
A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

of the Scriptures, others of like opinions accepted and endorsed it. This is not criticism; it is mere prejudice adopting an hallucination and then compassing earth and sea to discover some quibble to support its pretensions. The testimony of the Church of Israel, and the testimony of the Church of Christ, and above all, the testimony of the Lord Himself, must outweigh all the plausible speculations of modern Socinians and sciolists, and pour contempt upon the pretension of a fatuous claim to a knowledge superior to that vouchsafed to those "to whom were entrusted the oracles of God," a knowledge surpassing that of "the witness and keeper of Holy Writ," and transcending and contradicting (may God forgive even the thought) the knowledge of Him who came to fulfil these very prophecies in deed and in truth.

F. TILNEY BASSETT.

DULVERTON VICARAGE,
August 27, 1890.

ART. V.—IN MY PARISH.

IT was a wet, cheerless August day—one of the many such days of this, until September, disappointing summer, when I went to see some of my old people.

As a general rule, but little visiting can be advantageously done in the country during the month of August. If you call at cottages doors are fastened. The men are harvesting, the women and children gleaning, and few people are ill; even the aged and infirm creep out into the fields. But this wet afternoon I felt sure I should find the old folk at home, and so I did. I called, for instance, on B. He was, he said, *in his eighty*—the usual phrase in these parts. We naturally discoursed on the weather. I confess it had depressed *me*, and I thought of the farmers and of the labourers with a heavy heart—for the labourers because they are paid so much for a harvest, and the longer it lasts the worse the bargain for them. "We shall have some fine weather yet, sir," says he. "I am sure on it. Seed-time and harvest will not fail. They never have." And so the old man, whose prophecy happily proved a true one, with his strong faith reassured me, and I left his cottage in better spirits than I went in. It was not by any means the only part of my conversation with him worth remembering. One or two other things which he said will appear further on. As I went home I thought how general among our peasant population was this firm, this simple faith. The peasantry have their faults many and sad; but as a class they

are uninfluenced by the infidel, the atheistic, the materialistic views of the day. They still hold tenaciously to the faith of their fathers—still believe in an ever-present overruling Providence, and have no doubts whatever upon the subject of prayer for fine weather or prayer for rain, as needed.

A five years' ministry among them, following after thirty years of town life, has taught many lessons, scattered many delusions, as well as afforded many amusing incidents.

Let me jot down some of these at random.

When in London I firmly believed that the Burial Act Amendment Act of 1880 was earnestly desired by the Nonconformists, as well as a political necessity. A political necessity it probably was, and maybe it was honestly desired by the Dissenters in towns. Not so in the country. There, I am convinced, it has created rather than removed trouble. Our country folk, whether in life they attend church or chapel ("It don't matter, you know, where we go," is the common remark of a Dissenter to the parson), desire in their hearts to be buried as their forefathers have been before them; and if only the Dissenting minister would leave the family alone, so, I believe, the deceased would be buried in nine cases out of ten. I have very few funerals certified according to 43 and 44 Victoria, ch. 41—say, on an average, one or two a year out of twenty to twenty-five burials. In case after case of those so certified it has happened to me to know that the relatives, sometimes in accordance with the expressed wish of the deceased, desired a Church of England funeral. After a death that happened only a few weeks ago they had actually arranged it, but were induced to change. The Dissenting minister steps in, "ballirags them," so they say, and they yield, though reluctantly, and they amusingly send an apologetic message to me: "They are very sorry, but they were obliged to let Mr. —— have his way. If they did not they should never hear the last of it." "He is a regular body-snatcher!" said my sexton once, when he gave one of these messages to me. I always in illness visit Church-people and Dissenters alike. As a general rule my Dissenting brother, with whom, by the way, I am on very good terms, only calls *after death*, to make sure, if possible, of the funeral.

I could tell more than one amusing story in connexion with this. Let one suffice.

A poor man had died in the parish after a long illness, during which he had been regularly visited by me and another clergyman visiting in the place, and our visits had, I trust and believe, been blessed to him. One Tuesday morning I heard of his death. I made a sympathetic call on his mother in the afternoon. As I was going away I asked about the funeral, but remembering that the mother was a Nonconformist I said,

"Oh, but perhaps you intend to ask Mr. ——" (the Congregationalist minister) "to take it." "Oh no," she said; "poor —— would wish you to bury him; he so much valued your visits. Mr. —— never came to see him but once, and he did not care for him." The following Sunday was arranged for the funeral. These people will have Sunday funerals; it saves them so much expense. In the evening I got a letter, in which Mr. —— said that he too had called on the mother, but that I had anticipated him, and that, "induced by pressure put upon them" by me, he found they had consented to let me take the funeral; and then he proceeded to give reasons why he considered the funeral should be his. I try to avoid correspondence, especially as my predecessor warned me that any in which I became involved would probably find its way into the local papers; so I saw him, tried to show him that I had not been guilty of the offence he supposed, told him they were under no promise to me, and that they could do as they liked. He wanted me to go and ask them to let him take the funeral. This I firmly declined to do, and added that *I* should not go near the family again until after the funeral. I urged that he should keep away as well, and leave them free.

On the Saturday I received quite early a notice that he (the Congregational minister) would take the funeral, and he enclosed a letter from the father, *written for the man* and signed with his mark, that it was his (the father's) wish that Mr. —— should bury his son. Conceive my surprise when, a few hours after, I received a penitential letter, signed by father, mother, and six other members of the family, asking my forgiveness for their indecision, and saying that the paper the father had signed the night before he had signed under pressure from Mr. ——, and wished to withdraw, and that they all wished me to take the funeral. I was in some difficulty how to act. It is sometimes a good rule, when you do not know what to do, to do nothing. I acted upon this, simply writing to the parents and saying that they must decide. The next day the undertaker told me, a few hours before the service, his orders were to bring the funeral to the church, and I buried the man. I afterwards heard amazing stories, no doubt exaggerated, of the number of visits Mr. and Mrs. —— had paid during the week to try and get this funeral for the chapel.

I have modified my views upon the conscience clause; it, too, is a necessity, but it creates as well as removes grievances. In one school under my charge I think five children out of 150 are withdrawn from religious instruction. I do not believe one would be so withdrawn but for the pressure put upon the parents by the Congregationalist minister. "We don't care about it, and we know you won't teach them no harm," or some

such apologetic sentence is uttered. "But Mr. —— goes on so, and says we must withdraw them." I believe the great majority would be heartily glad if there was no such thing as a conscience clause in existence, and therefore no reason for worrying about the matter. The truth is, that Dissent is, I believe, rapidly ceasing to be a *spiritual* force where the Church is alive and active; it is becoming purely a political lever. This it has no doubt already become in Wales. "I am never so ashamed of being in any way connected with Dissent as when I am in Wales," said the daughter of a Nonconformist to me last week. "It is shameful how it is worked politically." She is a governess in that "gallant little" country, but there attends Church services, as, in fact, like her sisters, she is taking to do when at home. It is astonishing how rapidly the Church, where the services are hearty, devotional, bright, is winning over the people. The future is with the Church of England, if only she is faithful to her trust.

If we avoid internecine strife and extremes which irritate, if we do our duty faithfully, we need not, I am sure, fear Disestablishment. "I don't see as we should gain anything if we did away with you parsons. All I know is that if there is an odd job to be done in the place as no one else will do, the parson has to do it," was said to me the other day by the village shoemaker, and I believe he expresses the opinion of the great majority of the agricultural labourers. All we ask is that agitators will leave us alone.

My friend B—— was a bit of a politician. He read his paper, he told me, every week as well as he could; he was a Church reformer; he was well up in some local instances, in which, as he said, them as did least work had most pay, and he thought this should be altered. He had his views upon disputes between employers and employed, and told a capital story of a gentleman who lived in the place some fifty years ago, and would only pay half of the cost of a new pair of boots and gaiters which the postilion, who rode with him to church every Sunday morning, said he required. The postilion rode to church the following Sunday with a boot on one leg and no gaiter, and on the other a gaiter and no boot, and in this trim attended, as he was expected to do, morning service. The incident was of course much commented upon, and brought the master to terms. The old man told me he saw the postilion so dressed himself, told me the name of the master, whose monument occupies a conspicuous position in the parish church, and who, on his death, left money with which to buy coal for the poor in the winter season. We conversed on other subjects that wet afternoon.

"Knowledge will be the ruin of this country," said the old man, and he went on to expatiate on the folly of compulsory

education, passing standards, and the like, though his ideas were a little mixed, for he forthwith explained to me what an advantage it had been to his two lads in the army that he had given them some good learning, for they had often been put on as schoolmasters, earned a little extra pay, and been very good to him. Still, for all this, he thought it a shame that children should be forced to attend school when their parents wanted them at home, or when they could earn a little money.

Till I undertook the charge of a parish I had no idea how much of time and thought the management of a voluntary school and the keeping the accounts on the right side demands; in fact, many are the problems demanding solution. The non-payment of the weekly pence is a constant worry, and this and other considerations have made me a convert to free or "assisted" education, at any rate while a child is in a compulsory standard. The father's wages are 11s. a week; he has, perhaps, four or five children at school; the payments for them vary from 6d. to 10d. a week—a mere trifle, your town resident thinks—a considerable sum out of the weekly earnings, especially as there are many weeks in the year when, in consequence of bad weather, the wage drops to 3s. or 4s. in the week. The parents can apply to the Guardians, says another opponent. Yes, but this above all things they abhor if they have any self-respect. True, payment of school fees does not pauperize, but the relieving-officer comes and makes most inquisitorial inquiries, and knows he shall best please his masters the Guardians if he reports that the payment is unnecessary.

You will lose all control of your schools, says a third, if fees are paid by the State. Why so? The State already pays about sixty per cent. of your expenses; why should you lose control if she pays about fifteen per cent. more? Mr. Chamberlain's fair and masterly speech on the subject ought to have re-assured all. At any rate, from a Church-Defence point of view, I am convinced that opposition to a well-considered plan for giving free education will be most suicidal. My Congregationalist friend will support, and pose as the labourers' friend *par excellence*, if I oppose, and for free education the agricultural voters do care. But however they may vote at the next election, about the eternal Irish Question they know nothing and care less. If the labourer should vote for Home Rule at the next election, it will be because he has heard of Gladstone, and has been led to believe in him; and now that Disraeli is gone, he perhaps hardly knows the name of another statesmen, unless a member of the Government should happen to reside near, and then he probably thinks him even a greater man than he really is.

At the same time I for one hope, if education is free, the rules requiring regular attendance will be more stringently enforced,

and that no child will be allowed to leave school under thirteen, or until he or she has *passed* the fifth standard. Our Guardians consider that attaining the fifth standard means passing the fourth, and so a boy or a girl can leave between ten and eleven, only having attained the knowledge gained in standard four. What will the child know at fourteen or fifteen of that which has been taught at so much expense, at any rate if the child is a boy? Night schools ought not to be necessary. Alas! they are, and they will be until attendance at school is more regular and a higher standard of knowledge acquired than is at present necessary. I believe that at the Berlin Conference no fact impressed our representatives more forcibly than that our labouring class are worse educated than that of any other leading European country. In factory, mining, and other legislation, other countries must level up to our standard; in educational matters we must level up to them.

The whole question of relief is another most difficult problem. Every parish still possesses its impostors, whom it is hard to detect. I have more than one, but let me take one as a specimen of his class. No doubt he is poor, and needs relief, but, by plausible humbug and persistent barefacedness, he gets, I believe, far more than his share in a parish which contains many well-to-do families.

Almost directly after I came into the parish I made my friend's acquaintance. It was Monday morning. I met a man, who made his obeisance in the most lowly way. "I was at Church last night," says he. "Yes," I said, "I saw you there." "I *was* at Church, and had the pleasure of hearing of Mr. ——." "I suppose you did," said I, "as I preached." "I *did* hear Mr. ——, and had an uncommon good lift up to heaven last night." He did not get the shilling he was angling for and expected. I have relieved him from time to time, but not as often as he thinks I ought to have done, as the following incidents will show.

One Saturday afternoon I saw the old man ahead of me, walking at a fairly brisk pace. When I caught him up, his cough became very trying. I told him I was glad to see him able to walk so well, and hoped I should see him at my afternoon hamlet service the next day. "Oh! *I* do go to the Primitive Methodist now; they do preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified there," was his quick reply. By-the-way, about that time I heard of him as very often at the little Roman Catholic service that there was in the place: the good lady, since deceased, at whose expense that service was kept up, was very charitable in her way in the parish.

On another occasion, hearing he was not well, I went to see him. He was at his gate. "How are you?" said I; "I hear

you have not been well. "I do not think you care much how I be," replied he. "I have been very bad these three weeks, and you have never been to see me." I explained that I had only heard of his illness the day before, but he would take no excuse for my neglect. "Ah, if Dr. —— had been in the parish he would have been to see me, *he* would: he would have read to me, and prayed to me, and showed me the way to heaven, and given me a shilling. He was a good man, he was."

This character is very fond, if he gets the chance—which, as far as possible, I refuse to give him—of discussing the spiritual state and the fate of those who have passed away. One Sunday afternoon I looked in upon him in company with a London friend. A young man had died under sad circumstances the preceding week. He told me that he had just been to see the poor fellow, and had discussed with his mother whether, the body being before them, the soul was in heaven or hell. My readers can imagine what I said. I tried to impress upon him that the Judge of all the earth would do right, and that it is of our own spiritual state in the sight of God, and not that of others, that we should think. He was not to be put off. "It is written very plainly in the Bible—I was a-reading it over a cup of tea with my wife as you came in—'He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved'—I said over a cup of tea; but there, I have finished the tea you gave me—'but he that believeth not,'" and he finished the verse. The use of this verse for the purpose of getting some more tea is, I should think, unique in ministerial experience.

I could go on gossiping for some time longer, but my readers have probably by this time had enough of my reminiscences: at any rate for the present.

I will only say in conclusion that I do earnestly wish our agricultural labourers were better paid (I know, alas! the farmers cannot afford to pay them more), better fed, and above all, better housed. Many of our cottages are a disgrace to their owners; but, alas! when the land is in many small hands, rather than in one or two large—still more where, as in the case of my own parish, many cottages belong to landlords of small means living out of the place—it is nobody's duty, and certainly nobody's interest, to improve matters. I have practically said that I have no great faith in the relieving officer; I have none in the sanitary inspector, the attendance officer, or in fact in any official who has to please the Guardians or other local authorities. I have not had an opportunity of studying Mr. Ritchie's last Bill on the Housing of the Working Classes: I shall be thankful if it does something for us.

I earnestly wish we had fewer public-houses in the place; I had great hopes something would be done this spring, but I

confess to being one of those who think improvement has been made most improbable for many, many years by the misguided action of our would-be temperance friends, and by the way in which leading politicians have eaten their own words in the hope that by so doing they will score a point. We must be just to the publicans if we would advance the cause of temperance. As a class, I believe publicans are no better and no worse than others. Many are keenly anxious that their houses should be thoroughly respectable; the owners of the smaller houses should be treated with fairness, but their houses should be closed.

The clergyman of the parish, while not neglecting his directly spiritual work, should take the lead in any movement having for its object the material and social improvement of his people; he should further the cause of education, help to establish working-men's clubs and youths' institutes, be the friend of the poor as well as of the rich, and I firmly believe that, as the years roll round, the number of those who wish "to do away with him" will rapidly diminish.

A COUNTRY PARSON.

Notes on Bible Words.

No. I.—"PREVENT."

IN his "Farewell," deeply spiritual and suggestive, Adolphe Monod said: "The Word of God ought to be studied in two ways: First, it should be read *as a whole* . . . ; secondly, in detail, to be able to enter into and understand every verse and every word." Here and there, of course, occurs a "word" which it aids us much to "understand."

It is hoped that a series of Notes in THE CHURCHMAN, usually brief, on the more interesting or important "words" of the Bible, A.V., may be found helpful to some readers, both students and teachers.

In our own day "prevent" means to intercept and *hinder*. That is not the meaning in the Bible (King James I.) or in the Prayer Book. There the word is either to be earlier than, or to be in front of, so as to *help*.

1 Thess. iv. 15: "We which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep;" R.V.