

## THE RELIGIOUS CENSUS.

AT the Liverpool Diocesan Conference, a paper—which the *Liverpool Daily Post* rightly terms an exceedingly able paper—was read by Archdeacon Bardsley.<sup>1</sup> The subject was “The Spiritual Wants of the Large Parishes.” The Ven. the Archdeacon said:—

Since this subject was first selected for our deliberations, many questions affecting our large parishes have been made painfully prominent, and the inquiry has been raised, with startling emphasis, as to what extent the existing means of grace in our large parishes are being fully utilized. The Liverpool census of Sunday worship is being repeated in all our large towns, and the whole community anxiously waits for words of adequate explanation, if the statistics be not correct, or if, alas! substantially true, for some suggestions of remedial measures.

First, let us inquire what are the facts in reference to the spiritual condition of our large parishes—large parishes, that is to say, in numbers as well as area. Three millions only of the English people were found in towns at the beginning of this century, but of the twenty-six millions which the recent census records,  $17\frac{1}{4}$  millions are dwellers in towns as opposed to  $8\frac{1}{2}$  millions in the country districts—that is to say, the urban is to the rural population as two to one. Whilst, moreover, these  $8\frac{1}{2}$  millions are distributed in 10,500 parishes, with endowments amounting to £2,700,000 per annum, the  $17\frac{1}{4}$  millions of townspeople are distributed in 3,000 parishes only, and possess not more in the way of religious endowments than 1s. per head of their entire population. The present Dean of Lichfield has, from returns laid before the Southern Convocation, felt justified in saying that 5,000,000 of these dwellers in our large parishes have never, either from the mouth of the clergy or from others, had the blessed tidings of salvation through Christ brought directly home to them.

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Whilst the vigorous tones of our Bishop still linger in our ears, as in his first Charge he lamented the lack of spiritual appliances for dealing with these great multitudes—only 200 incumbents and 140 curates—we are startled and alarmed by statistics published in the *Liverpool Daily Post*, and by returns rapidly coming in from all the other large towns of the diocese, which seem to show that the multitudes are availing themselves of the means of grace in a smaller degree even than in the past, and that the facilities furnished for public worship are largely in excess of the amount required. The religious census made in Liverpool at the instance of the late Mr. Nathaniel Caine, in 1853, gave the following results:—58 churches, 63,279 seats, and 34,593 worshippers at one service. The census taken on Sunday

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<sup>1</sup> No report of this Paper, so far as we know, has appeared in the metropolitan journals. At our request the Archdeacon kindly sent us a copy; but we did not receive it till the December CHURCHMAN was printed. The Conference seems to have been a great success.

morning of October 16 last, however, shows 73 churches, 73,663 seats, and 23,193 worshippers; that is to say, whilst our churches have increased 25 per cent. and our seats 10 per cent., the actual number of worshippers have decreased by 33 per cent.

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As yet, we seem only to have touched individuals, not to have influenced the masses. These are they among whom the Salvation Army wins recruits; these are they who crowd the evangelistic services of our circuses and theatres. The fields are truly white with harvest. If we put forth the sickle we shall reap a great harvest; if we neglect them, the very crop that spiritually rots on the ground will, by its corrupt condition, become the instrument to scourge our sinful indifference. If the Church which is responsible will not rear her barns and will restrain her sickle, how shall she complain when earnest, though irregular workers seek, even beneath the frail shelter of four bare poles and a mere tarpaulin, to house and secure the golden grain! Surely, if the Established Church is to be indeed the Church of the people, not only at the polling booths and by general expressions of hearty goodwill, but by winning the multitude for the Master, she must rouse herself afresh, and by new methods adapt herself to the changed circumstances of the times. If statesmen in a recent emergency have shown that "resources of civilization" were in reserve, our dear Church must prove that, to deal with the great problem of our large parishes, the resources of her spiritual warfare are as yet not exhausted.

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I proceed next to suggest some plans which, by God's blessing, would, if carried out, do much to meet the spiritual wants of our large parishes. The first two suggestions come under the head of rearrangement, and have reference to the utilizing in a higher degree our present resources in men and material. . . . Thirdly, we want, if the lost and waste ground is to be quickly and effectually reclaimed, a much larger measure of lay help. . . . Fourthly, we want, if we are effectually to cope with the spiritual wants of our large parishes, more freedom and variety in our services. The poor want "teaching which they can understand, and sermons which they can grasp; services which they can follow, and music which they can sing."

On Nov. 27, Canon Blakeney, the Vicar of Sheffield, preached in the Parish Church on Christian work throughout the country, making an especial reference to the recent startling statistics as to public worship. Having shown how few people engage in the work of God, the honoured Vicar said:—

The late religious census which has been taken in Sheffield reveals to us a state of things for which many were not prepared. It would appear from the statement which has been published, that out of a population of about 285,000, only one person in every five-and-a-half of that number attended service in some place of worship last Sunday evening; or, as it has been calculated, one in three and three-tenths of those who might have attended if they had the will, that is, fifty-

eight in every hundred of the population. I think, however, this is somewhat in excess of the number who could avail themselves of public worship, for we must not forget that a large proportion of the population are incapacitated from attendance either at church or chapel. There are the great mass of infants and children of tender years; there are the aged, the sick, and the dying, and those who wait upon them; there are the hundreds of respectable poor who are deterred from mixing with their more fortunate neighbours on account of their shabby clothing; there are the multitudes of working women who have to tend and nurse their children, as well as prepare their husband's meals, which may be the only comfortable meals they can get during the week; there are hotel-keepers and their servants, domestic servants, railway porters and officials, post-office employes, policemen, cabmen, night watchmen, caretakers of houses, and many others that could be mentioned, all of whom may be fairly struck out of the list of those who can attend public worship. I think, if a careful inquiry were made, that Mr. Horace Mann's figures would be found to be in excess of the number which he has given in his calculations. Still, it is most distressing to think that there are hundreds and thousands who never darken the door of any place of worship whatever, and I think that it is time for the Christian Church to inquire carefully and prayerfully into this matter, and see what are the real causes of this state of things. For upwards of twenty-one years I have seen as much of working people as most men, and my experience leads me to believe that some of the causes which make them appear to sit so loosely to all religion are:—Firstly. The neglect of the Christian Church in the past. Secondly. The rapid growth of the population. Thirdly. The unseemly contentions between church and chapel, and chapel and church, and the disgraceful dissensions which often spring up among congregations. Fourthly. The frightful inconsistencies and declensions of those who make a profession of religion, and are often leading members in both church and chapel; for, alas! Christianity is more frequently read in the character and conduct of the professing Christian than in the Bible or Christ Himself. I could now speak in expansion of these causes, but I have not time. I hope to take them again on some other occasion. Many working men, and others, have been led to feel that all religion is a sham by what they often witness in the conduct of those who ought to be an example to them of holy living. I am afraid that this sad state of things will continue until we put from us all jealousy, envy, evil speaking, uncharitableness, unholy living, and unseemly contentions between the sects, and rise to a real sense of our duties and responsibilities before God, as a people professing to be followers of Christ. The world outside is quick-sighted in detecting any flaw which may be in our characters, and is influenced by it. The census which has just been taken ought to have a very humbling effect upon us all, and I trust will stimulate us to more prayerful efforts in advancing the cause of our Divine Master. And here I am bound to say that we shall be doing a grievous injustice to the great mass of those who attend no place of worship were we to conclude that they all were either atheists or sceptics. I believe if a house-to-house canvass were taken, there are

very few who would not feel themselves insulted were they to be classified among unbelievers. The great bulk of them would declare themselves as belonging to some Christian society. A year or two before I left St. Paul's, I had a careful census taken of all that resided in the parish, and it was remarkable how few returned themselves as belonging to no religious sect. Nearly 70 per cent. of the people declared themselves to be members of the Church of England. I have good reason to hope, if a similar census were taken, in the same way, in the other parishes of the town, that a similar result would be arrived at. I am often grieved and shocked by the way in which the working classes, who do not habitually attend places of worship, are sometimes spoken of—they are represented as being sceptics or infidels of various kinds, but I deny that such is the case. I have had great experience among them, and have attended hundreds, and indeed I may say thousands, on their sick and dying beds. I have been with them when hypocrisy was impossible. I have then heard from their own lips their real confession of faith, and witnessed their trust in God's love and mercy through a crucified Saviour. Most of them desire the ministrations of the clergy, and would shrink with horror from the idea of being buried without any Christian service. The very men who are often classified among those who look with contempt on all religion, have been taken *en masse* in the great works of the town, during the Missions that have been held when our revered Archbishop and others have addressed them, and it was most gratifying to witness the respectful attention with which they listened to the addresses. Many will remember the great meeting of working men held in the Albert Hall during the last mission, and the meeting which took place during the Church Congress. It did one's heart good to witness these magnificent sights, and to hear the songs of praise which ascended from these vast assemblies, the bulk of whom I believe are seldom seen in church or chapel. In order to get them to become active members of the Christian Church, we must first be united among ourselves, and then exhibit a kind, loving, Christian spirit in all that we do or say. And now a word about the attendance at this church. It is a cause of much thankfulness to me to witness the large numbers, especially of working people, who regularly worship here. Last Sunday was no exception to the rule, in fact the church is often more crowded in the evening than it was on that occasion; but while the morning and afternoon attendances are most encouraging, I should like to see them as much appreciated as that in the evening. I am afraid there is a growing tendency among all classes to be content with attending only one service in the day. Many thereby rob themselves of much profit and blessing. I do trust, however, that the day is not far distant when we shall see this great church filled from end to end with a devout and attentive congregation at all our services. All classes are welcome, and by the arrangements which are made the church is free and open to the public. My heart's desire and prayer to Almighty God is that He may bow the heavens and come down among us in all His power; and rouse the sleeping Church to a sense of her privileges and duties, that a great revival of true and saving religion may spring up, and that the Kingdom of Christ may be extended in our midst.