

The whole tone of the letter gave me, I must say, a much higher estimate of bishops in general, and of our own bishop in particular, than I had before. I have always liked their dignity and hospitality, their aristocratic bearing and their port; but I was not alive, as I now am, to the fact that they are indeed overseers of the Church, and take a minute and thoughtful interest in all that concerns her. Had our village been a cathedral city, it could not have been more accurately understood, or kindly cared for. The very peculiarities of our former churchwarden and his wife were not unknown to him. And, in all he said, there was a tenderness for the feelings of others which did him infinite honour. Had he been trying to get a canonry for his son, or an archbishopric for himself, he could not have taken greater pains to obtain his objects, than he took to win over my interest, and all in behalf of my own people, and their happiness and peace.

I confess myself not insensible to such influences from such a quarter. So, what with this and your favourable introduction, our new Vicar came amongst us under the happiest auspices. And certainly he made good use of the vantage ground thus secured him. A nicer fellow I never met. No nonsense about him: so plain and simple, but so refined in his manners. So scholar-like, without one particle of pedantry. So superior, without the least evidence of being conscious that he is so. So thoughtful, yet so cheerful. So playful, yet so earnest. You can well understand the great change for me, who, having had no one for long years in my neighbourhood I cared to talk to, except about tups and turnips, harvests and hounds, had let all my classic lore—so loved of old—drop into disuse. Now I am burnishing up my armour, and delight to have a tilt here and there over the old ground. As a champion, and one who will, I am sure, soon ripen into a friend, no one could be more charming.

His views also about parish matters seem to me sensible, though in many respects strange. It is quite evident—though he has never said so—that he thinks us all here to be in a miserably backward condition. I gather this more from the questions he asks, to which I cannot give satisfactory replies, than from anything he positively says. If all he has inquired after, as to whether it exist here, be necessary in a parish, we must, indeed, be sad in our shortcomings; and his task, in the introduction of reform, will be herculean. But he has never said one word of blame as regards others, or of confidence in himself. So that even my brother churchwarden, though evidently in a great fright, and not a whit more satisfied about him than when rumor condemned him so freely, is, what I can best describe as, dumfounded. I half suspect that his conscience is playing the part of traitor, as I know my own to be doing in a most disgraceful way, and that he feels himself in the wrong box, though he is not honest enough to own it.

The Vicar read himself in on Sunday, and preached. We had a large congregation—all open-mouthed and eyed and eared watching for wonders. There was, however, nothing strange in any way, except that his manner was most devotional, and his sermon was most deeply interesting. He had asked me beforehand how the service was usually celebrated in the time of his predecessors; and, except in the matters of reverence and fervour just alluded to, he adhered carefully to the ancient model. He spoke in his sermon of the solemn relation in which he stood to his new flock, the claims they had upon him, and his earnest desire to discharge them faithfully. He said very little about the future, save what we all felt was most needed and most true,—that he hoped we would help each other to be holy, to use life, and meet death, as God's children should. He told us he would not come into residence for a few months, but would send a wise and faithful friend to act as his curate, until the Vicarage may be ready for his own reception. Then he said he would come to live amongst us, and trusted that God's blessing would come down and dwell amongst us too.

He did not read, but spoke his sermon, simply, fervently, and every one, I am sure, felt and understood what he said. It was, I am disposed to think, almost the first sermon the people ever had heard. Dry old themes, such as a faded old schol-

ar would write, and a formal old man would read, were all they had ever heard before. The living speech of one who talked to them about God and their own souls, face to face, and heart to heart, was indeed a novelty. They are all, however, very silent and perplexed. The old horror of a Puritan, I beg your pardon—of a High Churchman, is still over them, they cannot shake it off; and though no change was made in the ordinary service, still one or two features of his own private and personal devotion could not but strike them.

Whenever the Sacred Name was spoken, he bowed his head. Reading the Nicene Creed in the chancel he turned his face toward the table, and at the mention of the Holy Name reverently bowed. It happened to be also our Sacrament Sunday—the first in the month; my wife and I had, some time past, feeling our own need of it, persuaded our old Vicar to give us at least a monthly communion. Our new Vicar administered the Sacrament to each individual, instead of offering it, as our old friend had done, with the utterance of one sentence, to the whole table. I was astonished at this, seeing how carefully he had endeavoured in other matters both to ascertain and follow the use of his predecessors; and I afterwards inquired how it was that he had not asked me his custom in this particular. "Because," he said, "I feared the answer you would give, and, as in this matter I could not do otherwise, even once, than as the rubric directs,—I avoided the subject." I must confess I was glad he did, for I never liked our former system—always longing for a personal application of the blessing to my own heart. But what with his sermon, and these few, to them, unintelligible practices, the people were regularly puzzled. Some of them have, I hear, said that they never, even in the dissenting chapel, heard anything that warmed their hearts so much, and did them so much good, as what he said to them on Sunday: and yet, if so, why dislike him unless it be for what I have already mentioned, and certain other reverential acts, which they had observed; for at the commencement of each "Gloria" he makes a slight obeisance. These reverential bowings were done so quietly and unobtrusively, that, if we had not been all of us all eyes that day, I do not think they would have been perceived. They were evidently the involuntary movements of his own inward devotion, and done as if they were the habit of his life. Still they were so new here, that men could not discover what they meant, and many, I fear, looked upon them as idolatrous and superstitious.

Thus he came, and thus he went, for the next morning, after a visit to the family at the Vicarage, he left us, and not to return for three months. His curate will come at the close of the week, and, taking up his residence in a farmhouse, where we have found lodgings, will have charge of the parish till the Vicar come into residence. He is to conduct everything, except a few matters like the mode of administering the Holy Sacrament, after the model of former times; and the Vicar has assured us he has the greatest reliance on his prudence. Should any difficulties, however, arise, he is to come to me for direction. This responsibility I hesitated to accept, both from a consciousness of unfitness, and also from the feeling that I, as a layman, have really nothing to do with such matters. But the Vicar urged it so strongly, that I could not resist. He said that not only as one of the people, but still more as a churchwarden, I had a great deal to do with them, and that, knowing the people and their habits, and having a real interest in their welfare, I could best advise a stranger, should any question arise likely to agitate the public mind. So, after long persuasion, I yielded. I suspect he knows nearly as well as our Bishop how to manage men, and to get them to help him to do his own work, by somehow or other making them feel that it is theirs only. No matter! I shall do my best to be honest to all parties, and not let either side humbug me; and, if I can be of use to them, and keep away misunderstandings and annoyance, and perhaps in my position here as landlord I may, I shall be most thankful.

Before our Vicar left us, he explained to me the cause of his delay in coming into residence. First, he would not make any changes in the parish, which might by their sudden contrast with former times give pain to the family of the late

Incumbent. Secondly, he does not like to fall in with any practices, even for a short time, which he would not continue—deeming it much safer for all parties that he should begin as he will end. Thirdly, he hopes by the wise teaching and personal holiness of his Curate, of which he has a high estimate, to prepare the minds of people for any change which he may think it right to introduce. All these seem sensible and kindly reasons, which, coupled with his unwillingness to close too hastily his ministry where he is, make me content; though I must confess the first feeling was that of great disappointment at the sudden departure of one in whom I had taken such an interest, and the consequent delay of that work of reformation in the parish, of which though I dread the process, I long for the results.

His generosity to the family of the late Vicar is great. He has requested them to retain the Vicarage for the three months of his absence. Some people, no doubt, will suppose that the delay in his coming arises from its dilapidated condition, and the necessity for extensive repairs. But such is not the case. He does not intend to do anything to his house, until he has made his church what it ought to be, and therefore, except where external repairs are necessary to keep out weather, he will not spend any money on the Vicarage. He has, moreover, told the widow that she need not have any anxiety about dilapidations. The family, I knew, dreaded them, for the place has not had sixpence expended upon it for the last twenty years, and the claims which might have been made would have swallowed up the small sum for which the late Vicar's life has been insured. His rights in this manner the new Vicar has waived, and has thus given the truest comfort to the poor sorrowing family. Although, he has won, if not gold, golden opinions everywhere; and, as no man could have been more dreaded before he came, so no man could be more vaguely admired, wondered at, and almost loved, during his short residence amongst us.

My wife and I have only one great unsolved wonder, and it is this: Why such a man should care to come down to such a place, and torment himself about a few poor, uneducated people in this remote land,—for I have no doubt that we will give him plenty of trouble and annoyance before he has done with us. He, who in Oxford has such genial society and pursuits, and, in the young collegians who flock to his preaching, such an intelligent, appreciating audience,—why should he ever care to come amongst such a flock as he will find in this parish? Its income can be no inducement; and though its situation is beautiful, and our coast the finest I know, yet these things hardly offer sufficient inducement for such self-sacrifice.

One hint as to a possible cause dropped casually in the course of our conversation, when I expressed my wonder at his acceptance of such a living. He loved the country, and especially the sea-shore, and he wanted more time for thought and reading than the stirring claims of his Oxford life permit him to enjoy. But deeper even than these, which seemed more like surface reasons, there appeared to lie a longing for a quieter, less ambitious path. For once, speaking with as much congratulation as I could venture to express, about his influence with the under-graduates, and the good which he might thus widely do, he sighed, admitted the width and importance of the sphere, but also said something about the danger of popularity, and the high price which some men must pay if they would risk it; and how the teacher might possibly drop beneath the level of the taught, if deep holiness and real self-sacrifice did not sustain him. I am a stupid fellow about such things, but somehow I felt as if I understood him, and had got the clue of his life.

At all events, I could not fail to respect one who seemed to be fitting himself for the guidance of others by disciplining and subduing his own heart. How good it is for a humdrum country squire like myself, to have such high motives put before him, and to be reminded that

"Life may have holier ends than happiness."

Farewell, my dear friend, and, as you say yourself, God have us all in His holy keeping!