

IV

REPLY

Your letter has given me the truest satisfaction. I have no doubt now how matters will end for you all.

I see that you have honestly entered on your share of the work, and, though I dare say that in the course of what lies before you there will be often anxieties, and questionings, and great searchings of heart, still I feel assured that in you and by you, truth will prevail.

Your self-corrected estimate of your Bishop I rejoice in. I did not like to notice your implied censure in your former letter, because I did not like to take too many subjects in hand; but I felt jealous for an order in our Church, which is sacred, and so essential to her well-being, and which is so often thoughtlessly, and almost sacrilegiously assailed. The difficulties Bishops have to encounter in the due management of their charge is great. Their power over the beneficed clergy is too limited; that over the unbeneficed, some imagine to be too unlimited, inasmuch as,—without giving any reason for so doing,—they can withdraw their licenses at a moment's warning and thus remove them from their posts. I do not, however, think that such power is too great, considering the hands that hold it. The instances where even those who are most affected by its exercise blame it as unjust or severe are very few; the instances where it is really unjust or severe, are far fewer.

I myself, being a beneficed clergyman, object to the difficulties which stand in the way of any defence of my doctrine or moral character, should either be assailed. The cost of a suit in the Court of Arches is so great, that oftentimes a Bishop must pause before he encounter such expense; for two or three such things, if unsuccessful, would almost ruin him. And if he be kept back from judicial proceedings by such cause, still more are the laity, who, unless in cases of very great scandal, think it best to bear in silence the evil it is so costly to remove.

I could wish we had a court as inexpensive as any ordinary county court into which all beneficed clergymen could be brought, or could bring themselves, when the tongues of others assail them. No honest man is ever afraid of open inquiry; while the shadow of a scandal resting even for one moment on the good name of a clergyman, is there too long, if it be possible to remove it. He should be like Cæsar's wife, free, not only from fault, but from the suspicion of it.

But I need not enter now upon a subject so grave as this. I am thankful for the evidence which your Bishop's letter has given you of the minute and parental care which I believe to be, in these days, taken by all our right reverend fathers in the management of their sacred charge. The days when ease, and pomp, and power seemed to be the great characteristics of those who occupied the episcopal bench, are gone.

Hard work, anxious care, laborious days, and wakeful nights are now the natural heritage of the mitre. And Bishops are beginning to know the special difficulties and claims of every parish in their dioceses, as accurately as clergymen get acquainted with every household in the parishes under their care.

But to return to your parish. The account you give of your new Vicar is most interesting—just what I expected to hear. I was not surprised to hear that he had taken a living so retired and quiet, for I knew, both from himself and through others, that he felt the wear and tear of so public a life as he had been lately leading, too great for his moral growth, and intellectual improvement. First, and above all other things, he values his own growth in grace, and, next to that, the cultivation and effective use of his mind.

He has not had time for meditation and writing, so great have been the claims made on him from day to day. He fears to dwindle—and therefore he had long resolved to seek, on the first opportunity, a quiet country life. He has found it through his friend the Bishop. He wants, moreover, I know, to make the experiment for himself, of what the Church, honestly and wisely carried out in all her teaching and practice, can do. He could not act independently as the curate of another, and so now he is going to try what the Church of England in an almost virgin soil can do.

Your parish, as you describe it, is that soil, as nearly as could be found;—a place in which, for half a century, the field has lain fallow.

The three months' absence he has taken are for his own preparation, as well as for that of the parish. He is just the man who will, as he says himself, begin as he will end. From the place where he once plants his foot, except to advance it further, he will not remove it. He will therefore be very cautious where he plants it. He will not go in amongst you, as some of our clergy do, to experimentalize, to make mistakes, and then, —to sustain a character for consistency (while in reality it is all self-pride and obstinacy), —blame those who will not accept their mistakes, and fight to retain them. He is a man of deep thought and large experience; he will not do anything in a hurry, or anything on a mere impulse, or anything at a guess. Whatever he does, he will be able to prove to all the world that he has a good reason for it; so he leaves you all for a season, he to prepare himself, and you to be prepared by the teaching of his Curate, for what, when he returns, he will do. He will not change anything suddenly, but when he does change it, so it will remain. Thus he lets his Curate keep things as they are for the present—and thus he escapes the apparent inconsistency of not being always the same in his practice before his people.

I wish I had adopted such a course in my parish when I first came. I found there a kind but prejudiced people, who had been alarmed by a sort of counterfeit High Churchism, which had all the exciting and sensational externals of something new; and none of the deep, real, heart-touching evidences of being the good old paths in which we should walk, and in which our souls could find comfort and guidance.

From a most deplorable fear of risking a popularity by which I hoped to work wonders, I fell in for the time with too many of the old habits of the parish; and now, after fourteen years of the trial of such a course, I find that every year has made it harder to change them. It is true, there were some great errors, such as that one which you say existed in your parish—I mean the administration of the Holy Communion to tables instead of to individuals, and also the celebration of the baptismal service apart from the public prayers—these things I changed at once; and some other important alterations, such as daily prayer during Lent and Advent, weekly communion, and the placing of the elements on the Lord's Table at the proper time, along with the alms, I also made. But still I feel that much of my teaching in the pulpit falls to the ground, fails to work itself into the minds and habits of my people, because the external forms of these truths are not so manifest as they should be in the services of our Church. I perceive the loss to my flock, and blame myself for their defects: for I see in another part of my parish, where some years ago I built a chapel of ease, and where the service is as near as I can make it in accordance with the Book of Common Prayer, how much more reverent and devout are our services; and how much more intelligently Church in their convictions and ways are they who worship therein. Had I adopted the same course in my parish church fourteen years ago, we might possibly have had a little disturbance at first, but it would have been but a nine days' wonder, over soon, and the people long since "established," "settled," in the use of a sounder and more strengthening ritual.

I fear I must even now, at the risk of all the annoyance it may cause, make the change. It is injurious to one parish to have two uses, or forms of service, within its narrow bounds. It confuses men's minds as to what is the real order of our Church Service, and gives every one,—as he may be High or Low,—an excuse for his own form. Most thoroughly do I value the forethought of my friend, who will begin as he will end, and thus not distract by changes even from his own observances, as well as by changes from the careless habits of former times.

With regard to the evidences of his own internal feelings of devotion, which you speak of as coming out here and there at certain parts of the service, and specially when using the Sacred Name, I do not wonder at their attracting notice, no matter how modestly done; for I

grieve to say they have for some years become almost obsolete. But they were in olden time the habit of our Church. I remember well how, in a country parish I once held, the oldest and simplest-minded amongst the poor always bowed their heads whenever the Sacred Name was spoken, and I cannot imagine how anyone can blame such a practice. It is an act of homage to the Name which is above every name, and at which every knee should bow; and it is a most wholesome remembrance to those who, even in the outbreathings of an overflowing love, might use it too familiarly. If the Jews hushed their voices, and spake not one mysterious name of God, should not Christians be as reverential and cautious in their use of that precious Name they hold so dear? It pains me often to hear it uttered lightly, even by those who I know love it in their hearts; and how anyone could, by any perversion of thought, deem such reverence to the Saviour superstitious, I cannot imagine.

With me it has become, thank God, such a habit, that I cannot even write The Name without an almost involuntary reverence; and I remember once having a touching proof of the use of such habits afforded me by the death-bed of a parishioner.

My last visit to his room found him, as his nurse thought, insensible. And it was quite true that he opened not his eye when I spoke, nor by the answer of the least pressure acknowledged the taking of his chilled hand in mine. Yet when I knelt and prayed beside him, and at the close of my prayer uttered the Sacred Name, even from the pillow his head rose gently to salute it, and thus show that the consciousness of its presence was before him, even in the shadow of death. It was like a monition to me from the confines of another world, ever by my practice and teaching to train those committed to my care, in reverence of the Name that is most Holy.

The bowing at the "Gloria" is also an old habit in the Church, but one not so common as that I have just referred to. It is not enjoined in the rubrics, and therefore not incumbent upon the people; but it is not an unbecoming act when we are standing up and singing the praises of the Triune God. None have a right to object to it, if it be done modestly, so as not to attract attention, any more than they have a right to object to persons kneeling, instead of sitting as most of the objectors do, throughout the Prayers. It is an expression of inward reverence. I am aware that some do it too demonstratively, so as to draw all eyes upon them. This is to be regretted, and should be avoided. Standing afar off, and scarce lifting up his eyes to heaven, was the attitude of him, who yet in the earnestness of his penitence smote upon his breast and said, "God be merciful to me a sinner." We should try and hide ourselves from ourselves, still more from the observation of others, when we are under the fig-tree with God.

They day will come, I have not the least doubt, when you will understand, and feel, and act upon all this as fervently as anyone in the world. Farewell.

(To be continued.)

A LESSON ON HARD TIMES.

In these hard times where shall retrenchment begin? Let no Christian think it *economy* to begin by "robbing God." A little reflection will convince us that the *friendship* of God is the last good thing a good man can afford to forfeit. Let us remember His precepts; He will remember His promises.

We clip the following from an old paper:

"Nothing in true Christianity is contrary to real reason; nothing in its doctrines—nothing in its practices—nothing in its demands. The Lord requires no man to be unreasonable in giving. But if man is a reasonable being, the Lord, who gave that reason, may rightly demand that man should use his reason in giving; and he should use the reason in respect to all things that may be incidental to giving. And with these reasonable things assumed, let us take a very brief view of what men might give according to the dictates of pure reason. Let us reason a little about giving. The members of our Church are more than 500,