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[p. 2e]

‘A Startling Proposal.’

WHEN “an able and eminent man of science” boldly propounds a method of dealing with the property of the Established Church, by which he declares society would secure beneficial influences “equal to those produced by the whole of our best literature,” ordinary commonplace people may well lift up their eyes in amazement. Yet this is precisely what Mr. Alfred R. Wallace has done in this month’s *Macmillan’s Magazine*. In an able article, headed “Disestablishment and Disendowment,” Mr. Wallace makes a startling proposal, which, although startling, is practicable, and which may ultimately turn out to be the best possible solution of the knotty problem of Church and State. Mr. Wallace’s key-note is that Church property, being national property held in trust for the nation, is now wrongly devoted to sectarian purposes, from which it must be rescued, and again consecrated to thoroughly national ends. Mr. Wallace does not propose any imaginary scheme of comprehension such as that which haunts men like Dean Stanley. He does not go so far as Mr. Miall, and propose to hand over the churches to the disestablished Episcopalians. He strikes out a path of his own, which, however difficult it may be to follow, promises to lead us out of the maze in which we wander better than almost any other. What, then, is this astonishing proposal? The following outline of the article will answer the query better than any phrase or epithet of our own.

Church property being national property, it should never be alienated. The churches and cathedrals of the Establishment should ever be retained for the moral and social advancement of the whole community. To its ancient edifices, with their hallowed associations, the Anglican Church owes much, if not most of its influence. To allow the appropriation of these edifices by any sect would be unduly to favour that sect, and leave existing the embers of jealousy, which it is the object of the Reformer to extinguish. The present organisation, which is supported out of the revenues of the Church, is useful, eminently useful, in securing the services of an educated, refined, and moral man as a light-point in every village. It fails in securing the benefits which it might obtain by identifying this organisation with the creed of a sect. To realise all the advantages which such an organisation might be made to yield, Mr. Wallace contends that the first step is to clear this organisation for civilisation of all traces of sectarianism, but the organisation, or rather the principle of the organisation, that of stationing a missionary of culture in every parish, should never be given up. Hence he would supersede the parish clergyman by an individual whom he proposes to style the Rector, who would undertake all the functions at present performed by the clergyman, excepting one—he would never conduct religious services of any kind. This Rector must be an educated man of thirty, of blameless morals, and whose religious views were free from sectarian prejudices. He must be trained specially in political economy and in the laws of health. He must be acquainted with physiology, medicine, surgery, scientific agriculture, and the natural history sciences. His private opinion on religious matters is not to be enquired into. Having thus defined what his Rector is to be, Mr. Wallace then proposes to define what he has to do. The Rector is to have entire charge of the parish church, which is to be used for religious services by all or any religious bodies, under such arrangements as he might find convenient. All sects have to have right to use the church, provided they possess a permanent organisation, and have ministers educated up to a certain point. The Rector himself would lecture in the church on moral, social, sanitary, historical, or philosophical topics, as well as allow the church to be used by others through the week for any objects not inconsistent with the social and moral improvement of the people. He must be an *ex officio* magistrate, an *ex officio* member of the School Board, and of the Governing Bodies of all public educational bodies in his parish. He must also explain the laws, and see that no one of his parishioners offended through ignorance. He might, if he

chose, visit the sick. He must be on good terms with all the ministers of all denominations, and make it his duty to induce them to work harmoniously together for moral and educational objects. Such is a broad outline of the duties of the clergyman—the centre of *[illeg.]* in our parishes when the Anglican Church has been disestablished and made to fend as other denominations are doing now. It is plausible, and on the surface looks feasible enough. Mr. Wallace does not anticipate much difficulty in securing the proper type of men for his Rectors. As there would be no theological tests, the range would be wider than it is now, and many who were now in the harness as Vicars might not object to accept the post of Rectors. Mr. Wallace would make no violent disturbance of ecclesiastical relationships: he would simply decree that no new clergy of the old type be appointed, but that as soon as any one died, a Rector of the new school should be appointed in his stead. He would leave to private patrons the right of appointing these Rectors, although he would insist upon a higher standard both in temper and in intellect, in heart and in head, than now suffices to secure admittance to the Church. Every candidate for a rectorship must have served five years as assistant rector before being entrusted with any parish. All would be subjected to a rigid examination on appointment, and would retain these appointments for life, subject to the supervision and control of Inspectors acting under the orders of a Supreme Board of Public Instruction. By rearranging the parishes, by grouping and subdividing, Mr. Wallace thinks he could secure such a number of divisions as would enable him to give every Rector a salary of from 300*l.* to 400*l.* per annum, while a few might be reserved at 1,000*l.* Such is a brief outline of Mr. Wallace's "bold and uncompromising" paper. It will appeal very strongly to the popular mind, and, before long, it will make itself heard in every assembly where the question of Church and State is discussed. It secures religious equality; it secures the appointment of an apostle of culture in every parish, and it consecrates to truly national purposes not only the vast endowments but the religious edifices, of the nation. Without sharing the sanguine anticipations of Mr. Wallace, we cannot deny that his new order of secular Rectors would achieve good which sectarian clergy can never hope to accomplish; and would, while destroying for ever the unjust ascendancy of one sect, preserve unimpaired to posterity the revenues which have come down to us from our ancestors.

The Alfred Russel Wallace Page, Charles H. Smith, 2021.