

THE CHURCHMAN

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ART. I.—THE ECCLESIASTICAL COMMISSION.

THE Ecclesiastical Commission has been well described as “the largest, the most wealthy, the most widely-operating and the most dignified Corporation under the Crown.” It has long since attained its majority. Of its scope, its administrative powers, its resources, and of the funds at its disposal, the public in general entertains that vague sort of idea which invests the unknown with gigantic proportions. And yet in reality there is no similar institution, the whole truth relating to which is so entirely accessible to any one who cares to inquire into it. Periodical Blue-books, the Reports of Commissions, continual discussions in Parliament, have left no secrets to be revealed, and have afforded ample statistics to be tabulated and arranged by any one who will take the trouble to do so.

We propose to give in outline some of the leading facts, obtainable from the ordinary sources of information, which may serve as a basis to the inquiry of how far the Ecclesiastical Commission has, or has not, answered the ends for which it was originally instituted. The fifty-two great personages to whom was entrusted the working of the Act of 1843, had the control of far smaller revenues and were saddled with much less responsibility than their successors of the present day. The majority of them were members of the episcopal Bench. Five Ministers of State, including the late Lord Palmerston, figured on the roll; other prominent statesmen were added; but the judicial Bench would appear to have been represented only by Sir Stephen Lushington, the great civilian. By the terms of the Act the Commission was to be started by a loan of £600,000 from the funds of Queen Anne’s Bounty, and full powers of sale were given over certain lands (formerly the property of the Church) now to be vested in the new Commission. We may observe *en passant* that the loan has long since (in 1868)

been repaid, as a large sum of money in the Three-per-Cents would seem now to be standing to the credit of the Commission. It was not until seven years later, in 1850, that the Commission was entrusted with the duty of taking over the estates which then belonged to the Bishops and Deans and Chapters. More than 500,000 acres were thus thrown into their hands. Indeed, the Sees of Llandaff and Bangor would seem to be the only old foundations the occupants of which have not thus surrendered their estates. On the other hand, nine Bishops would appear to have handed them back, after being re-arranged, to the Commissioners. There is reason, however, to believe that in more than one instance "agricultural depression" has worked a change of views in this respect, and that those who, when land was rising, did not object to find themselves land-owners, are now more enamoured of the "beautiful simplicity" of the Three-per-Cents. The idea of course was, that those who were only life-tenants with successors and not sons to inherit after them, would not have much inducement to effect extensive improvements, which could be better carried out by a body possessing larger powers of management and more ample funds under their control. So matters stood at the time when the Committee of 1863 inquired into the working of the Commission which it was then fondly supposed would complete the bulk of its labours about the year 1870.

The figures given in evidence before this Committee were certainly sufficiently startling. The Commissioners were in receipt in round numbers of a rental of £880,000 per annum. Of this magnificent income about £300,000 would have appeared to have been received from agricultural holdings; tithes figured for £270,000, houses for £150,000; while manorial and mining rights swelled up the total. About 250,000 acres were at the time under the direct control of Lord Chichester, the then chairman of the Commission. The two leading conclusions at which the Committee would seem to have arrived were, first, that it was undesirable that estates should remain "permanently" invested in the hands of the central body; and secondly, that management of estates by such a body was necessarily expensive. Upon this point Mr. Arnold, in his recent attack upon the Commission, dwelt very forcibly. He talked of "respectable extravagance" as evinced by the charges of solicitors and land-surveyors—which he estimated as amounting in all to £170,000, equivalent to a charge of about 20 per cent. for agency alone. It is fair, however, to say that upon this part of the case Sir John Mowbray's reply was tolerably conclusive. No less than 416,000 odd acres have been enfranchised by the Commission, and are now in the hands of lay-owners. The land now held directly under

the Commission is not 250,000, but 190,000 acres. The expenditure upon buildings was £52,000 in 1880 and £47,000 in 1881, out of a total of no less than £1,032,000 expended under that head by the Commission since its establishment. Within the same period £243,000 has been laid out in drainage. It is obvious that the management of estates upon such a scale must be a costly matter; but the Commissioners would seem not to have lost sight of the fact that under the circumstances a very moderate per-centage would suffice to meet the requirements of the case. The scale of surveyors' charges originally settled in 1851 was revised and reduced successively in 1857, in 1864, in 1873, and in 1881. Mr. E. J. Smith, for many years the able manager of that important portion of the estates of the Commission which were situated in the North of England, so raised them in value that the sum total of his charges did not amount to more than one year's increased income, which was realized by the change of system which he inaugurated. In answer to the report relating to the Commission of 1863 a statement containing full details was laid before Parliament in the course of the following year.

It appears that more than one hundred separate Acts of Parliament have been passed since the constitution of the Commission, increasing and extending the original powers confided to the Commission. Successive Ministries have thus seen their way to show marks of increasing confidence within the last eighteen years. The object of the Commission was, as we are all aware, to augment, by judicious management, the existing revenues of the Church, and so to apportion them as to meet, to the utmost extent of their capacity, cases of special spiritual destitution. How far this has, or has not, been accomplished, our readers can judge for themselves, after a perusal of the subjoined statistics, extracted mostly from the statement of Sir John Mowbray.

The work of the Ecclesiastical Commission, since its commencement, has been as follows:—

In the first place, out of the 15,000 benefices, throughout England and Wales, 4,700 of the poorest class have already been augmented.

In the second place, within the last forty years, £23,000,000 in gross value has been added to the property of the Church.

In the third place, an annual income, now little short of £700,000, and likely to increase by some £20,000 a year for several years to come, has been secured to the Church from this source. Here we must remark upon the marvellous elasticity which this item has displayed since the report of the Royal Commission in 1836. That estimated the probable gain to the Church at the modest sum of £134,000. The Committee of 1863 ventured

to raise their expectations so high as £146,000. Mr. Spencer Walpole, then one of the Church Estates Commissioners, speaking at a later date, expressed a hope that nearly £300,000 would ultimately be added. The result has proved accordingly how far, in this instance, the estimates have fallen short of the reality.

In the fourth place, the scope of the Commission has been very largely widened. One of its main duties was to put an end, as speedily as possible, to the evil system of Church leases. Lands so held were almost invariably let on lives, sometimes renewable for ever. There was the strongest possible inducement to the life-tenant, especially as he advanced in age, to make a bad arrangement for the Church with his immediate lessee, in the fear that if he did not come to terms the life might not be renewed until after his own death. We know of one instance, in which the lessee of Church lands, having a bad opinion of the life of an episcopal landlord, positively refused to name fresh lives and pay the customary fine for so doing, until he was driven into a corner by the unexpected death of two out of the three lives named in the lease. We know of another, in which a Canon of some fifty years' standing, drew during all that time about half of what should have been his income, because an enormous fine had been exacted for a lease of tithes half a century before, by the then members of the Chapter. Take again such a case as the Vicarage of Rochdale, with its present income of £25,000 a year. Can it possibly be contended that its incidents could have been properly dealt with by an incumbent of the living?

Large sales have been made whenever an opportunity offered of lands vested in the Commission; and since 1881 the Estates Committee have discontinued the allowance of 5 per cent. previously made to agents for expenditure on farm buildings. In the case of copyholds also, special instructions have been given with respect to the stewards' fees, which constitute so unsatisfactory an item in manorial accounts. These have all been steps in the right direction, and prove that the Commission have not been unmindful of the suggestions made before various Committees, and especially before that of 1868, by Lord Grey and other competent authorities. We suspect that the extinguishment of leaseholds for lives, and the enfranchisement of copyhold tenures, have been the most important of all the multifarious duties which have been assigned to them. But although much has been accomplished, yet at the same time this part of the work of the Commission is not yet completed. But in addition to freehold and leasehold property, they find themselves the owners of tithe rent-charges, manorial rights, foreshore rights, mineral rights, including coal and lead

mines, fisheries, stone quarries, agricultural buildings, house property, and woodlands. In Durham alone, Mr. Pease, who ought to know, estimates that the Commission now possesses 40,000 acres, with an income of over £109,000 a year. Such are the dimensions of the property, and such have been the results achieved. That the decisions of the Commission have always been wise, and their management always economical, it would be too much to assert. There is the oft-quoted instance of Lord Palmerston, and some other Ministers, having been outvoted at the Board by an unusual gathering of Bishops mustered to support a particular scheme for the Deanery of York. Nor can it be contended that a large corporation can develop a valuable property with as much ease or at so small an expense as resident owners, who are looking after their own interests upon the spot. On the other hand, Mr. Arnold is quite right in his assertion that glebe lands, and indeed Church lands of any description, were probably worse managed than any other kind of property. The reason for this we have already indicated—namely, the want of adequate interest in the life-tenant. Nor must it be forgotten that an ecclesiastical owner has other and more important duties to perform than those of looking after landed property—duties which, as a rule, are not left undischarged by those who are bound to perform them. We very much doubt whether, under any other circumstances, or by any other proprietors, £120,000 would have been spent in buildings, and £70,000 in drainage, even on an estate of such magnitude as that owned by the Commissioners in the county of Durham. Mr. Gladstone only did justice, therefore, to the general aptitude of the Commissioners, when he expressed his opinion that, had Mr. Arnold's motion been assented to, they "would not have come badly out of the inquiry." It is to be remembered that Parliament desired, in its original constitution, to secure the services of persons of many duties and of large experience. On such a Board there must be numerous absentees at each meeting. The episcopal members, in particular, for the most part rarely attend, except upon special occasions. It is quite a moot point whether, in the distant future, ecclesiastical persons are likely to wish to own land in preference to receiving their incomes from some other source. Manchester, Truro, Liverpool, St. Albans, and we may now add Newcastle, the most recent accessions to the number of episcopal Sees, have no landed estates attached to them. Agricultural depression has induced many incumbents, with the sanction of their Diocesan, to sell their glebe lands to some neighbouring proprietor. Some of the Bishops, as we have seen, have voluntarily handed back their estates, preferring a certain income; and several Chapters would be only too glad to do so, if they could get the opportunity. We can quite

believe that, in some instances, payment by salaries would be preferable to payment by fees, and that a Commission, acting as it must upon general principles, has to make larger reductions in times of pressure than would be conceded by individual owners. Still, looking at the question as a whole, with the facts and figures before us, it is impossible to deny that a great work has been done, and well done, and that the Church has benefited largely, both by the accretion of its resources and by a more equitable distribution of them.

This, however, is only a part of the whole question. As Mr. Gladstone remarked, two points are raised by such a discussion as that initiated by Mr. Arnold. The first and narrower one is the question of administration, to which a very satisfactory reply has, upon the whole, in our opinion, been given. This deals with the past and present. The second point, which is more a question of the future, is, whether the tenure of land by great corporations is desirable in the interests of the nation at large. Mr. Gladstone expresses an opinion that such corporations have "not that independence on the face of them, which attaches to private owners." Mr. Goschen takes much the same view.

There can be no question that the pursuit of agriculture, especially under existing circumstances, is a very difficult business; it is one which not only requires a special knowledge of the subject, but in which success depends largely upon personal attention and constant supervision. Looked at from this point of view, land is unquestionably a less desirable property for corporations to hold than other investments; but we are inclined to think that it is also less desirable for the country that land should be held in large masses in mortmain. The most obvious result of such a system is the subtraction, from the districts in which it prevails, of the important residential element. We doubt whether this drawback can be really compensated by any system of management, however liberal and business-like. Of the many grave mistakes which have been made by the promoters of the Irish agrarian movement, none is more grave than the attempt to drive away from the country resident owners by rendering their position intolerable. It is quite a moot point whether the uniformly generous management of the great absentee estates makes up for the absence of personal influence and personal example. Yet this want is practically perpetuated by the permanent retention of large tracts of land in the hands of corporations. Mr. Goschen quotes the instance of the Greenwich Hospital Estates, as one in which their gradual dispersion has benefited both the charity and the country. Probably the time will come when a somewhat similar process may be applied with advantage to the

Estates now under the control of the Ecclesiastical Commission. The Commissioners themselves have not shut their eyes to such a possibility; where sales and enfranchisements could be judiciously effected, they have been so: a beginning has already been made, and progress in the same direction will not be difficult should Parliament and the country desire it.

In the meantime, however, it would be unfair in the extreme to underrate the great work which has been done by the Commission. Previously to its existence, Church property had been managed upon the worst, the most wasteful, and the least beneficial of systems. Those who owned Church lands rarely realized their full value; those who occupied them did so upon a tenure the incidents of which were uncertain, and the conditions of which often stood in the way of substantial improvements being effected. There was an utter absence upon the part of the owners of the time, the knowledge and the capital requisite for the proper development of their property. They were, from circumstances, very much in the hands of their tenants, who drove hard bargains with them, and treated the land very much as they pleased. These were evils which could only be remedied by a complete change of system. Nor could that change have been carried out except through the medium of a central body endowed with full powers, and treating the questions submitted to them upon certain definite principles. That the Ecclesiastical Commissioners have occasionally been somewhat hard upon those with whom they have had to deal, is, we suspect, the fact; but it must be remembered that such must sometimes be the case where great laxity of practice has prevailed for generations. The old slipshod method of managing Church lands doubtless recommended itself to many who had an interest in its indefinite prolongation. Any departure from it was sure to cause an outcry, loud in proportion to the loss entailed by its abandonment upon the particular complainant.

In the face of the figures presented to our readers, three facts stand out prominently. The first is, that an urgent need existed for a severe and sweeping change in the management of Church property. The second is, that such a change has not only been carried out by the Ecclesiastical Commission, but that its results have been profitable to the Church far beyond all the estimates which had been hazarded as to its probable results. The third is, that those under whose auspices this change has been carried out can point to the steady enlargement of their powers as an evidence that the confidence originally reposed in them has been steadily continued by the nation, and that successive inquiries have only tended to vindicate the general correctness of the principles laid down, and of the methods by which they have been pursued. That there are

administrative drawbacks inherent to the constitution of such a body, we have already pointed out. Great changes can rarely be carried out without great expense, even if their final economical results be satisfactory. A corporation can never fill the place in all respects of an individual owner. There is always a danger that subordinates will arrogate to themselves too much authority. But after all this has been said, the fact still remains that a great work for the Church has been done by the Ecclesiastical Commission, and that in doing that work they have deserved well, not of the Church alone, but of the country. Nor will this fact be altered, should it be found advisable as time goes on to direct their attention to the gradual dispersion of the property which has come, from various sources, into their hands. Should such a course be adopted, it will be from motives of public policy alone, and not from any desire to cast a censure upon a body who under circumstances of peculiar difficulty have loyally discharged the trust which was committed to them by the nation.

MIDDLETON.

ART. II.—VIVISECTION.

THESSE pages are written in consequence of many requests that I should state my opinion on the much-disputed question of Vivisection, and its influence on man.

The task is not so simple as it appears to be. Nothing can be easier than uncompromising denunciation on the one side, or equally uncompromising advocacy on the other. It is easy for the one side to describe vivisectors and their advocates as fiends in human form; or for the other jauntily to sneer at their opponents as "humanitarians who would rather see thousands of human beings perish from preventible diseases than that a frog should suffer half an hour's pain, or a guinea-pig a day's inconvenience."

This sentence, by the way, is a marvel of ingenuity, as it compresses into the smallest possible compass the greatest possible number of fallacies, and "begs the question" no less than five times. I will revert to it presently.

Again, it is very easy to observe an attitude of neutrality, and to say that as doctors cannot agree upon the subject, an outsider has no right to form an opinion, and that the doctors must fight it out among themselves.

The difficulty is further increased by the evidence given before the Royal Commission of 1876, and printed in the "Blue-Book" of that year. It is about the most bewildering evidence