

souls. The last word of false philosophy and science may be : " God, I thank Thee I am not as other men are." But the first and last word, and the perpetual confession of the humble and contrite seeker at the foot of the Cross, will ever be : " Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before Thee, and am not worthy to be called Thy son." Repentance grasps the hand that rules the world. And from the other point of view, what is Creation (in the light of the Cross) but the Heart of God broken for us ?

NOTE.—It would not, perhaps, be difficult to show that St. Paul's doctrine or use of terms like "predestination" showed an acquaintance with the Stoics' teaching on the same subject, though, of course, he made everything new that he touched, and was always rather the hammer than the anvil—to quote Goethe's classification of men. And his employment of *προκοπή* and *προκόπτω* was an invasion of Stoic terminology. It has been asserted that St. Paul's "predestination" simply implies the teleology of Nature and Revelation. But even assuming this explanation, why does he press into his service words already associated with a peculiar significance ? Indeed, it would be impossible to believe that an intellectual giant like St. Paul was not familiar with all the theories of all the schools, educated as he was at such a centre of converging civilizations as Tarsus of Cilicia—"a citizen of no mean city."



Where the Shoe Pinches.

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AN association secretary, whose district covered the North of England, once made to me a startling statement. He said that among the many clergy with whom he had familiar converse he found very few who could be said to be content with their lot. The great majority declaimed against their hard position, and looked with not a little envy over their neighbours' fences, declaring that no men were so sadly placed as they. One and all longed for a change, for promotion, for a new charge, and fretted because the change was so long in coming. In fact, to put it shortly, the shoe was pinching them.

Possibly, if some of us clergy were cross-examined, we might say pretty much the same thing as the association secretary ; for we, too, have heard certain confidences expressed over the study fire as to the hardships of the parish, the cantankerousness of certain individuals in it, and the general cussedness of the world at large so far as it bore on this particular charge. Most parsons would, it seems, be glad of a change to pastures new, where nettles are excluded by law, weeds are suppressed by statute, and east winds are diverted by the strong arm of the police—where, in fact, a bit of paradise has dropped down upon the blessed spot, and kept its angelic character day by day without change. In fact, we should all like to wear a shoe that never did, never could, and never would pinch.

Where the shoe pinches is, then, our subject for consideration.

Now, in my opinion, the answer to this question cannot be put in a nutshell, nor be replied to in a word. It is a more complicated business than that. It is a subject around which we must ride carefully and study from every point of view.

1. Now, I think we must all agree that *something of this painful pinching is due to the shoe*. Clerically speaking, we are all bound to wear ready-made shoes. Had we been measured for them by the ecclesiastical shoemakers, we might perhaps be so fitted that the shoe should not pinch ; but alas ! we are not allowed that privilege. Hence the misfits. There, like the shoe, is the parish, rigid as an Act of Parliament can make it—toe, heel, and sole unyielding facts ; size, breadth or narrowness, all anciently defined ; and we are called to thrust our dainty, or perhaps clumsy, foot inside. At first we manage a little by dint of pride, and the strange glow of dignity which comes when you compare yourself with those who wear only stockings, to walk about with apparent comfort. But dignity disappears with use, and by-and-by there is time to dwell upon the inconveniences of wearing a shoe sizes too large or too small, but always with some point and excrescence which pinches sadly.

Now and then a parish is found by a lucky man which seems made for him, just as sometimes your shoemaker will at

the very first choice fit you with a comfortable shoe straight off; but this is exceptional. Now and then you may find yourself tolerably well suited, but I fancy the exact fit in our ready-made parishes is as uncommon as the winter swallows, and that the shoe which does not pinch somewhere is an extreme rarity. Sometimes it happens that the foot and the shoe are hopelessly at variance, and everybody can see with half an eye that that foot never was intended to be thrust into that particular shoe. But what can you do when some men are so mad for a living that, like the lady who has made up her mind to marry, and will marry anybody rather than nobody, they will take the first living that comes along, even if it be conspicuously the wrong one for them? Sydney Smith, you will remember, depicts the discomfort of a round man in a square hole, and a square man in a round hole. If we could insure men either round or square, we might manage to fit them; but the unhappy fact remains that there are a hundred other shapes possible to eccentric man, and a thousand other shapes for our parishes.

A great deal of accommodation is therefore necessary in this imperfect world and in these imperfect parishes and men. It is well to know what we have to expect with regard to the parochial shoe, for then, being forewarned, we shall be forearmed, and shall not suffer those poignant pangs when the shoe happens to pinch, which pangs, I may say, are all the worse when they are surprising and unexpected.

It will follow as a necessary corollary, I think, from the contrast between the shoe so rigid and the foot so sensitive, that if the candidate is so foolish as not himself to see the stupidity of thrusting his large foot into a small shoe, the patron, like the shoemaker, is considerably to blame if he thrusts a man into anything so painful. He, we may suppose, is cool and collected, and has no such rosy dreams as the man who wants a settlement. What in the world is he after when he perpetrates so miserable a mistake as to nominate so unfit a man? Circumstances, no doubt, alter cases, as when a man of principle, believing a certain type of Churchmanship is absolutely

wrong, resolutely refuses to appoint a man of the opposite colour ; but when a man who has no such reason straightway appoints a man who will in a month stir the place by his tactlessness like a wasp in a beehive, he ought, surely, to be suppressed by Act of Parliament. Nothing is so appalling as the methods of some patrons who, led by motives of a political or social kind, put an unfit foot into the shoe, and earn the gratitude of the few at the cost of the curses, deep and loud, of the many.

2. I should now like to point out as a second element in the discomfort of a tight shoe that *a good deal depends on the way you wear it.*

You may wear it, for instance, on the wrong foot, and this, I can well believe, is one reason why the shoe pinches so considerably. A left shoe upon a right foot is painful all the world over. This terribly aggravates the pinch.

Or you may dance about in it, and furiously increase the pinch by your unnecessary movements.

Or you may bring it into violent contact with some harder substance, as, for instance, with a kick.

Or you may shrink it more by getting cold water thrown over it. This is a sad experience, which is much to be deprecated by those who desire a well-fitting shoe.

You know what I mean. Every man's circumstances may be made infinitely worse by his stupid way of dealing with them. Under the best auspices the shoe will pinch, but we only aggravate the pinch by the various ways suggested above. Christian charity and loving dealings can soften the worst of pinches, but if you kick out venomously, even though you call it Christian faithfulness, it will only add to your misery. A parish is a big thing to kick, and very hard, and the parish which does not kick back must be in another and better world. The screaming parson who advertises his miseries on the housetops is, after all, only an object of ridicule to all sensible people, who recognize the coward when they see and hear him detailing his woes to every passer-by.

"In your patience possess ye your souls." Yes, we must

above all things wear the shoe on the right foot, which being a brave and trustful foot, may be trusted to get the minimum of pinches possible in this crooked world.

3. As a third element in the shoe-pinches of parochial life let me mention *how much is due to the last wearer*. Yes, our shoe is not only a ready-made shoe, but it is a second-hand one as well, very much second-hand when you recall how many have preceded you, and of these every one has left his mark, for weal or woe, upon the shoe.

Happy the man who was preceded by a foot something like his own for length, breadth, and height of instep! Miserable the man who has succeeded the other sort of foot. For shoes take the impression of the feet of the wearer, and if he has been long resident in the shoe, it will very probably reveal every corn and joint. *Your* corns will probably be somewhere else. This is a discovery we are bound to make sooner rather than later.

Now, your predecessor may have been an angel in disguise, with, of course, a perfect angel's foot. And even if he was not an angel, as a matter of fact his disappearance from that parochial scene will clothe him with seraphic virtues, just as the dead husband or wife is represented as a dear departed angel by the one that is left to the one who has come. You may depend upon it, your predecessor's dainty feet will, without fail, be trotted out for your emulation by, I may say, those who treated him the worst when he was there. Every Vicar is canonized after he is parochially dead.

And not only is he a sacred memory, but his organizations are sacred too. Woe betide the unhallowed hand which ventures to touch the ark which he had constructed! His successor may see, as he thinks, improvements, but let him beware. He must tread on exactly the same side of the shoe, and with the same spring of ankle and toe. He must turn his toes out at the same exact angle, and if his predecessor turned in his toes he must do the very same or earn the contempt of the whole community. He must use, too, the same kind of polish, and if there float on

the air the perfume of any other than Day and Martin's he must prepare to receive cavalry, for come they will, with a great clatter of bit, bridle, and spur.

For a good many years he is a suspect, whether he knows it or not, and until the aroma of his predecessor's memory has died down he dare not innovate, or improve, or suspend.

All this if the predecessor's foot is considered a proper shaped one; but if it was a misshapen one, here is another difficulty, for the shoe will have got misshapen too. It is hard to follow a negligent man, for the shoe has somehow become degraded by the bad contact of the bad foot of the other. The people will have contracted a dislike to all clerical feet for a time, and not until the bad man's memory has departed from common recollection will you wear the shoe with acceptance.

If your predecessor cherishes cool feelings towards your poor foot, he can do infinite mischief and make the shoe pinch most venomously. But, of course, no decent man would do that. Still, it has been done, and in some few instances it has been the direct cause of a pinching shoe. If any man needs to keep his mouth tight shut it is the man who has left his parish for another.

4. We must not omit to mention also *how much depends on those who help to clean the shoe*. No clergyman can possibly clean his shoe by himself. He will, if he be wise, call in others to help him in this cleansing process. They are his helpers in district, church, school, and his many other organizations. That these, in their generosity and zeal, may make the shoe supple and clean is a fact which we shall all to a man subscribe to. But, then, on the other side, they may so clean the shoe which the poor parson has to wear as to make it uncommonly uncomfortable. They may throw it out of shape. A few workers are, it must be confessed, rather hinderers than helpers. It is bound to be an imperfect world, is it not? Then, having to clean the shoe when it is on our foot, they are not sufficiently careful to avoid the corns and other tender places. They act as if they wanted to clean the foot as well, which, after

all, we did not engage them to do ; and they are sometimes not disinclined to give us an ugly blow or two with the brushes, by way of discipline for our many sins. Then, some of the shoe-cleaners don't attend to their business properly, and wander off to clean other parsons' shoes, which makes them a trifle undependable. Some of these fickle shoeblacks have even been known to clean one man's shoe and then go and sit at the feet of another man, not for the purpose of cleaning this time, but to look at their faces in the superior shine of his shoe. Some even wander over the whole of a town just for the sake of looking at more and more shoes and those who are wearing them. This sort of helper does not make our shoe any the easier to wear.

But the worst of all is when some evil-disposed helper in the shoeblack line, having studied your shoe for some time, knows exactly where the corn lies, and deliberately steps upon it. Your shoe pinches then, if you like, and for many a long day the tingle remains, and the horrid place stabs and jumps. Then you wish you never need wear a shoe any more. Then you would fain retire from the shoe business and let somebody else taste the sweets of office. Then you would be delighted to walk barefoot all the rest of your life. Dear me ! but what patience and long-suffering a poor parson requires in his shoe wear ! He sometimes dreams of having a set of perfect workers, who will do just what they are told without any fuss or fret. But he soon wakes up to find that Mrs. So-and-so won't clean anything but the heel of the shoe any longer, and that Mr. So-and-so insists on the shoe being laced or elastic-sided. One says that the wearer is a bit too easy already, and is giving way to new-fangled fashions, and that he would be the better for strictly adhering to the old shape of shoe, which everybody knows was laced tight. Then there is an everlasting quarrel about the kind of blacking, some wanting the blacking which requires only the lightest of labour to bring on the shine at once, without the old slow, tedious method of elbow-grease. Some insist on using brushes of a very antique type ; others prefer a newer make. The flinty-hearted ones insist on using

the back of the brush just to make you feel it, and not to clean the shoe at all. Some don't do any work, but spend their time in looking at others' work and telling them how to do it infinitely better. Critical people have a grand power for making the shoe pinch. They do their cleaning with their tongues. Some say that they are sick of cleaning such a dirty shoe, and that they are off to find a cleaner and more respectable one. And so the little parochial world wags. But, amidst these freaks and eccentrics, we must not fail to remember that the mass of our workers are good, real, sympathetic, and loving, that they really do their best to keep the shoe from pinching the wearer, and that with most it is no fault of theirs if the shoe pinches.

Taking all these causes into consideration, I do not think we have any cause to be surprised that the ecclesiastical shoe *does* pinch. The wonder is that it pinches so little as it does.

Seeing that the shoe does pinch in the case of most of us, *is it possible to ameliorate our condition and mollify the pain?*

Personally, I do not believe much in the policy of trying another shoe somewhere else, because, as sure as eggs are eggs, that shoe will be found also to pinch, and perhaps be found to be even more painful to wear. Changes promise a great deal more than they perform.

Neither would I recommend throwing off the shoe altogether, and betaking ourselves to the balmy lotos fields where the pinches of life are unfelt. You have to *find* them first of all, which is a bigger difficulty than we any of us know. Civilians' shoes, I fancy, pinch as well.

Neither would I recommend taking abnormally long holidays and leaving the shoe on the Vicarage shelf until you come back again; for then, while you save one pinch for your foot, you get a worse one in your conscience. Deserters never can have an easy time of it.

Neither would I advise the policy of *laissez-faire*, and of cultivating ease by not walking at all. If we do not denounce sin and do not probe the consciences of our people; if we drop all harsh truths and tootle away dance music and soft dulcet

strains on the ecclesiastical flute, carefully eliminating the shriller notes of alarm and warning, I dare say our shoe will be a great deal easier to wear. Let other people alone and they will let you alone, and you will have the character of a jolly, easy fellow, who wisely "lets sleeping dogs lie." But what will the Master say when we stand before Him, and what shall we be able to say ourselves about our faithfulness and reality?

I will not indulge in any more negatives, but proceed to positives. What is the easiest way to wear tight and pinching shoes?

Well, I *would advise the process of working them easy*, in the first place. Shoes are, after all, stretchable, and there can be no doubt that, given perseverance enough and energy enough, the most pinching of shoes will yield. How many a minister has overcome the pinch by sheer hard work done for God! It is better than screaming, which is quite ineffectual. Opposition can be worked down when it cannot be argued down or scolded down; and so, as regards the shoe which pinches, let us not wear it less, but more.

Then, it would be well to *see how far we are ourselves responsible for the pinch*. There may be something rather angular about our foot, which we may judiciously pare down. Perhaps we set our foot down a little bit too obstinately or a trifle too imperiously. Let us try the gentle footfall, and see whether the shoe will jar so much then. I fancy we shall very speedily discover an improvement.

Then, we may do a good deal in the direction of making the shoe more comfortable *by trying to soften the leather*. You know what I mean. Prayer is a wonderful softener. The upward look of faith will take our thoughts off the pinch and help us to forget it. And the oil of the Spirit is not a mere figure of speech, but a real agency for making the hard, rasping, and galling shoe harmless and comfortable. More religion, deeper spirituality, and a keener sense of the

Master's holy presence will not fail to take off the painful pressure of the ecclesiastical shoe.

I am not sure, either, that something cannot be done to the poor sensitive feet. They certainly may be hardened and rendered more callous in a good sense by right treatment. Your soldier will, in the heat of battle, be wounded sore, and to others the wound is as clear as daylight; but he goes fighting on, quite oblivious of all, and free from pain and sense of injury. That is the triumph of mind over matter, of spirit over body. Why should not we Christian ministers and soldiers of Christ, in the heat and enthusiasm of battle, be so engrossed in winning a victory for the King of kings as to be unconscious of the pinchings of the shoe? The bright and zealous spirit is a grand uplifter, and invariably, when the feelings are keen enough, it takes the thoughts off the foot and raises them to the Throne of God. If we can only hear the "Well done" of the Great Commander in anticipation, we shall not be concerned with the pinching of a shoe.

And, to mention another palliative, *can nothing soft be interposed between the shoe and the foot?* Is there no spiritual cotton-wool available to break the shock of the pinch? We know there is. Then, in God's Name let us see that it is interposed speedily. But then we and the shoe must be given over to the Great Artificer. "The peace of God, which passeth all understanding," must be our remedy, not special bits of wadding bought at the shops of philosophy or at the establishment of Worldly Wiseman. The remedy must be Divine if it is to prevail.

Lastly, let us be extremely careful that we *shake out from the shoe all the grit of inconsistencies, and earthly tempers, and mere self-will.* If the pressure of the shoe is in itself bad, how much more so will it be if something alien be introduced!

