

choosing for yourselves, incapable of knowing what is for your spiritual benefit, and are bound to accept the choice of the laird."

One can easily understand that at a certain period in the history of the Church, when the feudal relations between the patron and the parishioners were still in active operation, there would be no very great hardship in practically carrying out this theory, as we have put it purposely, in the most offensive form. At that time the patron was invariably a member of the Established Church, much respected by the people, and his decision quite unlikely to be questioned. But all this has passed away, and the dictum of lairds no longer carries the sort of mystical weight with it which it did in these good old times. The laity of the Church of Scotland has increased in intelligence, and still more in importance and influence; while the Church itself has extended beyond the bounds of its original establishment, and contains within it numerous charges where the election of the minister is, both in theory and practice, as free as in any of the Dissenting Churches. The law of Patronage itself has been quietly and silently modified by the patrons themselves, many of whom have practically left the presentation in the hands of congregations whenever they exhibit anything like unanimity. Others choose from a select list presented by the congregation, and others again have been so discriminating in their selections that discord was hardly possible. It may, perhaps, be a bold thing to say that, as a general rule, the people of the Church of Scotland have, in fact, nearly as little to complain of with regard to freedom of choice as the other Presbyterian Churches, but we believe it does not far exceed the truth. As Mr. Charteris pointed out on Wednesday last, in one-half of the whole charges there is almost entire freedom, and in the other half, with a few exceptions which the scandal of contests have made notorious, the Patronage is so judiciously administered that the people are satisfied, or, at least, make no dissatisfied movements. Does not a species of Patronage exist in Churches where theoretically the right of selection is vested in the laity? Every one knows that it does, and it is not the less offensive because it is exercised in an underhand, shuffling manner, by brow-beating, coaxing, and wheedling influences.

The truth is, it is the theory of Patronage which we have explained, and not the thing itself in its practical working, which so galls the consciences of the laity of the Established Church; and it is more upon this ground, than from the evils that at present flow from it, that we would urge its abolition. Lord Aberdeen's Act was an attempt to modify the power of the patron, and we observe that Mr. Charteris, in his able speech in the Glasgow Presbytery, has a good word for it, on the ground that it was the only thing that could be done while the initiative in a settlement lay with the patron. Possibly he is right, but it seems to us that this much-abused Act has contributed more to bring Patronage into disrepute, and make it rankle in the minds of the laity, than all the arguments that have been urged against the system since the days of Andrew Melville. The framers of the Act no doubt meant well, but they conced-

ed a principle and ratified it by enactment, which made the right of the patron an anomaly both in fact and in logic. That principle was that the people had something to say in the choice of a clergyman—that is, they could bring forward objections to the selection of the patron, which, if held valid by the Church, would be sustained. Now this in substance admitted the privilege of popular election, and was theoretically subversive of the ancient right of the patron. Practically the operation of the Act has been to obscure the position which it was meant the two parties in the settlement should occupy to each other, for while in twenty-seven cases presentees have been inducted in opposition to the objectors, in nineteen cases the patron has been defeated. On the other hand, it has undoubtedly embittered the feelings of the people against that repulsive theory of Patronage to which we have referred, and which must ever remain while Patronage exists, as the element which offends the conscience. We say nothing at present of the hardship and mental pain which a contested presentation under the Act entails upon the presentee. Nearly every one of the 46 cases of objection has furnished an illustration of its evil tendencies in this direction, and ought to furnish, as we believe it does, a clamant reason for clergymen wishing to see the uncertainties of the present law swept away, and a better system introduced.

What are the objections offered to the abolition of Patronage as it exists at present? So far as we can see, they are not very well defined, but seem to be all packed into the old adage, *Quies non mouere*—Do not disturb things at rest. Like all other maxims, this is often quite as unsafe to follow as to neglect. It is certain that the question of Patronage will not rest as long as theory of spiritual control which it involves offends the moral sense of the members of the Church. It is all very well to say, "Consider the evils which an agitation of this kind has produced in bygone days, and give us peace. Parliament will not give us relief, and what, then, are we to do? Are we to have another disruption, as disastrous as the last?" As if sealing up a running sore were the way to mend it. It strikes us that the safety of the Church of Scotland lies in the firm and temperate discussion of this subject till the evil is amended in some such way as that proposed in the original motion of Mr. Charteris—a proposition which would insure a popular settlement, and at the same time preserve us from the half-hidden arts of Patronage, to which we have referred, as practised in other Churches. The Church was never in a better position to discuss it, because, as we have stated, the yoke of Patronage is lightly exercised, and does not form an unbearable practical grievance, and also because since 1843 a spirit of healthy liberalism and toleration has been largely cultivated both among clergy and laity. As to the timorous suggestion that Parliament may be induced to touch Endowment if we ask it to touch Patronage, it is scarcely worth notice, for we may confidently assert that there is no ecclesiastical establishment on earth that has less to fear from a rigid scrutiny of its endowments than the Church of Scotland.