

recognise it as unquestionable that the realities of the Gospel, the life and the words of our Lord, and the facts of the Christian Church, do, as a matter of fact, answer to the visions and the words of the prophets, although, at this distance of time, it may be impracticable for us to discern, in detail, the circumstances on which they throw a partial light in the days of those who uttered them.

If, then, prophecy be such a great reality as we have been contemplating; if, as the prophets, the Apostles, and the evangelists believed, not a hair fell to the ground throughout the long history of the Jewish nation without the knowledge of its God and Saviour; if every event, and every inspired utterance, was controlled and directed by that God and Saviour towards the establishment of a Divine kingdom, under a Divine and human Messiah; if human nature remained the same throughout, and the divine methods of discipline and guidance were the same also; if our Lord, as the great Head and Representative of the nation, was to share their experience—or, rather, if they, in their degree, were to share His—then the Evangelist was justified in his quick eye for resemblances between the story of the Messiah and the history of his nation, in his deep conviction that all that happened in our Lord's life—not only the great features of His character, but the very circumstances of His career—had been intimated and foreshadowed in the past, and, in a word, in believing and teaching that “all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophets.”

HENRY WACE.



## ART. II.—THE PRESENT DEARTH OF CLERGY AND THE SCARCITY OF CANDIDATES FOR ORDINATION.<sup>1</sup>

IT is hardly necessary to give proofs of the scarcity of clergy at the present time in proportion to the demand caused by the increase of our population. The falling off in, or at any rate the stationary character of, the lists of ordained clergy at the Ember periods; the difficulty of finding men to supply vacant curacies, especially in the rural districts; the cry for more men, which comes from the foreign mission fields—all reiterate the same fact, so often commented upon

<sup>1</sup> A paper read before the Biggleswade Clerical Association, December, 1901.

in our Church journals, that recruits are sadly needed for Holy Orders.

The discussion which has taken place brings to light many supposed causes for this phenomenon, and suggests many remedies for it. Before entering upon these it may be well first to try and see plainly what the need is, and to obtain a clear notion of the situation.

The population of this country increases rapidly—at the rate of nearly one thousand a day, according to some estimates. In the towns it is growing almost universally, though in the purely agricultural parishes it is going down. New churches are being built, new districts formed, new agencies are springing up, which require the services of ordained men. In spite of the activity of Nonconformists, added to that of the Church, vast masses of our people are really left outside of all religious effort, and it is these which specially claim the care of the National Church. But the resources of the latter are limited. Its endowments, however large they may seem on paper, are small in comparison with the men and the work required; they have been, and still are, shrinking. Its voluntary efforts have been immense, and have resulted in millions being raised for church building and restoration, besides large sums for education and charitable work. A large annual income is raised and expended for the stipends of assistant clergy by the A.C. and C.P.A. Societies, and other sums, amounting to thousands of pounds, have been contributed to the Queen Victoria Clergy Fund for the benefit of the very poor livings. But there must be a limit to these efforts. The public purse has large demands upon it. The charity of our Church-people, who are often less able to give than their Nonconformist neighbours, may be stretched to its utmost bounds. It may well also be asked whether the Church of England can afford to pay more clergy than it already possesses, and whether the scarcity of men at the present time is not rather to be welcomed than regretted. Is it wise, they say, to multiply assistant curates, who will never have a chance of being beneficed, and also will find their market value diminish, and not improve, as years and experience increase? The scarcity of clergy, then, must be estimated not solely by the demands of an increasing population, but also by the capability of the Church of England to employ them and pay them. Certainly we should not insist upon the fiction, however pleasant it may be, that the Church of England, as at present organized, can make itself responsible for all the inhabitants of this country. We must recognise the fact that the united adherents of the principal sects and bodies outside the Church are nearly equal in number to the followers of the old Church, and that

it is only by reckoning as ours those who profess no other creed that we can claim to be the Church of the great majority of our countrymen. Of these, we know, millions never enter the doors of our churches, and to a large proportion of them the Church has to present itself in a purely missionary aspect. It is for this work, in fact, that the demand for fresh workers in our towns is made, and the future of our teeming populations appears to rest upon the success of the efforts made to increase the ranks of the clergy. If this is beyond our power, we must be content to see our people lapse more and more into neglect of religious worship and observance, and to fall more and more under the influence of purely secular training. We cannot, of course, ignore the various efforts made to enlist lay agents. The setting apart of lay-readers as helpers to the parochial clergy, the efforts of the Church Army to supply home missionaries of a humble class, and other similar movements, are all endeavours to meet the demand for spiritual ministrations, more or less successful. But such men as these agencies supply cannot take the place of trained, highly-educated, and commissioned clergymen. The extension of the Diaconate as a permanent vocation, to be exercised by those who do not forsake their worldly calling, is advocated by many as one great remedy for the dearth of clergy. It is supposed that the aid rendered by such men on one day in the week would be a great relief to the overburdened incumbents of our large parishes, whose Sundays are a ceaseless round of services in church and mission-room, and who require a larger staff of helpers than they can afford to employ. Still, even this expedient, if feasible, could not fill the gap. It is the week-day work of the curate in a town parish which tells, which fills the churches and the buildings. It is his presence and aid in the various agencies employed to enlist the parishioners in church work which swells the number of adherents. This cannot be done by men who must be engaged in their calling on the week-day, and who can at the most spare a few evenings to render help to the clergy. Still the cry will come for more fully-ordained men. Not only for more, but the circumstances of the time demand an improvement in quality as well as quantity. Hence the great danger of lowering the standard, social or intellectual, in the effort to meet the demand. The extension of education among the people, the rapid dissemination of every new idea in science and morals, the free criticism of sacred books and religious beliefs, the fecundity of a cheap press, all tend to demand a clergyman more, and not less, completely furnished with the best education, and the selection of the best brains for those who are to be the leaders of the people in all that concerns their highest interests.

Such considerations as I have urged must be borne in mind in the discussion of our subject.

In my opinion, there are at least eight causes to which the scarcity of clergymen engaged in active work may be attributed. Let me enumerate them :

1. The demand for young men to the exclusion of those of twenty or more years' standing.
2. The slowness and uncertainty of promotion.
3. The impoverishment of benefices.
4. The increased competition of other professions.
5. The demands of the colonial and missionary fields.
6. The stringency of tests.
7. The competition of Nonconformist bodies.
8. The spread of indifference, with the accompaniment of violent internal controversy.

1. We must note that the scarcity is mainly that of younger men. The man who is still unbeneficed at five-and-forty finds it hard to obtain a curacy. Those who have to advertise for curates know too well the long list of men of advanced years who apply for the posts they offer—men with excellent testimonials, men with nothing against their characters, men who may be trusted to perform the routine of parish work, yet in most cases men whose work has ceased to find acceptance, who cannot meet the manifold demands made upon the energies of the modern curate, who are too old to play cricket, who cannot intone the service, whose sermons are out of date, who are not prepared to organize Bands of Hope, Church Lads' Brigades, or branches of the endless Church societies for forming or reforming human character. We cannot forget that there are scores of such men, whose services might be utilized, who are capable of filling many posts with advantage, and yet who go to swell the ranks of the unemployed or casually employed clergy. To meet their case a new society has been started, which aims at the double object of finding such men employment, and at the same time providing by their means the assistance in Sunday duty so often required by incumbents who cannot afford to pay for it.

2. We now come to those causes which affect the supply of candidates for Holy Orders. Among these we must mention first the slowness and uncertainty of promotion. This is aggravated by the very efforts to increase the supply. The number of decently-endowed benefices does not keep pace with the number of additional curates ordained. It is a cause so completely wrapped up with the whole system of patronage that it is difficult to suggest a remedy short of actual revolution. Promotion to an independent sphere of work, whether

well paid or not, should be open to all successful and suitable assistant curates after a certain number of years. They should not be subjected so much as they are to the disappointment, and to the apathy so often the result of disappointment, which arises from the promotion of men younger than themselves to livings of importance or comparative affluence. The law might, of course, prohibit promotion to benefices before candidates have reached a certain standing. It does so, indeed, already to some extent. The Benefices Act of 1898 allows the Bishop to refuse presentation to anyone who has not been three years in Orders, and perhaps public opinion would warrant a further extension of the period. But as long as private patronage exists as it is there must be a limit to prohibition of this kind, and perhaps six years' service as assistant curate would be the longest period we could expect to see enforced.

3. But the slowness and uncertainty of promotion, which always existed more or less, has been of late aggravated by the fact that a large proportion of the benefices which were once of sufficient value to be regarded as promotion have sunk below a figure large enough to be attractive. If, then, for a moment we regard the clerical office as a profession, in which a living is to be earned, and an increase of emolument to be expected after a reasonable period, we see that now more than ever it fails to satisfy these requirements. We cannot wonder that men otherwise qualified, but not possessed of private means, shrink from embarking upon so hazardous an occupation. Parents need not be regarded as deficient in zeal and highmindedness because they refuse to encourage their sons to adopt Holy Orders as their calling in life. The present attempt to increase the parochial endowments is an excellent one, but it cannot expect to meet with such a success as will obviate the difficulty. To poor men livings of even £200 a year, with all their responsibilities, can never be objects of ambition, and all that the most sanguine expect from the efforts of the Clergy Sustentation Fund is to raise the smallest benefices to this figure.

4. Another fact which tends to diminish the number of candidates for Holy Orders is the competition of other walks in life. The assistant curate may be more favourably situated in a pecuniary sense than the briefless barrister or the struggling bank clerk; he may be free from the heavy expenses which attend upon the training of the expectant solicitor or medical man, or the life of the army subaltern; but his position is now, at the age of ordination, brought into comparison, among other rival professions, with that of the Civil servant, not to mention others. The University graduate who can pass a good examination is now eligible for appointments

many of which are worth £200 per annum to start with, and none less than £150. These increase in value steadily with length of service, until those who reach the higher grades enjoy a handsome salary, and may receive on retirement a substantial pension. It is true that the stipend of assistant curates has risen considerably as compared with the last generation, and enormously as compared with fifty years ago; but against this fact must be set the increase in their numbers, the uncertainty of promotion (if not the certainty of non-promotion), and the larger number of benefices on which a man finds himself unable to live as he ought to do. Again, then, we must, however reluctantly, face the fact that pecuniary considerations have great weight in deciding the question whether a man shall offer himself for Holy Orders. Without fair private means it seems to me that to do so is unwise. Much may be done by assisting deserving men in meeting the expenses of education, but this alone cannot solve the problem of finding a living wage for the labourer.

5. We must now leave the consideration of causes which depend upon pecuniary considerations, and come to others, equally or more important, which affect the supply of clergy in cases unaffected by the means they possess. First, I would mention the demands made by colonial and missionary dioceses in union with our Church. This country is the happy hunting-ground of the foreign episcopate, whether they are in pursuit of money or of men. In many cases they can offer attractions of a substantial kind, but in more they can enlist the enthusiasm of the neophyte, and draw him away from the comparatively tame position of a curate in an English parish to the forlorn hope of an African diocese, to the conflict with ancient Asiatic beliefs, or to the free and healthy atmosphere of a huge colonial charge. The expansion of the English Church abroad must, I think, be reckoned as one of the principal causes of the failure in the supply of clergy in this country. It is one for which there is no remedy. But something can be done by welcoming back those who have devoted many years of their life to foreign work, and by placing as few restrictions as possible upon the intercommunion of the various branches of the Church in the matter of clerical employment.

6. Another cause, of a different character, now claims our attention. It is concerned with far deeper matters, and, we may believe, is of far greater weight in determining the choice of a career than considerations of income and prospects. We must note the restrictions which have been for the last three hundred years and more imposed upon candidates for Holy Orders in order to secure, as far as may be, soundness and uniformity in teaching. These are found in the declaration

made by priests and deacons, affirming their assent to the Thirty-nine Articles and the Book of Common Prayer, and of the ordering of Bishops, priests and deacons, and professing their belief that the doctrine of the Church of England therein set forth is agreeable to the Word of God. At the same time, a promise is made to use the form prescribed in the Prayer-Book, and no other, except as ordered by lawful authority. We ask: Is it a fact that the terms of this declaration do at the present time deter many from ordination who would in other respects be desirable candidates? This is a very important question. It involves the limits of comprehension desirable in the ministry of the Church of England. Is our present test too narrow? Is it antiquated? Is it politic? Is it effective? Might it be enlarged or made less definite, so as to throw the net wider and enclose a greater number of suitable candidates for Holy Orders? That it is somewhat antiquated who will deny? That it serves its purpose may be doubted, when we remember the divergence of opinion at present existing among the clergy. That it imposes too much upon the intellect and conscience of a young man, generally speaking poorly furnished with theological learning, may be fairly argued. That it fails to exclude the thoughtless, while it is a stumbling-block to the conscientious, is often felt. Some test must no doubt be employed—something to guard against the eternal pretensions and overweening claims of the Church of Rome; something to protect our congregations from the zeal without knowledge which effervesces in the ranks of Protestant enthusiasts, and maintain the character for sober thought and feeling which the Church of England enjoys. Something of this kind there must be. But whether the Articles of the Elizabethan Age are the best test we can employ, and whether the Prayer-Book does not contain things which might be relaxed or made optional, whether alternative and additional services should not be employed to meet modern requirements, are matters upon which the mind may be left open. A simplifying of doctrinal tests at the first ordination is, I believe, one great remedy for the scarcity of candidates.

7. This reminds us of another fact to be taken into account. We must not forget that as our population has grown the Nonconformist bodies have increased and multiplied. Many of these offer substantial inducements to men of high education to enlist in their ministry. They give a special training of their own, which may favourably compare with that of the Church of England. They may have their own tests, no doubt, but they boast of freedom from State control, and some of them of liberality in theology. They draw largely

upon the supply of men who would otherwise be candidates for Holy Orders. These recruits have full use of our old Universities; they are drafted from our class lists in theological honours. A promising career is thus offered to those who have the preacher's gift. Some of these from time to time find their way into the ministry of the Church, showing that there is a weak point in the Nonconformist system, and superior attractions in our own. Would not many of these, if our tests were simplified, be content to enlist at once under our flag, and swell our ordination lists at an earlier period of their career? At any rate, if other reforms could be carried out in the distribution of patronage, I believe the leakage to Nonconformity of some of the best qualified men might be stopped.

8. We now come, lastly, to the widest question of all: the cause which, in the opinion of many, is the main reason for our complaint of the dearth of clergy. We have to go deeper than questions of finance, or even of subscriptions and tests. We have to face the spirit of the age and to probe the sore of the time—viz., the spread of agnosticism and religious indifference among the class from which we wish to draw our candidates for Holy Orders—the class which, socially and intellectually, is the only one from which a really satisfactory ministry can be recruited. For this must meet the requirements of a Reformed National Church, in which the seminary-trained peasant or the half-educated representative of the lower middle class will never be welcomed as clergy. To this cause must be added the effect produced by the bold attacks made upon the received views of the authority of the Old Testament books, which goes under the name of the Higher Criticism, but which is really Rationalism under another form. There can be no doubt that the difficulties presented now to the candidate for Holy Orders are of a different character from those which were encountered even by those who have been one generation engaged in clerical work. The attacks made upon the credibility of the Old Testament by Bishop Colenso, and the *Essays and Reviews*, had not penetrated its defences to the same extent as those to which I have just referred. Neither were they so widely popularized; nor, I may add, were they sanctioned by our dignitaries and divines, as appears to be the case at present. It cannot be doubted that the young men of the present day who contemplate ordination may well be deterred from making a solemn declaration of assent binding them, in all appearance, to the traditional view of Holy Scripture, without necessarily having the foundation of their Creed undermined, without feeling it necessary to withdraw from Church Communion.



Another cause of unsettlement in religious belief may, perhaps, be found in the ceaseless raging of controversy between extreme parties in the Church, and the wide gulf which separates the views of the advanced Ritualist on the one hand and of the Evangelical Churchman on the other, both claiming an equal right to be considered orthodox and faithful members. These intellectual and spiritual causes must be reckoned in calculating the reasons for the scarcity of candidates for the ministry.

It is easier to enumerate possible causes for this than to suggest remedies. We are glad to be assured by some of our Bishops that the quality of candidates has not deteriorated, that, as judged by tests of examination, men who are well informed and well read in religious subjects present themselves as much as ever; but I suppose it cannot be denied that the social status of the candidates is at the present time, on the average, lower. Much has been said in blame of the slackness shown by our heads of schools and tutors of colleges in recruiting for the ministry; of the diminution in that personal influence, which helps so much to turn the minds of the young in the direction of the sacred calling; of the numbers that are lost to the Church's service, not because other careers are more attractive, but simply because the higher vocation has not been brought before them. There is, no doubt, unwillingness to press the young into a service which may afterwards disappoint them, which under present conditions demands more than ever self-sacrifice and devotion. The higher standard of clerical work and the higher view of the clerical character which now prevail may, perhaps, in some instances be a deterring cause, and one which we can hardly deplore.

In the course of this paper many remedies have been suggested to meet the difficulties described. Whether, if advisable, these remedies are feasible is a very serious question. Church reform is, no doubt, in the air, but there are considerable obstacles in the way of bringing it down to the earth. It may, I think, be fairly open to doubt whether any large measure of Church reform can be carried under present conditions of Parliamentary management. The initial difficulty of giving the Church power to reform itself stands in the way, and more and more the suspicion gains ground that under the Establishment, as now existing, changes are well-nigh impossible. It remains, then, to be considered whether, in our anxiety to remedy ills, we are not running into others of a more serious kind; and I am tempted to think that the only hope of adapting the Church of England to the needs of the twentieth century lies in that gradual relaxation of the bonds

of Church and State which has been recently going on so openly. Hardly a measure affecting religious observance and education has been recently passed without knocking another nail into the coffin of the Establishment. Burial Acts, Marriage Acts, Education Acts, all tend more and more to emphasize the neutrality of the State upon religious questions, and perhaps the unsatisfactory nature of the present relations of Church and State have something to do with men's unwillingness to take Holy Orders. The one-sided nature of the bargain which the clergy now have to make at their ordination may well cause them to hesitate. They have to make the same professions of allegiance as have served for 300 years; they have to resign all other means of livelihood if they undertake parochial work, and all political aims and ambitions; while, on the other hand, the State looks on with indifference when it sees them badly paid, hardly worked, hampered by antiquated rules, and often put into a position of inferiority as compared with their Nonconformist rivals.

Perhaps I cannot end in a more practical manner than by suggesting that those of the clergy who belong to the older generation should ask themselves the question, Should I, if I were now of the age I was when I commenced my clerical life, be as ready as I then was to undertake the ministry of the Church of England? Am I surprised at the reported falling off in candidates when I regard the changed relations of Church and State, the unsettled condition of religious feeling and teaching, the chaotic state of Church discipline, the hopelessness of promotion for the average man, and the impossibility of making both ends meet if it does come?

But to conclude in a tone so pessimistic is not becoming. Shall we not, rather, rejoice in the fact that, in spite of all these drawbacks, the work of the Church is blessed as it is; that the ranks of the clergy are recruited with such earnest and zealous members; that, amid so much indifference, still so much active good work is done; and that, amid so much intellectual difficulty, warm hearts and faithful hands still lift the banner of the Cross amid our crowded population? The Church may be hampered in its work, it may seem slow to adapt itself to new conditions and surroundings, it may be the object of scorn to philosophers or enthusiasts; but "still it moves": its life is manifest; its work is blessed by God and acknowledged by men.

CARLETON GREENE.

