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CLERICAL INCOMES.

SOME time ago we drew attention to the very important subject of the incomes of the ministers of the various Christian Churches, and we are glad to see that the subject is being taken up and kept up in a thoroughly intelligent and satisfactory manner by the *Mail*. It is a sign that the laity are becoming alive to their own interest in this question; for, in truth, it is quite as much a layman's question as a clergyman's. Indeed, in one sense it concerns the laity more; for we can imagine a time coming when the clerical order might be extinct, or when the office of the ministry would be sought only by men who would be overpaid, however little they received; and in that case it would certainly be the laity that would suffer, rather than the clergy.

Curiously enough, these articles in the *Mail* have appeared contemporaneously with an article in the *Evangelical Churchman* which seems to us to reproduce the very worst form of sentiment on the subject of clerical stipends—the sentiment of suspicion and oppression, the sentiment which bids us believe that, if clergymen are not made entirely dependent upon their flocks, they will neglect their duties, and hold on to their posts merely for the sake of the endowments.

No doubt there are, and always will be, clergymen of this kind. Let it also be granted that such men will be fostered and perhaps increased by a system which renders them more or less independent of those to whom they minister. But this is not the question. We have further to consider whether other and greater evils may not result from the clergy being entirely dependent upon their congregations for their very subsistence.

Let us remember that the clergy are not the only officials who may be supported by these different methods: there are masters in schools, there are various kinds of officials in the service of the public. Is it proposed to make the same principle applicable to such officials as these? For example, is it proposed that the Principal of Knox College, of Wycliffe Hall, of Trinity College, shall be dependent upon the subscriptions of the friends of those institutions—which may rise or fall according as these functionaries "give satisfaction" to their supporters; or are they to have a fixed income guaranteed to them by the council or trustees by whom they are appointed?

It really does not seem to us that there is any great difference between these two applications of the principle in question. But what would be the result of making these incomes uncertain and precarious? Undoubtedly, one result would be that, in most places, a very inferior order of men would be appointed. Certainty of tenure, certainty of income—a moral certainty which should deliver the holder of an important post from the continual fear of being removed or of having the means of subsistence withdrawn—seems an absolute necessity, if we would in these posts have men worth having.

Now, we have no manner of doubt—judging of a matter in which we have no personal interest whatever—that, whatever may be the evils connected with the clergy having a measure of independence secured to them by endowments, the evils resulting from an underpaid and dependent clergy are far greater. It is a serious matter, indeed, for a clergyman to

speak unpopular truths in the presence of his people when the result may be a serious diminution of his income.

It is common enough to hear opinions like these snuffed down with a pious disdain which assumes that the opponent of the merely voluntary system is a worldly-minded person who is incapable of understanding the relations between a Christian pastor and a spiritually-minded congregation. We are not to be daunted by sneers at the "natural man," and by being told that these mysteries are "spiritually discerned." No lofty assumptions can get over the evidence of plain, hard facts. Readers of books like the "Shady Side," published some time ago in the States, know that the ministerial hardships there depicted were drawn from the life, and were in no way imaginary, or even infrequent; and we have no reason to think that those hardships have ceased?

Will it be gravely maintained that every Christian congregation, or that most Christian congregations, are willing to have their evil ways laid open and condemned every Sunday in the pulpit? Will it never happen that a Christian preacher may be constrained by a sense of duty to denounce the vices which distinguish the holder of the purse-strings in his congregation? Will it never happen that the richest man, or the four or five richest men or largest contributors to the funds of the Church in any particular place, will think that they deserve special consideration from their clergymen and from their fellow-worshippers? And if this cannot be denied, will it not be hard for a man to speak the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, when he knows that the probable consequences will be the loss of money necessary to carry on his children's education, or, in some cases, to procure them bread?

It is easy to say that a Christian minister ought to be superior to such considerations. And the ideal man might be; but the actual man must feel the force of them, however little he may yield to them. In a general way the clergy deserve the greatest admiration in this respect. Generally speaking, they are remarkably outspoken. But there is a danger of which they are hardly conscious, springing out of their sense of dependence. There are not a great many men who will deliberately say in the pulpit what they do not believe—not, perhaps, very many who will deliberately or consciously keep back what they deem it a duty to proclaim. But the process by which truth comes to be withheld is a more subtle one. The teacher thinks he must find out "acceptable words," he must win his people, he must beware of alienating them, and so, by degrees, he comes to be the mere echo of their opinions, perhaps often the mere mouthpiece of their prejudices.

Now, it is necessary for us laymen to say we do not want teachers of this kind. They can do us no good—they can do us nothing but harm. Unless the preachers of the Christian Church are to be prophets sent from God, they had better come down from their chairs. Let us have platforms on which we may exhort each other, give mutual counsel, help, comfort, as our knowledge or experience may enable us. This may be a reality. A minister of Jesus Christ who brings us no message from above, but only tells us what we bid him, and what we pay him to tell us, is an impostor who is receiving money under false pretences. He is professing one thing and practising another. There is another aspect of the subject, less tangible, perhaps, but not less real. The spirit of the Christian minister is broken, his tone lowered, his authority impaired or destroyed, not merely by the fear of man, the sense of bondage, but also by the wear and tear of earthly cares and anxieties. What is the great work of the evangelical teacher? Undoubtedly to keep the great facts and principles of Christian truth before the minds of his hearers, but also to set up a lofty ideal before the eyes of those whom he teaches, reminding them of something which they must be continually aiming at, which alone can satisfy their aspirations. Even an unbeliever like Renan holds that man is lost when he has forsaken his ideal; how much more one who believes in the Ideal of Humanity in the Incarnate Word? But how will this loftiness of tone be preserved in one who is forced to ask every day of his life: How shall we eat? And how shall we be clothed? and if he does not ask it, who will be asked by others whose sufferings are more to him than his own? Many a case has occurred of men beginning their ministerial work with the highest aspirations who have sunk to the level of mere drudges by reason of the pressure of earthly cares. What worse calamity could happen to the Christian community than such a degradation of their teachers?