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THE  
CHURCHMAN

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JANUARY, 1887.

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ART. I.—THE CHURCH AND THE PEOPLE.

THE assertion is very freely hazarded in the present day that the Church of England has lost her hold upon the affections of the people, and that her ministrations and methods are no longer adapted for supplying their spiritual needs. It is not denied that the Clergy and faithful Laity are doing all in their power to make the work of the Church effective. Recent statistics have made such a denial inadmissible. But it is alleged that, in spite of much zealous, self-denying effort, the Church's system is so out of harmony with the requirements of the times that little or no influence is exerted over the hearts and lives of the people.

Our own experience is so entirely at variance with these conclusions that we should hardly see the necessity of taking up our pen to combat them if it were not that we often meet devout Churchmen who accept them without question, and become, in consequence, more interested in the promotion of unauthorized and irregular methods of evangelization than in maintaining the efficiency and the spread of those opportunities of grace which they themselves have found so precious.

Under the circumstances, it shall be our endeavour to show first of all that the Church of England as a body has not lost her hold upon the affections of the people; secondly, that the ministrations and methods of the Church, when faithfully employed, are admirably suited to the spiritual requirements of the day; and thirdly, that the influence of faithful Church work upon the hearts and lives of the people is deep-rooted, conspicuous, and enduring.

Perhaps it is here necessary for us to define who it is that we mean by the People. Such a term should naturally

include the whole nation ; and we, for our part, are prepared to maintain the theses which we have just laid down, in their most general application. But for convenience' sake, and with a view to limiting the scope of our discussion, we will adopt the definition of the People suggested in the subtle distinction recently drawn by an eminent statesman between the classes and the masses. Let it, however, be clearly understood that in so doing we accept no deductions which either reflect injuriously upon the classes or attribute any monopoly of virtue and enlightenment to the masses. By the masses we simply understand the vast population of artisans, labourers, and struggling poor who form the great majority of our nation, and consequently possess the greatest claim upon the energies of the Church.

In maintaining our first proposition, that the Church of England as a body has not lost her hold upon the affections of the people thus defined, we shall not rely exclusively upon statistics. Any statistics upon such a point must of necessity be more or less unreliable, while the principal fact which it would be important for us to know (namely, the proportion of professed Church-people to the rest of the population) is hidden from us by the refusal of the State to make a census of religions. It is, however, worthy of note that, notwithstanding the facilities which are now given for marriage in Nonconformist chapels and before the registrar, 72 per 100 of the marriages that take place are still solemnized in Church. Moreover, of seamen and mariners who from among the people join the royal navy 75 per 100, and of soldiers who enlist in the army 62 per 100, declare themselves members of the Church of England. Facts such as these, while they should not be taken to prove too much, are nevertheless sufficient to justify us in emphatically denying the statement which is sometimes made, that at least a half of the nation is entirely alienated from the Church.

But we will leave dry statistics, and turn our attention to other more lively indications of the general attachment of the people to the Church. These indications appear everywhere. It is often surprising to observe how, in the face of all that is said against the Church, the people rally round her as the natural centre of their religious life wherever the opportunity is given them. Even those who attach themselves to Nonconformist places of worship for the most part disclaim anything like formal separation, and are glad from time to time to seize occasions of joining in the Church's worship. Thus we often see Friendly and Benefit Societies, whose members are drawn from many Denominations, eagerly assembling for a united service in some central Parish Church in their neigh-

bourhood. The same may be noted with regard to the various organizations for the promotion of Temperance. Good Templars, Rechabites, Sons of the Phoenix, etc., are all found uniting of their own accord with their brethren of the Church of England Temperance Society in public acts of worship.

But it is not only on these public occasions that the attachment of the people to the ministrations of the Church is manifested. There is also a general disposition to give a hearty welcome to the Clergy and other Church-workers in their house-to-house visitation. The instances are few indeed where any opposition is offered to such attentions. In fact, we have never known of a refusal in any case of sickness or distress. In the matter of the education of their children the people, so far as our experience goes, seem to have almost unbounded confidence in the Church. Church day-schools are, as a rule, preferred, even when the fee is higher, to Board schools, and the Conscience Clause, over which politicians were so much exercised, is scarcely ever required to be brought into operation.

We have no wish to undervalue the work of Nonconformist bodies, or to dispute their claim to some share in the affections of the people. On the contrary, while we regret, on what we believe to be the highest grounds, the fact that Nonconformity exists among us, we readily admit that Nonconformists have in some instances supplied a want which the Church has failed to meet. We are, nevertheless, still of opinion that the hold of Nonconformity upon the people is accidental and superficial, whereas their attachment to the Church is inborn and fundamental. To illustrate our meaning we may mention that we know of not a few parishes where, under a revival of Church-work, Nonconformist chapels have been abandoned for want of a congregation, and either completely secularized else or handed over to the Church.

But we have no desire to overstate our case, and we shall not attempt to deny that the people sometimes manifest indifference and hostility to the Church. We can expect nothing else. The Church on earth is a militant body, formed to contend with opposing forces. Sin, the world, and the devil confront her in various ways. In some instances, unhappily, the root of bitterness springs up from within, in the form of neglect on the part of the Clergy, or of religious discord provoked by an injudicious insistence upon trifling changes of ritual. A whole parish is thus for a time demoralized, and a large proportion of the inhabitants temporarily alienated from the Church. Sometimes indifference and hostility to the Church are the unprovoked outcome of

the party strife of politicians. It is humiliating to observe how often even those who profess to be Churchmen forget themselves in the heat of an electoral contest, and either indulge in wanton attacks upon the Church on their own account or allow statements to pass in their presence which they know to be unfair and unjust. The people are deliberately taught at such times to regard the Church as an institution which stands in the way of their full possession of their rights and liberties, and they are advised to treat the Clergy and all other Church officials with suspicion and mistrust. We have before us at the present moment the report of a speech delivered by an able Churchman, who in his own parish is a member of several Church committees and a devout communicant, who nevertheless, in the disappointment of defeat at the poll, which he chose to attribute to Church-people, urges his supporters not to rest until they have in every town and in every village in the division which he had contested an organization to counteract the influence of the Church authorities. Ill-judged, hasty utterances of this kind are not without their injurious effect upon those who hear them; and indeed, considering their frequency, it is only to be wondered at that after a general election the Church retains the affections of the people so generally as she does. Then it is hardly necessary to add that there is always a certain amount of indifference and hostility to the Church among the openly godless and vicious. It is impossible that those who forget God and take delight in sin should have any real affection for the society whose very existence is a standing rebuke to their conduct.

We do not, however, think it can be said that the exceptions which we have admitted in any way affect the truth of the general proposition that the Church, as a body, still retains her hold upon the affections of the people.

We come now to our second proposition, that the ministrations and methods of the Church, when faithfully employed, are admirably suited to the spiritual requirements of the day. In support of this proposition we shall point first of all to the simplicity and directness of the Church's teaching. Nothing could be more clear than the way in which the great truths of Christianity, with the privileges and responsibilities which result from their acceptance, are everywhere set forth in her formularies. We do not know of a greater insult to the intelligence of the people than the allegation which is sometimes made, that the Book of Common Prayer is altogether beyond their comprehension. We cannot admit for one moment that the lengthy, laboured, and flowing extempore prayers which are often indulged in at religious meetings are

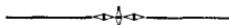
half so intelligible or devotional as the short, pithy, pointed collects and suffrages which are used in the worship of the Church. In a compilation such as the Book of Common Prayer, there must of necessity be some words that are hard to be understood; but while these are only occasional, the pages generally abound with the plainest possible devotional exercises and doctrinal teaching, based upon the plainest instructions from Holy Scripture. It has often been our privilege to witness the intelligent spiritual joy with which sick and aged Church-people, who can only just read, will pore over their Prayer Books at home, and find consolation in the familiar worship which they are prevented by infirmity from offering any longer in the house of God. We claim next, that there is completeness and harmony, as well as simplicity and directness, in the teaching of the Church. Where the course of the Christian Year is followed, and the Scriptural teaching of the Prayer Book adhered to, the whole counsel of God is annually declared. No single article of the Christian faith is magnified to the exclusion of the rest, but all are set forth in their proper proportion, so that the devout Churchman cannot fail to be thoroughly furnished for the fulfilment of the duties and privileges which belong to his high calling, and their completeness and harmony secure reasonableness and sobriety to the teaching of the Church, conditions which seem to us to be often wanting in the appeals made to the religious sense of the people by other bodies. In the beautiful logical sequence of Church Doctrine, the people can find conviction for the mind as well as for the heart. Not only are their feelings and affections worked upon, but their understandings also; and they are placed in a better position to give a reason when challenged for the hope that is in them. Doctrine thus taught and received produces sobriety of character. Religion becomes the atmosphere of everyday life, and ceases to be the mere occasional effervescence of mental and physical excitement. And the Church which provides this teaching possesses every opportunity for disseminating it as widely as possible. Her organization is capable of reaching all grades of society, and of grappling with every form of vice. It is not necessary that we should here enter upon a full explanation of the Church's system. Suffice it for our purpose to say that within the boundaries of their own parishes there is nothing to prevent the Clergy and faithful Laity from prosecuting the work of Christ in every possible direction. Not only is every branch of Christ's service open to them, but they are simply bound to fight manfully under His banner in every direction against sin, the world, and the devil; and we claim that in parishes where the ministrations and methods of the Church

are faithfully employed, no effort is spared, no organization neglected, which offers the faintest prospect of winning and keeping souls for Christ. We are sometimes told, as a recommendation of other religious bodies, that their agents can visit in places where the Clergy and other Church-workers would be afraid to go. But we emphatically dispute the statement, and entirely deny that there is any house or lodging, however degraded, which the conscientious Church-worker, whether Clergyman or District-visitor, would be deterred from entering by any motive of fear.

Our third proposition, that the influence of faithful Church-work upon the hearts and lives of the people is deep-rooted, conspicuous, and enduring, requires no proof to those who admit the truth of the first and second propositions. If, for instance, the Church still retains her hold upon the affections of the people, it is clear that the people have been deeply influenced by her ministrations, otherwise they would not still value them as they do. Or, again, if the ministrations and methods of the Church are admirably adapted for the spiritual requirements of the day, it is impossible that they should not exercise a powerful influence over the people when faithfully applied. But we may further appeal to our experience of every well-worked town or country parish. Whatever may be the peculiar difficulties or hindrances in such places, there are never wanting some signs of a pious public opinion resulting from the upright consistent examples of those among their fellows, perhaps few in number to start with, who have learned in the fellowship of the Church what it is to know Christ and to follow Him. The Kingdom of Heaven, of which the Church on earth is the visible expression, is still like leaven, deep-seated and secret in its operations, evident in its outward effects. Nor do we find that the people are only influenced passively by the Church. Many of the Church's most active workers are drawn from their ranks. In some parishes, indeed, if it were not for workers from among the people, there would be no workers at all; while in every parish where the Church is vigorous, the people contribute their full share to the activity of the organization. We could tell of parochial undertakings the success of which has been entirely due, under God, to the efforts of working-men. We know of one parish, at least, where, not content with giving their services for the promotion of Mission-work, delegates from the people have banded themselves together for the purpose of collecting the stipend of an Assistant-Curate. Facts such as these leave us no doubt that the Church is capable of inspiring enthusiasm in the hearts of the people for the spread of the Gospel.

Our conclusions may be summed up as follows: While the Church in her human relations is not altogether free from abuses or exempt from failure, she nevertheless retains as a body all the conditions of a Divine Vitality, and has at her disposal all the means for fulfilling her great mission of evangelizing the people. Her abuses are not inherent, but incidental; her failures are not general and permanent, but occasional and temporary. The ordinances of the Church are only formal to those who use them formally; the work of the Church is only fruitless to those who follow it aimlessly and heartlessly. The sincere and devout Churchman can hardly fail to regard the Church as the only body completely fitted to continue the work of Christ among the people. In the faithful ministration of the Word and Sacraments, in the careful instruction of the young, in the diligent visitation of the sick and dying, in the active prosecution of every crusade against sin and unbelief according to the methods of the Church of England, lies, in our opinion, the only well-grounded hope of maintaining the greatness of the nation by preserving the people in the fear of God.

JOHN M. BRAITHWAITE.



ART. II.—NEW TESTAMENT SAINTS NOT  
COMMEMORATED.—EPAPHRAS.

THE name of Epaphras occurs only three times in the New Testament; twice in the Epistle of St. Paul to the Colossians, and once in the Epistle sent by him, at the same time and by the same messengers, to Philemon at Colossæ. In none of the three places does the mention of him extend beyond one or two verses. In one of them it consists simply of his name, with a significant epithet attached to it, as the sender of a salutation. Yet out of these three brief notices an interesting and instructive memoir of an uncommemorated Saint may be constructed, by an attentive and thoughtful reader.

I. The first mention which we have of Epaphras presents him to us as, in all probability, the chief if not the exclusive founder of one or more Christian churches; while at the same time it gives us an insight into the manner, in which the Gospel was carried in those early times into regions beyond the reach of the personal agency of the Apostles. At the