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THE  
CHURCHMAN

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JUNE, 1888.

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ART I.—THE CLERGY AND THE MASSES.—THE  
ECONOMIC ASPECT OF THE CLERICAL PROFESSION.

FOR some time past there has existed amongst Churchmen a certain degree of misgiving as to whether the number of clergymen was increasing quite as fast as the multitude of people to whom they have to minister. It has been clearly seen that if this be not the case, then the work of the Church is likely in the long-run to suffer. On the one hand, the growth of our population is an unquestionable fact of modern times: it increases at the rate of about 300,000 every year. But, upon the other hand, the corresponding and continuous growth of the clergy who are to serve these ever-augmenting masses cannot be so easily and indisputably established. Even if the clergy remained stationary in number, perhaps some compensation may be found in the more advantageous distribution of them which has been thought to have occurred, many clergymen being drawn from less populous neighbourhoods into the larger centres of population. The extent of this transfer, if it exists, we have no means of estimating with any arithmetical precision. But when every concession has been granted in this direction which could be claimed, any want of elasticity in the supply of clergy could not be contemplated without dismay.

For the first time, however, in recent years, and perhaps for the first time since attention was given to the question, the figures which are before the world with regard to the past year—1887—furnish any substantial ground of anxiety. For many years past the number of clergymen annually ordained has been steadily increasing; increasing, not perhaps quite so fast as we might like, but still continuously increasing at the rate of (roughly speaking) about fifty in the year. Now, how-

ever, there is a drop; and the drop is no less than about a hundred in the year. In illustration of this it may suffice to cite the precise figures for the five years last past. Taking priests and deacons together, the deacons being about one half of the total, there were 1,512 candidates ordained in 1883; 1,514 in 1884; 1,546 in 1885; 1,605 in 1886; and only 1,501 in 1887. New sources from which clergy may be drawn are continually being opened in the form of colleges, examinations, and even foreign universities, so that only 58 per cent. of the year's candidates were in 1887 graduates of Oxford or Cambridge. But notwithstanding all facilities the fall has occurred. It is of course premature to assert positively that the change is anything more than momentary, accidental, casual. Time alone can show whether there is to be any recovery from the fall. But meantime the fall is too considerable to be left altogether out of our calculations for the proximate future. Figures do not generally move in this eccentric fashion without a cause. When a rising barometer suddenly falls, it is generally the symptom of disturbance to follow.

We must nevertheless be careful not to represent the position as worse than it really is. It has been calculated that in 1840 there were 1,137 people to every clergyman. In estimating the increment of to-day, there are so many qualifying circumstances—clergymen not engaged in parochial work, the supply of death vacancies and so forth—that an atmosphere of uncertainty threatens to gather around almost any calculation that could be made. It is therefore best to put our estimate in the simplest possible form. We have, then, this unquestionable fact, derived from counting the names one by one, that in 1887 there were 734 new deacons ordained. It has been estimated—but this is a matter of approximation—that 460 are required to fill death vacancies. Deduct 460 from 734 and we have a net gain for 1887 of 274 new clergymen. Distribute these over the 300,000 new people, and we have 1,094 people to each of the new clergymen. Set this against the figure for 1840 and it is quite clear that, even with last year's fall, the ranks of the clergy, judged by the 1840 standard, are still holding their own against the growth of population.

Where, then, it may be asked, lies the dread significance of the figures of 1887? It lies in this—that for several years before the profession had actually been gaining, at a tolerably steady rate, upon population; but last year the tendency was suddenly reversed, and the profession but just held its own.

We are considering the sacred profession for the moment not at all in its higher spiritual relations, but rather in its professional, its non-religious aspect. We are thinking of the parallels that might exist, or that ought to exist, between it

and other professions; thinking how far it is amenable to the same laws of supply and demand as they are with regard to surplusage or depletion in its ranks; and how far some special law of its own, having no application to other professions, may have been at work in producing the actual results in the clerical profession to which we are drawing attention.

In this direction there is a striking contrast between the profession of the clergyman and the sister learned professions. The universal complaint is that all professions are nowadays overcrowded. In the law it is perfectly well known that many more aspirants are called to the bar than ever are likely to make a living out of it. But there are several other avenues of employment which may be effectively occupied by members of the legal profession, and to which accordingly the surplusage of unemployed barristers is continually attracted. In the meantime there are great prizes open to the successful men in that profession, and a fresh recruit tempted into its overcrowded ranks is unable to say that one of these prizes will not in due time fall to him. The medical profession is so far sufficiently recruited that there is never a vacant post, however modest or obscure, but it can be immediately and suitably filled up. The army again, in the officers' department, is so far overcrowded that there are numbers of men who desire to be soldiers, and who are well fitted to be soldiers, but whom the existing limits of the army cannot receive. These men are actually seen at times (as in the case of the South African Cavalry) overflowing into the rank and file, when a suitable opportunity offers. Or, once more, if we look to the navy, the case is still the same. Continually we witness measures which are simply directed against overstocking the profession; and so one day we hear that the competition is severe, and that the examinations for entry become stiffer and stiffer, while the next day it is whispered that the authorities are racking their brains for a plan to accelerate promotion and to get rid of some of those who already occupy the ranks of the profession.

From all directions, then, the same cry arises with regard to those professions which can be adopted by men of that class of society from which the clergy have been mostly drawn. And the cry universally is that the professions are overcrowded. How comes it to pass, then, that the sacred profession forms the one exception to this complaint? The clerical profession is certainly not overcrowded. We may have, perhaps, even our little differences of opinion as to whether it is gaining or losing. But no one ever thought of maintaining that the market is overstocked. From all those who are conversant with the religious interests of the masses, the cry

invariably comes that men are wanted, even not less than money.

Yet there are some considerations which, it might be thought, would have a tendency to make it otherwise. There is absolutely no existing profession in which it is so easy to make some sort of an income immediately on starting. There is probably no other profession in which an ordinary recruit will find it even possible to make (say) £120 or £130 in the first year or two after entering his profession. Yet this is commonly done by a newly-ordained clergyman. True, there is not much to follow. But there is a certain class of minds upon which this initial fact would be likely to exercise considerable influence. There is a certain indolence of disposition, which is not suited to great enterprises of fortune, which cannot brace itself, and which in many cases cannot even afford, to make large ventures in the present for the sake of vaster prospective advantages in the future. Upon such characters, when in a mere worldly sense they are weighing the several professions open to them, the certainty of a present advantage, however modest, would be likely to exert an almost irresistible attraction.

Another fact which might be thought likely to have contributed to the overcrowding of the clerical profession is the social position occupied by the clergy. There probably never was a time, and there is perhaps no other country, in which the clergy have stood so high in social esteem as they do in the present era in England. There are scores of possible candidates for Holy Orders to whom it would be an unquestioned social gain if they could secure admission into the profession. Indeed, this has been sometimes reckoned a danger to the Church, as tending to invite the candidacy of unworthy men from low and improper motives. It is not necessary to estimate here the precise extent of this danger; but the very existence of such a fear is sufficient proof that there are some worldly considerations at work which *pro tanto* would tend to make the supply of clergy not only ample but superabundant.

How, then, it may be asked again, does it come to pass that the fact is the very reverse of this? Five-and-twenty years ago it used often to be said that the unsettlement of religious belief would certainly render men indisposed to enter the sacred profession. That was a prophecy frequently to be heard at the time of that movement of English religious thought of which the publication of *Essays and Reviews* might be taken as a symptom. It may be doubted, however, whether, after all, much influence can be ascribed to that cause. For notwithstanding all unsettlement there have been year by year more and more men taking upon them the obligations of clergy-

men until this last year, when the stream has been suddenly reversed.

Something, no doubt, must be set down to the account of a fact which all serious people heartily welcome, viz., the growth and spread of higher views of the responsibilities of clergymen. As a higher standard is realized, fewer men will feel themselves equal to attempting it. It is a fact that most of the younger clergy desire work. If rectors want assistant curates, the rector who stands the best chance of getting one is the rector who can plunge his assistant into the whirl of a severe, a taxing, an insatiable organization and can show him work.

When, however, all has been said and every allowance has been made, it must be feared that a very commonplace cause has been largely effective in producing the result which is being discussed. The result, it may be repeated, is new, and the cause must be new also. Have the financial difficulties of the clergy anything to do with it? This does not mean that men who seek or who decline the ministerial office are chiefly influenced by questions of income. But their parents cannot be always insensible to such questions; and it is the influence of parents which is often responsible either for guiding a young man into the sacred profession or deterring him from it. Perhaps there is no better type of clergyman and no more divinely assured "call" to be found than can be seen in the case of a man who seems to be "called from his mother's womb;" who from his earliest consciousness has always thought of himself as "going to be a clergyman," and who, when the hour of decision has come, has welcomed the sacred office with eager delight as the realization of all the dreams which had grown about him in his home. It was once said by a Bishop of old time that many of his best clergy were the sons of clergymen. But how many clergy of the present day can afford to bring up their sons to be clergymen? The patrimony has been divided and subdivided perhaps for two or three generations past; and though there has been a line of clergymen in the family, it becomes necessary that the sons should now go somewhere else, where an income can be made.

The sum of the matter is simply this: that at the present day the Church has not money enough to do her work properly. Sooner or later those who are in positions to make their voices heard will have to speak far more plainly upon the question than they have felt justified in doing yet. We have depended upon the possessions of the past, and those possessions are failing us. Already we hear of men being appointed to positions, not because they are most suitable, but simply because they are rich, and the position cannot be maintained without their wealth. It is a scandal that it should be so.

But the laws of tendency cannot be escaped; and if the people of this country continue in the same mind, if they expect their clergy to be, upon the whole, a married clergy, and moving in the full tide of such life as they live themselves, one or other of two alternatives must infallibly take place—either some vast and successful effort must be made, or, most disastrously and most paradoxically, the facts of modern life being what they are, the profession of a clergyman must in the future become a profession mainly for those who are rich.

H. T. ARMPFIELD.

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ART. II.—CLERICAL LIFE IN IRELAND A HUNDRED AND FIFTY YEARS AGO.

SKETCHES of social life in the far past have always an interest for us. We propose in this and another article to furnish the readers of the *CHURCHMAN* with some outlines of clerical and church life in Ireland in the last century. In the present article we shall have space for but one record. We propose to sketch the life history of one of those ideal country parsons whom the brilliant author of the "Deserted Village" has immortalised. We rejoice in the conviction that there were not a few such men.

Philip Skelton graduated in Trinity College, Dublin, in 1728, the year of Goldsmith's birth. He came of farming parents in the County Antrim. His taste for books originally sprang from a device of his father's. The quaint farmer used to put Philip to all the most disagreeable farm duties, and at the same time to place books within his reach. Whether at first repelled by the drudgery of the hand-barrow, or attracted by the novelty of the books, it is certain that Skelton soon bade farewell to farming, and developed decided literary tastes.

A stormy undergraduate course was not uncommon in those days. Quarrels with the town and plots against the authorities were too frequent to be noteworthy. In all Skelton took his part. As he left college he is described as a man "of a figure somewhat odd and terrific, a large-sized man of a majestic appearance." He was an accomplished athlete in those days, and possessed great physical strength, which he found use for more than once in later years. There was no match for him in the game of "long bullets" in his native parish of Derriagh. On one occasion this game, which consisted in a contest as to who should "put" the bullet farthest along a country road, had nearly-proved fatal. On the first morning of his life on which he had omitted his prayers, he