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THE
CHURCHMAN

MAY, 1897.

ART. I.—THE QUEEN VICTORIA CLERGY SUSTENTATION FUND.

“IT’S not my turn for dinner to-day.”

Such was the confession of a growing boy, one of the olive-branches of the Vicar in an agricultural East Anglian parish. His father had sent him to the Hall with a message immediately after morning service, and the Squire kindly told him to run home quick or he would be late for dinner. But, alas, poor little man! it was not his turn for dinner that Sunday. In every agricultural labourer’s cottage the whole family would be gathered round their substantial midday meal; but the parson could only afford to give his children a dinner on alternate Sundays.

This story illustrates no isolated case. It represents privations which, beginning some eighteen years ago, when tenants could no longer be found for glebe farms in the Midland counties, have become year by year more widespread and acute as the income from tithe has steadily diminished. In 1878 the country clergy received £112 for every nominal £100 of the tithe rent-charge. Now they receive only £69 17s. 11½d. Thus, the income of a parson who twenty years ago enjoyed from this source a stipend of £200 a year, is now reduced to £122 12s. Concurrently with this gradual pauperization of the clergy in the rural districts, the growth of the population in our urban districts has given rise to the creation of a number of new parishes, with very insufficient provision for the maintenance of the incumbents who have been put in charge of them. As the result of these two processes, the number of benefices of the annual value of between £100 and £200 increased between 1880 and 1892—two years in which statistics of them were specially obtained—from 2,597 to

4,173, and at present, out of the 13,688 incumbents in England and Wales, more than one half are computed to be in receipt of an income of less than £180 a year. The distress of the tithe-receiving clergy, which would be great if it were due only to the causes already mentioned, is further enhanced by the fact that they are the only persons who pay rates in respect of their professional income, and that while this, and as well as their private income, has been steadily falling, the rates have been as steadily rising.

The amount of privation endured by the beneficed clergy at the present time cannot be actually gauged. Some idea might be formed of it by exploring the pigeon-holes in the offices of our various clerical charities, but many of the most deserving sufferers decline to figure as suitors for alms. We hear now and then of one of these sinking into a premature grave for want of sufficient nourishment; but the diminution of physical and mental power which is inflicted on the survivors from the same cause will always remain a matter of conjecture. This much, however, is abundantly clear: the old clerical charities and the various recently-formed diocesan funds for the augmentation of poor benefices, as well as the Church of England Incumbents' Sustentation Fund, which was established in 1873 for making grants to poor incumbents throughout the country, have all proved utterly inadequate to relieve the growing clerical destitution. The idea has been more and more forced upon the minds of Churchmen that nothing can satisfactorily meet the case but a general fund which will embrace the whole Church, will evoke support from all classes of Churchmen, and will remedy all the instances of insufficient clerical incomes.

We may remember that ten years ago a suggestion was made to establish such a Fund as a memorial of the Queen's Jubilee. That suggestion was set aside in favour of the Church House; but the idea was not abandoned. It has since been recommended by Convocation and Diocesan Conferences, and has been urged at Church Congresses; but it was not till last year that a serious attempt was made to set it on foot. In March, 1896, however, Archbishop Benson and the Archbishop of York, in response to a memorial presented to them, appointed a committee of laymen to prepare a definite scheme under which (a) the Church, in her corporate capacity, should take up the whole matter of providing an adequate maintenance for the beneficed clergy; (b) a central fund should be formed to supplement the existing diocesan organizations and to adjust the balance between the richer and poorer dioceses; and (c) a central body should be established with authority to impress upon all Churchmen, from the highest to the

lowest, rich and poor alike, the clearly-defined Christian duty of each man contributing towards the support of the clergy.

The present Clergy Sustentation Fund is the outcome of the deliberations of this committee. It was actually launched on June 26 in last year, when the Archbishops gave their written approval to its constitution, and earnestly commended it to the Church and people of England.

How far does it fulfil the threefold object for which it was called into existence? In the first place, the corporate action of the whole Church is attained by the Fund being under the patronage of the Archbishops and all the Diocesan Bishops of the two provinces of Canterbury and York, and being governed by a board of laymen to which each Diocesan Conference has the right of sending three representatives, and an executive committee of forty-two members, six of whom are nominated by each Archbishop, and the remaining thirty are to be elected by the board. Whether the Fund will eventually secure that all the beneficed clergy shall receive adequate maintenance must, of course, depend on the liberality of Church people; but, at any rate, it provides ample machinery for the purpose. While proposing to effect the object mainly by annual grants, it affords to contributors the opportunity of otherwise appropriating their gifts if they prefer the method of permanent endowment. They may also, if they please, select the unbeneficed instead of the beneficed clergy as the objects of their liberality, and may assign their contributions to a particular diocese or locality. Secondly, the Fund is carefully framed so as to supplement, and not to supersede, diocesan organizations. It encourages the collection of money by and through them, and instead of undertaking itself to select the incumbents which it will aid, it entrusts this responsibility to the diocesan organizations, making block grants to the dioceses according to their needs, and leaving these grants to be allocated by the diocesan authorities in accordance with their local knowledge of the circumstances of the incumbents who require help. The adjustment of the balance between the richer and poorer dioceses is proposed to be effected by requiring each diocese, as a condition of receiving assistance from the Fund, to send up one-fifth of what it collects during the year for annual grants for incumbents. These fifths, together with all direct contributions to the Fund, are to be then lumped together, and the aggregate amount will be distributed among the dioceses according to their necessities. As to the third point—the impressing upon Churchmen the duty of supporting the clergy—the powers of the governing body of the Fund are, it must be confessed, limited. As laymen, they cannot usurp

the position of authoritative teachers. Rather does it lie with the Episcopal Bench, as patrons of the Fund, and custodians of the interests of the Church and clergy, to take the lead in this matter, and with the clergy themselves to educate the people to a sense of their responsibility. By the way, it may be here pointed out that while the central governing body of the Fund is composed exclusively of laymen, there is nothing to prevent a clerical element in the diocesan organizations affiliated to it, and such an element may with advantage be introduced.

There are two points in the above scheme to which serious objection has been taken in some quarters, and a few words of explanation upon them may not be out of place. The policy has been questioned of making annual grants to poor incumbents rather than aiming at the permanent augmentation of the endowment of their benefices. It is true that grants for the latter purpose might evoke similar sums from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners or Queen Anne's Bounty; but against this advantage there are several counterbalancing considerations. Obviously, the same amount of money will go much further towards relieving present distress if distributed annually, than it would if capitalized as endowment. Then the Fund appeals to all classes of Churchmen; but the poor amongst us, while they may fairly be expected to assist in supporting the clergy of their own day, can hardly be asked to provide for the wants of a future generation. Further, many poor benefices are in private patronage, and, as the law now stands, their permanent augmentation would enhance the value of private property by adding to the price at which the advowsons could be sold. Then, again, population is migratory, and many of these benefices are in parts of the country where it is diminishing, and may diminish still further. If it were practically to vanish, the transfer of a permanent endowment to a place where it was really required, would be attended with great expense and difficulty; but no such obstacles would stand in the way of the annual grant being transferred to a parish where it would be of practical use. Lastly, the case is not unknown of a poor benefice being held by a very undesirable incumbent, who, though he cannot be got rid of by law, is by no means deserving of an extra subsidy for his maintenance. An annual grant can be withdrawn in such a case, but if there had been a permanent augmentation of the benefice the unworthy incumbent would continue to enjoy the benefit of it.

The other point in the rules of the Fund on which a doubt has arisen is the policy of requiring one-fifth of the sum collected in a diocese to be sent up to the head office as a condition of the diocese being affiliated to the Fund, and

entitled to share its benefits. It should be stated that this requirement is confined to contributions collected in the diocese for immediate grants to incumbents, and does not extend to money raised for the permanent endowment of benefices. Insistence upon it appears, however, to be essential, if the Fund is to maintain its position as a general fund for the whole Church, and a channel for conveying the superabundant wealth of one portion of it into a quarter which stands in need of external assistance. So long as the Central Fund receives large contributions directly into its own coffers, each affiliated diocese may reckon with confidence on receiving back its fifth with an addition of more or less besides. But the Fund encourages decentralization as regards the collection no less than the distribution of the money, and the time might come when, but for this rule of pooling, so to speak, a certain proportion of the diocesan funds, each diocese would be reduced to provide for its own wants, and the poorer districts would receive no assistance from those in which greater wealth was located. The principle in question lies, therefore, at the root of the whole scheme of the Fund, and a diocese which objects to it can hardly avoid the imputation that it is more regardful of its own interests than of those of the whole Church.

But it is time now that we should pass on to inquire what progress the Fund has actually made during the first ten months of its existence. The total sum contributed or promised to it up to the present time, including affiliation payments from eight dioceses, amounts to upwards of £29,000. Out of this, £5,500 was voted in February to eight dioceses which qualified themselves for receiving grants by sending up their prescribed fifth in respect of the year 1896. The apportionment of the amount between these dioceses was arrived at by taking into account (a) the number of poor benefices in each; (b) the extent to which the diocese had suffered from agricultural depression; (c) its capacity for self-help; and (d) the amount of contribution for affiliation remitted to the Central Fund. As the outcome of these considerations, the total was divided between the dioceses according to the following table :

Norwich ...	...	...	...	1,350
St. Albans ...	...	...	...	900
Exeter ...	...	...	...	700
Salisbury ...	...	...	...	700
Carlisle ...	...	...	...	500
Llandaff ...	...	...	...	500
Peterborough ...	...	...	...	500
Truro ...	...	...	...	350

5,500

This vote immediately enabled the St. Albans Diocesan Poor Benefices Fund to distribute £1,215 among eighty-five of the most necessitous benefices in the diocese.

Nor is it only in the general work of the Fund that a beginning has been made. Although the present idea is to assist the incumbents of poor livings by yearly grants, its constitution expressly contemplates its instrumentality being made use of to help the unbeneficed clergy as well, and to provide, if thought desirable, permanent endowments instead of annual subsidies. And advantage has already been taken of the facilities which it affords for the creation of special forms of clerical sustentation. An anonymous London merchant, after contributing £500 to the general purposes of the Fund, has offered to give another £1,500 towards augmenting the permanent endowment of fifteen poor livings within what is known as Greater London, in the patronage of the Bishop of the Diocese or the incumbent of the mother church, provided that in each case his gift is met by benefactions from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, Queen Anne's Bounty, or private sources, sufficient in the whole, with his own gift, to augment the endowment of the living by at least £1,200.

But the contributions to the Central Fund, and the amount of direct assistance afforded by it to necessitous incumbents, represent only a part of its operation and value. Considerable progress has already been made in the work of stimulating diocesan efforts in the same direction. Since the Fund was started, several new diocesan organizations for clergy sustentation have been founded as a result of the interest in the subject which the formation of the Central Fund has evoked. Out of the thirty-four dioceses of the two provinces, seventeen have already attached their local organizations to the new Fund, and six others are in course of doing so; and, as the advantages of affiliation to it become gradually realized by experience, the remaining eleven dioceses will doubtless connect themselves with the general scheme.

This is something by way of a beginning, but it would be idle to pretend that it can be regarded as satisfactory in view of what is actually required. It was calculated in 1893 that if all the benefices below £100 a year were passed over as too hopeless for adequate assistance, and an attempt were to be made to raise to £200 a year the 4,173 benefices which were then between that figure and £100 in annual value, this process alone would require £210,000 a year, or a capital sum of £7,000,000. The Fund, as we have seen, actually began its career within a week after the commencement of the sixtieth year of Her Majesty's reign. Having regard to this circumstance, and to the fact that a similar fund would have been

established in 1886-7 to commemorate the Queen's Jubilee, if the project of the Church House had not at that time been considered to possess a prior claim on the liberality of Churchmen, it has been very widely felt that the new Fund ought to be generally adopted as the Church's memorial of the present year. Her Majesty has herself recognised the fitness of this course by granting permission for the Fund to be called the Queen Victoria Clergy Sustentation Fund. How is it to be rendered worthy of the Church, of the occasion with which its inception will always be inseparably linked, and of the want which it is designed to meet? This is the problem before us, and it can only be solved by concerted local action throughout the country. The Fund is wisely anxious not to create an expensive central machinery in London. For the accomplishment of its objects it appeals to the various dioceses, and it looks to the bishops to take the lead in pressing the movement upon the attention of clergy and laity alike. It has been suggested that collections for the object should be universally made on June 20 or 27, and episcopal authority will be of the utmost value in pressing this suggestion. Efforts, however, must not only be general, they must be also sustained. The Sixtieth Year commemoration will come and go, but clergy distress will remain with us as a constant problem. The same line of action is required to grapple with it as was selected by the late Archbishop for his system of Church Defence. The organization of the Fund must be carried out in dioceses, rural deaneries and parishes. Large contributions from a few wealthy Churchmen very properly form its nucleus; but if it is to take root as a permanent institution, and to grow to the dimensions to which it must attain in order adequately to meet the necessities of the case, it must rely mainly on the small contributions of the many, collected without cost by voluntary effort.

Archbishop Benson's network of Church Committees supplies more than a mere model upon which the Fund might be locally developed. It may appropriately become the actual machinery of the Fund itself. Church Defence and Church Sustentation are near akin, and now that the immediate urgency of the former object is for a time suspended, the discovery of a further object to which the Ruridecanal and Parochial committees may devote their energies will stimulate these committees where they exist, and help towards their formation where they have not yet been organized. Let them, then, be called together on the occasion of this summer's commemoration, just as they would be convened if a fresh attack on the Church were imminent. It is no deplorable conflict in which they are now asked to engage. Their

services are required in promoting the discharge of one of the foremost of Christian duties—the support of the Christian ministry. Gratitude for national blessings in general is being widely put forward as a ground for responding to the other appeals which are crowded upon us in this auspicious year. Surely the preservation of our ancient Church endowments and property from the spoliation with which they were not long ago threatened, is a special mercy which Churchmen ought peculiarly to recognise. And in what more fitting way could they show their thankfulness for it than by making up the deficiencies which, owing to various changes of circumstances, those endowments have become incapable of supplying? For other objects, the means of canvassing and collection require to be carefully elaborated. But for this enterprise we already possess a machinery ready to hand, and all that is required is that we should be at the pains to use it. The Fund, it must be regretfully confessed, has not been put forward as a Sixtieth Year scheme with quite such promptitude as some other less important objects. But, with these advantages in its favour, it will more than hold its own, if Churchmen in every parish and rural deanery will put their shoulders to the wheel in promoting it. It is to be hoped that the clergy will not, through any false modesty, be backward in urging the laity to their duty. In the face of the Offertory Sentences which they are bidden to read in the Communion Service, they cannot pretend that it is wrong or indelicate to set this duty before their people in reference to themselves, and still less in reference to their needy fellow-clergy. Rather does the Church teach them that they are under a positive obligation to do it. While, however, the clergy should encourage and foster local efforts in support of the Fund, it is by the people themselves that the active work in each rural deanery and parish must be done. Laymen with considerable expenditure of time and thought have started the scheme. They expect with confidence that the laity throughout the country, under the teaching of the clergy, will, by persevering exertions begun in the present year and continued in the years to come, make the Queen Victoria Clergy Sustentation Fund a permanent and adequate agency for removing from the Church of England the reproach and danger of possessing an ill-paid ministry.

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