

ART. II.—“THE CHURCH BOARDS ACT.”

OWING to the general block in Parliamentary business at the present time, Mr. Grey's Bill, to provide for the establishment of Church Boards in the parishes of England and Wales, is not likely to get through the House of Commons. The Bill was prepared and brought in by Mr. Albert Grey, Mr. E. Stafford Howard, Mr. Stuart Wortley, Mr. Marriott, and Mr. Pulley ; and it was to have been read a second time on the 27th of April. The general character of the Bill is interesting and important, for it indicates the direction Church questions, especially those relating to administration, are taking, and it involves principles which amount to something little short of a revolution in the whole system of parochial government.

The Bill is a short one, and contains only eighteen clauses. The second clause defines the word “parish” as denoting “any ecclesiastical district with legally constituted limits, over which the incumbent of the church thereof has exclusive cure of souls.” By “incumbent” is meant “rector, vicar, perpetual curate, or any curate in charge, where the rector or vicar shall be non-resident.” Clause 3 enacts that “no proceedings shall be taken under the Public Worship Regulation Act, 1874, in respect of anything done, or omitted to be done, in any parish in which a Church Board as hereinafter defined is for the time being established.” Such exemption would cut both ways: for where an extreme Ritualist and a majority of his parishioners were thoroughly at one, the ægis of the Church Board might shield the vicar from his Bishop; while a parish containing a slovenly incumbent, and laity averse to any change, would be more able to resist outside pressure in the cause of decency, reformation, and order.

Those who know the mischief and discontent which a very small number of meddling persons can set on foot will read the fourth clause with feelings akin to dismay. The clause runs thus:—

If any three such parishioners of any parish as would be entitled to vote at the election of churchwardens in an ancient parish shall at any time signify by notice in writing to the churchwardens their desire that the provisions of this Act shall come into operation with respect to such parish, the churchwardens shall, within *three* days after the receipt of such notice, cause the same to be affixed to the doors of the church of the parish; and, at the same time, without any consent being necessary, summon, by affixing a notice to the doors of such church, a meeting of the parishioners of the parish to be held not sooner than *fifteen*, and not later than *twenty-one* days after the date of such notice being affixed, to consider the expediency of adopting the

provisions of this Act. Such meeting shall be held in the vestry of the church, or in such other convenient place as may be specified in the said notice.

Thus, any *three* parishioners, irrespective of creed, can *compel* the churchwardens to summon a meeting within, say, three weeks from the date of their written request. This seems a dangerous privilege to put into the hands of any three parishioners endowed with the instinct of interference and a desire to stir up strife. Three men, not obliged to be Churchmen at all, are unconditionally empowered to force the wardens to call an audience together to listen to their rhetoric. It is true that the three malcontents by themselves could not pass any measures; but those accustomed to hear at meetings the irresponsible chatter of noisy busybodies will understand the damage to the Church and mischief to the peace of the parish which could be started at such a gathering. *Three* is too small a number to initiate a Church Board; especially when no guarantee is provided as to their integrity, religion, or profession of Churchmanship.

This fourth clause is contrary to the spirit of the Prayer Book, and unjust to the communicants of the parish. The language of the Prayer Book assumes that parishioners are Church-people; and the reason why no confession of faith is demanded either from churchwardens or those who appoint them, is the reason why early Acts of Parliament concerning highways in England contain no rules for travellers on bicycles: the present state of things was never contemplated as a possibility. Churchwardens are an institution dating back to a time when the idea of Church officers themselves not Church members, and elected by persons who need not even believe in a God, was inconceivable. Still the fact remains that, in these modern days, dissenting churchwardens, partly through dissenting votes, are put into office, without any very vigorous protest from the leaders of the Establishment: so that in this nineteenth century at any rate the principle has been virtually conceded, that outsiders in religion should have a voice in parish matters, and in vestry meetings, of course, many matters purely “secular” are of necessity debated and dealt with. By common consent indeed strict Church membership is not in these days an absolute essential in a lay Church officer. But it is one thing to allow an anomaly to grow up; it is quite another to make it legal or to increase it by an Act of Parliament.

Clause 5, however, has elements of uneasiness in it compared with which the question as to who originated the first meeting becomes insignificant.¹ *A bare majority* is enough to turn the

¹ If a majority of the parishioners present and voting at such meeting shall resolve that it is expedient that the provisions of this Act shall be

scale in favour of a Church Board, and to foist it upon a parish divided into two camps of nearly equal size—one for, the other against, such an organization. What a charming prospect of goodwill and unity such a clause opens out to the incumbent and his parishioners! Nor does the nature of the constituency to elect the Board furnish grounds for hope. Clause 6 says:—

The persons entitled to vote upon the expediency of adopting the provisions of this Act, and for the election of members of the Church Board, shall be the same persons as would be entitled to vote for churchwardens in such parish, if the same were an ancient parish.

Were the Church Board merely a multiplication of people's wardens, or sidesmen, somewhat after the manner suggested by Bishop Ryle in his excellent letter, recently published, little need be said against this sixth clause, but the present proposition is to call into being a council upon which enormous power is to be conferred; a council to possess authority not only differing in degree, but in kind, from that of churchwardens. Now the rights and duties of churchwardens have been ably and clearly stated by the Bishop of Rochester, in his "Primary Charge, to the Churchwardens of his Diocese," and printed in the June number of the *Diocese of Rochester Church Chronicle*. One or two quotations will suffice:

The main duties of a churchwarden may be described as threefold: *structural*, or those which relate to the maintenance and repair of the fabric; *administrative*—*i.e.*, those which refer to the apportionment of seats among the parishioners, and the keeping of church accounts, and custody of the benefice during sequestration; *disciplinary*, such as those of maintaining order in the church and churchyard, and correcting moral abuses and general negligence of religion, which, so far as the parishioners generally are concerned, is now of necessity fallen into disuse. Those also must be named which have a special reference to the visitations of the Ordinary, whether Bishop or Archdeacon, and go under the head of presentments, affecting severally the ritual, doctrine, and personal conduct of the minister of the parish, as well as the names of all who have behaved disorderly in the church, or in anywise hindered Divine Service.

The Bishop of Rochester further reminds us that the usual,

adopted with respect to such parish, the churchwardens shall forthwith give notice in the manner aforesaid that, at the next meeting of the parishioners for the purpose of electing parish officers, the number of persons prescribed by this Act for such parish shall be elected to constitute, with the incumbent and churchwardens, the Church Board of the parish. Each person present at such next meeting, and entitled to vote, shall be entitled to vote openly for any number of persons not exceeding three-fourths of the number of vacancies; and the persons who have the greatest number of votes shall be elected.

though not the universal, custom is, for the incumbent to nominate one churchwarden, and the parishioners the other. He also adds, "dissenters are legally eligible for the office."

The nominee of the incumbent may be assumed to be a staunch Churchman, and of course a communicant, while the people's warden is, in nine cases out of ten, at least a professing Churchman: yet the powers committed to them are utterly insignificant when contrasted with those given by this Church Boards Act to a body of men, of whom only the vicar and possibly the two wardens need be counted as communicants, and who settle all questions by a majority. Clergymen who, like the present writer, feel no jealousy of the laity, but rather encourage them to have a voice in Church affairs, ought, surely, to carefully consider these points before they give in their adherence to any such Church Boards Act as Mr. Grey's. Church Boards in the abstract we may heartily approve of; but the measure before us gives laymen generally too much power, and power over too wide a range of subjects, while it throws the odium of objecting upon the incumbent.

Clause 10 sketches the powers of this novel parish parliament as follows:—

The Board shall have the power from time to time of making any change not contrary to law in the manner of conducting the Services and ministrations of the Church, or in the vestments worn by any person officiating or assisting in such Services, or in the arrangements for the seating of the parishioners, or in the lights, ornaments, decorations, furniture, or fittings of the church. The Board shall also superintend the distribution of all moneys collected within the church, and undertake the management of any matter of an ecclesiastical nature affecting the general interests of the parish which has theretofore been managed by the incumbent, or by the incumbent and the churchwardens. The body shall be a body corporate, and shall have power to acquire and hold property of any kind in trust, to retain or apply the same for any religious or charitable object connected with the parish.

This tenth clause contains so many important points that it is well to restate them briefly. The Board has control over:—

1. The method of conducting the service.
2. The official vestments of the vicar.
3. The seating of the parishioners.
4. The ritual and furniture of the church.
5. The distribution of church moneys.
6. Matters of general interest "heretofore managed by the incumbent, or by the incumbent and churchwardens."
7. Religious and charitable property committed to the Board as trustees in their corporate capacity.

The pulpit appears to be the only place where the vicar can

speak with any freedom or authority. This tenth clause is a sentence of abdication from the headship of the parish, passed upon the vicar. It is true that he and the churchwardens are *ex-officio* members of the Board (see Clause 7); and that, if chairman, he has now and then the chance of a casting vote; but his official and social position are reduced to a minimum, and he is the slave of a majority—possibly of a majority of *one* person.

Clause 11 expressly forbids any change whatever to be made in any of the points just mentioned "without the sanction of the Board, unless the existing practice which shall be so changed is unlawful."

Still the vicar has some protection, such as it is.¹ The weapon of defence in the hands of a vicar is an appeal to the Bishop. He is at the beck and call of a band of laymen, elected by the suffrages of the parishioners, and in their hands he can initiate nothing, and can only oppose anything by asking the Bishop to exercise a veto. A dissenting minister once said to a clergyman in the North of England, "I congratulate you, Sir, on being under a bench of bishops, and not under a board of deacons." But according to Clause 14 a vicar would not be under a bench of bishops, but under a board of deacons plus one individual bishop—for observe the words, "subject to no appeal therefrom." People even of the most sluggish imagination will be able to perceive how a clause like this would hamper a clergyman situated as Dean Hook was when he first began his Church reform at Leeds. But the "last straw" will be found in Clause 15.²

¹ Clause 14 provides a gleam of comfort for the lay-ridden vicar. "If the incumbent disapproves of any such change he may within *twenty-one* days appeal to the bishop of the diocese. After the expiration of *sixty* days from the date of the notice, the change shall be carried into effect, unless in the meantime the bishop shall have decided in favour of the appeal, in which case the change shall not take place. The Bishop shall enforce compliance with the provisions of this Act on the part of the incumbent by monition, subject to no appeal therefrom."

² If the incumbent shall wilfully fail to obey such monition during the space of three weeks after the date thereof, the bishop who issued the monition shall, by notice under his hand, to be forthwith posted on the doors of the parish church, suspend the said incumbent from the exercise of his office as incumbent, and of the duties appertaining thereto in such parish, and sequester the revenues of his benefice until the incumbent shall signify to the bishop in writing that he is willing to obey such monition; and if the said incumbent wilfully exercises his said office or any of the duties appertaining thereto notwithstanding such notice, or wilfully fails during the space of twelve months after the date of such notice to signify to the bishop in writing that he is willing to obey such monition, such bishop shall, upon being satisfied thereof, declare by a further notice, signed and posted as aforesaid, that such incumbent is,

According to this clause disregard of the monition for *three weeks* entails suspension of the incumbent, and sequestration of the living; and if persisted in for *twelve months* is followed by deprivation; but these penalties are not the result of practices contrary to law, but practices contrary to the tastes of the Church Board and the bishop. The reply, of course, is that no bishop of the present day would press points frivolous and unessential upon an unwilling incumbent; but surely in framing Acts of Parliament the utmost stretch of power in the hands of one determined to use it should be kept in view. It is by an extreme illustration that the bearing and drift of a measure are made vivid.

Under this Act a very Low Church "Church Board" having a majority of one, backed up by a very Low Church Bishop, might strip a church of lawful adornments and furniture which had been there for years; and, conversely, a High Church "Church Board," with a majority of one, backed up by a Ritualistic Bishop, might fill a church with adornments and furniture, some of doubtful legality, very distasteful to a large minority of the parishioners. The question is, be it observed, *not* whether these cases are likely to happen at present, but whether a Bill allowing them to be a possibility some day is for the permanent welfare, peace, and happiness of the Church.

Mr. Grey's Bill, no doubt, is one symptom among many of the dislike felt for the clerical popedom which obtains in certain parishes. Dictatorial incumbents do now and then deliberately, and perhaps conscientiously, set themselves against the evident sense of the parish in Church matters; but these cases are not sufficiently numerous to justify such sweeping legislation as the Bill before us contemplates. To dethrone the incumbent and enthrone a Church Board, not one member of whom need be a communicant, is indeed a startling proposition. Whether the original three who set on foot the agitation for a lay executive be religious men or not, is comparatively of little moment; also whether the electors are all of them *bonâ-fide* Churchmen or no, need trouble us little; but that those elected to serve on a council, vested with the control of church furniture and ritual together with the entire organization of the parish, should be men of real piety and sound churchmanship, is absolutely essential to the maintenance of religion in the parish and of order in the Church.

It is little short of an insult to ask the clergy to hand over the reins of government to a body in the constitution of which

and such incumbent shall thereupon be, deprived of his said benefice for all purposes as if he were dead from and after the date of the posting of such notice.

Christianity is not a necessary factor. Some qualification stating that the Board be composed of "regular communicants" must stand in the forefront of any Bill to be accepted by the clergy.

Nor do bishops desire to be dragged into every parochial squabble, and to act as umpires in petty disputes. The bishops are already overwhelmed with duties, and live amongst arrears of work impossible to overtake. As long as a clergyman keeps within the law he should be unmolested, whereas the enforced meeting of the Church Board twice a year at the least (*see* Clause 8) would lead to the manufacture of grievances and the perpetuation of strife. There are in the world fussy local magnates to whom Nature has denied fame, but who aim at notoriety, who would leave no stone unturned to ensure their election to the Church Board. Business men, tired with a hard day's work in the "City," are proverbially unwilling to attend evening meetings, hence the government of many a "town" parish would be at the mercy of a clique. Men of leisure, of noise, and of grievances, would attend the meetings, and, unless the vicar courted them, would thwart and browbeat him. All the clergy who recognize the enormous harvest, and the fewness of the labourers in the kingdom of Christ, delight to see the leading laity rallying round them as Churchwardens, as Sidesmen, as Lay Preachers, as Sunday School Teachers, as Choirmen, as Managers of Schools and Temperance Societies and Bands of Hope; and in many places they welcome help from a Church Council in the administration of the parish and the stewardship of its accounts. But to surrender the executive of the church and parish into the hands of a haphazard society, and to give away the privilege of a veto and the right to initiate a change, if required, will never find favour with the clergy of England.

Let the bishops agree upon something like uniformity of use—let the services in one diocese be not so very unlike those of another; enable the Diocesan easily to punish or get rid of idle and incompetent clergy; let him have frequent intercourse with the rector, vicar, or perpetual curate as to the concerns of his parish, but do not rashly call into being a lay court through which the bishop may manipulate a parish, while the vicar stands waiting cap in hand. Draw the bishop and the clergy closer together, and let not a Church Board such as this put them asunder. Let the paternal relationship of the bishop to his clergy, especially to the younger ones, be emphasized, and let him be really accessible to each and all of them; but let him also be armed with the right to compel obedience, without incurring legal expense. The Church of England does not so much require new machinery, as the old machinery put into gear.

The ideal parish, with its brotherhood of modest and loyal

laymen, seated round an earnest incumbent, all eager for peace, and animated by an intense longing for God's glory and the salvation of souls, is truly a charming picture; but those who are familiar with human nature as wont to exhibit itself in parochial politics, in the councils of religious societies, and at the tables of committees—those who are obliged to listen to the utterances of good but excitable men, full of their own religious hobbies—those constantly in contact with members of Boards, whose one talent is the talent of always misunderstanding an opponent, should be very cautious lest, in an undue zeal for a lay priesthood, they admit into the chief seats of parochial authority persons unbaptized, utterly ignorant of Church law and Church teaching, yearning for popularity, fond of interfering, perhaps disloyal to the Establishment, and not agreed as to the very fundamentals of the "Faith once delivered to the saints." We object to place our official responsibility in the hands of such a Church Board as the one indicated by this happily abortive measure, but we heartily invite the co-operation of fit and proper laymen in parochial enterprises for God.

C. H. GRUNDY,

ART. III.—THE SALVATION ARMY.

1. *The War Cry.*
2. *The Little Soldier.*
3. *Salvation Soldiery.* By THE GENERAL.
4. *Heathen England.* By G. RAILTON.
5. *Holy Living. What the Salvation Army teaches about Sanctification.*
6. *Orders and Regulations for the Salvation Army.* By WILLIAM BOOTH.

THE extraordinary success of the religious movement associated with the name of WILLIAM BOOTH is, perhaps, the most striking fact amongst the remarkable religious enterprises of the day. And this is an age which has not been wanting in signs of unusual religious activity. To say nothing of the Tractarian and Ritualistic controversies within the Church of England, which have certainly caused stir and excitement enough in their time, we have had the remarkable revival-meetings of Messrs. Moody and Sankey, the Blue Ribbon Army, a Gospel Temperance Movement, the Children's Mission, and in the East End of London, the evangelistic efforts connected with the names of Mr. F. N. Charrington and Dr. Barnardo. But