

Choice Literature.

LAICUS.

OR THE EXPERIENCES OF A LAYMAN IN A COUNTRY PARISH.

CHAPTER III.—WE JOIN THE CHURCH.

"I have bought the house, Jennie," said I.
 "Thank you," said Jennie. She said it softly, but her eyes said it more plainly than her voice. I had hesitated a little before I finally closed the purchase. But Jennie's look and her soft "Thank you" made me sure I had been right.

Since the baby has come we have converted the chamber over the library into an upstairs sitting-room. I found her there before the open fire, on my return from New York. The baby was sleeping in her arms; and she was gently rocking him, pressed close to her bosom.

"I wish you would have a nurse for the baby, Jennie," said I. "I don't like to see you tied to her so."

"You wouldn't take baby from me, would you, John?" said she appealingly, nestling the precious bundle closer to her heart than before, as if in apprehension. No I wouldn't. I was obliged to confess that to myself, if not to her.

"John," said Jennie, "Mrs. Goodsole has been here this afternoon. She wants to know if we won't take our letters to this church the next communion. It is the first of September."

"Well?" said I, for Jennie had stopped.
 "She says that if we are going to make Wheathedge our home she hopes we can find a pleasant home in the church here. I told her I could not tell, we had only hired the house for the summer and might leave in the fall. But if you have bought it, John, and I am, oh! so glad you have and thank you so much—one hand left the baby gently, and was laid on my arm with the softest possible pressure by way of emphasizing the thanks again—"perhaps we ought to consider it."

"I have no notion of joining this church," said I. "It's in debt, and always behind hand. I am told they owe a hundred dollars to their minister now."

"That's too bad," said Jennie.

"And we can't do much if we do join it. I have no time for church affairs, and you—you have all you can do to attend to your infant class at home, Jennie."

"That's true," said Jennie.

"Besides it is a Presbyterian church and we are Congregationalists."

Jennie made no reply.

"And I can't bear the idea of leaving the Broadway Tabernacle Church. I was brought up in it. I have been in its Sunday school ever since I can recollect. It was dear to me in its old homely attire as a Congregationalist meeting-house. It is dear to me in its new aristocratic attire as a Congregationalist cathedral. And Harry was baptized there. And there are all our dearest and best friends. It would be like pulling a tooth to uproot from it."

"It is dear to me, too, John," said Jennie softly, "for your sake, if not for my own."

"And all our friends are there, Jennie," continued I. "Except the Lines and Peacock Goodsole we hardly know anybody here."

"Though I suppose time will cure that," said Jennie.

"I do not know that I care to cure it," said I.

Jennie made no response.

Was it not at Bunker Hill that the soldiers were directed to reserve their fire till the attacking party had exhausted theirs? That is the way Jennie conducts an argument—when she argues at all, which is very seldom. She accepted every consideration I had offered against uniting with the Wheathedge church, and yet I knew her opinion was not changed; and somehow my own began to waver. I wonder how that method of arguing would work in the court room. I mean to try it some time.

I had exhausted my fire and Jennie was still silent. Silence they say means consent. But I knew that it did not in her case. It depends so much on the kind of silence.

"What do you say, Jennie?" said I.

"Well, John," said she slowly and thoughtfully, "perhaps there are two sides to the question. I don't like to leave the Broadway Tabernacle. But it seems to me that we have left it. We cannot attend its prayer meetings, or go to its Sabbath school, or worship with its members on the Sabbath, or even mingle much with its members in social life. We have left it, and we ought to have thought of that before we left—not after. Perhaps I am to blame, John, that I did not think of it more. I did not think of what you were giving up for me when you took this beautiful home for my sake."

I had not taken it for her sake—that is, not wholly for her sake. And as to the giving up. Why, bless you, that little sitting room, with the wife and baby it contained, was worth a thousand Tabernacles to me; and I managed to tell Jennie so, and emphasize the declaration with a well, no matter. But she did not need the information, she knew it very well before, I am sure.

"The real question seems to me, John, to be whether we mean to be church members at all?" said Jennie.

"Church members at all?" I echoed.

"Yes," said she. "We are not members of the Broadway Tabernacle any more except in name. What is a foot or an arm fifty miles away from the body? Can they keep loving watch and care over us; or we over them? It is not a question between one church-home and another, John; it is a question between this church-home and none at all."

"But, Jennie," said I, "the finances here are in a fearful state. They are always coming down on the church for contributions, and holding fairs in summer, and tableaux and what not, in winter, and generally waiting for something to turn up. If I had the naming of this church I would call it St. Micawber's church."

Jennie laughed. "Well, John," said she, "I think you are ready enough with your money." (I am not so sure of that. I am inclined to think that is Jennie's way of making

me so.) "And I have nothing to say about the finances."

"Besides, Jennie," said I—for I really had no faith in the financial argument—"this is a Presbyterian church and we are Congregationalists."

"It is a church of Christ, John," said Jennie, soberly, "and we, I hope, are Christians more than Congregationalists."

That was the last that was said. But the next morning I carried down with me to New York a letter addressed to the clerk of the Broadway Tabernacle, asking for letters of dismission and recommendation to the Calvary Presbyterian church at Wheathedge. And so commenced our parish life.

CHAPTER IV. THE REAL PRESENCE.

"Jennie," said I, "I don't believe in Mr. Work's sermon this morning, do you?"

"I don't think I do, John; but to be candid I did not hear a great deal of it."

It was Sunday evening. Harry was asleep in his room. The baby, sung to her sweet slumbers pressed against her mother's heart, had been laid down at last in her little cradle. Jennie, her evening work finished, had come down into the library and was sitting on the lounge beside me.

"I was not so fortunate," said I. "Blessed are those who having ears hear not—sometimes. I listened, and took the other side. My church was converted into a court-room, I into an advocate. If I believed Mr. Work's doctrine was sound Protestantism I should turn Roman Catholic. Its teaching is the warmer, cheerier, more helpful of the two."

Then I took up the open book that lay on my library table and read from Father Hyacinthe's discourse the following paragraph—from an address delivered on the first communion of a converted Protestant to the Roman Catholic Church:

"Where (in Protestantism) is that Real Presence which flows from the sacrament as from a hidden spring, like a river of peace, upon the true Catholic, all the day long, gladdening and fertilizing all his life? This Immanuel—God with us—awaited you in our Church, and in that sacrament which so powerfully attracted you, even when you but half believed it. In your own worship, as in the ancient synagogue, you found naught but types and shadows; they spoke to you of reality, but did not contain it; they awakened your thirst, but did not quench it; weak and empty rudiments which have no longer the right to rest, since the veil of the temple has been rent asunder and eternal realities been revealed."

"Yes, Jennie," said I. "If I thought Father Hyacinthe were right, I should turn Roman Catholic. And Mr. Work this morning confirmed him. He took away the substance. He left us only a type, a shadow."

The sermon was on the words: "Do this in remembrance of Me." It was a doctrinal sermon. I am not sure that it might not have been a useful one—in the sixteenth century. It was a sermon against Romanism and Lutheranism and High Church Episcopacy. The minister told us what were the various doctrines of the communion. He analyzed them and dismissed them one after another. He showed very conclusively, to us Protestants, that the Romanists are wrong, to us Presbyterians that the Episcopalians are wrong, to us who are open Communionists that the close Communionists are wrong. As there does not happen to be either Romanist, Episcopalian, or close Communionist in our congregation, I cannot say how efficacious his arguments would have been if addressed to any one who was in previous doubt as to his conclusions. Then he proceeded to expound what he termed the rational and Scriptural doctrine of communion. It is, he told us, simply a memorial service. "As," said he, "every year, the nation gathers to strew flowers upon the graves of its patriot soldiers, so this day the Christian Church gathers to strew with flowers of love and praise the grave of the Captain of our salvation. As in the one act all difference are forgotten, and the nation is one in the sacred presence of death, so in the other, creeds and doctrines vanish, and the Church of Christ appears at the foot of Calvary as one in Christ Jesus."

Mr. Wheaton asked me, as we came out of church, if the sermon was not a magnificent one. I evaded the question. I was obliged to confess to myself that it was unsatisfactory. If I were obliged to choose between the Protestantism of Mr. Work and the Romanism of Father Hyacinthe, I am afraid I should choose the latter.

"But," said Jennie, "Mr. Work's sermon was not true Protestant doctrine, John. There is a Real Presence in the communion. Only it is in the heart, not in the head, in us, not in the symbols that we eat. Did you not feel the Real Presence when Father Hyatt in the afternoon broke and blessed the bread? Did you not see the living Christ in his radiant face and hear the living Christ in his touching words, and his more touching silence?"

Yes! I did. Father Hyatt had disproved the morning's sermon, though he said never a word about it.

Father Hyatt is an old, old man. He has long since retired from active service, having worn out his best days here left at Wheathedge, in years now long gone by. A little money him by a parishioner, and a few annual gifts from old friends among his former people, are his means of support. His hair is white as snow. His hands are thin, his body bent, his voice weak, his eyesight dim, his ears but half fulfil their office; his mind even shows signs of the weakness and wanderings of old age; but his heart is young, and I verily believe he looks forward to the hour of his release with hopes as high and expectations as ardent as those with which, in college, he anticipated the hour of his graduation. This was the man, patriarch of the church, who has lived to see the children he baptized grow up, go forth into the world, many die and be buried; who has forth the second and even the third generation, and has seen Wheathedge grow from a cross-road to a flourishing village; who this afternoon, perhaps for the last time, I could not help thinking so as I sat in church—interpreted to us the love of Christ as it is uttered to our hearts in this most sacred and hallowed of all services. Very simply, very gently, quite unconsciously, he refuted the cheerless doctrine of the morning ser-

mon, and pointed us to the Protestant doctrine of the Real Presence. Do you ask me what he said? Nothing. It was by his silence that he spoke.

A few tender, loving, reverential words as he broke the bread. Three minutes of silver speech, the rest of his part of the service a golden silence. But those few words were radiant with the presence and the love of a risen, a living Saviour. It was not of the Christ that died, but of the Christ that now lives, and intercedes, and guides, and preserves, and saves, he spoke, with voice feeble with old age, but strong with love. And as he spoke, it seemed to me, I think it seemed to all of us, that the Christ he loved so much and served so faithfully was close at hand, near and ready to bless us all, not with a sacred memory only, but with a Real Presence, the more real because unseen.

"Yes, Jennie," said I, after we had sat for a few minutes in silence recalling that sacred hour, "Yes, Jennie, there was a Real Presence in Father Hyatt's breaking and blessing of the bread. But what do you say of the disquisition of Mr. Work on transubstantiation which followed it?"

"I didn't hear it, John. Was it really about transubstantiation? Perhaps I ought to have listened—but I could not, I did not want to. A higher, holier voice was speaking to me. I was absorbed in that. I was thinking how of old time Christ appeared in the breaking of bread to the disciples whose eyes were holden. And to-night, John, as I have been rocking baby to sleep I have been reading Tennyson's Holy Grail, and thinking how often, in our modern life, Galahad and Percivale kneel at the same shrine, and how often what is but a memorial service to the one affords a beatific vision of a living and life-giving Lord to the other."

And Jennie repeated in a low soft voice a verse from that strange poem, whose meaning, I sometimes think, is at half understood even by its admirers:

"And at the racking of the Mass, I saw
 The holy elements alone: but he—
 'Saw ye no more?' 'I, Galahad, saw the Grail,
 The Holy Grail, descend upon the shrine;
 I saw the fiery face as of a child
 That smote itself into the bread, and went,
 And hither am I come; and never yet
 Hath what thy sister taught me first to see,
 This holy thing, failed from my side?"

"Ah! yes, John, Father Hyacinthe is mistaken, and Mr. Work is mistaken too. There is more in our communion than can be explained. The reason is a great deal, a great deal, but it is not everything. And there are experiences which it can neither understand nor interpret. Baby is not only upstairs, John; he is in my heart of hearts. And you are never away from home, husband mine, though often in the city, but are always with me. And my Saviour—He is not far away, He is not in the heaven that we must leave Him down, nor in the past that we must summon Him from centuries long gone by. He is in our hearts, John. Do I believe in the Real Presence? Do I not know that there is a Real Presence? And neither priest nor pastor can take it from me."

"I wish you could have administered the communion this afternoon, Jennie," said I, "instead of Mr. Work."

"I wish some good friend of Mr. Work would advise him not to talk at the communion," said Jennie.

"Write him a note," said I.

Jennie shook her head. "No," said she. "It would only do harm. But I wish ministers knew and felt that at the communion table there is a Real Presence that makes many words unfitting. When we are on the Mount of Transfiguration, we do not care much for Peter, James or John. And so, dear, I recommend you to do as I do—if the minister must give us a doctrinal disquisition, or a learned argument, or an elaborate arabesque of fancy work, or an impassioned appeal, let him go his way and do not heed him. I want silence that I may commune with the Real Presence. If the minister does not give it me, I take it."

Jennie is right, I am sure. What we laymen want at the communion service from our pastors, is chiefly silence. Only a few and simple words; the fewer and simpler the better. Oh! you who are privileged to distribute to us the emblems of Christ's love, believe me that the communion never reaches its highest end, save when you interpret it to us, not merely as a flower strewn grave of a dead past, but as a Mount of Transfiguration whereon we talk with a living, an ascended Saviour. Believe me too, we want at that table no other message than that which a voice from on high whispers in our hearts. "This is My beloved Son, hear ye Him!"

WORKING ON THE REVISED OLD TESTAMENT.

It was on the 30th of June, 1870, that the company first entered upon their task, and in the interval, before they held their last meeting, upon June 20, 1884, ten of their number had passed away. And the rest cannot but feel that a solid portion of their lives has been spent upon this great work. They have grown old while endeavouring to give to the English-speaking race the Word of God in a translation representing, as exactly as possible, the meaning of the original. And whatever may be the nature of the reception accorded to their labours, at all events they know that they have worked honestly for the glory of God, and not for human praise or reward.

Their usual method of working was to meet upon the morning of a Tuesday in each alternate month, and to continue their session for ten days, until the Friday in the following week. On each morning they met at eleven, and continued their labour until five p.m., except upon the last Friday, when, for the convenience of trains, they broke up at a rather earlier hour. Of these sessions there have been no less than eighty-five, and the whole number of days devoted to the work has been 792. Their method of working was to begin with prayer, after which the Hebrew of the Book on which they were engaged was read verse by verse; the discussion was then opened by the reading of the suggestions of absent members; and finally, after deliberation, the company proceeded to vote. In this manner the whole of the Old