

CHARGES AND ADDRESSES

An address given at the Hull Church Congress, 1890.

by

the Right Reverend Bishop of Liverpool,

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Brotherhoods.

On one point I entirely agree with Archdeacon Farrar.¹ I admit without reserve that the condition of a vast proportion of the lower orders in many of our large overgrown parishes, both morally and socially, is simply deplorable. It is useless to shut our eyes to it. I dwell in Liverpool, the second city in the Queen's dominions, and I know what I say! There is a state of things in some quarters of all our great cities, within a short walk of grand Town Halls and Palaces, which cries to heaven against England, and is enough to make an angel weep.

The class of whom I speak, remember, are not infidels or reasoning sceptics, like many of the upper ten thousand in our Clubs and Squares. Nothing of the kind! The mental position of the immense majority is utter *indifference* to all religion. They are not touched either by church or chapel. They drift on without Christ, without God, and of course without any moral standard. They are rightly called 'the dangerous classes' by our French neighbours; and no wonder. For they are a standing danger to Church, and State, and social order. They have nothing to lose by a general scramble, and are always ready to become the prey of those talking meddlers who delight in setting labour against capital, to encourage discontent, and to make a living out of the ignorance of their fellow-creatures. These dangerous classes have stirred the heart of Archdeacon Farrar; and I sympathize with him entirely.

I believe, however, that there is nothing in the condition of these huge masses of English humanity which cannot be reached, if we use rightly the right means. There is nothing more incurable in the religious and moral state of the men and women who compose them than there was at Rome in the days of Tiberius, Nero, and Caligula. There is nothing worse than there

¹ Frederic William Farrar, appointed Archdeacon of Westminster in 1883.

was in London last century, as we may learn from Hogarth's pictures. There is nothing for which the old Gospel of Christ, rightly administered, is not an amply sufficient remedy. We need neither Robert Elsmere, nor a revised Book of Sports, nor a Continental Sunday. We shall obtain no solid lasting results from a vague restless altruism, or music, or dancing, or pictures, or theatricals. These things may touch the skin of the evil; but they do not reach hearts. We need nothing new, nothing but the old story of the cross, the blood, the love, the power of our Lord Jesus Christ. These men and women whom we want to moralize, and civilize, and Christianize, are made of the same flesh and blood as ourselves. Like us they have hearts and consciences. If Christ and the Holy Ghost have done good to you and me, I maintain that we should never despair of any 'rank, sort, or condition' of men, however fallen and degraded they may at present appear to be. The old Gospel is not worn out, and what it has done it can do again.

But it is needless to say that the value of a remedy depends very much on the manner in which it is used. Does the Church use the best and most effective machinery for bringing the gospel to bear on the vast crowds of our non-worshipping population? Archdeacon Farrar contends that she does not, and wishes us to try a new engine in the shape of Brotherhoods. Here is the point at which, with all respect for his zeal and able advocacy, I am obliged to part company with him and his supporters. I maintain that wherever the existing machinery of the Church of England is rightly worked we want nothing more. Our present system, in right hands, is not a failure. We do not want Brotherhoods in order to reach the masses. In short, my objection is twofold. I contend that in well-worked parishes this well-meant new machine is not needed; and that in no parish would it ever comfortably work.

The statement I have just made requires fencing with a few words of explanation. If the patrons of large working-class parishes choose to make unwise appointments and put round men in square holes; if they appoint quiet prosy men destitute of popular gifts, as good as gold, but as heavy; if they appoint men who are only preachers and not pastors, men whose whole time is devoted to the composition of pulpit fireworks, mere homiletic orators, on Sundays incomprehensible and on week-days invisible; or men who can think of nothing but music, singing, and liturgical services in church—if *this* is the representation of the Church of England, I admit frankly that you will not reach the masses. The great gulf which the Archdeacon and I alike deplore will not be bridged.

But give me a clergyman who really knows Christ, and has the Holy Spirit, a thorough pastor as well as a preacher; a man of decided positive opinions, and not one of those unhappy clergymen who say that nothing is certain in religion, that it does not matter what a man teaches, if he is only

in earnest; a man who takes care to have plain, hearty, bright, simple meetings for worship in mission rooms as well as prayer-book services in church; a man who can preach in a street without a surplice, as well as in a pulpit; a man who will go in and out of every alley in his district and talk simple Gospel to half-a-dozen ragged folks in a dirty cellar as heartily as to five hundred well-dressed people in a church; a man of fire, and love, and sympathy, and tact, and patience, and sanctified common sense, if not a giant in intellect and book-learning. Give me a clergyman who has not only the regulation staff of curates, district visitors, scripture readers, Bible women, and Sunday School teachers who visit their classes at home, but also scores of communicants who voluntarily help Christ's cause, and think it a privilege and a duty to be always carrying on a work of aggressive evangelism. Give me a clergyman of this style in a large working-class population (and there are such to be found) and I see no need of a Brotherhood. I see no place for the new machine, and I do not believe such a clergyman would care to have it. I believe he would tell you, 'I want nothing new. Our old machinery is quite sufficient.'

I do not say that such a clergyman as I have described will do impossibilities, if you are senseless enough to give him a parish of 15,000 or 20,000 people. I do not say that he will convert, or reach, or moralize every man or woman in any parish. I do not expect the Millennium before the Lord comes. But I do say that He will make a deep mark, and will prove that the lowest strata of our people can be got at by our old machinery, and that Brotherhoods are not needed at all.

There are, however, in my opinion, three heavy special objections to this scheme of Brotherhoods, which I will proceed to state as briefly as possible.

(1) My primary objection is the extreme improbability of a *sufficient supply* being found of qualified persons to form them. You cannot bombard a fortress without gun-powder, or make bread without flour. The number of men who are entirely independent of professional income is at all times very limited, and if the members of the Brotherhoods are not to be paid, I am convinced there will be very few of them, except perhaps in London. If they are to be paid I do not see wherein they differ from curates and lay-agents. However I will not dwell on this point. I will assume that the men can be found.

(2) My next objection is that I cannot imagine how Brotherhoods can be made to fit in with our existing *parochial system*, and be worked without incessant risk of friction, collisions, heartburnings, and scandalous quarrels. If the members of the Brotherhood are clergymen, are they to be licensed to the Bishop to work independently of the Incumbent under the Bishop's directions, or are they to be licensed to the Incumbent, and become a supple-

ment to his existing staff of curates? If on the other hand they are to be laymen, I should like to know who is to select them, who is to judge of their qualifications, who is to mark out and superintend their daily work, and in what respect they are to be more useful than our present Scripture readers and lay agents. Under all these heads I see a large crop of difficulties. The parochial system of the Church of England will never work successfully if you try to put the reins in more than one set of hands. You might as well have two captains in a ship. Rectors and Vicars are not angels and seraphim, but flesh and blood. They have their feelings like other men, and are not fond of interference with their own plans and official position. Give a right-minded Incumbent as many more living agents as you please, and he will find something for them all to do. Call them Brotherhoods, if you like, and let them all live together, if they wish to do so. But for peace sake let them all work under the Incumbent's directorship.

(3) About *vows* I could say much. But time will not allow me fully to discuss this disputed subject. I must frankly say that I have a strong dislike to the multiplication of them. I am content with the vows of baptism and confirmation, required of all members of our Church, and I want no more. The light of Church history in the first fifteen centuries makes me regard any apparent attempt to revive monasticism with deep suspicion. Orders of men and women have too often been founded under the banners of avowed poverty and celibacy, and have ended most disgracefully. Experience does not favour 'will-worship' and self-imposed asceticism. Such things have a great 'show of wisdom,' and are very taking for a season with ignorant and shallow Christians. But they only 'satisfy the flesh.' If men professing to be converted, and true believers in a crucified Christ, cannot be chaste, self-denying, and obedient without solemnly registering a vow, I must plainly say I think they are not likely to do much good. At present I see scores of curates and Scripture readers doing most excellent work as men simply licensed, with no vows at all. If the members of the proposed Brotherhoods cannot do like work without vows I think it will be a public confession that they are an inferior order of men.

But, after all, I must plainly tell the Congress that the roots of our 'present distress' about the unreached classes are far lower than is commonly supposed. They will not be touched by Brotherhoods or any other brand-new machinery. The true solution of the problem is to arouse our lay communicants all over the land, and awaken them to a sense of their responsibilities and duties. This is the true alternative. We want a revival among our communicants quite as much as among our non-worshipping classes. We have been too long blind and asleep on this matter. Let me explain what I mean.

I assert then, without hesitation, that at present the laity of our Church

are not where they ought to be in the direct work of Christ, and the furtherance of Christianity in the land. There is a sad gulf between the Church of the first century and that of the English Church in the nineteenth century. A mischievous habit of leaving all religion to the parson of the parish has overspread the country, and the bulk of lay Churchmen seem to think that they have nothing to do with the Church but to receive the benefit of her means of grace, while they contribute nothing in the way of personal active exertion to promote her efficiency. The vast majority of churchgoers appear to suppose that when they have gone to church on Sunday, and have received the Lord's Supper, they have done their duty, and are not under the slightest obligation to warn, to teach, to rebuke, to edify others, to promote works of charity, to assist evangelization, or to raise a finger in checking sin, and advancing Christ's cause in the world. Their only idea is to be perpetually receiving, but never doing anything at all. They have taken their seats in the right train, and are only to sit quiet, while the clerical engine draws them to heaven, perhaps half-asleep. If an Ephesian or Philippian or Thessalonian lay Churchman were to rise from the dead and see how little work most lay Churchmen do for the English Church, he would not believe his eyes. The difference between the primitive type of a lay Churchman and the English type is the difference between light and darkness, black and white. The one used to be awake and alive, and always about his Master's business. The other is too often asleep practically, and torpid, and idle, and content to leave the religion of the parish in the hands of the parson.

No one, I suppose, will think of denying that the Churches to which the Epistles of the New Testament were written, were in a far more lively condition than our own Church in the present day. They had no printed books, no endowments, no cathedrals. But they turned the world upside down, emptied the heathen temples, confounded the Greek and Roman philosophers, increased in numbers and influence every year. And what was the reason of it? I answer that the prominent position occupied by the laity in these primitive communities was the grand secret of their undeniable strength, growth, prosperity, and success. There were no sleeping partners in those days. Every member of the ecclesiastical body worked. Every one felt bound to do something. They needed no Brotherhoods; for all were brothers. All the baptized members, whether men or women, if we may judge from the 16th chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, took a direct active interest in the welfare and progress of the whole ecclesiastical body. They were not tame, ignorant sheep, led hither and thither at the beck of an autocratic sacerdotal shepherd. The best regiment in an army is that in which officers and privates take an equal interest in the efficiency of the whole corps. It is the regiment in which the officers trust the privates and the privates trust the officers, as they did when they fought through that

eventful night at Rorke's Drift in the Zulu war.¹ It is the regiment in which every private is intelligent, and behaves as if the success of the campaign depended on him. It is the regiment in which every private knows his duty, and is honourably proud of his profession, and would fight to the last for the colours even if every officer fell. Such a regiment was a Primitive Church in apostolic days. It had its officers, its bishops, and deacons. It had orders, due subordination, and discipline. But the mainspring and backbone of its strength lay in the zeal, intelligence, and activity of its laity. The Epistle to the Philippians was addressed to the saints, '*with the bishops and deacons.*' Oh that we had something of the same sort in the organization of the Church of England! We should have no need then of Brotherhoods.

With the deepest feeling of affection for the Church of England I cannot avoid the conclusion that in the matter of the laity its system is at present defective and infra-scriptural, and hence this well-meant scheme of Brotherhoods. I cannot reconcile the position of the English lay Episcopalian in 1890 with that of his brother in any apostolic Church eighteen centuries ago. I cannot make the two things square. To my eyes it seems that in the regular working of the Church of England almost everything is left in the hands of the clergy, and hardly anything is assigned to the laity! The clergy settle everything! The clergy manage everything! The clergy arrange everything! The laity are practically allowed neither voice, nor place, nor opinion, nor power, and must accept whatever the clergy decide for them. In all this there is no intentional slight. Not the smallest reflection is implied on the trustworthiness and ability of the laity. But from one cause or another they are left out in the cold, passive recipients and not active members, in a huge ecclesiastical corporation; sleeping partners and not working agents in an unwieldy and ill-managed concern. In short, in the normal action of the Church of England, lay Churchmen have been left on a siding. Like soldiers not wanted, they have fallen out of the ranks, retired to the rear, and sunk out of sight. The effect at the present day is that the English laity are far below the position they ought to occupy, and the English clergy are far above theirs. Both parties, in short, are in the wrong place. The clergy have too much to do and the laity too little, and the whole result is that the masses are not reached.

I know not whether the present state of things can now be remedied. But I never like to admit that it is too late to win a battle, and I cannot admit that matters will be at all mended by Brotherhoods. I should like every parochial Incumbent to make a point of teaching every communicant that he is an integral part of the Church of England, and is bound to do all that he

¹ January 1879. A British force of 103 men successfully held a 'laager' against a host of Zulus.

can for its welfare—to visit, to teach, to warn, to exhort, to edify, to help, to advise, to comfort, to support, to evangelize; to awaken the sleeping, to lead on the enquiring, to build up the saints; to promote repentance, faith, and holiness everywhere, according to his gifts, time, and opportunity. He should educate his people to see that they must give up the lazy modern plan of leaving everything to the parson, and must be active agents instead of sleeping partners. On this point, I believe John Wesley was the first man who understood the wants of this country in the last century. The old Methodists beat Churchmen hollow. With them every new member was a new home missionary in their cause, and the first question asked, as soon as he was enrolled, was ‘What are you going to do?’ The blind stupidity with which John Wesley was treated was a disaster to our Church. We ought to have taken a leaf out of his book. Never will things go well with the Church of England until every individual member realizes that he has a duty to do to Christ and His Church, and keeps that duty continually in view.

My reverend and lay brethren, the times are critical, and this is our day of visitation. In our Established Church it will never do to try to man the walls with officers, and let the rank and file sit idle in their barracks. Clergy and laity must learn to work together. We must have not only an apostolical succession of ministers, but an apostolical succession of laymen, if our Church is to stand much longer. Give us a church in this condition, and we need no Brotherhoods.