

The Church and the Working Classes.

At a social meeting of the Liverpool Baptist Union, held in Myrtle-street Chapel, Liverpool, on the 13th inst., John Cropper, Esq., in the chair, the Rev. C. M. Birrell read an interesting paper on "The Church and the Working Classes."

After an account of the evangelical movement among the working classes in Italy, in which country he had been recently travelling, Mr. Birrell remarked:—England has always counted a large body of the working class within her sanctuaries. There are few places in which the Gospel is preached with any force and plainness, in which they are not found. There are, indeed, some whole denominations, particularly among the branches of Methodism, which consist of no other class. But that does not touch the real question, which is not, are working people to be met with in Christian churches, but are they there in proportion to their numbers? I believe, although I have not the means of speaking with certainty, that persons in receipt of wages from manual labour form about three-fourths of the whole population: are they to be found in our places of worship in the proportion of three-fourths of the whole congregation? I apprehend not. The fact is, it is the only morally upper rank of the working class which appears among us; the middle and lower moral ranks keep away from us. There are, therefore, masses outside of us which we never reach. Let a popular preacher engage the amphitheatre or the circus, and send out invitations for all to come freely to hear the Gospel, and what does he find? A very respectable auditory, such as he has around his own pulpit, with a sprinkling of strange faces at the outskirts of the crowd. Let a converted boxer or collier, known to be a clever speaker, do the same, and what does he find? A multitude of a different sort! The respectable people, who injudiciously follow the heels of their own minister wherever he goes, stay away, and those for whom the effort was intended, come, strange to the Bible, strange to the hymns, strangest of all to prayers, utterly strange to everything like public worship. Leave that gathering and explore the club-rooms of working men, the boarding houses of seamen and labourers, the places for debate, gambling, and drinking, in which thousands meet every Sunday, and what do you find there? People to whom the notions of religion are totally foreign, and who would no more dream of exchanging their haunts for a place of worship, than you would of exchanging a place of worship for their haunts. Now: Given the commission to "preach the Gospel to every creature," how is it to be fulfilled with respect to these people? The meeting recently held in London, which has attracted so much attention, had that problem in view. But its promoters seem to have confined their attention to the class of skilled artisans, the reading, thinking, and reasoning set, it was presumed, had such grounds for abstaining from public worship, as they could clearly state. The leaders, therefore, of their organized bodies were applied to, to send fitting representatives of such workmen to a meeting, and they came in a force of about sixty, to the London Coffee-house. There they were confronted by a body of equal number, consisting of clergymen of the Church of England, and Nonconformist ministers. From two in the afternoon, with only an interval of forty-five minutes for tea, till ten at night, did the two armies, from opposite heights, fire into each other's ranks. It was, however (if my figure is at all consistent with such a fact), a most friendly encounter. There was no attempt to spike each other's guns, but rather a readiness to stand still, and let each volley take effect. The working men, never having had such a chance before, poured shot into their antagonists without mercy, and if they did not admire the patience and self-control with which their victims stood the assault, they have less discrimination than I give them credit for. Leaving out a number of minor grievances, the leading objections which these picked men from the skilled artificers assigned for their desertion of divine worship, appear to me to have amounted to less than half-a-dozen, viz:—1. The want of political sympathy with them on the part of ministers. 2. The worldliness of the Church of England as exhibited in the sale of livings, and the wealth of the bishops. 3. The seat-rent system, which throws them into uncomfortable sittings. 4. The exclusive spirit of the better classes. And 5. The dullness and stupidity of the sermons. Some of you may have made out more lessons; but those certainly do the chief duty; and with all respect to the opinion which others may have formed, I must say I have seldom met with a fuller illustration of the tendency of people in a quarrel to put forth good-looking pretences, while they keep the actual reason a profound secret. It is my own conviction that more than half of these allegations have no weight at all. There is first the want of political sympathy in ministers. But is it not the fact that the majority of Nonconformist ministers, at least, are Reformers, and that some of them consider it compatible with their duties even to appear personally on the arena of party politics for their sakes, and yet their ministry is no better attended by workmen than the ministry of others. Then as to the enormous wealth of the prelates of the Church of England: that does not extend to the curates nor even to the majority of the incumbents, and it is certainly not a blot which stains the Nonconformists. It was said by Mr. Cecil that objections against the truth of Christianity had sprung up in his own mind, stronger than any he had met with in the books of sceptics; and I should have supposed that the fact that so many Churches keep their religious instructors on the

brink, and frequently over the brink, of poverty, would have been a stronger point for a shrewd opponent. But I do not find these men attending the ministry of preachers who, in pecuniary respects, stand on, or under, their own level. Then as to seat-rents. The mode of levying the expenses of public worship may be open to improvement; but are those churches in which the seats are all free filled by the working classes? They are not. The fact is, that while some persons, under pretence of serving the working classes, harp continually on that subject, an honest working man knows perfectly well that the expenses of a building—with gas and fire and door-keepers and preacher's brains—must be supplied from some quarter, and he does not choose to pauperise himself by not taking his fair share of the burden. The other two reasons deserve attention, and I should be glad if in the conversation which may follow, they were carefully taken up; the club is swung both to right and left: "the exclusive spirit of the people and the dullness and stupidity of the preachers." Now, as it is easiest to confess other people's offences, I will first acknowledge yours. An Englishman looks on his house as his castle, into which even the King may not enter without leave, and he is inclined so to regard his pew; but a relaxation of this maxim and a little more affability to strangers would certainly not be unbecoming. As to preachers, I am equally ready to admit, and none are so ready to admit, as those who have tried the task, that they might be much more effective than they are. But having made that double confession, I would say on the opposite side, that when complaining of the class feeling of others, working people often forget that they have a class feeling of their own, and they sometimes imagine an affront when none is either given or intended. When, too, they think a sermon stupid, they overlook the fact that that may possibly arise, in part, from their own stupidity. There, indeed, lies more than one half of the whole matter. When I ask myself why the classes to whom I have referred do not come to hear us preach, I have no difficulty in finding an answer. Why should they come? What is there to interest minds precisely in their position? We speak, must speak, so as to instruct the majority of those actually there. And who are they? Persons who have been brought up in Christian families or taught in Sunday-schools, and who, therefore, have a certain acquaintance with the Bible, with the doctrines of Christianity, and with the phraseology and language of religion. But, unhappily, these strangers have not had those advantages. Besides, being untrained to the habit of sitting still, in the posture of reflection, for an hour and a half at a time, there is nothing said which connects itself with what is already in their minds; they cannot make out the object or drift of what is said, and they either fall into a dream, or go away, calling that dull and stupid which others, in a different state of preparation, prize more than necessary bread. What then? Shall we give them up? Certainly not. We dare not; nor is it necessary. They must be educated elsewhere up to a certain elevation, and then, like a stream, they will flow into mixed congregations as by a law of nature. Town missionaries and scripture readers, valuable as they are, cannot meet the case. They who are kept visiting for six hours five days in the week are not in a state to give instruction of high quality on the seventh to sceptical, shrewd, and ill-informed men. Congregations, enjoying the sort of instruction which suits themselves, must open halls and maintain well-educated preachers for the working classes, to give them the sort of instruction which is suited to them; and there will be a continual current out of those special places into those congregations, consisting of all ranks and conditions of men, which present the true form of the Christian Church.

Why do gentlemen go to church?

The subject of the foregoing address has received considerable attention in Great Britain. All the London papers have had comments, more or less, upon it. The Pall Mall Gazette very pertinently remarks, on another view of the subject, as follows:

The really interesting thing would be to know, not why working men do not go to church, but why so many gentlemen do go there. If you could walk into one of the churches in Tyburnia some Sunday morning, impose on all or any considerable part of the well-dressed males between thirty and sixty to be found there, and extract from them, by home questions which must be supposed to be honestly answered, their real reasons for coming to church, some very curious results would probably be obtained. A large proportion would no doubt answer that they came simply from the force of habit—not a few would be obliged to admit that they did it to please their wives. This would be considerably qualified in others by an impression that it was a necessary part of the education of their children, and almost every one would be more or less influenced by the consideration of the general respectability of the institution, and the propriety of supporting it on the ground of its respectability and social utility. So strong is this motive that acquiesces who, when they are in London, never by any accident see the inside of a church, will constantly go in the most regular manner, at least to morning service, in the country, by way, as they say, of setting an example. It may not be good or required for themselves, but they have an impression that it is good for their inferiors. It must also be observed that to abstain altogether from going to church would be rather a marked singular thing in a gentle-

man, and there is nothing on which people so much hate to be singular as matters of that kind. It would be unjust to represent these motives as the only ones which take the gentry of London and other great cities to church, though we have no doubt that if they were all to cease to operate at once congregations would be strangely thinned.

Correspondence.

For the Christian Messenger.

St. Patrick.

Our worthy friend, W. T. Waterman, sends us the following information concerning Ireland's patron saint. If he had given us the authority by which he makes the statement, it would have been more satisfactory to those of our readers who are particular in matters of history and biography:—

"In the article taken from the Canadian Baptist in your paper of the 13th ult., there is a mistake about St. Patrick. St. Patrick was not a Scotchman, he was born in Brittany, a Province of France. His ancestors were Jews, and he was sold into Ireland for a slave when quite a boy. From that he made his way into Scotland, England, and other kingdoms, preaching everywhere as he went.

He was converted while tending sheep or cattle in the mountain, and there in silence and in solitude he studied theology, and drank deep of the peace that flow from faith in Christ.

As soon as he felt himself called to preach the gospel, he took steps to qualify himself for that important office, and when he opened his commission, there was a great rush to his standard, so that he baptized thousands of Irishmen in the river Shannon and other localities in that country. When he could find no convenient place to administer that lovely ordinance, he would build a place for the purpose. One of these places is still to be seen in Ireland, and is known by the name of St. Patrick's Pool."

Mauder's Biographical Dictionary states:— "ST. PATRICK is supposed by some to have been a native of Cornwall, whose zeal prompted him to cross the channel for the conversion of the pagan Irish. By others, however, he is said to have been a native of Kirkpatrick, on the Clyde: and that his name was Saccutus, until changed by pope Celestine. Others again assert, that he was born in Brittany, and carried by some freebooters to Ireland, where he was at first employed in keeping sheep. Be this as it may, it is allowed by all that his endeavours were crowned with great success, and that he established there a number of schools and monasteries. Nennius states that his missions continued forty years, and various miracles are attributed to him, particularly the often-repeated assertion of the absence of all venomous creatures from Ireland, ascribed by the superstitious to his holy benediction. We can no more reconcile the conflicting testimonies relative to the place of his birth, than we could determine the validity of his miraculous powers; and, perhaps, for the sake of truth, the least that is said of either the better. It would seem that the latter years of his life were devoted to acts of piety and religious meditation; and that he died, at an advanced age, about the year 493. His works, or at least those ascribed to him, were published, with remarks, by Sir James Ware, in 1658.

For the Christian Messenger.

A Donation Speech.

We occasionally have acknowledgments by ministers, of donations received from their people. On these occasions addresses are given, of varied character, according to circumstances. The following copy of one of these has been sent us. It contains some points of interest and instruction.

It was my privilege to be present at Brother P's. Donation a year ago, and just as I was bidding him good-bye, he said to me, "I would like for you to become a Christian before our next Donation visit, and then you would give a speech." Through the mercy and goodness of God, I have professed to be a Christian, though I sometimes feel that I am a very weak one. Yet I would rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness, and now I will try and make a speech:

Since the present visit was announced I have been thinking over some of the duties of the members of Christian Churches to their Pastors, and I find that they all concentrate in the one word, Love. Paul and Timothy in exhorting the Church at Thessalonica, made use of these words, "We beseech you brethren to know them that labour among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake."

To prescribe in what way our love should express itself is almost needless, as love is the most inventive passion of the heart, and will find or make a thousand opportunities of displaying its power. It breathes in kind words, it lives in kind deeds. Where a minister is properly loved and esteemed, there will be the greatest deference for his opinion, a delicate attention to his comfort and happiness, and a scrupulous regard for his character. Some people treat their ministers as though they had no feeling. Instead of this let them see

that their prayers, their sorrows, and their solicitude render them dear to the hearts of their flocks. If they are in sickness visit them, if in trouble sympathise with them, if absent from home take a kind interest in their family, and when they return greet them with a smile. It is astonishing what an effect is sometimes produced on a minister's mind and comfort by the least expression of his people's affections. Of this we have a beautiful illustration in the life of Paul. On that important journey to Rome which was to decide the question of life or death, he appears to have felt a season of temporary depression. When the important city presented itself to his view, in silent meditation, he revolved not without some degree of dismay, his approaching appeal to a tribunal, from which he had nothing in the way of clemency to expect. For a little while the heroism of this exalted man was somewhat affected by his situation. At this crisis some of the Roman brethren hearing of Paul's approach came out to meet him, as far as Appii forum and the Three Taverns, whom, when Paul saw he thanked God and took courage. From that moment tears of Nero, of prison, and death, all forsook him. He sprang forward with fresh ardor in his career, and prepared to offer himself in sacrifice on the altar of martyrdom.

If then the love of these brethren who travelled a few miles to meet Paul, produced so happy an effect on the mind of this illustrious Apostle, how certainly may the members of our churches calculate on a similar effect being produced on the minds of their ministers, by the least expression of their affection.

Again, if we love our ministers we will pray for them. How often and how earnestly did the great Apostle to the Gentiles repeat this sentence, which contains at once the authority of a command and the tenderness of a petition. "Brethren pray for us." At another time he ascribes his deliverance and preservation to the prayers of the Churches. You also helping together by prayer for us. If then this illustrious man was depending upon and indebted to the prayers of Christians, how much more so the ordinary ministers of the Gospel. Then let us pray for our ministers, pray that we may appreciate their intellectual attainments, for increase in their spiritual qualifications, and for their success, pray for them at your private approaches to the throne of Grace, pray for them at the family altar, and thus teach your children to love them. Reasons both numerous and cogent enforce this. It is enjoined by divine authority, it is due to the arduous nature of their employment.

Again, if we love our ministers we will subscribe liberally toward their support. The Scriptures are very explicit on this head. "Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things." "Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges? even so it is ordained that he who preaches the gospel should live of the gospel." Let all Christians, therefore, consider what is a just and generous return for the labours of a man who is devoting his life to assisting them to obtain "an inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away," "an exceeding great and eternal weight of glory," who by his ministrations soothes their sorrows, throws a radiance around their gloomy scenes, and gilds their brightest ones with additional splendour, and who is prepared to attend them to the very verge of the dark valley, and irradiate its gloom with visions of immortality.

For the Christian Messenger.

The LaHave in Winter.

A correspondent writing from Bridgewater some two or three weeks since, gave us a sketch of this river. We accidentally overlooked it at the time, but think it worth insertion, even now:

Yesterday—Sunday—after a fearful rain storm the ice above LaHave Bridge came tumbling down, end over end, at a desperate rate, threatening to sweep all before it. Some damage was done to the property of the Steam Foundry Company, Wyman's, Oxner's, Andrew's & Keefer's wharves, and Starrett's large stable, &c. A few hundred dollars, however, will make good all losses. The sudden rush of huge ice cakes being crushed beneath the power of the sweeping torrent, the ice cakes in some places sinking under each other until they come in contact with the bed of the river, then piling up some feet above the surface. Logs, trees, &c., being snapped as easily as pipe stems; hundreds of spectators rushing from one point of view to a more commanding one presented a scene surpassing in grandeur anything of the kind I ever witnessed, and would cast in the shade many of the glowing scenes in foreign lands, so ably described by tourists. One could not help reflecting on the boundless and destructive power of the elements when let forth by the Power which controls all animate and inanimate nature, and exclaim, "Great art Thou and greatly to be praised for thy wonderful works to the children of men."

For the Christian Messenger.

A Mission Sunday School.

It may not be uninteresting to Sunday School children in Halifax to hear something about a school in a far off Western city. Now this same city has a very questionable reputation of its own, and so when a rumor of anything particularly bad gets afloat, it is given a local habitation there, and is adduced as another proof of the hopeless viciousness of the city. It is scarcely