

TOUCHINESS.

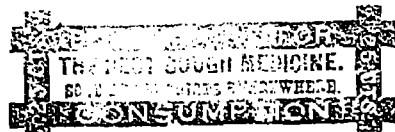
One of the most trying and difficult parts of a parish priest's work nowadays is how to deal with touchy people. That such should be the case in the religious world, especially among Christians and communicants, who know, or ought to know, that charity is the greatest and chief of the theological virtues, may seem wonderful, and, to those who have had no experience in this matter, incredible; but still most of our clerical readers, we are sure (if they have had a long experience in parish work) must realise that it is but too common. Of course, if all our communicants and fellow-workers were saints, or even thoroughly instructed in the practice of the highest theological virtue, it would not be so, but, as a matter of fact, the average Churchman and Churchwoman is a human soul struggling, we hope, to better things, but who yet has the spiritual conflict to fight out, often with imperfect knowledge and insufficient devotion.

The strangest part of the matter is that there seems more touchiness in the religious than in the secular world. The average English man of business still more the average English working man, in his secular affairs—in the counting-house or workshop—is not a particularly sensitive person. He gives and takes. He realises that in commerce or industry it is better for men to keep their temper, and if they are only treated with common fairness and honesty they have not much reason to complain. Perhaps this absence of touchiness has had an influence in "the making of England." We do not strain at etiquette or politeness so much as some foreign nations do, and an Englishman often puts up with rudeness if thereby he gains his end. But in the religious world the emotional part of man comes more into play. And here also both sexes are to be considered more than in worldly business, and women are notoriously more sensitive than men, more emotional, and more excitable. Then, again, the very dignity and respect for the priest's office renders his acts and words of more importance in the eyes of his own people than those of a mere layman. There are many Churchmen or Churchwomen who would pass by with contempt a rude word from a lay person, but who would be deeply hurt by an even supposed slight or reproof from their parish priest. This reflexion should reach the clergy to be very careful in their dealings with their people to give no needless cause of offence.

But the worst is that in not a few cases people take offence both with their pastor and their fellow communicants without any offence being intended or dreamt of. It often re-

quires not only an abundance of love and kindness, but also of wisdom, tact, and penetration, to avoid giving certain persons offence. This readiness, to be offended is a form of moral disease which is very difficult to deal with. The ingenuity of some persons in finding causes of offence is truly wonderful. We have heard of a farmer who was bitterly offended at the vicar of a neighbouring parish because, when he went to market at the county town, the vicar had not recognised him, the fact simply being that the priest never expected to see him, and actually did not notice him. Another case was that of a person who excused herself from going to church on a Wednesday evening because when a strange priest took the duty he did not preach. The vicar always preached on Wednesday when he was at home, but she henceforth abstained from going. Ritual grievances often might come under this category, but as they pretend to involve principles they may not be fairly quoted here. But personal sermons are frequent grievances. We have heard of a man never going to church after a certain grave crime had been denounced in a sermon, because his father was known to have committed it. On this ground the Decalogue, and, indeed, all morality would be excluded from the pulpit. As to parish festivals, one of the hardest works is to avoid giving offence to somebody.

Now, all this is not well, and we are glad to see Professor Drummond, in his "Pax Vobiscum," making some wise remarks (from a philosophical or commonsense standpoint) on the moral disease of touchiness. To some persons it is almost a mania. They are always suspecting that everybody (the unfortunate parson especially) is slighting them in some mysterious and inexplicable manner. The greatest courtesy and charity and consideration will not suffice. Self-consciousness dominates them. To these we would commend a careful reading of St. Paul's sublime panegyric on Charity in 1 Cor. xiii.; or, if they want something modern, Professor Drummond's clever books, where reason and religion are shown to point the same way to a spirit of charity and kindness and an absence of taking offence, especially where no offence is meant.—*Church Review*.

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