

THE
CHURCHMAN

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ART. I.—A COUNTRY CLERGYMAN'S WEEK.

IT is a very common notion that the life of a country clergyman is on the whole a very easy one, and that, as compared with his brother in the town, but little hard work falls to his share; and such doubtless is the case in some parishes buried in the country and with scanty populations; but the following recital of the manner in which a week was spent in a country parish will show that a great variety of work falls to the lot of most country parsons, and that plenty of it is the share of at least some who do not labour in towns.

This variety of work arises not only from the fact that the country vicar or rector is alone in the ministry, and has therefore to conduct all the public services himself, and has, moreover, to undertake all the preparations which these services involve, but also because he has himself to play so many different parts. Not only has he to minister in public and private to the spiritual needs of the people, but he is called upon not infrequently to be their general adviser in matters temporal. On his shoulders will fall in most cases the dispensing of a great deal of charity, and the keeping of a large number of public accounts. He has also to bear a great deal of anxiety which often does not touch a town parson. He is obliged to interest himself in many purely secular matters, such as cricket clubs, flower-shows, etc., which, in a small place, he cannot overlook and cannot altogether leave to others. And in carrying out what he considers his duty in matters secular as well as spiritual, he often brings himself into conflict with some of his parishioners, and this sometimes causes a friction which cannot well be evaded, as it can to some extent in a town parish. There, people who disagree with their clergyman can leave the church and find shelter elsewhere, and so avoid coming into contact

with him ; but this is almost impossible where there is no other church to which they can easily go, and where clergyman and parishioner rub up against one another almost every day. This last remark suggests another country difficulty. In a village, the area of work being so limited, for good or for evil, the personal influence of the clergyman and his family is very largely felt, and after a few years he seems to have reached all whom he is likely to influence ; but, still, he must labour on earnestly, patiently, and prayerfully, although to him it seems as if another voice and another mind filling his place would do more good ; and he must work on in faith, knowing that as long as God keeps him in that particular corner of the vineyard *he*, and no other, is the right man for it.

Another great drawback to attempting any aggressive spiritual efforts in the country is the extreme difficulty of persuading people to come out on the Lord's side. Everyone calls his neighbour by his Christian name ; all have grown up together. How hard it is for some even to come to church ! Men have been known to attend regularly two or even three times a Sunday, and then suddenly to give up entirely, and on inquiry the reason has proved to be that they were so laughed at they could not endure it. And if it be a hard matter to come to church, how much harder for a man to break off his old associations and become a decided Christian ! The fear of man, how great it is ! The groups of mocking companions at the street corners—lions could more easily be faced than they.

Such are some of the special difficulties of ministerial work in rural neighbourhoods ; and now the daily duties of an actual week in December, 1889, are detailed to show what variety makes up the occupation of a country parson. The reader must please pardon the frequent repetition of the autobiographic "I," which is used for the sake of greater clearness.

I am vicar of a parish in one of the home counties, and not very distant from London. The extent of the parish is three miles by two, but the population of under 1,300 people is chiefly centred in a long winding main street with two branch streets, though two cottages are actually three miles apart. I am single-handed, having no curate, but a Scripture-reader visits once a week, and a good band of district visitors report their work monthly.

In recording the doings of the week, I begin with the Sunday duties.

Being superintendent of the Sunday-school, I arrived at the schoolroom about 9.15. Having made all preliminary arrangements, I admitted the children and teachers (many of the teachers, alas ! not arriving until the majority of the children were seated). I then learnt by message that one of the teachers

would not be present, so had to take his class. School being over, I proceeded to church, read prayers, and preached. Communion was administered after the morning service. In this I was helped by a clergyman who was staying in the parish, but even with his help 1 o'clock had struck before we had finished.

Afternoon Sunday-school was at 2.30. I found another teacher absent on this occasion, and had to hear the lessons of the children of her class. Being the Sunday for children's service, the scholars and teachers marched to church, where I played the hymns, read the service and gave the address, and after the children were dismissed took a baptism. Evening service was at 6.30, but having heard of an accident to a parishioner, I snatched a few minutes before the service to see his wife and learn particulars, and found that he had been taken to the infirmary, four miles distant. The full evening service and sermon, with a good and attentive congregation, was of course a blessed and happy close of this day's work.

On Monday I went up to London on business, and being there I visited a life insurance office on behalf of two aged parishioners, who had insured their lives, and who were unable to keep up their payments. New Year's cards had to be selected for the Sunday-school and various other little articles purchased for parochial purposes. I then attended the committee meeting of a society engaged in foreign work, after which I did the same duty for another society engaged in home work.

On returning home I found a telegram awaiting me asking me to take the place of a deputation of the Bible Society, who had fallen ill, at the meeting in a neighbouring village. Being unable to do it myself, I arranged for a messenger to go over to a friend to see if he could undertake it. Several letters containing subscriptions to various parochial charities had to be attended to, and within half an hour of my arrival at home I was at the mission-room practising carols with the choir. After an hour thus spent, I made my way to another room, where I took the payments of a club. Another hour was spent by no means unprofitably, for here many of the men of the village meet to make their payments, and an opportunity of getting better acquainted with them is afforded. Eight o'clock struck, and so ended the public duties of Monday.

On Tuesday my first business was to prepare one of my sermons for Sunday, and then to write out notes for the Wednesday evening's discourse. This finished, three visits were paid, and I lunched at the squire's, whose abode is a mile from the village. He is not only squire, but also part patron of the living. He and his family take a real Christian interest in the village, and he has built us a new parish church, which is a great blessing to the parish. I was driven down again after

lunch, and spent some more time in visiting. Towards the end of the afternoon I met the Scripture-reader, who was paying his weekly visit, in order to talk and pray over matters with him. He, together with a gentleman who was to give a lecture in the evening, bore me company at tea. At 7 o'clock I presided at the said lecture, upon the subject of "Practical Beekeeping," which was delivered in the schoolroom. At the close of the meeting it was my pleasing duty to sign, as president, the cards of membership, numbered 247-249, of three new members of our Parochial Temperance Society, the lecture taking for the nonce the place of the weekly meeting of the society, held throughout the winter.

Wednesday morning was spent, first, in preparing the second of the sermons for Sunday, and then in arranging a sermon-in-song. This is an extra address, given once a month in the winter at the close of the evening service. A subject is taken, a few words of introduction are spoken, and hymns are sung bearing upon the subject, interspersed with words of application. This sermon-in-song is very popular; the whole of the congregation present at the evening service generally remain to take part in it.

To resume the story of Wednesday. I then visited the schools, set a Scripture examination for the upper standards, and taught Standards I. and II., our Scripture hour being the last of morning school. This being ended, I took the payments of a coal club, with about eighty members. After dinner I visited in the parish, and later in the afternoon, as this was the third anniversary of my eldest, and until five days previous, only boy's death, I walked up to the quiet churchyard to visit his earthly resting-place. The remainder of the afternoon was spent in writing off some correspondence and various minor parochial matters, such as choosing hymns, etc. After tea I went to the weekly gathering of the boys of the Band of Hope. As I have no adult to help me, some of the boys are formed into a committee and take part in the management. Service in the church with address followed. After service came the choir practice, and I arrived at home at about 8.30 p.m.

On Thursday morning I spent from 9 to 11.30 in conducting a monthly examination of the school children in secular knowledge. On returning home I prepared for the Bible-classes to be held in the evening, for the evening of Thursday is a busy one. At 5.30 I held the weekly meeting of the girls of the Band of Hope, being aided in this by a committee of girls. From 6.30 to 7.15 I spent with my Bible-class for young women; and from 7.30 to 8.30 with the men's Bible-class. The afternoon of the day was occupied in visiting and taking a short walk.

Most of the morning of Friday was taken up with a committee

meeting in London. While going up to town and in the meeting I snatched time to make up the cards of the members of the coal club, and to write out their orders for coal. In the afternoon I was invited by a doctor to help him to operate on the foot of a boy in the parish; but though I have been present at four operations, I declined, thinking I was not really wanted, as there was a hospital nurse present, and went visiting instead. In the evening I was occupied for an hour in practising carols with the children of the choir, and then made up my own accounts, and made the weekly entries in some of the seven-teen or eighteen parochial accounts which I have to keep.

On Saturday I was glad to spend a quiet day chiefly at home; but this did not interfere with the visits of a number of applicants for help from the offertory fund during the morning, nor with my sending out, as secretary of the school committee, notices for a meeting of school managers. In the afternoon I went to see the boy who had been operated on, and in the evening I received two visits from persons calling on me in reference to the man who had met with an accident, and who had been taken to the workhouse. The rest of the evening I was able to devote to quiet preparation for Sunday. Thus ended a week of hard but happy work for God; and yet this week was lighter than some, for there was no vestry meeting, no committee meeting in the parish, no funeral, no special sick case needing daily visiting.

It may be said that the work in the parish would have been greatly lightened if parts of two days had not been spent in London. My answer is this: It is, I think, the duty of a clergyman who is fully occupied in parochial duties to take a day or part of a day for rest during the week; and if he chooses to spend this in helping the committees of those societies which promote God's cause at home or abroad, he is getting relaxation, and at the same time doing good. On the second occasion, feeling overworked, the little change did me no harm, and a good deal of petty work, which had to be done some time, was accomplished in the run up to London.

What was the result of this week's work? As to anything definite resulting from the labours of these particular seven days it is difficult to speak. But a warm welcome at almost every house I visit; a Sunday-school crowded both morning and afternoon with bright and happy children; a church, holding some 300, well filled on Sunday evening for the most part with working men and women, as the gentry make the morning their chief service; horny-handed agricultural labourers and hard-working mothers kneeling at the Holy Table in increasing numbers—surely these things may be put down as in some measure the result of the quiet work of weeks such as this?

Since the week chronicled above a mission has been held in the parish. Crowded congregations have been assembling in the church—men who have never been at church before have been seen there, and seen Sunday after Sunday, too ; and better than all, men and women and elder lads and girls have been pressing into the kingdom of heaven, so that there has been a blessed *reaping* time. And though this reaping immediately resulted from the earnestness and power of the mission preachers and workers, yet it cannot be wrong to suppose that the steady work going on week by week and year by year has been the *sowing* time. The country clergyman, like his town brother, has to go forth bearing precious seed and often weeping as he goes ; but if he does it patiently and without fainting, he shall doubtless come again with joy, bringing his sheaves with him ; or if not he, when he lies in the churchyard some successor shall reap where he has sown, and some day both together shall rejoice.

The word that goeth from the mouth of God
 Shall not return Him void, Himself hath said.
 Oh, be not weary in thy glorious toil !
 Thy work is done for God, and thou shalt reap
 All in due season if thou dost not faint.
 Away then, foolish fears ! pluck up thy heart ;
 For *doubtless* thou shalt come again with joy,
 And with thee priceless sheaves—redeemèd souls.

A COUNTRY PARSON.



ART. II.—THE SUNDAY OPENING MOVEMENT.

ALTHOUGH the Sunday opening of the People's Palace in East London is referred to in a recent article on "The Working of the People's Palace" in the *Nineteenth Century*, there are many important facts connected with the Sunday opening of the Palace which are not mentioned, and which ought to be carefully considered by all who are interested in the work of the Palace and kindred institutions.

It is regretted by many that an institution which is designed for the benefit of all classes of the working population should have been so managed as to have aroused the active opposition of a very large portion of the most thoughtful sections of the working classes in East London, and the active resistance of many of the clergy and Nonconformist ministers and other philanthropic workers who, for many years, have done great and good service in that part of the Metropolis.

The late Dean Stanley once said: "The observance of Sunday, more than any other religious question, touches the