

Choice Literature.

LAICUS;

OR THE EXPERIENCES OF A LAYMAN IN A COUNTRY PARISH.

CHAPTER XI.—OUR PASTOR RESIGNS.

All Wheathedge is in a fever of excitement. "Blessings brighten as they take their flight." We have just learned that we have enjoyed for these several years the ministry of one of the most energetic, faithful, assiduous "sons of thunder" in the State. The cause of this his sudden rise in public estimation is a very simple one. He has been called to a New York city parish. And he has accepted the call.

This is a curious world, and the most curious part of it is the Church. While he stayed we grumbled at him. Now he leaves we grumble because he is going.

I first heard of this matter a couple of weeks ago. No. Some rumours of what was threatened were in the air last summer. One Sabbath, in our congregation, were three gentlemen, in one of whom I recognized my friend, Mr. Eccles, of the Street Presbyterian Church of New York City. He was there again the second Sabbath. It was rumoured that he was on a tour of inspection. But I paid little attention to the rumour. In October our pastor takes his vacation. I thought it a little strange that he should spend half of it in New York, and seek rest from preaching in his own pulpit by repeating his sermons in a metropolitan church. But I knew the state of his purse. I therefore gave very little heed to the gossip which my wife repeated to me, and which she had picked up in the open market. For Sunday is market day, and the church is the market for village gossip in Wheathedge. And Jennie, who is constitutionally adverse to change, was afraid we were going to lose our pastor, and said as much, but I laughed at her fears.

However, the result proved that the gossips were, for once, right. About two weeks ago, Mr. and Mrs. Work came into my house in a high of subdued excitement. Mr. Work handed me a letter. It was a call to the Street Presbyterian Church in New York—salary \$4,000 a year. It was accompanied by a glowing portrait of the present and prospective usefulness which this field opened. The church was situated in a part of the city where there were few or no churches. The ward had a population of over fifty thousand, a large majority of whom attended no church. More than half were Protestants. There was a grand field for Sabbath school labour. The church was thoroughly united. Its financial condition was satisfactory, and its prospects encouraging. And the hearts of the people had been led to unite as one man upon Mr. Work.

"I cannot but think," said Mr. Work, "that it is providential. The position is entirely unsought. Yet I do not really feel equal to a place of such importance. I am sensible how much wider is the sphere of usefulness. But am I able to fill it? That is the question."

"Well, for my part," said Mrs. Work, "I confess I am mercenary. There is a great deal of difference between \$1,200 and \$4,000 a year. It will put us at our ease at once. And then just think what advantages for the children."

They wanted my advice. At least they said so. It is my private opinion that they wanted me to advise them to go. I told them I would think about it and tell them the result the next week. They agreed meanwhile to wait.

There were two considerations which operated on their minds, one usefulness, the other salary. I undertook to measure these considerations.

The very next day gave me an opportunity to investigate the former. I met my friend Mr. Eccles at Delmonico's. We talked over the affairs of his church at the table.

"You are trying to get our minister away from us," said I.

"Yes," said he. "And I think we shall get him. He is a sound man—just the man to build us up."

"And how are you prospering?" said I.

"Capitally," said he. And then he proceeded, in answer to a cross-examination, to interpret his reply. The church had almost a monopoly of the ward. Its debt was but \$10,000, which was in a mortgage on the property. There was also a small floating debt which could be easily provided for. It paid its former pastor \$4,000, just what it offered Mr. Work. Its pew rents were about \$3,500. The deficiency was considerable, and had to be made up every year by subscription. "But our minister," said Mr. Eccles, confidentially, "was a dull preacher. I liked him—my wife liked him. All the church folks liked him. But he did not draw. And it is not enough in New York city, Mr. Laicus, for a minister to be a good man, or even a good preacher. He must draw. That's it; he must draw. I expect the first year, that we shall have a deficit to make up, but if next spring we don't let all our pews, why I'm mistaken in my man, that's all. Besides, they say he is a capital man to get money out of people, and we must pay off our debt or we will never succeed, and that's a fact."

I got some figures from Mr. Eccles, and put them down. They give the following result:

Income.	Expenses.
200 pews at present average	Salary.....\$7,000
\$30 a pew.....\$6,000	Interest.....700
	Music.....1,200
	Sexton, fuel, light, &c. 1,200
	Total.....\$7,100

When I showed the footing to Mr. Eccles he shrugged his shoulders. "We shall have to raise our pew rents," said he. "They are unconscionably low, and we must pay off our debt. Then we are all right. And if we get the right man, one that will draw, he will put our heads above water."

With that we separated.

Not, however, till I got some further information from him. He remarked casually that he had a notion of moving

out of town, and asked me about prices at Wheathedge. "It costs a fortune to live here," said he. "My wife has an allowance of \$300 a month for household and personal expenses. My clothing and extras cost me another \$500. And the 'sundries' are awful. You can't go out of your house for less than a dollar. I have no doubt my incidentals are another \$500. It is awful—awful."

I advised him to move up to Wheathedge the more cordially because I have a lot I would like to sell him for about a thousand dollars. I really believe he is thinking seriously of it.

The next day I went into the office of my friend Mr. Rental, the broker. I told him I was looking for a house for a friend, and asked the prices. He showed me a list—rents \$2,000, \$2,500, \$3,000. They were too high. Would property in Brooklyn or Jersey City do? No. It must be in New York. It must be in the ward. It must be a good, comfortable, plain house, without any show or pretensions.

"There are none such to be let in the city," said Mr. Rental. "Land costs too much. The few plain houses are all occupied by their owners." The very best he could do was one house, half-a mile from the church for \$1,800. He had one other for \$1,500, but it was opposite an immense stable, and had neither cellar nor furnace, and Croton water only on the first floor. I thanked him and said I would look again if either of them suited.

Last week, according to appointment, our pastor and his wife came in for a second consultation.

"There are," said I, "two considerations which might lead you to accept this call—increased usefulness and increased salary. I do not deny the importance of a New York parish, nor fail to recognize the good work the city ministers are doing. But you must not fail to recognize the difficulties of the situation. New York is sensation-mad. The competition in churches is as great as in business. There are, perhaps, half-a-dozen men of genius who fill their churches with ease, or whose churches are filled because they are the resort of 'good society.' The rest of the ministers are compelled to devote three-quarters of their energies to keeping a congregation together, the other quarter to doing them good. They accomplish the first, sometimes by patient, persistent, assiduous, unwearied pastoral labour, sometimes by achieving a public reputation, sometimes by the doubtful expedient of sensational advertisements of paradoxical topics. But in whatever way they do it, the hardest part of their work, a part country parsons know next to nothing of, is to get and keep a congregation. What you are wanted for at the Street Presbyterian Church is to 'build it up.' The one quality for which you are commended is the capacity to 'draw.' Doubtless there are devout praying men and women who will measure your work by its spiritual results, by the conversion of sinners and the growth in grace of Christians. But what the financial managers want is one who will fill up their empty pews, enable them to add fifty per cent. to the rentals, and in some way pay off their debt. That will be the measure of your usefulness."

It was quite evident that my good past and his wife thought me uncharitable. Was I?

"As to salary," said I, "you country clergymen are greatly mistaken in supposing that city congregations are prizes to be coveted. Six thousand dollars is only a moderately fair support for a New York clergyman, and there are comparatively few who get it. You must pay at least \$1,800 rent. You must dress as well as the average of your best families. You must neither be ashamed for yourselves nor for your children in the best society. You must keep open house. You must set a good table. You must be 'given to hospitality.' You must take a lead in organizing the missionary and charitable movements of your church, which you cannot do without some money. You must be ready to co-operate in great public, church and philanthropic movements. You must take a vacation of six weeks every summer, which of itself, at the lowest estimate, will cost you \$150 or \$200 a year. I have made some inquiries of three or four economical friends in New York. Here is the result of my inquiries. You may reduce the figures a little. But it will require quite a much economy to live in New York on \$4,000 a year as in Wheathedge on \$1,200."

With that I showed them the following memorandum:

Rent.....	\$1,800
Household expenses (a low estimate).....	1,800
Dress for Mrs. Work and the two children.....	600
Dress and personal expenses of Mr. Work.....	500
Summer vacation.....	150
Incidentals.....	500
	\$5,350

Mr. and Mrs. Work thanked me for my advice and took my memorandum home with them. But it was quite evident that Mr. Work was not satisfied that \$4,000 was not a great advance on \$1,200. And I was not at all surprised when Mr. Work read his resignation from the pulpit last Sabbath. Next Sabbath he preaches his farewell sermon.

I hope I may prove a false prophet. But I think Mrs. Work will find her arithmetical powers taxed in New York as they never were in Wheathedge, and I shall be more pleased than I can tell if in five years Mr. Work does not retire from his post a disappointed man, or find that he has purchased success at the price of his health, if not of his life.

Meanwhile we are beginning already to look about for his successor.

CHAPTER XII.—THE COMMITTEE ON SUPPLY HOLD AN INFORMAL MEETING.

Mr. Work has preached his last sermon. A committee has been appointed to supply the pulpit, and secure a candidate for the pastorate. I believe this sort of business is generally left to the session; but on Deacon Goodsole's motion a special committee was appointed partly out of respect to the congregational element which is considerable in this church, and partly, I suspect, as a compliment to Mr. Wheaton. It consists of Mr. Wheaton and Mr. Gear on

behalf of the society, and Deacon Goodsole, Mr. Hardcap and myself on behalf of the church. I forgot to mention that since our Bible-class was commenced, Mr. Gear has begun to attend church, not very regularly. Mr. Goodsole nominated Mr. Gear on the committee, and of course he was elected. I was rather sorry for I would have preferred that he did not know about the internal workings of this church. I do not think it will enhance his respect for religious institutions. Still I could make no objection. I did make objections to taking a place on the committee myself, but Jennie persuaded me to relinquish them. She had often heard me arguing that politics is a duty, that citizens are bound to take and administer public office for the benefit of the State. By a neat little turn she set all of these arguments against me, and as I could not answer them I was obliged to yield. Our wives' memories are sometimes dreadfully inconvenient.

Our committee held a sort of informal meeting last night, at the post office, where we all met by chance the usual way. In the post office is the news exchange of Wheathedge, where we are very apt to meet about the time of the arrival of the evening mail. Deacon Goodsole had been delegated to get a supply for the next two Sabbaths till we could discuss the merits of candidates. He reported that he had engaged the Rev. Mr. Elder, of Wheathensville. "He has the merest pittance of a salary," said the Deacon, "and I knew the twenty dollars would be acceptable to him. Besides which he is not only an excellent man, but a sound preacher."

"Why wouldn't he be the man for us?" said I.

Mr. Wheaton exclaimed against me, "Too old," said he.

"Besides, he's got five children," said Mr. Hardcap.

"What's that got to do with it?" said I. "So has Deacon Goodsole; but he's none the worse for that."

"We can't afford to support a man with a large family," said Mr. Hardcap. "We must get a young man. We can't possibly afford to pay over \$1,200 a year, and we ought not to pay over \$1,000."

"Oh!" said I; "do we grade the minister's salary by the number of the minister's children?"

"Well, we have to consider that, of course," said Mr. Hardcap.

"Solomon wasn't so wise as he is generally thought to be," said Mr. Gear, sarcastically, "or he would never have written that sentence about blessed is he whose quiver is full of them!"

"Well," said Mr. Hardcap, "all I've got to say is, if you get a man here with five children you can pay his salary, that's all."

"When you take a job, Mr. Hardcap," said I, "do you expect to be paid according to the value of the work or according to the size of your family?"

"Oh! that's a very different thing," said Mr. Hardcap, "very different."

"Any way," said Mr. Wheaton, "Mr. Elder is entirely out of the question—entirely so. Mr. Laicus can hardly have proposed him seriously."

"Why out of the question, gentlemen?" said I. "He is a good preacher. Our congregation know him. He is a faithful, devoted pastor. We shall do Wheathensville no injustice, for it cannot give him a support. As to age, he is certainly not inhum. I do not believe he is a year over forty-five."

"No! no!" said Mr. Wheaton, decidedly. "It is utterly out of the question. We must have a young man, one who is fresh, up with the spirit of the age; one who can draw in the young men. The Methodists are getting them all."

"And the young girls too," said Mr. Gear, dryly.

I wish Mr. Gear were not on this committee. The deacon meant well. But he made a blunder.

"Very well, then, gentlemen," said I, "if we want a fresh man let us go right to the theological seminary and get the best man we can find there."

"The seminary!" said Mr. Wheaton. He received this suggestion even more disdainfully than the previous one. "We must have a man of experience, Mr. Laicus. A theological student would never do."

"Experience without age!" said I; "that's a hard problem to solve. For the life of me I do not see how we are going to do it."

"Well, you must consider, Mr. Laicus," said Mr. Wheaton, adding force to his words by a gentle and impressive gesture with his forefinger, "that this is a very important and a very peculiar field—a very peculiar field indeed, Mr. Laicus. And it requires a man of very peculiar qualifications. It is really a city field," he continued. "To all intents and purposes Wheathedge is a suburb of New York city. In the summer our congregation is very largely composed of city people. They are used to good preaching. They won't come to hear a common-place preacher. And at the same time we have a very peculiar native population. And then, apart from our own people, there is the Mill village which really belongs to our parish, and which our pastor ought to cultivate. All these various elements combine to make up a diverse and conflicting population. And it will require a man of great energy, and great prudence, and no little knowledge of human nature, and practical skill in managing men, to get along here at all. I know more about Wheathedge than you do, Mr. Laicus, and I assure you that it is a very peculiar field."

I believe that in the estimation of supply committees all fields are very peculiar fields. But I did not say anything.

"And we need a very peculiar man?" said Mr. Gear, inquiringly.

"Yes," said Mr. Wheaton decidedly; "a man of peculiar abilities and qualifications."

"Well, then," said Mr. Gear, "I hope you are prepared to pay a peculiar salary. I don't know much about church matters, gentlemen. I don't know what you put me on the committee for. But in my shop if I want a peculiar man, I have to pay a peculiar salary."

There was a little laugh at this sally, but Mr. Gear evidently meant no joke, and as evidently Mr. Wheaton did not take any.