

## LAY HINDERERS.

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FOR a quarter of a century, or more, the Lay Helper has been a stock topic at Church Congresses and Diocesan Conferences; but so far as I am informed, that far more ubiquitous personage the Lay Hinderer has never been considered worthy of a thought. The Lay Helper has

the recipient of no end of grave resolutions unanimously. He has been bountifully blessed with shops; charmingly charged by Archdeacons; ostentatiously coddled by College Dons; ostentatiously organized by rival Rural Deans; admiringly mentioned in the *Official Year Book*; and yet, if the whole state of Lay Help in the one melancholy muddle of misused and misapplied efforts. And who is there can be but one answer; the

take a look at the culprit at close quarters. Foremost the Lay Hinderer disguises himself as a Lay Helper. He offers for service in some remote parish, and when once installed in office settles down to his destructive task with a determination which nothing can shake. The Hinderer chooses that particular department of work for which he is specially unfitted, and is stoutly taken as his pattern the chubby boy in the soapmakers' placard, "He won't be happy till he gets it; and, having 'got it,' very much ensures that henceforth no other worker in the shop knows a moment's happiness, from the day when he is put to the organ-blower!

The Lay Hinderer diligently cultivates all those bad habits which harass and worry a real Lay Helper. He may be counted upon to be a model of civility. The more others are kept waiting, the more the Lay Hinderer is honoured. In the end, civility is at a discount. He is very much attached to the pernicious habit of giving people a name for what he calls "his mind"; and as he knows

everything except himself, and can do everything except the thing which he has been appointed to do, it will be understood that the Lay Hinderer may be depended upon to make his presence painfully felt at all times and seasons.

If the parson starts a scheme for the erection of a new church, the Lay Hinderer comes to the front with plenty of arguments against the project. If, on the other hand, the parson does not want a new church, but only a few thousands for the restoration of the old church, the Lay Hinderer energetically clamours for a new church; he vehemently protests against tinkering up an old building; with profuse prodigality he eloquently pleads for posterity; and so in either of these typical cases the end is always the same, the Lay Hinderer pleasantly pares down his unwilling donation to the smallest possible point, and punctiliously emphasises the fact that he is against the scheme on principle and so cannot conscientiously give a large subscription!

It is astonishing to what extraordinary lengths the Lay Hinderer's conscience will lead him! Things which he would never think of doing as a business man, he will readily do as a Church worker; and it is his curiously contrived conscience which is always conjured up as the great controlling cause.

It is, of course, a delicate matter to speak slightly of the workings of conscience, but we do well to remember that there is such a thing as a morbid conscience. Augustus Hare in his delightful autobiography, "The Story of My Life," relates this instance of a morbid conscience in a certain Oxford undergraduate:—

"One day a man said to him, 'How do you do, R.?' and he answered, 'Quite well, thank you.'

"The next day the man was astonished at receiving from R. the following note:—

"DEAR SIR,—I am sorry to tell you that I have been acting a deceptive part. When I told you yesterday that I was quite well, I had really a headache; this has been on my conscience ever since.'

"The note amused the man, whose name was Burton, and he showed it to a friend, who, knowing R.'s weakness, said to him, 'Oh, R., how could you act so wrongly as to call Mr. Burton "Dear Sir," thereby giving him the impression that you liked him, when you know that you dislike him extremely?'

"R. was sadly distressed, and a few days later Mr. Burton received the following:—

"BURTON,—I am sorry to trouble you again, but I have been shown that, under the mask of friendship, I have been for the second time deceiving you; by calling you "Dear Sir" I may have led you to suppose I liked you, which I never did, and never can do.—I am, Burton, yours, etc."

If we could put our finger on the parish in which Mr. Hare's "R." resides, I doubt not we should find him an active Lay Hinderer.

(To be continued.)