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"VOLUNTARY CLERGY" ON THE PRAIRIE AND IN THE BUSH.

BY THE REV. J. D. MULLINS, D.D.

THE problem of supplying the ministrations of the Gospel to scattered communities of our fellow-countrymen overseas is one that ought to exercise the minds of Churchmen far more than it does. Few people know the extent of the problem, fewer still its urgency. The Fifth Report of the Missionary Council, issued in 1927, lifted the veil of ignorance of the facts for a great many people, but even it could not supply the imagination necessary to enable the Home Church at large to grasp its import and rouse itself to tackle the problem in earnest. A certain interest was aroused at the time, but is already dying away. Some parents, whose sons or daughters have gone out to the Dominions or other lands, learn from their letters about their spiritual destitution, drop their former apathy and become impotently indignant that the Church does so little for those dear to them. Amongst those who lack that personal touch, the subject moves few to enthusiasm or effort.

Let us review the facts briefly. All over the Dominions, and indeed in most habitable portions of the globe, our people have gone to settle or to live for prolonged periods for purposes of trade or the like. The older and larger communities are supplied with clergy and services maintained by the inhabitants themselves. Many others receive these ministrations with aid from the Dominion Churches or from England; but newer and smaller centres arise as migration proceeds. The villages scattered over the Canadian prairies, the group settlements and bush homesteads in Australia, the smaller stations in India, and the British trading colonies in innumerable ports are typical of these. Taking the world over, there are literally thousands of these smaller centres and of thinly settled areas which rarely or never get a service or a visit from a clergyman, where the young are brought up with little or no religious instruction and where the settlers either lapse into a pagan godlessness or fall a prey to some form of superstition or heresy.

To meet their spiritual needs, even to a far less degree than is thought essential in the homeland, would need the provision of many hundreds of clergy, and of enormous sums to maintain them until their people could do so. With the ranks of the home clergy so grievously depleted it is obviously impossible to supply the men from England.

The Rev. Roland Allen has come forward with a remedy: Let one man in each hamlet or village community be ordained and empowered to administer the sacraments, and let him do so voluntarily whilst continuing his ordinary avocations. Mr. Allen seems

to consider this plan a reversion to the apostolic method, forgetting that the elders set apart by the apostles were to be, as a rule, what Mr. Allen calls "stipendiary." St. Paul's whole argument in I Corinthians ix. 1-14, goes to show that the manner of life followed by himself and Barnabas was the exception, not the rule, and his final dictum is emphatic: "Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel."

But there are more weighty objections to the plan. First, it presupposes that the people to be reached are devout Christians, eager to welcome and attend such ministrations. As a matter of fact, they are samples gathered from our own people at home. As Horace says: "Those who cross the seas, change their skies but not their characters." In other words, on an average about one person in ten would go to public worship with fair regularity, whilst a much smaller proportion could be described as devout believers. The rest, if described on their immigration papers as "C. of E.," range from those who at home drop in at their parish churches occasionally to those who only know the inside of the building when constrained to enter it for baptisms, weddings or funerals. In only too many of these scattered communities the very desire for spiritual things has grown tepid from lapse of time, if it was ever ardent. Let us assume, however, that there remains a nucleus of earnest souls in such a spot, and that one is found amongst them ready to administer the sacraments to the rest. Mr. Allen's scheme makes no provision for bringing the other types into the fold of Christ, for awakening the careless, reclaiming the prodigals, converting the unbelievers, or teaching the younger generation as it grows up. It does not even provide spiritual teaching for the faithful few. The only answer Mr. Allen can give to this objection is that his "voluntary clergy" would no doubt read morning or evening prayer, and that these services include the reading of Scripture! In other words, they are not to be a teaching ministry, but just performers of services and administrators of sacraments. Allowing for the existence of a faithful few who would benefit by such a ministry, what would become of such a Church when they had died or moved away? What about the "C. of E." churchfolk? What of the younger generation, brought up without Christian teaching? St. Paul's conception of the ministry is wholly different from this: "Give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine" . . . or again, "How shall they believe in Him of Whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" What Church has ever continued to exist, much less to evangelize and expand, without a preaching ministry?

In the foregoing, we have assumed, as Mr. Allen does, that it would be usually possible to find in any such community a man, or perhaps more than one man, who would be willing to undertake to be the ordained minister to the rest. The contrary is my experience, extending by observation and inquiry over twenty-five years. It is the rare exception to find a man who has sufficient standing, education, and Christian courage to accept such a position. To be

sure, Mr. Allen's plan demands no more education than is necessary for reading a service and enough instruction to enable the celebrant to perform certain acts correctly. As an Anglo-Catholic clergyman said in Marylebone recently: "Any fairly educated server knows enough to be able to celebrate." But to state the proposition in such terms is to condemn it. I repeat, for any reasonable form of religious leadership it is hard to find the man. Many a group settlement or similar centre is composed entirely of the labouring class; many again have no member whose churchmanship rises above the census "C. of E." standard.

As an illustration of my contention, during my Australian tour in 1919 I was asked to take an afternoon service at a community-hall in Gippsland. I found that the people received a visit from a clergyman about once a month. After the service, observing that two men in the congregation were wearing Masonic emblems, I tackled them. I argued that they were no doubt used to performing ceremonies in their lodge: why should they not between them run a regular service? But no, they could not be prevailed upon. They excused themselves, and were plainly dismayed at the idea. In Saskatchewan, some years ago, Bishop Lloyd propounded a less exacting plan: let a committee of, say, seven men be jointly responsible for maintaining services in the absence of a clergyman. But even that method was not taken up warmly, and soon fell through in the few places that tried it.¹ I admit that in places like some Indian stations, where there is a local official of standing, such as a magistrate or even a schoolmaster, who is also a devout Christian, he might be found willing to act, and perhaps even now does conduct services, just as some ships' captains do; but such exceptions do not break the rule and are not numerous. It is the official position which carries the day, not the "voluntaryism."

Furthermore, the overseas British settler, or, at any rate, the overseas British Churchman, does not take kindly to ministrations conducted by a neighbour with whom he may have at other times business dealings, and possibly competition. Thus in a Bush area in New South Wales I met with a case where services, conducted by a settler, described to me by the nearest clergyman as qualified and suitable, were not welcomed by other settlers. The objection has nothing to do with ordination, for it seems to have equal force against even clergy who have taken up land and become settlers. In three cases known to me, one in Western Canada and two in Africa, clergy who had homesteaded found the services they conducted were not popular with their neighbours. On the other hand, the average settler, in Western Canada at least, is quite willing to welcome a "preacher" who comes from elsewhere and whose function, so long as he is in the place, is definitely religious. Thus throughout Canada Divinity students are employed with acceptance

¹ Since writing the above I have seen in the *Canadian Churchman* that the Rev. L. J. Hales, of Vanderhoof, B.C., being removed to another station, prevailed upon a body of four residents to continue holding services regularly in Vanderhoof. This is an almost unique exception to the general rule.

as additional missionaries in the long summer vacations, and missions by Church Army captains have proved successful.

The root of all this problem lies in the condition of our homeland. If Great Britain were a land of earnest faithful Christians, then her sons, when they went forth to new countries, would carry their religion with them, as indeed did the Puritans driven out by the persecutions of Archbishop Laud. Whether by means of a stated ministry or by free co-operation with each other, they would maintain the public worship of God and would find means to teach the Gospel to their children. Here and there, if one only knew, groups animated by this spirit may possibly be doing the same thing to-day as was done three centuries ago in New England : if they were the rule, the problem would not exist or would be easily solved.

For the present distress a locally born or locally trained ministry should be encouraged in the newer parts of the Dominions, both by the Church which is more firmly established in the older and more settled areas, and by the Church at home. The short-service system, by which men ordained in England undertake to serve in the Dominions for a limited period of years, may afford those who volunteer for it valuable experience, but that experience is gained at the expense of the pioneer districts they serve. Their ministry is exotic and if it preponderates in any diocese must give the Church in that region the character of an alien.

In the early stages of the settlement of any overseas area it is inevitable that the clergy, like the settlers themselves, should come from elsewhere, and the Mother Country should take her full share in supplying the ministry as she does the other new inhabitants. But as a generation begins to spring up native to that region the ideal should be to try to discover candidates for the ministry amongst the younger folk.

The S.P.C.K. has long since encouraged the growth of a local ministry by offering some bursaries for colonial-born Divinity students for training in approved local theological colleges. The system might well be extended and also copied by the Dominion Churches. The sturdy spirit of self-help which the oversea settler develops makes it possible to train candidates for the ministry at much less cost than at home.

Similarly, and on a larger scale, the Colonial and Continental Church Society has for more than twenty years sent out considerable numbers of carefully selected young men from England to be trained in Western Canada or in Australia, so that they may become acclimatized to the region where their future ministry is to lie and also be further tested before being launched upon it. Going into areas where the other inhabitants are also new-comers they are not liable to the stigma of being imported, and by the time they are ready for ordination they are not distinguishable from their flocks in outlook and local patriotism. Moreover, having been sent out young, they have it impressed upon them that the new land

should be their home. As a fact, many who went out in this way as much as twenty years ago are still in the field.

When all this is done, however, there still remains the wastage of man-power and of means arising from overlapping with other non-Roman denominations, with the result that in some parts two or three churches are competing for a population which might support one, while other places are left untended and unevangelized. The union of Churches is in the air, and in my opinion the solution of this world-wide problem is in some concordat or form of co-operation with the other Protestant Churches. From several great mission fields there has come a demand that Christian converts should be formed into one national Church, unfettered by the controversies and interests which divide Western Christendom. A remarkable article, making a similar appeal for a National Church of Canada, recently appeared in the *Canadian Churchman*. The conditions, of course, are not parallel. In the mission fields, when once the Western missionary element is eliminated, there is no history of past feuds to embitter the discussions about Church Union: in the Dominions and amongst British settlements generally the heritage and traditions of the past still hold good. The trend towards unity exists, as was shown by the still recent amalgamation in Canada of the Methodists with a large section of the Presbyterians, though it seems to have been too hastily consummated, and by similar movements in the United States. It is to be feared, however, that the time is not ripe for the formation of a National Church of Canada, or even for any working arrangement between the Church of England in Canada and the United Church. In Australia the idea of a rapprochement between the Anglican and Presbyterian Churches, which was broached about twenty years ago, seems not to have been revived, and certain discussions on the subject of Church Reunion have a merely academic air. The chief hope for the future evangelization of our fellow-countrymen overseas is that the fire kindled by the Jerusalem Conference of last Easter may be caught by British Christians overseas and draw them to united efforts for the spiritual care of their far-off unshepherded brethren.

WHY SHOULD I READ THE BIBLE. By the Rev. C. Owen French, M.A. London: *Chas. J. Thynne and Jarvis, Ltd.* 2s. net.

A posthumous collection of seven sermons on the Bible preached in Pudsey Church, Yorks, in 1926. These plain talks will be welcomed by those who were privileged to hear them and by all who are anxious to see the more significant facts about the Bible set out in a lucid and orderly fashion, by a conservative student.

S. R. C.