

BROTHERHOODS OF CLERGY.

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It is now universally acknowledged that the ordinary parochial system, valuable and precious as it is for the regular pastoral care of average parishes and settled congregations, is even at its best weak on its missionary side. In the rapidly growing populations, of which we have now anxious and painful experience, it is confessed to be inadequate, at least as administered on the old familiar lines. I need only refer, if authority beyond the personal knowledge and observation of any one of us be needed, to the report of the select committee of the House of Lords of 1858, on the deficiency of the means of Divine worship in populous districts, the report of the joint committee of the Convocation of Canterbury of 1885, on the spiritual needs of the masses of the people, and to the report of a similar committee of the present year.

The parochial system needs, on the missionary side, supplementing. Observe, I say, not supplanting, but supplementing. The responsibility for this work is by no means limited, in its tremendous urgency, to the local ecclesiastical authorities, parochial or diocesan, but really touches the conscience of the whole Church and nation. And to meet it our parochial system must, by some general concerted action, be greatly reinforced and expanded.

But it must be reinforced by something thoroughly consistent and harmonious with itself; loyal, I would even say *subordinate*, to it; something which shall strengthen, not weaken, nor supersede it; which shall regard the parish church as its mother, its centre, and its goal. Any fresh departure must simply aim at lifting up the souls it may gather in from the hitherto unreached masses out of the condition in which they are the subjects of elementary evangelistic labour, to the higher condition of folded sheep under the regular pastoral ministrations of the Church; and, further, of being themselves in manifold ways the happy and much needed ministrants of blessing to those who may still be in the unreached condition in which themselves once were. In any new agencies or methods which the Church and her rulers may, under a very pressing sense of solemn responsibility, brooking no more delay, be guided to adopt, there must be—we are quite sure there will be—no antagonism, no rivalry with long-tried methods, nor even any very sharply marked distinctions; but rather a perfectly harmonious and continuous, though a very considerable extension and development, and that both of agencies and methods.

As for the subdivisions of parishes, that has gone far enough, perhaps too far. Rather we have come to feel we want stronger centres and stronger staffs, and greater unity of aim and of co-operation. Mission rooms we want in plenty, with suitable services, simple and elastic. Lay co-operation, in any amount that is to hand, provided only the laymen be of the right sort, actuated by the right motives, lovers, before all things, of Christ, His people, and His Church. All this really goes without saying. We have been saying now already a great deal too long. The time has come for really extensive and energetic, yes—don't let us be afraid—enthusiastic action.

Most of all we want more clergy. The Church is undermanned. How strange that once, in

1537 our English Litany contained the needful prayer, "That Thou vouchsafe to send us plenty of faithful workmen into Thy harvest;" and so provision was made for the Church's fulfilment of our Lord's express command; "Pray ye, therefore, the Lord of the harvest that He will send forth labourers into His harvest." How or why that petition dropped out we cannot now say. We need it sadly now. It is useless to talk of multiplied and extended agencies if the right men are not forthcoming, whether for lay or clerical work. They are our first need. We must make it our business, as a Church, constantly, earnestly, urgently, to ask God for them. We want no mediæval revivalists, no mere imitators of the outward features of the systems of bygone ages, whatever good such systems may have done in their day, in times and under conditions which they suited, being their natural growth. We must do, not what the best men, the most devoted saints, the wisest and most far-seeing originators did, in their day, but rather what they, with their faith, their zeal, their self-sacrifice, their love of God and man, would do were they living now, in our time, facing our problems. Their faith, their zeal, their love, their patient wisdom, we need it all. St. Benedict, St. Columba, St. Aidan, St. Bernard, St. Francis, St. Philip Neri, St. Vincent de Paul, Bernard Gilpin, Whitfield, John Wesley, Charles Lowder, we need them all; and all the gifts of a l. May God in His mercy grant them to our prayers, for His glory's sake, for His Church's sake, for our nation, for our empire. Never was a call so loud, never a door of so glorious opportunities so open. God grant it be not said of us of this age that we knew not the time of our visitation.

But, suppose we find the men, among those whom God calls to Holy Orders, how shall we best use them? Given men ready, for the love of Jesus and of souls, to offer ten, fifteen, twenty years of their youngest, strongest life to missionary work among our "rapidly growing populations" here in England, men who, putting off, I do not say necessarily abandoning, the prospect of marriage and a settled home, are ready to "endure hardness, as good soldiers of Jesus Christ," and to wait, as many an officer in army and navy, many a college fellow, many in our over-crowded professions, actually have waited and wait, for those special blessings, until middle life, or past it, what shall we do with them? How shall we organise them and their work, so that it may be both happy, blessed, and fruitful?

First, ask them distinctly to undertake for the missionary and evangelistic side of Church work, realising distinctly what they are doing in such undertakings, counting the cost. That they may the better realise this, take them two years on trial. That would sufficiently test their fitness for work in this special sphere. Then, and not till then—say at five and twenty at the soonest—let them offer themselves to the continuance of such work for, say, five, ten, or fifteen years more—i.e., to about forty years of age. On the expiry of each five years' period let them distinctly, as before God, and with the advice of their superiors, both immediate and diocesan, face the question of their safe and useful continuance in such special work, and then renew it or not as should seem conscientiously right. The third five years' period past there should be a very special reconsideration, both on their own part and that of their superiors. It might be the experience gained had both increased their fitness and success, and confirmed their vocation. They might be supremely happy in their blessed work. God's inward drawing might point to its continuance. We may hope it would often be so. The ripe wisdom—the steady devotion of the practised "fisher of men," is as precious and as needful (to say the least) as the zeal and enthusiasm of the younger; and would be always specially valuable, in its example and guidance, to them, as well as in its effect and influence on those upon whom the missionary energy is directed. But it might be otherwise. God's

Hand might point the conscience to a settled pastoral charge as now more suitable. Health, strength, spirits, all sorts of considerations may come in. Let them change. If need be, let them marry. Our English society, even outside our "rapidly growing populations," has not yet outgrown the need, far from it, of the example and influence in its midst of holy Christian homes and high-toned family life. Our parishioners, town and country, would rise *en masse* against the idea of an exclusively or predominantly celibate clergy. They know what the rector's or vicar's wife—we may say children too, daughters especially—can be to them, when they are what they ought to be, and may be, and often are. And they know what they would miss if they lost them. But how would our average clerical life be enriched by the distribution amongst us of men who, up to forty or more, had borne the burden and heat of the day among our masses! How should we love and honour them! How would our tone be enriched by them to the great benefit of the whole Church!

We need, then, no lifelong vows, whether of single life or of exclusive missionary work. My own deliberate and long-standing conviction is that such vows are either needless or dangerous—needless so long as the conscience and will, humbly watching God's leading for the time being, are content and happy, and the life useful, in the special work to which, under His leading, it was given; dangerous when, from whatever causes, the will becomes averted from such special life, or the conscience comes to feel, rightly or wrongly, after sufficient trial, that a mistake has been made, or that altered circumstances, inward or outward, have made such special life and work no longer possible. Work done under such changed conditions, and merely under the compulsion of a vow, must soon become entirely mechanical, and so not only useless, but mischievous. Therefore no lifelong vows—only such reasonable engagement as should ensure sufficient continuity and permanence, and guard any from lightly giving up while health remains. Perhaps the requirement of six months' notice, and the consent of the Bishop, before withdrawal, might sufficiently secure continuity, and prevent retirement from causes which might be only temporary. These points settled, a well-ordered community life, in convenient buildings in the very midst of the population they had to evangelise, would be a great security for both the happiness and the usefulness—two requisites which can never really be separated—of the missionary clergy. They should hold curates' licences under the parish priest, who, if himself unmarried, would be their resident head, but who should be the immediate director, in any case, of all who are working in his parish, subject only to the Bishop. But within the walls of the Mission-house the life should be that of a religious community, simple, frugal, self-denying, without discomfort or artificial austerity, not without grace and refinement, and much social happiness; entirely without care and anxiety, everything found for them, except their own personal books and clothing—all financial matters managed by a lay committee with the parish priest as chairman. Stipends would be needless, as in the Universities' African Mission, except £10 a quarter to each for pocket-money. Are there no wealthy laymen who, for the love of God, will found and maintain such collegiate Mission-houses in our over-crowded parishes? If the institution grew—and our wisdom would be to nurse it from small beginnings under a growing experience, and not to start with any ambitious, full-grown, and highly elaborated scheme—then it should have some one country home and centre—or more than one, one in each diocese, if necessary, in which each missionary priest should have two months, either continuous or at separate periods, of rest and retirement in each year, and which should be the final refuge of those who, having served the grandest of causes while health and strength lasted, were at length compelled finally to retire, and were not otherwise provided for.