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THE CHURCHMAN

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OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND*

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ART. V.—WORKING-MEN IN EVANGELISTIC MOVEMENTS.

"HOW TO REACH THE MASSES OF THE PEOPLE BY ADDITIONAL MINISTRATIONS OF LAYMEN OR OF DEACONS, AND BY SERVICES SUITABLE TO THEIR HABITS AND EDUCATION."¹

THE subject for consideration is one which, in the main, has occupied the minds of Churchmen for some years. It has been discussed with great earnestness and ability in Convocation, at Church Congresses, Diocesan Conferences, and Parochial Councils; but in most of these debates it has seemed to me that existing agencies have been lost sight of.

Men have spoken as if no means had been adopted for reaching the masses of our people, whereas in nearly all our great towns and cities, and throughout our country districts, extraordinary efforts of almost every kind have been put forth. Special Services and courses of sermons in our churches have been tried; Services in theatres, music-halls, mission-halls, in the open air, in warehouses, in large works, in the homes of the people, and even down in our mines! Besides all these, other agencies, equally important in their way, have been in operation, such as Mothers' Meetings, Day Schools, Sunday Schools, Night Schools, Bible Readings, Young Men and Women's Associations, Church of England Temperance Societies, the distribution of pure literature, and above all the visitation from house to house by the Clergy, Scripture Readers, Bible Women, and male and female District Visitors. Go where we may, visit most of our parishes from one end of the land to the other, and some or all of these agencies will be found at work; and as a result, a considerable portion of the masses are being won back to the Church, and the whole body of our people more or less influenced. I may mention that in the rural deanery of Sheffield, at least 75 per cent. of those who attend church are working-class people.

Still, according to the religious census which was taken in some of our large towns a few years ago, it was discovered that on a certain Sunday the majority of our population was not found in any place of worship.

The question is, how can the National Church affect these masses who appear to be outside Christian influence? I would say, by all means let the existing agencies be carried on in a prayerful spirit. Let all the extraordinary efforts which are

¹ The Venerable the Archdeacon of Sheffield has kindly supplied us with that portion of his paper read at the Diocesan Conference at York (October 29) which relates to the co-operation of working-men.—ED.

now being put forth be continued, if possible, with increased energy and zeal. But experience leads me to believe that we must enlist the co-operation of other agents hitherto but little recognised in the Church of England. I allude to those who may themselves be said to be among the masses. The Clergy, Scripture Readers, Bible Women, Lay Readers, Tract Distributors, Lay Evangelists, have done, and are doing, a blessed work, but there is a power amongst working-men which, if it can be added to the work of those just named, would, I feel convinced, have a marvellous influence in bringing the truths of Christianity to bear upon that class of the community which it has been found so difficult to move. This idea was brought out at the late Church Congress which was held in Carlisle, and was urged with much force as a means for the Church to adopt. I am thankful to be able to say that the experiment has been tried, with very cheering results, in my own parish.

A few years ago a mission-hall, capable of holding 700 or 800, was erected in the most thickly populated part of the parish. A clergyman was appointed to take charge of it and conduct the services. He was also to visit in the district surrounding the building, with a view of inducing people who attended no place of worship to avail themselves of the services which were established at their very doors. He was a young man of talent and energy, and had the assistance of a Bible Woman and a number of District Visitors, who worked with diligence and zeal, and visited from house to house. He had a bright and cheerful service, and his sermons were of a popular character. He succeeded in gathering around him a congregation of those who were either in the habit of attending church, or who could have been persuaded to do so: but the class of people for whose benefit the services had been established were not to be seen there. From time to time special efforts were made to get them in, yet all to no purpose. About twelve months ago, however, it was thought advisable to secure the assistance of some working-men who were members of a Bible Class, which numbers about two hundred and fifty, and which meets from eight to ten every Sunday morning in the same building. This idea was brought before them, and a considerable number volunteered their services. They undertook to try and influence their neighbours and friends. A large choir was formed of those who were musical, and it was arranged that certain members should assist in giving addresses and in other ways. The men became greatly interested in the work, a system of visitation was organized, and in a short time the room began to fill with the right class of people. This has continued now for many months with unabated success, so that on Sunday evenings working-men

(many of whom had not been for years in any place of worship) are seen with their wives and families crowding into the hall. Fourteen of the men were presented last March to his Grace the Archbishop for confirmation, and they have ever since been constant attendants at the Holy Communion in the old parish church.

This movement, I believe, will grow, and become very influential for good, as many of the men thus brought in will become centres of Christian influence, in the workshop, in the warehouse, in the forge, and indeed in every department of manual or skilled labour. As we all know, when once a working-man is influenced by true religion, he becomes very real and downright in his profession of Christ. It is astonishing to see the force and power which he displays in addressing his own class. There is a point and reality in what he says often lacking in those who have had more advantages in training and mental culture. His grammar may not be the most correct, his diction the most refined, nor his manner of speech the most polished; but there is a directness in his utterances and a sincerity in his manner which go straight home to the hearts of his hearers. I do not for a moment wish to advocate the indiscriminate employment of working men in evangelistic work; but I do say that wherever a man be found with natural gifts, and his heart influenced by God's Holy Spirit, there is an agent which the Church would do well to enlist in her service.

The Salvation Army, about which I do not wish to express an opinion, favourable or otherwise, has shown what can be achieved by working-men, and how they influence their fellows. There is a latent power among working-men which, if only drawn forth, would, with the blessing of God, move the thousands and tens of thousands of those who are not so much opposed to the Church as they are indifferent to its work.

We want every kind of agency to meet the demands of the times. We want our scholarly and able Divines, our eloquent and impressive Preachers, our diligent and earnest Pastors, our hard-working and persevering Lay Readers, our self-denying and loving female Visitors, our devoted and sympathizing Sunday and Ragged-School Teachers; but in addition to all these we want the experience and common-sense of our hard-headed working-men to reach the masses of our people. By all means let us have our well-ordered and impressive services in our parish churches. Let everything there be done decently and in order. Let the music be congregational and hearty, let the prayers of our services be fervently offered up, let the preaching be heartfelt and Scriptural. Let all the various

parochial organizations be made as complete as possible, and be systematically worked; let the gospel be preached in the open air, in our courts and lanes, in our highways and byways; but by all means let us enlist the co-operation of the great army of Christian working-men. Let us establish services in which they can assist, and which the poorest and most ignorant can understand and appreciate. Then, I believe, with the blessing of God, will the masses be reached and the kingdom of Christ advanced.

J. E. BLAKENY.



ART. VI.—THE PROPHET JEREMIAH, AND HIS WRITINGS.

THE name of Jeremiah stands, if not highest, yet dearest to his race in the honoured list of their ancient prophets. His voice rises from amidst the ruins of Jerusalem in its first terrible overthrow by the Chaldæans, bewailing the sorrows of his countrymen led off into captivity, but in the midst of his bitter grief cheering them with the promise of a joyful return after the purifying exile of seventy years. In his lifetime the stern censor of his contemporaries, he had to bear the opposition and ill-treatment inevitably allotted to all true and earnest reformers; but with his death there came the usual reaction. Persecuted while alive, he was erelong almost worshipped when gone. The justice of his rebukes was admitted by the sons of those who had resented them; his tender patriotism was recognised; his yearning solicitude for the future restoration of his people seemed to point him out as still, from a higher sphere, their guardian and friend. Legends respecting him multiplied apace. He had hidden away the ark in security till the days of the Messiah. He would return as the herald of the Anointed of God. He was the patron-saint of the nation.

The prophet was born in the village of Anathoth, three miles north of Jerusalem—a spot belonging to the priests, as part of the Church lands—and being a child of a priest, was consequently by birth a priest himself. His father's name was Hilkipah, and it may be that he was thus the son of the high-priest under Josiah, so famous as the counsellor and friend of that famous king. The respect which the prophet as a rule received from the princes and kings of Judah—the contrast between his treatment and that of his contemporary Urijah, who was put to death for uttering the same opinions as those ceaselessly advanced by Jeremiah, and the fact that Baruch