

leaving out this section. And I wish to state very briefly the reasons which induced me then, and induce me now, to support this proposition. I entirely agree to everything that has been said by the gentleman from Kent (Mr. Chambers,) in regard to the impropriety, as a general thing, of a minister of the gospel, taking part in politics. If I had my way in regard to it, I would desire that as a general thing none of them should do so. But I think that so far as the Constitution of this State is concerned, there is no reason why we should disqualify that class of persons, unless it proceeds from some doubt that as a class it is dangerous to the State to have them in the Legislature. That is the only ground upon which this restriction can be defended. The question whether they do or do not discharge their clerical duties, is a question with which the State has nothing to do. It is not a part of our business to prevent them from coming here, or to prevent people from sending them here, unless it can be shown that they are dangerous, and unfit to take part in public affairs. Now that I do not believe.

On the contrary, the Constitutions of most of the States, that have introduced this provision, put at the beginning of it the declaration, that whereas a minister of the gospel ought to devote himself exclusively to the service of God, therefore he ought not to go into the Legislature. And that declaration is made by men, nine out of ten of whom have no regard for God or the minister. Now, that is stating a wrong reason. In most cases the object of putting in such a restriction was far different from that.

Now, whatever may have been the case in the past, though our fathers may have thought that the Church and State should be separated finally, and this was one of the measures for that purpose, we have fallen upon different days. There are a large class of people in this State who are excluded from a seat in the Legislature, who are not excluded from the position of member of Congress, or that of Governor of the State, or any office in the State, except that of a member of the Legislature. Now, why a man should be disqualified from being a member of the Legislature, and allowed to be a Governor of the State, really to me seems to be hard to explain.

At the time this Constitution was originally adopted, there were very few religious denominations in the State. As everybody knows, the settled minister of the Episcopalian, Presbyterian and such denominations, was more permanent than the minister of other denominations of the present day. But the interpretation put upon this Constitution excludes from the General Assembly large numbers of people who have no congregation, and who are laymen in every sense of the term as distinguished from ecclesiastics. I know

a gentleman in Baltimore, who is the president of a bank; who has held office under the city government, and who is everywhere known as a layman, but who happens to hold the position of local preacher. He is excluded from being nominated to the Legislature of this State, because he happens to be a local preacher in the Methodist Episcopal Church. And such men can be numbered in this State by hundreds.

And while I think no harm will result from striking out this prohibition, it will satisfy and gratify a large class of those people, who feel that while in every other respect they are allowed to take part in the concerns of this State, they are excluded from the General Assembly. The evil intended to be guarded against is at least an evil that nobody has felt. It is not likely that many ministers will be sent to the General Assembly. Those who will come are those whose circumstances have obliged them to abandon preaching, and engage in other pursuits. And it will gratify many who are friendly to this Constitution, and desirous to vote for it.

Mr. MILLER. The clause as it now stands only prohibits those who are actually engaged in preaching, as ministers.

Mr. STIRLING. All these local preachers are engaged as ministers, although they do not perhaps preach more than once a month. Although they perform certain duties which that Church recognizes as clerical duties, they have no settled charge. Take a preacher who has abandoned his profession from sickness, or some other cause, but who still continues to preach at times, like my friend from Caroline (Mr. Todd;) if he continues to preach once a year, he is still exercising his function as a minister. I know some people who have abandoned the ministry, and gone over to infidelity, and denied the gospel and everything else; yet you allow them to come to your Legislature. You do not think there is any danger in admitting those people in the Legislature, for you do not regard them as ministers of the gospel. And if they are expelled or excommunicated priests, they are admitted into your Legislature.

Mr. SPOONER. If this were an ecclesiastical instead of a political body, I could see the full force of the argument offered to us by the gentleman from Kent (Mr. Chambers.) But we are not here for the purpose of preserving the purity of the clergy, however desirable an end that may be to accomplish. We are here to form a Constitution for the State, and we set out with the idea—that is the theory that runs all through it—that all the citizens of the State are under equal obligations to the State, and entitled to equal privileges in the State. If we are going to provide any exceptions to that general rule, they should be upon grounds clearly defined and well understood.

Now, what ground is there for constituting