

THE
CHURCHMAN

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ART. I. — WHY HAS THE CHURCH MISSED THE
MIDDLE CLASSES?

FORTY years ago Emerson wrote that the Anglican Church was "the Church of the gentry, but not the Church of the poor." That may have been the case forty years ago—though we doubt it; it certainly is not the case to-day. It may, perhaps, be said of British *Christianity* that it has not drawn the poor into its net. There is some sad enough evidence of that. The almost heathen masses of East and South London witness to it. The bare-armed, *Sunday-Times*-loving operatives, sitting in their shirt-sleeves upon door-steps and smoking their pipes in the faces of churchgoers, witness to it. The indifferent rustic swains of the wolds, leaning in awkward groups against gate-posts, while the church-bells fill the air with their invitation, all bear the same sorrowful testimony.

But if the Anglican Church has not got the poor, no one else seems to have got them. It is clear that the Dissenting chapels have not. Dr. Jessop has noted that fact amid the wilds of his Eastern Arcadia. Anybody may see that for himself in the great towns, where chapel after chapel, forced by the exigencies of its condition, has followed its well-to-do congregation to the fashionable suburb, and left the poor to their slums. If the British poor are not Church-goers, they certainly are not Dissenters. If the Church has done little for them, Dissent has done still less.

Moreover, it is not impossible that in a few years the Church may be able to give a more direct denial to that statement of Emerson's. She may one day be known and acknowledged as *the* Church of the poor. It is undeniable that the Church is now making great efforts, at least in the towns, to get hold of the poor and preach the Gospel to them. So long as fifteen

years ago a leading Nonconformist (Paxton Hood), while criticising the Church pretty severely, spoke of her as "the most active organization for every kind of religious energy in our land." No other community at present works as she does among the unprofitable poor, who can neither pay for their "sittings" nor contribute anything toward the maintenance of their shepherd. Nor in vain. The Bishop of Wakefield, in his article in the December *Contemporary*, has fairly demonstrated that the East-End is undergoing a change. The outlines of the Cross begin to appear upon that surface of adamant beneath the chisel of the Church. The same is apparent throughout the kingdom. We have all seen town mission-halls, country churches, district school-rooms, filled with the poor, who, but for the aid of the Anglican Church, would be almost without any place of worship at all.

But while the Church may reasonably claim to have the lion's share of the "gentry" and of the poor, what about the middle classes? We fear it must be conceded that the Church has them not. On Sunday morning, while the bells are ringing, the West-End pours its well-dressed throng into many a fashionable nave; the East-End sends its streams of decently-garbed poor to many a mission-service; but where are the sturdy ranks of respectable Philistia? Follow this multitude of dark coats and shiney hats walking arm-in-arm with comfortable dames in silk dresses and botanical bonnets, and accompanied by decorous little boys and girls carrying large Bibles, and by-and-by you will find yourself ascending the flight of steps which leads up to a building whose peaked front of dressed stone, shallow windows, and flat ornaments, remind one of a cardboard model. Within, a pulpit, toward which deep galleries and well-upholstered pews converge. Here, with many nods of recognition to neighbours in other pews, the man of the middle class settles himself down, as comfortably as may be, to listen for the next hour and a half or two hours to scripture, prayer and sermon—mostly the last. The parish church knows him not, but here he is at home. How comes it that the Church has won the top and the bottom of society, the learned and the unlearned, the rich and the poor, but that she has missed that great nondescript body which comes between these extremes, and which, for want of a better name, we call the lower middle class?

But perhaps, in asserting so much, one ought to define what he means by the middle class. I may say at once, then, that I do not, for the purpose of our present argument, include in this class any who have received a liberal education, who have been brought up at any of the best English public schools, or who have been trained to appreciate

the teachings of a refined culture. Nor do I include in it any of the *ιδιώται* and *ἀγράμματοι*, the poor and illiterate who have no learning or culture at all. I mean, rather, that class which consists mainly of the lesser shopkeepers, travellers, under-clerks, merchants in a small way, and all that race which, though often very well to do, has never been completely educated, has no large knowledge of men or things, no right culture, no just acquaintance with art, literature, or society. Philistines, every one of them. Dickens has portrayed them lovingly; *Punch* weekly caricatures them. One of them examines critically the particular shade of green which some artist has swept over the foliage in his picture which hangs on the wall of the Royal Academy, and remarks to his buxom wife: "Jane, my dear, that colour is just the very thing for our front door." Another (Lamb's landlord) finds "much indifferent spelling" in Chaucer. You enter the house of one of them. It stands somewhere in the outskirts of the town, amid miles of similar villas, poor in design, thin-walled, and sickly-same. You are shown into the best parlour—save the mark! Everywhere is an air of studied propriety. The chairs are arranged in grim rows around the walls; excepting four, which box the compass of the central table. On the back of each hangs a woolwork or thread antimacassar. All the furniture is *en suite*. At each corner of the table is piled a little heap of books, generally such as are brought round by pushing publishers' agents. Somewhere upon a woolwork mat is displayed the electro-silver tea-kettle or cake-tray which was presented to the good lady at her marriage. German prints are on the wall. A wonderfully-frilled paper ornament fills up the fireplace. It is quite chilling even to look at the fire-irons. When are they ever used? There is not a sign in the room to show that the owner thereof has entered into the soul of things, has appreciated for himself the beauty of God's world, or craved for himself some resting-place in harmony with Nature. No, not even in the open piano, where miss is accustomed to practise for so many hours daily. Something seems to say that she, too, is seeking, not satisfaction in her art, but to do what her neighbours do. Such a room is a type of the attitude of the mind of the middle-class man toward the outer world of thought which does not actually come into touch with the affairs of his daily life.

If you carry your investigations further than the best parlour, you will find that everything else in the house is practical enough, if tasteless. The middle-class man lives comfortably and solidly. On his beds are smooth linen sheets and warm blankets. In his larder is a good round of beef. His kitchen has all the accessories needful to produce a sub-

stantial dinner. His house is an epitome of himself. This sober-sided and respectable citizen is not a very interesting character. We fear that we cannot absolve him altogether from the charge of vulgarity. He is a blind worshipper of customs, and is afflicted above all others with the curse of self-consciousness. But he is not without his element of solidity. Utterly devoid of humour, unable for mental generalizations, impregnable to any but personal arguments, he is nevertheless shrewd and capable to a wonderful degree. He makes up for the want of many finer senses by the constitutional gift of a sound common-sense. Though he cares to see nothing that requires much looking for, he sees clearly what things he does see. Moreover, what he has, that he holds fast to. Such virtues as are his by instinct, or by inheritance, he lives up to. He is, on the whole, a moral and a domestic man; a good son, husband, father. Such doctrines, also, as have been accepted by him, he grips to with the tenacity of a limpet. He is a dogmatically religious man. Perhaps, for these reasons, his is the most successful class in society. It is not too much to say that to this solid, practical, persistent middle class, England owes much of her prosperity and permanence among the nations. Some have even thought that they have found in this middle class the substratum of the English character, and have endorsed Napoleon's dictum that we are a nation of shopkeepers.

I would next beg leave to explain what I mean by missing this middle class. I do not, of course, mean that no middle class men attend Church services, or that some of them are not stanch Church people. No doubt all congregations have some leavening from this class among its members. It is quite possible, moreover, that here and there solid congregations may be found which are almost entirely composed of middle-class men; but I contend that this is the exception, and not the rule. It is generally due to the personal influence of some man who has succeeded, either by his preaching or by his special sympathy with this class, in attracting them to himself. Even then one may surmise that they are more often Episcopal Congregationalists than discriminative and loyal Churchmen. It is worth while to inquire why the Anglican Church has lost these men. But the answer is not quite ready to hand. One might jump to the conclusion that these men formed a radical class which naturally revolted from an Established Church, the traditions of which are monarchical and aristocratic. Unfortunately for that theory, we find the same phenomena in countries where the Church has nothing to do either with Establishments or aristocracies. In America, Dr. Walter Smith recently remarked that the

Episcopalians were mostly "mugwumps." When some persons objected to that term, he explained that he had used the word not in its offensive, but in its literal sense of "superior persons." In that case he was apparently not far wrong. A highly intelligent and widely cultivated American gentleman, who used to attend the English service at Grindelwald a few years ago, told me that he had sometimes seriously thought of joining our Church. When I remarked that I supposed that Episcopalians were few and feeble folk across the Atlantic, he replied, "Sir, on the contrary, your Church is, I assure you, the rising Church in America." Of that there seems to be no doubt. But if it is rising, it is rising because there is among the Americans a growing class which has leisure to acquire culture and taste, which were impossible to their emigrant forefathers. The American Episcopalian is, as a rule, either a "superior person," or else one of those poor who are gathered into mission-halls and churches provided and paid for by the rich.

The case is not very different in Canada. It is true that the Church is maintained there, and vigorously maintained, and by the middle class, who form the bulk of the population. But it is just over this class in Canada also that the Church has the least hold. There, too, they form the backbone of Nonconformity. The same may be, I believe, said of our Australasian colonies. This is, perhaps, more noticeable in Scotland than almost anywhere else. The Episcopal Church has more than her share of the rich and great. The poor are coming to her in proportion as she is able to provide for them. The middle class are, nearly to a man, Presbyterian.

Some hard-headed champion of Dissent, who has sat under a Binnie, may complain that Church pulpits do not supply him with that pabulum for thought which his reasoning faculties demand; another, who prefers Dr. Parker, that the Church is dull and pointless. Yet another, who delights in Mr. Spurgeon, that the Church is lacking in spiritual power and directness of appeal. But such complaints will not stand the most superficial investigation. If the general tone of Church preaching is dull and poor, the level of Dissenting pulpits is not much higher. That is the conclusion at which the *British Weekly* arrived after discussion of the subject. The Church has little to fear from a mere comparison of popular gifts. She has still, as old Fuller puts it, any number of "clerks and bishops who, out of their gowns, would turn their backs on no man;" and who, we may add, in their gowns cannot easily be bettered by any man.

If the Presbyterian and Nonconforming communities produce preachers who meet the needs of the day, the same may

be said of the modern Anglican Church. If Mr. Spurgeon is unique in his special gift, so is Canon Liddon in his. And, for the rest, the Church can cap a McNeil with an Aitken or a Body, a Price Hughes and Mark Guy Pearse with a Haslam, a Knox Little, a Webb Peploe or a Stuart, a Parker with a Farrar, a Dale with a Magee, a Caird with a Boyd-Carpenter. It would be absurd to lay to the charge of a Church which has secured the attachment of such men as Lord Salisbury, Mr. Gladstone, Chancellor Cairns, and Lord Shaftesbury, that she does not supply sufficient food either for the intellectual or the spiritual man.

The reason for the detachment of the middle-class man, whether thoughtful, emotional, broad or evangelical, must be sought elsewhere.

It may yet again be urged that the Church has driven the plain man out of her pale by her development of ritualism and sacerdotal teaching. Some colour is given to this statement by the ascertainable fact that in Canada, New Zealand, and Australia, where the Church depends for its existence upon the support of the middle classes, the general bias of feeling is Evangelical, and the forms of worship simple. Moreover, those Churches at home in which the middle-class man has a preponderating influence are generally Low. But here, again, the explanation falls short. If the plain man has been driven away by excessive ritual, where was he before this ritual was introduced, some fifty years ago? The answer must be, Where he is now, in his chapel. And again, how comes it that the plain men who belong to the other classes of society have not likewise been driven to secede? And yet, again, why do the Low Churches, with certain exceptions, fail almost equally with the High Churches in gaining the adherence of this section of the community?

The question is a very difficult one. After propounding it, I am almost afraid to attempt an answer. It is not only difficult, but complex. To get to a right understanding of it, one would have to study the origins of Dissent in the past history of the English Church. One would have to get back to the time when Church and State were actually one—when individuality in religion was not only discouraged, but crushed out with the cast-iron roller of the temporal power—when men like Bunyan, who could not control their religious emotion, were literally squeezed out of the Church. As the writer on "The Church and the Puritans," in "Epochs of Church History," says: "In the England of Elizabeth there was little room for the manifestation of any religious enthusiasm whatever." In the Caroline days, too, many of the most serious men escaped as best they could wherever they could. George Herbert wrote:

Religion stands on tiptoe in our land,
Ready to pass to the American strand.

The Church of the Georges was as dead as the taste of their age was barren. The men who tried to wake the slumbering virgins, and get them to go seek oil for their lamps, were treated as Dissenters until they often became so. The emotional people of Cornwall and Wales, when they sought for shepherds who could give them what they craved for, were literally handed over to Dissent. Without doubt, the Church is suffering for her past. The grapes which our fathers offered to the thirsty wayfarer were often very sour; the *memory* of them is enough to set the children's teeth on edge. A great deal of dissent is hereditary. The Church has waked up at last, but men cannot all at once believe it. Scarce a generation has passed since Emerson's strictures were only too well deserved. "The religion of England," he then wrote, "is part of good breeding. . . . Their religion is a quotation; their Church is a doll. . . . The Gospel the Anglican Church preaches is 'By taste ye are saved.'" Some men cannot forget that time. They talk as though Dissent and spirituality of life were still interchangeable terms.

But even this does not go very far to explain the alienation of the special class which we are considering. Spirituality is surely not confined to the middle class. Why should they, then, alone refuse to be reconciled to their alma mater?

Perhaps a partial answer may be found in the fact of the middle-class man's Philistinism. It is difficult to find another word which exactly fits his state. The educated classes, and especially the classes of leisure, appreciate deeply the historic continuity, the thought of the unbroken order, and the traditions of the Church mellow with the gifts of the ages. The middle-class man cares for none of these things. He is not without sentiment. If his Covenanting and nonconforming forefathers have suffered persecution for their convictions, the thought of their sufferings and their testimony has always power to kindle a fire within his breast. The wrongs heaped upon his co-religionists a hundred, or even two hundred years ago, are still very real to him. He is easily made hot on this subject. In the same way he clings tenaciously to those doctrines and confessions of faith which have been fought for, suffered for, and sealed with the blood of the testators. But the idea of the Catholic Church, the Church of the Ages, with its claims so powerful that they lay hold upon the whole being of the man who has apprehended them, yet so ethereal that they evade the touch of him who would handle them too roughly, is beyond the ordinary middle-class man; he has, indeed, no sense to which such an idea can appeal. As he prefers the

ballads of Scott to the idylls of Tennyson, the hymns of Charles Wesley to Faber, the "Blue Danube" or "Myosotis" to Mozart, and the paintings of Frith and Doré to Raphael—so to him the tangible traditions of the Chapel are real enough, while the mystic majesty of the Church, with all its incomparable associations, is as a thing that is not. In dealing with the middle-class man, too, the Church is at this disadvantage. As we have seen, he is not gifted with taste. "The liturgy, ceremony, architecture, the sober grace" of the Church have no special attraction for him. Westminster Abbey, except for size, has no great advantage over the City Temple.

So much for negative reasons. To advance to something more positive—we are, perhaps, upon solid ground when we remember that the middle-class man is of all mortals the most independent. He hugely dislikes to be patronized. It is true that he can appear subservient when some noble or wealthy customer enters his shop, but he takes this out in other ways. There are moments when the middle-class man forgets his caution. In such times of excitement he will reveal his true feelings. He will sometimes then flout his patron to his face. In the chapel he takes his place, perhaps, as a deacon and a director—at least, as an equal. In the church he is only a layman of the middle class. Though, in theory, all distinctions cease directly the threshold of the church is crossed, and high and low, rich and poor, meet on equal terms before God, yet in practice he is made to feel, everywhere in the church, that he must keep his place. Again, the middle-class man is by nature and training an active and energetic man. He believes in push. In the chapel he immediately finds scope for all his energies. Individuality makes its mark there at once. He is made to feel that he is somewhat, and of importance to the community. If he have the gift of the ready tongue, plenty of opportunity is afforded him to speak. If he have the gift of government, he soon becomes a real governor, and not merely a member of the church staff which is wielded by the hand of the vicar. In any case he is an elector. How comes it, too, that the Church loses so many of those rising young men who become the lights of Dissent? Why can she not retain within her ranks such men as Thomas Cooper, Charles H. Spurgeon, Joseph Parker, Price Hughes and others, who find at once in the chapels the outlet which their special genius craves?

May not the answers to these questions lie somewhere among the facts that the Church is too timid about admitting the layman to a real share in her administration; and secondly, that she is still too stiff—that there is not yet sufficient elasticity about her manners or her methods?

With regard to the first supposition, we may assure ourselves that the shrewd and sturdy middle-class man is not to be put off with sops. In the chapel he really has some power. In the church he will not be content to be set up as a dummy. If he is made a member of a church council, he will want to make himself felt. Both King Charles and Cromwell were made aware of that when they summoned Parliaments to do their bidding. Any vicar who calls on laymen, especially middle-class laymen, will soon be made aware of that. It is even possible that the vicar who has felt the power of a vestry or church-council may have occasion to sigh for the happy days of his autocracy. We all remember Mr. Spurgeon's complaint that there is only one thing worse than priestcraft, and that is deaconcraft! In the meantime, apart from any new legislation, something might, surely, be done by the individual clergy to make their energetic laymen feel that they are really of use in their congregation, and that they have some due voice in controlling its affairs.

Much more also might be done than is done by the fathers of the Church in at once marking and welcoming native talent. Why should the gifted young man or woman be left to fall into the open arms of the Chapel? Is there no room for an unordained speaker in the Church? Must a man leave his business altogether, and enter the Ministry before he can be permitted to undertake any higher function than that of a Sunday-school teacher?

With regard to the other accusation—that the Church is still somewhat too stiff and inelastic—a remedy certainly lies in the hands of the clergy themselves. If they cannot approve of the free-and-easy manner in which the chapel is literally turned into a meeting-house and chatting-place, they can at all events do much to turn their congregation into a society of friends. The strength of the Chapel seems to lie mainly in three things :

1. *The Bond of its Brotherhood.* Every new member is welcomed, and made much of—caused to feel that he is not merely an appendage, but a necessary part of the body. Hitherto the Church has, with some delightful exceptions, been singularly lacking in this cultivation of the individual.

2. *Its Homely Surroundings.* Here we may confess that, whatever sympathy we may have with shy Churchmen or with High Churchmen, we have none with dry Churchmen. The Prayer-Book allows plenty of license to him who cares to avail himself of it. It is now possible to vary, amplify, or abbreviate the services so as to meet the requirements of all sorts and conditions of men. Moreover, I trow that the House of God is not more holy because there hangs over it the chill and silent air of a mausoleum! Can one not avoid the

gossipy public-halliness of the chapel, and yet make the church a centre and a home? The Jews solved the problem in their Temple. The Roman Catholics have found a solution. Cannot the Anglican Church do the same?

3. The strength of the Chapel seems to lie in its *Popular Government*. In this particular matter the Church will possibly never rival the Chapel. Certainly not until the Patronage Question is settled. But, as I have ventured to say, upon the broad and willing shoulders of the layman might safely be laid a far heavier burden of responsibility than he is now usually allowed to bear.

The Church cannot afford to do without the middle classes. If they became her conscientious adherents, they would, by their very characteristics, be among her staunchest adherents. But if she would gain them she must, where they preponderate, adapt herself to their special requirements. Not only must she aim to content respectable and conservative Matthew Bramble, she must also provide things convenient for his enthusiastic henchman, Humphrey Clinker. She must not conclude that she has done her duty to the world when she has satisfied Sir Roger de Coverley and his dependents, who are pleased with whatever pleases the master: she must also find a place for the sturdy matter-of-factism of the bailiff, the tradesman, and the farmer, if she is to be truly the Anglican Church—the Church of the English-speaking people.

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ART. II.—THE NEW TESTAMENT AND PHILOSOPHY;
A CHAPTER OF UNDESIGNED COINCIDENCES:
BEING A CONVERSATION WITH SUNDAY-SCHOOL
TEACHERS.

“YES; it is an undesigned coincidence,” said the superintendent of the Sunday-school. The clergyman of the parish had been explaining to his Sunday-school teachers the progressive miracle in the cure of the blind man at Bethsaida. After the first act of our blessed Lord in his behalf the blind man saw men as trees, walking; then, a second miracle being wrought on him, he saw all things plain.

“Are we, then, to suppose,” said the superintendent of the school, “that the blind man’s sight was given to him at first in an imperfect way, enabling him to see the mere outline of things indistinctly, as in a fog?”

“There is a line of cleavage,” said the clergyman, “between the works of our blessed Lord on the blind man.” Then he went on to show how, in modern times, it has been found out