

ministers and preachers of the gospel an exception to this general rule for all classes of men? I confess that I see none. Are they less intelligent, less moral, less fitted by the circumstances in which they are placed to discharge properly the duties of legislators? Sir, it is an insult to the common understanding to say that they are less intelligent as a body than any other class of the community; to say that they are less moral, or that they have less at heart the good of the State. If that be so, and our sole purpose in framing a Constitution is to endeavor to provide the best possible class of legislators, then why exclude these men? They are bound to pay taxes the same as other men; they are equally liable to military duty. They owe every obligation to the State that other citizens owe; and they are endowed with every other privilege but this. They may be constables, or justices of the peace, or road supervisors, or county commissioners, or members of Congress, or Governors of the State. They may hold every civil or military office except the single office of member of the General Assembly. Then what reason can there be for that exception?

The argument drawn from the antiquity of the custom in this State has no weight with me, none at all. Go back to the time when there was an apprehension that certain persons might exert an undue influence; that it was necessary, for instance, to exclude Catholic priests from positions of political influence; or the Catholic priests themselves were afraid that the clergy of the Church of England would have an undue influence in political affairs. I can easily understand that a compromise might then be made between the Catholic and Protestant denominations, that they would exclude all priests together; and that in those days when each was fearful of the future, this might have been incorporated in the Constitution. It has stood here until no well-balanced mind in the State of Maryland has any apprehension of priestly influence. If, then, that was the original occasion for the insertion of such an article in our Constitution, and the occasion has gone by forever, then why retain that which was the growth of that occasion, which is a blot upon the State Constitution as it now stands, and which is unlike any other State Constitution in that respect? What harm can there come of it? Has there been such a rush of the clergy for other political offices that we apprehend they will rush for this and monopolize the halls of legislation? How many clergy are there in the State holding political offices, from a postmastership down? Not a baker's dozen; perhaps not one. How is it in other States where there is no such restriction? Are their halls of legislation overrun with clergymen? Much as I pride myself upon the legislature of our State, I think that the legislatures of some of the States,

where this restriction is not found, will not suffer by comparison with our own. I therefore say that in reason and experience alike we find no reason for an exclusion of this kind.

Then, again, it is an invidious and odious distinction, extremely so. Who are excluded, by your Constitution, from your Legislature? First, those holding certain civil and military offices. Now, although in some of its applications that is a hardship, still there is some show of reason for it; because a man appointed to a civil or military office gives an implied pledge to the public that he will devote his whole time, or so much as is necessary, to the faithful discharge of his duties. And to accept another office might be incompatible with the proper discharge of those duties, and he would be holding two offices, and receiving two emoluments at the same time. Who else are excluded? Negroes and convicted felons; no one else.

Mr. DANIEL. And women.

Mr. STOCKBRIDGE. Women have certain legal rights, but no political privileges. But all men in the State are admissible in your Legislature, negroes, convicted felons and ministers of the gospel excepted. A pretty row, certainly. I say this is a disgrace to our legislation, and an outrage upon the common sense of the community, and I hope it will be stricken out of our Constitution.

Mr. PURNELL. I can see no reason why ministers of the gospel should not occupy seats in the legislative halls, as well as in this Convention. It cannot be for want of cultivation; it cannot, I apprehend, be for the want of moral character, or for want of literary attainments. It is a fact that that class are better prepared in view of their qualifications than most any other class that are sent to the legislative halls of this State. And I think this large and influential class of citizens should be entitled at least to the same privileges and the same immunities with other of the most favored citizens of the State.

Besides that, it is a matter which should be left exclusively to the constituents, to the people of the respective communities, to select and choose their own agents, to say in their primary conventions who shall and who shall not represent them. And they should not be bound down to any particular class, or to any particular line in making their selection of those to legislate for them.

And I think, as has been very properly remarked here, this is an invidious distinction. They are precluded from any participation in the legislation of the State, in the passage of the laws by which their lives and their liberties are controlled. Of course they must abide by any legislation, or any terms that may be imposed by their agents who are sent to officiate in that capacity.

And if this evil is of that stupendous character, as has been represented by the gentle-