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Missions : Parochial and General.

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(Continued from p. 520.)

DURING THE MISSION.

PASSING from the preparation for a mission, our minds must now consider the conduct of the mission itself, and in submitting a few suggestions on this point it is obvious that some must apply to the missioner and some to the clergy and workers. Let me say, then, at the outset that the actual conduct of the mission must be left entirely to the missioner. No one, not even the vicar, unless under most exceptional circumstances, must interfere with his methods. Of course, in the selection of a missioner the action of the parish priest ought to be free and unfettered. He may wisely consult others, and they may rightly counsel him, but the choice must be his, and a solemn choice it is, never to be made without much prayer, inquiry, and consideration. For the lack of care in this choice I have known cases of disagreement as to doctrine and method, with consequent disappointment and even friction. In one case it was found necessary to call for the intervention of the Bishop, who revoked the missioner's licence, the mission coming to an abrupt and most unfortunate end. No delegated decision can therefore relieve the parish priest from this great and grave responsibility. Once, however, the invitation has been given and, with the Bishop's approval, accepted, the missioner must be supreme in the conduct of the mission. He should be regarded as the curate-in-charge of the parish, with the parochial clergy as his chief assistants. In other words, they may counsel, but he must control.

The first need of the missioner is a full knowledge of the parish. This he can best obtain by one or more preliminary visits, during which he will naturally discuss methods and details

with the vicar, meet first the wardens and other chief officials, and then the general body of workers, and finally preach to the congregation. I have assumed that the missioner is one called from outside the parish, and for this plan, after what I have said on the matter of special "gifts," no apology is needed. But, of course, the best missioner may be, and sometimes is, the parish priest or one of the staff, or even, if it be possible, the Bishop. Perhaps I may be allowed here to speak of my own experience. From the time I was appointed to a cure of souls I have regularly conducted missions in my own parish, and now find it possible to assist the clergy in this way. I recognize, of course, that for most, if not for all, of my Episcopal brethren to devote a week, ten days, or a fortnight to one parish or district is out of the question. All I wish in this connection, is that the dioceses of England were smaller in area, and that the work of Bishops would allow of more direct spiritual help being given, not to the clergy only, but to the people in general.

Respecting the methods of the missioner, these, as I have already said, must depend upon the personality, and vary with the experience, of the man. Many men, many minds, and many minds, many methods. If, however, a personal testimony be of any value, I gladly give it for what it may be worth.

In the first place, I always encourage the clergy (of course in their cassock) to be in the church some time before the mission service begins to give a personal welcome to the people, as I also desire that this preliminary period should be spent in the singing of the mission hymns. Not, be it noted, that I suggest the clergy should actually seat the people, and thus usurp the privilege of the wardens and sidesmen, all of whom should be, if possible, at their posts. On the contrary, I never fail to expect the active co-operation of the officials, and by thus giving them "something to do," solicit or encourage their sympathy, which, let me say, they never fail to appreciate. All that I ask the clergy to do is to be visible as those who are keenly interested in the effort, and to announce carefully chosen hymns for the people to sing. Here, again, what may appear

to be a small thing in itself is really not small but great, if the hymns are not only announced by number, but if the first or succeeding verses be impressively read, with a brief explanation of their meaning or a short application to those present, as, e.g., "*Come, every soul by sin oppressed.*" "Does sin oppress you? Do you feel its burden?" "*There's mercy with the Lord.*" "He is now in our midst, ready and waiting to be merciful to you." "*I heard the voice of Jesus say.*" "Have you heard this voice before?" "Would you hear it again to-night? Listen to His call, '*Come unto Me*—not simply to My house, but to *Me—and rest.*' He can and will take away to-night the burden of sin, if only you will come to Him." By this means the people are solemnized and prepared for the service before it begins. Only let me add one further suggestion—viz., that the hymns be constantly changed. Two, or at most three, verses of the same hymn will be sufficient. In this way variety is secured, no one is kept long without joining in the singing, and the interest of the whole congregation is sustained.

The service should be short and simple, never lasting more than half an hour, including the lesson which, with the hymns, should be selected by the missioner in view of the subject on which he is about to preach. In most mission hymn-books suitable services are provided. For myself, I generally use the opening part of Evening Prayer, as, in addition to the teaching of its structure of exhortation, confession, absolution, Lord's Prayer, issuing in the call "Praise ye the Lord," with the response, "The Lord's name be praised," it accustoms those who are not acquainted with the Prayer-Book to its order, and this method has its own distinctive and permanent value.

In the matter of the mission sermon, my own plan is to arrange beforehand—of course, carefully and prayerfully—a systematic course of subjects, always beginning with the infinite love of God, passing on to the spiritual nature of man, and thus preparing the way for dealing with sin and the great redemptive message of the Gospel. I know some missioners prefer to use the exceptional opportunities of the first Sunday by preaching

on sin, its tyrannies and consequences, with a view to arousing at the outset the consciences of the congregation. In this I differ from them. For my method I claim the Scriptural order, "In the beginning God," thus laying the foundations of truth in the Divine nature, building on it the creation of man, with its purpose in the likeness of God, followed by the fall through temptation into sin, issuing in the revelation of redeeming, restoring love. Of course, the subjects and treatment vary, even though the structure and order are the same. Moreover, experience teaches me that this method has a practical value. It is more attractive and certainly less repellent to the average man to be led first to think of God's love rather than his own sin, and to be guided through the glory of his origin and therefore destiny, ere his mind is turned to the graver and sadder view of the reality and heinousness of human sin. To some, this method may appear to be of little importance, but I have known large and expectant congregations on the first Sunday of a mission disappointed and discouraged, even frightened, by thundering declamations and awful warnings to such an extent that many have stayed away from the remaining services. On the other hand, I have found that, by the method suggested, prejudices against the mission have been removed, interest has been quickened and imagination stirred, minds have been aroused and hearts won. Those present on the first Sunday have been constrained and even allured to attend the subsequent services.

No one will, however, suppose that any missioner can make light of sin—"They that be whole need not a physician." Far otherwise. The profound teaching of Scripture on sin—its reality and mystery, its guilt and power, its heinousness and consequences—is admittedly paramount and secondary only to the primary message of the love of God. And in dealing with this great and awful fact in human life, he will study and apply his teaching in the light of current thought. He must keep himself abreast of present-day theories and tendencies, and speak to the people in the line and plane of their own reflections and

experiences. Many, it may be assumed, of those to whom he preaches will be sadly ignorant, through long neglect or wilful sin, of the meaning of religious terms. He will strive after lucidity and for this purpose use illustrations, the most powerful of which are those drawn from actual life. In some of his hearers not only is the heart darkened but the will is weakened, and he will seek by every means not to break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax. He will lovingly plead with sinners as one who is himself a sinner, and by his manner and voice prove his deep and heart-felt compassion for the erring and lost.

So again, every missioner's message must unfold and apply the glory of the redeeming love of God in Christ. The Incarnation with its declared purpose—the salvation of all men—must be the dominant note in all his sermons. The Living Christ, who died for all and lives that none may die, must be lifted up as the one and only Saviour alike from the guilt and power of sin, willing and waiting to receive and welcome, to pardon and cleanse, all who come to Him. The Lord's own key-word to His all-embracing love—"Whosoever," "If any man"—will be urged and pressed with a reiterated persistency. "He is able to save to the uttermost all who come" will be declared and enforced again and again.

Above all and through all, the missioner will be conscious by a constantly enforced conviction that if the effort is to succeed it will "not be by might nor by power but by My Spirit, saith the Lord." He will keep himself as free as possible from all secular matters and vicarage affairs and be much alone with God. He will be constantly preparing in heart the subjects he has previously prepared in mind, and seek for a daily refilling of the Holy Ghost for the work. Then only will he come forth from the Divine Presence illuminated by the light of which he is unconscious, and empowered by the might which is not his own, for the most solemn task of standing between the living and the dead, and pleading with dead souls for the Living Christ.

The "after-meetings" for more definite instruction are times

of great potency of which every missioner will naturally make the most. Only the earnest and anxious will remain and the opportunity is then at its greatest. The souls of the people are more receptive and their hearts more responsive, and then it is that the missioner's best work for God is done. Here, as elsewhere, methods vary. Some of our great Evangelists adopt what may be called the "inquiry room" method, and invite the undecided anxious for decision to accompany them to an adjoining room, hall, or school. Others, after a brief address, pass from pew to pew, aided by the clergy and workers, while the choir and congregation sing suitable hymns, and deal individually with such as may have given or may give some outward sign of their desire for personal conversation. The fact that both these methods have been adopted and are still practised by experienced missioners proves that much may be said in their favour. But while admitting this, their advantages, in my experience, are outweighed by obvious objections. The passing out to another room involves a great strain to weakened wills, and the new atmosphere is naturally less spiritually helpful, while not everyone desires personal conversation even if the workers are efficient, which in many cases they are not. The plan I have adopted seems to me, all things considered, the best. Standing on the chancel step, or in large churches the pulpit, in unofficial dress, I conduct what may be called an unconventional service. First, I ask for silent prayer and quiet thought, which, after the disturbing influence of the departing congregation, is advisable if not necessary. This is followed by an extemporeaneous prayer, generally by one of the clergy. Then follows an address on some subject related to the sermon—conviction, repentance, faith, conversion, obedience, atonement, and such-like. This affords the opportunity for definite Church teaching on, *e.g.*, Baptism, Confirmation, public worship, family prayers, Bible study, and the Holy Communion. In this connection I have found invaluable what may be called teaching by repetition—*i.e.*, stating a doctrine in simple words and asking the congregation to repeat it first with me, then after me, then

alone; or in teaching a verse from Scripture which is by them repeated. Again, I have proved the value of the Catechetical method of first stating a question and giving the answer, and then asking the question for the people to answer. These methods, rightly used, do not disturb the devotional character of the service, but they do make it, I think, more definitely and permanently useful.

All this leads up to the necessity for providing opportunities for personal intercourse at stated times, in which individual difficulties and doubts, sorrows and sins, are dealt with by the missioner. This may be done during or after the mission.

As the mission draws to a close, the plan experience has taught me to be most useful is the distribution of a form of questions on one side referring to Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Communion, etc., and on the other, asking, *e.g.*, "In what way has the mission been a blessing to you?" "What subject has helped you most?" etc. These latter questions prove a difficulty to some, but for that reason are of real value in promoting and defining thought. In addition to which they have been a help to me, both in helping me afterwards to assist those in need either directly or through the clergy, and also in suggesting new treatment of the same subject on subsequent occasions.

In the thanksgiving service these papers are brought up to the chancel steps, where they are given to the clergy, and in return I give the memorial card. No one receives the card without the application form being returned, and by this means a most useful record of some of the results are retained both by me and the clergy—who have access to the one side of the form and such information as I feel it right to give from the other.

In addition to the evening evangelistic services, every mission has its morning or afternoon addresses on the spiritual life, although these should not be entirely bereft of the evangelistic element, even as instruction forms part of the evening service. Addresses to men and to women, as also to distinct classes where the latter is necessary, form an integral part of every well-organized mission, and of these I need not speak in

detail as local conditions by which they are governed vary so much.

Frequent celebrations of the Holy Communion also have rightly their place in the scheme of the mission, not only as occasions for the strengthening and refreshing grace through the Sacrament, but also as opportunities for those who have drifted into indifference and neglect to return to the constant and blessed observance of this Holy Feast of love.

Thus far in dealing with the mission itself, I have confined myself almost entirely to the missioner, but it must not be forgotten that during this time the parochial clergy and workers are strenuously engaged in the parish, leaving no stone unturned to bring everyone to the services. They are also urged to pray very earnestly, both privately in their homes as well as at the Holy Communion and prayer-meetings, most of all during the mission services. It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of this constant stream of intercession, both in its direct results and its reflex benefits. The missioner will be well advised, therefore, to constantly enforce the duty and privilege of prayer on the part of the faithful especially as he enters the pulpit and during the time he is preaching.

(*To be concluded.*)

