

THE MEASURE OF A PRIEST'S SUCCESS.

No. I.

HOW often do we hear the verdict passed upon a priest of God's Church, "A good, hardworking man, but not a success in his parish!" This may or may not be true according as we judge failure or success from a worldly or from a spiritual standpoint. That a really Christian and self-devoted priest can be a failure at all in God's sight, we deny. If only one soul is saved directly through his ministrations, his ministry has not failed. Much less has it failed if he has built up the weak in the faith; strengthened the wavering by breaking to them the bread of sound doctrine; soothed the dying bed, comforted the sin-sick soul in its last agony. Still less has his ministry been a failure if he has but kept together a flock that would otherwise have been scattered, or would have strayed into alien and noxious pastures, and gathered together the lambs and penned them safe in the Chief Shepherd's fold. He may not have been a great preacher, he may not have come prominently before the world; nevertheless what he was and the measure of his success shall be declared at the Great Day.

We will, however, grant that some priests are apparently not a success, and this with all their learning and all their piety to back them. Why is this? We shall best arrive at the answer by showing some of the qualifications that go to make a successful priest, and some of the fallacies entertained by those who imagine that they are judges of what a successful priest should be. First, then, let us enquire what should be the early surroundings of a priest. If he has come of a worldly, frivolous stock, of a family well understood of all as being everything that is of the earth earthy, that has no idea of what the Church should be, that cannot advise sound doctrine in any form, then (except by a special grace of Almighty God, the chances are that the priest descended from such a stock, however well intended,—we may say with all reverence—however holy in his own life, will not be a success, at least amongst those who know him and his antecedents. There will be a want of confidence as to his perseverance in the good work, a feeling of doubt as to the reality of his vocation, a sense of misgiving as to whether the defects in his *stirps* may not suddenly appear in himself. In any case, on the principle of reaction, he is not unlikely to run into extremes either of Puritanism on the one hand, or on the other, as too often is the case with those who spring from ultra-Evangelicalism or sectarianism, into Romanism itself. Perhaps he does neither. But he may show such vacillation and uncertainty in his method or rather want of method in his teaching and practice as to suggest an ill-balanced, untrustworthy mind—of itself enough to destroy the influence of the holiest and the best intentioned priest in Christendom.

Another element in the success of a priest's career is his early education. This is, of course, part of the first, yet a part so important as really to deserve a separate classification. "Just as the twig is bent the tree's inclined," and if at school or college the mind has got into a slovenly, lazy, or intermittent way of studying, the habit so framed is likely not only to be permanent but to intensify with years. Hence, not only will his sermons be crude, ill-digested productions, but his whole system, whether of reading or of parochial visitation and organization will likewise be of the same slovenly, desultory sort. He will begin one plan after another only to drop it, he will embark on this or

that project only to abandon it, and all because he has not properly arranged its details or thought out their results. Thus the confidence of his parishioners in his plans is destroyed, and every announcement that he makes of some new move for the benefit of his people is received with distrust, if not with ridicule.

Or, perhaps, his early education has been of such a kind as to warp and narrow his faculties; it has been according to some wooden model of a by-gone age; of such a description as to lead him into the idea that when he left college his education was at an end, and that he was fit to rub shoulders with the world, and to hold his own with any disputant. He finds out too soon that his ideal world is not that of every-day life, and that his real education has yet to begin. But with a formed habit of mind, and with stereotyped notions of how men believe, think, speak, and act, he is at a loss how to meet them; he cannot take in the difficulties of the new school of thought, nor see that what is clear enough to him cannot be dogmatically thrust down the throats of those whom the shallow sharpness of the modern newspaper and magazine article, or the flimsy, plausible assertions rather than arguments of the now-a-day agnostic—better call him infidel at once—have influenced by their persuasive subtleties and glittering fallacies. Perhaps he is a rigidist and purist himself. In such a case he cannot away with the foibles of modern times, and, therefore, sets himself up against the use of pleasures and amusements that are harmless in themselves, and condemns even an innocent dance or a game at cards from which gambling in any form whatever is completely absent. He is an impractical and impracticable idealist, unfit to deal with, or accommodate himself to the spirit of the age, and utterly unable to follow St. PAUL's plan of making himself a servant to all that he might gain the more; of becoming all things to all men, that he might by all means save souls.

Again, he may lack higher education altogether; he may, perchance, have been ordained for some particular emergency to supply a given want in a given parish. That want may have been successfully supplied, or the condition of the parish may have altered. Possibly it was a back-woods mission, consisting of a simple rural population to whose spiritual wants he attended first as a lay-reader, then as a clergyman, ordained for want of any one else to take up an unremunerative and laborious work. But owing to circumstances it has rapidly developed into a town, or perhaps into a suburb of a great manufacturing city. Or, perhaps, when he undertook to work in the place to which he was afterwards ordained, it was the haunt only of the lowest and the vilest characters, mere animals, who felt not they were sinners, nor knew that they had souls to be lost or saved, who recked not of a God or a hereafter, and had never heard of a Saviour's love. For them the "old, old story" sufficed, and the simpler the words, the more stirring the manner in which it was told, the more easily their hearts were won and the harvest gathered in. But with other times came other needs. The rural population was supplanted by the urban—the low, savage people of the district now sitting clothed and in their right minds, came in contact with or was superseded by the intelligent, half-educated working men from the factory or the forge, many full of the errors of the day, others anxious to refute these errors, which their neighbours never cease to din into their ears as a challenge or with the intention of proselytizing.

Our good, simple priest is unable to meet them for want of that competent knowledge which only a higher education can afford—and the effect is disastrous to a degree. Or it may be that he is ambitious and desirous of a higher sphere of labour, or that he feels worn out, and would fain be transferred to an easier post; or that his bishop, thinking that as he has been such a success or has toiled so hard in his first parish, he will do equally well in another, or that he deserves some further recognition than the answer of his own good conscience and the knowledge of his future crown, promotes him over a richer congregation. The poor man at once finds himself out of his element; he is in every respect, except in that of personal holiness, unfit for his position, and adds one more to the list of those who have failed as priests for want of the proper degree of education.

There is another kind of failure not chargeable to the priest, but to his surroundings: that of him who is appointed to a parish abounding in work, with a population to be numbered by the hundreds, but without means to support a resident minister or one of any sort. Perhaps, in addition, the Church is in debt, and everything is languishing for want of money and zeal on the part of those who might but will not help in any way. A volunteer steps forward to do his best in keeping the mission open. That he may live at all, as well as to support his family, he has to follow some avocation not incompatible with the priestly office—such as literary or educational work. To do this properly he has to reside near where his livelihood is made, probably at considerable distance from his parish. His secular work naturally engrosses much of his time, yet his Sunday work is never neglected. The newly born children are baptized, the Holy Communion is duly and frequently administered, the two or three Sunday services never fall through; the sick are visited, the dead are buried; the Sunday-school is maintained, though with difficulty. During the week a service or a cottage meeting is held, and the most pressing cases duly visited. The pastor is at all times ready to attend any summons, even risking his worldly prospects by so doing; but he cannot devote himself systematically to a work in which his whole soul is interested, for the one reason that as the mission cannot pay its way, much less pay its priest, the latter has to find his means of living elsewhere, and devote to that the time which should be given to his people. Naturally his *hede-roll* of communicants is small, his congregation are the same: and those outside the Church gobble up many of his children and flock. He is voted by his brethren and by outsiders a failure. A failure doubtless he is; but is he to blame for the failure? Must there not be something radically wrong in those who, calling themselves Churchmen, would let a large parish fail in this way, and suffer souls to be lost to the Church for want of assistance either in money or volunteer help in the Sunday-school or house to house visitation? Yet for such failure not they, but the priest is blamed, and sometimes in no measured terms. There are, alas! many such failures everywhere—to the shame of the richer parishes be it spoken!

IMPROVING OUR SERVICES.

A PRACTICAL DIFFICULTY.

USEFUL, and indeed necessary, as the work of pruning had become among the Rubrics, one practical difficulty became inseparable from it. The multitude of minute directions as to the *modus operandi* in the different parts of divine service was so great that every page of the old service books was so filled with these red-letter directions that little room was left for the black-letter text of the actual service. This was exceedingly awkward and undesirable; but when the greater part of these directions were carried out of the way, as unnecessary to be printed, their spirit was kept alive out-