

ART. V.—DIOCESAN MISSION SERVICES.

IN the biography of Richard Waldo Sibthorp appears an anecdote about crowded churches some sixty years ago. Mr. Sibthorp's popularity in the neighbourhood of Lincoln¹ as a preacher, we read, made rapid strides among devout Churchmen and also among the religious Dissenters. The common people heard him gladly. Wherever he preached, in fact, crowds followed; and one Vicar objected on this very account. "Such a throng of people," he said, "made the church dirty." In Mr. Knight's admirable "Memoir of Henry Venn," is recalled a similar anecdote. A Fellow of Queen's, Incumbent of a church in Cambridge, was taking a holiday. Being told that his church was being filled to crowding by a popular young substitute, the Vicar remarked, "It doesn't matter; I can soon empty it again."

Such a state of things can hardly now be realized. An Incumbent who complains of a "throng of people," or regards his empty church with satisfaction, is almost an impossibility. A few fossils, no doubt, may be known; but a Rector or Vicar whose dwindling congregation causes him no concern is at all events a rarity. Public opinion nowadays is strong; and a clerical conscience which may be callous to episcopal criticism is apt to be sensitive with regard to local critics, whether clerical or lay. Certainly, as a rule, throughout the Church, the clergy zealously bestir themselves: the services are conducted with regularity and reverence, sermons are—to say the least—sincere, and the duties of the pastorate are conscientiously fulfilled. Further, in the majority of parishes, perhaps, there are occasionally special services of an evangelistic character; efforts are made for the conversion of careless Churchgoers, and of outsiders, and for the deepening of the spiritual life in real Christians. A very high standard of ministerial duty and

¹ At an earlier date, according to Gunning's "Reminiscences," some churches in Lincolnshire were badly served. At a certain very small parish, service was performed only once a month. A clergyman who was visiting for a few days in the immediate neighbourhood, and who was a friend of the officiating minister (residing at a distance), offered to perform service on the following Sunday. Consent was readily granted. When notice was given to the clerk, he appeared confused, and then submissively remarked, the service ought not to have come off until a week later; for, not at all expecting there would be any change from what they had been so long accustomed to, he had set a turkey in the pulpit as soon as their parson had left, and he had reckoned that by the time he came again the pulpit would have been at liberty!

responsibility, in fact, is admitted almost universally and without dispute.

Nevertheless, though this is so, the condition of things, viewing the Church at large, is far from satisfactory. Whether the inquiry be made with reference to the spread of sound, spiritual religion, or with a special view to the question how far the Church is gaining the affections of the great body of the people, and what support as an Establishment she may rely upon to meet the brunt of a Disestablishment and Disendowment agitation in these democratic days, the statistics which have been published in the last two or three years, due deductions being made, supply matter for very serious reflection. It can hardly be denied that in our large towns a considerable proportion of the working-classes do not attend a place of worship; and if a careful census-taker makes allowance for chapel-goers among some sections of the great middle class, the number of habitual attendants in the churches of the National Church, we fear, is sadly small. It has been stated by the Dean of Lichfield, on the authority, if we remember right, of Convocation returns, that 5,000,000 of the English people have never had the tidings of salvation brought directly home to them.¹

The condition of the country parishes, in some respects, is infinitely superior, of course, to that of the great towns and cities and the densely peopled modern districts. The country, as opposed to the town, is richly supplied with Pastors and churches. The means of grace, as a rule, are ample. Yet those of the rural clergy who are eminent for spirituality of tone, for diligence in pastoral labour and affectionate zeal in preaching, seldom depict the religious state of country parishes in glowing colours. Oftentimes one hears of dulness and formality; and in many an out-of-the-way parish it must be easy to sink to a humdrum level. Three points are sometimes taken as tests. First, of the total population of the parish, making due allowance for age and health, what proportion habitually, Sunday after Sunday, make their way to the sanctuary? Second, what proportion never, or scarcely ever, enter church? Third, what is the *communicant* proportion?

¹ There are twice as many people in England now as there were about sixty years ago. In the last ten years 3,000,000 of souls were added to the nation.

In his admirable address, at the Rochester Diocesan Conference, the Right Rev. President said: "If out of our debate together we can get only a little light on how to fill our empty Churches, as well as to build new ones which shall not be empty; how to imitate the enthusiasm of the Salvation Army, without copying their eccentricities . . . we shall not have met in vain."

In eloquent words the Bishop of Peterborough, at the Leicester Congress, put the facts of the case as regards the duty of the National Church, at the present moment, towards the largely increasing population of the land. "The one great Church question of our time," said the Bishop, "before which all others fade into insignificance, is this: Round about church and chapel, impartially indifferent or impartially hostile to both, lie the masses of our great town populations, the scattered units in our country parishes, for whom life has no higher, no better meaning than that of a daily struggle for the means of a joyless existence, uncheered by the hope of a happier hereafter, undignified by the consciousness of Divine descent and heirship of immortality. What can the Church of England do for these—these masses on whom, in their fast-growing might, some are looking with timid fear and others with sinister expectations, but on whom the Church should look only with yearning and affectionate desire, as her truest wealth and her most precious Catholic heritage? This tangled, trodden, earth-soiled harvest into which her Lord has sent her to toil and reap—can she gather this? Can she so enlarge her barns as that they shall hold this? Here, believe me, lies the one supremely urgent question for which we have to find an answer, and that speedily."

Suggestions for gathering the people from the highways and byways may be grouped under four heads: first, the Sermons; second, the Services; third, Sympathy, exhibited and evoked in Pastoral visits from house to house; and fourth, Spiritual power, as the result of promise-pleading prayer. As to the sermons and ministerial sympathy, the Bishop of Liverpool's *ad clerum* at the Derby Congress has doubtless borne good fruit. With regard to the services, a plea for greater elasticity has often been urged in THE CHURCHMAN. In the Sunday morning service especially, as we think, for agricultural labourers no less than for artisans, simplicity¹ and variety are clearly called for. In those parishes where the Incumbent has no curate, and where more than two services on the Sunday can hardly from the nature of the case be expected, the provisions of the Act of Uniformity Amendment Act are, unhappily, of little or no service.² Of the highest importance,

¹ In the "Life of the Prince Consort" appears an anecdote worth quoting in regard to repetitions. "Lord W. asked if a prayer for the Queen's peculiar circumstances should be added.—Prince: 'No, no; you have one already in the Litany—"all women labouring of child." You pray already five times for the Queen. It is too much.'—Lord W.: 'Can we pray, Sir, too often for Her Majesty?' Prince: 'Not too *heartily*, but too often.'"

² In the *Standard*, lately, appeared a letter from a vicar of what may be called a working class town parish. He found that the men and

however, may be regarded those suggestions which come under the head of Spiritual power. In a day of self-indulgence and materialism on the one hand, and of sacerdotal ecclesiasticism on the other, there is obviously a need of special prayer. One cheering sign of the times, indeed, is the growing acceptance of the maxim, "To pray is to work;" and when clergy and their congregations gather together in hopeful prayer for an outpouring of the life-giving Spirit, an increase of devotion and usefulness will surely result. The week-night prayer-meeting in the schoolroom is a feeder for the services in the sanctuary, both on the weekday and the Sabbath.

These thoughts arose and found expression as we pondered over the lately published letter of Archbishop Benson concerning Mission Services. That weighty and interesting letter, which, in connection with the Tait Memorial Fund, has attracted much attention, will strengthen the hands of those in any diocese who have pleaded for systematic "Mission" services, and evangelistic work, under the Bishop's direction. The subject—to take a single instance—was brought before the Chichester Diocesan Conference six years ago by Mr. Purton, Rector of Kingston-by-Sea, and he recommended that a series of special services in every parish or district should be carried on—if not otherwise—under some members of the Cathedral body.¹

women of the working class, and of the lower middle class, would not attend the Sunday morning service. The service was not, to use a common phrase, "*suivable*." He ventured, therefore, to make a few omissions, and he found that the attendance increased. A certain parishioner, however, complained to the Bishop, and his lordship directed the vicar to read the full service, according to law, without alteration. Similar experiences have been published concerning rural parishes. It is easy to say, "Take the Litany as a separate service, with two or three hymns;" but, to make only one reply, "What is to be done in the thousands of parishes where, during the winter months, the second service is held in the afternoon?"

¹ Again, in the year 1880, in concluding a paper on Missions, Mr. Purton said: "In my pleading for variety I would touch upon another point. Three years ago, in the first happy assembly of a Conference in this diocese, I pleaded for special services under diocesan guidance. During those years the movement in favour of such services has in some dioceses gained strength; there is a 'Canon Missioner' in Truro and in Winchester, while in Lincoln the Canons assist in evangelistic services. At the recent Church Congress—I was glad to observe—this point was prominent. It is, in my opinion, of great importance; for by it (1) you may have Mission services in parishes where otherwise they would not be held, and (2) you may carry on yearly, once, twice, or thrice a year, special services under able experienced Preachers, in every parish of the diocese. A *Mission* can only be held after an interval of some years; but I plead for—to use a cumbersome term—ordinary 'extraordinary' services of an evangelistic character; week-night sermons (they must be

The Primate's letter was read at a meeting of the Tait Memorial Mission Fund. "I should highly desire," wrote his Grace, "that the Fund should provide living agents, and not fresh buildings." Lord Shaftesbury has often protested against a mere "bricks and mortar" plea; and everybody knows that of the churches built for the working-classes, not a few are as empty "as barns in July." Living agents are needed; and it must be added, agents of the right stamp. The Primate proceeded as follows:

I have no hesitation in saying that something more systematic and better organized than the present valuable but temporary mode of Mission work is demanded by our circumstances. I should be glad to see attached to every diocesan centre of work, in its Cathedral, a body of Mission Canons, or at least one Canon Missioner with such small staff under him as could be provided. This is what Cranmer established in the Six Preachers of Canterbury, and though the funds are now inadequate for the purpose there, the idea remains in connection with that Cathedral. But in the meantime it would be quite possible to lay the plan and to work it afresh in connection with the Archbishop.

The work which such Mission Preachers should carry out is described by his Grace in seven clauses, the first clause running thus:

(1) The preliminary and universal condition of their work would be wholly subsidiary to the parochial system; the Missioners would work in no place without the invitation of the parish clergyman and the consent of his Bishop.

"Without the Incumbent's permission;" these words will not, we presume, exclude an episcopal suggestion. The "parish clergyman" may not always be ready to invite Diocesan Preachers. In a parish where Mission labour is very greatly required, whether the Incumbent be indolent or incapable, it is possible that without a direct appeal from the Ordinary, the door may remain closed. One defect of our parochial system is this: the Incumbent is, practically speaking, an autocrat; and a worldly, vain, and sluggish Incumbent can lay down the law that no clerical voice "in *my* church," or "among *my* people," shall be listened to, except that of which his congregation or parishioners have long been weary. The Church of England, indeed, as a National body, is too parochial; the diocesan tie is very thin, and the forces of central organization are feeble.

When "thus invited," continues the Archbishop, the Missioners would work in the following modes:

preached in the evenings, when working-men in towns and the agricultural labourers can attend) preached by picked men. Two seasons in the Church's year, Advent and Lent, are of course especially suitable for such services."

(2) They would penetrate almost godless districts and groups of population by preaching, visiting, and arousing knots of people with whom, if they were once drawn together, the parochial clergy and their lay-helpers would deal. (3) They would take groups of parishes in this way, where the Incumbents had so arranged their plans as to awaken the attention of larger areas and bring more force to bear. (4) They would associate with themselves for special Missions clergy from the neighbourhood or farther afield, whom their wide experience would show to be sufficient for their purposes, though not ready to devote themselves entirely to such work. (5) One of their most important functions is the entering of well-worked and organized, but hitherto somewhat irresponsible parishes, where the clergy so often need a fresh voice, fresh witnesses, varied appeals to strengthen and "back up" their own long-continued unrewarded efforts. I have witnessed the most remarkable and rich results of long good work thus suddenly realized in communicants, schools, classes, etc., in parishes where there had hitherto been only languid life, and many could not be attracted at all.¹ (6) They would take with them devoted laymen as time would allow, and train them to boldness and readiness in working in the open air and otherwise in support of their own ministers. (7) All their teaching would have a substantial basis and staple (instead of excitement and strangeness which end where they began), namely, the thorough understanding of the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments, and what springs immediately from those when they once are realized.

"Two such Missioners, at £300 a year each," adds the Archbishop, "would make in the course of a short time many clergymen glad, many parishes alive, many gainsayers Christians. They would draw to themselves other men able to support themselves, and would promote much self-devotion, and attract much ability to religious work which now is aimless.² I believe that this would be a true commemoration and pursuance of the aims of my revered predecessor."

¹ Mr. Hay Aitken—whose experience, probably, in our day is unrivalled—stated, not long ago, that he has never detected any feeling of jealousy on the part of Incumbents, when they have seen persons to whom they had preached for years with apparently little effect, coming to the Mission Preacher, and yielding themselves to the power of God.

² In a characteristic speech, full of point, the Archbishop, at Lord Granville's, alluded to the results of Mission labours in certain parishes of the diocese of Truro. A clergyman and his wife, said his Grace, asked for advice. He recommended them to try a Mission. They did so, and a more changed place than that parish became after the Mission he could not imagine. He had lately to confirm between forty and fifty persons, old and young, where formerly they could not get more than two or three. The local preacher, who had been all hardness and opposition at one time, when on his death-bed, sent for the clergyman's wife and said to her, "I have been a different man since the Mission, and now God is calling me, and I have sent for you to pray with me." The churches were now filled. Many people went who were Dissenters, and would never cease to be Methodists, and nobody was seeking to make them otherwise. They went to church in the morning and to the meeting-house in the evening, and they encouraged their children to go to the Sunday School.

This letter of the Archbishop—rich in promise—many Church Reformers will deem most timely, and will gladly welcome its suggestions. For ourselves, provided only the Mission Preachers be sound and suitable men, we consider that the hopes expressed in the letter are thoroughly well-grounded, and we make no doubt that they will, with the Divine blessing, be all fulfilled. But the Canons must be evangelistic rather than ecclesiastical. If they are evangelists, “full of faith and of power,” minded to preach Christ’s Gospel in simplicity, able to stand up with a Bible in their hands and attract attention in out-of-the-way corners in towns, at a dinner-hour audience in a factory, or a railway workshop, or a barn, gathering to themselves coadjutors, clerical and lay, breathing the same spirit, they are sure to succeed; and they will get a permanently increasing series of earnest workers. It is in Lay Preachers that the Church of England has always been weak. Nor is there any way of getting at the masses, and at the same time of deepening Christian zeal among our devout laity so effectual, probably, as the one which enlists laymen’s sympathies and employs their powers as personal workers in evangelistic efforts.

One result of the Mission Services, as recommended by Archbishop Benson, will be, we think, the strengthening of the Cathedral system. At present, Cathedrals are the weakest part of the National Church. “What Cathedral has contributed largely to evangelization?” asked the late Lord Harrowby, some twenty years ago, at a Church Congress; and the answer of that sound, staunch Churchman was, “Not one!” Matters, no doubt, have somewhat improved of late. Nevertheless, among thoughtful Churchmen not minded to live in a fool’s paradise, it will generally be admitted, perhaps, that in the working of dioceses the Cathedral establishments, speaking broadly, are of little or no use. In these democratic days, when every institution in England is said to be on its trial, and when the utilitarian principle of “payment by results” seems to be gradually gaining acceptance, it is surely prudent to divert some portion of Cathedral revenues into an evangelistic channel.



ART. VI.—EPISCOPACY IN SCOTLAND:

A REJOINDER.

IT will probably surprise no reader of Dr. Skene’s article in the June number of *THE CHURCHMAN* to learn that the Church of England congregations in Glasgow do not accept its statements as representing their opinion of the present con-