the human writer so exactly, if that be possible, as to be able to put ourselves into his place, we are yet only at the beginning of exegesis. We have still to ask the question, what the Divine voice had to say through this human testimony in relation to our Lord and His kingdom that was to come. His Alpha and Omega, or rather He Himself, as the Alpha and the Omega, can alone furnish the reply. To Himself or to the Spirit, Who is His representative amongst us, we must look for this. I will only add one thought in conclusion, which springs naturally out of the context of Rev. xxii. 13. "Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. I am the Alpha and Omega." Is He Himself the Alpha and Omega of all that we speak or write in His Name? "He that speaketh of himself, seeketh his own glory; but he that seeketh His glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him." "To him that worketh righteousness shall be a sure reward."

C. H. WALLER.

ART. IV.—THE PARISH CHURCHES BILL.

THE agitation about Church Reform is already passing out of the stage of discussion into that of action, as it is quite right and time it should. Foremost of these enterprises of reform—so far, at least, as the present Parliament is concerned—is the "Parish Churches Bill," introduced into the House of Lords by the Bishop of Peterborough, and read a first time on January 21st. It is a Bill of no great length, since it contains altogether only seven enacting clauses, and two of those are formal only; but its importance must not be measured by its length. Its title describes it as "An Act to declare and enact the Law as to the Rights of Parishioners in their Parish Churches;" and its preamble recites that "whereas according to the common law of this realm, every parish church in England and Wales is for the free use, in common, of all

"Inspiration and Interpretation," p. 141 (published in 1861, twenty-five years ago). But surely modern exegesis still concerns itself far more with the literal sense which Scripture had to the ears of its first hearers, than with the discovery of its meaning in relation to Christ. The position of Joseph or Moses among the Egyptian dynasties, is far more interesting to most readers than the relation of either of them to Christ. Yet He alone is the Alpha and Omega of either story. The Scripture narrative will make no real history (any more than consonants without vowels can be read intelligibly) apart from Him.

parishioners for the purposes of Divine worship;" and whereas "these rights have, for many years past, been infringed in many places by the appropriation of seats and pews to certain of the parishioners to the exclusion of others, and especially of the poorer classes," etc., it is "expedient that such common law be declared, with a view to its better observance." The main enacting clause, in which the gist of the Bill is to be found, is the fourth, which runs thus:

> From and after the passing of this Act, it shall not be lawful for any Archbishop, Bishop, ordinary, court, or any corporation, or other person or persons whomsoever, to issue any faculty granting or confirming, or purporting to grant or confirm, or in any other way to appropriate, any seat or pew in any parish church to, or in favour of, any person or persons whomsoever, except in the cases hereafter provided.

Then follow clauses preserving existing rights to Church seats, so far as they rest on a legal basis, such as faculty or private proprietorship, and saving also pews and pew-rents authorized by "an instrument or scale" under any of the Church Building Acts—public, local or private; and there is, likewise, a clause warranting the use of the chancel by the officiating ministers and their assistants.

To what extent—upon how many of our churches would the Bill operate if it became an Act of Parliament? What would be the effects produced by it were it applied?

The promoters have furnished us with information upon the first point. They estimate the number of churches which would come under the saving clauses at 2,000 "at the outside;" and thus 13,000 of our churches would remain as the number directly affected by the provisions of the proposed Bill.

This fact of itself shows how carefully those provisions should be scanned. Regarded merely as to the range of its operation, the Bill is an extremely important one; and under the able escort and eloquent advocacy of the Bishop of Peterborough its prospect of success, at any rate in the House of Lords, cannot be deemed inconsiderable.

That prelate has endeavoured to allay the alarm which its somewhat sweeping Clause 4 has excited by a letter of explanation addressed to the *Times* newspaper in the end of January, which was so generally copied into other newspapers and periodicals and commented on that it can hardly have escaped our readers' notice. It appears that the Bill, as formerly launched in the House of Commons, contained in its fourth clause the word "assign" as well as the word "appropriate;" and that the Bishop made it a condition in taking charge of the Bill that the word "assign" should be omitted. The effect of this omission he takes to be that all permanent appropriation of seats in parish churches would be prevented,

"leaving to churchwardens whatever right they now may have of seating the parishioners from time to time, whether from Sunday to Sunday, or for longer periods." The Bishop states also in his letter that he is strongly of opinion that the churchwardens ought to have and exercise this power, and ought to have it too "in the interests of the poor." "The rich under any system may be trusted to take care of themselves; but the poor, on the absolutely free and open system—*i.e.*, a system where there is no regulating of the sittings—would run the risk of being thrust into corners in the struggle for accommodation with their wealthier and more influential neighbours."

We cannot but express our astonishment, at the outset, that the friends of the Bill should have been willing to accept the Bishop of Peterborough's championship on the terms he imposed. Its chief promoters are the London "Free and Open Church Association." In the recent "Official Year Book," the leading claim put forward for the Association is its promotion of the "Parish Churches Bill." Now, it is this very Association which has, for some years past, been most frequent and vehement in denouncing the practice of "assigning" sittings. Again and again its "organ" has returned to the charge, objecting to any interference of the churchwardens in the matter of "seating the parishioners," and even denying, with a magnificent disdain of Church Courts and judicial deliverances, that the churchwardens have any such powers whatever as those which the Bishop of Peterborough thinks so necessary and salutary. Nay, in order to clinch the controversy, it has gone the length of asserting that the churchwardens are not ecclesiastical officers at all!

However, all this ought to be dropped now, and we should be glad to hear no more of it.[1] If the Bishop of Peterborough cannot get their Bill through the Lords, no one else can do so; and we may safely trust the Bishop to have laid down clearly and definitely the conditions on which alone he was willing to take charge of it. But the further question arises, whether the omission stipulated for by the Bishop will secure the points which he desires to safeguard? We must confess to some misgivings on that subject. The very object and purpose of the Bill—at any rate, one main object and purpose of it, as originally conceived and promoted by the "Free and Open Church Association"—was to oust the churchwardens

[1] We remark, however, that the secretary to the Association (Mr. T. Bowater Vernon) reiterates the notions here alluded to in letters to the *Church Times* of March 5th and 12th. How this is to be reconciled with the understanding arrived at with the Bishop of Peterborough we are not informed.

from their ancient functions of allotting pews or sittings in the churches. Now we think it by no means unlikely—for reasons which will appear by-and-by—that the Bill, even if it became an Act, would remain to a very large extent a dead letter. But if it became effective at all, we suspect that its terms, as they now stand, would just as decisively as before shut out the churchwardens from doing that which the Bishop of Peterborough wishes them to do. And we half suspect that the zealots of the "Free and Open Church Association" know this, and mean it too. We do not think they would care much about the Bill at all, if they did not anticipate this result from it. And, indeed, how are we to distinguish in a sufficiently precise and technical manner the "assignment" of sittings which the Bishop of Peterborough intends to permit, from "appropriation," which he proposes to forbid? He thinks that the 4th clause, as it now stands, would prevent "permanent appropriation," whilst the churchwardens might still "assign" seats "from Sunday to Sunday, or for longer periods." But even now no churchwardens can "assign" or "appropriate" for a longer period than their own year of office, at least in the 13,000 churches that are affected by this Bill. Will the clause as now drawn prevent this annual "assignment" or "appropriation," or not? If it will not, the clause is needless and nugatory. There are already ample powers for correcting such an abuse of churchwardens' powers as is involved in "permanent appropriation," *i.e.*, appropriation beyond the term of the churchwardens' office who grant the appropriation. On the contrary, if the clause does interdict such appropriation for the churchwardens' year of office, it also, in effect, interdicts it for six months, or a month, and practically abolishes altogether the churchwardens' control over the business of seating the parishioners. In other words, we do not understand how a churchwarden can "assign" a sitting for such "longer periods than from Sunday to Sunday" —such periods as the Bishop speaks of—without having thereby "appropriated" that sitting for the time to the allottee, and so doing the very thing prohibited in the fourth clause of the Bill.

The Bill has alarmed many incumbents and churchwardens. We think it likely that their apprehensions are very much greater than they need to be. The Bill contains no machinery for giving effect to its own provisions. We feel, indeed, somewhat doubtful whether this defect in it does not place the Imperial Parliament in a somewhat unfitting attitude towards the subject with which the Bill deals. Its preamble tells us that the law has been for many years infringed, and the rights of the parishioners in many places invaded; but it does not propose to do any-

thing to vindicate the law, nor does it offer any remedy whatever to the parishioners supposed to be aggrieved. Is it not rather idle to declare that the law has been systematically set at nought, and then to re-enact it without attempting to secure its better observance? We could wish also—if there is to be any legislation at all about these matters—that greater facilities might be given for getting rid of those pew-rents and pew-proprietorships which modern legislation has created in many places. Circumstances have changed very much in parts of our large towns, and many of the churches built thirty or fifty years ago are saddled with arrangements which now encumber them sorely. The Act 32 and 33 Vict., c. 94, is useful, but does not go far enough, nor give facilities enough. We will add, too, as regards the Parish Churches Bill, that we should greatly prefer to leave dealings with church sittings to the Ordinary. If his jurisdiction is too limited, let it be enlarged and strengthened, and let cheap and easy redress be provided for grievances about sittings, or the want of sittings; but we do not care to see the business transferred to Parliament, nor desire, generally speaking, interference on the part of Parliament with the internal affairs of the Church.

It is stated, we think with truth, that there are many churches in which appropriation and pew-rents prevail without any regular and legal sanction. In some cases no "instrument or scale," such as the Bill alludes to, and such as might lawfully have been framed when the church was consecrated, has ever existed. But matters have gone on very well from the first, and it is quite certain that, had there been no such provision for the incumbent, and no such arrangements for the people, the churches, or some of them at any rate, would never have been built at all. The weekly offertory is not in favour everywhere even now, and to have proposed it twenty or five-and-twenty years ago as the main source of supply for church expenses and incumbent's salary, would have been utterly futile. We are not saying that this ought to have been so, but are simply stating the fact. The Parish Churches Bill would simply confiscate the incomes of clergymen in the position we have described, if it became operative at all; for its saving clauses reserve only those pew-rents which have been "expressly authorized" by legal instrument. No mere understanding that there should be pew-rents, however long and unbroken, would save them. Now if the Ecclesiastical Commissioners were prepared at once to endow these churches, no doubt their incumbents would be only too glad to have it so. But we all know that the Commissioners will, and indeed can, do nothing of the sort; their resources, like those of too many of our country clergy, have been sadly crippled by the agri-

cultural depression. And thus the Parish Churches Bill would, in law at least, sweep away the whole revenues of many incumbencies, and with them, too, those of many churchwardens. For the church expenses in such churches are frequently met by a sum annually set aside out of the pew-rents.

There is another class of churches not so wholly dependent on pew-rents, but which might be much embarrassed by the proposed legislation. We may take St. Peter's, Eaton Square, as an instance. Many of our readers may recollect a public statement made by its late vicar, now Bishop of Truro, since his elevation to the Bench. He said that Bishop Jackson, in collating him to the benefice, made it a condition that he should not seek to do away with the pew-rents; that at the time he much regretted the Bishop's determination in this respect; that he had since been convinced that it was a wise determination, for the pew-rents had furnished the salaries of the clergy who served the church, and left the large offertories—which otherwise would necessarily have been drawn upon for those salaries—free to be devoted entirely to various pious and charitable purposes. Now we never heard that St. Peter's Church was, during Dr. Wilkinson's incumbency, slack in its duties to the poor, or that it was shunned by such of the poor as might be regarded as belonging to it. And we have no doubt at all that this is far from being an isolated case. The sudden and summary abolition of all pew-rents except those saved by legal and statutory securities would undoubtedly involve a severe loss to many a missionary undertaking, and to many a medical charity. Congregations would have to use strenuous efforts to provide the stipends for those who ministered to them. It is most true that the same persons find the money, whether it comes in the shape of pew-rents or oblations. But it does not follow that the same amount would be forthcoming from the latter source alone, if the former method were done away with. Perhaps it ought to be so, but those who have had practical experience in parish work know that it would not be so, at any rate not at first, nor, as we think, for a long time. The truth is that a congregation needs to be trained and taught, and that sometimes for a long period, to value and support the weekly offertory. We hold it to be the more primitive scriptural and excellent system of Church Finance. All we say is that it is not expedient to throw our congregations generally on it all at once; and we believe that not a little anxiety, suffering, and irritation would be caused by such a sharp sweep as the "Free and Open Church Associationists" would seemingly wish to make.

Appropriation is sometimes set off against the rights of

parishioners, as if the two things were opposed. They are not necessarily so at all. On the contrary, there are not a few cases in which the rights of parishioners and their free use of their parish church cannot be secured without appropriation. What is to become of the parishioners in such places as Scarborough, Eastbourne, Torquay, if the rule is to be merely "first come first served"? Or are the residents in such favoured spots to be expected to provide sufficient accommodation, not only for themselves, but for all visitors at the fashionable seasons? The rights of parishioners, if by that term we are to understand those whose homes are in the parish, will assuredly be not only infringed, but utterly destroyed for the time, unless their own places are kept for them in church. It does not follow, of course, that those places ought to be kept empty. In many of the best-regulated churches of our watering-places, all seats unoccupied when the last bell commences five minutes before the hour of service, may be taken by any who want them. Nor is appropriation, thus limited and guarded, necessary in resorts such as those just mentioned only. A church that is served by an eloquent preacher, or has reputation for a superior service, attracts crowds in London and our other large towns, crowds drawn from all parts. In truth, the "Free, Open, and Unappropriated" system is in some of its aspects rather congregational than parochial. If the parishioners, to whom a favourite or fashionable church belongs, intend to keep their rights in a populous district, they can only do it by that very appropriation which the Bill declares to have taken those rights away. And in truth, so pressing has this necessity become, that even churches that proclaim themselves "free and unappropriated" have sometimes to resort to devices which are very inconsistent with that profession, in order to provide some accommodation for their regular worshippers. The writer occasionally, when in London, attends a much-frequented church, which is declared to be and always has been "free and unappropriated." Having more than once been at the doors before they were opened to the public, he has gone in with the first and found to his astonishment the church already three-parts full. On inquiring from a friend, who is a "member of the congregation," he ascertained that those who regularly attend are admitted at a side door in a by-street, upon the production of the incumbent's visiting card. We must say that an acknowledged appropriation would be more straightforward. We will only add to this part of our remarks that where the church sittings are ample in number for the population, we cannot see any reason why each parishioner should not have his own place in church allotted

to him if he so desire. He might well, in such instances, have it without injury to any other parishioner, and this is the great principle to be kept in view throughout. Doubtless churchwardens ought to take care that no quasi-proprietorships are established, and by way of precaution would do wisely to assign, by written circular, certain sittings to certain persons at the commencement of the churchwarden's year of office, and for that year only; thus the churchwardens would in effect resume possession of the sittings on behalf of the parish every year. Annexing of seats to certain tenements is, on many grounds, objectionable, and probably, unless done by faculty, illegal. But we cannot see why the desire to have "one's own place in church" is so censurable as some of our ardent Churchmen of the modern school appear to think it.

There is one thing which the Parish Churches Bill would certainly accomplish. It would put an end to the practice of "Nominal Grants" made by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, for the purpose of bringing churches under certain of the old Church Building Acts. These Acts provide that four-fifths of the sittings may be let, whereas under the New Parishes Act of 1856 no more than one-half can be so. The history of this practice seems worth rehearsing. It goes back to the conclusion of the great war, when a "thank-offering" of a million and a half of money was voted for the erection of additional churches, and a church-building Commission was created for the purpose of administering it. This Commission was charged to make "a certain number" of free seats in the churches built by it, the exact number not being fixed. In 1856 the present Ecclesiastical Commission took over the functions of the older one, and with them a few thousand pounds that remained of the money voted by Parliament in 1818. This has been doled out in very small sums—as small as £5—and the Commissioners thus bring the churches that receive this grant under the old Church Building Acts, and are statutably enabled to impose a proportion of rented sittings which the more recent Acts do not allow. We may be assured that the Commissioners have believed themselves to be acting for the best in this matter. They have doubtless only resorted to this expedient of making a "nominal grant" when strongly solicited to do so by circumstances, or by the local promoters of some new church, who do not see their way to any better arrangement. At the same time the expedient has rather the appearance of an evasion of the law, and has become something of a scandal. Still, there is no reason why an Act of Parliament should be resorted to. The Bishops are all Ecclesiastical Commissioners, and could bring about the cessation of

this very objectionable practice if they chose to do so at any time.[1] Still better, if they will get their colleagues promptly to vote away the small remaining balance of the old Parliamentary fund—there are a very few thousand pounds only now left—the possibility, and with it the temptation, to create new churches, which are almost wholly pew-rented and so proprietary, will be done away with.

The writer does not wish to conceal his personal opinion, based upon a considerable and somewhat varied experience, that the "Free, Open, and Unappropriated" system is by far the best in itself. He believes that the classes for whom the greatest responsibility and anxiety is now felt, those that live on their weekly earnings, greatly prefer, as a rule—though not without exception—those churches where there is absolutely no distinction attempted between man and man. And those classes of our people, too, are generally found quite as willing as any to support, according to their means, the weekly offertory, which is the financial handmaid of that system. He thinks, too, that when the system has broken down it has sometimes done so because it has not been carefully and thoroughly prepared for, and carried into effect. A church worked on this plan ought to have every sitting provided with its own kneeler, Bible, Prayer Book, and Hymn Book. The people ought to have nothing to take to church but themselves. Separation of the sexes will return inevitably in populous communities. The idea of the church congregation as an aggregate of families, which came in with pews, will depart with them, amidst not a few tender regrets from old-fashioned people. The churches that are well attended ought to have their faithful churchwardens and sidesmen, who will not grudge the trouble of being present as soon as the church doors are opened. They need not, indeed, "seat the parishioners," for the best way of doing that is mostly to leave them in an unappropriated church to seat themselves; but they should be ready to give information, and interpose where there is occasion. It is also a question whether the best way of "seating a church" is not in these days to have chairs only. These are now made in very convenient, comfortable, and cheap forms, and when benches are fixed, even

[1] Since this article was written it has been announced that the Ecclesiastical Commissioners have, on the motion of the Bishop of Peterborough, resolved "That no scales of pew-rents be hereafter authorized, except those under which one-half of the sittings shall be free, and as advantageously situated as those for which a rent may be fixed and reserved." In other words the system of "Nominal Grants" is done away with, by the action of the Commissioners themselves, as is above suggested.

though they be open, it is difficult to prevent those associations growing up which lead to a sense of proprietorship. The naves of our cathedrals, which now contain some of the most remarkable and not least devotional of our congregations, are commonly fitted up in this way. A Parochial Finance Committee to take cognisance of, and make known, the state and progress of the weekly collections, is also useful; and diligent house-to-house visiting is indispensable—without it the minister of an "Unappropriated" church will never know who goes to church and who does not, unless his congregation is sparse indeed.

But all this does not carry with it the writer's approval of the language and policy of the "Free and Open Church Association," or of the Bill introduced under their auspices into the House of Lords by the Bishop of Peterborough. They and their allies have done good work in times past, for which they deserve our gratitude. They have in many places helped to put an end to the practice of keeping pews empty when their "owners" are not at church; they have spread valuable information about the best way of arranging churches so that in these days no one ever proposes to cut up the area of a church into square or oblong blocks; they have done a good deal to bring back into our church life the idea of oblation from our substance as an element of public worship. But their words are often unmeasured, and their imputations against those who do not unreservedly agree with their views are sometimes uncharitable. The "Parish Churches Act" is an attempt to get that done in a summary way which its promoters ought to be satisfied to bring about by fair argument and persuasion. It is a sample of the arbitrary and intolerant temper which is too common in these days. Men will not wait patiently for the result of the more sure and safe method of convincing their neighbours, but are ready whenever they see the chance to coerce them. Our parishes differ very much one from another, and are also in various stages of progressiveness in Church matters. We do not desire to see one and the same rigid system of church arrangements thrust on them everywhere alike. It is also to our mind no recommendation of this Bill that it has the support of Erastian Church Reformers like Mr. Albert Grey, nor yet that the "Liberation Society" is pleased to approve of its principles. Its chances of passing, at any rate in the House of Commons, seem to be very slender for the present session; and if it did pass, we are inclined to think that its practical results would not be by any means such as to justify either the expectations of its friends or the apprehensions of its opponents.

THOMAS E. ESPIN.