

Choice Literature.

LAICUS;

OR, THE EXPERIENCES OF A LAYMAN IN A COUNTRY PARISH.

CHAPTER V.—OUR CHURCH FINANCES.

I found one evening last week, on coming home, a business-like letter lying on my library table. I rarely receive letters at Wheathedge; nearly all my correspondence comes to my New York office. I tore it open in some surprise and read the note as follows:

WHEATHEDGE, Oct. 9,

DEAR SIR, A meeting of the male members of the congregation of the Calvary Presbyterian Church will be held on Thursday evening, at eight p.m., at the house of Mr. Wheaton. You are respectfully invited to be present.

Yours respectfully,

JAMES WHEATON, *Ch'n B'd Trustees.*

"Well," said I to myself, "I wonder what this means. It can't be a male sewing society, I suppose. It can hardly be a prayer-meeting at Jim Wheaton's house. Male members! eh? I thought the female members carried on this church." In my perplexity, I handed the note to my wife. She read it with care. "Well," said she, "I am glad the people are waking up at last." "What does it mean?" said I. "It means money," said she. "Or rather it means the want of money. Mrs. Work told me last week she believed her husband would have to resign. All last quarter's salary is overdue, and something beside. It seems that Mr. Wheaton has begun to act at last. I don't see what they want to make such men church officers for."

My wife has not very clear ideas about the legal relations which exist between the church and the society. Mr. Wheaton is an officer, not of the church but of the society; but I did not think it worth while to correct the mistake.

"I do want to think kindly of everybody," said Jennie; "but it makes me indignant to see a minister defrauded of his dues."

"Defrauded is a pretty strong word, Jennie," said I.

"It is a true word," said she. "The people promise the minister \$1,200 a year, and then pay him grudgingly \$900 and don't finally make up the other \$300 till he threatens to resign; if that is not defrauding, I don't know what is. If Mr. Wheaton can't make the Board of Trustees keep their promises any better than that, he had better resign. I wish he would."

Mr. Wheaton is not a member of the church; and, to tell the truth, his reputation for success is greater than his reputation for integrity. But he is president of the Koniwasset branch railroad, and a leading director of the Koniwasset coal mines, and a large operator in stocks, and lives in one of the finest houses in Wheathedge, and keeps the handsomest carriage, and hires the most expensive pew, and it was considered quite a card, I believe, to get him to take the presidency of the Board of Trustees.

"Of course you'll go, John," said Jennie.

"I don't know about that, Jennie," said I. "I don't want to get mixed up with our church finances in their present condition."

"I don't know how they are ever to get in a better condition, John," said she. "Unless some men like you do get mixed up with them."

Jennie, as usual, knew me better than I knew myself. I went. I was delayed just as I was starting away, and so, contrary to my custom—for I rather pride myself on being a very punctual man—I was a little late. The male members of the Calvary Presbyterian Congregation were already assembled in Mr. James Wheaton's library when I arrived. I was a little surprised to see how few male members we had. To look round the congregation on Sunday morning, one would certainly suppose there were more. It even seems to me there were at least twice as many at the sewing society when it met at James Wheaton's last winter.

I entered just as Mr. Wheaton was explaining the object of the meeting. "Gentlemen," said he, suavely, "the Calvary Presbyterian Church, like most of its neighbours, has rather hard work to get along, financially. Its income is not at all equal to its expenditures. The consequence is we generally stand on the debtor side of the ledger. As probably you know, there is a mortgage on the church of four thousand dollars. The semi-annual interest is due on the first of next month. There is, I think, no money in the treasury to meet it."

Here he looked at the Treasurer as if for confirmation, and that gentleman, a bald-headed, weak-faced man, smiled a mournful smile, and shook his head feebly.

"The Board of Trustees," continued the President, "have directed me to call this meeting and lay the matter before you."

There was a slight pause—a sort of expectant silence. "It isn't a large sum," gently insinuated the President, "if divided among us all. But, in some way, gentlemen, it must be raised. It won't do for us to be insolvent, you know. A church can't take the benefit of the bankrupt act, I believe, Mr. Laicus."

Being thus appealed to, I responded with a question. Was this mortgage interest all that the church owed? No! the President thought not. He believed there was a small floating debt beside. "And to whom," said I, "Mr. Treasurer, is this floating debt due?" The Treasurer looked to the President for an answer, and the President accepted his pantomimic hint.

"Most of it," said he, "I believe to the minister. But I understand that he is in no special hurry for his money. In fact," continued he, blandly, "a debt that is due to a minister need never be a very serious burden to a church. Nominally it is due to him, but really it is distributed around among the members of the church. Part is due to the grocer, part to the tailor, part to the butcher, part to the dress-maker, and part is borrowed from personal friends. I lent the parson twenty-five dollars myself last week. But mort-

gage interest is another matter. That, you know, *must* be provided for."

"And pray," said I, for I happened to know the parson did need the money, "how much is the parson's salary? And how much of it is overdue?"

"Well," said the President, "I suppose his salary is about two thousand dollars. Yes," continued he, thoughtfully, somewhat affectionately playing with his gold watch-chain, "it must net him fully that amount."

I was wondering what this "about" meant, and whether the minister did not have a fixed salary, when Deacon Goodsole broke in abruptly with "It's twelve hundred dollars a year!"

"Yes," responded the President, "it is nominally fixed by the Board at twelve hundred dollars. But then, gentlemen, the perquisites are something. In the course of a year they net up to a pretty large amount. Last winter the ladies clubbed together and made the parson a present of carpets for his parlours; the year before we gave him a donation party; almost every year, Deacon Goodsole sends him a barrel of flour from his store; in one way or other he gets a good many similar little presents. I always send him a free pass over the road. And then there are the wedding fees which must amount to a handsome item in the course of the year. It can't be less than two thousand or twenty-five hundred all dollars told. A very snug little income, gentlemen."

"Double what I get," murmured Mr. Hardecap. A very exemplary gentleman is Mr. Hardecap, the carpenter, but more known for the virtue of economy than for any other. He lives in three rooms over his carpenter shop down in Willow Lane. If our pastor lived there he would be dismissed very soon.

I wondered, as the President was speaking, whether he included the profits made in selling Koniwasset coal to the Newton railroad among his perquisites, and as part of his salary. But I did not ask.

"Week before last," said Deacon Goodsole, "the parson was called to attend a wedding at Compton Mill. He drove down Monday, through that furious storm, was gone nearly all day, paid six dollars for his horse and buggy, and received five dollars wedding fee. I wonder how long it would take at that rate to bring his salary up to twenty-five hundred dollars."

There was a general laugh at the parson's mercantile venture, but no other response.

"Well, gentlemen," said the President, a little gruffly, I fancied, "let us get back to business. How shall we raise this mortgage interest? I will be one of ten to pay it off."

"Excuse me," said I, gently, "but before we begin to pay our debts, we must find out how much they are. Can the Treasurer tell us how much we owe Mr. Work?"

The Treasurer looked inquiringly at the President, but getting no response, found his voice, and replied, "Three hundred dollars."

"The whole of last quarter?" said I.

The Treasurer nodded.

"I think there is a little due on last year," said Deacon Goodsole.

"A hundred and seventy-five dollars," said the Treasurer.

"The fact is, gentlemen," said the President, resuming his blandest manner, "you know the Methodists have just got into their new stone church. The Trustees thought it necessary not to be behind their neighbours, so we have completely upholstered our church anew, at a cost of five hundred dollars." ("And made the parson pay the bill," said Deacon Goodsole, *sotto voce*.) "We should have frescoed it, too, if we had had the money." ("Why didn't you take his wedding fees?" said the Deacon, *sotto voce*.)

"Well, for my part," said I, "I am willing to do my share toward paying off this debt. But I will not pay a cent unless the whole is paid. The minister must be provided for."

"I say so, too," murmured Mr. Hardecap. I was surprised at this sudden and unexpected reinforcement. The Deacon told me afterwards that Mr. Hardecap had been repairing the parson's roof and had not got his pay.

"Perhaps," continued I, "we can fund this floating debt, make the mortgage four thousand five hundred, raise the difference among ourselves, and so clear it all up. Who holds the mortgage?"

This question produced a sensation like that of opening the seventh seal in heaven. There was silence for the space of—well, something less than half an hour. The Treasurer looked at the President. The President looked at the Treasurer. The male members of the congregation looked at each other. The Deacon looked at me with a very significant laugh lurking in the corners of his mouth. At length the President spoke.

"Well, gentlemen," said he, "I suppose most of you know I hold this mortgage. I have not called you together because I want to press the church for money. But a debt, gentlemen, is a debt, and the church, above all institutions, ought to remember the divine injunction of our blessed Master (the President is not very familiar with Scripture, and may be excused the blunder). 'Owe no man anything.' ('Except the minister,' said Deacon Goodsole, *sotto voce*.) The proposition of our friend here, however, looks like business to me. I think the matter can be arranged in that way."

Arranged it was. The President got his additional security, and the parson got his salary, which was the main thing Jennie cared for. And to be perfectly frank with the reader, I should not have gone near Jim Wheaton's that night if it had not been that I knew it would please Jennie. I wait with some curiosity to see what will become of a church whose expenditures are regularly a quarter more than its income. Meanwhile, I wonder whether the personal presents which friends make for affection's sake to their pastor ought to be included by the Board of Trustees in the estimate of his salary? and also whether it is quite the thing to expect that the pastor will advance, out of his own pocket, whatever money is necessary to keep his church from falling behind its neighbours in showy attractions?

CHAPTER VI.—AM I A DRONE?

Deacon Goodsole wants me to take a class in the Sabbath school. So does Mr. Work. So I think does Jennie, though she does not say much. She only says that if I did she thinks I could do a great deal of good. I wonder if I could. I have stoutly resisted them so far. But I confess last Sunday's sermon has shaken me a little.

I was kept in the city on Saturday night by a legal appointment, and went the next day to hear my old friend, Thomas Lane, preach. His text was "Why stand ye here all the day idle?"

He depicted very graphically the condition of the poor in New York. He is a man of warm sympathies, of a large and generous heart. He mingles a great deal with the poor of his own congregation. To his credit and that of his wife be it said, there is a good many poor in his congregation. But he does not confine his sympathies to his own people. He told us of that immense class who live in New York without a church-home, of the heathen that are growing up among us.

"You need not go to Africa," said he, "to find them. They come to your door every morning for cold victuals. God will hold you responsible for their souls. Are you in the Sabbath school? Are you in the mission schools? Are you in the neighbourhood prayer-meeting? Are you a visitor? Are you distributing tracts? Are you doing anything to seek and to save that which is lost?" Then he went on to say what should be done; and to maintain the right and duty of laymen to preach, to teach, to visit, to do all things which belong to "fishers of men." "There are a great many church members," said he, "who seem to suppose that their whole duty consists in paying pew-rent and listening to preaching. That is not Christianity. If you are doing nothing you are drones. There is no room in the hive for you. The Church has too many idle Christians already. We don't want you."

He did not argue. He simply asserted. But he evidently felt the truth of all that he said. I believe I should have decided at once to go into the Sabbath school as soon as I came home, but for a little incident.

After church I walked home with Mr. Lane to dine with him. Mr. Sower joined and walked along with us. He is at the head of a large manufacturing establishment. He is one of Mr. Lane's warmest friends. Mr. Lane believes him to be a devoted Christian. "Well, parson," said he, "I suppose after to-night's sermon there is nothing left for me to do but to take a letter from the Church—if you don't excommunicate me before I get it."

"What's the matter now?" said the parson.

"I am neither visiting," said Mr. Sower, "nor distributing tracts, nor attending a tenement-house prayer-meeting, nor preaching, nor working in a mission, nor doing anything in the Church; but going to its service and paying my pew-rent, and sometimes a little something over to make up a deficiency. The fact is every day in the week I have my breakfast an hour before you do, and am off to the factory. I never get home till six o'clock, sometimes not then. My day's work uses up my day's energies. I can't go to a tenement-house prayer-meeting, or to tract distribution in the evening. I can hardly keep awake in our own church prayer-meeting. If it were not for Sunday's rest my work would kill me in a year. I sometimes think that perhaps I am devoting too much of my time to money-making. But what shall I do? There are four hundred workmen in the factory. Most of them have families. All of those families are really dependent on me for their daily bread. It takes all my life's energies to keep them employed. Shall I leave that work to take hold of tenement-house visitation and tract distribution?"

Mr. Lane replied promptly that Mr. Sower was to do no such thing. "Your factory," said he, "is your field. That is the work God has given to you. It is your parish. Do not leave it for another—only do not forget that you have to give an account of your parochial charge. You are to study, not how to get the most money out of your four hundred workmen, but how to do them most good. That is Christian duty for you. But your case is very peculiar. There is not one man in a thousand situated as you are."

Then I began to think that perhaps my law office was my field. It gives me enough to do I am sure. We are not all drones who are not working for the Church. There is a work for Christ outside. And I do not want to take a Sabbath school class. I want Sunday mornings to myself. Every other morning I have to be an early riser. I do enjoy being lazy Sunday morning.

But then there is that class of young men from the mill. Deacon Goodsole says they don't know anything. He has no one who can manage them. And Mr. Work thinks it's a dreadful sin, I do not doubt, that I do not take it at once. I do not care much for that. But Jennie says I am just the one to manage these boys if I feel like undertaking it. And I would like to prove her good opinion of me true.

I was just in that perplexity when night before last a meeting on behalf of the City Mission Society was held here. Mr. Miggins, the superintendent of city missions, was one of the speakers.

He made an earnest and at times a really eloquent speech. He would have made a splendid jury lawyer. He depicted in the most lively colours the wretched condition of the worst population of New York. With all the eloquence of a warm heart, made more attractive by his broad Scotch, he pleaded with us to take an active part in their amelioration. "Pure religion and undefiled, before God and the Father, is this," cried he, "to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."

I resolved to take up that class of mission boys straight-ways. But as I came out I met Hattie Bridgeman. She is an old friend of Jennie's and has had a hard, hard life. Her husband is an invalid. Her children are thrown on her for support. As I met her at the door she pressed my hand without speaking. I could see by the trembling lip and the tearful eye that her heart was full. "I wish I had not come to night," she said, as we walked along together. "Such thoughts make my heart bleed. It seems as though