

THE  
BRITISH COLONIAL MAGAZINE

Conducted by W. H. SMITH, Author of the "Canadian Gazetteer," &c. &c.

NUMBER XVII.

PRICE 3d.; or 12s. 6d. per Annum.

THE CURATE OF ST. NICHOLAS'.

Amongst the most generally beloved, not merely of the clergy, but of the whole population of Belford, as that population stood some thirty years ago, was my good old friend, the Curate of St. Nicholas'; and, in my mind, he had qualities that might both explain and justify his universal popularity.

Belford is, at present, singularly fortunate in the parochial clergy. Of the two vicars, whom I have the honour and the privilege of knowing, one confers upon the place the ennobling distinction of being the residence of a great poet; whilst both are not only, in the highest sense of that highest word, gentlemen, in birth, in education, in manners, and in mind—but eminently popular in the pulpit, and, as parish priests, not to be excelled, even amongst the generally excellent clergymen of the Church of England—a phrase, by the way, which just at this moment sounds so like a war-cry, that I cannot too quickly disclaim any intention of inflicting a political dissertation on the unwary reader. My design is simply to draw a faithful likeness of one of the most peaceable members of the establishment.

Of late years, there has been a prodigious change in the body clerical. The activity of the dissenters, the spread of education, and the immense increase of population, to say nothing of that "word of power," Reform, have combined to produce a stirring spirit of emulation amongst the younger clergy, which has quite changed the aspect of the profession. Heretofore, the "church militant" was the quietest and easiest of all avocations; and the most slender and lady-like young gentleman, the "mamma's darling" of a great family, whose lungs were too tender for the bar, and whose frame was

too delicate for the army, might be sent with perfect comfort to the snug curacy of a neighbouring parish, to read Horace, cultivate auriculas, christen, marry, and bury, about twice a quarter, and do duty once every Sunday. Now times are altered; prayers must be read and sermons preached twice a day at least, not forgetting lectures in Lent, and homilies at tide times; workhouses are to be visited; schools attended, boys and girls taught in the morning, and grown-up bumpkins in the evening; children are to be catechised; masters and mistresses looked after; hymn books distributed; bibles given away; tract societies fostered amongst the zealous, and psalmody cultivated amongst the musical. In short, a curate, now-a-days, even a country curate, much more if his parish lie in a great town, has need of the lungs of a barrister in good practice, and the strength and activity of an officer of dragoons.

Now this is just as it ought to be. Nevertheless, I cannot help entertaining certain relentings in favour of the well-endowed churchman of the old school, round, indolent, and rubicund, at peace with himself and all around him, who lives in quiet and plenty in his ample parsonage-house, dispensing with a liberal hand the superfluities of his hospitable table, regular and exact in his conduct, but not so precise as to refuse a Saturday night's rubber in his own person, or to condemn his parishioners for their game of cricket on Sunday afternoons; charitable in word and deed, tolerant, indulgent, kind, to the widest extent of that widest word; but, except in such wisdom (and it is of the best,) no wiser than that eminent member of the church, Parson Adams. In a word, exactly such a man as my good old friend the rector of Had-