
A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

"O Lord, how manifold are Thy works, in wisdom hast Thou made them all. The earth is full of Thy riches."

Nowhere that I have ever been on this earth do those grateful and reverent words find such a counterpart as in the sunset land of the far, far Western States of America. The impression made on my heart can never be effaced. There was neither speech nor language in those gigantic monuments of the groves; no audible sounds issued from the green beauty and the luxuriant vegetation of the pasture-lands. No voice was heard from the golden grain which clothed the fields in waving abundance; in silent majesty the everlasting hills reared their pine-clad summits to the skies. Yet, I felt as if inanimate Nature loudly recognised her Lord—that the trees of the forest clapped their hands, that the hills, great and small, shouted for joy, and that the cultivated valleys responded to the song; that every streamlet and river, and the mighty Pacific Ocean close by, joined in the solemn chorus, and that they all bore their united testimony to His boundless benevolence that knows no rest, till in every possible combination it has produced every conceivable form of beauty, existence, and enjoyment. If it were only to hear such "songs without words," a visit to California will amply repay the traveller.

G. W. WELDON.

ART. IV.—RURAL DEANS.

SOME five-and-thirty years ago I was at Burton Agnes on a visit to my dear friend Archdeacon Robert Isaac Wilberforce, when he handed me the cover of a letter, and asked what I made of the seal. It was a *cardinal's hat*, plain enough, but the writer was only a Rural Dean! This led to a conversation on the duties of an office which the Archdeacon was trying to call out of the abeyance it had long fallen into. Though not prepared for the eminence aspired to by his correspondent, he still wished for a title to distinguish the new officials from the common herd. "Egregious" would savour too much of the proctor. The functions would long be purely tentative; hence I suggested "Rather Reverend," as a modest and not inappropriate designation. The Archdeacon (I suppose) reported the joke to his brother, for in the Bishop's biography it is given as his own. Those brilliant conversationalists are not above confiscating a good thing. Theodore Hook was a notorious pirate, and my cousin, James Smith, carried about a notebook to impound his neighbour's cattle.

Joking apart, however, my suggestion was not a bit more laughable than some of the "laudatory epithets" in daily use.

An Archbishop is (very properly) addressed in the Prayer Book as Most Reverend Father in God, and *Reverendissimus* is his standing designation in the Acts of Convocation. His "Grace" is a piece of cast-off royalty, a *canine* translation from the *Dei gratia* formerly affected by Primates as well as Kings. Our Dukes have co-opted it, I presume, by "parity of reason;" *en revanche*, the Bishops have prefixed a State "Right" to their Church style of "Reverend Fathers in God;" and now we are beginning to heap "Right Honourable" upon Prelates of the Privy Council, though no Duke or Marquis would condescend to it. When and why Cathedral Deans became more truly (*vere*) reverend than their brethren I have not discovered; I suspect it was within the present century. As for Archdeacons, I knew an old Yorkshire incumbent who had no patience with this novel distinction. "The Very Reverend the Dean, if you please," he would say, "and the Venerable the Chapter, but who made Archdeacons 'venerable'?" He never got an answer.[1] Yet nowadays a Colonial Bishop will create Very Reverends and Venerables *ad libitum*, and these ghostly dignitaries *walk*, here in England, after quitting their corporal functions, if they ever had any. Then the Roman Catholics, not having any use for Deans, devolve the "Very" on their Canons. Why then should our own most respectable Deans Rural be left without a decoration?[2]

The office is as old as the Exodus (Ex. xviii. 10). If it existed, as we are told, in the Anglo-Saxon Church, it is more likely to have originated, than to have been copied from, the lay constable of the tithing. In this country the Church moulded the State, not the State the Church. The *title*, however, seems to have come in with the Norman Conquest, when the Abbots of Secular Chapters were replaced by Deans.[3] There were other Deans, having no Collegiate Chapter, who acquired peculiar jurisdictions (more or less independent) in rural districts, like the Prebendaries of the Old Foundation. Two or three of these still survive, though deprived of their jurisdiction; and of this, too, a portion remains in Jersey and Guernsey. These dignitaries assume the honours of Cathedral Deans, with

[1] In the Chapter Acts at York the Dean is styled "Right Worshipful," and the Canons "Worshipful," the English of *venerabilis*. The Clergy List now distinguishes the lay Chancellor as "Worshipful," which seems to be a trespass on the magisterial dignity.

[2] The Archdeacons have appropriated the Doctor's "shovel;" but the corded and tasselled "dish-cover"—a cross between the cardinal and the carter—is just the thing for a rural dean. I saw a *purple* one the other day, decidedly "rather reverend"!

[3] So at York and in other Cathedrals of the Old Foundation; so too at Westminster; but in the Cathedrals of the New Foundation the Bishop takes the Abbot's stall, and the Dean the Prior's.

the exception of one, who has long promoted himself to more substantial powers. The Dean of the Archbishop's Peculiars in the City of London held his Court in Bow Church, which for that reason was called the "Court of Arches" (*de arcubus*). The jurisdiction ceased with the Peculiars; but the lawyers having transferred the title from the Court to the Dean, and from him to the Archbishop's "Official Principal," still persist in calling the lay Judge of the Provincial Court by the incongruous appellation of "Dean of the Arches."

Of the Deans of Peculiars, he is now the best known; the least distinguished, perhaps, was the Dean of Middleham—Bishop, Primate, and all but Pope, of his own village in Wensleydale. It seems that Richard Duke of Gloucester, whose ruined castle still adorns the landscape, was minded, in one of those religious intervals, for which Shakespeare has not forgotten to give him credit, to found a Collegiate Church after the model of the King's Free Chapel at Windsor. At his request, the Archbishop of York and the Archdeacon of Richmond formally surrendered their jurisdiction, and the place was constituted a papal peculiar. The Rector also resigned the benefice, and was installed Dean in return. The "titles" were selected for the Canons' stalls, and nothing was wanting but the promised capitular endowment. Unfortunately, Richard Duke of Gloucester was too busy with the old King and the young Princes in the Tower to attend to this little detail. The Dean was left without a Chapter, and except for the honour and glory, no better off than before. He became a "Very Reverend," and the parsonage-house was "the Deanery,"—he licensed his Curate, and gave marriage licenses, and even probate of wills in the parish, like an Archbishop; but the old rectorial revenue was all his income. When I went to preach there for the S. P. G. soon after my return from India, I was surprised to see two rows of newly erected deal stalls, in the chancel of a whitewashed village church, inscribed with titles "S. George," "S. Ninian," "S. Cuthbert," etc., in imitation of a Collegiate Chapter. I learned that they were due to the enterprise of an archæological curate, who, discovering from the charters, carefully preserved at the Deanery, that in default of Richard Duke of Gloucester and his heirs the nomination of the Canons devolved on the Dean, persuaded him to fill up the long-vacant preferments, built the stalls himself, and from the humble designation of "Curate" bloomed out into "Subdean, Sacristan, and Canon in Residence."[1] All this unmercenary magnificence was ruthlessly extinguished by the Cathedral

[1] It surprises one to learn that a man of Kingsley's calibre was induced to write himself "Canon of St. Anthony" in this chapter of ghosts.

Act (1840). Still, Middleham enjoys a transient compensation in having a Bishop for its Rector at the present moment.

Rural Deans of the ordinary kind were not dignitaries; they had no jurisdiction, and therefore no courts or seals. They were officers of discipline, like the Deans of the greater monasteries, and of our own University Colleges. Their function was one of inspection under the Archdeacon: a luminary of the law calls them the "eye-glasses" of the Bishop's eye; let us hope they are not *magnifiers*. Their powers were of the kind described in the Highgate oath. They might do anything they liked, if nobody objected. They could hold Ruri-Decanal Chapters, if the clergy chose to attend; they could inspect churches, if the door was not locked against them; and direct repairs, if anybody would execute them. At all events, they could tell the Archdeacon, and he in those days was more formidable than venerable. I am writing in the district of which Chaucer sings—

> "There is in Yorkshire as I guess,
> A marsh country y-called Holderness."

The poet tells us that—

> "Whilom there was dwelling in my country,
> An archdeacon, a man of high degree;
> For small tithes and small offering,
> He made the people piteously to sing,
> For ere the Bishop hent them with his crook,
> They weren in the archdeacon's book;
> Then had he through his jurisdiction,
> Power to do on them correction."

In those days the Archdeacon was a terror to parsons as well as people. They had to get a canon to protect them from his visiting with more than the limited number of horses. There was some excuse for the Churchwarden who confounded the Church Terrier with the Archdeacon's official. Moreover, as neither he nor his train could rightfully dispose of more than one dinner a day, it was provided that when two churches were visited the same day, the "procuration" should be shared by the Incumbents. In those palmy days, even a Rural Dean might get attended to, by menacing the culprits with the Archdeacon. But many things have happened since then. Holderness has been drained, and so has the Archdeacon. The marsh has got rid of the water, and the clergy of the Archidiaconal troop of horsemen. Instead of visiting the churches, he calls the parsons to visit him, and expects every one of them to bring a "procuration" in his pocket, and pay for his own dinner besides. In this utilitarian age we do not care to pay for visits that are not made, and would be useless if they were.

A great Prelate is said to have entertained his Archdeacons and Rural Deans, at the palace meeting, with a review of the law relating to the Archidiaconal functions. They are no longer the mystery that they were in Bishop Blomfield's time. One by one they were mercilessly shown to have been extinguished, or absorbed by the Bishop, till the conclusion came that no legal powers of any kind are left to an Archdeacon. "I beg pardon," gasped out one of them, "your Grace has forgotten the jurisdiction over the Parish Clerks!" "Ah, yes," was the reply; "I give you the Parish Clerks."[1]

Rural Deans, however, have nothing to say to Parish Clerks; what, then, have they to do? When I asked this question at our first Ruridecanal Chapter, an old Incumbent desired that nothing might be said against Rural Deans. "Some years ago there was a great muck-heap at my church door, and say what I would, I could not get rid of it. I wrote to the Archbishop, and he referred me to the Archdeacon. The Archdeacon said he had no power. Then I went to the Rural Dean, and he came down to the church and ordered the Churchwardens to take it away directly. I have had a great respect for Rural Deans ever since."

Knowing this gentleman to be a bit of a wag, I asked, "And was the muck-heap taken away?" "Oh no! it is there to this day. But then he ordered it, and it was no fault of his that he could do no more!"

The wonder is that the impotence of the office detracts nothing from its reputation. The Bishops have got an Act to increase the number of their powerless Archdeacons, and they seem to multiply Rural Deans by division (after the manner of polypi), at their own will and pleasure. In some of the large towns the Rural Dean is parochial, and I see nothing to prevent any other parish from being raised to a Deanery.[2]

In Exeter Diocese the clergy elect their Rural Deans, which

---

[1] Bishop Blomfield had much trouble with the Parish Clerks of London, who formed a trades union in defence of their freehold rights, including drunkenness, revellings, and such like. An Incumbent dismissing his Clerk for misconduct was liable to a *mandamus*, and the British juryman is loth to take away a freehold for such a trifle as going to Church a little merry. The Bishop discomfited this worshipful fellowship by putting a clause into the Act 7 & 8 Vict. 2, c. 59, giving the Archdeacon power to try and remove a Parish Clerk. It is a power not often exercised; for I remember but one instance within my knowledge.

[2] The ancient Rural Deaneries have been broken up and re-arranged, apparently by no other authority than the Bishop's. The new Rural Deans are accounted his officers, not the Archdeacon's: and it does not seem to be necessary for them to reside in their Deaneries. They are named in some modern statutes as persons who may be commissioned by the Bishop, but I find no legal powers, nor mode of appointment.

seems to be a relic of some synodical function. In fact, I have found them, along with the Archdeacons and their officials, in some old lists of Convocation. At present it is the practice of many Bishops to hold a *synodling* of Archdeacons and Rural Deans at the palace, to discuss questions previously submitted to the Ruridecanal Chapters. This is often thought a sufficient substitute for the Diocesan Synod; and, on the Exeter system, there might be something to say for it. But according to the general practice, by which all are the Bishop's nominees, I doubt the feasibility of converting his eyes and eye-glasses into ears and ear-trumpets. It is not so easy for a clergyman to convey a difference of opinion to a Bishop at his own table. A particularly clever man is slow to take in the possibility of a difference. There is a story of the late Bishop of Manchester meeting a London clergyman at dinner, who was famed for parochial management: he expressed his delight at the opportunity of receiving information on a subject of which he had no personal experience. The two retired to a corner, and parted, after a long conversation, with many expressions of mutual respect. The Bishop declared he had never profited so much from any other man; but when the clergyman was asked what he had said to produce such an unwonted effusion, he protested he had never once opened his lips! The Bishop had talked all the time, giving his own views on the management of a parish, which the other did not in the least accept, but did not care to correct. A Rural Dean would have had a poor chance with Bishop Prince Lee at a palace meeting. Even a less masterful Bishop may be in danger of mistaking the echoes of his own voice for the opinion of the clergy.

The truth is that discipline and counsel are two very different functions, and it is a mistake to confound them. On this point I can add nothing to the illustration I offered fifteen years ago: "A Synodal meeting is as different from this as the veins from the arteries in the human body. Both are charged with the same fluid—both are ruled by the action of the same heart; but the one is the outward, and the other the homeward current. From the Bishop, as the heart of the Diocese, discipline flows out by Visitations, Archdeacons, and Rural Deans, to the furthest extremity of the organization; but the vital current never returns by the same channels. It has become weakened and disintegrated by its own exertions; it needs to be conducted into the lungs, and there purified and invigorated by fresh air. Then it goes back to fill the heart with fresh life, and issue out again in another vigorous tide of action. The Diocesan Synod is the Bishop's lungs. The strongest and purest heart cannot dispense with its refreshing function. Discipline deadens and becomes poisonous without

discussion, and many an episcopate has fallen suffocated behind its own vizard, which might have lived and left its mark upon the age, if it could only have got, now and then, a mouthful of fresh air."[1]

The Palace meeting is too large for a Cabinet Council, and too small for a Synod. For the purposes of discipline, it seems to me an inversion of the true process. In the army, the General of a district does not summon the Colonels to headquarters to report on their regiments, but goes himself to inspect them. He sees the officers at their work, and hears the complaints of the soldiers on the spot. In like manner, if a Bishop wants to know the state of his diocese, instead of calling the Rural Deans to the Palace, he should go and stay a day or two with each of his Rural Deans. Clerical Conferences in the morning, Confirmations in the afternoon, with Consecrations and Church openings, would find him work enough. There should be time for clergy and laity alike—and that of every degree—to see and speak to their common pastor. In country parishes the railways—or the absence of them—seem to put us further off from our Bishop than before. He descends upon us once in three years, flashes through two or three Confirmations or Consecrations in a day, and is gone before the slow-coaches have got out a word of their long-ruminated desires. The world is now always in a hurry, and the Bishops partake of the rush. They are dreadfully hard worked; but my belief is the work would be all the better done if they took it more quietly. Instead of absorbing all powers into themselves, they would do well to entrust a great deal more to their Archdeacons and Rural Deans, provided they were themselves often among them. With such a host of active, aspiring officials, it is a pity not to give them work enough. A great opportunity was missed in the Dilapidations Act: the Archdeacons and Rural Deans could have managed the whole affair much better than the Bishops and the Bounty Office, and at half the cost. Rural Deans are even now more useful than Archdeacons, because they make visits instead of Visitations. Both might become of real advantage by a judicious distribution of power. Two things, however, they can never do: they can neither supply the place of the Bishop in the diocese, nor adequately represent its mind to the Bishop.

GEORGE TREVOR, D.D.

[1] "York Church Congress Report," 1866, p. 233.