

The Church Guardian.

Upholds the Doctrines and Rubrics of the Prayer Book.

"Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity."—Eph. vi. 24.
"Earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints."—Jude 3.

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THE ADVENT MISSION IN HOLY TRINITY, FIFTH AVENUE AND ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY-FIFTH STREET, NEW YORK.

I am asked to give some account of the Advent Mission in my parish, and to state my impressions of its results.

I. The preparatory work must first be referred to, because it is, in my judgment, an integral and essential part of the Mission. It is, moreover, a feature which differentiates it broadly at the very outset from "the revival system." We distinctly repudiate the idea of "getting up" a revival, but we firmly believe that a genuine revival of religion may be called down from Heaven by united prayer and united labor. We made this our motto during the months of preparation—"ora et labora." Earnest effort was made to quicken and deepen the faith of the people in the power of united, fervent prayer for a blessing from on High; and at the same time to vivify their sense of responsibility to arouse them to work for the success of the Mission.

A large and effective chorus was organized, which met weekly to learn the Mission hymns. Committees were appointed; on literature, on printing and advertising, on district visiting, on shop-girls, on visiting the sick, on enlisting young men, on finance, on young ladies, on the Sunday-school children. The parish was thoroughly canvassed. Thousands of notices, leaflets and hand-bills were distributed, posters were put up. A thousand letters were sent over the rector's signature to the dwellers in the "brown-stone fronts," upon whom our district visitors did not venture to call. (The result of this was seen in the large attendance of the non-church going class.) The Wednesday evening service was utilized for four or five weeks in advance of the Mission, as a special service of preparation. The Mission hymns were sung. Reports of committees were then received. District visitors told the story of their experience in their work. Special prayers were offered (some of them extemporaneous) for a blessing on the Mission. All this was most helpful. The life of the parish was quickened. The zeal of many was kindled. Had the Mission for some reason been abandoned, the preparation would have been a blessing in itself.

It ought to be added that earnest effort was made to lead the people to feel that we were expecting the advent of the Holy Ghost, the sanctifier and teacher, rather than the coming of a great preacher, who by his eloquence was to win souls to Christ. The effect of such an attitude of mind was most salutary. It disarmed criticism and opened the way for the missionary's message in the very outset of his work. And to-day, though Mr. Du Vernet is held in loving remembrance in all hearts, and many feel they owe him an unspeakable debt of gratitude, yet it is the Mission, not the man, which is magnified, the visitation of the Spirit, and not the visit of the preacher of righteousness.

II. *Special features of the Mission.*—Among these I mention several which distinguish the Mission from the familiar "revival." (a) Though a special service was used, it was liturgical, and

the prayers were all taken from the Prayer Book or else from the Bible. Thus the liturgy was honoured and the words of the Prayer Book made familiar to many ears unaccustomed to its use. With the exception of a brief extempore prayer by the rector at the morning service, and another by him at the close of the evening service, and sometimes one by the missionary at the same service, all the worship was liturgical. The liberty of extemporaneous devotions was at all times tempered and chastened by the spirit of the Book of Common Prayer. (b) The entire absence of excitement and noisy demonstration of feeling was very noticeable. It was not the "earthquake" or "the storm" which one heard in these services, but the "still, small voice" of God's Holy Spirit.

The apostolic fervor of the missionary produced a deep impression upon the entire congregation, but it exhibited itself in the stillness which pervaded the building and the seriousness which was manifest in the faces of the listeners. The periods of silent prayer were most impressive. It was then that the Spirit seemed to be doing His deepest work, while every head was bowed in silence, if not in prayer, and the truth spoken to the ear was sinking into the heart. The missionary's reliance was not placed in any artificial forcing process, but in that reasonable and scriptural method described by the apostle—"by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." To quote the language of an observer: "There was no extravagance, no sentimentality, no sensationalism. Reliance for the success of the Mission in bringing souls to Christ was not on new methods and irregular efforts, not on oratory and eloquence, but on the power of the Holy Spirit."

(c) The due prominence given to the sacraments. The Holy Communion was celebrated on Sundays, on Tuesdays, and on Thursdays during the two weeks of the Mission. At the early celebrations the attendance was small. At the midday service, on the first Thursday, one hundred persons communicated; at the same service, the following week, one hundred and thirteen; at the Sunday morning service, (11 A. M.) three hundred and twenty; at the Sunday evening communion, the following Sunday, about one hundred and ninety.

Baptism and confirmation were also brought to the attention of the people.

(d) Among the special features of the Mission I include also systematic, definite, and connected scriptural teaching. In this parish the value of such teaching was very strikingly manifested, and coupled with it was an illustration, which I shall never forget, of the power of very simple, very direct and reiterated statements of fundamental and elementary truths.

(e) *The After Meeting.*—As conducted by Mr. Du Vernet this bore no resemblance to the scenes at the "mourner's bench." The congregation is dismissed, an invitation being given to all who desire to see the missionary or the rector to remain in their seats. Then, while a select choir softly sings some of the Mission hymns, one of the clergy approaches those who remain here and there in the darkened church, and in a subdued tone speaks with them of the

things that pertain to their peace, and sometimes prayer follows. All is private, quiet, reverent. Some retire into the chapel adjoining, where the rector sees them, one by one, in the library. I desire to bear my testimony emphatically to the very great value of the after meeting in certain cases. The nail is driven home. Impressions are made permanent. The wavering are led to a decision. Says a keen observer of our Mission: "In these quiet moments of counsel and conference the eyes of many were opened to the fact of the forgiveness of sins, even of their sins: for others the doubts of long, unquiet years were solved, and joy and peace became at last a reality to their restless hearts; morbid consciences were taught a more excellent way than ceaseless introspection and self-torment, while experienced, kindly hands showed earnest but perplexed and weary spirits how to overcome their special practical difficulties."

III. *Results.*—It is too soon to attempt to measure them. Fully to measure them would be impossible till the day when all hearts shall be revealed. But certain things are clear: The religious life of the parish is broadened and deepened. Many Christians are aspiring after a closer walk—a consecrated life with God. Some striking cases of conversion have occurred. Christian people are awaking to their responsibility and are seeking to save the lost. The power of the Spirit is felt. Christian brotherhood is made real. The bonds of love are strengthened between Christians of different names. I have a goodly list of new communicants. I have also a list of lapsed communicants restored to the communion during the Mission, one of them after thirty years' backsliding. I have another list of nominal and formal communicants who have either come now for the first time to the experience of real religion, or have been quickened again into life from spiritual death, spiritual slumber. I have yet another list of persons who have "passed from death unto life," from a life "without God and without hope" into a life of faith, or else have now for the first time decided to surrender themselves to Christ. These lists I have. I doubt not the angels have additional lists of souls over whom there has been joy in heaven, but of whose repentance I knew nothing.

I have also a large number of letters bearing testimony to the blessing—generally a distinct and definite blessing—received during the Mission.

At our thanksgiving service on Monday night, December 14, I read brief extracts from twenty-five of these letters, and I wish to say that the effect of these testimonies upon the congregation was very marked indeed. It was like the effect of the testimony of an eye-witness upon a jury. I thought it the best chapter on the evidences of Christianity I had ever read.

I give you two examples: One writes, "You have helped me to see that a joy of my life was a sin. I have given it up for Christ's sake."

Another, who had been in impenetrable darkness, in an agony of rebellion, stubbornness, defiance, hatred of God and His Word, and in disbelief in prayer, writes, "To His grace be the praise! I never conceived such victory could be given. Now my joyful cry is 'Thy will be done.'"