

# THE WEEK.

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## A PAROCHIAL MISSION.

How to reach the masses? This is a question which is being anxiously asked by every section of the Christian Church. For it is quite certain that, however superior the masses may be, according to Mr. Gladstone, in political discernment, at least they are largely untouched by religion. Persons in better circumstances do, for the most part, attend some place of worship. At least there are not a great many families whose position is supposed to be above that of the working class, of which some of the members do not go to church somewhere; and this, whether they live in town or in the country.

As regards, however, the condition of the labouring classes in our great cities and towns, it is a matter of certainty that the vast majority of them are not found on the Lord's Day in any of our churches or chapels or places of worship. If any one doubts this, let him get the statistics of the outlying districts of the English metropolis, and compare the increase of population with the church provision that is made for their accommodation. Let any one take the city of New York, and, without going into its squalid localities, let him select any block, from, say, Third Avenue to the East River, or from the Eighth Avenue to the North River, taking in twenty or thirty streets, and let him find out the population of that block, and then ask how many of them can be got into all the churches of every kind that are to be found within that area, or anywhere near its boundary. What is to be done? Perhaps the best answer to that question is to go and do something; and even if it is not done in the best possible manner, or according to the most perfect theories, earnest work will seldom be done in vain.

The writer is not forgetting how strongly many persons feel on this subject—some holding that it is absolutely necessary to depart from conventional types of service if we would reach those who are at present alienated from the gospel, others holding that it is most injurious to adopt any methods which are not sanctioned by custom and authority. Between these extreme theorists stands the large mass of commonplace Christian people who believe, on the one hand, that no special methods are required, but only a more diligent working of the old; and, on the other, that new methods which are found practically useful are not to be condemned, unless it can be proved that they are productive of greater evils than those which they remedy, or at least that the good which they effect could be quite as well done in other ways, without the evil consequences connected with them. Under the methods thus brought into doubt, many sober Christians not lacking in enthusiasm would place the system of the Salvation Army.

Without pretending to settle these questions, the writer would like to give some account of a mission established in the city of New York, on Avenue A, between Fifteenth and Sixteenth Streets, in the district adjoining the Church of St. George, Stuyvesant Square. It is well known that a new experiment was tried in the way of popularizing this church, by making the seats free and unappropriated, at the accession of the present rector, Dr. Rainsford. This experiment has been eminently successful, a fact which is attested by the largeness of the congregation, and by the

presence of all classes, rich and poor, especially at the Sunday evening services.

It was evident, however, that there were multitudes—probably thousands—within the sound of the sonorous bell of St. George's, who gave no heed to its invitation or to any other of a similar kind; and about two years ago a room was opened in Avenue A, at which services were conducted of an informal character to which all kinds of people were invited and entreated to come.

This movement has gone on for two years, and is still conducted with so much zeal and devotion that there is a service held in the Mission Room every evening, and on Sunday two services and a Sunday-school. Sometimes a clergyman conducts the service, sometimes a layman, frequently several conductors are present, but always some one is responsible for the service. It is only the consideration that these lines may fall under the eyes of those devoted men that prevents the writer saying what he would wish to say respecting the wonderful union of enthusiasm with practical common sense and skill in some of the laymen who form the strength of this work.

Some time before the hour appointed for the service, a little group appear at the street door of the Mission Room, with hymn books in their hands. The leader gives out a hymn, which is sung heartily by the workers, by a number of children who are sure to be there, and even by some of the passers-by. The hymns used are "Gospel Hymns" of the Moody and Sankey type—hymns and tunes, not of a high order, but evidently well adapted for this purpose, and, as far as the writer has remarked, perfectly harmless.

By and by, the assembled crowd are informed that service is to be held inside, and they are invited to come and take part in it. After they are seated, the hymn-singing is begun again, and continued for some time—an admirable provision for preventing talking or confusion before what would be called the beginning of the service.

Then the leader rises and gives notice that they will begin the service by singing a certain hymn; this is generally done standing. After the hymn a prayer is offered, generally extempore, sometimes consisting of a few collects. Then another hymn is sung. Then some one rises and reads a portion of Scripture, which he expounds, or else, without doing so, speaks in a plain and simple manner on some subject which he considers adapted to the character and circumstances of his hearers.

The order of the service here becomes a little uncertain. Permission is given to any one present to ask any questions, or to bear his testimony to the power of the gospel, or to bring to the notice of the leaders some special case needing attention or intercession.

It is perhaps at this point that the greatest difference of opinion will be felt, some holding that these testimonies are in many ways dangerous and likely to be productive of mischief. The writer has a certain amount of sympathy with these feelings. What he has here to say, however, is that, as far as his own observation has gone, he has seen nothing but good in the manner of conducting this work at the Avenue A Mission. In various ways such testimonies have been valuable. They have strengthened the hands of the workers. They have helped to confirm the converts—a confirmation sorely needed; and they have encouraged others to come forward.

Generally speaking, they are brief, quiet, humble, unpretending. It is quite true that such methods afford good opportunities for boasting; the writer can only say that he has not been present when they have been thus misused. He might give examples. One night a respectable workman, with a German accent, said that, by attending the services there, he had been led to an entire change of life, so that, whereas a year or two ago he had been a terror to his wife and family, he had now a thoroughly happy Christian home. The man had come in one evening when prayers were asked for his unhappy wife, who had borne her lot patiently and uncomplainingly, and was now almost despairing. The wife's patience, the testimony at the meeting, the prayers of the people, bore their fruit. The man was utterly changed.

Another time the reading had been on death as the wages of sin. A man stood up and said that he had been delivered by the work of the Mission, and he had tried to bring a fellow-workman to the services. One day he had told him he was going. "What was the use of that kind of stuff?" was the reply. The man was drinking. That night, in a fit of