

ART. IV.—THE CHURCH AND THE SOCIAL PROBLEM
(continued).

III. THE "OPPORTUNITY" AND THE "EQUIPMENT."

UNDER the head of "opportunity" I would bring all which makes it possible to apply "the Truth," as contained in the principles of Christ, to the "needs of men," as manifested in the social conditions of the present time. And under the head of "equipment" I would consider the means of doing this now at the disposal of "the Churches," and more particularly at the disposal of the Church of England.

I. As to the opportunity—1. I believe it is at present great in this respect, that, amid all the terrible indifference of which we see so much evidence, there never was a greater readiness to listen to "the principles of Jesus," nor was there ever at bottom (even if unexpressed) a stronger conviction that, if the evils of society are to be remedied, we shall be wise in seeking their remedy in these principles. The amazing (if very ephemeral) popularity of a book, with not very much besides its title—"What would Jesus do?"—to recommend it, certainly witnessed to the widespread interest in the answers to this question. As Professor Peabody says: "It is one of the most extraordinary signs of the times that, while the great *doctrines* which centre about Christ have to great multitudes almost lost their meaning, His personality has acquired fresh loyalty and homage. . . . Among the conflicting activities of the present time, His power is not one more activity among the rest, but is that of wisdom, personality, idealism. Into the midst of the discordant efforts of men He comes as one having authority; the self-assertion of each instrument of social service is hushed as He gives His sign; and in the surrender of each life to Him it finds its place in the symphony of all" (pp. 127, 128).

2. Another factor in the "opportunity" of the present I believe to be the growth, however slow and feeble it may yet be, of "the power of appreciation of truth," or at least of the detection of unreality. Even a little education frequently gives this. There is a sense in which it is true that the mass of the people are both terribly thoughtless and extremely ignorant. They seem, almost wilfully, to refuse to think, and they often appear to be incapable of that appreciation of truth and moral beauty which it should be the primary object of education to bestow. But I believe these powers of appreciation are much more dormant and unexercised than actually non-existent. As a proof of this, I would cite the fact that we

frequently see this power exercised in a way which is not pleasant for "the Churches"—I mean in the way of criticism. The criticism may be ignorant and unjust, it may be superficial and untrue, but the very fact of criticism witnesses to the existence of interest. It witnesses to some mental activity, and it suggests to us the possibility of increasing this interest, and of guiding its exercise into wiser and more profitable directions.

3. Another element in the present which should not be disregarded is "the sense of responsibility for the poor," which probably has never been felt as it is felt now. This sense of responsibility may often be little more than a vague "feeling," whose exact nature it may be difficult to define. As to how to act upon this feeling there may be little, if any, intelligent knowledge. But its existence adds to the opportunity, and it is certainly a force to be employed by being guided to a wise discharge. As Professor Peabody says: "Never was the sense of responsibility for the poor so profoundly felt by the Christian Church as at the present time. No body of Christians, however humble, can maintain its self-respect without an elaborate organization of compassion and relief" (p. 232).

4. As one more factor of the opportunity, I am inclined to add the growing sense of stewardship. This, of course, is far from being either so deep or so general as it should be; still, I believe it is more conscious and more widespread than it was. It forms a more common topic for sermons, and for speeches at all kinds of philanthropic meetings. And though thousands of rich and leisured people still seem to be utterly regardless of any other thought about their time and money except that these may be used solely for their own self-gratification, yet the number of those is growing who have at least "an uneasy feeling" that, where they do possess time and money, a portion at least of one or both of these should be devoted to some object external to themselves. As a proof of this, the immense increase in the number and variety of charitable and philanthropic agencies seems to imply a corresponding increase in the number of those who are trying "to do something or other for those who need."

Taking into consideration all these various signs of the times or factors of the age—and with more space I could have increased their number—I am led to the conclusion that at present the "opportunity" (I use the word in its widest sense) does seem propitious for a "forward movement" in an attack upon "the social problem."

II. I turn now to the "equipment" of "the Churches" as they stand face to face with the problem, and as they are attempting its solution. This equipment may be regarded

under two heads: (1) That of "organization" or machinery; (2) that of workers.

1. At first sight the Church of England seems here—in her "parochial system"—to have an enormous advantage over all other Christian bodies. Has it not been said in praise of the definiteness and comprehensiveness of this system that there is not a man, woman, or child anywhere in England but who dwells within some definite parochial boundary, for the oversight of which some definite man with cure of souls is responsible? Surely, where the best or most possible is made of it, it would not be easy to exaggerate the value of the parochial system.

Here I would take the opportunity of most strongly recommending, to everyone who is in any way interested in the social problem, "Chalmers on Charity"—an admirable compendium, drawn from many volumes, of Chalmers' work and teaching on that subject. The book has been compiled and arranged by Mr. G. F. Masterman, who is himself an authority upon the subject, and whose own teaching, generally as a commentary upon Chalmers, is a valuable part of the book. It would be difficult to praise this book too highly; and if I were asked to name any *one* book in which could be found the safest and soundest advice as how best to deal with the problems of poverty—no small part of the social problem—I should without hesitation name this book of Chalmers.

I mention it here because Chalmers had the strongest possible belief in "the parochial system." Upon its lines all his work was done. He felt that it gave to himself and his workers a definite position and a definite sphere of responsibility; and I suppose there is not on record a more thoroughly successful experiment than that which Chalmers inaugurated and carried out in his large, poor Glasgow parish, with its ten thousand people, in the lowest and worst part of the city. I have not space here to describe either Chalmers' methods or results, but everyone who wishes—whether on parochial lines or otherwise—to be a true helper of the poor should make a careful study of these methods. They are, I believe, not only right ones—they are the only right ones; and just because he employed them his success was assured.

Mr. Masterman's comment at the end of the description of Chalmers' plan is as follows: "The parochial clergy have an immense advantage over the best agencies which have been formed to guide the administration of relief. They are strong where the societies are weak. They have a territorial system divided into small areas, and occupied by a band of visitors with a moral mission to the poor. They can exert the highest kind of influence. These are the very conditions which

Chalmers established in his model parish. But here the resemblance ceases. Our clergy do not use their instruments for his purpose. The position has been thrown away. The natural relationship between the people and their friends has been destroyed by almsgiving, and that too often of the very worst kind—inadequate almsgiving at the hands of visitors uncontrolled by discipline or knowledge.”

This condemnation is certainly too sweeping, though in the great majority of cases it is probably only too true. Did not, at least, one Metropolitan Relief Committee last winter seek to prove its wise expenditure of the funds committed to it by stating that “those clergymen whose wisdom and knowledge in regard to this work were not assured” had been carefully excluded from its operations?

The parochial system, if well and wisely worked—that is, by men inspired by the wisdom and equipped with the knowledge of Chalmers—is excellent. But this is a very large proviso. And is it not well known to social workers, as to others, that frequently the best instruments are the most dangerous in the hands of those who do not know how to use them? The parochial clergy have, as Mr. Masterman shows, definite areas in which, as far as our Church organization is concerned, their authority may be said to be supreme. Thus, for the efficiency or inefficiency of any voluntary organization connected with the Church or ecclesiastical parish they must finally be held responsible. Let me say that I do not here refer merely to the organization of charity, to which Mr. Masterman refers, but to all *voluntary* organizations for the moral and spiritual, as well as the material, benefit of the people.

In this lies the weakness of the parochial system—in the frequent *unfitness of the men* who occupy positions from which, simply for inefficiency, they cannot be removed; and, from being in possession, they also prevent others from doing good work in the areas over which they may be said to have control.

2. We must also remember that the inefficiency of the head affects all the workers. One of the very strongest parts of Chalmers' work lay in his judicious choice and in his careful training of his workers, to whom he imparted his principles, and who worked in strict obedience to these. All this I must not stay to describe, but must again be content with a reference to the chapter in Mr. Masterman's book entitled “The Parochial System of St. John's.”

No doubt one of the difficulties which clergymen to-day—especially those working in large and poor parishes—have to encounter is the finding of suitable workers. Most of

Chalmers' twenty-five deacons came from *outside* his parish; but, remembering the attraction which, as Professor Peabody shows, philanthropic work has now for so many, it ought not to be difficult, if they are sought over a sufficiently wide area, to obtain suitable workers. Here is one point in which, surely, the parochial limit may be overstepped, and so leisured persons living in rich parishes may find work among their poorer brethren.

Thus, as far as the "opportunity" and "equipment" are concerned, the present time does seem favourable for the Church to make progress towards the solution of the great pressing social problem. The atmosphere is full of evident interest, and not only of interest, but of an uneasy conscience—indeed, of an ardent desire to do something which may be beneficial. These feelings, surely, can be utilized. Then, as far as equipment is concerned, the Church has her parochial system, her buildings, and her workers. She has her churches and schools and mission-halls. She has her clergy and her great host of lay-workers, her zealous laymen (would they were more numerous!), her sisters and her deaconesses, her district visitors, her day and Sunday school teachers.

Wherefore, then, her alleged paralysis and her apparent failure to exercise a real and manifest influence for good upon the great masses of the people? To attempt to answer these questions shall be the last portion of my subject.

IV. THE NEED TO-DAY.

Of this, again, I believe we shall best think under the same two heads of (1) organization and (2) equipment (*i.e.*, properly equipped workers).

If the parochial system, as alleged, is generally a failure, it is so, not because of any inherent weakness in itself, but on account of the men who are working it. We must remember that the number of "large and poor" parishes is now very great; they are found in the towns, and in the country, and even in the suburbs. But who will venture to assert—even if we could insure that the most suitable man for the particular parish was always placed over it—that among the clergy there is an equal number of men who may be described as "well equipped" for the work which the head of each of these separate "spheres of influence" should be capable of doing? Let me speak of only a portion of that equipment.

1. It implies the fullest knowledge available of what may be termed in the widest sense "social science"—*i.e.*, the principles and laws which govern the welfare of society, these laws being in themselves as fixed and irrefragable as the laws

of chemistry or building-construction. To obtain this knowledge will need much hard study of all kinds of the best literature dealing with the various aspects of the social question; and, in the light of this knowledge, it will demand study of these various problems very *patiently* and at first hand. The discrepancies between the opinion of an expert and the rough-and-ready method of dealing with some fragment of the social problem as generally pursued by amateurs (*e.g.*, in regard to almsgiving) may well lead us to think seriously.

2. The equipment of the parochial clergyman should imply the qualification of being able to "address," and so to appeal to, the "masses." With these "manner" is a great matter. They will not listen to "a poor talker." I do not say they demand oratory, but they do demand clear, thoughtful, earnest, and "ready" speech. They want a man who can state his case clearly, and whose method of stating it appeals to them. And not only do the clergy need this power, but they need to cultivate it in their workers. Yet how many lay-speakers in an average parish are capable of "holding" an audience of working men? Here I believe the Nonconformists, and especially the Wesleyans, with their lay-preachers trained by years of practice, are far stronger than the Church. As a proof of the Church's weakness here, I would again ask anyone to look through the various returns of the recent religious census in London, and especially to those columns headed "Church of England Mission Services." No one can examine these without noticing how very few *men* appear to attend these services, either in the morning or the evening. Here we have, at least, one key to the weakness of the Church when brought face to face with the masses of the people—a weakness which is in some measure due to the great weakness of the parochial system—I mean in its tempting us to have, if not actually too many efforts, certainly too many *weak* ones. This thought leads us back to the question of organization.

Churchmen may at times learn something from Nonconformists, and undoubtedly the modern Wesleyan method of strong "Central Missions" in our great towns has much to recommend it. I cannot speak from personal experience of their London missions; but I can do this of their Manchester Mission, whose success, judged by more than one standard and from more than one point of view, may be regarded as phenomenal. I only wish I had space to tell of what I know of the work whose centre is the Central Hall, in Oldham Street. But anyone who wishes to learn about it may for one shilling obtain a history and report of the mission, entitled "After Fifteen Years." This volume—for it consists of more

than 200 closely-printed pages—will, I think, convince any dispassionate reader of what an enthusiastic, yet wise and intelligent, aggressive effort may do among the masses of the people. A few figures may be given. The official paid staff—consisting of superintendent, ministers, lay-preachers, sisters, and nurses—now numbers 36. The *voluntary* workers are more than 1,500. Besides the Central Hall, the mission owns, or rents and works, thirteen other buildings, including a great Men's Home, shelters for women and girls, and a House of Rest. In the Central Hall alone each week upwards of 70 services, meetings, and classes of various kinds, are held. In the various Sunday-schools there are more than 3,500 scholars and more than 300 teachers. On a Sunday evening the Central Hall, which holds 2,000, is packed; the Free Trade Hall, almost the largest building in Manchester, is equally crowded, and a relief service has now to be held in the Grand Theatre. It is computed that by the paid and voluntary workers more than 6,000 visits are paid each week to the homes of the people, while in one way or another week by week some 30,000 people are under the influences of the mission. On the social side the work, as far as one can judge, is equally successful. Take, for instance, the men's shelter and labour yard. In these two it is shown in the last report that in one year 5,802 helpless men were dealt with. The expenditure was £2,160, but the income—received from the letting of cubicles, the sale of food, and the work of the men—amounted to £2,283, showing a profit of £123: 3,198 cubicles were let weekly at 3s. a week, and 12,870 were let nightly. The report of the women's shelter is very similar, and showed a profit on the year of more than £95.

Where lies the secret of success? I believe, very largely in this: that a thoroughly efficient man stands at the head of the mission—a man who is a genius in the work—and that his next lieutenants are almost equally capable. One "weak" chapel after another in the city, with perhaps a feeble organization and a dwindling congregation, has been, not absorbed by the mission, but put into connection with it, and always to be revived into strong, effective, and aggressive vitality.

I now ask, "Is something of the same kind impossible in the Church?" And I answer, "Yes, quite impossible, *so long as* the parochial system is narrowly and selfishly and rigidly worked." I would not *destroy* the parochial system in our great towns, but I would not regard it as supreme. It requires to be worked *under* a higher and larger system. Here the diocesan system is ready to our hand. If the parochial system is to be successful, from the highest religious point of view, in

dealing with the great indifferent masses of the people, it must be worked as part of a diocesan system.

The details of such a scheme would require the most careful consideration, and they would have to be adapted towards the needs of each town and its particular population. But in each great town, for this particular work, there should be as superintendent (this word implies the office and work to be done, rather than the title necessarily to be chosen) one who is an expert in social work, and who has great power of appealing to the people. Under him there should be a small band of experts ready to carry on this work anywhere in the town. The superintendent would know what part each parish was able to take in the whole work or permanent mission; while much of the time of his immediate helpers would be taken up in the careful training of voluntary workers, who would, of course, work within the limits of the different parishes. But the various churches, schools, and mission-halls would at suitable times be at the command of the mission superintendent for services and meetings of a missionary nature. But behind all schemes there will lie the need of men—capable in themselves and capable of training others—if the great “social problem” is to be solved. Till these are found, or, rather, trained and educated, the Church will remain, as to-day, in the majority of parishes conspicuous by her weakness rather than by her strength.

I cannot speak from experience as to how far instruction upon the various problems which comprise the social question enters into the ordinary curriculum of the theological college, nor as to how far knowledge of the subject is required by the Bishops in candidates for Holy Orders. But, surely, for practical usefulness in dealing with and influencing men, few branches of knowledge can be more necessary!

Enthusiasm and self-sacrifice are essential, and among both the clergy and the voluntary workers in our large, poor town parishes we see many and very beautiful examples of both virtues. But without knowledge and skill to direct these forces they must to a large extent prove ineffectual.

That this knowledge and this skill are among the greatest needs of the Church to-day, those who know how religious organizations are struggling, but, alas! too often making little progress, among the toiling multitudes of our great centres of population, can feel no doubt.

W. EDWARD CHADWICK.

