No true Christian can help sympathizing with the Dean of Canterbury's paper in your February number. But his argument omits three important considerations, to which I respectfully invite his attention.

I. No one is now attempting to interfere with private members of the Church. Liberty of opinion cannot be trammelled. But the clergy are *trustees*. And a man who accepts that office is bound to conform to the trust deed, not according to his own notion, but the intention of its author. Otherwise the *cestui que trusts* might be robbed.

II. It is a legal maxim that there is no wrong without a remedy. There are courts of law to which all who think themselves wronged can appeal, with the assurance that unless their cause is frivolous or vexatious it will be heard and redressed. The one and only exception, as far as I know, is that caused by the Bishop's veto. On this I would only say that (whether its exercise of late has been caused by a dread of litigation or a sympathy with the accused clergy) it has had the effect of encouraging on one side that lawlessness which is one great sign of the times, and on the other a feeling of bitterness from the sense of unredressed wrong. The issue is, as I venture to think, far worse than any that would be caused by litigation. Anger is in this respect like love :

The more thou damm'st it up, the more it burns.

III. The Dean objects to these prosecutions being carried on by a central society, rather than by the aggrieved parishioners themselves. It might be answered, that when there is a widespread tendency among a