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CHURCHMAN

A Monthly Magazine

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which is prominent among us now, it must nevertheless be acknowledged—and the Church may well learn a lesson from the fact—that it has grasped the centre-point of the Christian message in taking, as it were, “for an helmet the hope of salvation.” Let the Church go to the suffering masses in our great towns, or to the heathen masses under our rule, and proclaim to them the hope of salvation in its widest sense—deliverance from moral evil here, from physical and political evil so far as that moral salvation is attained, and perfect salvation hereafter—and it cannot fail to command a welcome hearing. The glory of a spiritual deliverance may be poured into the poorest home, may illuminate the gloomiest cellar, and soothe the most suffering bed. And, for ourselves, let us endeavour to grasp this aspect of our Master’s message more firmly. It would bestow a new energy on our Christian character if we lived more clearly, day by day, in the sense that we were the possessors of this Gospel; that we have the Spirit of God to give us ever-increasing deliverance from our moral evil; and that, in proportion as we yield to His influence, shall we be blessed ourselves, be a blessing to others here, and be abundantly rewarded hereafter. The message, indeed, is to the poor; but there is no man or woman who is not poor—none who can afford to stand alone, none who is not liable to fall without the Divine help, none who does not need the guidance and strength of the Spirit of God. But to all who are thus sensible of their poverty, the promise stands as the everlasting Gospel, “Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in Me.”

HENRY WACE.



ART. II.—PASTORAL VISITATION IN COUNTRY PARISHES.

I MUST begin by apologizing for the necessarily egotistical way in which I am almost compelled to write the following paper. It is well-nigh impossible to write on such a subject except in the first person, inasmuch as the sentiments expressed are, for the most part, the result of personal experience of nearly forty years in the ministry.

And, at the outset, let me say that I think that pastoral visitation should always be considered by us, the clergy, as holding a very foremost place in our ministerial work. I look at the matter from the standpoint of one who has the care of a country parish committed to him; and I am well aware that

in very large towns it may be almost impossible for the Rector to do much in the way of parochial visiting. There are so many committees to be worked, so much parochial machinery which requires his personal superintendence, that it may be difficult, if not impossible, for him to find time for much visiting of his people. And yet I may be pardoned for saying that I think it would be well if the chief pastor of a flock were sometimes to delegate more of the committee work of his parish, and less of the pastoral visiting to his curates than is usually the case. The visiting of the poor is supposed to be very easy work, which anyone can do. An inexperienced man, fresh from the University, is placed down in a parish, and is supposed to be enabled, at any rate, to do the visiting by the mere light of nature. I believe this to be a great mistake. I believe this, like all other parts of ministerial work, to need the guiding hand and faithful advice of one who has learned, by many years' experience, the art of parochial visiting—for art it is. There are many rocks and shoals to be avoided. We visit, not merely as the ordinary acquaintance or the kind friend, but we visit in our ministerial capacity as those set over our flocks in the Lord. You sometimes hear of parishes being over-visited, that the people are never left alone, and so on. I do not, for my part, much believe in the existence of over-visited parishes; I am sure there are hundreds under-visited to one over-visited. Poor people (to use the common phrase) like being visited often. They like to see their parson often in their midst, going in and out amongst them, ready at hand if they have anything special to bring before his notice. Over and over again it has happened to myself to be waylaid in going down into the village of which I am the incumbent, by the remark, "I was almost sure you would be passing about this time, sir. Can I speak to you for a few minutes?"

Nor can the importance of this matter be exaggerated. Surely it should remind us clergy of a question put to us in the most solemn moment of our lives:

Will you use both public and private monitions and exhortations, as well to the sick as to the whole within your cures, as need shall require and occasion shall be given?

To which we gave answer:

I will, the Lord being my helper.

Perhaps I may be allowed in this paper to give a few simple hints for those, more especially, who are just beginning this work. I imagine myself speaking to one anxious to learn the very A B C of pastoral visiting.

I must then begin at the very beginning, and remind you to knock at the door of the house before you lift the latch. Be

it over so humble, an Englishman's house is his castle, and the poor like to have this recognised.

Take off your hat as you enter the cottage, even although you afterwards put it on again because of the draught, with some such words as, "If you will allow me, I will put on my hat if that door is left open." The poor never like to be treated *de haut en bas*; and though the master of the house will sometimes sit with his hat on without removing it at your entrance, it may help to teach him manners if you first take yours off, as you would on entering the house of a rich man.

Then, further, if a meal is on the table, try to turn your eyes in another direction; do not appear to be prying or anxious to find out either what they have or have not for dinner.

With these preliminary remarks, I desire to systematize what I have to say under a few heads:

I. First, then, in importance is the visiting of those sick unto death. I take it for granted—as, thank God, I may—that the days are gone by when the clergyman waits to be sent for. We all know how loath the poor are to do this. They suppose, often most unwarrantably, that the clergyman knows at once when they are ill; and we must be careful to keep our ears well open to hear the least rumour of any particular illness. To visit the bedsides of the dying is a great privilege. Oftentimes you have the sick man or the sick woman all alone (and this can generally be arranged by the pastor, who is well known, simply saying, "Do not trouble yourself to come up;" "I know my way," and the like), and a great advantage it is. Intercourse is free and unreserved. Religious ministrations are looked for and expected. They are not thrust in head and shoulders, perhaps rather out-of-place, but seem to come naturally. The sick man is laid by from his work: he has time given him for thought, time for reading, or for hearing books read, which, in a busy life, it is so difficult to find. Would he like help in this? Would he like special passages of Scripture pointed out suited to his case? And so the reading of the Word of God comes naturally, and prayer as naturally closes the ministration.

And here comes in a very important question. What sort of passages of Scripture should be read to a sick or dying man? It is impossible to dogmatize. The parish priest must know his people, and must suit his medicine to individual cases. The hardened must be awakened, the terrors of the Lord, if necessary, sounded in their ears; the timid and the broken-hearted must be comforted; the cloak must be torn off from the hypocrite, the arrow driven homo with a "Thou art the man." But whatever be the individual diagnosis and

the consequent treatment, I am sure that we must never forget that we are ministers of the Gospel of Love, and that, above all, we must ever hold up Jesus Christ, our crucified Redeemer, as the one Saviour of all true penitents, Who would not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should be converted and live.

With regard to the duration of a pastoral visit, it is well to remember that the sick patient will soon get wearied—better to leave him too soon than after too long a visit; and much better to look in frequently, if only for a few minutes, than to make a very lengthened stay. This should specially be borne in mind in infectious cases, and then it is well to sit between the bed and the window, so that the wind may blow on to the patient from you, not *vice versâ*. Oftentimes a single verse is all that the dying man can bear; but this may be chosen by the skilful visitor so that it may be suggestive of special topics suited to the particular case.

It is not necessary to say anything special as to the administration of the Holy Communion, but I wish to say one word as to the use of the Order for the Visitation of the Sick. Even if not used in its entirety, it is most helpful and suggesting. The poor like extempore prayers, and it may be well to offer them up; but it seems to me that for the clergyman himself it is an inexpressible comfort at such a time to use words which for years past have been offered up under like circumstances with comfort and profit to those who have heard them. The commendatory prayer should be learned by heart, and one realizes the communion of saints in communion in prayer beside a dying man.

II. I pass naturally from the visiting of the sick to the ordinary daily visiting of those who are in health. Some persons think this a waste of time, and that the clergyman has something else to do than merely pay visits to the women, and talk (as they will do incessantly) about their ailments and ordinary topics. I venture entirely to differ from such an opinion. Of course in a large town population, where the list of the sick and dying is so long that all available time is taken up in it, they must have the preference over those in health. But in small country parishes I am confident that constant, systematic, regular visiting amongst the whole, is of the very utmost importance. How can the clergy expect their parishioners to send for them when ill, look upon them as friends, treat them and confide in them as such, when they have not by constant visiting broken the ice, and removed the *gêne* of a fresh acquaintanceship. The face must be familiar before the sympathy can be reckoned upon. If previous interest in the details of daily life has been shown, the pastor

is much more likely to be able to visit in sickness, ministerially and successfully, than if he has to begin as a comparative stranger. If he is in and out of their cottages as a friend, they are assured of his real and true sympathy when needed. Talking to them about their interests, their children, and the threads of their daily life, will make them believe in the reality of that sympathy as not merely professional. If they believe in their pastor, half the battle is gained. He does not visit them as the rate-collector, or to obtain Government statistics, but as the true pastor whose interest is real in the sheep and lambs of his flock. Let me say how important I think it is to discourage inexorably any gossip about neighbours. If they are encouraged, the poor will tell tales by the hour; but once let it be seen that the clergyman comes to talk about them, and not about their neighbours, and they will soon acquiesce in the fact.

It seems to me that ministrations to the whole are much more difficult than ministrations to the sick. But it must be borne in mind that the poor need spiritual instruction of a very elementary character, and rather expect the clergyman to suggest it if there be any opening for spiritual ministrations.

III. I pass on to the time of visiting. Of course in the case of sickness, no time need be specially chosen. The sick man is always ready for the pastoral visit; but in ordinary visiting of the whole, I think it is well to remember that the poor cannot like to be interrupted in their household work, any more than we like to be interrupted in our business. The afternoon seems to me the best time. You avoid meal-times. Dinner is cleared, and tea not begun, and the children are at school. As a rule, Saturday is a bad day for visiting, on account of the children being at home. Some clergy think much of evening visiting. I do not like it myself, except in case of illness. The man comes home worn-out with his day's work, and may think the parson comes spying, if he drops in unawares in the evening. Some years ago, I went throughout the parish under my charge, beginning family prayers in so many cottages each evening. But then I invariably made an appointment for a particular time, and was expected accordingly.

As a minor matter, it seems to me of importance that we should never appear to be in a hurry. No doubt we are all of us more or less busy men, but the poor have no idea that we have anything particular to do, and have still less idea of the value of time. Often and often have I chafed inwardly in a cottage below stairs, while the good woman above was making herself tidy. The minute in which she promises to

be down, swells to ten, and one longs to be off to some one else. It is wiser not—wiser to exercise self-discipline—lest they should think you fussy or impatient. They do not believe in pressure of business, and will think the parson did not really care to see them.

Perhaps I may be allowed to mention here a difficulty which has occurred to me once or twice in my ministerial career. I hear of a sick case—perhaps in the ranks of the middle class. I go to the house; see the parents; but the sick one “is so easily upset, so nervous, or only just awake—the doctor says she must be kept so quiet;” and in effect you are kept out of the room. I go again, of course, the next day or in a day or two, as the case may be, or as other engagements permit. The same thing occurs as before, and that for two or three times successively. What is to be done? In one case which I have in my mind’s eye, the house where the sick patient lived was a mile and a half from my house, and after two or three ineffectual attempts, I said to the mother, quietly but firmly: “You know I shall be very glad to come and see your daughter, and read with her, and pray with her, if it would be any help or comfort to her; but you must be aware that the mere coming here and returning home takes the best part of an hour. My time is very much occupied, and I do not feel justified in coming so repeatedly merely to ask how your daughter is. I would grudge no time or labour, if you will allow me to visit her ministerially.” The justice of what I said was recognised, and I was allowed to see her.

In another case, I acted in the same way, and with a similarly good effect. In this latter case, the sick person did not recover, and I ministered to her up to the last, and was sent for over and over again at her express wish.

Of course, in a case of this kind, great care must be taken to avoid the appearance even of being tetchy. I think it was the Bishop of Bedford who said, at one of the Church Congresses, that a clergyman must never take offence. This witness is true. He must be case-hardened, prepared absolutely to pass by little innuendoes, and refuse to be angry even though he may think he has a right to be so.

If for any reason a parishioner is angry with him, it is well occasionally to try to bring such an one round by circuitous methods. Agricultural poor are not easily persuaded by argument, and explanations often exasperate. It happened to me once to speak to a mother about her son, who I feared had been intoxicated on a particular day. I had no doubt whatever as to the fact, or I should not have mentioned it. The mother denied it, and I did not pursue the subject; but I missed her at a service in an outlying hamlet, which she was in the habit

of attending, for two or three Sundays afterwards in succession. I went to her house, found that her son had been taken ill and had gone to the hospital. On inquiry I found that she was to see him on Saturday, and I then asked her to stop after church on Sunday, to tell me how her son was, taking it for granted that she would come to the service. The *ruse* succeeded. She came to the service, and her wrath seemed to have passed away without being deepened by explanations and counter-explanations.

IV. Another point worthy of notice is, that peculiar opportunities should be diligently observed. The parson should be on the look-out for something happening in the family which will call for a visit, that he may show that he has a real interest in what is going on in their families. A birth; banns being put up; fresh mourning-clothes being seen; a child going out to a first place; one who has left for service seen in church again; the soldier son at home for a furlough; the railway-porter on his two days' holiday—all these give occasion for a visit, and should be taken advantage of as occasion may serve.

V. Conventionality should be avoided. It is not necessary that a clergyman at the moment he enters a cottage should put on a forbidding grave aspect. Undertakers may think this necessary as part of their profession. Not so with us. Of course if sickness, and still more if death, be in the house, the manner of the visiting pastor will be more or less subdued; but in the case of sickness there is no reason why he should not be cheerful. Quite the contrary. Quiet, of course, in his movements he should be; but it would be well if the sick one, whose time must pass somewhat monotonously, were led to look forward to his visit, as, in its general character, cheering. It is well occasionally to take a few flowers. It shows at any rate a wish to please. The great point is to be natural. It is not necessary to interlard the conversation with texts of Scripture, but it is quite possible, and should be our aim, to give the most ordinary conversation an elevating tone, without making use of set phrases which may be quite foreign to the speaker's usual habits. It may be that a text will be apposite, and come in naturally. If so, well and good. The quoting of it will not be forced. The chief point to be aimed at, is to be real and natural in our every look and word.

VI. Pastoral visitation should be systematic. Of course sickness and accidental circumstances constitute a claim for exceptional visiting; but it is well to go regularly through the parish over and over again. The pastor gets thus to know the details of his parishioners' lives, and assures them all of his real interest in their welfare, and of his readiness at any

time to come to them if called upon to do so. Systematically to pass over the doors of those to whom he knows his visits are not so welcome as they may be elsewhere, is to go far towards stereotyping this feeling, and to widen the breach between himself and that particular member of his flock. Even the worst cases in the parish expect as a right to be visited in sickness. It is one great advantage that the parochial parish priest has, that the whole parish, not an eclectic portion of it, is committed to his pastoral care. The people recognise and feel this.

Not long ago I heard the case of a man who lived in a country town. He was a bad character, never entered church, and the clergyman was never welcomed to his house. He fell ill, and the rector did not like, as it were, to force his visits. But daily as he passed the house, he asked the man's daughter how her father was. One day the girl said to him: "Father says it is very kind of you asking after him, but that you never come and see him." It is not necessary to add that no further hint was required to make him gladly enter the door thus unexpectedly thrown open to him.

VII. But if pastoral visitation is to be systematic, it certainly must not be perfunctory. Visiting is not the mere going from cottage to cottage so as to get through so much in a given time, with the same passage of Scripture and the same prayer for all. The individual characters of those visited must be studied, and they must be dealt with accordingly. Here the communicants' list will be of great use, so that, if opportunity arises, a word in season may be said on this point to any backslider, to too infrequent a communicant, or to one who has never approached the Lord's Table at all. An effort at any rate must be made so that the visit may be really profitable by its character being adapted to the particular case in hand.

Pastoral visitation of such a character as this is, indeed, no easy matter. It must be made a matter of prayer. It can only be carried out by the preventing and assisting grace of God. Our speech cannot be seasoned with salt, or our influence in connection with our pastoral visitation be of an elevating character, if we are cold and formal and self-reliant about it. The old saying is that a house-going parson makes a church-going people; but that house-going must be wisely and judiciously carried on, or it may be worse than useless. A hasty or angry word, or any partial dealing—say in the matter of school-discipline in connection with the parents—may undo the effects of many a sermon from the pulpit. It is because I am so convinced that it is really a very difficult matter efficiently to carry out this part of our pastoral work, that I

have ventured to write this paper. And yet, though difficult it may be—though difficult it is—there is One Who can make the weak things of the world confound the things which are mighty; and Who by the powerless blast of trumpets can cast down the strong walls of a fortress. Thank God, help if sought from Him is never withheld!

GEORGE HENRY SUMNER.



ART. III.—SAINTS' DAYS IN THE CHURCH'S YEAR.

I. JANUARY. CONVERSION OF ST. PAUL.

A. THE LORD'S CHOSEN VESSEL.

"A chosen vessel unto Me, to bear My Name before the Gentiles."—
ACTS ix. 15.

THOUGH the intervals which divide the Saints' Days of our Christian Year one from another are irregular, yet in each month some one of these Saints is definitely presented to us, to claim it as a peculiar possession. In some instances such candidates for our reverent attention are more than one. June is made very rich by the memories of St. Barnabas, St. John the Baptist, and St. Peter; and in December the great Christmas Festival is surrounded by the threefold presence of St. Thomas, St. Stephen, and St. John.

In this first month of the year there is no doubt as to the Apostolic figure that arrests our attention. Our series of "Meditations on Saints' Days" must begin with St. Paul; and one topic will be enough for this beginning. The words quoted above are not the whole of the sentence addressed by the Lord to Ananias at Damascus, when he, who was presently to be Paul the Apostle, was a trembling penitent in darkness and perplexity, and when Ananias, who knew him only as a fierce persecutor of the Christians, hesitated to visit him. But this fragment of the sentence contains quite enough in substance and variety for our first and immediate use.

When Ananias had received directions to go to this man to "put his hand on him, that he might receive his sight," with the assurance that he himself had been prepared, by an explanatory vision, to welcome him as "a brother,"¹ Ananias

¹ See Acts xxii. 13, "*Brother Saul.*" The skilful manner in which Ananias is used in this speech ought to receive the closest attention.