

THE CHURCH PASTORAL-AID SOCIETY.

BY W. GUY JOHNSON.

ON February 19, ninety-nine years ago, and one hundred years after the great religious revival of the previous century had its first faint stirrings in some meetings for prayer and Bible study amongst a few students at the University of Oxford, a Society was formed for the promotion and assistance of home missionary work in the Church of England. It was called the Church Pastoral-Aid Society, a name which accurately describes its purpose and suggests the methods of work which it adopted and which it has ever since maintained. The need was very great. The industrial revolution caused by the development of steam power and the application of machinery to the processes of manufacture, had begun a vast change in the conditions of English social and economic life. From being a rural and agricultural country still dominated by the spirit of feudalism, England was transformed to a land where factories and railroads and densely populated towns were the prevailing factors. The increase of population in the town areas was so great that hundreds of thousands of people were without any provision for their spiritual needs; and more churches and more clergy were needed if a large part of our people at home were not to be deprived permanently of the opportunity of hearing the Gospel message of hope and salvation. The formation of the Church Missionary Society, and its great success through the blessing of God on the energy and wisdom of its founders and earlier workers at home and abroad, testified to the zeal of Evangelicals for the furtherance of the Gospel in the uttermost parts of the earth; but it had become evident that we had in our midst great masses of people whose mental, moral and social conditions were hardly less degraded than those of the Fiji islanders or the natives of Central Africa: and no man cared for their souls. Although the second quarter of the nineteenth century was rapidly passing, the conditions under which the poor and the working classes in the great manufacturing centres lived were appalling. The nation was then, as now, suffering from the disastrous consequences of war; and to unemployment and poverty were added a callous indifference to the welfare of their people on the part of those who employed them which is almost unimaginable in these days. The lives of the poor were for the most part a misery without mitigation and without hope. And as it was in the main owing to the work of Evangelicals that the negro slave was released from his bondage, so it was in the main that a slavery as savage and intolerable was abolished in our own land. Let the life of the seventh Earl of Shaftesbury, the great Earl, if ever any man deserved the title, bear witness.

It is necessary to dwell on this, for unless the circumstances of the time in which it was born are in some measure realised, it is

not possible to understand the nature and scope of the problems which lay before the infant Society, nor the extent to which it grappled so successfully with them. To these social and economic difficulties have to be added the state of religion in the country and the general attitude of the Church in regard to it. The Evangelicals were still generally looked upon with hostility, or at least with suspicion. The novelists of the Victorian age have combined to caricature them. Trollope, Thackeray, Wilkie Collins, Dickens and others pictured them in the most unfavourable light, and the view they give is probably that taken by the ordinary man of the world at the time. Indeed, Evangelical religion is never to the taste of the man of the world, not so much because of the narrowness and eccentricity of some of its followers, but because it demands a surrender of the whole self to the service of God; a sacrifice so great that they are unwilling to make it. And the Evangelicals fared no better as regards the authorities of the Church. It was almost hopeless to expect preferment from them or from the Government, though matters were improving slightly in that respect. Bishop Henry Ryder, who had adopted Evangelical views, was, in spite of the protests of the Archbishop of Canterbury and a storm in the House of Lords, made Bishop of Gloucester in 1815—the first Evangelical Bishop. In 1826 C. R. Sumner was made Bishop of Llandaff and soon after was translated to Winchester; and in 1828 John Bird Sumner was consecrated as Bishop of Chester, and twenty years later became Archbishop of Canterbury. There were, moreover, stirrings of genuine religious life in quarters not Evangelical. These, though generally unfriendly to Evangelical work, showed that the forces of darkness and evil were being recognised for what they were and that their entrenchments were beginning to be assailed with some effect.

In these circumstances the C.P.A.S. was established. It was an Evangelical Society, but it was formed not for party purposes, but in order that the Gospel might be preached to the poor. It was a Church Society, for its founders were loyal Churchmen who believed in the order and teaching of the National Church, and saw in its parochial system, if only properly worked, the best means of bringing the warnings and consolations of religion to the people of the land. Its origin was very simple. A few Islington laymen, headed by Frederick Sandoz, inserted a paragraph in the *Record* calling attention to the need of a Home Missionary Society. Through this they got into touch with Robert Seeley, the publisher, who with a few others had endeavoured without success to persuade the Bishop of London to form a Diocesan Society. The two groups then united to convene a meeting to be held in the Committee Room of the C.M.S. It is worth while to give the actual text of the letter of invitation of February, 1836, for nothing could better express the objects of the Society or the spirit which animated its founders:

“ SIR,—

“ Having regard to the true interests of our National Church, as well as to the spiritual welfare of multitudes who are wholly or greatly deprived of

her pastoral care, and consequent on several communications with and from esteemed individuals among the clergy and laity, the promoters of the Church Pastoral-Aid Society have determined, in humble hope of the Divine blessing, to convene a meeting of the friends of the object, for which occasion the use of the committee-room of the Church Missionary Society has been kindly granted.

"We have accordingly most earnestly to solicit the favour of your attendance at the Church Missionary House, Salisbury Square, Fleet Street, on Friday, the 19th instant, at one o'clock precisely, when a plan for extending the means of grace in and to necessitous parishes in strict conformity with the spirit, constitution, and discipline of our venerated Church will be submitted, which it is trusted will meet with your cordial approval and strenuous support.

"Entreating your prayers for a special blessing on the design and occasion,

"We are, with Christian regards,

Yours most faithfully,

"JOSIAH PRATT, B.D., Vicar of St. Stephen's, Coleman Street.

"THOMAS SNOW, M.A., Rector of St. Dunstan's, Fleet Street.

"THOMAS DALE, M.A., Vicar of St. Bride's, Fleet Street.

"ROBERT SEELEY, 172, Fleet Street.

"FREDERIC SANDOZ, 30, Park Place West, Islington. } Hon.

"NADIR BAXTER, 12, Brompton Square." } Secs.

The meeting thus convened was duly held. Lord Ashley, afterwards Earl of Shaftesbury, occupied the Chair, and there were sixty-one persons present, twenty-five clergymen and thirty-six laymen. It is interesting to note that among the latter was Mr. John Deacon, who proposed the motion appointing the Committee. Later on, his son, also Mr. John Deacon, became Treasurer of the Society, and on his death in 1901, his son, Mr. J. F. W. Deacon, succeeded him in that office. Subsequently, on the death of Colonel Granville Smith, Mr. Deacon was appointed President as well as Treasurer, both which offices he still holds, to the great advantage of the Society, in which he takes the keenest interest. Resolutions were passed at the meeting formally constituting the Society and appointing the necessary officers; Treasurer, Committee and Honorary Secretaries, though there was no definite mention of a President. But that position was accorded from the very first to Lord Ashley, and he held it until his death in 1885. The Society was beyond measure fortunate in securing his leadership from the beginning of its course, for it would be difficult to estimate what the Church Pastoral-Aid Society owes to the whole-hearted enthusiasm with which he supported and advocated its work. Though he was one of the foremost workers of the time for social reform and for the amelioration of the always hard lot of the poor, he was never tired of asserting his conviction that the principles of the Gospel carried out in the lives of the people were the only ultimate and permanent cure for the ills from which the country suffered.

The Society, now safely launched, at once set about the task which was committed to it, though a very little knowledge of the period would lead us to expect that it would have to encounter opposition, the state of Church opinion being what it then was, and opposition was raised at the very outset, though every care had been taken to avoid offending against Church order. To remove

the smallest possibility of misunderstanding on this point an addition was made in 1837 to the Regulations of the Society as follows :

" No grant from the Society's funds for the benefit of any parish or district can be made unless the incumbent himself shall apply, or sanction the application for aid, and shall furnish to the Committee sufficient proof of the exigencies of the case. The nomination of an assistant shall always be left with the clergyman to whom the aid is given, the Committee claiming only full satisfaction as to the qualifications of his nominee, who, when approved, will be under engagement only to the clergyman by whom he is employed, and solely responsible to him. Grants from the Society towards the support of an assistant are made to the clergyman to whom aid is given, and are voted for one year."

In spite of this a furious controversy arose over two points. One was the claim that the Society should be satisfied as to the fitness of those towards whose stipends grants were to be made. The Rev. G. R. Balleine, to whose valuable *History of the Evangelical Party* this paper is much indebted, in describing this tells us how severely this regulation was criticised. He writes :

" That a London Committee ' in the plenitude of its super-papal authority ' and ' hyper-archiepiscopal tyranny ' should ask for the qualifications of a man, who held the Bishop's licence, was considered an insult not to be endured. Cromwell's Triers and the Spanish Inquisition seemed quite humble inquirers in comparison. In number after number the *British Critic* thundered against the Society. But the Committee stood their ground. They pointed out that theirs was definitely a missionary society for aggressive evangelistic effort amongst the masses outside the Church, and that obviously many licensed clergy were quite unsuited for this particular work, some through infirmity, others through temperament, others through the opinions that they held."

The Church Missionary Society had had to face similar criticism in its early years. It is almost amusing to read that it was seriously urged that as in Apostolic times disciples having sold land, and doubtless other property, laid the money at the Apostles' feet for them to dispose of, so now, Church people should place all their contributions for religious purposes in the hands of the Bishops, leaving to them the choice of men and other arrangements. The proposal commended itself as little to the Committee of the C.P.A.S. as it had done to that of the C.M.S.

The other point of dispute raged round the proposal to employ lay assistants. In our day, when all sections of the Church cordially welcome the help of laymen, it is difficult to realise the amount of heat which this proposal engendered. It was in fact so great that some supporters of the Society, led by William Ewart Gladstone, broke away and formed the Additional Curates Society for the assistance of clerical workers solely. The Committee of the C.P.A.S. declined to be either coerced or cajoled into abandoning what was with them a question of vital principle. They thus opened up the way, and everyone has since that time followed them in treading it.

The opposition died down in due course in face of the resolute and uncompromising attitude taken up by the Committee, and the Society began to make its way steadily. From the beginning

it had the countenance and support of Bishops J. B. Sumner of Chester and C. R. Sumner of Llandaff. To the wise counsel of the former it owed much, for its constitution and rules were submitted to him for approval before being adopted. By the time the Society held its eighth Annual Meeting, it had eleven English Diocesan Bishops enrolled as Vice-Patrons. Three years later its income had risen to £22,505, which had enabled the Committee to make grants amounting to nearly £19,000. During the first ten years of the Society's existence it had raised a sum of more than £164,000 and had expended upwards of £130,000 in grants. We may well imagine the encouragement and help which would be afforded by the provision of a curate to a Vicar struggling single-handed, as in the following case which received a grant in the year 1842.

"Population 15,000 to 20,000. Manufacturing, a few wealthy and many poor, neither educated nor moral. Gross income of benefice is £105, net £87, without parsonage house. The Church contains 2,000 sittings."

Cases like this could be multiplied indefinitely, and they show how great was the need for the Society. Without an organisation of the kind, people, however well disposed and generous, would hardly know that such needs existed, and would have no means of inquiring into the merits of the case; nor would the incumbent striving to overtake a task far beyond his strength know to whom to apply for sympathy and help.

At the Annual Meeting in 1848, after an address by the Bishop of Norwich in which he mentioned that he had supported the Society from its commencement, the Bishop of Manchester expressed his sorrow that he could not say the same, for he had at one time held the view that it was less desirable to support it than some others. He then went on to say: "But I have had within the last few months such ample evidence of its usefulness, that I must admit and retract my error. I found when entering on my new sphere of duties the most ample means of information from my venerable predecessor; and where I found commended by him any particular district, there I was almost certain to find some assistant or some curate supported by the Church Pastoral-Aid Society."

It would be an easy and a pleasant task to fill a volume with selected cases and selected testimonies such as the above, taken from the Annual Reports and the speeches delivered at the Annual Meetings; but while given in different language and from many points of view, they would all testify to the same thing;—the vast and universal need for the spread of the Gospel of Christ, that souls might be saved for time and for eternity; and the blessing which in God's providence had rested upon the Society's labours in promoting the preaching of it.

The date of the formation of the C.P.A.S. was only a year before Queen Victoria's accession to the throne. The years of its formative period, therefore, coincided with the opening out of that great reign. The lethargy or inertia of the early part of the nineteenth century as regards the social and ecclesiastical order was giving place slowly and reluctantly to a restless energy on behalf of reform

in every direction. The extension of the missionary and Colonial episcopate; the efforts for the spread of education at home on Christian lines which were being made by Lord Ashley and others; the efforts to promote Church building and Church discipline seen in the Acts of Parliament relating to these and cognate questions, all testified to a growing discontent on the part of the nation with long-established abuses. At such a time it was of the greatest value that a Society was at work leavening the community with the principles of the Gospel of Christ; proclaiming more by its deeds than by its words that no mere outward reform could by itself produce a sound and stable State, and that it could only be secured by the conversion of men and women in heart and mind to God. Righteousness alone exalteth a nation and sin is a reproach to any people; and it was by affirming this in all its work, that the C.P.A.S. quietly and steadily played a great part in that raising of the moral and religious tone of the country which was so marked a feature of the nineteenth century; and which, promoted by the same influences, under the guidance and with the blessing of the Holy Spirit of God, is still proceeding.

“The kingdom of God cometh not with observation.” We do not, looking at a short period, notice any very evident change, but when time elapses and a longer view can be taken, we are able to judge better the improvement that has been made. The spirit that depreciates our own times and compares them unfavourably with the past, a spirit which so provoked Macaulay, is still with us; and it is worth while to remind ourselves of his words. “The more carefully we examine the past, the more reason shall we find to dissent from those who imagine that our age has been fruitful of new social evils. The truth is that the evils are, with scarcely an exception, old. That which is new is the intelligence which discerns and the humanity which remedies them.”

There can be little doubt as to the value and importance of the service which the Church Pastoral-Aid Society rendered to the spiritual and religious life of the nation. Parochial work, house-to-house visiting, organisation and daily and weekly routine have neither the glamour nor the spectacular value of foreign missionary work, or of great religious demonstrations; but such work patiently and faithfully carried on in face of all discouragement, is that which does more than anything else to keep the heart of the nation sound and to build up that zeal and enthusiasm for the Gospel which are needed if it is to be carried to the farthest corners of the earth.

The formation and growth of the Society and of other Evangelical Societies at or about the same time, did moreover serve to foster a sense of union and a spirit of united action among Evangelical Churchmen which had a great subsidiary value. Mr. Balleine writes:

“For one thing, they effectually counteracted a certain tendency towards Antinomianism, which had distressed Scott and Cecil and some of the wiser leaders. Many congregations had been deeply interested and moved by Evangelical doctrine, but hitherto they had found no outlet for Evangelical work. The tree had been richly watered, but it had not yet learned to

produce an adequate crop of fruit. But now the tiniest village congregation felt itself a unit in an army, which was undertaking a task of overwhelming difficulty. To every individual came the call to self-denial and sacrifice. The Evangelicals were still comparatively a small body, and when we find them committed to such tasks as that of securing workers for all the great town parishes, of providing the colonies with the means of grace, of converting the whole Jewish race, abroad as well as in England, of evangelising Africa and India and New Zealand, of providing the whole world with Bibles and religious literature, it is clear that henceforth there is no danger that they will ignore the practical side of religion. The Antinomian peril disappears."

"Again, the Six Societies proved a wonderful bond of union; they bound the scattered units into a more coherent whole. One thing which helped greatly in this was the system of deputations. . . . These visits did good to every one concerned. The village clergy no longer felt isolated, now that they were sure of having one of their leaders staying in the vicarage every year. And the London clergy gained an intimate, personal knowledge of the work and feeling of their brethren in the country" (*Hist. Evan. Party*, 121-2).

As the century approached and passed its middle period, the Church became agitated and rent by controversies which, alas, are still with us. The issue of the "Tracts for the Times" which began in 1833 terminated in 1841 when Tract 90 was condemned by the Heads of Houses at Oxford. No further "Tracts" were issued and in 1845 Newman, Ward, Oakeley and others seceded to the Church of Rome, leaving behind them a legacy of disunion and false doctrine which has gone far to undo the Reformation, and would, if it were possible, root out the Evangelical movement from the Church of England. This was shown in the Gorham Case when Bishop Philpotts of Exeter endeavoured, though unsuccessfully, to prevent the institution of the Rev. C. G. Gorham to the benefice of Bramford-Speke. The final Court of Appeal decided in favour of Gorham and so settled the question whether Evangelical teaching on the question of Baptismal Regeneration was to be permitted in the Church of England. Then there were the various Ritual suits in which the Ritualists, as they were at that time called, were condemned again and again; there was the controversy over *Essays and Reviews*; the publication of the notorious *Priest in Absolution*; the alarming growth of secularism and materialism; and innumerable questions, theological, political and other, affecting the life and teaching of the Church. Whatever the merit or otherwise of any particular matter, the agitation at least showed that the period of stagnation had gone, and it seemed impossible to forecast the form which would ultimately arise from the welter of conflicting ideas. In such matters, which, though they could not leave the Society unaffected, yet lay outside the direct scope of the Society's work, the C.P.A.S. as such, took no special part, though the addresses at the Annual Meeting of the President and other speakers, and references from time to time in the Annual Reports, show sufficiently that it was fully aware of the signs and currents of the times. But in truth each year's output of pastoral and evangelistic and philanthropic work, by the devoted men and women whose labours were made possible by the Society's benefactions, was a solid contribution to the promotion of truth and

the refutation of error, of vastly more worth and effect than any number of Resolutions passed by the Committee and published in the press.

The growth of Ritualism did not greatly, or not directly, affect the Society, though to parishes where it found an entrance the C.P.A.S. was naturally precluded from making grants. But it became necessary to exercise greater care in regard to the selection of parishes to which grants were made, and it was found desirable to add to the requirements of soundness of doctrine, personal piety and fitness for the work, an assurance of loyalty to the order of the Prayer Book in the matter of ceremonial. As the first step in the way of departure from the Reformation was very commonly the adoption of the Eastward Position, the Committee decided to make the use of the North side position the test, according to the rubric, "And the priest, standing at the north-side of the Table, shall say the Lord's Prayer, etc." There was good reason for selecting this particular point. It is the position prescribed in the Prayer Book; then the Eastward Position had been pronounced by the highest Court illegal, a judgment not at that time reversed; and again, the Eastward Position was the first of the "Six Points" for which those who would Romanise the Church were contending at all costs. It was, moreover, significant of unscriptural doctrine regarding the Holy Communion. Owing to the perversity of men's minds, it is impossible to frame any rule which shall have the effect of retaining only the good and excluding only the bad; but this rule, which has guided the Committee for something like fifty years, has worked satisfactorily, and it would be difficult to find a better one. It should be remembered, moreover, that in the Lincoln Case, the Archbishop in delivering his Judgment said: "The north end became the generally used position, and is beyond question a *true liturgical use in the Church of England*." He further said: "The apostolic judgment as to other matters of ritual has a proper reference to these; namely, that *things which may necessarily be ruled to be lawful do not, for that reason, become expedient*."

In August, 1892, the Rev. A. J. Robinson, Rector of Holy Trinity, Marylebone, wrote to the *Record*, pointing out that the best way to defend the doctrines of the Church was to make the parishes in which they were taught thoroughly efficient. This plea was supported by the Editor in a leading article: "The wise course lies plainly before us. It is by doing good rather than by preventing evil that the Evangelical body exert a real influence in the Church." There is much truth in this, even if it is not the whole truth; but the advice is admirable as far as it goes. Certainly, if Evangelicals do not continue to show the same self-sacrificing zeal in winning men for Christ and in leading them to consecrate their lives to Him, as that which inspired the men on whose foundations they build, they will cease to command either respect or attention. In response to this appeal of the Rector of Holy Trinity the Committee framed a scheme for a forward movement which resulted in a considerable advance in work, and in consolidating and strengthening

the influence of the Society. The effort has not spent its force after the lapse of nearly fifty years.

The most recent controversy, and possibly the one which attracted more general attention throughout the country, was that which began with the issue of "Letters of Business" to the Convocations to consider the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Ecclesiastical Discipline (1904-6), in regard to the Prayer Book and to report. Discussions went on endlessly in the Convocations and, subsequently, in the Church Assembly for about twenty years, when in 1927 a revised Prayer Book, with a very un-Protestant emphasis, was submitted to Parliament and was rejected by the House of Commons after having been passed by the House of Lords. With unimportant modifications the book was again introduced for acceptance by the Commons six months later and was again rejected—the second time by a larger majority than on the first occasion. In this, as in other Church questions of acute interest and real importance, the Society, as such, was not called upon to intervene, though it showed by the tone and language of its Annual Reports that it was fully alive to the urgency of maintaining the Scriptural and Protestant basis of the Church of England, on behalf of which it carries on so devoted, efficient and loyal a work. Many quotations in evidence of this could be given from the Reports: the following is sufficient as an example:

1929. "Our Church is passing through a great testing time. Twice within twelve months the Bishops of our Church have submitted to Parliament proposed changes in the Book of Common Prayer. On both occasions the elected representatives of the people of the country have declined to legalise the proposed changes because in their opinion they were of such a character as to alter the doctrinal position and ecclesiastical outlook of the National Church, in a direction away from the principles set forth at the Reformation. It seems to us that if the authorities of the Church would frankly accept the decision of Parliament and return to the one safe principle of including in public worship only those things which 'are agreeable to the Word of God,' we should be much nearer to that internal unity which we all desire and be preparing for the revival of true religion in the land, which is so essential to the best welfare of the Nation and Empire."

The Church Pastoral-Aid Society has entered upon its one hundredth year. On February 18, 1936, it will have completed a century of labour in behalf of the Gospel, of which it makes no boast, but the record of which will endure the closest examination, and of which Evangelical Churchmen may well be proud. But God's reward for good service is to open the way for yet more and greater endeavour; and the Committee are making plans prepared with much prayer for beginning the Society's second century with an earnest effort to promote a greatly extended work of evangelisation throughout the country, not as a spasmodic movement for a time, but as a regular and continuous and integral part of parochial Church life, incumbent on laity and clergy alike. The time calls urgently for it, and there have appeared many signs during the past year that God is leading His people in this direction. Experience in recent years has shown that many of the large general

movements for the spiritual and moral welfare of young people especially, though not exclusively, fail at the point of their attachment to the Church as a company of Christian men and women, members one of another, each contributing his or her share to the whole. Without such attachment, there is an inadequate sense of responsibility, and no such opportunity for growth in grace and divine knowledge as loyal and enthusiastic membership of the Church affords. It is God's method for the development of the Christian character; and it is the line along which the Church Pastoral-Aid Society works and encourages others to work.

The question arises whether the need for such evangelistic work is as great as it was when the Society was founded, or whether different methods of work or a different way of approach is not needed in view of the greatly altered circumstances in which we now live. The answer seems to be that while the worker in one age naturally and unconsciously addresses himself to the spirit and temper of that age, there are two things which do not change with the passing of the years; one is the deep and abiding need of sinful man for God, and the other is the power of the Gospel of Christ to supply that need.

The social, educational and economic conditions of one hundred years ago are, it is true, no longer with us. Such utter degradation and ignorance of large masses of the people as the eighteenth and early part of the nineteenth century exhibited are not to be found among us. There is still the old problem of poverty, though not in so hopeless a form; and also sin and wickedness are to be found only too abundantly in our midst. And to these must be added the widespread apathy in regard to religion which appears to possess so large a part of our population, and which presents a far harder problem than open resistance or enmity. And yet the people of England in this year, educated, cared for and ministered to by a thousand ameliorative agencies, are among those for whom Christ died, and who yet know Him not. And saddest of all, generations of children are growing up with no instruction in religion to guard them against the dangers which lie before them. While these conditions remain the call to the Christian Church to arise and build comes with greater urgency than ever; to seek by prayer and by unceasing effort to bring the redeeming and sanctifying power of the Gospel within the reach of those who are yet strangers to it. To this call the C.P.A.S. is now responding in the confident assurance that God will continue to guide His people and to bless their work; and will in proportion to their faith lead them into yet larger and more fruitful fields of service.

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