

Literature, &c.

The British Magazines.

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A SERMON ON UNIVERSAL CHARITY.

AND WHAT WAS THE FRUIT IT BORE.

By G. De Lys.

A SHORT discourse was preached, at the parish church of —, by a young clergyman, on the first Sunday after his appointment, at £40 a year, as curate to a canon residentiary who held that living with other preferments. He had never before addressed any congregation. The parish contained several families of great respectability; which term must always be understood to signify wealth, and those other adjuncts akin to wealth, that not only place the possessors above all necessity of conforming themselves in any respect to each other's tastes, pursuits, and habits, but make them also in a great measure independent of other men's favourable opinion and good will; which the poorer and meaner sort must cultivate, according to the same law by which they cultivate the ground, with toil and sweat, as giving them a title to the creature of life, nay, oftener still, the only means of supplying its most wants.

It was a very orderly parish. Rich and poor, all within it, were regular church-goers; for our young curate's predecessor had, throughout a long residence there, always punctually and zealously discharged his high duties. Faithful to his Great Master, he was a tender and generous friend to the poor, a stay and comforter to the sick and desolate, a kind and able counsellor to the conscience-stricken and the doubtful, and an active minister of peace among all. Therefore all in the parish were of his congregation. But at his death, some differences of opinion on polemical matters, which had been restrained from outbreak by his healing doctrines and example, broke forth among the more respectable of the communicants into, to say the least of it, an intense and peremptory desire to ascertain what might be the controversial bias of the new pastor. And none doubted but that somewhat in that sort might be gathered or inferred from the inaugural discourse. And each was hopeful of discovering therein, as in a chart laid open before a practised eye, the indication of some strong holding ground, some snag and land locked cove of shelter, for his own small dark private craft of warlike controversy to cast its biting anchor in.

But in this expectation all were disappointed. Of High or Low Church tendency—of a leaning to the Arminian or to the Calvinistic side of the articles,—of a preference for Evangelical or Tractarian interpretation of the sense, natural or non-natural, wherein points of faith are to be rightly understood—of all this nothing indeed could therein be found, how jealousy however sought for. Even as the visionary water springs and palm groves which mock the weary wayfarer of the desert with promise of some loved shadow for repose, or sparkling draught to slake his burning thirst, but vanish in succession as they rise before his dazzled and craving hope,—so would a faint glimpse sometimes present itself to Fancy, a dreamy picture to the far off distance of some blest oasis of refreshingly exclusive doctrine, where the contentious and weary might rest and banquet; and ever and anon, an eager impulse beat quick and strong in answer to an opening sentence, which seemed to promise much, yet passed away, leaving what was most looked and longed for more vague and doubtful even than before. All was of the simple Catholic doctrine of HIM, who set the little child in the midst, and said 'Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven;' who preferred the worship of the publican before that of the Pharisee; who called to the heavy laden to come to him, and He will give them rest; and whose voice was heard upon the waters of Galilee, saying,—'It is I—be not afraid.'

The text was from the words of the apostles of the gentiles—'But the greatest of these is Charity.' And the discourse was of the nature and obligations of Universal Charity. It appeared to some to be a text singularly chosen for the occasion. For how could it apply itself to the subject of an appointment to a laborious curacy at £40 a year? Nevertheless, all left the Church highly pleased with the discourse. Several expressed their appreciation in letters sent by the next post to their friends. A letter of congratulation lastly, was addressed to the young curate himself, by his far distant Rector, to whose ears the intelligence had come as a flattering tribute of praise for his considerate goodness in having vouchsafed to the parish a curate, who had made such early display of powers and disposition to serve God and his flock. These letters, we will give, in order, as they were communicated to us:—

The first was from a single lady, of respectable independence in the parish, of much and long experience, and whose judgment was much deferred to by a large body of correspondents of her own sex, age and condition, on all subjects of religious and social propriety.

Letter I.—From Miss Judith Sharpe, of Stone Cottage, to Mrs Justus Crampton, of Edge-on-the-Sower, Sowerby, Yorkshire.

MY BELOVED FRIEND,

I haste, according to promise, to send you an account of our young curate's first sermon. I can truly say, that as far as it went, it was both in manner and substance, all that even

you or I could desire. I say, as far as it went. There were, doubtless topics omitted which we should, both of us, be inclined to think most desirable in the introductory effort of a person to whom the requirements of his flock naturally turn for satisfaction, if not for confirmation, on some points of belief as well as discipline—you know what I mean—on which you and I have so often conversed in such happy agreement; but on which, unhappily, so many divisions are to be found within the pale of our church. On these points, I lament to say it, absolutely nothing could be inferred, even as to the preacher's own impressions. But we must hope for the best. Nor was there, in this manner that tone of authority, that confidence of Stewardship, one so much wishes to see, particularly in those whose ministry is among a congregation containing within it so many of the lower and vulgar, and grossly ignorant sort, as in this parish. But this may come, and I trust will, with more use of the pulpit.

His text was, on the whole not ill chosen. Paul, 1st. Corinth., Chap. XIII., verse 13. "But the greatest of these is Charity." A doctrine much needed amongst us here, Heaven knows, to be special recommended in the largest and most Christian sense. He told us all boldly of our faults. I say us;—for you know, my dear, I don't pretend to be better than my neighbours. I do believe I may say it of myself, without arrogance, that if there be one perfection whose importance I have ever more specially acknowledged or humbly striven for with a more hopeful zeal than any other of the perfections necessary to a Christian calling, it is this very one of Charity, in its widest and universal influence, knowing how imperfect we all are, the best of us. To you, I will say it, dear Mrs. Justus, (for with you I have no reserve), I do not remember having ever heard anything that set me more a-thinking—more perhaps, I am ready to admit, than ever before—on this great subject. He took the Apostle's definitions in their order; enforcing each with so much modesty and good sense, but at the same time with an under-current of shrewd and searching illustration, capable of being as clearly and particularly applied as if he had known these he was addressing as long and thoroughly as I have, and as if he had said to A, B, and C, (who shall be nameless,) "I appeal now to your consciences against yourselves." It was very remarkable, this; and gives me a high opinion of his discernment. I leave it to you, my dear, to judge,—for you know this unhappy parish almost as well as I do. If you had but heard the dauntless and missionary tone in which he gave out these words, and commented upon them:—'Charity suffereth long, and is kind. Charity envieth not. Charity vaunteth not itself; is not puffed up!'

Fancy now the squire's pew, which you know, with its scarlet lining and fringed cushions, just under the pulpit which he spoke from; and in that pew the squire himself, and those awfully spoiled children, whom one could so whip; and his odious wife with her French polka pelisse sticking out there! 'Puffe up' indeed! I'll be bound the Corinthians never saw anything like that! And he, from whom hardly a civility, so much as a dinner at the hall, or even a bow at the Church door must be expected—except, indeed near election time—and then, to be sure he is condescending enough! And she, who from sheer envy, cannot see one's name down for an annual £2 to our Christian-Fellowship-according-to-Church-of-England discipline—Day school, but she must needs top one with her ostentations £5! And then, 'Doth not behave it self unseemingly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh not evil!' I could not but take one peep over the corner of my pew into the next pew to me,—you know it,—to see how this was borne by no less a person than that Mrs Joab Pierce, the rich salesman's widow there, who cant speak two words together, of intelligible English, and is one of the life patronesses of our school, and certainly not behaving herself very seemingly among her betters, with that show of artificial flowers at church, on herself and her two big daughters, and their eternal eye glasses,—and bustling going into Church, and bustling going out, whilst other people would be collecting their thoughts for pious meditation—and she, the most violent tempered, censorious poor thing of any I can name in this quarrelsome censorious neighborhood. Never happy but when she thinks she is inflicting a wound. I wonder how she felt. At all events, I was glad for her sake, to see she looked as if she would not forget it. And I warrant our young clergyman will be no favourite of her's, for the lecture he read her. In short, as I said before, the sermon was a most valuable one; though I fear its doctrines have fallen sadly by the wayside, where they will be trampled on. I am bound in charity to hope not.

But I must now leave you, dearest Mrs Justus—I must attend the charity day school. For it is my week, and I am the more bound to go, as that Mrs J. P. happens to be my colleague as weekly visitor. And I would not be five minutes late. For I could not trust the school for one minute of the five to her sole management, and answer for the consequences of her unspeakable vulgarity, ignorance, bad temper, and bad judgment. So I break off. But, knowing you will rejoice with me in all I have so imperfectly said of this excellent sermon, I remain my beloved friend as ever.

Yours most affectionately,

J. SHARPE.

Letter II.—From Mrs Joab Warley Pierce to the Rev. Grisley Skinner, Harden Tythes, Flint Canon Residentary of —

REVEREND SIR,

You laid me under an obligation, so to speak, that I should write you, at earliest convenience, my candid opinion of our new minister as his first effort might have given it me. I haste to take this opportunity by due course of post so to do, beholden as I am to your expressed wishes, according to the best of my poor abilities. And excuse all faults. I should do the young gentleman an injustice,—which I hope I never may be found to do an injustice to any fellow-creature, knowing of the same,—if I did not say he made a great impression on us all. Not but there was, I am free to acknowledge, a many particulars on which this benighted parish I will have the boldness to think he might have denounced, much to our instruction and comfort; which he didn't. Not that I intend any amputation on the young gentleman, or would presume it. Though I have heard doctrine, Reverend Sir, from them as shall be nameless to you, that I much wished might have borne fruit to edification and sound controversy on this favourable occasion. But, from beginning to end, though often led to hope he might have given us something on the points I have so often listened to with improvement, (not from our late curate, good sir, but from his betters,) on the backslidings of Popery and Sectarianism, Antinomianism, Sublapsarians, and Supralapsarians, and Anchorites, and Amorites which was smote with the edge of the sword, and the like, which, as I said before, he did not cast any healing light on any of them, which is much to be lamented;—though venial. Nevertheless, both my daughters and me, which went early and staid it out, with our humble respects to you, Reverend Sir, and all your worthy family, and we beg particular Compt's to Mrs. S. and all we hear is expected soon to be added to your blessed family, and may your Reverence have your quiver full on 'em,—which we hope they are in good health, as thanks be to Him we are at this present,—agrees in opinion that the Sermon was to Edification, and so, in my poor way will endeavour to give you the best account I can of it.

First, his delivery was undeniable, though wanting a trifle in unction, which may come. Grant it may! But what is these externals to 'that which passeth show, good mother?' see Psalmist.

Now what do you think was the text? If I venture with all the difference, to think it the best he could have chosen, and if I may venture to riddle your reference as to what you may guess that text was, I saying it is my favourite text, I almost think I hear your reference say, Mrs P., I know what it was—I know your heart. It was 'the greatest of these is charity.' And so it was, dear sir. But the greatest of these is charity. And nothing about Faith, and Hope,—which is neither here or there,—but only 'Charity.' And as far as I, may speak, I never did hear this heavenly doctrine more fruitfull in our poor vermicular. How my heart went with him as he decanted upon the 13th chapter of Corinthians! 'thinketh not evil—suffereth long—is kind—envieth not.' Sir there are such things as bowels, and we pity our erring neighbours which I have always felt bound in, so to do; and I ponder their iniquities in the night seasons. And could I but hope for the ripening of good doctrine like this in the hearts and minds of the unconverted. And could I but hope for the effects, as my heart yearned for my neighbours who was even in the next pew to me, which she shall be nameless;—for why?—you Reverend sir know who I mean and I must say, saving your reverence, good sir, as cantankerous an old cat as was ever in a Christian congregation; who is envying of everybody who makes a handsomer donation to our school, and a putting down of her shabby two pound ten annular, which I'll be bound she would call it a 'bestowing of all her goods to feed the poor,' and a 'giving of her body to be burned.' At least that's my introspection.

But, to return to the points of the sermon,—and oh with how longing a desire do I look for that blessed maxim to strike its roots deep into the earth and bear its triumphant roots aloft, wherein, as our pastor truly said, is the very essence of all Christian Charity, and for why?—'it thinketh not evil.'

And how the blessings can we hope we are in the right way if, like some, which I grieve to say there are too many of them, and could name them, leastwise some of them who really and truly think nothing but evil of their neighbours, which is their flesh and blood—and what concern have we with our neighbour's peccadillys, having, all the rest of us beans in our own I's, and is not 'puffed up.' Which my second daughter known to you, sir when the minister came to this head, as I looked at her, to see if she wasn't thinking of something, the dear gave me just one intelligent glance of her down cast eyes, turning of them up in silent devotion, the picture of a true Angel, with her pink and white magnolias, and three rows of French face on her bonnet, and just once as if to say, 'I understand you mother' she spelt on her pretty fingers for me to see, the six letters S Q U I R E; I do declare I believe truly, if it had not been in church, I must have smiled outright. For there he was to be sure in his great gaudy pew under the north window, and the whole family, through which you might see the yellow baroque awaiting with the coachman, and the two footmen in blue plushes, and sil-

ver kneed bands, begging pardon for my freedom in the same, like heathens of old they might be, and to be sure they might be inside in prayer, with the bay horses a snorting, as if a purpose to disturb the congregation, which the great Danish dog was continually a jumping up at their noses. From my heart I pity them, which so says both my daughters likewise, and would do them any good that laid in their power. But alas good sir, for our 'sounding brass'—and what is she but a tinkling symbol!

But here I must break off—For I am, this week, one of the two ladies visitors of our Charity School, which capacity I have filled ever since my blessed Joab was removed to a better place, who respected you, being eligible to the same as widows and maiden ladies; and it's the time, and something tells me I couldn't in conscience leave the duties to be performed by an individual, whom I will not mention, whose christian name begins with a J and her Sur with a U, and a S and a H, who is, I am sorry to say, my collick at this present on the work. But I never shall forget this sermon on Universal Charity, and remains, reverend sir,

Your obedient Servant,

PRISCILLA WARLEY PIERCE.

Letter III.—From Sir Hardress Pouchley, of High Hall Manor, to the same.

MY GOOD FRIEND,

I am happy to be able to express to you my satisfaction at the choice you have made in the young man whom, with my concurrence, you have sent down to this parish to supply the place of the late curate. At all events, his inauguration sermon yesterday was of a sort which, as far as the tendency of it went, I could not but approve, and which I think you would have been pleased with also—which are the main points. I feel it, as you know, to be a duty I owe to myself, as a magistrate, and patron, of this living, and proprietor of the lands and free warren of this parish, to take some interest in the doctrines which are preached to the common people.

He is a young man of creditable and gentlemanlike appearance, and, in so far, does honour to your choice. I might, perhaps, have wished he had taken somewhat more directly to submission in matters of Church and State, a subject I always felt to have been too much neglected by our late curate, and on which it might have been as well if he had received a previous hint as a useful topic for his first sermon. But some allowance must be made for his natural diffidence, it being known that I and my family were in the country, and should be at church. And we may hope that more use of his pulpit may bring him out on these subjects. On the whole, however, I was so well contented with what I heard, that I sent my servant to him, after church, with an invitation to dine here, to mark my approbation of what I heard, and to give him some direction as to the points I think it desirable he should lose no time in attending to with the lower orders. I was, I confess, a little surprised at his excusing himself from dinner, upon some plea of a sick woman, or something of the sort, whom he said he wished to pass the evening with. But he wrote to me to say, with his respects, that he would take the liberty of calling sometime in the course of this, Monday's, afternoon, in the hope of finding me at home, when I shall not fail of saying what I wish.

But a word on his sermon. It was on Universal Charity. The text, from St. Paul, was enough in its way and no harm whatever in his manner of handling it, though in some parts, as indeed could hardly be avoided, considering the commonplace nature of the subject, uninteresting enough. There was one passage however which struck me as being particularly applicable to circumstances of no small importance in the present day, and therefore judiciously introduced. I mean that in which the Apostles so sensibly animadverted upon the vulgar notions of charity,—that discriminate sort of charity, I mean, which only spoils those who are the objects of it, and is always sure to be abused. 'Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor,' &c. &c., &c., 'it availeth me nothing.' 'The man,' said he, 'who carelessly flings away from the superfluous stores of his wealth, more, from even what he may feel to be important to his own comforts, to relieve the more pressing wants of another, and goes home rejoicing in the belief that every duty of brotherhood and charity has been fulfilled, deceives himself, and perchance it avileth him nothing. It may have been but to rid himself of a spectacle of wretchedness, which is irksome and painful to behold. And this well-ordered conscience would tell him is not charity. It may have been but to please chase thanks from the object of his munificence, or perhaps to win praise and good opinions from others—and this availeth even worse than nothing.—For it manifests, that he hath the virtue of charity, but the vice of ostentation.'

How true this is! I think the indiscriminate squandering of money among persons really respectable, and calling that charity, a breach of duty which cannot be too strongly inveighed against. You know, my worthy friend, the burthens now pressing on the poor—in wages or relief is the greatest—the common people should be constantly reminded of this. If the pauper submits himself cheerfully to the condition in which Providence has been pleased to place him; and the labourer is, as the same Apostle says,