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condescended to reveal Himself, could there be anything more important, than to look most carefully into the Revelation? And it is often by the careful and prayerful study of the *details* of Divine Revelation that we are led to see the inspiration and beauty of the Holy Word.

GEO. S. BOWES.

THE TOWN POOR PARISH PROBLEM.

IT is impossible to face the problems of a poor town parish, if we confine our attentions to the parish itself. We must first take a wider view; it may be that then we may take our stand within the parish, and look at the problems it presents with some measure, at any rate, of hope and completeness.

To take first, then, a wider look than the parish itself presents. The enormously greater proportion of our home population is to be found in towns, and therefore in town parishes. We may welcome the fact or regret it, but fact it is, and fact, even to an increasing proportion, it probably will remain.

But more, there is also the stern fact that within the area of our towns, be they larger or be they smaller, but particularly if they be larger, the rich and the poor are becoming more and more separated locally the one from the other. It is less and less common for employers and employed, for the more and less wealthy, for the more and less cultured, to live within reasonable touch one of the other, and to enjoy, to the benefit of both, the privileges of mutual give and take. When the truth is declared it will certainly not be the poorer in this world's reckoning that will be seen to have been either the only, or even perhaps the greater, losers if this separation is allowed to continue or even to grow. If the principles of Christianity mean anything, such a middle wall of partition, as there now too often is, is not a hindrance merely, but a flat contradiction to the practical hold or spread of Christianity.

But I am afraid that the very truism of these statements will make against the practical purpose of this article. To write or read statements such as these is, alas! all too easy. Writer and reader will agree, and then—what? Let me, therefore, put several not unimportant questions.

And first this: Might there not be amongst the inner circle of consecrated Church workers, whose call is the home and not the foreign field, and whose homes are far from the dense population of poor town parishes, quite a new realization of what the call to home Church work means?

To go forth from home and country for years at a time, and face all manner of risks and trials, is the joyful response to a felt call to foreign missionary work. In individual instances such a going forth is approximated—yea, it may be is equalled—in response to the call for home service; but in how many cases is it not so? To leave for a few hours so many days a week, or, better still, for a Saturday to Monday trip to a poor parish, a wealthy home and its bright surroundings, does not seem very much to ask; and yet somehow it is more than common for incumbents even of very large poor parishes often to go for years without response in any adequate measure to such appeal. And if we look even further than this, and fail to see any real reasons why there should not be at any rate in our larger poor parishes a far greater number of voluntary workers who, for the sake of the poor and to witness amongst them of Christ, have entirely yielded themselves to live and labour in poor parishes, such real reasons are oftentimes hard to trace. Trained lay workers, both men and women, living and working at their own charges, surely should be forthcoming where the need is greatest, and will be forthcoming in ever-increasing numbers as it is realized that the call to home and foreign service is one at root, and is a call involving genuine self-sacrifice on the part of every consecrated worker. If means are lacking to allow of wholly voluntary work, service can be offered, and will be offered, at the lowest possible rate, and the burden of collecting the money will not be allowed to rest entirely on the incumbents of poor parishes.

And secondly this: Putting aside any thought of special call to constant active service in a parish, and looking at the matter rather from a different point of view—namely, the setting free of wealth for Christian service and of the well-to-do from the cares of wealth—when are people who bear Christ's name, not some here and there, but all, going to realize that increased wealth is not necessarily a call to increased outlay on self and family? Which of us has not noticed over and over again that the larger the income becomes, the larger the rate of personal and household expenditure becomes, and less and less year by year—not proportionately only, but actually—is the sum given to Christian work or the interest shown therein? On this point let two notes be made, and enough will have been said. Where such is the line taken, the fountain of charity within the heart of the head of the household is dried up, and, worse still, the young people are encouraged to begin life as their parents ended, and a never-ceasing retrogression from the point of view of the sacrifice of the means and self is the result. The first thing is to keep up such-and-such a standard of living, and the next thing is

to increase it. Thus the separation named above grows wider and wider; and, let it again be stated, it is not the separated poor, but the separating rich, that lose the most.

Bearing in mind the two questions previously asked, may we not look for some aid in the solution of the problem before us from taking note, side by side, as mutually helpful and as both equally necessary, of two lines of action?

The first line of action is well known, but, alas! not nearly so widely adopted and supported as it should be. It may take the form of community life strictly so called, or of methods of living more or less nearly approximating to this; or it may take the form of settlements, where more or less permanently, those engaged through the day in other occupations may live, and give their evenings and their Sundays to Christian work amongst the poor.

The second line of action has not, so far as I know, been formally advocated or largely practised; indeed, it is simply a matter of root for individual householders. There are scores of poor parishes where perfectly happy and healthful home-life could be maintained by people of moderate or even of considerable means, and yet these parishes are constantly drained of the better-to-do families, and the question arises whether, after all, there are not cases, neither few nor far between, where it might not reasonably be expected that some regard should be paid, as before God, to the claim of a poor neighbourhood for the influence and help of higher culture or better means, rather than that a move into the suburb should be regarded as the normal step to take. I do not think that it is only a matter of so many more or less wholly devoted parish workers living singly or in settlement that will reverse the tendency for the separation of poor and rich. Better-to-do families as such should remain in poorer neighbourhoods, or be ready, if for a while circumstances necessitate their removal therefrom, either to return themselves or to encourage the younger members of their families to settle again where they were born.

Hitherto the problems of a poor town parish have been before us rather from without than from within; the due distribution of consecrated means and effort, and of the forces of higher culture and greater wealth over wider areas, rather than the actual problem that faces the workers within such a parish, has been before us.

Let us now take our stand within a single poor town parish, and let us glance hopefully, if incompletely, at the problems it presents.

In the first place, let us by all means remember that the wider the outlook, and the more freely the people are

encouraged to give, alike of means and service, the truer to the spirit of Christ, and therefore the more progressive, will the life and work of the parish be. It is not only wrong in itself, but also hurtful to home progress, to fail of zeal for foreign missions.

In the next place remember: It is the strength available from either that is the master-feature. Are the present workers meet vessels for Christ's use? Are the communicants, as God enables, ready to serve and give? Are the God-given workers and the God-given means rightly distributed? It is just in proportion as the general body of workers and communicants realize their call and responsibility in these matters that progress will be made—first in husbanding the strength that there is and then towards the increase of strength. It is the mutual helpfulness of the various workers and communicants one to another, that makes and keeps warm the heart of the parish, attracting the young as they grow, fresh workers as they come into the parish, and not less those more or less deeply a prey to the darkness of the world. Hence the absolute necessity of prayerful and careful heed to all that touches the fellowship of the faithful.

Given a poor town parish in which these two points are well heeded, it is wholly unthinkable that it should fail to be a centre of Christian light and influence, the influence of whose inner circle will constantly grow stronger and stronger. There may be—for the most part there will be for long enough—an immense disproportion in numbers between the warm-hearted fellowship of Christ and the many living around more or less influenced. Indeed, probably in most cases for many years, the multitude will seem indifferent even where in many cases a more true description could be given if the secrets of every heart were known. But be the progress quick or slow, manifest or not manifest at once, progress there will be—yea, progress there is. Christianity, statisticians may tell us, is not in possession here, and they may tell us so truly; but the effectual witness of Christ is there, and where the fort is bravely held, the soldiers will prove victorious for their Lord.

But here again, as in the earlier part of this paper, I am afraid that the very truisms of these statements will make against the practical purpose of this paper. One writes, another reads. Writer and reader agree, and then—what?

In principle we are agreed. In practice we are oftentimes untrue to our principles and discouraged for lack of immediate and visible result. May we not put the matter thus?—Which of us would not very readily admit that, without the power of God the Holy Ghost working on the lines of Scripture promise,

it were useless to attempt to win this or that centre, and so to win ultimately all along the line for Christ? Why should we not put the question in exactly the obverse way? If, without the power of God the Holy Ghost on the lines of Scripture promise, the attempt is useless, is not the same attempt, with that power on the lines of Scripture promise, equally sure to be crowned with victory? And if so, ought we not to be far more courageous, to be far more hopeful, to be far more confident, even in the face of the greatest difficulties, than we are apt to be?

Is the staff very inadequate? Are the provided centres for work wholly inadequate in number or equipment? Are the means apparently, perhaps at the moment really, altogether below the amount requisite to maintain, to say nothing of extending, the existing standard of work? Be it so; yet hold the fort. Do something if you cannot do much. Never go back. Be quite sure, where the local church is liberal in giving and loyal in serving, God will provide the needful staff and the needful means. In saying this, of course, it is to be remembered and allowed for that staff and means may be withheld if those to whom God gives a first opportunity to provide them close their hearts and their pockets, and stand in the way of the blessing God in love desires and is ready to give through them. But, even so, if some use not the opportunity He in love gives them, He will assuredly, in due time, raise up others to be instruments of His good pleasure. At any rate, let the local church, poor as it may be, love and labour in hope, content to face its problems incompletely, so only, up to its strength it faces them honestly.

Now in a closing paragraph look back, and from the point of view gained as we stand and work within a single poor town parish, look anew at the wider aspect of the problem touched on in the earlier part of this paper. Is it not at least possible that the problem of the due distribution over wide areas of the service and means available, or that might be made available, for Christian work, while it is a problem too vast to be attempted directly and as it were in bulk, is yet being solved little by little and as it were from two sides? In other words, if we think of the men and women that God is using in the wider sphere of the whole town or the whole country, and in the sphere of the many well-to-do parishes, and then of those whom He is using in the individual poor parishes of the towns, and as we realize that these from different ends are working for the same result, being possessed and used by the same power, shall we not gather hope and courage? God is preparing help from wider and more favoured areas, while He is holding the poorer area

till help arrives. And so, while we still mourn the hurtful separation between rich and poor, employer and employed, more cultured and less cultured, shall we not through it all not only believe that God is now, as of old, fulfilling Himself and His purposes in many ways, but also press, alike more hopefully and more urgently, each in our several spheres, for the breaking down of the middle wall of partition which is the source of so much hindrance to the spread of Christianity, and which makes so difficult the work of our town parishes in poor districts? And yet, thank God, even when it is most difficult, it is the happiest and most inspiring of works.

S. B. BENSON.



THE EARLY CHURCH AND THE ROMAN EMPIRE.¹

CHURCH history has only too often been the hunting-ground of the ecclesiastical partisan. To produce a useful brief there is no necessity to say what is untrue. By a judicious selection of facts, and by carefully throwing upon these facts the particular coloured light in which it is wished that they shall be viewed, it is comparatively easy to produce quite different impressions of the same age and circumstances. Such a method of writing Church history has been all too common in the past. But of late years we have had many examples of the growth of a better spirit. Professor Bigg's volume is eminently such an example, viz., of the dedication of historical study to a higher and a nobler purpose.

I would especially commend his preface. There we read how Church history should be written; we learn in what spirit and temper the records of the past should be approached; we must search simply for knowledge in order to express the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Beyond a clear expression of the truth, whether it agrees or not with our predilections and preconceptions, we must not go.

The period covered by the book—the first four or five centuries of the Christian era—is one of peculiar difficulty, though, thanks to the untiring labours of many genuine searchers after truth, we are year by year becoming more able to form a clear conception of what *ordinary* people then thought and how they lived.

This period is in almost every diocese chosen as one of the

¹ "The Church's Task under the Roman Empire." Four Lectures, with Preface, Notes, and an Excursus, by Charles Bigg, D.D. Oxford, at the Clarendon Press, 1905.