

Our Contributors.

The Religious Outlook in Germany.

What Is To Be Done.

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(Continued from last week.)

I would begin with the House of God, and those who regularly minister at its altars. It is to be regretted that thus far in Germany, there has not been more contact, and the exhibition of a larger mutual sympathy, between the clergy and the people. Nor are the latter so much to blame as the former: while, on the other hand, the clergy are in part the creatures of an obsolete and outgrown system. Certainly steps cannot too quickly be taken to remedy existing defects, and thus contribute towards the inauguration of a better and more promising future.

The causes which have helped to bring about the present unfortunate situation are very numerous, but I may mention a few of them. (1) Most of the clergy are men who have been brought up in country districts, they have been nurtured under the restraints of a very rigid religious discipline. Their training has for the most part been obtained at the smaller Universities. True, German students have the habit of moving about a good deal and a semester or two at Leipzig or Berlin is pretty sure to be included in the course of their preparation; but what do these men really learn about their new surroundings during such visits? Not to speak of the peculiar exclusiveness of all sorts of social functions in this land,—even of those that we would deem most modest, if not indeed commonplace,—the time of students is likely to be fully occupied in quite other directions. Of the inner side of city life,—its struggles, its disappointments, its distinctive ambitions, its triumphs,—they know very little. Hearing much of the excesses which reveal themselves in the great centres of population, they come to regard with suspicion and unveiled aversion things,—some things, at least,—of which they know at first hand absolutely nothing. This they are often found condemning what is good and bad without much discrimination: if it were needful, I could cite some surprising instances of German narrowness of theological view, though it is customary to credit such teachers with holding opinions of quite inordinate breadth. Hence some lines of conduct are denounced which in themselves are wholly innocent, and are very mildly alluring to those who are really acquainted with them. On the other hand, these leaders are often simply untouched by, and are profoundly unconscious of, those fierce and terrible temptations by which many of their people are confronted insidiously almost every day. In a word: the pastor and his people do not know each other! And so, when the shepherd leads, the sheep don't follow him. These clergymen know well, as the outcome of diligent study, the domains of History, Apologetics and Exegetics,—on any of these subjects they could pass a most creditable examination; but they don't sufficiently understand MEN, and so not a few of the thinking anxious toilers who listen to their sermons remain practically uninfluenced by them. Is this result singular? The very same catastrophe happened in the later experience of the early church, and it arose from the very same causes. On the one hand stood the

primitive christian teachers, and on the other the great mass of Jews, Greeks and Romans: and unhappily neither party quite understood the other. So, before very long, they began actually to hate each other. Denunciation took the place of persuasion and invitation, mutual distrust arose, and immediately the work of Christ's Church was imperiled and restricted, even where it was not permanently arrested. In the middle ages, we find the same thing. Unhappily the same mistake is bearing the same fruit still, and in other countries quite as certainly as in Germany; but the fact remains that the pastors of the land must in some way get into closer personal touch with their people, if the dangers of the present serious crisis are to be successfully surmounted.

Then (2) the Parish system of the Empire must be immediately overhauled and re-adjusted, and the number of fully ordained ministers must as rapidly as possible be doubled and even quadrupled. The huge size of many of the present charges is simply absurd. So extended are they and so altogether unwieldy, that it is next to impossible for a pastor to know more than the fraction of his people. What is to be thought of a Parish containing 100,000 souls, which yet has only a single church building, and the needs of which community have to be looked after by one minister and two assistants! Or take another Parish that contains 40,000 people: the clergyman in charge of it told a friend of mine that of at least 38,000 of his flock he knew practically nothing. Parishes of 20,000 or 30,000 each are nothing extraordinary. A city pastor in Canada knows what it means to be rushed, and to have to seem to undervalue opportunities which he recognises to be of the very first importance; but what sort of chance has a man, under such conditions as prevail here, to discharge the demands that are ceaselessly made upon him? Even the pastoral visitation required in cases of absolute necessity is excessive. The burials and funeral addresses in a large Parish, in the course of a single year, reach all the way from 200 to 400 or 500. Is it any wonder that the tired worker is often at his very wit's end, and that, far from inviting an aggressive spiritual campaign, he is always aware that already he is hopelessly overworked. And so,—as a quite opposite outcome,—the holy fire that glows in his own heart is not unlikely gradually to burn dim, if indeed it does not go out.

Yet further (3), there are various places where, for purely local reasons, the minister stands separated from his people, and so does not manage very effectively to influence them. In Prussian Poland, for example, just in so far as the clergy yield obedience to the mandates of the civil government, they are to that extent discredited in the eyes of those about them, who are seeking if possible to save themselves from complete national extinction. Even in Prussia itself, a too close association with the powers that be has been found to awaken many unforeseen and hurtful antagonisms, and thus greatly to impede and interrupt the church's distinctive work.

It is considerations such as the foregoing, and others which cannot now be specified, which make one somewhat apprehensive concerning the future of the religious life of Germany. The times of unparalleled plenty, which have of late so largely contributed to swell the material

resources of the country, seem likely to undergo a change for the worse before very long. Leading trade newspapers here are at present uttering some very gloomy forecasts. The recent failure of several Banks has not only severely shaken public confidence, but it has seriously crippled the projected action of various prominent financiers. It is beyond denial that the abundance of money which has been so characteristic of the last few years, the expensive habits that have been formed, the disposition to indulge in display, the spirit of pride and self-complacency that has become developed, and the practice of rigid mechanical conformity to established custom, will make the pinch all the more bitter and testing when it comes. How will the people stand the strain? Above all, how will the church meet and bear it? Will there be any sudden and unexpected surrender? Will there be any temporary eclipse of the faith? And what will the ultimate outcome be?

Personally I am profoundly convinced that what Germany needs today,—more than anything else, more than Army or Navy, more than the further multiplication of riches or the expansion of her Colonies,—is another Reformation. May it come to her during the quiet days of peace, and not in the face of confused uproar and stress and storm! Germany needs another Luther, and even a more thoroughgoing Luther than the first. Within the last four hundred years, notwithstanding all her magnificent achievements, this land has drifted far away from the old moorings. The great Reformer did not claim to speak as a man whose own life was faultless: he showed patience therefore towards shortcomings: but certainly there are many things in the life of the Fatherland today at which he would instinctively shudder. Nevertheless the general outlook, even though it will be admitted that I have painted in the darker shades with a very liberal hand, is illumined by the growing light of many an enlarging hope. Not all of those who crowd the pews and aisles of the Churches are careless about the things of Christ's Kingdom. A more earnest note than heretofore, though still faint, may be detected in many quarters. There is a restless spirit abroad,—happily in the Church, as well as outside of it: and men who have learned what it means to be thoroughly disenchanted of the world are inquiring where they can find Jesus. Many of them too are confessedly anxious to know Him through the enlightenment of a personal interview, and they are at last willing to become His disciples if He successfully authenticates His claims upon their allegiance. They have come to realize that religion is something more than an elaborate creed, and the maintenance of a respectable standard of daily conduct. They long to feel that their deeper spiritual life is being reached and nourished and strengthened. To me the present seems therefore to be the unique opportunity of the Church in this land. It has now the ear of thinking men who are seeking for the light. Surely the preaching of cold ethics may fairly yield place to the preaching of the cross. Surely the preacher himself will at last see to it that he gets into "close grips" with his people, lest he sacrifice an opportunity which comes but once in a lifetime. If on the other hand the Church should let the present occasion slip: if it should fail to