

PASTOR AND PEOPLE.

OUR COLLECTIONS.

Most readers will think this a very seasonable but a very prosaic heading. For there is no hour of night or day when our Church is not in need of money for some scheme or other. Few days pass without some epistle, printed or written, arriving at the manse of our ministers, all weighted with the same burden—money! more money! And we are far from joining in the vulgar outcry against these demands. Money must be had. If it does not pour in spontaneously, our amiable and energetic secretaries, conveners, etc., must do all they can to stimulate the flow of charity. Sure we are that they do their work ably and well. But we cannot avoid the impression that our title has a most prosaic sound. All of us have had the feeling after listening to an eloquent sermon—oh, that that horrid collection could be left out to-night! When pressing the careless and the worldly to go along with us, we have suddenly recollected the collections and pew rents, and our eloquence has somehow been less energetic in consequence.

And yet it was not always thus. When the tribes came pouring in with jewels and gold and silver, with oil and incense, with costly draperies and fine wood, for the service of the sanctuary, there was no touch of the prosaic to mar the beauty of the picture. When the offerings of the early Christians were brought solemnly into the church on the Lord's day, and deposited upon or beneath the Lord's table at the most impressive moment of the service, no one thought it prosaic. And we know how the charity of entire Christendom was inflamed during the crusades, and when the splendid cathedrals of Europe were being erected in the Middle Ages. We know how men burned with a sacred thirst, not for gold, but for parting with gold.

It might be worth while in a paper of a different kind from this to marshal some of the causes which have led people to look upon the collections with so much disfavour or indifference. We think the chief cause of it has been that the Lord's offering has ceased to be an important part of Christian service. It is taken at the door and then huddled away in the vestry or session house till after service. We hear and see no more of it. Hence our people have ceased to feel that it has a symbolical significance, symbolizing the sacrifice itself upon the altar—the consecration of ourselves and all that we have to the service of the Redeemer, of which consecration these offerings are a symbol, a far too inadequate one. Much good might be done if the offertory could be made a public and solemn act of worship.

In the meantime, we fear a large proportion of Christian people in all the churches look upon the collection box most unlovingly. They feel as if somehow people should not be taxed for religion. They would give largely to some case of severe poverty, would respond to an appeal for some splendid missionary enterprise, but nothing that can be said or done will awaken and keep alive an enthusiasm which shall be bright and responsive every Lord's day. And yet money is the sinews of war in religious as well as in political or military campaigns. Our Lord has left behind Him no mode of advancing His Gospel which shall dispense with hire for the labourer, passage money for missionaries, funds for building churches, colleges, hospitals, etc. It may seem a strange thing that His kingdom should rest on such a material substratum. Surely, some will say, Christian zeal and enterprise would find some way of doing their work, though not a penny flowed into the treasuries of the Church for a century. But mark, if the work were done, money would have to be spent and sacrifices incurred by some one. It would not flow into any public treasury, but it would have to flow from the pockets of a thousand private individuals, and probably far more would be required than at present. Our organizations enable us not only to consecrate our efforts, but to do the work more cheaply. But when we say the Church rests on a substratum of cash, that without money her enterprises would be paralyzed and ruined, we are far from admitting that it rests on a material substratum. The money is the exponent of profound religious conviction. It is a vast sacrifice which the Church offers every year to her Founder. It is an annual triumph of Christianity to be able to extract so many millions from men and women who,

but for her influence, would be as sordid as their neighbours, to redeem from the basest to the noblest uses a portion of the vast sum which is spent every year upon the gratification of low passions and frivolous propensities. That is, always presuming that the money has been given by the right people, in the right proportion, in the proper spirit, and that legitimate methods have been used to gather it in.

1. We reassert the principle so often forgotten—the Lord's work by the Lord's people. The Lord's offering from the Lord's people. Believers only can give to the cause of Christ with consistency, with entire satisfaction, with prayer that their gifts may be blessed. Most accursed is that Church, we all feel, which subsists upon money wrung by means of taxes or tithes from an adverse, perhaps an infidel, population. And not less accursed is the dissenting Church which depends upon the pompous patronage of a few rich men who give with a grudge and give with the intention of getting back their money's worth in reputation or influence. Such a state of matters may be pronounced impossible, but we have seen ugly symptoms of something very like it. We do not say that "a man who is not a professing Christian should bring his gift to the altar, it is to be rejected." "The money is not heretical," as the witty friar said to the American tourist when he told him he was a heretic. But woe to the Church which depends to any great extent upon selfish, worldly men. Not less degrading is it when frequent appeals have to be made to a careless and mocking public, in the shape of soirees, popular lectures, entertainments, etc. We wonder what the apostles would have said if they had foreseen that the finances of Christian congregations would be supplemented in this way, that the warm tide of Christian benevolence, flowing in imperceptibly and without effort, was to be superseded by a general meanness which should leave holy things and holy men to the cold sneering charity of the world. More upon this part of our subject we dare not permit ourselves to speak. Let Christian societies take upon themselves no liabilities that they have not a reasonable prospect of meeting; and while that liability exists, let it be felt as a personal debt resting upon each individual of that society. Let us act with the caution implied in the first clause of the above sentence, and let us try to stimulate the honourable sentiment implied in the second, and we should soon hear less of the difficulties in Christian finance.

2. Good people should give in good measure. Probably there are very few in any congregation who have ever taken the trouble to make an inquiry into their affairs and to ascertain how much they ought to give to the house of God. Till this is done, how can a man say he is giving in good measure? He may be giving too much or too little. In either case he is doing wrong. It is right that every man should ascertain what proportion of the expenditure of the Church falls to his share. Divide the total sum wanted annually by our membership, and we believe the quotient would be a sum that most of our members could raise if they chose. Now, if to a large income raised in this way, as a voluntary tax, without entreaty, without compulsion, without deputations, we were to add all given over and above their due share by the rich and benevolent, what a glorious financial position we should occupy! Our Church might then pass on without fear to occupy new ground and win fresh laurels. Till that is done, our progress will be a scramble, not a general advance, and all our movements hampered by a discreditable meanness.

3. Let good people give in a good spirit. It is a melancholy fact that many of our churches must have a tea meeting once a year to raise the funds, not because it will do good, but because the members would not give a farthing *directly*. They must give in this vulgar ostentatious way. They must have a *quid pro quo* for their money in the shape of a newspaper report next morning, with the names of Mesdames A, B, C, and Misses D, E, F, duly recorded. It is said, moreover, that frequently the church is the loser to the extent of several pounds by this desire for notoriety. They would have had far more money in hand, if they had all simply laid down their contributions in solid cash upon the table. Now is not this a most degrading state of matters in a Church like ours? Would it not be far better for such a congregation simply to lessen its expenditure, reduce the salaries, if need be, than pander to such an unchristian spirit? We fear the whole system of Christian finance in this country tends to foster the vice of ostentation. In-

stead of Christian men being nervously anxious to conceal their charities, they are anxious to proclaim them to the world. In many churches the minister is soon made aware of the fact that So-and-so and So-and-so are the main supports of the congregation. What right has he to know this, if these men or their friends observed our Saviour's precept? Does not the system of eternally proclaiming to the world lists of contributors to our schemes stimulate this unhealthy state of matters? Then, what a fuss is made, often by ministers who ought to know better, if a rich man gives a large sum for some special purpose; what endless reference to the fact, what trumpeting about it in speeches and reports. Would it not be better if men would drop their gift into the treasury and let no one be the wiser of it? Is it not enough if God knows about it? The right spirit in which to give is that of humility. A man should feel that when he has given most, he has given no more than he ought to have done. We greatly fear that if all the unhealthy stimulants to Christian liberality now in vogue were withdrawn, a good many would withdraw their subscriptions. They would not give in the dark, even though the eye of God made it luminous. But what of that? A blessing would rest on what was given, and by-and-by Christian men would begin to find a positive luxury in secret benevolence. Certainly England at the present time would seem to be the last country in the world for making such an experiment. You cannot pass along a street in any town without seeing advertisements which prove that the Christian public no more realize their responsibility for their own debts than they do their responsibility for those of the Emperor of China. It is considered rather a chivalrous thing than otherwise to build a huge chapel and leave it with a huge debt to successive generations of half-starved ministers and grumbling and dwindling congregations. When we read of the tumultuous applause with which the treasurer's sheet is received at the large annual gatherings, we sometimes wish that some superhuman intelligence, some Asmodeus, could first discover and then narrate how each particular penny was gathered in. How small the bloated sum total would often appear in the eyes of those who look to the motive as well as to the sum given. And yet bad as things are, they are getting worse, we believe. Our Church must look to her hands and try to keep them clean. Let us abolish this parade of benevolence; let us have voluntary contributions in the strict sense of the words; let our people be made to understand that we can do without their money rather than give them an equivalent for it in the shape of teas and concerts. No doubt such a system would entail losses and sacrifices at first, but, we believe, it would result in an ultimate success. It would be a glorious thing to be pointed at as a Church whose members gave as a duty, gave as a privilege, gave without being asked. The best men in all the Churches feel that the present condition of things is intolerable and cannot last long. People who have to be periodically whipped up to give will soon be beyond the reach of such a process. They will go to their own place. We have had many worthless revivals in England of late years; where is the man who will revive the dead sentiment of Christian honour in the hearts of thousands of professing Christians, and succeed in making them feel that the debts of the Church are their debts?—*London Weekly Review*.

MAKING DRUDGERY DIVINE.

It is the light in which we look at the work we have to do, which settles the question whether we count it mere drudgery or a desirable service. Severe exercise and scanty fare seem very different to a young man, when they are the necessity of poverty, from what they seem when he is in training for a college boat race. In one case he thinks of his deprivations; in the other of his hope of glad triumph. The details of every-day business in a counting-room are one thing to a clerk who has no thought beyond earning his wages, and quite another thing to a partner in the house who expects to make a fortune through attention to those details. And when a clerk is fired with ambition to prove himself so useful there that he also shall become a partner, the more he has to do the better. What is treadmill stepping to his companions is ladder-climbing to him. Tolling up a mountain side is wearisome work to one who thinks only of the rugged path and the cheerless surroundings; but it is an inspiring effort to the enthusiastic lover of nature