THE

CHURCHMAN

AUGUST, 1886.

ART. I.—CHURCH BOARDS.

CHURCH Reform—so far at least as it depends upon Parliament—is at a stand-still. Ireland not only "holds the field," but engrosses it. Great Britain will evidently get nothing at present in the way of important legislative improvements. The Home Rule Bill, so suddenly and peremptorily sprung upon the country, has practically swallowed up all other projects of law. True, Parliament has slain it; but it has retaliated and has slain the Parliament of 1885; and has, moreover, died with a very positive "Resurgam" blazoned amongst its memorials. The next Parliament, we may now say the present Parliament, must again, and at once, grapple with the Irish question; and if the past may be taken as any criterion of the future, is but little likely for some time to come to be in condition to spare time and attention for much else.

So far as the Church is concerned, we could easily console ourselves for this preoccupation. We sincerely believe that the best and the most wanted Church Reforms are just those which can be effected by ourselves, if we have the grace and the energy to take them in hand, without the interposition of Parliament at all. And there are some reforms, too, which perhaps will not be thoroughly established without the sanction of the law, but which might seek it at much greater advantage by-and-bye, when the time of experiments is further advanced, if not over, than just at present. And the present cessation of attempts at Church legislation seems to us a valuable interval which we ought to turn to account, by turning over and carefully weighing such proposals as have stamina in them, and are likely to be heard of again.

Amongst such we certainly do reckon Mr. Albert Grey's "Church Boards Bill," which has been introduced every session, if we rightly remember, for six successive years, with

some minor changes from time to time, but identical in all leading principles and features. In the past session, the first and the last of the Parliament of 1885, it was backed, not only by Mr. Albert Grey, but by six other members, some of them certainly members of more than average influence and ability, and not all of them from one side of the House. We may be quite satisfied that whichever party, or whichever of the parties, for the old duality of the House seems broken up for the present, comes victorious out of the elections now being held, and not yet concluded as we write, the Church Boards Bill, or something like it, will be launched before the next Parliament as it was before the last.

We are not sure that the importance and scope of this Bill, in the form which it has now assumed, are at all realized as they ought to be. The Bill as brought in last session, and ordered by the House of Commons to be printed on January 22nd, contained twenty-two clauses, and was designed to provide by enactment for no less than seven novelties in our parochial arrangements. It proposed—

(1) To give parishioners power to elect a representative Board to deal with matters relating to their parish church.

(2) To vest the management of the services, and the control of the embellishments and music of the church in such Board.

(3) To enable the Board to provide for the occasional delivery of sermons "by persons not in Holy Orders of the Church of England."

(4) To give the Board a veto on the nomination of the patron, when the living is vacant.

(5) To require the incumbent to give effect to resolutions of the Board.

(6) To enable the Bishop to enforce such resolutions by suspension or deprivation of the incumbent.

(7) To suspend the Public Worship Regulation Act in parishes which adopt the Church Boards Act.

Surely this is a sufficiently lengthy list of proposals, and those of a most serious—shall we not say revolutionary?—nature! We must add, in further explanation, that the Board which is to wield these extraordinary powers is to consist of the incumbent, churchwardens, and six elective members. The persons entitled to vote at the election are to be "the same persons as would be entitled to vote for churchwardens in such parish, if the same were an ancient parish"—in other words, the ratepayers. The Act is to come into operation when any three parishioners—the well-known triad of aggrieved parishioners, we suppose—give notice to the churchwardens in writing that they desire to have a Parochial Church Board, and a parish meeting, which the churchwardens are required forthwith to

call, has resolved accordingly. We take the clauses as they stand in the Bill actually brought in at the opening of the last session, and we have no sure information that its backers have agreed to accept any important change. It has, indeed, been said that Mr. Albert Grey is now willing to insert in his Bill words which shall provide that none save communicants of the Church shall be eligible to seats on the proposed Church Board. If this statement be true, it is a striking admission of the force and effect with which certain objections against the Bill have been urged. We greatly doubt whether the statement be well founded; and have no doubt at all about the reception which such a proposal would meet with in the House of Commons. We forbear to dwell upon the difficulties which would surround an attempt to draw out a legal definition of the term "communicant," and to apply that definition in practice: nor will we embark on any inquiry as to the proper Parliamentary Court of Appeal in cases of contested claims to the rank and privileges of communicant; we simply say that it is in these days preposterous to expect the House of Commons to limit to communicants, no matter how the term be defined, any statutable rights which it might see fit to call into existence. We might add *à fortiori* that still less, if possible, could such restriction be expected to be put on statutable rights so important, so closely touching temporal things, as those which Mr. Albert Grey would attribute to his Parochial Boards. If he really has intimated any sort of acquiescence in the limitation in question, we suspect that he has only done so in anticipation that the reception it must meet with will convince those who recommend it that their case is hopeless. The suggestion that the statutable Board should contain communicants only, is not practicable, and is in itself gravely objectionable. And if it were practicable, it would but slightly dilute, it would not at all remove, some other objections to which the Church Boards Bill lies open in our judgment.

At the same time, we desire to do full justice to the motives which have, we doubt not, actuated Mr. Albert Grey, and we may well hope his allies also, in bringing forward and advocating this Bill. They see clearly and truly enough that the weakness of the Church, where she is weak, arises from the fact that so many residents in our parishes do not interest themselves in her work or her administration. In some parishes hardly any do so. In some parishes the more earnest and devoted have transferred their zeal to other religious organizations. Well do we recollect Mr. Grey's ardent words and impressive manner at the Carlisle Church Congress, when he described the office of a National Church:—that it should

fulfil its mission over every acre of our land; that it should "saturate with the wholesome influence of its regenerating work every household in the district committed to its care." And this, he argued, could never be "until the great steady hand of the people is raised to support and help the machinery of the Church." Nor are we disposed to quarrel at all with the principle he announced: "If we wish to make the Church thoroughly effective, if we wish to make Church work the work of all, we must hold, not the clergymen alone, but the whole body of parishioners responsible for the way in which the work is carried out." All this is most true, and we will add, most reasonable. There are parishes, happily now not a great number, and, moreover, a rapidly diminishing number, in which there is a great deal of lamentable torpor and apathy; in which the bare routine of what the Bishop can enforce to be done is the most of what is attempted. Mr. Albert Grey's desire is, we are well assured, to kindle new religious life in such parishes; not at all to introduce intestine strife and party spirit into parishes that are vigorously administered. But when we come to consider the machinery through which he proposes to accomplish these excellent purposes, we find it open to very grave objections in principle, and likely, as we fear, if ever it could be tried, to work far more mischief than it ever could confer benefit. The application of the Bill might galvanize into spasmodic activity some few dead parishes—dead so far as true Church work is concerned. But we greatly doubt whether, even in these cases, the activity thus generated, when a Church Board had been forced upon a recalcitrant incumbent, would be at all of a Christian character, or would really promote the work of Christ amongst the people.

But we proceed to say something about the provisions of the Bill *seriatim*, and will pass lightly by the first enacting clause, which interdicts any proceedings under the Public Worship Act of 1874 in parishes which have established a Church Board. About the policy of the Act of 1874 we need not now say anything; but at any rate it is a general and public Act of Parliament, and we cannot think it ought to be got rid of piecemeal in this curious way. We can quite imagine, too, that the relaxation of general restraint and surrendering our parishes one after the other to the management of little parochial coteries, might in time very seriously impair the practical unity of the Church. The Parochial Councils would undoubtedly differ very much in their theological complexion, and the Bill would enable them to give effect to their local proclivities to a degree as yet unknown. We think this a dangerous clause, and vicious in principle.

Objections of a graver nature still occur when we come

to the fourth and following clauses of the Bill, which provide for the establishment of Church Boards, and determine their constitution and powers. To consign the management of Church worship to a body of ratepayers, qualified for their functions *in sacris* simply because their names are found in the books of the parish collectors, this seems to us perfectly monstrous. Whilst compulsory church-rates lasted, there was colourable reason for giving the vestry some control in the matter, because it had to find money to pay for divine service, repairs of church, salaries of organist, etc.—to find it by rate. But when Parliament took away the power to compel payment of a church-rate by legal process in 1868, it carefully provided (31 and 32 Vict., cap. 109, section 8) that those who made default in paying a voluntary church rate should be disabled from voting about the expenditure of the moneys to which they had refused to contribute. This is surely fair. Nothing can be more evident than that those who find the money should have a voice in its expenditure, and that those who do not find the money ought not to regulate that which is provided for by the liberality of others. Mr. Albert Grey's Bill is in flagrant contradiction to this sound principle of justice. The finances of the Church come, in one shape or another, from the congregation, not from the ratepayers. It is manifest, therefore, that the ratepayers as such have no right to dictate, as this Bill would enable them to do, the number and character of the services of the Church, or to give orders about "the lights, ornaments, decorations, furniture, or fittings." We should say clearly that they themselves, or Parliament for them, divested themselves of this right when they insisted on the abolition of church-rates in 1868. Pay and power ought surely to go together, and Parliament in the Bill of 1868 clearly recognised this principle as sound.

A still more formidable set of objections arise when we observe that Mr. Albert Grey's Bill would make the Church a sort of parochial plutocracy. To produce your receipt for the last poor-rate would be the condition for the exercise of the religious franchise. Can anything be more incongruous? Can any two things be more emphatically not *in pari materia?* We are taking measures to abate the scandals attending the traffic in livings; but if this new qualification for ecclesiastical power is introduced, we shall have created a greater scandal than any that we have taken away. Some of our very best Churchpeople and not a few of our best Church-workers bear names that do not appear on the overseer's books. Lodgers do not pay poor-rates; but many such are choirmen and Sunday-school teachers and district visitors. Why are they to be disfranchised? Then there are the poor, about

whose religious welfare so much anxiety is expressed; and amongst them are to be found some of the most attached Churchmen and regular Churchgoers. Why should they be allowed no voice in Church administration? Mr. A. Grey is a Liberal in politics. But his Church Boards Bill breathes a spirit that is not Liberal at all. The Church is too democratic to consent willingly to limit any of her spiritual responsibilities and privileges to ratepayers.

But our objections to Mr. A. Grey's Bill go deeper than this. It is framed on the assumption that every person who bears the burdens of a citizen has a full right to share in the administration of Church affairs. To this assumption we demur altogether. No doubt those who maintain it believe it to be a constitutional principle. They regard it as a restatement of Hooker's famous position that Church and State are but two aspects of the same corporate community; that Churchman and citizen are but names describing the same individual in respect of his ecclesiastical and civil character. But those who allege this venerable theory must be reminded that Hooker assumes and requires certain conditions, without which the whole becomes evidently inapplicable. He never contemplates that the State shall tolerate all beliefs or tolerate even utter unbelief in its citizens, according to them all the while full civic rights; and whilst he presupposes that the citizen is of course a Churchman, he no less takes it as of course that the citizen will conform to Church rules. Nay, he even expects that Church rules shall be enforced by State coercion, as any one may satisfy himself who will read Book VIII., c. vi., of the "Ecclesiastical Polity." The identity of Church and State does not imply that every citizen is a Churchman, without holding him bound likewise to render due obedience to the Church. Church and State are not co-extensive now; and all schemes which take it for granted that they are so must miscarry in practice because founded on a false basis. The Church is national, not because every Englishman has a natural right to intermeddle in her concerns, but because she freely offers herself to every Englishman, and recognises her obligations to him, if he will allow her to discharge them. But if he repudiates her ministrations altogether, if he be not baptized, nor be a worshipper in her sanctuaries, nor a communicant at her altar-rails, he has no moral right to interfere with her internal affairs. If he claims to act on the letter of the statute law or ancient customs of the realm, to attend Church vestry meetings, to exercise that voice in ecclesiastical administration which constitutional theory allows, then he should be consistent, go to Church regularly, conform to the rubrics and canons, especially that which says: "And note, that every

parishioner shall communicate at the least three times in the year, of which Easter to be one."

Nothing can be more unreasonable than to re-assert the authority of the citizen in Church government, and at the same time to emancipate him, or, more strictly, leave him emancipated from all duties and obligations to the Church. It is impossible to pass away from this part of the subject without remarking how constantly the question of the discipline of the laity comes to the surface when these questions are discussed. We need hardly remind our readers that the notion of an effective system of Church Courts enforcing ecclesiastical obligations underlies the whole of our Church formularies. The State has paralyzed this part of our system: and we frankly confess that as yet there seems no likelihood of its revival. But in this our own Church is only in the like predicament with every other in the modern world. However, what we are at present concerned with is Mr. Albert Grey's attempt to reassert the citizen's ancient rights without in the least recalling him to his ancient duties.

We duly note that the powers of Mr. Albert Grey's Church Board would be limited by the law, and sincerely give him credit for believing that no such disastrous effects to faith and worship would in practice ensue from his Bill, as some have apprehended. At the same time we do hold that our character as essentially a religious community, as a branch of the Church of Christ whose first duty and high office is to bear witness to the faith once delivered to the saints, would be seriously compromised were we to admit that a man may be a sort of "ruling elder" in the Church without baptism, without any Christian profession, simply because he pays rates. And we are very sure that such an enactment, far from strengthening the Church and securing her national position, would lead to disruption and speedy downfall. Nor even, were this otherwise, should we ourselves care to preserve the Establishment when the Church had ceased to exist; for she would have ceased to exist when she became, as Mr. Albert Grey and, we may add, Canon Fremantle, would make her, the mere echo of the religious sentiment of the day.

After rehearsing objections so many and so weighty as these, it seems almost superfluous to refer to further details; but yet, in order to give our case something of completeness, we will criticize briefly some of the other proposed provisions. Take, *e.g.*, the eighteenth clause, which empowers the incumbent or the Church Board—not, be it observed, the Board with the consent of the incumbent—to invite "any person not in Holy Orders of the Church of England to preach an occasional sermon or lecture in the church." We can imagine nothing

more calculated to cause intestine strife in a parish, nothing more bewildering to a church congregation, than the results that must ensue were a clause of this character to come into operation. We should have Nonconformist ratepayers on many Boards, and undoubtedly efforts would be made to carry resolutions inviting their favourite minister to preach in the parish churches. The offence that would be caused to many staunch Church-people would vastly outweigh any advantages that could possibly accrue from conciliating any Dissenters, if, indeed, such an invitation would conciliate any, which we are much inclined to doubt. When will our Church Reformers realize what ought to be so very plain, that the Church would gain no strength by alienating her own loyal children in vain attempts to win over a few from other religious societies, whose adhesion would never be hearty, and probably be only cold and nominal? A thorough Church revival can only come about by our giving effect consistently and thoroughly to our own principles, not by compromising and dissembling about doctrines, ordinances, and usages which we have inherited from old days and believe to be Scriptural and primitive.

We might urge very strong reasons against the clauses (twenty and twenty-one) which bear upon the patronage. The Board may notify to the Bishop that "in the opinion of the majority of such Board the presentee ought not to be instituted;" and the Bishop is then to be empowered to refuse institution. And further, if the Board shall have done this in case of a second presentation for the same vacancy, the Bishop is to set aside the patron altogether for that term, and is himself to present as may please him. Now we quite admit that checks and safeguards on the exercise of private patronage may and ought to be provided, but it really does seem monstrous to abolish the patron's rights altogether at the bidding of a majority of a small committee of ratepayers. If Church Reformers put forward schemes so extreme as this, they will effect nothing at all. And we can hardly imagine any clauses which would be more certain, could they ever come into operation, to cluster round themselves a plentiful crop of scandals, abuses, and suspicions.

Again, very many parishes could not furnish the material for a reasonably competent Church Board. The Bishop of Exeter has recently been telling his clergy that there are in Devonshire 23 parishes with less than 100 persons resident in them, 61 others with less than 200, and 63 with more than 200 and less than 300. It is often no easy matter to find two fairly qualified churchwardens in such places as these. Mr. A. Grey fixes the number for his Board at nine. In half our parishes in Canterbury Province we will venture to say nine

fit and proper persons could not be found for this purpose, and sure we are that a Church Board of unfit and improper persons would be vastly worse every way than no Board at all. Indeed, looking at our vestries and their action generally, we should doubt whether the ecclesiastical portions of their work have been at all well done. It can hardly be said that the impulses and suggestions for church improvements have usually emanated from the parish vestry. And Mr. Albert Grey's Church Board would in reality be nothing more or less than a select vestry.

Again, the exceedingly severe clauses which are to be enacted for the terror or coercion of incumbents who may not like the orders of the Church Board, are really quite a new feature in Church government. It would be safer to break every commandment of the Decalogue, and every rubric in the Prayer Book, than to neglect or resist the mandate of the Parochial Board. Would not such a tyranny, if really put in practice, very soon drive many men of high spirit, independent judgment, and large culture, out of the Church as a profession? Could we expect them to submit to a yoke to which that laid by the Papacy on its clergy is freedom? Would it be compatible with that respect which belongs to the sacred ministry, the preservation of which is so essential to its usefulness, to make the incumbent the bondslave, in all those matters now left discretionary, of a knot of ratepayers?

We do not observe in the Bill any provisions for getting rid of a Church Board. Once constituted, it would apparently go on reproducing itself in the parish which had once adopted it year after year, for ever. In this respect it would be like the School Boards which many parishes established in haste, and are now repenting for at leisure; for useless and even mischievous and costly as the machinery is, it cannot, in ordinary cases, be abolished if once introduced. But we forbear to press this point further, in order to bring forward one more point in conclusion. We object to Mr. Albert Grey's Bill because it is utterly superfluous. We can already obtain all that we want, or can reasonably be thought to want, in the way of organized and duly authorized lay help without any new legislation whatever. In any parish where sidesmen are not now elected, they can be so at any Easter vestry by giving due notice; and in any parish where it is now customary to name sidesmen, the numbers can be increased if desired. The writer, in discharge of his duties as Chancellor of Chester, admitted those chosen for these functions to their office in May last throughout that diocese. Some few parishes, for various reasons, were not represented at the centres of Visitation, or at the adjourned Court held at Chester on May 27th, and their officers remain to be admitted at later dates. But 245 parishes duly made

their presentments, and sent up their officers, giving a total of rather more than 480 churchwardens and 180 sidesmen. In fact, nearly all the large and populous parishes have both sorts of Church officers, and it may be said to be the well-established custom and understanding of the diocese that as the Church work and machinery of a parish grows and is extended, the staff of lay officers should be enlarged also. If, for instance, a Mission Church or a licensed schoolroom is opened for Divine service in a distant part of a parish, the regular practice is to appoint two new sidesmen for the special purpose of managing its financial and other concerns. The same course is adopted in the diocese of Liverpool; and indeed the proportion of sidesmen is there larger because the average population of the cures is much greater. Cheshire still contains a number of small rural parishes. The population of the diocese of Liverpool must now exceed a million and a half, and the number of benefices is under two hundred, giving more than six thousand to each if the distribution were even. In both dioceses also the lay representatives, chosen by the communicants for the purposes of the diocesan conference, are not by any means always either churchwardens or sidesmen. It is plain, therefore, that we already possess the needful machinery for securing as many lay auxiliaries as we need, and possess it, too, under much more elastic regulations than the wooden system which Mr. A. Grey's Bill would thrust upon our parishes indiscriminately. We think also that sidesmen duly elected under the Canons of the Church, and admitted to office by the Bishop or his representative, are far more truly and properly Church officers than those elected ratepayers would be whom he recommends to us. And we think also that they would be far more likely to know and deal satisfactorily with the wants and wishes of the worshippers in the church. If to the churchwardens and sidesmen be added the two laymen chosen for the Diocesan Conference, we have all the materials at hand already for a very sufficient Parochial Council.

THOMAS E. ESPIN.

ART. II.—NOTES ON THREE MONTHS' LECTURING, ETC., IN WALES.

LAST autumn, at the request of some of the leading clergy in Wales, and specially commissioned by the Church Defence Institution, I devoted six weeks to lecturing and