

## THE CASE AGAINST MRS. PRENTICE

### CHURCH ARMY'S DECISION.

#### DEFENDANT APPEARS IN COURT WITH HER HUSBAND.

The adjourned proceedings against Mrs. Hilba Godsell Prentice, the wife of the Rev. J. G. Prentice, late rector of Tollerton, who was convicted of false pretences some time ago, were resumed under quite dramatic circumstances at the Nottingham Summary Court to-day.

At the last hearing a week ago, it was stated that Mrs. Prentice was too ill to appear, but just as the magistrates had taken their seats to-day she entered the court on the arm of her husband, who was only discharged from prison this morning, and also supported by a lady friend. Mrs. Prentice looked extremely ill, and was accommodated with a seat near her solicitor (Mr. R. A. Young).

Mr. Young said he had had great difficulty in getting his client to attend. She was still suffering from her illness, and had actually had two attacks in his office that morning.

The Chairman (Mr. F. Acton) remarked that since the last hearing his friend Dr. Snell had seen him, and it was only due to the doctor for the Bench to explain that he acted in perfectly good faith in allowing Mrs. Prentice to go away, having been assured that the case against her was at an end. It was under those circumstances that he sanctioned her going away.

Mr. Young: I am convinced of that, sir.

#### CHURCH ARMY'S WISH.

Mr. F. Berryman, the prosecuting solicitor, reported that he had communicated with the Church Army on the lines suggested by the magistrates, and had received a reply, stating definitely that they did not desire to proceed further with the matter.

Mr. Acton: Is that all you were instructed to say to us?

Mr. Berryman replied in the affirmative.

Mr. Acton pointed out that seven informations were filed in the court at the instance of the Church Army, alleging certain offences against the husband. That matter was disposed of, but there was a further information alleging a far more serious offence against the lady which remained on the files of the Court, and had to be seen by the Bench. Mr. Berryman did not admit that his clients on investigation found that there were no grounds for the case, so the information stood on the files of the Court to be dealt with. It was customary in such cases for the Court to relieve itself of responsibility by placing the circumstances before the Public Prosecutor, and leaving with him the responsibility of saying what course should be pursued.

At this point Mrs. Prentice collapsed, and nervously drummed her fingers on the desk; but she gradually recovered.

#### "SQUARED."

Proceeding, Mr. Acton said so far as the Bench were concerned, they had no desire whatever personally to proceed with the case. It was only a question of seeing justice done. It had been openly stated that the matter had been squared, but the Bench had no knowledge of anything of the kind.

Mr. Young suggested that the fact that the charge was impending was having a serious effect on the health of Mrs. Prentice, who had undoubtedly been much too ill to attend the Court previously. She had now travelled under considerable difficulty, and he would be very grateful if the magistrates could dispose of the case.

The Chairman: Assuming we found her guilty, it is quite competent for the Bench to take into consideration the suffering she has undergone.

Mr. Young said Mrs. Prentice emphatically denied the charges, but even if they were able to proceed now, he was afraid she was not in a condition to do herself justice in the witness box. If any course could be adopted which would end the matter to all intents and purposes, it would be a great relief to his client and her husband.

The Chairman said the only line the magistrates could adopt was to adjourn the case *sine die*, and refer the documents to the Public Prosecutor.

## TOLLERTON RECTOR'S FAILURE.

### A QUESTION OF DILAPIDATION.

"Heavy expenses for the upkeep of the Rectory, the stipend being insufficient for that purpose, and a heavy claim for dilapidations," are the causes which John Godsell Prentice, formerly rector of Tollerton, alleges induced him to file his petition in bankruptcy on January 25th. A first meeting of his creditors was held to-day at the offices of the Official Receiver (Mr. Wynne Humphreys), and there were present Mr. D'Oyley S. Ransom, Mr. J. James, of Colgrave, and Miss Goddard (representing Messrs. Griffin and Spalding). The debtor was represented by Mr. R. A. Young. The meeting decided to leave the administration of the estate in the hands of the Official Receiver.

The summary of the debtor's statement of affairs reveals liabilities, expected to rank for dividend, of £409 9s., and assets (including furniture, which realised £228 by sale) of £443 4s. 10d., leaving a deficiency of £46 4s. 2d.

In his observations, the Official Receiver states that the debtor, who is a graduate of London University, was originally a schoolmaster and had held various curacies in different parts of the country, and in 1909 he came from All Saints', Hull, to become the rector of Tollerton, a living worth £300 per annum gross with a rectory. He remained there until December last, when, in consequence of proceedings, he was suspended by the bishop of the diocese. So far no action has been taken to obtain a sequestration of the living. The outgoing rector, the debtor states, who had obtained a five years' certificate, and resigned shortly before the expiration of that period, was under no liability to restore the rectory or for dilapidations generally, and he himself did not take any steps to ascertain the extent of any obligations resting upon him. He seems to have been in more or less financial difficulty for many years, and admits knowledge of insolvency shortly after removing to Tollerton. He has earned about £3 a week for 14 months in a mansions factory in Nottingham, and this has enabled him to reduce somewhat his general indebtedness, which he was in hopes of gradually wiping out. The unsecured indebtedness comprises £225 for money borrowed, £120 for dilapidations at Tollerton Rectory, £54 for drapery, and £51 for groceries and seeds. It is understood that the money for filing the bankruptcy petition was deposited by friends.

The Official Receiver observed that the dilapidations at Tollerton, originally estimated at £120, were now placed at £20.