

HOW M. GAMBETTA TRIES TO HOODWINK THE FRENCH PEASANTRY.

M. GAMBETTA, the leader of the French republicans, speaking evidently for the ear of the French peasantry, has been denouncing the Priesthood. At first sight this would appear a dangerous proceeding on the part of Gambetta seeing, that the French clergy as a body come from the peasant class. But Gambetta knows the ground he stands upon, and is not likely to do anything, that would hurt the feelings of a class of men, whom he sees and the world sees slowly but surely drifting into his beloved republicanism. Why then denounce the Priesthood to the peasants whose sons the Priests are? Herot hangs a tail, and for the matter of that *two tails*. In the first place, although Gambetta's figures mean to hoodwink the French peasantry, seem to prove the contrary, the real fact is the French peasantry is ceasing to supply France with Priests. The peasants are becoming more prosperous, and consequently the ridiculous income of \$200 a year doled out by the government, is no longer a prize to be desired even for a third or fourth son. As undoubtedly the English Elizabethian apostacy owed its success to the degradation of the clergy superinduced by the disgracefully low incomes they had received for years, so if the Roman curia look not to it in time, France will undoubtedly see her Priesthood become extinct, or if not extinct, so thoroughly demoralized that a national apostacy will be the necessary result. Are we inventing this deficit in the ranks of the French clergy? We have figures for it; and figures given on very reverend authority. The Vicar General of Orleans shows that there are in France at the present moment, 2,881 vacant cures and 3,000 additional parishes without a priest or church! Gambetta may well then denounce the Priesthood to the French peasant. In the second place the French peasant hates the conscription, and we commend him for it. That every young man should be sent to barracks for three years, and at a time when his young labor is of most value to his father, is a piece of tyranny that it is difficult to

understand rational beings submitting to. Nothing but "standing armies" and "the divine right of kings," which came in with the Reformation! could have engendered such a thing. We are no admirer of Gambetta, because he hates the Church, but we think that whilst fighting *against* the Church he is fighting *for* her. That kings and monarchies will eventually go by the board is certain. When republicans hold the day, the Church will be able to identify herself more and more with *the people*. And after all it is *the people* that are God's Church not *kings and princes*. The French peasant then hates the conscription and (by an apparent non-sequitur) all not liable to it. But the clergy are exempt. Here then is the clue to Gambetta's denunciation of the clergy to the French peasant. But why should Gambetta wish to denounce the Priesthood? France has universal suffrage and Gambetta knows full well that under universal suffrage, power must always rest with the peasant class; this class he sees swaying towards republicanism; and he is astute enough to see that the clergy is the only counter-influence to be feared. "*Hinc illa lacrym*"—tears of anger as well as grief.

But M. Gambetta's denunciation of the evil is unscrupulous, because *false*. There are 150,000 priests in France, he tell us, all exempt from military duty. Now 150,000 drawn *yearly* from the ranks of the French army, would indeed be a large, in fact too large a proportion if standing armies have to be. But are there 150,000 drawn *yearly* from the ranks? By no means; far from it; though M. Gambetta wishes the conscription-hating French peasant to think so. "Once a priest always a priest," is an old aphorism. Now thirty years average *priestly* life, is a very small average, for a priest is, as a general thing a long-liver, owing to his comparative temperance and vow of celibacy, and the fact that no cripple is admitted to the Priesthood. This 150,000 then must be spread over thirty years at least, which leaves only 5,000 exemptions per year; not a very large annual exemption after all. And thus it is that M. Gambetta the tribune of the people would hoodwink the people. *Fie M. Gambetta!* H. B.