

CHURCH REFORM.

No. V.

The Ministerial Office, as it exists in the Church of England.

BY THE REV. J. C. RYLE, B.A.

THE Ministerial Office, as it exists in the Church of England, is the next subject to which I venture to call the attention of my readers. Here also, as in other things, I am bold to say, there is much room for improvement, and much need of reform.

The purpose for which the office of the New Testament ministry was instituted is too well known, I hope, to require much explanation. To preach and teach God's Word, to read and expound the Scriptures, to maintain the orderly administration of the Sacraments, to feed the Church of God, to awaken the careless, to inform the ignorant, to witness against sin, to call sinners to repentance, to edify the body of Christ—these are the ends for which our Lord Jesus Christ appointed a ministry. A sacrificing priesthood, an order of men set apart to offer up any sacrifice in the Church, is a thing of which we find no mention in the New Testament. The Church of England, reverently following the Bible, affords no sanction to a sacrificing ministry, either in her Articles or Prayer-book.

The system of ministry which the Church of England provides is well known to everybody. She holds the three ancient orders of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons, without condemning other Churches which are differently constituted. She admits no one to be a Deacon until he is twenty-three years old, or to be a Priest, or Presbyterian, until he is twenty-four. To the Bishops she gives the charge of Dioceses, and the power of ordaining and confirming. To the Priests she gives the charge of parishes or territorial districts, into which each Diocese is divided. The Deacons are appointed to assist the Priests first, when they require help, and afterwards, on taking full orders, they occupy parishes themselves, if they are appointed to them, or continue assisting others till they are. Deans, Archdeacons, Rural Deans, Canons, Prebendaries, are ornamental titles conferred on the holders of certain man-made offices for convenience sake, but nothing more. The only orders the Church of England recognises among her ministers are those of Bishop, Priest, and Deacon. These are ancient things, I know, and I am almost ashamed of going over them. But it will clear the way to bear them in mind.

Now the questions I want to consider are these—Does our present system succeed in bringing into our ministry all the men that we might get and ought to get?—Is the territorial or parochial plan so entirely successful that it meets all the wants of our times, and has no weak points about it?—In a word, can nothing be added in order to strengthen and improve the ministry of the Church of England, and to enable it to reach the myriads of our people who as yet are practically Nothingarians?—To these questions I shall venture to supply answers. I see room for certain reforms, which I believe would be very useful. Let no reader be frightened at what I am going to say. I do not want to pull down or hurt anything. I only wish to make our ministerial system larger, more elastic, and more popular. The things that I want to see are only additions and not destructions.

(1) I suggest, in the first place, that *the Church should afford increased facilities for young men desirous of obtaining office as her ministers*. We ought to take them by the hand earlier, and to go down lower to meet them. Such a reform I take leave to call a *vertical extension* of the ministry. It is a reform which is greatly needed.

Everybody knows that the Church of England is not suffering from a plethora of young ministers. The very reverse is the fact. There is a notorious dearth of them, and a dearth which is every year increasingly felt. From all quarters we hear clergymen complaining that “they cannot meet with curates.” In every direction we hear of spiritual work standing still for want of hands to do it. In every part of England the demand for young helpers in the Church is much greater than the supply. And what is the reason of all this? I answer that it arises in great measure from two radical defects in our ministerial system, which I should heartily like to see remedied and reformed.

One grave defect is the rule by which no one is allowed to take any ministerial office until he is twenty-three years old. A more unfortunate and suicidal rule I cannot conceive. It repels from the Church of England many who might become the sinews of her strength. From twenty to twenty-three is precisely the age when many a young man’s parents wish him to begin doing something for himself. They have probably spent a considerable sum of money in educating him up to this period. They now want him, not unreasonably, to become a bread-winner and not a bread-consumer in the family. And yet, if this young man is inclined to the work of the ministry, the Church of England can find him nothing to do! Two or three long years he must wait before any official post is open to him. Two or three long years he must support himself before there is any niche of ecclesiastical office that he can fill. Can any one wonder that scores of young men under these circumstances are either lost to the ministry altogether, and plunge into some secular profession, or are caught up by the Nonconformists, re-

moved entirely from our ranks, and made Dissenting preachers? They cannot afford to wait till they are twenty-three. They cannot afford to “stand idle in the market-place,” if the Church will not hire them. They have often gifts and graces and aptness to teach, which might be most usefully employed. But it is of no use! The door of the Church is shut and barred against them until they are twenty- three! This is a great blot in our ministerial system, in my judgment, and one that cries loudly for reform.

Another grave defect is the rule by which the knowledge of Latin and Greek is required from all who seek any ministerial office. In saying this, I hope I shall not be mistaken. I owe so much myself to a classical education at Eton and Oxford, that I am not likely to undervalue classical learning. I hold as strongly as any one that an ignorant, illiterate ministry is sure to fall into contempt. As a rule, our Bishops and Priests ought certainly to be well-educated men. But all this is beside the question. Are there not many departments of ministerial work which a man is perfectly competent to undertake, if he has only God’s grace in his heart, a good knowledge of the Bible in his head, and a certain aptness to teach in his tongue? Are there not hundreds of parishes in this land where a man may be eminently useful without knowing a word of Latin and Greek? I challenge any man of common sense to deny that there is only one way in which these questions can be answered. Well, if this is the case, where is the wisdom of sticking so rigidly to the “hard and fast line” of “no admission without Latin and Greek”? Where is the sense of rejecting entirely the services of a zealous, able, and godly man, because, forsooth, he has not had a classical education? Who can wonder if such a man turns off to the Wesleyans, Baptists, or Independents, and without Latin and Greek crowds his chapel with hundreds; while some learned scholar from Oxford is reading dry essays to empty pews from the pulpit of the parish Church? Classical knowledge, no doubt, is an excellent thing; but surely it might occasionally be dispensed with, for the sake of drawing into the Church graces and gifts. This, again, is a great blot in our system, and one which ought to be removed.*

* Lord Macaulay’s remarks on this subject are so valuable, that I make no apology for commending them strongly to the attention of all my readers. They will be found in his famous essay on “*Ranke’s History of the Popes.*” It is a melancholy proof of the timidity, or narrowmindedness, or apathy of our Church rulers, and those remarks were written in 1840, and yet after thirty years nothing has been done to remedy the defect pointed out in our system.

“In England it not unfrequently happens that a tinker or coal-heaver hears a sermon or falls in with a tract which alarms him about the state of his soul. If he be a man of excitable nerves and strong imagination, he thinks himself given over to the evil power. He doubts whether he has not committed the unpardonable sin. He imputes every wild fancy that springs up in his mind to the whisper of a fiend. His sleep is broken by dreams of the great judgment-seat, the open books, and the unquenchable fire. If, in order to escape from

these vexing thoughts, he flies to amusement or to licentious indulgence, the delusive relief only makes his misery darker and more hopeless. At length a turn takes place. He is reconciled to his offended Maker.

“To borrow the fine imagery of one who had himself been thus tried, he emerges from the valley of the shadow of death, from the dark land of gins and snares, of quagmires and precipices, of evil spirits and ravenous beasts. The sunshine is on his path. He ascends the delectable mountains, and catches from their summit a distant view of the shining city which is the end of his pilgrimage. Then arises in his mind a natural and surely not a censurable desire, to impart to others the thoughts of which his own heart is full, to warn the careless, to comfort those who are troubled in spirit. The impulse which urges him to devote his whole life to the teaching of religion is a strong passion in the guise of a duty. He exhorts his neighbours; and if he be a man of strong parts, he often does so with great effect. He pleads as if he were pleading for his life, with tears, and pathetic gestures, and burning words; and he soon finds with delight, not perhaps wholly unmixed with the alloy of human infirmity, that his rude eloquence rouses and melts hearers, who sleep very composedly while the rector preaches on the Apostolical succession. Zeal for God, love for his fellow-creatures, pleasure in the exercise of his newly discovered powers, impel him to become a preacher. He has no quarrel with the Establishment, no objection to its formularies, its government, or its vestments. He would gladly be admitted among its humblest ministers. But, admitted or rejected, he feels that his vocation is determined. His orders have come down to him, not through a long and doubtful series of Arian and Popish Bishops, but direct from on high. His commission is the same that on the Mountain of Ascension was given to the eleven. Nor will he, for lack of human credentials, spare to deliver the glorious message with which he is charged by the true Head of the Church. For a man thus minded, there is within the pale of the Establishment no place. He has been at no College; he cannot construe a Greek author or write a Latin theme; and he is told, that if he remains in the Communion of the Church, he must do so as a hearer, and that, if he is resolved to be a teacher, he must begin by being a schismatic. His choice is soon made. He harangues on Tower Hill or in Smithfield. A congregation is formed, A license is obtained. A plain brick building, with a desk and benches is run up and named Ebenezer or Bethel. In a few weeks the Church has lost for ever a hundred families, not one of which entertained the least scruple about her articles, her liturgy, her government, or her ceremonies.

“Far different is the policy of Rome. The ignorant enthusiast whom the Anglican Church makes an enemy, and, whatever the polite and learned may think, a most dangerous enemy, the Catholic Church makes a champion. She bids him nurse his beard, covers him with a gown and hood of coarse dark stuff, ties a rope round his waist, and sends him forth to teach in her name. He costs her nothing. He takes not a ducat away from the revenues of her beneficed clergy. He lives by the alms of those who respect his spiritual character, and are grateful for his instructions. He preaches, not exactly in the style of Massillon, but in a way which moves the passions of uneducated hearers; and all his influence is employed to strengthen the Church of which he is a minister. To that Church he becomes as strongly attached as any of the Cardinals whose scarlet carriages and liveries crowd the entrance of the palace on the Quirinal. In this way the Church of Rome unites in herself all the strength of Establishment, and all the strength of Dissent. With the utmost pomp of a dominant hierarchy above, she has all the energy of the voluntary system below. It would be easy to mention very recent instances in which the hearts of hundreds of thousands, estranged from her by the selfishness, sloth, and cowardice of the beneficed clergy, have been brought back by the zeal of the begging friars.

“Even for female agency there is a place in her system. To devout women she assigns spiritual functions, dignities, and magistracies. In our country, if a noble lady is moved by

more than ordinary zeal for the propagation of religion, the chance is that, though she may disapprove of no doctrine or ceremony of the Established Church, she will end by giving her name to a new schism. If a pious and benevolent woman enters the cells of a prison to pray with the most unhappy and degraded of her own sex, she does so without any authority from the Church. No line of action is traced out for her, and it is well if the Ordinary does not complain of her intrusion, and if the Bishop does not shake his head at such irregular benevolence. At Rome, the Countess of Huntington would have a place in the calendar as St. Selina, and Mrs. Fry would be foundress and first Superior of the Blessed Order of Sisters of the Gaols."

The subject is one which requires great plainness of speech. In true love to the Church of England I will give place to no man. I daily pray for her peace, and labour for her prosperity. But I dare not shut my eyes to the fact, that my Church is sadly wanting in elasticity and power of adapting herself to circumstances. Its organization is stiff and rigid like a bar of cast-iron, when it ought to be supple and bending like whalebone. Hence its machinery is continually cracking, snapping, and breaking down. Churchmen talk and act as if a system which did pretty well for five millions of Englishmen 250 years ago, when there were very few Dissenters, must needs be perfectly suited to fifteen millions in 1870! Like some fossilized country squire who lives twenty miles from a railway and never visits London, the poor dear old Church of England must still travel in the old family coach, shoot with the old flint-locked single-barrel gun, and wear the old jack-boots and long pigtail. And all this time Dissent is netting and bagging the Church's children by scores, and laughing in her sleeve at the old gentleman's folly. Surely it is high time to awake out of sleep and attempt some reform of our ministerial system!

The reform which I suggest is as follows. Let the Church of England boldly *revive the office of Subdeacon*, and make it an essential part of her system. Let any one be eligible for the Subdiaconate who is above twenty years of age, if he can satisfy a Bishop that he has received a sound English education, knows his Bible, has a right heart and a good character, and is "apt to teach." To any such person, let the Bishop grant a license to be a Subdeacon in his diocese under any Priest who likes to employ him. Let the remuneration of the Subdeacon in no case be less than £70 a-year. Let the work of a Subdeacon be to assist the Incumbent with whom he is engaged, by reading prayers, by visiting from house to house, and by conducting non-liturgical services in unconsecrated places, all over the parish. Let it be distinctly understood that no Subdeacon is bound for life to hold a ministerial office, and that at any time, while he is a Subdeacon, he may resign his calling, and take up a secular profession, if he sees fit. But let it also be understood that if he wishes to go forward with the work, he may present

himself for regular ordination at the end of three years, and may be ordained if the Bishop is satisfied with him.

The plan I have here propounded may be startling to many because of its novelty. I only ask that it may be weighed, thought over, and calmly considered. I have long come to the conclusion that this plan, or something like it, would be an immense benefit to the Church of England. It would rescue many a noble young heart from the drudgery of an uncongenial trade or business, and give him scope for all his spiritual energies. It would preserve to the Church of England many a promising intellect, which is now snapped up and carried off by Nonconformists. It would provide remunerative work within our pale for many an active young Churchman, who at present wants regular, recognised, official work, as an agent of the Church, and cannot find it. Above all, it would bring in a numerous reinforcement of young men into the Church's army who, under proper guidance and direction, might soon turn our large parishes upside down. Considerations like these weigh heavily with me. I have seen, with my own eyes, dozens of young men lost to the Church of England because there was no occupation for them. I hear every year of dozens of large parishes where the cause of the Church languishes for want of ministerial agents. I can see no remedy for this state of things except a bold, vertical extension of our whole ministerial system. I therefore advocate, as a measure of Church Reform which the times most pressingly demand, the establishment of the office of Sub-deacon.

(2) I suggest in the second place, that the Church ought to make *a more systematic and organized effort to evangelize the large masses* of ignorant and godless people who are to be found in many parts of England. This can only be done by employing a new order of agents, such as we have seldom used yet. We want a *lateral extension* of our ministerial system as well as a vertical one. I will give my reasons for saying this, and explain what I mean.

The parochial system of our Church—the system by which every Incumbent has a territorial district assigned to him, and represents the Church of England within it—is an admirable system, when properly worked. I know no system so likely to do good, so wisely conceived, and so eminently calculated to save souls. It marks out definite work for every clergyman, and prevents him becoming the minister of a few picked, petted, and partial adherents. It secures spiritual oversight for every family in our population, so that no one can ever say, “There is no one to care for my soul.” I do not hesitate to say that an English parish rightly worked, with right preaching in the pulpit, right education in the schools, right visiting from house to house, and right machinery for assisting the sick and poor, is one of the pleasantest and most refreshing sights in this evil world. Granted a faithful administra-

tion, and I know nothing so good as the parochial system of the Church of England.

But just in proportion to the good which the parochial system does when it is properly worked, is the harm which it does when it is worked badly, or not worked at all. Grant for a moment that the clergyman of the parish is unsound in doctrine and does not preach the Gospel, or worldly in life and cares nothing for spiritual things—grant this, and the parochial system becomes a most damaging institution, a curse and not a blessing, a hindrance and not a help, a nuisance and not a benefit, a weakness and not a strength to the Established Church of this realm.

Now, it is nonsense to deny that there are scores of large parishes in almost every diocese in England, where the parochial clergyman does little or nothing beside a cold, formal round of Sunday services. Christ's truth is not preached. Soul-work is neglected. The parishioners are like sheep without a shepherd. The bulk of people never come near the church at all. Sin, and immorality, and ignorance, and infidelity increase and multiply every year. The few who worship anywhere take refuge in the chapels of Methodists, Baptists, and Independents, if not in more questionable places of worship. The parish church is comparatively deserted. People in such parishes live and die with an abiding impression that the Church of England is a rotten, useless institution, and bequeath to their families a legacy of prejudice against the Church, which lasts for ever. Will any one pretend to tell me that there are not hundreds of large English parishes in this condition? I defy him to do so. I am writing down things that are only too true, and it is vain to pretend to conceal them.

But what does the Church of England do for such parishes as these? I answer, *Nothing, nothing at all!*—It is precisely here that our system fails and breaks down altogether. So long as the parochial minister does his duty up to the bare letter of legal requirement, it is a ruled point, both in theory and in practice, and a matter of ecclesiastical etiquette, that nobody must interfere with him! His people may be perishing for lack of knowledge! Infidels, Socinians, and Papists may be going to and fro and beguiling unstable souls! Dissenters of all sorts may be building chapels, and filling them with the families of aggrieved and neglected Churchmen! The children of the Church may be drawn away from her every year by scores! But no matter! The Church cannot interfere! The Church of England looks on with folded arms, and does nothing at all. Can any one imagine a more ruinous system? Can any one wonder that some irritated and disgusted Churchmen become Dissenters, and that others despise or loathe the Church which allows such a state of things to go on? Can any one feel surprised if the inhabitants of such parishes complain bitterly that they are left without remedy until their parson is either converted or dead?

I write strongly because I feel warmly. I do not believe there are five Bishops on the bench who would not admit they have large parishes in their dioceses which are in a most unsatisfactory state, and yet under our present ministerial system they cannot be improved by the Church of England. No! If the careless Incumbent likes to shut his door against improvement, and entrench himself behind a perfunctory discharge of his duties, the Bishops can only sit still, and wait, and hope, and pray! And while this goes on for twenty or thirty years, the Church suffers, Churchmen are driven into dissent, the world mocks, the infidel sneers, the devil triumphs, and souls are ruined. In short, a neglected parish is at present a keyless Bramah lock, and cannot be picked. Like the Englishman's house, it is the Incumbent's castle, and nobody can enter it to do good, except a Dissenter! It was a common joke of O'Connell's that a certain Irish town had over its gates the inscription, "Jew, Turk, and Atheist may enter here, but not a Papist." I fear that the case of a neglected English parish is somewhat parallel. You may write over its boundaries, "Infidels, Papists, and Dissenters may enter here and do what they like, but not a Churchman." If this is not a blot in our ecclesiastical system, I know not what is. It is an abuse that cries to heaven against the Church of England, and it ought to be redressed. Here, if anywhere, there is need of reform.

The reform that I venture to suggest is as follows.—Let the Church boldly call into existence a new class of ministers, to be named *Evangelists*. (I remark, by the way, that I care little about the name so long as we have the real thing; but the name, at any rate, is Scriptural) Let these Evangelists be either clergymen or laymen, selected on account of their possessing peculiar powers of preaching. Let them receive a commission from the Bishop to preach anywhere in his diocese, and not be tied down to any particular parish. Let them act under the direction of the Bishop and his Council, and be sent to preach in any parish where there seems to be special need, for two, three, or four weeks consecutively, in any place or room that seems most desirable. Let the main object of their preaching be to proclaim Christ's Gospel, to arouse the careless, to arrest the attention of the indifferent, to inform the ignorant, to gather together the scattered believers, and to show them how to keep their souls in the right way. Let these Evangelists, in short, use the same weapons that were used a century ago, with such mighty power, by Grimshaw and Berridge. But, unlike these noble-minded men, let them be sanctioned, authorized, commissioned, and encouraged by those in authority, and not snubbed, threatened, frowned upon, and rebuked. Above all let them proclaim, as Berridge and Grimshaw used to do everywhere, that they come as members and friends of the Established Church of England, and desire to strengthen and assist her cause.

Now, I am well aware that the reform I now suggest is open to a host of objections, and could only be carried out with great difficulty. But I have yet to learn that the objections are insuperable. As to difficulty, there never was any good thing done in this world without it. The great enemy of souls never allows his kingdom to be invaded without a struggle.

(a) Some men will tell me that the plan I suggest is not Scriptural. I am not so sure of that. I find a text in which an inspired Apostle says, "He gave, some Apostles; and some, Prophets; and some, *Evangelists*; and some Pastors and Teachers." (Eph. iv. 11.) Moreover, if we talk of Scriptural authority, I think we might be puzzled to find any direct express authority for parishes, dioceses, and rural deaneries, or for rectors, vicars, archdeacons, and rural deans. At any rate there is nothing contrary to Scripture in the idea of an Evangelist. Nay, rather it might easily be shown that the first preachers we read of in the Acts were much more like itinerant Evangelists than settled parochial clergymen.

(b) Some men, again, will tell me that the plan I suggest is entirely new. This, again, admits of considerable doubt. I find in the early Church, according to Dr. Burton, "there appear to have been, in addition to presbyters and deacons, who may be called resident ministers, preachers of the Gospel who were not attached to any particular Church, but who travelled about from place to place discharging their spiritual duties. These men were called in a special manner Evangelists." (See Riddle's *Christian Antiquities*.) I find in the reign of Edward VI. that our own Reformers appointed certain preachers, among whom were Bradford, Knox, and Grindal, who had a general commission, and went everywhere in England preaching the Word. I am not sure that the idea is not being taken up by some of the Ritualistic body in certain dioceses at this very time. In short, the charge of novelty cannot be supported.

(c) But some man will ask me where the proposed Evangelists are to come from, and what prospect is there of a supply of suitable men? I reply that I have not much fear on that score, if the scheme is really taken up and properly launched. There are not a few laymen already who can preach, we know, and do preach, and would gladly take up the work if the Church invited them. There are not a few ministers in England who have more gifts for preaching than anything else, and would gladly give themselves wholly to that work if they had the opportunity. In short, I hold entirely with John Wesley, "Use talents, and you will have talents given you." I do not believe the movement would stand still for lack of agents.

(d) But some man will object that the scheme I propose would break up the parochial system, and greatly damage the Church of England. I do not believe it a bit. I believe, on the contrary, to begin with, that it would do immense good among the laity. It would rally them round the Church of

England, and show them that they were not entirely forgotten. It would keep them within the pale of the Church, and preserve them from being carried off by Dissenters and Plymouth Brethren.—I go a step further. I believe it would do good eventually among the parochial clergy. They would see at last that the diocesan Evangelist did not come into their parishes as an enemy but as a friend. They would gradually learn to value his aid, and might even be provoked to emulation by hearing and seeing what he did.

(e) But some man will say, “Who is to undertake the responsibility of directing the Evangelist’s movements, and indicating the places to which he shall go?” I answer, without the least hesitation, the Bishop and his Council. It is precisely one of those things in which a Bishop would find the help of a Council invaluable. Of course every Bishop who works his diocese properly is well acquainted with the statistics of its parishes, and the doings of his clergy. Armed with these statistics, a Bishop can have no difficulty in pointing out where an Evangelist should go. I admit it would require a judicious mixture of tact, courtesy, and firmness, on the part of all parties concerned in the arrangement, both Bishop, Council, and Evangelist. At first especially there might be danger of some jarring and collision of feelings. But surely the interests of the Church of England ought not to be sacrificed to the wishes of any individual. The cause of God in the diocese should not be allowed to suffer because the sensitive feelings of some careless Incumbent are likely to be aggrieved. The prejudices of those clergymen who (like the famous canine animal in the manger) will neither do a thing themselves nor allow others to do it for them, ought at last to be no longer considered or consulted. They have been borne with too long already. The Church’s excessive tenderness for the so-called rights of the parochial clergy has done no good at all, but positive harm. The practical result has been that the Churchmen of many parishes, deserted and left to themselves, have taken refuge in Dissenting chapels, and been driven out of our Church, and lost to us altogether.

The truth must be spoken on this matter, however offensive it may be to some. The Church of England *has made an idol of her parochial system*, and has forgotten that it has weak points as well as strong ones, defects as well as advantages. To hear some men talk, you might fancy the parochial system came down from heaven, like the pattern of the Mosaic tabernacle, and that to attempt any other sort of ministry but a parochial one was a heresy and sin. It is high time that we should change our tone and humbly acknowledge our mistake. It is useless to ignore the fact that neglected parishes weaken the Church of England, and that they cannot be safely let alone, however difficult the application of the remedy may be. We must face this difficulty, if we want to win back the affections of myriads of our fellow-countrymen. We must break the bonds which black tape has too

long placed on us, and cast them aside. We must take the bull by the horns, and supplement the ministry of inefficient Incumbents by an organized system of Evangelical aggression, and that without waiting for any man's leave. Parishes must no longer be regarded as ecclesiastical preserves, within which no Churchman can fire a spiritual shot, or do anything without the license of the Incumbent. This wretched notion must go down before a new order of things, sanctioned and directed by our Bishops. Of all possible reforms there are few that I desire more heartily to see than the institution of an order of diocesan Evangelists.

There are other minor points connected with the ministry, in which I think there is need of reform. They are points of deep interest to many, but not perhaps sufficiently so to all to justify my entering fully into them. I shall simply name them, touch the surface of them lightly, and pass on to a conclusion. Time and space will not permit me to do more.

(1) I suggest, for one thing, that we need *a great reform in the preaching of Church of England ministers*. At present it is certainly below the mark. Neither in matter, nor in style, nor in delivery, does our pulpit come up to the requirements of the day. There never was a time since the beginning of the world when powerful speaking of any kind had more influence than it has now. There never was a time when it was so important for the clergy to speak for Christ with eloquence, life, plainness, and power. But, alas! how sadly rare this kind of preaching is! How far a man may travel before he hears a really striking sermon! How few clergymen command the attention of their congregation! How many forget that "the foolishness of preaching" is not foolish preaching! These things ought not so to be.

One reason, no doubt, is the utter want of training for the pulpit which the Church of England provides for her young ministers. Few men, I suspect, ever go into orders with any clear idea of what a sermon ought to be, or how they ought to set about making one. Their sermons for the first few years of their ministry are nothing better than experiments, and they often end with giving up in despair, and regularly preaching the compositions of other men. "Alas! master, it was borrowed," would be the true comment on many a clergyman's sermon. This is an evil which might partly be remedied by the Universities providing instruction in sacred rhetoric, and partly by the Bishops laying more stress on the composition of a sermon in their examinations for orders. But it is a matter in which something ought to be done. There is real need for reform.

The main reason why the pulpit of the Church of England is so weak is, I fear, a much more serious one. A stupid notion has lately possessed many clerical minds, that preaching is no longer of importance,—that education and the increase of reading make men think little of sermons,—that the prayers of the Church are the principal thing, and the sermon is of little

moment,—that our main effort should be to improve the ceremonial of the Church, and that we need not think much about the pulpit!—A greater mass of delusion than all this line of argument I cannot conceive. It may suit those who want excuses for laziness in preparing their sermons. It will never satisfy those who open their eyes and look at facts. There never was a period in the history of our Church when men were more ready to listen to really good sermons, if they can only get them, or more quick to show their dislike to bad sermons, if you will preach bad ones. Shrewd men of all schools of opinion are wide awake on this point. Wise men, like the Bishop of Oxford, and Mr. Liddon, and Dean Stanley, and Dean Alford, do not think lightly of sermons, or hold them in low esteem. Let us all look this matter in the face, and see if we cannot improve. Let us strive to reform our preaching.

(2) I suggest, for another thing, that *more effective checks ought to be provided against the admission of unfit persons into the Church's ministry*. This is a very delicate point, but it is a very serious one. It cannot be denied that numbers of young men take orders every year who are thoroughly unfit for the sacred office they enter. Their hearts are not in their profession. They know nothing experimentally of Christ's Gospel, and therefore cannot properly preach it. They are not prepared to "give themselves wholly" to the work of the ministry, or to come out from the follies and vain pursuits of the world. It is mere affectation to ignore these things. Every man of common sense knows them; and every Christian man must feel that ministers of this kind do immense harm to the Church of England. They are the dry-rot and plague of the Establishment. They not only do no good, but they give occasion to our enemies to blaspheme.

The remedy for this evil must be sought in its proper place. As a rule the Bishops who ordain are not to blame, and it is most unjust to say they are. A Bishop cannot read hearts, and discern spirits. He can only judge the young men who offer themselves for ordination by their outward demeanour, their examination papers, and the testimonials they bring with them. If satisfied on these three points, it is extremely hard to say what a Bishop can require more. Those who hastily find fault with Bishops, because some clergymen turn out ill, would do well to consider what I am saying.

Who, then, is to blame? I answer unhesitatingly, those laymen who hear a "si quis" ["if anyone"] read for an ungodly young man and make no objection, and those clergymen who sign a candidate's testimonial for orders when they know that the man who asks for it is unfit to be ordained. Here is the root of the mischief. We want more conscientiousness, more faithfulness to the Church, more honesty, more courage, more firmness, more plain dealing with those who apply for testimonials. Give us a reform of this kind, and it would be an immense blessing to the Church of England. The

man who knowingly helps into the ministry a young worldly fellow who is unfit for it, by signing his papers, may think he is doing a charitable thing. He is totally mistaken. He is doing no real kindness by helping a man into a false position. Above all, he is not a friend to our Church, but a foe.

(3) I suggest, lastly, that *the rule of making orders indelible ought to be entirely swept away*. If any clergyman finds that he has mistaken his calling, and wishes to retire from the ministry, and take up a secular profession, by all means let him go. Let every statute, law, and canon, that stands in his way, be abrogated, abolished, and repealed. I firmly believe that our present system on this subject is a complete mistake, and tells against the Church of England in two ways. On the one hand it prevents many conscientious young men taking orders at all. They shrink from committing themselves to a line of life in which, if once committed, withdrawal seems impossible. On the other hand it retains upon our roll of clergy multitudes of men who do the Church no service at all. They are weary of their position. They have found out their own unfitness for the ministry, and yet cannot get out of it, and remain clergymen against their will. Let those who will be horrified at my proposal. I believe the alteration of the rule **of** the Church in this matter would relieve many consciences and be a most beneficial reform.

But I dare not dwell longer on these subjects. If I can only supply food for thought, and set wiser heads than mine working and thinking, I shall be satisfied.

London: William Hunt & Co., Holles Street, Cavendish Square.

[ONE PENNY.]