

superseded mine, and in that case I should have only been too happy to retire.

I am your sincerely,

Archibald Lampman.

Cobourg June 29th.

Family Reading.

OUR NEW VICAR.

BY THE REV. J. S. B. MONSELL, LL.D.

XXIII.

THE TWELFTH LETTER.

Your theory of Sisterhoods I like; but our experience of their blessings in this parish is worth a thousand theories and arguments. The fever has spread, and spread to other homes than those of the poor. Two or three of our farmers have been laid low, and several members of their families also with them. Two more Sisters have come, and even the refractory nurses have given in, and consented to take office under them. All hands are full, and more than full, and many a heart anxious and sad, dreading what may come. So far as we have gone the mortality has not been great, still we have had one or two most touching cases.

The wife of the dissenting minister was taken ill, and at once—so much has their fame spread—application was made to the Vicar for one of the Sisters. She was of course sent, even to the inconvenience of some of our own people, and no tongue could tell the blessing she has been. After a long and hard struggle the poor sufferer sank, and has left a broken-hearted husband, and a large family of young motherless children. To her, to him, to all, the Sister was an angel of mercy; and he who at one time was a bitter enemy is now a gentle and real friend.

My brother churchwarden—who was more opposed to all these (as he called them) Church innovations than any man in the parish—has been at death's door, and has only barely recovered through God's blessing on the unwearied care of another Sister. His eldest daughter, however, feel a victim to the disease, and through all the ravings of her illness, was tended, comforted, and soothed by that Sister's ceaseless attention. Not only to the last hours of her life, but beyond it, to the last moment, in which her poor body could be ministered to, she never left her, dropping into the grave, with

"The little sprinkling of cold earth that fell
Upon the coffin lid,"

the bright wreath of fresh flowers that breathed of life everlasting. Here is another fault-finding voice silenced by gratitude and conviction.

But the saddest part of the story remains to be told. Our poor Vicar, who seemed ubiquitous, like Goethe's star—"unresting, untiring"—the head of all,—the heart of all,—and, in many of the most difficult and dangerous trials, the hand too,—at length gave way, and he has now been, for several days, in imminent danger. The doctor has ever hope—his life has been so temperate, and his mind is so calm. But still he looks so slight and fragile, that there is great fear deep in all our hearts.

There is a hush in the parish, as if it were all his home, lest loud voice or rude noise should in any way disturb him. And I am sure there is not a prayer that goes up to heaven that does not bear his name upon its wings. The doctor expects that this night will bring the crisis, and I shall not close this letter till to-morrow, that I may be able to tell you, I hope, good news. Meanwhile there is one subject on which I wish your advice. It has just now come before my mind forcibly in connection with the many deaths among the poor of our parish.

It has been so pitiable to see the efforts made at such times to keep up the accustomed ceremonies that surround the grave, and to think of all the added cost this entailed, in addition to the expenses that sickness had already made great. Could not something be done to save our people in this matter?—a better example set by the rich?—some system established, which the unbought and unbuyable graces of Christian charity (not almsgiving) could supply, instead of the undertaker's wretched ritualism? I should be sorry to see less respect paid to the remains of the dead, only it

should be more personal, less professional; more of genuine sympathy, less of the scarf and hat-band; more of what friends can pay, less of those cold trappings and forms which the poor mourner, when all who gather round him in the hour of his grief are gone, must surely and heavily pay for.

I have heard that these things are better done abroad,—that the rich mingle themselves at such times with the poor, and undertake the lowliest offices: just what I should like to see in our own land. Why, with all our benevolence and Christian sympathy, that wait so tenderly round the sick and dying, why not take one step further in the gracious work, and follow, with the freewill offerings of our hands and hearts, to their last earthly resting-place, the remains of the dead? . . .

The doctor has just come in, and made my heart glad with the happy tidings that our good Vicar is out of danger. The looked-for change has come, his face is set health-ward, and in all human probability he will recover rapidly.

How grateful we ought to be to Him who gave, and, by thus sparing, has given to us again such a blessing; and what a teeming harvest of devotion and love He will find ready to be gathered in, when He once more goes forth to reap it! "Heaviness may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."

"Our sorrows sometimes are our truest joys,
And better friends than many a one that bears
More smiling aspect, more bewitching airs,
And yet the very peace it speaks destroys.
Bitter the sweet whose over-sweetness cloy,
And sweet the bitter, that can keenly give
An appetite for pleasures that shall live
Beyond earth's baubles, and time's tinsel-toys.
Give me, O Lord, whatever lot Thy love
And wisdom deem most fitting for me here,
So it be gilded with Thy grace, and prove
Me to Thee nearer, Thine to me more dear:
What is a crown, if it be crown'd with loss?
And what are chafing cares, if glory crown the cross?"

XXIV.

REPLY.

How like the story of a family is the account of your parochial sorrows and joys! Thank God, the Vicar is safe. Now, the rest of his way amongst you will be comparatively easy. That furnace through which your parish has been passing consumes the perishable stubble of prejudice and party feeling. All that remains is genuine ore, purified and purified by fire. Thus God turns man's extremity into His opportunity, and, as it is often

"Darkest night when day is nighest,"

so. He makes our darkest sorrows and alarm the frequent forerunners of our most abiding joys.

It was thus He gave a great notional impulse to the English mind, upon the subject of Sisterhoods, during the great national sorrows attendant upon the Crimean War. What a wall of opposition "fell down flat" before that simple band of devoted Englishwomen, who went out to nurse, for Christ's sake, our suffering English heroes! It needed not the seven days even to do the work; one night's walk around those lonely hospital beds, and the next day the gentle victors walked over the ruins of a thousand prejudices into the ten thousand thousand hearts of our honest English people. Under ordinary circumstances, it would have taken half a century to have removed objections that crumbled into dust in one night before the touch of Florence Nightingale.

The Christian chivalry of such deeds of love and daring—the honest English gratitude which they called forth—the artless letters, written home from Eastern hospitals, telling how domestic comforts, care, and tenderness, such as they thought wives and mothers and sisters only could bestow, had found out the sufferers in their troubles, and made their hearts glad with the homeliness of home, which floated like a sweet atmosphere around them;—these did more than theological argument could have done to convince England that she wanted Sisters, as well as soldiers, to crown her glory.

What a national sweep away of prejudice one good generous impulse will effect! Like a sudden thaw, after some wide-spread wintry bondage, in one night the deliverance comes; and the gentle breath of the soft south wind does, in a few hours, what thousands of toiling hands would have found it hard in so many days to accomplish.

Thus it has been with you. A few weeks of sickness and sorrow have done more to melt and mould men's hearts than years of ordinary teaching could have effected. Henceforth, few will be found in the parish to wag his tongue against Vicar or Sister.

Your thoughts about some improvement in the management of funerals remind me of the state of things abroad, in Florence and Leghorn especially. There they have the Order of Misericordia, which embraces all classes; the highest, as well as the more humble, seeking admission into it. Noblemen and artisans, walking and working side by side, wrapped in a disguise so effectual that, except as a rough or neat boot, a fair and jewelled or discoloured and work-hardened hand, may betray a difference of rank,—they are to each other unknown.

Their obligation of membership constrains them to leave all pursuits of business or pleasure in which they may be at the time engaged, and hasten, at the summons of their Order, to bind the broken limb, to bear the sufferer to hospital, to wait by the sick bed, or carry a Christian brother to the grave.

Such seem to me some of the most truly Christian kindnesses which man can render to man; and their introduction amongst us, as part of our Church system, would seem second in importance only to the formation of Sisterhoods.

Christian Brotherhoods, founded on the same principles, might be formed in great towns, or wild, remote, uncivilized districts, or for the purposes of education; and, if translated into plain English, would only mean colleges of unmarried clergy or laity who, though not bound by a lifelong to celibacy, or any special sphere of work, would still remain single, and in the special work selected, for a certain defined time;—just as a Fellow in his college, or a curate in his clergy-house, or a servant in his place; but with the option which Fellow, curate, and servant have, of abandoning the single life and special calling when circumstances arise to justify a change.

Outside such distinct families of Christian brothers should exist what perhaps I can best define as Associate brothers; men who would not be called upon to abandon private relationships or public duties, but simply to give the intervals of their lives to some especial work for God; who, as sub-deacons, readers, catechists, etc., would have an assigned place and duties given them by authority, and recognized as *their* place by the whole body of the Church. The demand for such, and the desire to become such, are increasing every day; and already some of the heads of our Church are meditating seriously the revival of such offices amongst us. We have only to go back to the primitive usage of the third and fourth centuries to find, in the tried and settled ways of ancient Christianity, all we now need. Our own efforts after Church work and Church order are only the wakings up of the long-dormant life which has slept during generations of winter, and now, under the breath of another spring, are bursting out: the old things in the old places, and to do the same work, by whatever names we may call them.

It matters not what may be the name, so we have the reality; only, somehow, to the mind there is a definiteness, and order, and authority, in these various offices, as we find them in the early Church, which in their present embryo state, they are only feeling after, and gradually acquiring.

How many persons might be found in every parish ready to work for God, who, with some assigned work given them by authority, would do ten-fold more as the officers than the self-appointed goodies, which exist every where, could do on their own hook, and in their own blundering and spasmodical way!

It is impossible that the clergyman can do—what all, nevertheless, expect him to do, namely—everything. He must visit the poor, tend the sick, teach in the schools, manage the charities, take the chair at all vestries, to be badgered, and bullied, and possibly insulted, if some rough farmer, or half-educated squire, or bitter dissenter may find it suit his interest or ill-humour to do so.

He must often advance out of his own slender income charities unpaid, and then dun for their repayment, until he is made feel ashamed, as though he were a personal beggar, when all the while he