

**A VICAR'S VIEW OF
CHURCH
PATRONAGE**

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BY THE REV.

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VICAR OF ASHBY FOLVILLE, LEICESTERSHIRE

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INTRODUCTION

NO subject connected with the Church of England requires more careful consideration than her system of Patronage. All thoughtful Churchmen who watch the signs of the times, and know the requirements of the Church and nation, are solicitous that some wise and effective measure of reform should be passed by Parliament as speedily as possible.

The Bishop of Peterborough's bill has drawn attention to the subject, but it still requires ventilating that it may be better understood by the public, and a more general interest may be excited in it. The writer of the following pages commits them to the press in the hope that they may in some slight measure contribute to this result, and conduce to an equitable settlement of that which he regards as of the utmost importance to the future welfare of the Church of England.

A Vicar's View of Church Patronage.

PART I.

The Position of the Patron.

§ I. CHURCH Patronage is one of the subjects at present engaging the attention of Parliament, and often very prominent in the public mind. So no doubt the public generally will regard with interest any trustworthy information on this important and yet little understood subject.

Besides the origin and position of the patrons of the Church benefices, two other interesting branches of the subject might be discussed, viz.—the effect of the Patronage system on the clergy; and also, its relation to the laity.

With regard to Church patrons; they are the direct successors in power of the original founders and givers of the endowments of the Church, having a prescriptive right to nominate to the Church benefices, which are said to number about eleven or twelve thousand.

It is calculated that about one half of the Church livings is in the hands of official patrons; that is to say, the Lord Chancellor, the bishops, and others, hold them by virtue of their office. The other half

2 *A Vicar's View of Church Patronage.*

is in the hands of private patrons, whom the law recognises to have in them a property right, as well as a spiritual trust.

To ascertain whether it is just and fair that such a right should be allowed, a glance at the original endower's position is rendered needful. The motive, ruling thought, and argument in the minds of the founders and first patrons, no doubt, was somewhat as follows: They regarded their estates as justly chargeable from year to year with the maintenance of a clergyman. Allowing this, they thought it could matter little in the end if they (on the part of themselves and their heirs) discharged the duty of the estate for ever by giving up land, etc., for a permanent endowment, forasmuch as the nomination to the benefice could be secured to them and their heirs in perpetuity.

It is well known that our parishes and the estate of the ancient endower are commonly co-extensive with each other.¹ Through the commencement of a patronage system, he who before was rather the chaplain and stipendiary to the hall became the permanent and endowed priest for the parish.

¹ The owner and giver of landed property and tithes made by them spiritual provision for all the people living on his property. A parish was frequently of the same extent as an estate; so that the clergyman was chaplain to the landlord and to all the people living within his boundaries. From such an arrangement great diversities must have arisen, for some estates were large and valuable, whilst others were small

The following important and *true* representation is to be found in a publication of the British Anti-State Church Association, now, the Liberation Society.

“In process of time there crept in the endowment of parochial churches, which was not done (says the learned author of the *Origines Ecclesiasticae*) in all places and at the same time, in one and the same way; but it seems to have had its rise from particular founders of churches, who settled manse and glebe upon them, and upon that score were allowed a right of patronage, to present their own clerk and invest him with the revenue wherewith they had endowed it.”¹

The action of the old endowers and builders of our parish churches was the outcome of a principle of

and perhaps more thinly peopled. The question of patronage is easily explained, when we know the historical facts. The person who granted the tithes, or otherwise founded an endowment, appointed the minister from age to age. The people paid nothing, but received the full benefit of a resident clergyman provided by the property of a patron.

In the course of time estates changed hands. Sometimes the purchaser succeeded to the full possession of what his predecessor had enjoyed; whilst at other times the title of ownership of the property, representing nine-tenths of its value, was sold to one, and the right to appoint the clergyman, representing one-tenth, was sold to another. This arrangement, having its origin in the early history of our Church, prevails everywhere at the present day. A landlord may have the patronage in one parish, a bishop in the next, and a stranger to the locality, who may have succeeded to the rights of another, may enjoy the patronage of the next.

So wise and useful is the parochial system, adopted in the early ages of the Church, that even with all our experience and enlightenment at the present day we cannot improve upon it; and all that there is left us to do is to carry out, in all its spirit and entirety, a system so wise, so practical, and so comprehensive. In the tenth century Church property became a recognised legal possession, and Church privileges became a settled right enjoyed by all parishioners.—Rev. R. R. MOORE.

¹ See page 77 of their tract, *Church Patronage*.