

## Choice Literature.

## LAICUS;

OR THE EXPERIENCES OF A LAYMAN IN A COUNTRY PARISH.

## CHAPTER VII.—THE FIELD IS THE WORLD.

Last evening before I had found an opportunity to talk it over with Jennie, Dr. Argure and Deacon Goodsole called. I suspect the deacon's conscience had been quickened even more than mine respecting my duty to that mission class by Mr. Mingin's address. For I have noticed that our consciences are apt to be quickened by sermons and addresses more respecting our neighbour's duties even than respecting our own.

Dr. Argure had come down the day before from Newtown to attend the city mission meeting. He is a very learned man. At least I suppose he is, for everybody says so. He is at all events a very sonorous man. He has a large vocabulary of large words, and there are a great many people who cannot distinguish between great words and great thoughts. I do not mean to impugn his intellectual capital when I say that he does a very large credit business. In sailing on Lake Superior you can sometimes see the rocky bottom thirty or forty feet below the surface—the water is so clear. You can never see the bottom of Dr. Argure's sermons. Perhaps it is because they are so deep; I sometimes think it is because they are so muddy. Still, he really is an able man, and knows the books, and knows how to turn his knowledge to a good account. Last summer he preached a sermon at Wheathedge, on Female Education. He told us about female education among the Greeks and the Romans, and the Hebrews and the Persians, and the Egyptians—though not much about it in America of to-day. But it was a learned discourse—at least I suppose so. Three weeks after, I met the president of the board of trustees of the Pulltown Female Seminary. I mentioned incidentally that I was spending the summer at Wheathedge.

"You have got a strong man up there," said he, "that Dr. Argure, of Newtown. He delivered an address before our seminary last week on Female Education; full of learning, sir, full of learning. We put him right on our board of trustees. Next year I think we shall make him president."

A month or so after I found in the weekly *Watch Tower* an editorial—indeed I think there were three in successive numbers—on Female Education. They had a familiar sound, and happened to meet the editor. I spoke of them.

"Yes," said he, "they are by Dr. Argure. A very learned man that, sir. Does an immense amount of work, too. He is one of our editorial contributors as perhaps you see, and an able man, very learned, sir. Those are very original and able articles, sir."

This fall I took up the *Adriatic Magazine*, and there what should my eye fall on but an article on Female Education. I did not read it; but the papers assured their readers that it was a learned and exhaustive discussion on the whole subject by that scholarly and erudite writer, Dr. Argure. And having heard this asserted so often, I began to think that it certainly must be true. And then in January, I received a pamphlet on Female Education by Dr. Argure. It was addressed to the Board of Education, and demanded a higher course of training for women, and was a learned and exhaustive discussion of the whole subject from the days of Moses down.

"An able man, that Dr. Argure," said Mr. Wheaton to me the other day, referring to the same pamphlet.

"Yes, I think he is," I could not help saying, "I think he can stir more puddings with one pudding stick than any other man I know."

Still, he stirs them pretty well. And if he can do it I do not know that there is any objection.

But if I do not believe in Dr. Argure quite as fully as some less sceptical members of his congregation do, Deacon Goodsole believes in him most implicitly. Deacon Goodsole is a believer—not I mean in anything in particular, but generally. He likes to believe; he enjoys it; he does it not on evidence, but on general principles. The deacons of the stories are all crabbed, gnarled and cross grained. They are the terrors of the little boys and the thorn in the flesh to the minister. But Deacon Goodsole is the most cheery, bright and genial of men. He is like a streak of sunshine. He sensibly irradiates the prayer meeting, which would be rather cold except for him. The little boys always greet him with a "How do you do, Deacon?" and always get a smile and a nod, and sometimes a stick of candy or a little book in return. His over coat pockets are always full of some little books or tracts, and always of the bright and cheery description. Always full, I said; but that is a mistake; when he gets home at night they are generally empty. For he goes out literally as a sower went out to sow. I do not believe there is a child within five miles of Wheathedge that has not had one of the Deacon's little books.

I suspected that the Deacon had come partly to talk with me about that Bible class, and I resolved to give him an opportunity. So I opened the way at once:

Laicus. Well, Deacon, how are church affairs coming on; pretty smoothly; salary paid up at last?

Deacon Goodsole. Yes, Mr. Laicus; and we're obliged to you for it, too. I don't think the parson would have got his money but for you.

Laicus. Not at all, Deacon. Thank my wife, not I. She was righteously indignant at the church for leaving its minister unpaid so long. If I were the parson I would clear out that Board of Trustees and put in a new one, made up wholly of women.

Deacon Goodsole. That's not a bad idea. I believe the women would make a deal better Board than the present one.

Dr. Argure (with great solemnity).—Mr. Laicus, have you considered the Scriptural teachings concerning the true relations and sphere of women in the Church of Christ? The apostle says very distinctly that he does not suffer a woman to teach or to usurp authority over the man,

and it is very clear that to permit the female members of the church to occupy such offices as those you have indicated would be to suffer her to usurp that authority which the Scripture reposes alone in the head—that is in man.

Laicus (naively).—Does the Scripture really say that women must not teach?

Dr. Argure. Most certainly it does, sir. The apostle is very explicit on that point, very explicit. And I hold, sir, that for women to preach, or to speak in public or in the prayer-meeting of the church, is a direct violation of the plain precepts of the inspired Word.

Laicus.—I wonder you have any women teach in your Sabbath school. Or have you turned them all out?

Mrs. Laicus (who evidently wishes to change the conversation).—How do affairs go on in the work of your church?

Dr. Argure (who is not unwilling that it should be changed).—But slowly, madam. There is not that readiness and zeal in the work of the church that I would wish to see. There are many fruitless branches on the tree, Mrs. Laicus, many members of my church who do nothing really to promote its interests. They are not to be found in the Sabbath school; they cannot be induced to participate actively in tract distribution; and they are not even to be depended on in the devotional week day meetings of the church.

Deacon Goodsole (who always goes straight to the point).

Mr. Laicus, here, needs a little touching up on that point, Doctor; and I am glad you are here to do it. How as to that Bible class, Mr. Laicus, that I spoke to you about the week before last? There are four or five young men from the barrow factory in the Sabbath school now. But they have no teacher. I am sure if you could see your way clear to take that class you would very soon have as many more. There are some thirty of them that rarely or never come to church. As for me, I can't get at them. They are mostly unbelievers. Mr. Gear himself, the superintendent, is a regular out and out infidel. And I never could do anything with unbelievers.

Laicus.—Deacon, I wish I could. But I am very busy all through the week, and I really don't see how I can take this work up on Sunday. Beside, it would require some week-day work in addition.

Dr. Argure.—No man can be too busy to serve the Lord, Mr. Laicus; certainly no professed disciple of the Lord. The work of the Church, Mr. Laicus, is before any other work in its transcendent importance.

Laicus.—I don't know about that. Seems to me, I have seen somewhere that if a man does not provide for his own family he is worse than an infidel.

Dr. Argure (putting this response away from him majestically).—It is unfortunately too common an excuse, even with professors of religion, that they are too busy to serve in the work of the Lord. There is for example the instance of Dr. Curall. He was elected at my suggestion last summer as an elder in our church. But he declined the office, which the apostle declares to be honourable, and of such a character that if it be well used they who employ it purchase to themselves a good degree. As I that it should be so frequently so—ourselves first and Christ afterwards.

Laicus.—Is that quite fair, Doctor? Must Dr. Curall be put down as refusing to follow the Master because he refuses to leave the duties of his profession which he is doing well, to take on those of a church office which he might do but poorly? May not he who goes about healing the sick be following Christ as truly as he who preaches the Gospel to the poor? Is the one to be accused of serving the world any more because of his fees than the other because of his salary? Can an elder do any more to carry the Gospel of Christ to the sick bed and the house of mourning than a Christian physician, if he is faithful as a Christian?

Dr. Argure shook his head but made no response.

Deacon Goodsole.—That may do very well in the case of a doctor, Mr. Laicus. But I don't see how it applies in your case, or in that of farmer Faragon, or in that of Typsel the printer, or that of Sole the boot-maker, or in that of half a score of people I could name, who are doing nothing in the church except paying their pew rent.

Laicus.—Suppose you pass my case for the moment and take the others. Take farmer Faragon, for example. He has a farm of three hundred acres. It keeps him busy all the week. He works hard, out of doors, all day. When evening comes he gets his newspaper, sits down by the fire and pretends to read. But I have noticed that he rarely reads ten minutes before he drops asleep. When he comes to church the same phenomenon occurs. He cannot resist the soporific tendencies of the furnaces. By the time Mr. Work gets fairly into "secondly," farmer Faragon is sound asleep. So he does not even listen to the preaching. It he then a drone? Suppose you make a calculation how many mouths he feeds indirectly by the products of his farm. I cannot even guess. But I know nothing ever goes from it that is not good. The child is happy that drinks his milk, the butcher fortunate who buys his beef, the housewife well off who has her apples and potatoes in her cellar. He never sends a doubtful article to market; never a short weight or a poor measure. I think almost every one who deals with him recognizes in him a Christian man. He does not work in Sunday school, it is true; but he has brought more than one farm hand into it. Christ fed five thousand by the Sea of Galilee with five loaves and two small fishes. Was that Christian? Farmer Faragon, feeds in his small way, by his industry, a few scores of hungry mortals. Is he a drone?

Or take Mr. Typsel, the printer. He publishes the *Newtown Chronicle*. He sends a weekly message to 10,000 readers, at least twenty times as many as Dr. Argure's congregation. I do not know how good a Christian he is; I do not know much about the *Newtown Chronicle*. But I know that the press is exerting an incalculable influence over the people for good or ill, and the man who devotes his energies to it, and really uses it to educate and elevate the community, is doing as much in his sphere for Christ as the minister in his. He has no right to neglect the greater work God has given him to do for the lesser work of teaching a Sabbath school class.

Jennie.—That is, if he cannot well do both.

Laicus. Yes—of course. If he can do both, that is very well.

Dr. Argure. That's a very dangerous doctrine, Mr. Laicus.

Laicus. (warmly).—If it is true it is not dangerous. The truth is never dangerous.

Dr. Argure.—The truth is not to be spoken at all times. Deacon Goodsole.—That's a very unnecessary doctrine, Doctor, to teach a lawyer.

Dr. Argure (indifferent alike to the sally and to the laugh which follows it).—Consider, Mr. Laicus, what would be the effect on the Church of preaching that doctrine. It is our duty to build up the Church. It is the Church which is the pillar and ground of the truth. It is the Church which is Christ's great instrumentality for the conversion of the world. When the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, then the Church will have universal dominion. Here in Wheathedge, for example, Mr. Work is labouring to build up and strengthen the Church of Christ, and you tell his people and the people of hundreds of similar parishes all over the land, that it is no matter whether they do any work in the Church or not. Consider the effect of it.

Laicus. It seems to me, Doctor, that you entertain a low, though a very common conception of your office. The ministers are not mere builders of churches. They are set to build men. The church which will have universal dominion is not this or that particular organization, but the whole body of those who love the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. Churches, creeds, covenants, synods, assemblies, associations, will all fade; the soul alone is immortal. If you are really building for eternity you cannot merely build churches.

Dr. Argure.—Consider then, Mr. Laicus, the effect of your doctrine on the hearts and souls of men. Consider how many idle and indifferent professors of religion there are, who are doing nothing in the Church, and nothing for the Church. And you tell them that it is just as well they should not; that they are just as worthy of honour as if they were active in the Lord's vineyard.

Laicus.—It is just as well if they are really serving Christ. It does not make any difference whether they are doing it in the Church, or out of the Church. Christ Himself served chiefly out of the Church, and had it arrayed against Him. So did Paul; so did Luther.

Deacon Goodsole.—Do you mean that it makes no difference, Mr. Laicus, whether a man is a member of the Church or not?

Laicus.—Not at all. That is quite another matter. I am speaking of Church work, not of Church membership; and I insist that Church work and Christian work are not necessarily synonymous. I insist that whatever tends to make mankind better, nobler, wiser, permanently happier, if it is work carried on in the spirit of Christ is work for Christ, whether it is done in the Church or out of the Church. I insist that every layman is bound to do ten-fold more for Christ out of the Church than in its appointed ways and under its supervision. I have read, Doctor, with a great deal of interest your learned and exhaustive treatise on the higher education of women (I am afraid I told a little lie there; but had not the Doctor just told me that the truth was not to be spoken at all times), but I declare to you, that so far as the elevation of women is concerned, I would rather have invented the sewing machine than have been the author of all the sermons, addresses, magazine articles, editorials and pamphlets on the woman question that have been composed since Paul wrote his Second Epistle to the Christians.

Dr. Argure (shaking his head).—It is a dangerous doctrine. Mr. Laicus, a dangerous doctrine. You do not consider its effects on the mind of the common people.

Laicus (thoroughly aroused and thoroughly in earnest).—Do you consider the influence of the opposite teaching, both on the Church and on the individual? We are building churches, you tell us. The "outsiders," as we call them, very soon understand that. They see that we are on the look-out for men who can build us up, not for men whom we can build up. If a wealthy man comes into the neighbourhood, we angle for him. If a drunken loafer drops down upon us, does anybody ever angle after him? If a poor, forlorn widow who has to work from Monday morning to Saturday night, comes to dwell under the shadow of our church, do we angle for her? Yes! I am glad to believe we do. But the shrewdness, the energy, the tact, is displayed in the other kind of fishing. Don't you suppose the "world" understands this? Don't you suppose our Mr. Wheaton understands what we want him in the board of trustees for? Such men interpret our invitation—and they are not very wrong—as, come with us and do us good. not come with us and we will do you good.

Consider, too, its effect on the individual. I attended a morning prayer-meeting last winter in the city. A young man told his experience. He started in the morning, he said, to go to the store. But it seemed as though the Lord bid him retrace his steps. A voice within seemed to say to him, "Your duty is at the prayer-meeting." The battle between Christ and the world was long and bitter. Christ at length prevailed. He had come to the prayer meeting. He wanted to tell the brethren what Christ had done for his soul. The experience may have been genuine. It may have been his duty to leave the store for the church that particular morning. But what is the effect of a training which teaches a young man to consider all the time he gives to the store as time appropriated to the world? It is that he can serve both God and mammon; that he actually does. It draws a sharp line between the sacred and secular. And most of his life is necessarily the secular.

I forgot to mention that Mrs. Goodsole had come over with her husband. She and Jennie sat side by side. But she had not opened her lips since the salutations of the evening had been interchanged. She is the meekest and mildest of women. She also is the most timid. In public she rarely speaks. But it is currently reported that she avenges herself for her silence by the curtain lectures she delivers to her good husband at home. Of that, however, I cannot be sure. I speak only of rumour. Now she took advantage of a pause to say: