

ART. VII.—PAROCHIALIA; OR, HOW IT STRIKES  
AN OUTSIDER.

“WE will continue steadfastly in prayer and the ministry of the Word.”

So said the Apostles as they shook from their shoulders the intolerable burden of the secular cares of the Early Church, and turned to give themselves afresh, with free hearts and minds, to the work of carrying out the Master's command: “Go ye, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations.” How they did it we know: “They that were scattered abroad went out preaching the word.” Preaching was evidently *the* work to which they felt themselves called.

But that was 1,900 years ago, and times have changed, and Church systems have changed, and people look for something more from their clergy nowadays. The Apostles were itinerant missionaries, but our parish priests live among us; they must concern themselves with parochial matters, or the whole organization of the parish will fall to pieces.

This, which is often urged, is doubtless more or less true, yet as we make the admission a sense of something akin to despair creeps over us, since we cannot but feel that in the case of many an overworked and overworried parish priest it is the secular, not the spiritual, burden which is wearing him out, and that we of the laity who make such exorbitant demands on our clergy have much to answer for. For have we not gradually come to consider that all work of a charitable and philanthropic nature which is started in a parish must necessarily be part of the Rector's or curate's work, and is not likely to succeed unless the clergy have a share in it? I have lived in parishes where, monstrous as it may seem, those who managed the Band of Hope continually clamoured for the Rector's presence. The ladies who held missionary working-parties were not happy unless one or other of the clergy appeared to read the opening prayers. Boys' clubs, men's clubs, factory girls' classes, mothers' meetings, golf clubs, cricket clubs, choral unions, choir practices, besides innumerable committees, all felt themselves aggrieved if the clergy took no part in them. And the Rector and curates pursue the weary round uncomplainingly, with the poor consolation that they are spoken of as hard-working and indefatigable, though, as some never-to-be-satisfied people are spiteful enough to say: “They are but poor creatures in the pulpit.” It would be a miracle if they were anything else. Those who thus force this burden of semi-secular work upon them should at least pay for the

mending of the clerical boots, and provide the clerical library with a sufficiency of printed sermons.

But it may be urged the remedy is in their own hands. Why do they fritter away their time dispensing coal-tickets and other charities, keeping club accounts for the parish, attending boards and committees and what not, and doing a hundred and one things which a layman or a laywoman could do as well or better? As well might a doctor carry round his bottles of medicine, or a merchant sweep out his office himself, as a clergyman thus take upon him other people's work, with the inevitable result that time fails him to do his own. We do not attempt to explain the mystery. We have heard it said that laymen are not willing, do not come forward to take the burdens from the clerical shoulders; but we have also heard the other side of the question, and the layman's complaint that his aid is not asked. There is something wrong here, and the consequence is a great decline in the power of preaching throughout the land, and, as was well said the other day, "It is not the want of faith, but the bad reading and poor preaching, which are emptying our churches."

Are we setting too high a value on the ordinance of preaching? Surely not, for however diligent a visitor a parish priest may be, it cannot be denied that he moves in a limited sphere, and that there are and must be numbers of his parishioners—employés in shops, domestic servants, workmen, governesses—who are unknown to him by sight, and with whom he never exchanges a word. Yet these he may meet through the medium of preaching, always supposing that his preaching is sufficiently good to bring them to church; and all unknown to himself he may bring them a message which will make crooked ways straight, dark places light before them, life more hopeful, and death less terrible.

That there is so little of this preaching, so few sermons which abide in the memory for years to come, or even linger with the listener throughout the week, may well be the cause why men weary of church-going, and many churches which were once well filled now show a depressing number of empty seats. We can think of many a church in London which forty years ago could not contain the congregations which thronged them, though in many cases galleries were built one above another. Now the galleries have gone or are empty, and London streets more crowded than ever; but the churches wait the preacher's voice to call their multitudes back. Musical services will not do it, grand ceremonials will not do it; but the earnest pleadings of Christ's ambassador, the thoughtful words of the man who has been much in the secret

place of the Most High, and is abiding under the shadow of the Almighty, will have a power and an influence that will draw men from far and near, away from the world, away from sin and self, to the rest and the peace and the safety to be found at the foot of the Cross.

Are we setting too high a value on the ordinance of preaching? Nay, that is impossible.

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## Notices of Books.

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*Monumental Facts and Higher Critical Fancies.* By A. H. SAYCE, LL.D., D.D., Professor of Assyriology in the University of Oxford, etc. London: The Religious Tract Society. Pp. 127. Price 2s.

Archæology has been called "the avenger on the track of rationalism." This is not an inapt description, considering the nature of the facts which the spade of the excavator has brought to light. One theory which it has effectually demolished is the old contention that the Israelites were unable to read or write, and that a mature literature, such as we find in the Old Testament, could not have come into existence at an early date. Professor Sayce has put together a concise account, which ought to be in everybody's hands, of the principal discoveries bearing on the age and authenticity of the Old Testament Scriptures. For the purpose of history, philology can only be of service accidentally, being concerned merely with the linguistic sense of the record, not with the historical circumstances it embodies; and the delusive character of the philological method relied upon by modern critics is clearly shown by Dr. Sayce in his first chapter. "Time after time," he observes, "the most positive assertions of a sceptical criticism have been disproved by archæological discovery; events and personages that were confidently pronounced to be mythical have been shown to be historical; and the older writers have turned out to be better acquainted with what they were describing than the modern critic who has flouted them." After explaining the use and value of archæology as a test, the author describes the revolution effected in our conceptions of the antiquity of literature by the Tel-el-Amarna tablets and other finds, proving that the age of Moses, and even the age of Abraham, was almost as literary an age as our own. One of the most valuable chapters in the book is devoted to an account of the confirmation of Gen. xiv. supplied by Babylonian monuments, from which we now learn that the political situation presupposed in the narrative corresponds exactly with the actual requirements of history, though only a few years ago it was declared to be an "impossibility." Even the names of several of the Kings mentioned there have been recovered. "The Laws of Amraphel and the Mosaic