

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

friendly, more sympathetic, more consistent, more real, more zealous. The Church and kingdom of Christ are ill understood by many. It is our privilege, by making the presentation of them intelligible and attractive, to remove hindrances from many an honest and manly soul.

WILLIAM SINCLAIR.

ART. IV.—THE CHURCH AND THE NAVVIES.

- Navvies and their Needs.* By the Rev. L. M. EVANS, B.A., late Rector of Leathley. With Appendix. (Reprinted from the *Quiver*, 1877.) Pp. 32. Printed by Andrew Churchman, 16, King Street, Hammer-smith.
- Little Rainbow.* A Tale. By Mrs. CHARLES GARNETT. Isbister, 1877.
- My Friends the Navvies.* By the same. (Reprinted from the *Sunday Magazine*.) Pp. 28. Leeds: J. W. Petty and Sons, 1882.
- The Bishop of Manchester on the Claims and Needs of Navvies, and the Work of the Navy Mission Society.* A Speech, December 11, 1890. Pp. 4.
- In a Hut.* Illustrated. Pp. 4. Navy Mission Society: Office of the Society, Church House, Westminster, S.W.
- The Story of our Mission.* By Mrs. CHARLES GARNETT. Pp. 22. Ramsbottom: J. T. Grime, 1897.
- Nineteenth Annual Report of the Navy Mission Society,* April, 1896, to April, 1897. Office of the Society.
- A Quarterly Letter to Men on Public Works.* Edited by Mrs. C. GARNETT. Navy Mission Society.

UNTIL comparatively lately little was known of the navvies. It would seem that Christian philanthropy was unaware that there existed in our midst a great body of men, shut off from all other classes in almost every conceivable way, and with needs, physical, social, and spiritual, that cried aloud for relief. For all practical purposes, the navvies were an unknown people. Sufficient information, however, has now been collected to show that they possess strong claims upon the Church and society; and this article aims at presenting its leading points in a condensed form, in the hope that further attention may be drawn to this unique class, and more be done to raise its condition. Such treatment leaves but little room for emotion, but the story is full of pathos, and those who can read the underlying meaning of facts and figures will discern what will stir to its depths the compassion of every feeling heart.

1. THE NAVVY CLASS.—The men originally employed in constructing canals and water-ways, it appears, were called "navigators," and, as the same class also undertook other public works, their name followed them, and, shortened into the familiar "navvy," has become the accepted designation of

this vast labouring tribe. Labourers of a typical kind they are indeed, for they are the strongest of all the labouring classes, and the work they perform can only be done by their own powerful limbs.

This body numbers in the aggregate 100,000, or upwards of the entire efficient strength of the Royal Navy. The navvies are a nomad class, having no settled home and wandering over the country wherever work offers. They possess their own strongly-marked characteristics and maintain their own customs. They are, in fact, as much wanderers as the gipsies, and as distinct from all other classes in society; but differ from them as being a home-bred stock, and in their sterling worth and honesty.

To these sons of Anak we owe our great railways, docks, canals, reservoirs, and sewerage works. It is estimated that in England and Wales there are now in course of construction 300 miles of railway; twenty great reservoirs, some of which are remote from any town; 100 miles of water-track, either laid out or actually being made; seven enormous docks; and hundreds of miles of sewerage and similar works. These are the outcome of the rapid advance of comfort and civilization in our day, and are necessary for the health of our growing population. The Manchester Ship Canal alone took the labour of 20,000 navvies. These facts all point to the great debt we owe to the navy class.

Now, if we consider the effect upon the navvies of their wandering life, it will be seen that they form a great disfranchised class. It is not merely that, having no settled home, they are unable to qualify for the parliamentary or municipal vote. That is a minor, though not an unimportant, matter. But, beside this, they are outside all that network of civilization with which the framework of our society is encompassed. Difficult as it may be to credit, and still more difficult to grasp the full significance of it, the navvies are outside the Parochial System, the Poor Laws, the Education Laws, the Sanitary Laws, and the Drink Laws; and are, in a word, absolutely excluded from all our social organizations.

2. HABITS AND CUSTOMS.—The navy's work taking him for the most part away from towns, and being essentially temporary, it would be impossible to find cottage accommodation for the numbers gathered together wherever a railway has to be constructed or a reservoir excavated. They therefore live chiefly in huts, constructed near the scene of their operations and grouped in settlements. These dwellings they erect themselves under the direction of the contractor, and, when they leave, they take them down and remove them.

These huts are uniform in plan. The material is wood pro-

ted by roofing felt. You enter the kitchen, which serves for the general "living" room and is furnished with tables and forms. On one side is a door opening into the men's sleeping-chamber, and on the other one leading into the landlord's family bedroom. In this kitchen the men take their meals, and sit by the fire with their pipes, newspapers, and dominoes after the work of the day is done. If a navvy falls sick, there is no separate place in which he can be nursed. He has to lie amongst his companions as they rest from the toils of the day.

The work of a navvy is fraught with danger. Sometimes by a fall from an engine; sometimes by a waggon accident, while conducting the dangerous operation of "tipping," or throwing over a load of soil for the railway embankment; sometimes, by a fall of rock or earth in a tunnel, a navvy labourer will lose limb or life. It has been computed that, for every mile of railway, a navvy has sacrificed a limb, while every tunnel has cost from one to twenty lives. In the Arthington Tunnel thirty-six lives were lost. Add to these the dangers to life arising from exposure, carelessness, neglect, and want of proper infirmary accommodation, and we shall scarcely wonder that an old navvy is seldom seen.

The dress of the navvy is characteristic. Strong lined cloth or velveteen coat; plush waistcoat; white trousers, or knee-breeches and woollen stockings; warm thick shirt and heavy boots; and sometimes a sealskin cap. His tools are such as the pickaxe, the spade, and the wheelbarrow. His food is necessarily very supporting and abundant, or it would be impossible to perform the work. These requirements make a navvy's expenses considerable, and although the wages are fairly good, leave him but little for himself. Besides this, they are often the victims of unscrupulous tradesmen, who prey on their necessities, and are frequently charged ruinous prices for the roughest sleeping accommodation where huts have not been provided.

Navvies are very kind to any of their "mates" who are sick or injured, and will sometimes sit up to nurse them, and contribute freely towards their needs from their own hard-earned wages. Generous and confiding to a fault, they will entrust their money for safe-keeping to landladies, who, if dishonest, will keep back the larger part of it. A navvy will sometimes weary of the station upon which he works, and then a singular custom obtains. On his leaving to go "on tramp," he can claim a shilling from each of the men at work. This is known as "the tramping bob," and the custom, as may easily be imagined, is subject to frequent abuse. To any in need, a navvy will lend or give freely; sometimes his

all. Navvies never beg. They have been known to walk for days without food rather than do so. They are fond of travelling about the country, and thoroughly enjoy a railway journey.

One confusing custom is their use of aliases. A man is known more often by a nickname than by his own name. This will be drawn either from his personal appearance or from the place he comes from. Owing to this cause, it is difficult to identify a man amid new surroundings, and members of families become almost hopelessly lost to each other. Here the Quarterly Letter of the Navy Mission Society often renders valuable assistance.

Their isolation from other classes produces habits of their own, often of evil tendency. Drink is still rife amongst them. Bad language was formerly their ordinary speech, though less common to-day. Marriage between navy couples was hardly the rule, but in this respect a great improvement has been wrought. A navy missionary states that, through the circulation of literature dealing with this subject, the whole tone of navy life has been changed. Before mission-rooms were established in their midst, Sunday was known as "hair-cutting day," and was chiefly interesting from dog-racing and prize-fighting. These practices have now received a check.

3. NAVVIES AND THE OTHER CLASSES.—The settled inhabitants usually regard the navvies working amongst them with a mixture of fear and contempt. Hardly, indeed, are they recognised as belonging to the human race. A woman, narrating an accident, stated that "three men *and a navy*" had been killed. As a rule, they do not get a fair chance to win a position amongst the other classes. We have seen at what cost they obtain the barest shelter and common necessities. Even the clergy have shown their aversion to them. "A navy! give him three months!" was what they had to expect from magistrates. They are perfectly aware of the estimation in which they are held, and bitterly resent it. They laugh at the fear felt for them as absurd, but despise the cowardly and selfish spirit of those who indulge it. Outlawed, the pariahs of society, with no welcome anywhere, it is no wonder that they lived so long in barbarism. There were no reading-rooms open to them; no religious services, Sunday-school or night-school provided for them; and the ordinary religious agencies were unable to meet their requirements. The manager of one works, twenty years ago, wrote: "We have been here four years, and we have never been visited by any minister. Our job is nearly finished. No one has ever so much as sent us a tract to read on a Sunday." To do the parochial clergy justice, very few of them have the

opportunity, the aptitude, or the means, without special aid, to minister with efficiency to this class of men.

4. BEGINNINGS OF CHURCH EFFORT AMONG NAVVIES.—Thirty years ago there was no organized attempt to bring the Gospel to the navy. It is true that a few earnest, sporadic efforts had been made, notably by Miss Marsh, who has told the story in her "Light for the Line," and by Canon (afterwards Dean) Fremantle. But these were purely local, and the good influences did not follow the men when they left the favoured neighbourhoods. Navvies, being a nomad class, require a nomad mission. Like the Israelites in the desert, they must drink of a spiritual rock that follows them. Their tabernacle must be one that can be taken down and removed, if it is to stand ever in their midst the symbol of God's presence among them.

Such an organization has been found in the happily-devised work of the Navy Mission, of the inception of which we must now give a brief account.

5. ORIGIN OF THE NAVY MISSION SOCIETY.—In the year 1870 a large reservoir was being constructed at Lindley Wood, in Wharfedale, to store water for the town of Leeds. The curate of the neighbouring town of Otley, the Rev. L. M. Evans, afterwards Rector of Leathley, began to visit the men, and became deeply interested in them. By his efforts a small wooden church was built, and another room adapted to a reading-room and school. Services were held by him and attended by the navvies. Other workers joined, stirred by his earnestness, and continued the mission until the settlement broke up on the completion of the work. The effect was to change the whole tone of navy society on the spot. The children were gathered into the day and Sunday schools; the men into the night-school; and the Church services were hearty and well attended. But on inquiry, it was found that scarcely anything was being done elsewhere. Unless some general movement were made, the good impressions that had been made would be obliterated. The first step was to form the Christian Excavators' Union, which, beginning with twenty-five members, has increased to upwards of 600. The mission-work was transferred to Swinstey, six miles from Lindley Wood, where another reservoir was being made, and 400 men, with their women and children, were living in huts.

In 1877, two articles written by Mr. Evans appeared in the *Quiver*, and a tale entitled "Little Rainbow," by Mrs. Charles Garnett, based on her experience as a worker at Lindley Wood, was published. A circular was issued appealing for funds, and resulted in the formation of the Navy Mission Society the following November. Mr. Evans, now in an

advanced stage of consumption, acted as honorary secretary, but the following year rested from his earthly labours. The late Dean Fremantle, of Ripon, one of the pioneers of Navy work, threw himself into the young Society, as did also Canon Jackson, of Leeds. Since then the Society has continued its useful labours, the object of which is to promote the spiritual welfare of this class; to collect and publish information as to their condition, and thus elicit the sympathy and help of more favoured classes; and to provide a channel through which funds may be most efficiently and economically administered.

In co-operation with the local clergy Missions are organized for the various stations, and grants are made towards the employment of Scripture-readers. The work is conducted on the lines of the Church of England, and a modified form of the Church Service is found to be the best possible instrument for supplying the religious wants of navvies. The salaries of workers amount to over £4,000 a year; towards which the Society grants £1,300, the rest being raised locally. The Society owns fourteen Mission Rooms, twenty-seven more being provided by contractors and six by local missions. Most of these are moved about from place to place, as required. There are forty-six lay missionaries who visit the men in the dinner-hour, and also the huts. They hold Sunday and week-day services, Bible classes, prayer meetings, temperance meetings, entertainments, Sunday and night schools, savings banks, mothers' meetings, ambulance classes, and any other gatherings conducive to the general welfare of the men and their families. There are fifty-two stations at present. Besides these workers, there are two chaplains and two clerical secretaries who organize and superintend the missions. The devotedness and ability of the workers are well tested and proved. Christmas gifts of clothing are made annually by friends of the mission, and are highly valued by the navvies and their families. A quarterly letter to men on public works, with a record of births, deaths, marriages, and accidents, as well as a complete list of works throughout the country, is freely circulated among the men, and is so much valued that they annually contribute a large sum towards the expense of printing. The "Navy's Guide," as they call it, contains remarkably plain and direct treatment of the sins frequent among them, and reads to the uninitiated very quaintly. Last year 145,000 of these were issued.

The influence of ladies upon the men is a notable feature of the work. Mrs. Garnett still continues her unwearied labours, and many other lady workers have arisen in the local missions. The navvies welcome their frank and kindly advances and

their practical counsel and assistance. The more delicate a lady appears to be, the more, it would seem, she appeals to their chivalrous feelings. At all events, the influence they rapidly yield to ladies is unbounded.

It must be remembered that the Navy Mission is not one among several societies of the same aim, but the only one working amongst navvies; so that, were its efforts to cease, there would be nothing to hinder a relapse into the barbarism of the past.

6. RESULTS.—The results of the work have been great. Prize-fighting and riotous orgies have received a check. Moral tone has improved, and marriage is now far more general. Many have become total abstainers—a wise step in presence of the illegal sale of drink in huts. A navvy is reported to have said: “The Navy Mission has changed all our works. It has raised our class; it has taught people to respect us, and it has taught us to respect ourselves.” A number of men have been presented for confirmation and admitted as communicants. From personal experience in administering the Holy Communion to navvies, the writer can aver that no more devout recipients could be desired. This kind of navvy, though a numerically small proportion of the whole class, is exercising a powerful influence upon the rest. One happy result has been the establishment of a similar society in Scotland, which is stated to have a superintendent and eight missionaries. An effort has also been made for foreign navvies, principally Italians and Scandinavians. The condition of navvies in America is reported to be very bad, and it may be hoped that the Christianity which has freed the negroes will do something for the white slaves.

7. CONCLUDING REMARKS.—What we now have to aim at is to bring the navvy class within the operation of the beneficent laws, already named, from which they are practically excluded. We trust also that contractors will make a conscience of providing sufficient hut accommodation, and of preventing overcrowding. Managers can do much to check the sale of drink in huts. Sanitary authorities can have the settlements properly inspected and dangers to health removed. Educational authorities can provide for the children. But no greater service can be rendered than by strengthening the income of the Mission, now only £4,000 a year, to enable it to grapple more effectively with the needs of this great class. If some philanthropic member of Parliament would take up the cause of the navvies, something might be done by legislation to improve their condition. It might even be found possible to enfranchise them, and thus give them the same voice in the affairs of the nation possessed by other working

men. Meanwhile our appeal, as ever, must be to the Church, whose wings of love ever outstrip the lagging feet of human policy in the Divine work of delivering those that are drawn to death.

A. C. DOWNER.

ART. V.—THE ART OF PUBLIC SPEAKING.

HINTS FOR THE PULPIT, BAR AND PLATFORM.

PART I.—BREATHING.

IN the exquisite perfection of the human voice, we see the conception not of a finite mind, but that of the Divine Artificer! For how complex, yet perfect, its organism! How numerous and delicate its constituent parts, and yet how sublime the harmony in which those parts are made to interact! In design it is incomparably more beautiful than anything the human mind ever projected!

Yet what organ is there more abused than the voice? And, because abused, the pulpit and platform alike witness to repeated failures in the art of public speaking, because it is falsely assumed that the voice may, by some intuitive power, be played upon with varying degrees of skill by the most uninstructed tyro without any instruction or training.

Such a notion is contrary to the opinions and practice of ancient and modern orators.

In the Republics of Greece and Rome, men were orators not by nature or accident, but became such by a rigid and systematic training.

The first failures of Demosthenes in public speaking are attributed by Plutarch to his inattention to the art of delivery. On hearing the actor Satyrus deliver some lines from Euripides or Sophocles, he was powerfully convinced of how much is lost if speech have nothing of the ornaments or graces of delivery. He therefore built for himself a subterranean study, into which he daily descended for practice. It were needless to show with what success his labours were eventually crowned. Cicero, too, failed at first through an excessive vehemence of manner, which he conquered through study and discipline. "No one," writes the Bishop of Ripon, "will become a great or effective speaker without training."

John Bright regularly read aloud during the Session of Parliament from one of the standard poets. The inference, therefore, is that if such men of acknowledged oratorical endowment submitted themselves to some training in the art