

but we have erred in expecting them to do what they never have done and never can do. Their value as agents for promoting the spiritual life of the community is insignificant, and experience has taught us that they offer no adequate compensation for all the trouble and expense which their management has entailed on the clergy. It is time to return to the only real method : we must emphasize the redemptive power of the Gospel of Christ. This is our starting-point.

S. KIRSCHBAUM.

CLERICAL WORK IN TOWN AND COUNTRY.

THOSE who have had any lengthened experience of a clergyman's life and work in town and country parishes know well how different they are from each other. Our aims and principles should, of course, be the same in both ; but our methods in carrying out the work have to be adapted to the habits and idiosyncrasies of the people and to the surroundings of each place. As one who, after many years' experience of town work, has since been for a considerable time Vicar of country cures, the writer may venture to offer his brethren a few reminiscences of his past.

In reference to a ministry in London and large towns, it is obvious that it involves a far heavier strain upon the mental, and to some extent the physical, powers than does that in the country, and that it taxes to the utmost the energies of even a strong man in the prime of life. But there is the stimulating sense of dealing collectively with large numbers of our fellow-men, although not as closely and personally as we could desire. The incessant demands on our sympathy and interest call forth all that is best in a man, and, if his strength be equal to them, make the work a real pleasure. There are the large congregations in the Church on Sundays, intelligent and thoughtful, and often responsive and sympathetic, followed, or preceded, by the numerous companies of earnest communicants that from time to time gather round the Holy Table of their Lord. The Sunday-schools, (if not always in these days the day-schools), with their well-appointed and well-taught classes and bands of devoted teachers, are centres of deepest interest to the clergy, not to speak of the teachers' meetings, where they train and assist them in their preparation for their duties. Then there are also the various useful institutions which cluster round every well-worked parish, such as mothers' meetings, Temperance societies, Bands of Hope,

Bible and Confirmation classes, communicants' guilds, working parties, benefit clubs, etc., all of which look for more or less attention. But lest "our good Vicar" should be overwhelmed with these multitudinous calls on his time and resources, he will, let us hope, have not only secured competent and like-minded curates, but gathered round himself and them capable and willing helpers from among his parishioners. These, by their sympathy, efforts, and prayers, can supply what is lacking in parochial visitation, the care of the young, collecting and distributing charities, temperance and missionary organizations, and other ways. Such are some of the brighter features of the town clergyman's lot. But we must add that, if he be a faithful and earnest man, he will have his difficulties and discouragements as well. He may often feel sadly alone amongst (it may be) the thousands of poor crowded together in their narrow tenements, and constantly on the wing. In his early zeal he attempts house-to-house visitation, but having so little time and strength left by other claims of duty, he deposes this to others, and confines his visits to cases of sickness or sorrow or need, as well as to the regular attendants at his Church. Occasionally at least he meets with rebuffs and slights, or churlish refusals to receive him. Many operatives, and even their wives, have a strong aversion to the parson and religion—oftener, perhaps, to the former than to the latter—and this feeling, arising very much from ignorance and prejudice, has to be overcome by kindly courtesy and consideration.

It may happen to others, as it once, and only once, befell the writer, when he was curate in a Northern town, to be taken for the undertaker. It was a visit of condolence, and the family was expecting that functionary. When they saw the clergyman's black coat, white band, and somewhat solemn look, they showed him at once upstairs to take the measure for the coffin! Explanations and apologies soon set matters straight; but there may have been something wanting in manner, or an unwonted look of depression in one's face, which gave rise to the mistake. More often is the strange clergyman taken for the doctor, or possibly for the policeman. Peculiar and not always pleasant are the adventures that we meet with in the towns. One such may be mentioned as typical of a class of people to be found everywhere. Conversing one day with a shrewd mechanic, who seldom darkened the doors of any place of worship, the clergyman asked him to what denomination he belonged. "Well, sir," he replied, "I don't suppose as you ever heard of it before, for I'm a Calothumpian." "Pray what is that?" I inquired with no small curiosity. "They are," he rejoined, "a sort of folks

as likes plenty to eat and drink, and to get through this world as easily as they can, and think nothing about the 'next.' That was a plainer and coarser avowal of godlessness and indifference than one usually hears from even those whose characters it describes to the life. What followed is now forgotten, but the speaker, though not a very promising individual, was easier to "tackle" than many more plausible and reserved persons.

Incidents like these diversify the monotony of the work, though by no means helpful or uplifting to our own spiritual life, and they must be taken as a set-off against not a few cases of a very opposite and cheering kind. These are not, however, the most trying features of the clergyman's experience. Far harder is it when our fellow-workers, clerical or lay, fail to see eye to eye with each other, or with the head of the parish. Differences of judgment and taste will arise at times, and if not wisely, firmly, and kindly dealt with, may generate misunderstandings, and even dissensions. Heart-burnings and disputes may spring up between us and those who, we feel sure, have the Master's work as much at heart as we, and really desire His glory. But patience, tact, and charity will often remove prejudice, and heal sores which might rankle into open ruptures. As curate at one time to the Rev. George Lea, at Christ Church, Birmingham, who, though somewhat angular and narrow in his temperament, had such a wonderful hold on commercial men in that Midland Metropolis, I well remember his quaint advice to all his fellow-workers: "Let us set our watches by the town clock, and we shall all keep time."

Too often in our day these troubles assume a ritualistic form. Perhaps our young people evince an unhealthy craving for novelties in our Church order, especially in the musical part of the service, which the incumbent regards as inconsistent with the Prayer-Book, and would feel it wrong to gratify, and which would give serious offence to the older and more conservative of his flock. These questions frequently sorely tax his wisdom and his patience, and yet, if not dealt with in a spirit of decision blended with tenderness, may do infinite harm to the best regulated congregation. Financial difficulties are another no slight source of anxiety to heads of large poor parishes, particularly if their own income depend on pew-rents or offertories. These, through no fault of the incumbent nor from any lack of liberality in the parishioners, may fall off in consequence of the removal to a distance and to some more desirable neighbourhood of the Church's most ardent and generous supporters, and their places may be taken by others, very willing but quite unable to give as

adequately for the support of the clergy. Then there are the many institutions that must be kept going by hook or by crook, such as the Sunday-schools—their books, prizes, summer excursions, and winter feasts. Church expenses are always, like the cormorant, clamouring for more supplies, not to speak of the repairs of existing buildings and the erection of new ones, salaries of deaconesses, lay helpers, clerk or sexton, and the like, and a thousand and one other inevitable claims have to be satisfied. The parishioners may be already doing their utmost, and can scarcely be asked for more, so appeals have to be posted or personally made to well-known leaders in charitable work, whose purses, though capacious, are almost exhausted by the incessant demands upon them from the clergy. All this begging to a sensitive man is not a little irksome and unpleasant, and especially as it takes him off from that spiritual work for which he was ordained, and on which his heart is chiefly set.

These, we take it, are some of the every-day trials of the town clergyman which weigh down his spirit, and from which he often sighs for relief. And yet all the time he is expected to keep himself well abreast with the events and the Biblical criticism as well as the literary progress of the day, and to produce weekly sermons suited to meet the difficulties of his more intellectual hearers, whilst he speaks to the hearts of the least lettered and most spiritually minded. Can we, then, wonder that so many of our town clergy break down prematurely under such heavy burdens, and have either (if they can afford it) to try the rest-cure or to abandon the struggle altogether?

We will not here attempt to discuss all the reasons of this, but we may venture to offer one suggestion. It is that the clergy in not a few instances, like Moses, impose impossible tasks upon themselves alone, and that the laity are not encouraged to share as many of them as they might. Many of our Nonconformist brethren are more alive to this danger than we Churchmen. The work amongst them is more equally divided. Its more secular departments are taken up by the deacons or elders, and even the spiritual duties are to some extent discharged by local preachers and other qualified persons. This is surely a far healthier arrangement than that which generally obtains amongst us, and is much more conducive to the good of the whole Christian community. By such means more useful service is effected without undue pressure on the minister. May it not prove that the ever-increasing requirements of the times will ere long bring the question of lay help and unordained ministrations more urgently before the Church?

But it is time to turn, by way of contrast, to our rural parishes, and to ask how our brethren fare in them. Often does an overworked incumbent or curate in the towns sigh for the green lanes and sylvan retreats of Arcady, and secretly envy what they suppose to be the far easier and pleasanter lot of the country clergyman, as he plies his task far from the madding crowd of the overpopulated tumultuous cities. But if he should be tempted to change his sphere, experience will sooner or later prove that he has only substituted one set of difficulties for another. Rural England is nowadays not always a bed of roses, and even the roses have their thorns. The sun does not shine there every day, nor does summer last through all the year. Autumn comes, with its cold, drenching rains and biting winds, followed by winter and its chilling ice and snow, miry roads, and shortening days. There is then the more need for pastoral visits to the sick, the aged, and the destitute, and the Parson may not be a man of an iron constitution and proof against all the assaults of the elements. Even if he can keep a pony-trap, the exposure may prove to be too much for his physical powers, and may lay him by for a time. If his be a poor, small, and scattered parish, he cannot afford to pay a curate, if he can find one. Lay helpers may be few and far between. So he, his wife and daughters, must generally do the work between them as best they can. Then there is the effect of weather and of the difficulty of locomotion on even the Sunday services, as well as on the school, weekday meetings and classes, which is very disheartening. It may be true, as someone has said, that God's weather never hinders God's work, but it is hard at the time to realize this view of the matter.

Such are some of the most trying drawbacks to the position, though we do not wish to paint the picture too darkly, for it is undoubtedly relieved by other circumstances of a brighter and more agreeable hue, especially for those who have been always used to rural life and are in thorough sympathy with its simple joys and pleasures. To an earnest worker it is a great compensation for the comparative dulness of his surroundings that he can know most of his flock, old or young, individually, and be known by them. Thus a mutual confidence and even affection may spring up, seldom experienced in the towns. "He knoweth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out." It is unhappily true in our day that the spirit of unrest and love of change is fast invading Arcady. The relations of farmers and labourers are more strained now than even a few years ago, through, we fear, faults on both sides. Slight differences too frequently lead to migration to the towns or to other farms. So far as

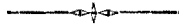
this is so, the country Parson has to meet with new faces on the roads or in the cottages, and it may be that the most satisfactory and interesting people are followed by the careless and indifferent.

Still, apart from this difficulty, upon the whole the visitation of a rural parish, if conducted in an earnest and yet genial spirit, will be found full of interest, and may be followed by much blessing. Of course, it is not so in all cases. I well remember a thoroughly true-hearted country clergyman, now long since gone to his rest, full of fire and zeal, a very Boanerges in the pulpit, who when he visited the poor was so shy and embarrassed that, after exchanging a few commonplaces he would sit silent and moody, and then abruptly take his leave. This seemed the more strange and the less excusable as he had considerable powers of conversation in clerical or general society. There are, no doubt, some men who can for a time or to some extent enter into his feelings, but this is a difficulty which practice and a larger inflowing into the heart of Divine love will gradually overcome. *Solvitur ambulando.* Certainly, a very silent and nervous man is not the best suited for country folk. They will open their hearts most freely to one who can talk with them in a homely, familiar style about every-day things, and yet, like Goldsmith's Vicar of Auburn, "lure to brighter worlds and lead the way."

One remarkable instance of success in such efforts may serve to encourage others, as it has often cheered the writer. In a parish of a country town of which he was in sole charge there lived a poor old woman, an earnest Christian and an attached Churchwoman and devout communicant, who was a great help to her neighbours and her clergyman. But it had not been always so with her. This was her story, as she simply told it to him: She had been very careless, ignorant, and ungodly. A former Rector during a round of visits knocked at her door. She opened it, and rather rudely told him that she was too busy to see him. He quietly replied that he would not disturb her then, but wished to say one thing. "My good woman," he said, "I fear you seldom pray for yourself, but do remember that Jesus Christ is praying for you." She made no answer, shut the door, and went back to her work. Yet those few simple words touched her conscience. She could not get rid of them; but, being alone in the house, she fell on her knees, and there and then prayed as she had never prayed before. This proved to be the first step in her true conversion, and for many years afterwards, by her consistent conduct and zeal in God's service, she proved its reality.

What, then, is the conclusion of the whole matter? Will not a comparison between the life and work of town and country clergymen make it evident that each sphere has its own peculiar difficulties and drawbacks? *Per aspera tendo* must be our motto in both. *Ta παθήματα* everywhere may become *μαθήματα*. In the Christian ministry, as in other departments of human life, there is a wonderful compensation between good and evil, joys and sorrows, encouragements and trials. Happily, some men are naturally adapted to one line of service, some to another. It is very unfortunate when the square pegs are forced into the round holes, as is too often the case through the want of system in our Church patronage. Sudden changes from town to country, and *vice versa*, are not always productive of the best results. Occasional interchanges of duties between town and country Parsons may be most beneficial all round. In any case, God's work must be carried on everywhere alike, and if it be faithfully done with a single eye to His glory, Christ's presence and blessing are assured to all His servants.

W. BURNET.



THE MONTH.

THE Bishop of Chester's open letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury is one of the evident indications of the near approach of the Report of the Royal Commission on Church Discipline. We are also being favoured with forecasts of the document which may be safely disregarded; but the Bishop of Chester's letter is a clear summons from one in authority to face possible results of the Report, and to frame our policy accordingly. There can be little doubt that the question of Vestments will be the *cruz* of the situation, and it is to this point that the Bishop's letter directs our attention. He pleads for a *maximum* and a *minimum* of ritual, and urges that both uses should be made legal. At the same time he seeks to show that the doctrinal meaning of the vestments is of very secondary importance, and that those who insist on their symbolism are in reality occupying themselves with a very rudimentary and non-spiritual form of Christianity. The Bishop's letter will doubtless receive the attention it deserves from the writer's high position, but we confess we are inclined to agree, though on very different grounds, with the *Church Times* when it expresses its fear that Dr. Jayne's letter will not conduce to peace in the Church. For, on the one hand, nothing will ever permit Evangelical Churchmen