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ON THE  
AUGMENTATION  
OF  
POOR BENEFICES

IN THE COUNTY OF LINCOLN.

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A LETTER

TO THE

RIGHT REVEREND THE LORD BISHOP OF LINCOLN,

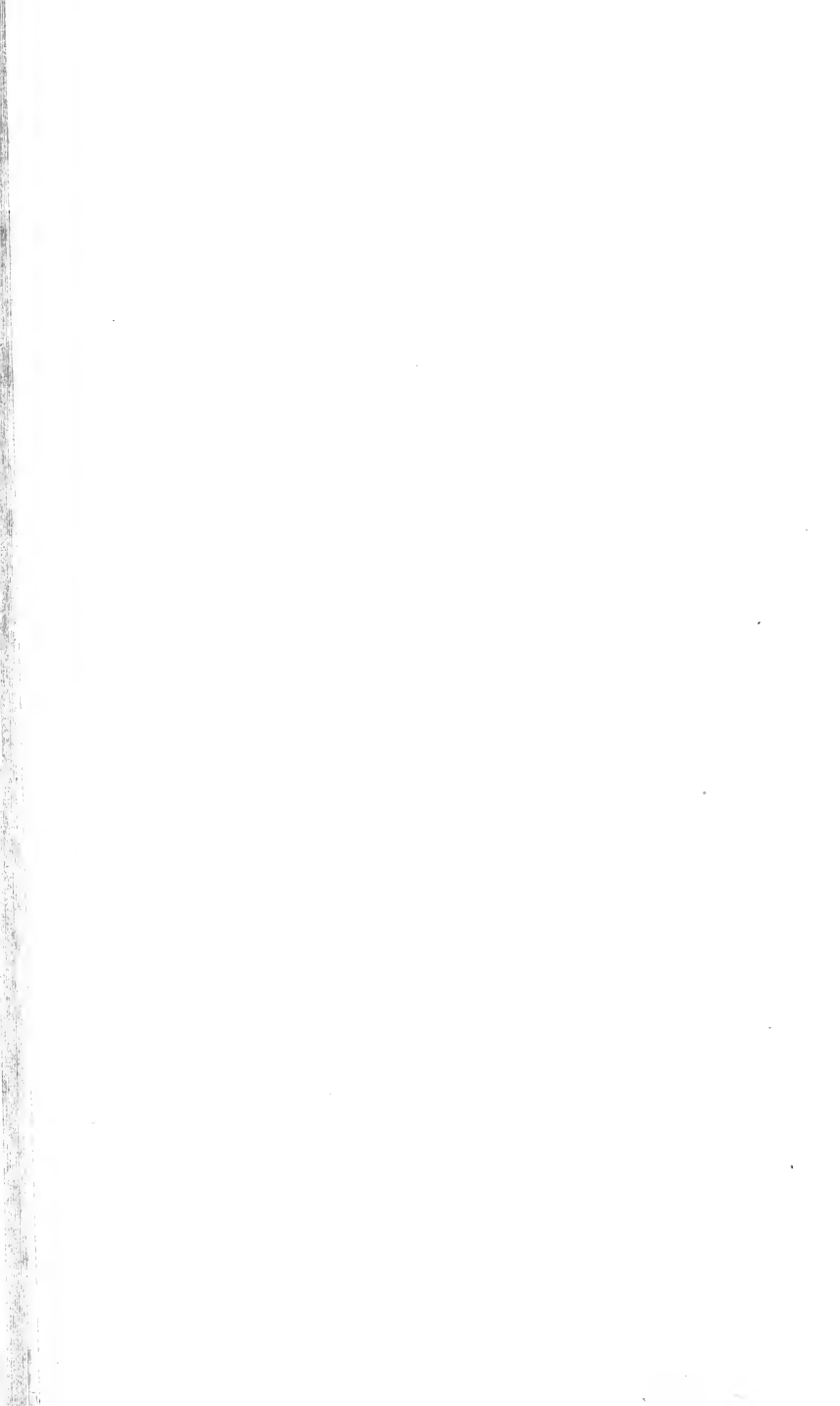
BY

W. E. WELBY, Esq., M.P.

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GRANTHAM :

L. RIDGE, STEAM PRESS OFFICE, HIGH STREET.



MY LORD BISHOP,

You have recently set on foot a movement “for the Augmentation of poor benefices in the “County of Lincoln,” in which I take so deep an interest that I venture to trouble you with a few remarks concerning it from a lay point of view. I have long felt the magnitude of the evil with which you are attempting to grapple, I think, if I may be allowed without being considered presumptuous to say so, that you have taken a wise step in the formation of your Association, and that its constitution is such as to entitle it to the confidence of the laity, on whom its success must in so great measure depend; and I therefore sincerely hope that they will accord it a prompt and generous support. But when I see that in a pamphlet which has been circulated, and described by your Lordship as the work of the Archdeacon of Lincoln and bearing the stamp of authority, it is said that, “It is in the “hope of eliciting voluntary liberality . . . . that “an Association is sought to be established,” and that its “business, when formed, will be to raise “funds . . . . and to employ the funds so raised, “in subsidizing the contributions of others,” I cannot help thinking that one part of the subject is in some danger of being overlooked. The law

sanctions processes by which the condition of many poor benefices may be improved, and it is to these that I wish to see the attention of the public, and especially of patrons of livings directed. I desire however to guard myself most carefully against being supposed to imply that the existence of these powers in any degree obviates the necessity for an Augmentation fund, or that the exercise of them relieves patrons from the duty of contributing to it. On the contrary, I consider that the special responsibility, which your Lordship has pointed out as attaching to many of them as land and tithe owners, would be most inadequately met by the mere carrying out of arrangements, which would in most cases involve no personal sacrifice whatever.

In the Archdeacon's pamphlet, p. 2, it is stated that, "It will be no part of the business of the Association to identify itself with any plans, however excellent in themselves, which may require legislative interference with the existing tenure of ecclesiastical property." In the propriety of this I entirely agree, and shall therefore make no further reference to them.

Of the existing means of improvement, one, Consolidation, was frequently referred to at the Meeting, and has been somewhat elaborately discussed by Canon Drake in his published letter to your Lordship. I hold with him, that any general process of equalization of livings is "inexpedient and impracticable," though something may be done



by voluntary effort in this direction ; and I agree in his opinion, that where two adjacent benefices of moderate size have similar populations and similar duties, but widely different revenues, it is better that they should be held by “ one well-paid and “ experienced incumbent, over-looking the work of “ a younger and less-experienced man as his curate, “ and able to meet in both parishes the calls of “ charity,” than by “ two incumbents equal in age “ and standing, whose position, in a worldly point “ of view, will be subject of painful contrast.” But, whereas his leading idea is the annexation “ of “ a poor benefice to a neighbouring rich one,” I should prefer, as a rule, in the rural districts, the union of two or more small ones. Where the income of a benefice already amounts (as in the case of several, to which Canon Drake proposes that smaller ones should be annexed) to £800 or £1000 per annum, or more, I do not think it desirable that any further addition should be made to it ; but if it should happen that the union of a poor benefice to one of these would be evidently the most convenient arrangement, I should wish to see the endowment of the poor one transferred to some other poor parish under 1 & 2 Vic., c. 106, so that the accession to the rich one should be of labour alone, not of emolument. There are, however, in Lincolnshire many benefices which owing to the Pluralities Act must be held each by a separate incumbent, but which provide for him a sufficiency sometimes neither of income

nor of work, sometimes of the one only and not of the other.\* The Archdeacon states that there are in the County, out of 580 benefices, 307 which do not exceed £300 *per annum*, 176 which do not exceed £200 *per annum*, and 65 which do not exceed £100 *per annum*. On the other hand, the Diocesan Calendar shows that there are about 232 with a population not exceeding 300, 149 under 200, and 45 under 100. Some of these are of considerable value, others quite the reverse. Some extend over a wide area, so that the proper supervision of them is a severe tax on the physical powers of the incumbents; but many are of small acreage, and lie within easy distance of each other, so that two or sometimes even three could be effectively† served by one incumbent with the assistance of a curate, and the consolidated income would be adequate without being excessive. I do not attach much importance

\* One effect of the Pluralities Act has been found to be that Diocesan Societies instituted for the support of the widows and orphans of the Clergy have been more burdened by applicants since than before the passing of it. In the present day, when it is said that more Clergy are required, it seems to be a waste of power if two Clergymen are employed where one would suffice.

† 13 & 14 Vic., c. 98, gives the Bishop power, when benefices are united, to require two services in each Church. The carrying out of this would be facilitated by a division of the Morning Service, as suggested in the final Report of the Ritual Commission. "The Morning Prayer, the Litany, and the Order for the Administration of the Lord's Supper, may be used together or as separate services, at the discretion of the Minister."

to the objection raised by Prebendary Perry, that union would be distasteful to the parishioners, and alienate many of them from the Church; at least, I am not aware that experience has proved this. The chief difficulty lies, as Canon Drake says, "in the adjustment of the question of patronage when the annexed livings are not in the same hands." But it should be remembered that the patronage of a living of £100 or £150 a year is not worth much. Although occasionally from various circumstances, such a benefice when vacant may be in request; the patron will frequently have difficulty in finding a desirable incumbent for it. And even in the case of livings of a somewhat higher value, the right of alternate presentation to a living of £400 a year, is probably worth as much as the sole patronage of one of £200; so that in practice even this obstacle would not be found so formidable as it seems at first sight. The expense of consolidation is small, and I believe that many patrons would be found willing to carry out arrangements of this nature if properly suggested to them, who otherwise might never give a thought to the matter.

The same remark applies to the power of Apportionment, given under 3 & 4 Vic., c. 113, by which part of the income of a rich benefice may be transferred to a poorer one in the same patronage. Few patrons are aware that they have this power; if more widely known, it would probably be more freely exercised.

Other means, such as an extension to all public patrons of the power given to the Lord Chancellor by Lord Westbury's Act (26 & 27 Vic., c. 120), and an addition to the Pluralities Act, which should permit neighbouring benefices to be held together when the joint income would not exceed a specified amount, although each of them should be above £100 a year, might perhaps be attained without much difficulty; but as they would affect not this Diocese alone but the whole country, any attempt to procure them should have the sanction of Convocation. Consolidation and Apportionment are means ready to hand by which many small and poor rural parishes, which otherwise would tax the resources of the Association, can effectually be provided for; if they could be shewn to have been utilized as far as possible, the appeal to private liberality on behalf of the remainder would obtain great additional force; how therefore to make the most of them appears worthy of the most anxious consideration and enquiry.

Other points have been raised, which also deserve careful attention. Both the Archdeacon and Canon Drake seem to contemplate raising the incomes of *all* benefices to a fixed minimum. The policy of this is at least questionable. Where the parish affords an adequate field of labour for the incumbent, but not a sufficient maintenance, the latter should undoubtedly if possible be increased; but in the case of a benefice with small income and population

and of small extent, which might advantageously be annexed to some other, it would be unwise to hold out to it any prospect of a grant from the funds of the Association, as the patron might thereby be prevented from dealing with it in the better way. And where an incumbent is possessed of good private means, the benefice however small could hardly be considered a fit subject for augmentation during his lifetime.

Again, it is well known that from alteration in the value of glebe lands, and other causes, the returns of incomes given in the Clergy List, Diocesan Calendar, &c. are frequently incorrect, while for the proper application of public money complete and precise information is indispensable. Moreover, from the great size of Lincolnshire, the circumstances of benefices in it vary more widely than in most counties; so that, while in some parts of it they are small and numerous, in others the parishes are of enormous extent, and there is need, not for consolidation, but for the creation of new benefices by sub-division.

All these considerations seem to me to point to the necessity of a thorough and exhaustive inquiry, before the Association can fully enter on the distribution of its funds; and I therefore think that Canon Drake's suggestion of a small mixed committee of clergymen and laymen, is a most valuable one. The central and ruri-decanal committees of the Association are already constituted. It is right and necessary that every portion of the county should

be represented on the Central Committee ; but that very necessity renders it too unwieldly for practical work. I venture to hope that at its first meeting, your Lordship will propose the appointment of a sub-committee of three, or at most five members, to carry out such an investigation as I have described. Their first duty should be to frame questions to be sent to the Ruri-decanal Committees, and asking for accurate \*information as to the present income, population, acreage, and Church and school accommodation of every benefice in each Deanery. Such statistics would be useful for many purposes, educational for instance, besides the work immediately in hand. With regard to all benefices below a given value, further inquiry should be made into the local circumstances of each, with the view of ascertaining whether it could profitably be united to, or held in plurality (supposing that to be legal) with any neighbouring benefice; whether the patron possessed also the patronage of any other living, a portion of whose revenues might reasonably be allotted to the poorer parish, and whether there would be any

\* It may be that this information is already given to your Lordship. If so, and if it could be annually put before the public in an authentic form, a repetition of the inquiry would of course be needless. But in any case, as the questions would be asked solely with a view to the welfare of the Church, it might fairly be hoped that the Clergy would not regard them as in any degree inquisitorial, but would be willing to answer them frankly and explicitly.

probability of his thus exercising his powers; whether any other prospect of augmentation could be held out, and if so, from what source; and so forth. A complete knowledge would thus be obtained of the state of every small benefice in the Diocese. The replies to these questions should be treated as confidential communications to the Sub-committee, who from them should draw up a report, either private in the first instance to your Lordship, or for the use of the whole of the Central Committee, as they should deem best. This would be a task requiring not only much labour but great discretion and delicacy, for much might depend in individual instances on the way in which the subject was approached. The Sub-committee should therefore be most carefully selected. They should be men of mature age and good position, whose judgment and tact could be relied on, who could meet for deliberation without too much personal inconvenience, and who would have leisure to devote to the thorough performance of their work. By such agency the public could be put in possession of clear complete and reliable information as to the present requirements of the poor benefices, the existing and probable means of improving them, and the amount of work which would remain to be done when individual efforts have been exhausted. This is what the Laity want, but at present cannot obtain. The information they now have is meagre, and, as I have said, not always accurate; even the Archdeacon's pamphlet

requires, as admitted by himself, revision on some points.\* The promoters of this movement only desire that all the beneficed Clergy of this County, should possess such decent competency as would enable them to carry out their ministrations effectively. Thorough investigation would prove how frequently they must lack this, unless aided by the Association, and that proof alone is required to ensure a general and liberal response to your Lordship's appeal.

I am, my Lord Bishop,

Very faithfully yours,

WILLIAM EARLE WELBY.

*Newton House, Folkingham,*

*September, 1870.*

\* It appears from the printed regulations of 1870, that the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, and the Governors of Queen Anne's Bounty, will not both make grants for the same object; and it is not very clear from the Archdeacon's statement, pp. 5, 6, how far donations to benefices with small populations are likely to be met by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners.









