

The Gardeners Chronicle : A Stamped Newspaper of Rural Economy and General News, 1841

Extract from Document

Lancaster.—For some time past, the parish of Heysham has been thrown into great excitement, in consequence of Mr. T. J. Knowlys, a magistrate residing there, having transmitted to the Bishop of Chester charges of a grave and serious nature against the conduct of the Rev. R. S. Barton, Rector of that parish, and a magistrate of the county. The Bishop, therefore, in order that justice might be done both to the complainant, the accused, and his parishioners, ordered a commission of inquiry, under the recent act of parliament for the better regulation of church discipline. The petition of the complainant setting forth the grounds for the inquiry, had been transmitted to his lordship so far back as June last; and it was the intention of the petitioner that the inquiry should extend to the conduct of Mr. Barton for the two years previously to its date; that being the period allowed by law for cognizable reference to be made to any alleged clerical offence.

The commission was appointed to sit on the 14th inst., when Mr. Barton was called upon to answer to the charge of being guilty of “lewd and immoral conduct, profane cursing and swearing, and intemperance.” After the preliminary proceedings had been arranged, the clergymen composing the commission decided that Mr. Knowlys should be allowed to make a statement explanatory of the motives which had led him to institute these proceedings. He then stated that the legislature had thought proper to pass an act to discountenance and punish all persons who might be a scandal to these realms; whilst it required those in authority, both civil and ecclesiastic, to set an example the more effectually to reform those who led dissolute lives. Mr. Barton had conducted himself in a manner unbecoming a clergyman, and he therefore held it to be his duty as a magistrate and justice of the peace to take the present proceedings, and to support the charge against Mr. Barton, as described above. Several witnesses were then called, from whose statements it appeared that in August 1839, the rectory-house at Heysham was very much dilapidated. Mr. Barton consequently employed a number of masons and plasterers, most of them belonging to this city, to put it into repair. During the time they were at work, Mr. Barton is alleged to have gone among them, conversing with them, sometimes in a familiar, but gentlemanly manner, whilst at others he descended to topics and language unbecoming his character as a clergyman; and on more than one occasion he was seen intoxicated. These things being repeated by the workmen, Mr. Knowlys examined them as to the truth of what they had stated, and upon their asseverations, and the reports of others, he founded his proceedings. The evidence adduced in support of these allegations was somewhat contradictory and inconclusive, and the counsel for the inquiry having moved for an adjournment in order to obtain further testimony, the commissioners postponed the hearing to Thursday. A correspondent, in reference to this subject, informs us that the proceeding has excited unusual interest in the county, and that the village of Halton, where the court is held, is crowded with visitors from the adjacent townships.

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A separate publication would appear to give further information:

Resumed inquiry into the conduct of the Rev. R.S. Barton, rector of Heysham, at the suit of T.J. Knowlys, Esq., of Heysham Hall.

Author: Robert Brandt; R S Barton; T J Knowlys Publisher: Lancaster : Printed by A. Milner, 1841.

(Robert Brandt was a barrister acting for R S Barton)