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ART. I.—LAY WORK IN NONCONFORMITY.

A GREAT living leader of the English Church has observed that the closing years of the nineteenth century seem likely to be marked in the history of the Church of England by a new departure in the employment of lay agency.

The great problem of the evangelization of the non-worshipping masses has been forced upon the Church's attention by the amazingly rapid growth of our large towns and mining and manufacturing villages. In the back streets of our big towns tens of thousands of the poor are congregated in ignorance and misery. The Church is a mere name to many of them, and scarcely more. Even the Christian religion in any form is for the most part an unknown system—a proper and most respectable thing at which they look carelessly from afar, and with which they do not feel they have so much as a remote concern. We are thus, to use the forcible words of the Bishop of Bath and Wells, "brought face to face with a great evil and a great danger—a huge population in a Christian land not enjoying the blessings of a living Christianity—a huge multitude of men exposed to all the arts of the demagogue, all the blandishments of a smooth-tongued socialism, all appealing to their worst passions and basest inclinations, and they without the safeguard of a Christian faith or that wisdom which comes from an acquaintance with the Word of the living God."[1]

This appalling problem calls for a prompt solution. The population is mounting up by thousands every week. The work that absolutely must be done by the Christian Church in England, vast as it already is, grows in extent every day, and is to the last degree urgent. To wait in meditative, hesitating, undecided mood is a weak and halting policy, fore-

[1] *Guardian*, April 22, 1885, p. 600.

doomed to the ignominious failure it would so richly merit. It means that the Church shall look on with folded arms while the masses she would fain attach to herself are being seized by other and too often hostile hands. Such a course would argue a strange inaptitude to recognise the great day of the Church's opportunity. Happily there is little danger of this. The conscience of the Church is now thoroughly awake. Her ears are open to the piteous voice of the neglected multitudes crying inarticulately but unmistakably for the living message from God. Her heart yearns to respond up to the full measure of her power, in well-directed efforts for their rescue, their elevation, their full and true incorporation into the Christian Church.

What is the wisest and most effectual way to this consummation so devoutly to be wished? To this all-important question there has come a variety of answers most perplexing in their diversity, not to say their discordance. The enumeration and discussion of these would lead us away from our present subject. It is enough just now to point out how on all sides there is a growing agreement that the clergy are utterly insufficient in point of numbers for the work which must be done. No schemes for an extended or permanent diaconate, good and desirable as they may be, are at all likely to yield a sufficient supply of workers. When everything possible has been done, the labourers of this class will be inexpressibly too few for the tilling and sowing and reaping which the moral wastes of our country demand. The solution of the problem must be sought in another direction. In the minds of very many, and these by no means the least experienced or the least trustworthy among the leaders and workers of the English Church, the conviction is gathering strength day by day that the one sure way out of our pressing difficulties, the one effectual method of dealing with the crying necessities of our vast unreached multitudes, is to be found in the employment of laymen on a far larger scale than they are now used. The Bishop of Durham said to the York Convocation three years ago, "The great need of the English Church at the present time is to employ laymen as laymen." "The evangelization of the masses can be done in that way and no other." "The great hope for the Church of England in the future lies not in adding two or three more to the clergy here and there, but in gathering in the whole body of laymen and giving them all work to do as laymen."[1] About the same time Archdeacon Blakeney, in this Magazine,[2] expressed a similar opinion. "Ex-

[1] *Guardian*, April 30, 1884, p. 652.
[2] THE CHURCHMAN, Dec., 1884, p. 209.

perience leads me to believe," he wrote, "that we must enlist the co-operation of agents hitherto but little recognised in the Church of England. I allude to those who may themselves be said to be among the masses. The clergy, Scripture readers, Bible women, lay readers, tract distributors, lay evangelists have done, and are doing, a blessed work, but there is a power amongst working-men, which, if it can be added to the work of those just named, would, I feel convinced, have a marvellous influence in bringing the truths of Christianity to bear upon that class of the community which it has been found so difficult to move." There is, unquestionably, a large amount of energy and zeal among the laity of the Church, now lying dormant, which they are willing to devote to her service, provided practicable ways of using it can be opened out to them. This lay power should be brought into action as speedily as possible. The further the Church can go in the full utilization of lay effort the better it will be for her own practical efficiency and for the moral well-being of the whole nation.

The past of the Church of England is not rich in experience of lay work on which we may fall back for guidance in the present emergency. The small use she has hitherto made of her laymen, and the limited sphere assigned to their energy, constitute one of the weakest places in both her past and present organization. It may, therefore, be of service, while the whole question is undergoing in Synod and Congress and Convocation, the most careful consideration, to look across our own borders, and fix an inquiring eye upon those communities which, separated though they be from our fellowship and in many kinds of religious work our inferiors, are nevertheless in this one matter of the utilization of lay strength decidedly our superiors. No one who really understands the service which Dissent has secured from its laymen will be inclined to differ from the Bishop of Durham when he says that we may well "take a lesson from Nonconformists, who in this matter are wiser than ourselves." "The truest Churchmen are those whose minds are most open to the lessons which can be gathered from all quarters."

The first glance at Nonconformity as a whole makes the observer aware that the different denominations have made very unequal demands on the devotion of their lay adherents. Some communities, such as the Quakers and the Plymouth Brethren, who both reject the principle of a separate ministry, do all, or nearly all, their work by means of laymen. Others, like the Irvingites and the Unitarians, employ the laity to a comparatively limited extent. These bodies, however, constitute the extremes of Dissent; their numbers are small; and

we may at once pass from them to concentrate our attention upon the four principal and most influential denominations.

Among these, again, a singular inequality in the utilization of lay power at once strikes the eye. Congregationalists and Baptists on the one hand, Methodists and Presbyterians on the other, have each opened a large field of labour to their members; but the proportion of workers actually engaged in spiritual toil is considerably greater in the latter bodies than in the former. How is this fact to be explained? After a careful consideration of this striking diversity and of the causes which may have brought it about, we are persuaded the secret of the difference may be expressed in a single word —*organization*. Where the congregations of a denomination take "isolation" as their principle and watchword, where they are separated from and independent of each other, with no more connection and cohesion than grains of sand, then the number of lay workers is small in proportion to the size of the community, and of the opportunities afforded. But given highly organized societies, like the Wesleyan and the Presbyterian, with congregations closely bound together, with district welded to district, and synod to synod, with all the varied powers and functions of the body compacted into one solid organism—there the amount and success of lay work is signal and most instructive. The closer the connection between the component parts of a denomination, the more thoroughly it can organize and utilize its laity. In short, organic unity is essential to the highest development of lay power; whilst the principle of "Independency" is fatal to it! This fact is most hopeful for the Church of England. With her "the sense of corporate unity" is built on strong and deep foundations, so that "she has a greater power of utilizing the evangelistic zeal of her lay members than any other Christian community, though hitherto it has been latent."

All lay work is divisible into two great classes. On the one side is the work of evangelizing and teaching; on the other is the business of council and administration. Reserving the latter of these for a separate paper, we will proceed at once to the consideration of the more directly spiritual departments of lay service in Nonconformity.

Upon such modes of lay work as Sunday School teaching and District Visiting, in which Anglicans are not only fully abreast but also far ahead of the most successful Nonconformist bodies, there is no need to speak. The Church has nothing to learn from Dissent in these matters; rather may Dissent well take a lesson from the Church. So much, however, cannot be said in regard to the exceedingly important subject of evan-

gelistic work among the masses, carried on by men who are not separated from secular pursuits.

Lay preaching is a great and prominent feature in all the principal denominations, except the Presbyterian. For some reason or other it has never flourished in the Scottish communities, although there is much in their polity and organization that seems favourable to the development of this sort of work. There are signs, however, that before many years are passed Presbyterianism will make far greater use of this kind of agency than it has hitherto done. Amongst the Baptists and Congregationalists lay preaching has long been recognised and employed as an effectual means of dealing with small scattered populations, or large poor populations which are unable to sustain a minister. Yet considering the length of time it has been practised, and the extent to which it has been used, surprisingly little is to be learnt from their experience. The method of admission, the plans and rules of work, vary with every distinct congregation. Here, as elsewhere, the action of the principle of independence, the absence of corporate life and union, are most mischievous. The evil appears to be realized by the more intelligent and energetic members of these denominations, for the Congregationalists have in this matter broken away apart from the most distinctive ground of their separate existence as a religious body. Where lay preaching most flourishes among them, we understand there is generally a committee appointed by "a group of churches" in the district, which selects the preachers after trial, and makes arrangements for their services. In some cases the appointments are submitted to the "church meetings;" in other cases the power to appoint is delegated absolutely to the committee. This may be a good working plan, but it is by no means the best conceivable; and, let Congregationalists protest as much as they please, it savours far more of Presbyterianism than Independency. Apart from this new system, the great variety of usage prevailing in both communities confines the working of any one method for selecting, authorizing, and employing their agents to so limited an area as to deprive it of value for our present purpose. The Baptists employ 4,041 lay preachers; the Congregationalists, as usual, give no statistics.

The palm for elaborate organization and extensive use of lay preaching is carried off by the Wesleyan Methodists, with whom the office holds a position of unique importance. As such, the system deserves more detailed description and consideration. Every candidate for lay preachership must be a fully recognised member of the Wesleyan Society for some time previous to his candidature, and must have regularly

attended the weekly meetings of the society class to which he belongs. Should the superintendent minister of the "circuit" in which he resides consider him a suitable person for the office, he gives him a letter authorizing him to conduct two or three services at specified times and places, when one lay preacher or more will be present to report on the candidate's qualifications. Their report is first sent privately to the minister, and then, if he be satisfied with it, to the Quarterly Meeting of all the ministers and lay preachers belonging to the "circuit," or group of societies within a fixed area. At this meeting the presiding minister (and no other person) having certified that the candidate has passed a preliminary examination in the Second Methodist Catechism and the elements of English Grammar, may propose that he be received on probation for the office. The meeting has simply the right of approval or veto. The period of probation extends over twelve months at least, during which time the "lay preacher on trial" conducts a considerable number of services. At the end of his term of probation, when he is seeking full admission and recognition, he must assure the lay preacher's meeting that "he has read the standard sermons of Mr. Wesley and his 'Notes on the New Testament,'" and believes the doctrines therein contained; he must likewise pass "a satisfactory examination in the definitions and Scripture-proofs of the leading doctrines of Christianity as there explained." At the close of this *vivâ-voce* examination, reports are given in on the services he has held, and then, on the proposition of the presiding minister only, he may be admitted to his office by the vote of the meeting. After admission a very strict discipline is maintained over the lay preachers. At their Quarterly Meeting the names are read out one by one; inquiry is made in regard to each separately, whether any objection is made to his moral and religious character, his belief and faithful preaching of Methodist doctrine, his observance of Methodist rule, and especially his attention to and ability for his appointed work. If a charge be preferred against any lay preacher, affecting his work only, it may be dealt with then and there; but if it affect his moral character it must be remitted to the "Leaders' Meeting" of the society to which he belongs, and there be investigated according to the regulations laid down for the trial of all members alike.

This system of admission and discipline, of which we have sketched only the main outlines,[1] is no doubt highly organized

[1] For other details, see Williams, 'The Constitution and Polity of Wesleyan Methodism,' pp. 101-104.

enough. Some parts of it are open to criticism, and we will touch them presently; but first let us look at the work of these men and the results it produces.

The lay preachers of Wesleyan Methodism are in number 15,009; those of the Primitive Methodists amount to 16,138; over 6,000 more are employed by the minor Methodist bodies, so that the total is not far short of 38,000. They are drawn from all ranks and grades of the Methodist community, a great many of them being plain working-men. Each Sunday this army of workers is sent out into the country chapels and town mission-rooms of our land according to a plan of appointments which is drawn up and published quarterly by each superintendent minister. Those who can afford it use conveyances; but the majority travel on foot, walking, in some instances, from ten to twenty miles. One fact alone speaks volumes as to the extent of their work. The number of Wesleyan Ministers in Great Britain is 1,970, the number of chapels is 7,145, and this return does not include rooms and buildings which are rented for service; hence there must be at least 5,000 congregations in Wesleyan Methodism, and probably many more, which are every Sunday dependent on the voluntary efforts of the lay preachers. No impartial observer who is acquainted with their labour can doubt its self-sacrifice, its warm-hearted spiritual earnestness, or the great and wide-reaching influence it has had. Many of these men have known how to speak to working-men in their own language, and with deeply sympathetic knowledge of their peculiar needs, temptations, and trials; to address them with a contagious emotion, and with a straightforward directness of aim that the hearers have often found it peculiarly hard to withstand. In fact, their work is amongst the two or three secrets of the power and success of Methodism. No denomination has grown in the course of this nineteenth century like this cluster of kindred communities. That Methodism has so grown is largely due to its fearless and far-sighted use of lay preaching. A Methodist writer said truly not long ago: "Village Methodism could not live another week without the untiring labour of our lay preachers." Addressing a recent annual gathering of them, Dr. Rigg declared: "It is not too much to say that without your aid, concurrence, and labour, all that has been specifically characteristic of our Methodist churches in the past, in the best and brightest times of their history, would decay and pass away. The wings would be cut away from our Church, and it would subside into something which, though possibly it might still bear the name, would have lost the virtue and life of the Methodism of the ancient days."

Churchmen may and doubtless will think with good reason that several parts of the Wesleyan method are open to serious animadversion. They will object that to test a candidate's fitness, in the first instance, by setting him to conduct a service and preach a sermon, is unfair to him, and painfully derogatory to the dignity and ideal of divine worship; that even under the pressure of a large demand in rural districts there is undue yielding to the temptation to employ spiritually inferior men, whose principal qualification for their grave and solemn task is a certain readiness of speech or perhaps a simple willingness to be used; that the absence of any systematic and general provision for the training and instruction of lay preachers in their work and in the interpretation of Holy Scripture, is a serious injustice to both them and their hearers. This and more may be urged. But when everything in the shape of criticism has been advanced and all deductions have been made, the solid and most instructive fact remains, that the community which, of all others outside the Church of England, has made the greatest advance, owes its present position and influence, to a very large extent, to its lay preachers, and that if these were permanently silenced it must speedily shrink to one-fourth of its present dimensions.

Is there any sufficient reason why the Anglican Church should not utilize its laymen as thoroughly and profitably? In the best qualifications—in piety and energy, in loving devotedness and spiritual earnestness, in careful and accurate knowledge of Scripture—thousands upon thousands of them are, to say the very least, equal to the best Methodist lay preachers, while in general culture and refinement they are decidedly superior. As the "Report of Convocation on the Spiritual Needs of the Masses of the People" says: "There is a mass of volunteers and very serviceable recruits which may be almost indefinitely multiplied. . . . In the more highly educated classes of Churchmen a very remarkable desire exists to take their part in the great work of winning souls." Why should not the Church enlist these volunteers and recruits in her service to a far larger extent than she is now doing, organize them, and bid them go forth in the name of God amongst the vast masses of ignorant, indifferent, degraded souls, for whose evangelization the clergy in their present numbers, with their multifarious duties and straitened resources, can do so little?[1]

[1] In any attempt to thoroughly organize lay preaching in the Church, a number of difficult questions would have to be faced, such as cannot be discussed in a paper on Nonconformist lay work. How, for instance, lay preaching might be carried on in rural parishes? Whether laymen should be permitted to preach in consecrated buildings? Against this last proposal very grave objections may be urged.

One other form of lay ministration there is, peculiar, as far we know, to Methodism, and sufficiently notable to call for attention. Every person who desires to be regarded as a member of the Wesleyan Society is required to join a society class. There are usually from twelve to twenty persons in a class, "united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love." A layman selected by the minister and approved by the other leaders connected with the society is placed in charge of the class. It is his business to meet the class once a week, to conduct the service, which consists of extempore prayer, the singing of hymns, the recital of Christian experience by the members, followed in each case by suitable advice from the leader in regard to what has been said, or to what he knows of each member's special trials or spiritual necessities. It is obvious at once that here is work of the most delicate character and an agency capable of great results. Everything depends upon the intelligence, the fidelity, the spiritual wisdom and power of the leader. Should he be a man well read in his Bible and the secret workings of the human heart, of sound integrity of life, genuine and unaffected in his mode of speech, full of loving sympathy with the soul in its aspirations, its disappointments, its successes, he will be of real use to his fellow-members, and they will find the meetings instructive and helpful. But let him be, as is too often the case, a man stereotyped in thought and life, with no gift of spiritual discernment, of small knowledge and power and sympathy, then one of two things will certainly follow. Either the members will be repelled by the sleepy repetition of stock phrases out of which the vitality has long since fled, and they will gradually fall away; or they too will learn to repeat week by week the same dead phrases and stereotyped "experiences," to the blunting of their spiritual sensibilities and the crusting over of the soul with a coat of terrible unreality.

It is no part of our present business to discuss the class-meeting as a condition of membership, or to examine the details of its working. We are simply considering it as a field of spiritual work for laymen, and what as such it may suggest to Churchmen. On one side it is open to the grave objection that part of the work of spiritual guidance and direction which is entrusted to the layman is work which ought properly to be undertaken by the clergyman, as demanding the utmost knowledge and skill of a trained and qualified teacher. On the other side, the system of constant interest and oversight, of weekly religious instruction for the young and the spiritually ignorant—that is, for people inexperienced in the devout life—is a system of great power and value. Might not Anglican laymen be

used to similar good purpose in Bible-classes, in guilds, in small unions or societies of working-men? For example, after a mission, during which many people have been deeply impressed and brought into personal intercourse with the missioners, the most backward and least instructed of these might be formed into small guilds or classes, one of which could be committed to the charge of some devout and experienced layman, who should meet them at stated times for conversation, instruction, and guidance; who should quietly observe their attendance at church and holy communion, encouraging or stimulating as each case might require, and who should always ask the attention of the clergyman to those who needed special help or admonition. We do not plead for the introduction of the class-meeting into the Church of England. We entirely grant that the most fit and suitable person for such instruction as we have in view is the parish priest. But, alas! he cannot multiply himself indefinitely, nor can he possibly take ten or twenty classes per week in addition to the work he already has; still less can he give to the several members of such classes the abundant personal attention which is so valuable and which is the secret of success. A worker such as we have in view would not supplant the clergyman or interfere with his work, or intrude upon the pastoral office; but he would assuredly be a most valuable auxiliary, enabling the clergyman to overtake his work, and relieving his heart and mind of a burden often too heavy to be borne.

We are thus brought back to the point with which this article began. There is no hope that within the next fifty years the clergy will be increased to such an extent as will be sufficient to meet the crying spiritual necessities of our country. But in the laity the Church has a great and comparatively unworked mine—a vast host of workers in reserve, who may well be called up to the relief of the over-tasked parish priests in the hard conflict with indifference and sin. How much may be done and how safely, we may already see from the various successful experiments that have been made—those bold ventures of consecrated energy and enthusiasm which are even now making a deep mark in the history of the Church. Mr. Charles Mackeson's six years' work as a layman at Hampstead, that has brought from forty to fifty persons to confirmation every year, and has added three hundred names to the parish roll of communicants, is one instance of what lay ministration can effect, and a striking illustration of what the Church annually loses from the want of it. The labours of Mr. Trevarthen in connection with the Guild of St. Alban's, of which a Dissenter volunteered the statement that it had

completely altered the character of the district, is another example. The Bishop of Rochester had in 1885 seventy lay readers and fifty lay preachers employed in his diocese, and he testifies that the system works well. Many must remember the energetic, self-sacrificing, and enthusiastic service rendered with such striking effect during the last London Mission, both in east and west, by the Church of England Working Men's Society, which is reported to have a membership of 8,500 men, all communicants.[1] In truth, as the Bishop of Bedford has said, "Thousands of earnest, manly, unpretending laymen, and multitudes of devoted women are now undertaking work for the Church. We have Prime Ministers acting as lay readers, and Lord Chancellors as Sunday teachers, at one end of the social scale, and working-men in their guilds and associations, enthusiastic in aiding the mission-work of the Church, and in teaching and influencing their fellows, at the other end." These instances are sufficient to show that the system of lay co-operation can be wrought into the Church's work and harmonized with her best established methods, that there is nothing in the structural condition of the Church of England to prevent her applying the additional machinery that is needed. What is wanted now is that spiritual lay work should pass out of the stage of isolated action and experiment, even though it be diocesan, into the stage of a well-considered and thoroughly organized movement on the part of the whole Church as one compacted body.

J. STEPHENSON.

ART. II.—LIFE OF SIR JOSEPH NAPIER.

The Life of the Right Hon. Sir Joseph Napier, Bart., ex-Lord Chancellor of Ireland. A Political Biography. By ALEX. CHARLES EWALD, F.S.A. Longmans, Green, and Co. 1887.

A BIOGRAPHY like that of Sir Joseph Napier gives us both the history of a human life and the history of a national epoch. The life of the man is full of personal interest. It is the life of a thoroughly noble man, with a high order of intellectual power, with a warm and tender heart, and a moral character remarkable alike for its strength, simplicity, and loftiness of tone. No one could attentively read the record

[1] For a further interesting illustration of the use that may be made of working-men, see the account of Mission-work in Sheffield, given by Archdeacon Blakeney, in the article already quoted.—(CHURCHMAN, Dec., 1884.)