

PARISH MAGAZINES.

Sir,—Please allow me to add to the information of your issue of 23rd ult. regarding the Stamford Parish Magazine. So far from our people not reading such matter, we are changing from a monthly (the Dawn of Day, localized) at 25c per annum, to a weekly, the "Church Army Gazette," at 50c. The reasons for the change are partly that the irregularity in the receipt of the "Dawn of Day" prevented its usefulness in giving notice of coming events. Our services and church social arrangements are now regularly established and well known. Our distance from a local printer caused much trouble and loss of time every month. The programme of the "Dawn of Day" for the coming year did not appear very attractive, and its teaching is sometimes beyond the comprehension of the country reader. The "Church Army Gazette" is well and favourably known here, and I think it will do more good.

R. H. ARCHER.

CHURCH CHOIRS.

Sir,—I desire to point out some few facts in connection with church choirs which are either overlooked by clergy and laity, or so generally taken for granted, as to excite no interest or attention. I speak as one of the great body of singers who sing without reward or hope of reward, to whom the work is attractive as a recreation or a hobby. There are some of us who claim a higher motive, and who would consider service in the choir a legitimate and acceptable department of lay work. But for some reason this view is not encouraged, even by the clergy. In fact, to judge by the amount of criticism and censure levelled at choirs, it would not be unreasonable to suppose that they exist as a necessary evil within the church, and that their membership is composed of men and women who are altogether lacking in ordinary Christian graces, quite unworthy to be recognized as lay workers, and apparently not worth taking the trouble to evangelize. Some time ago I listened to an address on "Church Choirs," delivered by a Canadian Bishop. It was caustic and critical throughout, and in the course of his remarks the Bishop referred to the words of some witty dean, who had stated "that the people came into church through the front door, the clergy through the vestry, but the devil—through the choir." In fairness to the Bishop it must be said that his remark was intended to be jocular, but the audience received it with such demonstrations of approval as to indicate that it expressed their sentiments exactly. No doubt it did. Make disparaging remarks about choirs almost anywhere, and they will be endorsed at once. Lest I may be accused of over-stating the case, I quote the following from the pen of the musical editor of the Montreal "Metropolitan," who writes in the issue of Dec. 18, 1897.

"Speaking of voluntary choirs, we state emphatically we have no sympathy with non-payment of boys, ladies and gentlemen. With reference to the boys, it is all very well if the boys' parents are members of the Church and make it a rule that their boys shall attend regularly all practices and services; but what is the case generally? The boys in such cases are generally the sons of parents blessed with plenty of this world's goods, and from a musical standpoint are the worst material any organist has to contend with. Their attendance at rehearsal is wretched, caused by parties, skating, and other amusements. They leave town for Lachine and other places on the riverside in May, and do not return until October, and if an organist had only boys of this class for his choir, he could not possibly maintain his position three months. As far as we know the boy choirs in this city are made up of the children of parents in humble circumstances. We say, pay them some small amount; it will help at home. And why should not a church pay its choir as it pays its clergyman, organist and sexton? The congregations of the churches in Montreal do not speak to the choir members. They do not know them, and don't want to know them. As for the choir members (boys, ladies

and gentlemen), we can state from actual experience that they have the same feelings towards the congregation. Choirs sing for their organist, who is always their friend. As for singing for any clergyman or congregation, whilst there are individual cases of such, the great bulk of voluntary choir members sing for their organist and for the pleasure derived therefrom. We admit that choir members should have higher thoughts in joining choirs; but a little taste of the indifference of congregations towards choirs completely eradicates any high motives."

The writer of the above views the matter from the standpoint of a professional musician. He realizes that anything like fair appreciation of the work of a choir is not to be expected from the average congregation, who "do not speak to the members—don't know them, and don't want to know them." Certainly, in such cases choir membership had better be made a matter of business at once if the singers are to retain any self-respect.

What is the status of the volunteer chorister? The fact is he has no status at all. He may be a Churchman and a member of the vestry, but as a member of the choir he owes his allegiance not to the Church, nor the rector, nor the congregation, but to the choirmaster, who in his turn is an employee of the vestry. Under some circumstances this may work well enough. The choirmaster may himself be a Churchman, a man of some culture, with a proper appreciation of the dignity and importance of music in worship, and capable of inspiring his choir with right motives in the discharge of their duties. On the other hand, he may be anything but a Churchman—a heretic or a heathen; nothing more than a professional musician to whom the music of the church is a "performance"—so much work for so much money. Sooner or later his ideas of what constitute "attractive" music conflict with the opinions of the rector and congregation, and even with the rubric; and then there is "trouble with the choir," every member being blamed, although, as a matter of fact, they have no voice whatever in the direction of affairs.

My contention is that the choir should be organized as a definite institution in the Church, and of the Church, with the rector as its head ex-officio. While it would be arbitrary and inconvenient to exclude all but Churchmen, its members should at least owe their allegiance to the church, and should be encouraged and instructed in every possible way to appreciate their responsibilities as leaders of an important part of Divine worship. It is an astonishing fact that any other system should have been allowed to develop. As a Church we are particular about the men and the means employed in our services. We do not allow unconsecrated men to administer the sacraments, nor do we permit the priesthood to alter the liturgy. But we engage organists and choirmasters, who may be at the best entirely lacking in sympathy with the Church or its liturgy, and we practically say: "Take possession of the organ and the chancel, select a choir as best you can, and from where you please, and do as you like generally." Then we express surprise that our choir is only a musical society, which gives "performances" every Sunday!

Let the clergy and the laity also cease finding fault with the worldliness and irreverence of choirs. Let us have proper organization, and let the members of the choir be encouraged to come to church to worship and to sing to the glory of God, instead of giving a performance, under the direction of some musician, for the edification—I was about to say amusement—of the congregation. If a choir is simply a musical society, it is absurd to expect its members to be examples of Godliness and leaders of worship.

WILLIAM Q. PHILLIPS.

Clinton, Ont., Dec. 27, 1897.

Family Reading.

SOME FAMOUS YOUNG MEN.

Bacon was a member of Parliament at twenty-three.

Longfellow's first poetry was published at thirteen.

Shakespeare left school at fourteen; John Bright at fifteen.

Scott entered the fair realm of literature at twenty-five. At thirty-four he was the most popular poet of the day.

Galileo discovered the isochronism of the pendulum at nineteen.

Byron's first poems appeared at nineteen. At twenty-four he reached the highest pinnacle of his literary fame.

Wilberforce entered Parliament at twenty-one.

"Pitt the younger" was in Parliament at twenty-one.

Burns' first volume was published at twenty-seven.

Napoleon at twenty-seven commanded the army in Italy.

Tennyson at thirty-three took that high stand among the poets he held till his death.

Brougham, that strange and wonderful phenomenon, entered school at seven, and graduated at the head of his class when twelve. At twenty-five he was a noted scientist.

GOOD-BYE, OLD YEAR.

Good-bye, old Year! How many a heart
Hast steeped in joy or filled with tears.
One thrill for all—before we part,
For mem'ry's Home through coming years.

Good-bye, old Year! Thy world of Love
Glow's once again on memory's wing;
Thy world of pain, the Heavens above
Will hide in flowers, with songs of spring.
That star of Hope beams out to-night—
Go forth for that with ringing cheer:—
Uproot the wrong! Uphold the right!
And bring to all a Bright New Year.

With brimming hearts we welcome thee,
With Love's true eye, and Manhood's hand!
With these, for all there'll ever be
A gate to Heaven from ev'ry land!
To all "A Bright New Year."

THE CERTITUDE OF FAITH.

The sharp sword of logic may cut off the weeds of doubt, but it leaves the roots in the ground. Argument, however convincing, ends in probability, not in certainty. Nay, if my certainty that Jesus is the Son of God and my Saviour depends upon argument, what argument has created, argument can destroy. And are any of you prepared to say that that can ever be destroyed? No, my friends, reason has its province, and I will tell you what the province of reason is in its relation to certitude. It can cut a way through the dense jungle of difficulties; it can cut a clear way for the soul to reach its Lord; it can do for the soul what the friends of the blind man did for him in the Gospels; it can take the soul and conduct it into the presence of Jesus. But when reason has done that, it has done all it can; it never yet opened the blind eyes. It may lead me to Christ, but when it has led me into His presence its work is done. And now you see we have reached the point at which we are able to discern the ground of certitude. Reason has led the soul into the very presence of Christ, just as the friends of the blind man led him to the Saviour. Yes, but when Christ laid His hand on those poor sealed eye-balls, and in a moment the blind eyes opened, and the blind man, blind till then, saw the fair earth and the glory of the sky, the faces of his friends, and the face of his Saviour, saw it all for the first time, he wants his friends no longer; he stands himself seeing Christ, and he can say in answer to all the doubts and difficulties of those who oppose him, "One thing I know, whereas I was blind, now I see."—G. S. Barrett, D.D.

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