

that sweet melody sweep up to heaven with my heart upon its wings so joyously, as that evening; I do not think there was a voice silent in the church: then a pause, and all dropped upon their knees, while the solemn words of benediction closed as stirring a service, and as happy a day, as I had ever known in my life.

It was nine o'clock. Slowly the church was emptied; one by one, as if with unwilling footsteps, the people went out. They seemed to linger round the dying embers of a happy day. And, as the gathering groups hung round the porch, or loitered at the gate of the churchyard, the band, assembled under the old yew tree, gave us, in full voice, the National Anthem. One good ringing shout, from which even the solemnity of the scene just left could not restrain our younger friends, and "every one went unto his own house."

We could hear the joyous cheer revived again and again, as the various groups parted from each other at the partings of the roads, each for his more distant hamlets, like last sweet echoes of the pleasure which had rung out so merrily amongst us during that long summer day; and, as I strolled home with my wife and boys, we said to each other—what was uppermost in our hearts—that if all the festivals of our Church were so kept, it would go far to restore their use and popularity, and give back, at the same time, to our country, what in this age of toiling care, she has almost lost all right to—the once distinctive and well-deserved name of "Merrie England."

Since then, revolving the matter over in my mind, and longing to make the people happy, I have thought, would not such be a most legitimate mode of spending our Sundays? I never spent a Sunday in my life in a more happy, or I think I may add, a more holy way. And I really do not think that there was aught said or done by any one throughout it, upon which God would not look with approval.

Who then, instead of having our Sundays, as they too often are, dull and heavy on our hands, could we not make them really festival, and throw into their sanctity, which I would not wish to lessen, all this element of joy, which brightened our feast at St. John?

XX.

REPLY.

I have been charmed with your account of your parish festival. This is the true way to make our Church take hold upon the hearts of her people. Those who are really holy will be always able to find in her services and holy-days—no matter how dully given or observed—comfort, and strength, and guidance. But those who are not holy—and they are the majority—require something to attract the natural man, and make him love his Church at first, for the sake of lower blessings than those which he will find she has in store for him when he has a higher appetite for her spiritual gifts. I do not think we have any stronger evidence of the deep and real truth which is embodied in her services, than the hold which they have managed to retain upon the affections of her children, notwithstanding the wretched manner in which for generations they have been rendered.

Take, for example, our most beautiful and perfect Service, as you will find it celebrated—(the word, I fear, is too grandiloquent, I should rather say droned)—in too many of our country churches. The clergyman and clerk are the only participants, the people lolling in their pews half-asleep, without one symptom of life-like devotion to show that they are sharers in what is being done—done for them, as if they really had nothing in the matter to do for themselves. They would be angry if you said their priest could save them; but to pray for them (and by that I mean, to pray instead of them), that they seem to look upon as his office; while they in too many instances neither kneel, nor think, nor feel, nor pray. Is it not a wonder that any religious feeling should survive such a state of things one generation?

Hence the great carelessness of our people about prayer. Preaching is with them the *bonne bouche* at the end, to entitle them to the enjoyment of which prayer must be endured. Any service without a sermon is vapid and dull. Now no one values preaching more than I do: it is one of God's highest ordinances for the conversion and edification of souls. There is in it (if duly appre-

ciated and faithfully used) a deep mystic power; which we can no more understand than we can the mystic power of the Sacraments, by which, through the action of His preached Word upon men's souls, their dormant spiritual life is roused and awakened, as in the case of Christians; and the very gift of new life conferred, as in the case of those sitting in darkness and the shadow of death.

But still preaching is a means, not an end; and as the end is always higher than the means, so the end to which preaching should lead—namely, the worship of God—is higher than the preaching which leads to it. That flock is rightly pastured which loves both—the hand that feeds and the adoration of the Great Feeder,—living daily on His Word, but living only that they may daily render back to Him the grateful homage of hearts whose life is in His perpetual love.

But our homage should be hearty, and it is not in human nature (and remember, now I am speaking of those who are not under strong spiritual influences)—it is not in human nature to take pleasure in that which has no feature or form of pleasure connected with it. I do not by any means wish for the introduction into our ordinary parish churches of high ritual or choral service. I want simply what we can all have in the most rural districts—fervent, glowing, religious services, full of heart, and life, and voice; reverent reading, universal responding, simple chanting and singing, in which all can take a part—every heart making itself heard in heaven, no voice silent upon earth: the lessons read, the prayers prayed, the hymns and psalms sung. This we all might reach, and reach without one vexation or alarm.

Then a stranger entering our churches would know that we were worshipping; then, what is of more importance, God and our own hearts would know it too, and, much as preaching would be still valued, worship would be valued more, the one teaching us what to do, the other the doing of it.

Your description of your village festival, and the hearty evening service which closed it upon St. John's Day, led me off on this track. I believe the secret of making our people again begin to care for their long-depised and forgotten holy days, as the Church enjoins them, is to make them *holidays* too.

I remember when I was chaplain to that best of men, the Reverend Bishop Mant, driving with him in his carriage one day, and talking of such things, I gave utterance to my thoughts in the playful manner in which he so much delighted, and in which he was as much an adept himself, as in the gravest and most graceful of his literary efforts—propounding this charade upon the word "holyday," or, as it is sometimes pronounced, holiday.

"My first is, what my second part
On earth should ever be;
My whole claims manhood's thoughtful heart,
And childhood's thoughtless glee.
Its joys our younger years confess,
Free from restraint and care;
Surely we will not love it less,
When blest with praise and prayer."

I am quite sure that we must first, both with our lips and in our actions, pronounce the word *holiday* before we can get our common and ignorant people to value and use it for what it represents as *holy-day*.

England has lost, as you well say, her right to her old title "Merrie." Her growth in population, and power, and wealth has taken from her her leisure for enjoyment. How beautifully Henry Taylor expresses this in his poem on Lago Lugano!

"O England! 'merry England' styled of yore,
Where is thy mirth? thy jocund laughter where?
The sweat of labour on the brow of care
Makes a mute answer. Driven from every door,
The may-pole cheers the village green no more;
No harvest-home, nor Christmas mummings rare.
The tired mechanic at his lecture sighs,
And of the learned, which, with all his lore,
Has leisure to be wise?"

It should be the aim of the Church to bring back to her, this long-lost glory; and she has no means so legitimate for attaining such an end as by giving her people their own natural and spiritual rights, and the real restoration of their holy-days.

One of the chief difficulties in effecting this is

that which appeared to be your difficulty when the suggestion was made by your Vicar—a money difficulty. He seems to have got over it admirably well. That the labourer should help himself to his holiday is all right, but it is as right that we also should help him.

It has long been a vision of mine, that the rich holiday-keeping portion of England's population should create a fund, to redeem a certain number of holidays for the poor. Amongst her giant works of beneficence, few could be found more honest or graceful than this. But, even short of a national movement, you have shown how much may be done by many hands lightening the burden. And I am sure many parishes in England—pauperized as my own is by charities—could hardly turn the bequests of our generous forefathers to better account, than by thus using them to bring back some of the old gladness, so common in their days that it was a proverb in our land.

We complain that our working classes are morose and discontented—that they do not reverence or observe the Lord's Day. We cry out against the efforts of those who, knowing no better, would make that day common, by filling it with worldly amusements. But, all the while, we do nothing ourselves to lighten their burdens, or brighten the darkness of their lives. It is impossible that men can endure perpetual work; they must have some relaxation. If they were holy, they could have none more cheering than a holy use of God's day; but if they are not holy, religious services, specially when as unexciting as ours too often are, do little to cheer.

How it would lighten a man's weary toil, if he were sure of one day in every month, as bright as that which your people have been enjoying! He would have something above mere life to work for, some motive to deny himself the besetting pleasures with which the low public-house supplies him; something which could not be enjoyed unless he can take his place, without a blush, among his fellows, with his decent clothes on his back, his wife and children decent too—with his good dinner, to take its fair place beside the other dinners which the village housewives furnish; and all the honour and respect of his humble degree as unsullied as the honour of a peer.

These decent clothes, this wholesome food, this honestly independent mien, cannot be had without self-control and self-denial. The draper and butcher cannot have what has been already given to the publican. At one time, when I lived in Ireland, an English company came to my parish to work some coal mines there, and I recall now with shame the half-sneering and contemptuous smile with which I heard one well-fed, John-Bullish looking gentleman suggest, that to teach them the value and comfort of a good dinner was, in his estimation, one of the first and most important elements in the improvement of the Irish people. What I at first despised as stupid sensual folly, I found, after a little thought, to be sound philosophy. A man will labour for what he values. The canker at the root of Irish prosperity is that wretched lazy indifference which says "Anything will do." Give the people a higher taste, even in the lower matter of their food, you touch the right spring; you give them a motive for self-control and exertion, and the transition from potatoes and salt to beef and pudding is only a first step in that upward move whose end, we may hope with all reverence, will be in God.

The Church could do more to brighten life, with her fasts and feasts, than haply she imagines; her fasts, honestly kept, giving her funds to redeem her feasts for the sons of toil, and make their celebration a gladness.

However, until we give them other days of amusement, we cannot, with a clear conscience, speak to the working classes about their observance of Sunday. They will continue to rob God, until we help them in their holidays in a more honest way.

Sunday, though a high festival, is one over which we have less control than over our other festal days. It is emphatically God's day—given for many blessed purposes; but chief, and above all, for His worship and honour. Games and amusements most suitable for a Church festival, would be, in my mind, a desecration of the Lord's Day.