

THE GOSPEL TRIBUNE, AND CHRISTIAN COMMUNIONIST,

A

Monthly Interdenominational Journal.

VOLUME III.]

NOVEMBER, 1856.

[NUMBER 7.]

"ONE IS YOUR MASTER, even CHRIST: AND ALL YE ARE BRETHREN."

Moral and Religious Miscellany.

THE PRESS AND VOLUNTARIYISM.

On the 26th of August, in the year of our Lord, 1856—we chronicle carefully a date of such great importance—a humble begging letter appeared in *The Times*. A poor curate begged the charity of the public for a yet poorer curate—a suffering, indeed a disabled one to boot. For twenty-five years he had laboured in a parish of 1,300 people (how many Dissenters we are never told in such estimates), his vicar owning, and residing on a large estate in Ireland, and receiving £390 per annum, yet allowing his substitute, who did all the work, but £80 a-year, with residence in a damp ill-furnished house. Unable to rise from his bed, suffering acutely with vertebral disease in the neck, without a relative or friend, paying a clergyman for "doing his duty," and, unaided by the landlord vicar with £390 a-year from the living, he presented a fair case indeed for charity. It was not withheld, £400 was quickly raised to supply his wants. But the matter did not stop there; Parliament is not sitting, the daily papers have room for correspondence, and the clerics of the incumbent and curate classes have been in session ever since in the columns of *The Times*.

Very amusing the debate has been to us outsiders. Had we a Gathercole among us, it would not take much ingenuity to concoct an autobiography of a poor curate, or a fleeced incumbent, which might be considerably more truthful than that of a Dissenting minister. "An incumbent" soon replied that unless the incumbent had been instituted before the 20th of July, 1813, he must by law pay his curate £150 a-year. The kind curate, on the 1st of September, promises to look into the legal part of the business, thanks contributors, but announces the startling fact that five thousand curates live (?) on £80 a-year, and six thousand incumbents on less than £200 a-year. The writer himself is but a poor curate "passing rich with £60 a-year, rent and taxes clear," is a married man with five children, and trusts to some one's writing for him, should his health also fail. His neighbour, the Dissenting minister, has £400 a-year. Our readers will ask, and who is the Dissenting neighbour to this Essex curate? We cannot enlighten them. We believe it was Robinson, of Cambridge, who remarked on the inappropriateness of the invocation in the Church prayer for the clergy and people; but surely only He "who alone worketh great marvels" could inspire such curates with "a healthful spirit of grace."

Possibly the curate controversy might soon have dropped, but on the tenth of this month *The Times* itself entered the field, and can it be credited? with the solemn announcement that the service of the Church is not in a pecuniary sense worth a man's

while, and that her servants are idlers; that so poor is the current pay that a worthy bishop who tried to allure Dissenters into the fold by ordination without a degree, soon found his game shy of the net, so unattractive was the bait; and that the clergyman is generally the idlest man in the parish. Indeed, we are told that the argument is a circle, that "the clerical profession is the idlest among us because it is the worst rewarded, and the worst rewarded because it is the idlest." *The Times* knows of but one remedy—to make clergymen like other public servants (which) give an account of their time. They must keep a parish clerical log book.

As might be expected, our contemporary brought on himself a perfect storm of letters—clergymen idlers needing to make written proof of their ministry!—numerous incumbents now rushed into print, but specially, to prove their poverty. Their £1,000 a-year left but £600 nett, and their £600 but £140. Moreover, absenteeism was now the exception, and the curate was but a deduction from the incumbent's income for doing the excess of work assigned him by his holy but exacting Mother. After the lapse of a week the oracle speaks again. The ground is shifted. Before, curates were ill paid because they were idlers, now because they are extras, and no one likes the extras; we do not in a school bill, we do not when the waiter comes to us after an hotel dinner, or the boots expects to be remembered. The Establishment knows nothing of curates (the Prayer-book notwithstanding), bishops, archdeacons, &c., down to rectors it knows; but who are curates? Extras, plaguy extras. The people give them nothing because the Establishment provides them with a clergyman; the Establishment gives them nothing, for they have no part or lot in it. State endowment and voluntarism send them backward and forward to each other, and between the two they would literally starve but for the charity of rectors and vicars. Poor curates—successors of the apostles too—each of them entitled to look down with pity and contempt on the Dissenting teacher, each of them despising the slaves of voluntary support, yet each liable to be cashiered from the diocese at the whim of "his diocesan," and to have his little stipend stopped if he displease his employer.

The important circumstance, however, is that all the papers which have given their attention to the subject are beginning to see that in some form there will have to be at least a partial appeal to voluntarism. *The Times* itself only requires that first the revenues of the Church shall be made the most of, and that contributors shall be asked only for a proved necessity. *The Spectator* considers the matter in its own way, in detail, and comes to the conclusion that "if the Church of England is to stand, sooner or later we must come to a general voluntary contribution for its partial support, and sooner is better than later; indeed, postponement may be irre-