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Missions : Parochial and General.

BY THE RIGHT REV. J. DENTON THOMPSON, D.D.,

*Lord Bishop of Sodor and Man.**(Concluded from p. 582.)*

AFTER THE MISSION.

NO words can exaggerate the critical importance of the close of a mission as being both an end and a beginning. It is the end of a period set apart by prayer and effort for purposes of spiritual revival and aggressive evangelization. It is sometimes, however, forgotten that the end is a beginning of a new chapter in the history of the local church, the contents of which will depend mainly on the way in which the mission is closed and the means which are used to gather in and utilize its work. No one claims that all missions are equally successful—if the word may be used in this connection—or that the permanent effects are in all cases the same. So much depends upon the wisdom and power and, let me say, Churchmanship of the missionary, as also upon the extent to which the faithful have co-operated in prayer and work before and during the mission. But even more are the after-results conditioned by the character and capacity of the parochial clergy. How often have I heard disparaging remarks on missions as being comparatively ineffective uttered by clergy, while all unconsciously—to themselves—they were passing sentence upon their own inefficiency! They lacked, without knowing it, either leadership and organizing power, or enthusiasm and consecrated effort, to deal with the problems which a well-conducted mission necessarily creates in a parish. The failure which they condemned to some extent was due to themselves rather than to the missionary. It is impossible, therefore, to emphasize too strongly the critical nature of the close of a mission, and especially the tremendous responsibility it throws upon the Church in general and the clergy in particular.

In offering a few suggestions, which experience has taught me are of value, let us begin by facing certain facts, and the influences which flow from them. In the first place, when the mission closes, a time of spiritual tension comes to an end and some measure of reaction is to be expected. The excitement which not unnaturally accompanies such an effort suddenly terminates, and the result is, with some, a sense of depression, and with others, a consciousness that "something is wanting." The exertion put forth by the workers is followed by a corresponding exhaustion. Ordinary duties, which have been more or less suspended, must now be resumed, and the ordinary is not equally attractive to all. Secular work, which was at least partially set aside for spiritual claims, must begin again, and not everyone perceives that the secular may and ought to be sacred.

Secondly, the close of the mission coincides with the departure of the missionary, and his place is taken by the parochial clergy. This often involves a change—perhaps a great change—in the method of preaching and to some extent in its matter. The special gifts of the missionary may not be possessed in the same proportion by the resident clergy, while the sermons of the latter are generally more didactic and less evangelistic than those of the former. All this means that the sense of loss is increased, and most of all in those who, during the mission, have been converted, restored, or otherwise helped and blessed. Moreover, the services in the church, which were of course exceptional, now return to the normal. There is no singing before the services begin. The clergy are not in the church to extend by their presence a welcome to those who come. A change has taken place in the spiritual atmosphere. The church seems colder, and the worship more formal.

Thirdly, a mission is fraught with much influence, direct and indirect, partial and temporary, as well as complete and permanent. In other words, while the effort, we may assume, has resulted with some in personal conviction of sin and definite conversion to God, with others it has simply aroused a transient interest in spiritual concerns or awakened desires which may

easily pass quickly away. No one supposes, *e.g.*, that only those who apply for a memorial card have received blessing. There are always some who for various reasons make no application, but who, nevertheless, have been helped in some way, while every mission leaves men and women, alas! halting between two opinions—almost persuaded, but still undecided.

It is just these facts and experiences arising from, or connected with, the close of a mission which, frequently overlooked or forgotten, call for careful consideration. Let the clergy remember, what human nature is, and that they also are human nature. Let them recognize that the spirit of loyalty and gratitude must cause the people to miss the missionary, and that the spirit of jealousy or suspicion must not be allowed to creep into their hearts. Above all, let them consecrate themselves to adjusting the Church, its services and agencies, to the new conditions the mission has created. That these suggestions are not needed in many cases I know, but that they are useful and even required in others I also know. There have been missions where, through the lack of a study of human nature—I had almost said through the want of sanctified common sense, or, better still, of Divine grace—their close has been marred by strained relations between the clergy and the missionary, or the clergy and the people, while in several cases known to me, when the mission came to an end the clergy went for a holiday!

Assuming, however, that as a rule better counsels than these prevail, and that the mission has closed with a great evening thanksgiving service, completed by a celebration of the Holy Communion—a Eucharist indeed—the following morning, we may proceed to ask: "What methods can best gather in the fruits of the effort?" In the suggestions I venture to submit for the consideration of my brethren, I claim no more than that I have found them useful. In this, as in other matters, experience varies, and it is quite possible that other and better methods may have approved themselves to some of my readers. I can only speak of that I know, and testify to what I have seen.

By way of introduction to more definite proposals, I may be

permitted here to refer to a plan which I have found to be generally, though not always to the same degree, successful. As the mission closes, it is my rule to announce my intention of remaining a day or two longer in the parish or district, with a view of helping anxious souls by personal intercourse. In Douglas, *e.g.*, I gave two days and nights to this solemn and blessed work, and had many solemnly blessed interviews. I invite the people to come either singly or together, and this not only helps the timid and fearful, but has brought, *e.g.*, the husband and wife to confess together the cause of some estrangement, or engaged couples to seek counsel for their future life, or father and son, mother and daughter, etc., with their own peculiar and related difficulties, personal or domestic, besides many seeking, sinning, and sorrowing souls, who have found comfort, forgiveness, and blessing by the medium of this private ministry. Some missionaries I know adopt this plan earlier, and indeed during the whole mission. In my experience, without discouraging such personal interviews and always welcoming them when they are desired, I have found that as a rule they are better taken at the close, both in the interests of the physical strength of the missionary and the spiritual state of the people.

My first proposal, as the mission draws to an end, is that on the night immediately following its close a special service should be held for all those who have received spiritual benefit, with a view to hearing an address on the subject of Church membership, its privileges and obligations. Both the subject and its importance ought to be emphasized by the missionary at the thanksgiving services, and if at all possible the address should be given by him. In my own experience I have found this method of completing the mission to be of the greatest spiritual value, and to be appreciated by very large congregations. Here, in the Isle of Man, I make it a rule on the last few days of the mission to announce that I propose to give such an address, and to invite all who have been in any way helped to be present. At the same time I am careful to explain that

Christ came not only to save the individual, but to form a society, and that only in fellowship with the society can the individual live his full life, and therefore that active membership of the Church is not simply advisable but necessary. Having thus urged the importance of the subject, and pleaded with the people to attend, I deal, on the evening itself, with Baptism as the sacrament of admission, Holy Communion as the sacrament of fellowship, Confirmation as the order for confession, leading to the duties and privileges of the Church's worship and work. The results have been as remarkable as they have been encouraging, and more than justify my plea for the setting aside of an evening for such definite instruction. I ought perhaps to add, as many Nonconformists attend the services here, that I am careful to explain beforehand the nature and object of the address, and at the same time to say that, if with this candid explanation any desire to understand or understand better the Church's system of doctrine and worship, they will be of course most welcome. By this method I avoid the charge of mere proselytism, and make it easy for Nonconformists to attend, which not a few of them do, and often with the best results.

Secondly, I suggest that a meeting of the workers be called at the earliest possible date after the close of the mission, and that they then be encouraged to revisit their districts with a view of making a definite report. This should not be merely a general statement, but should include special cases which call for "following up" the effects which have been produced, either by the workers or the clergy. In some parishes a further meeting might usefully be convened for the purpose of presenting such portions of the report as it might be deemed advisable to read. By this means the efficient workers are encouraged, the inefficient corrected, and the spiritual work as a whole is consolidated and made more real.

Thirdly, at whatever cost—and it must necessarily be great—all who have received memorial cards ought to be personally visited by the clergy, and as soon as possible. This, I know, involves strenuous and self-denying work. It makes a great

and heavy demand upon ministerial time and strength when arrears in other departments of duty must be dealt with and energy is somewhat exhausted. But its importance cannot be overestimated, and again I repeat, with reiterated emphasis, it ought and must be done if the harvest of the mission is to be reaped. Here it is my rule to meet with the clergy for conference, intercession, and thanksgiving, and to distribute, as in Douglas—where all the Churches were united—the names and addresses from the application forms, according to their parishes, for visitation purposes.

Fourthly, everyone who it is known has been influenced by the mission should be induced, either directly by the clergy or indirectly through the workers, to join some guild, union, society, Bible-class, or club, with a view of making more direct and definite their attachment to the Church. In every well-organized parish such agencies exist, as, *e.g.*, the Mothers' Union for mothers, the C.E.M.S. for men, the G.F.S. for young women, Lads' Brigade or Scouts for boys, with other methods of drawing together the members of the Church of both sexes in healthy unity and intercourse. The secretaries and committees of these various agencies should be entrusted by the clergy with the names and addresses of those considered to be suitable for membership, and should be instructed to leave no stone unturned to induce them to become members. In this way the activities of the Church are still further directed and developed, while those who have been helped by the mission are not left, as is sometimes the case, to their own resources, to join other bodies or to drift away altogether. If, again, I may be pardoned for referring to personal methods, there are three duties on which I lay the greatest stress at the close of the mission over and above those which have been already mentioned or suggested. After inquiring whether such agencies exist and if they do not, assuring myself that they will be at once formed, I appeal most strongly for all who have been confirmed to join the Communicants' Guild or Union. This I do because I believe a regular meeting of "the inner Church"—its

real members—for purposes of fellowship, instruction, and intercession, to be so spiritually helpful as to be practically necessary in every parish. In the same way and under like conditions I plead with all who have been influenced by the mission to join the Bible-reading Union, which can be worked as a branch of the Communicants' Guild. Here again I feel the daily systematic reading of the Scriptures to be so essential to spiritual development—"that ye may grow thereby"—that without the stimulus and guidance of a definitely formed Union the parochial organization is seriously defective. Thirdly, I plead for the adoption or renewal of the time-honoured practice of family prayer. No words are needed to enforce the sanctifying and unifying power of the altar set up in the home, nor the direct and indirect blessings which issue from its hallowing influence. But that the practice is diminishing there can be no doubt, to the incalculable loss of the unity and purity of family life. No mission can therefore fittingly close without a strenuous effort to win back its revival on the part of the missionary and clergy. In Douglas, *e.g.*, nearly 300 bought in the porch the penny manual of "Family Prayers," published by Messrs. Longmans, and in so doing, at my suggestion, pledged themselves to revive or begin the practice. In view of the importance of concentrating effort on practical results at a time when the hearts of the people are impressed and responsive, I can make no apology for thus entering the region of detail.

Fifthly, the close of the mission ought not to witness the end of direct evangelistic efforts but rather their adoption, occasionally or at regular intervals, as the parish priest may determine, and as far as possible on the lines of the services during the mission itself. By this, I mean the circulation of literature and handbills throughout the entire parish, the visitation of the people by the workers, the use of the mission hymn-book, etc. The season of Lent and Holy Week offer suitable occasions for such efforts, or they might be continued for a time on a fixed Sunday in the month, during the winter in the church and during the summer in many parishes the usual open-air

services would fittingly and more regularly realize the same end.

Lastly, and I need scarcely offer the suggestion, so usual is its adoption, there is the advantage of a "revisit" from the missionary. His return is, as a rule, not only warmly welcomed by the clergy and people, but it serves to refresh old memories and to inspire new endeavours, besides utilizing still further the special gifts with which he is endowed by God for the furtherance of His Kingdom.

My task, so pleasant and congenial, is now completed, and bears on its surface the defects of everything human of which I am only too deeply conscious. My one hope and prayer in writing these articles has been that by some word of appeal and testimony I might do something, however little, to hasten the day of a spiritual revival for which the Church is languishing and most of us are longing. Not that I think missions will alone accomplish such an end, so necessary and desirable, but simply because I feel that they powerfully contribute as a means to the end, and also because I am sure that they help to keep alive and vigorous the evangelistic element as an essential part of the normal life of the Church.

