

Of the success of the congregational election of ministers, so far as has hitherto been tried, there can hardly be any doubt, save in the most prejudiced minds. Not a few elections have already taken place both in country and town parishes, and almost invariably they have been conducted with decorum and good feeling, and, moreover, in most cases with a conspicuous deference to the self-respect of those who have been spoken of as candidates. Congregations have been satisfied, and appointments made which, whether or not ideally the best in all cases, will certainly contrast favorably with the appointments made under the old Patronage law. Any slight disturbances which have arisen have been in cases where the elements of disturbance were rife, and would have broken out under any system of election whatever. Under no other system would these disturbing elements have been less operative than they have been. Even those who may have been least anxious for the abolition of the law of Patronage can hardly deny that there seems to be a prospect of more harmonious settlements under the new than under the old order of things. At so far as the intellectual standing and character of the clergy are concerned, the Church has this in her own power—as she has always had—and is not entitled to blame any system for settling ministers whom she herself has licensed and sent forth for the purpose of supplying her parishes. If congregations insist upon some measure of popular gifts, as well as general intellectual character, who can blame them for this? Why should any man be chosen for the office of a preacher whom neither nature nor art has qualified to speak with interest or effect? The indictment of the popular taste in this respect has always appeared to us somewhat shallow. No doubt congregations will make mistakes, and sometimes choose fluency in preference to solidity, and accept showy declamation for well-informed eloquence; but patrons surely were not above such mistakes any more than congregations, while they were subject to mistakes all their own, and sometimes far more injurious in their influences upon parishes.

Nothing is more strange in connection with the recent abolition of Patronage

than the sudden elevation into which the deceased Patron has risen in the eyes of certain people who profess extremely liberal views respecting the Church. A writer in the 'Pall Mall Gazette' has returned once more to this view of the subject. The "lay patron," it is said, "acted as the representative of the State;" "the body now invested with the patronage is not any legal representative—not the ratepayers, nor those who might conceivably act as delegates of the State—but the communicants and adherents of each congregation. Nothing could more denationalise the Church and form it into a State-paid sect." There is something amazing in such statements on the part of any fair and well-informed person. No lay patron, so far as we know, represented anybody but himself. Take any special illustration—the Duke of Buccleugh, or the Duke of Argyll, or the Earl of Zetland; it is surely an abuse of language to say that they were the representatives of the State in the exercise of their Church patronage. These and many other patrons did their best, and no blame is imputed to them. But if they were representative at all in the exercise of their undoubted right, they represented the parish and congregations—those very communicants and adherents who are spoken of with so much contempt by the writer in the 'Pall Mall Gazette.' And how the transference of a right from a single patron to those on whose behalf the right was alone legally entitled to be exercised, should have any denationalising effect passes comprehension. In what sense are "communicants and adherents," or in other words the congregations, of the National Church, less national than "lay patrons"? Is their position less national, or their interests less national? It is said that the Patron was of no definite ecclesiastical colour; the "congregations" must all belong to the Church. The "ratepayers" as such, or others who might "conceivably act as delegates of the State," have no voice in the election. But the fact that the lay patron did not necessarily belong to the National Church surely made him less rather than more national than those who belong to it. All who know Scotland know this very well; and that if there is any class in the country less