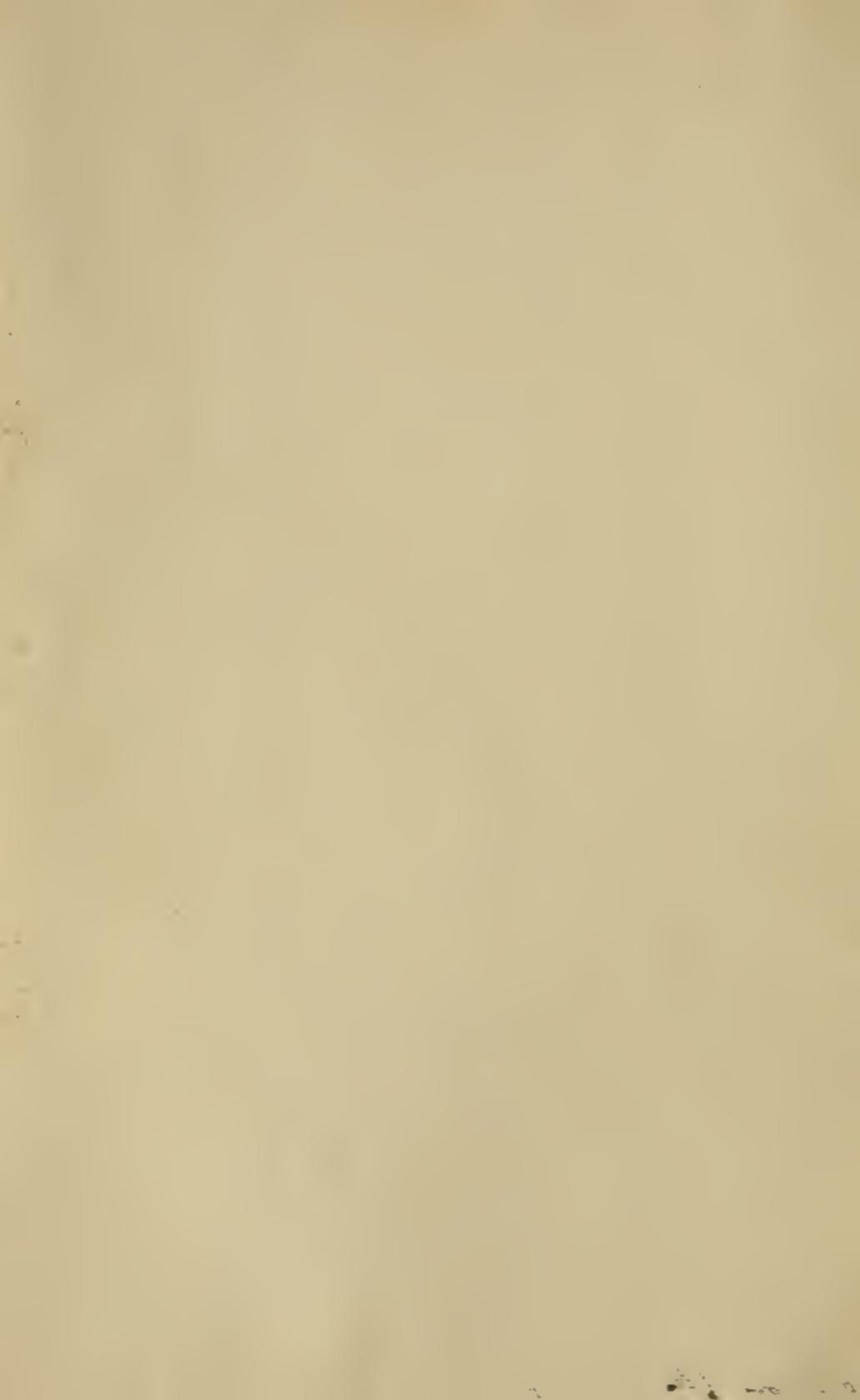


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THANKSGIVING FOR THE EAST-END MISSION.

SERMON BY VEN. ARCHDEACON FARRAR.

S. PAUL'S CATHEDRAL, DECEMBER 1, 1884.

'But first they gave their own selves to the Lord, and to us by the will of God.'
2 Cor. viii. 5.

THE service of this evening, my friends, can perhaps hardly be regarded as a thanksgiving for the *results* of the great Mission effort which has just come to an end in the East of London. Those results as yet are very inadequately known; probably but a small part of them ever can be known. It is said, for instance, that nine million tracts and leaflets have been floated among the people. Who can tell whether those tracts—some of them so simple and so solemn—may not have been as the arrow of him who drew his bow at a venture and smote between the joints of the harness? Hundreds of services have been held; hundreds of addresses delivered; countless prayers have been offered up by earnest hearts. Would it not be the coldest faithlessness on our part to suppose that such efforts, prompted by motives so pure, carried out with energy so self-denying, have all been in vain? I, for one, am sure that they will not prove to have been in vain. Is there nothing encouraging in the fact that on one weekday evening it is calculated that 30,000 worshippers were assembled in the East-End churches? We have heard that at some of the churches the congregations were poor and thin. Ought any to have been surprised at this? Has it ever been otherwise? Are not the counter-activities of evil more energetic when, if I may borrow Milton's image, the warrior Zeal leaps into his chariot and shakes loosely the slack reins? When Isaiah delivered his burning messages, was he not compelled to cry,

‘ Who hath believed our report, and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? ’ When John the Baptist uplifted his mighty voice in the wilderness,

Who listened to his voice? obeyed his cry?
Only the echoes which he made relent
Rang from their flinty caves, ‘ Repent! Repent! ’

Nay, after the Lord of Glory had preached for three years through all Judea, how many disciples had He won? Of one hundred and twenty disciples at Jerusalem, not one stood beside His cross. Of the twelve Apostles, one was Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him. Yet that little flock, going forth as lambs among wolves, conquered and disarmed the whole majestic world. It may be that even the smallest of the late gatherings have been as fruitful as any. S. Francis de Sales was one of the greatest preachers of his day, and not only did he never shrink from preaching even to so small a congregation as seven persons, but he has left his record that from some of his smallest congregations he won the richest fruit. Must we not believe that even the fewest worshippers shall not have met in vain when we read Christ’s own promise, ‘ Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them ’? Can He forget His promise? Oh! if any missionary or pastor be at this moment sad and sore of heart, bitterly and grievously depressed in the strong reaction of weariness and apparent failure, humbly but earnestly in God’s name would I bid him be comforted. His work in God’s sight may have been even more deeply successful than that of those which has been crowned with the most apparent encouragement. He has cast his bread upon the waters; he shall find it, though it be after many days. For the seed which he hath now borne forth weeping, he shall one day, here or hereafter, carry back sheaves of golden grain. One of those American missionaries who has addressed so many thousands of the poor began a recent Mission with the words, ‘ Let us thank God for what He is going to do. ’ Have we no faith to say, even if as yet we know it not, ‘ Let us thank God for what we are very sure that He hath done ’?

2. I have not, therefore, been at all troubled by the questions of those who have asked, ‘ What can be the meaning of a thanksgiving service, before it is possible for us to know of any traceably permanent results? ’

How of the field’s fortune? That concerns our Leader:
Led, we struck our stroke, nor cared for doings left or right.

Even on the supposition—a supposition happily the reverse of true—that the Mission had not succeeded, I see in the history of the Church abundant proof that efforts, which seem at the time to have failed hopelessly, have in the end wrought most mighty deliverance. Sometimes the saints of God, after years of bitter disappointment, have lived to see the tardy blessing which has over-rewarded them. Sometimes they have, in assured faith, seen them afar off, and been persuaded of them. Always they have, at least, possessed their souls in patience, and, having done their duty to the uttermost, have left the results to Him alone in whose hands are all the issues of human actions. To us surely the Cross of Christ is at once the emblem, the pledge, the explanation of all apparent failure, which is, in reality, eternal triumph. When Paul lay in his lonely prison, deserted by all the children of all his churches, and, chained and shivering, went forth to meet his obscure, unknown, unwitnessed end; when William Tyndale, the translator of the English Bible, was strangled at the stake where his body was burned; when William Carey, the itinerant Northampton shoemaker, had gone to be the founder of Indian Missions, and, by the upsetting of a boat, all that he had provided for the establishment and support of his Mission went in one moment to the bottom of the Hooghly; when Coleridge Patteson saw the poor wild savages make their rush at him on the island shore; when Charles Mackenzie died of fever, in a thwarted expedition, among the malarious swamps of the Zambesi; when Allen Gardiner was slowly starving to death in the bleak Antarctic cave, and painted the rude hand pointing to the words of the text which expressed his undying trust in God: what was the comfort of one and all alike? Was it not the same as that of S. Francis Xavier, when, as he lay a-dying, and the chill blast of a Chinese winter swept over his feverish brow, he raised himself on his crucifix, and said, ‘*In te, Domine, speravi, non confundar in æternum,*’ and so expired? Supposing that this Mission be found, a few years hence, to have left no appreciable results; to have caused no observable change; to have won no numberable converts; to have produced no tabulated success;—I am sure that this will not be so—but, if we suppose the worst in our determination to exaggerate nothing, we should not even then admit that it has been what the world calls a failure. The words of our daily creed would furnish the implicit witness against such weak despondency, when we say, ‘I believe in the Holy Ghost.’ And does not all history establish the certainty of this our faith? In old days, God’s Prophets have been sawn asunder; Apostles have perished,

none can tell us how or where ; the Church's Martyrs have uplifted praying hands from amid the flames ; Saints have died in the amphitheatre and been buried in the catacomb ; Reformers have been smitten by the ban of Empires and the anathema of Churches ; Puritans have fled to far-off lands ; Covenanters have wandered in deserts, and mountains, and dens and caves of the earth ; good men of to-day and yesterday, loving the world that hated them, have spent troubled lives under the oppression of a perpetual hissing ; and yet, like the morning spread upon the mountains, like the dawn shining more and more unto the perfect day, the kingdom of God has ever enlarged its borders, and the cause of God advanced irresistibly to its final victory. ' God buries His workmen,' said John Wesley, ' but continues His work.' So we believe it will be with this humble but earnest effort. Even if, weary and overburdened, we be passing through the Valley of Baca, we may use it as a well. ' The ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads ; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.'

3. But, quite apart from all the good results, which, we are faithfully assured, will arise in due time, and are germinating now in many hearts, whether visible to us or not, there are two other blessings for which this may be our service of thanksgiving : the one, that there has been a Mission at all ; the other, that our people—that so many, especially of the laity no less than of the clergy—have willingly offered themselves.

i. We thank God this evening, in this cathedral church of the diocese, that there has been a Mission at all.

There may be some who have doubted of its expediency, who have felt misgivings respecting its methods, who have been painfully impressed by the tares which, in all earthly fields, must always be mingled with the wheat. They are few in number, and we sympathise fully and respectfully with their hesitations. But yet we may, for our own selves, thank God that there has been a Mission, whatever imperfections may be necessarily involved in its fulfilment. For what every Church has to dread most of all is formalism and sterility ; contentment with the average ; self-satisfaction in the outward ; the torpor of unbroken assurance ; the deep slumber of unquestioning uniformity ; the selfishness of religious Pharisaism ; immoral acquiescence in deeply-seated evils, and a base dread of, or compromise with them, as though they were inevitable things. Not once or twice only

have Churches sunk into such a state—the condition of neutrality, in which good and evil lie flat together, side by side; in which the Church lays aside her sceptre of fearless judgment, and the world pays its tribute of civil hypocrisy. Nothing is worse than this slow death by respectable conventionality; this substitution of routine for energy, and decency for righteousness; this ‘ghastly smooth life, dead at heart.’ It is as the film of iridescence over deep-lying stagnation; it is as the gleaming surf of the Dead Sea shore, hiding the blight and barrenness beneath. In such a state was the Church of Laodicea; in such a state, during one period, the Church of the fourteenth, the Church of the fifteenth, the Church of the eighteenth century. I trust that this Mission is at least one of a thousand signs that the Church of England is not in such a condition now. For Churches have always been rescued from their sloth and hollowness by Missions—generally, at first, by the mission of individuals. The Church of the thirteenth century was roused from worldly splendour and moral death by S. Francis and S. Dominic; the Church of the fifteenth century by Luther, with his burning love of truth, and his sense that the Word of God must often be a sword and a fire; the Church of the eighteenth century by Wesley and Whitfield. Think of the work which Whitfield did! Think of him as he

Stood pilloried on infamy’s high stage,
And bore the pelting scorn of half an age.

Think of his hard voyages to Georgia—of his sermons to Kennington mobs and Kingswood colliers, when the tears made white unwonted furrows on their swarthy faces! Think of the many thousands whom he reclaimed from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God! If one man could accomplish so vast a work, can a hundred—can a thousand—earnest Christians do nothing? Where is the Lord God of Elijah? Ah! He is there, when there are men with the Christian spirit, and also with the Elijah zeal to do His work!

ii. For, whatever be the meaning of the mystery, certain it is that God does His work among men by men. He cannot make men best without men’s best to help Him. Only when the lad offers his barley loaves can the multitude be fed; and, therefore, in thanking God that this Mission has been held at all, we thank Him that so many, above all so many among the laity, have taken part in it. We thank God because the people have willingly offered themselves. They were invited to help by contributions, and this they did, not as

we hoped, but first of all they gave their own selves to the Lord, and to us by the will of God. To give money is something, and it shall not be unrewarded. They who, by their gifts only, have thus sown with blessings, shall also reap with blessings. But it is an even deeper matter for thankfulness that so many of the laity have helped, not only by personal contributions, which, after all, is the least part of Christian effort, but also by personal endeavours. Even if the Mission had produced no other result than to evolve in God's service this spontaneity of self-denying zeal, we might well be thankful for it. For the evils which must be conquered if England would be saved are too vast—far too vast—to be grappled with by the clergy only. Without the aid of the Christian laity, on a scale far larger than now, the clergy will become increasingly inadequate for the work which must be done. What can a single pastor do in a parish of even 4,000, much more in a parish of 6,000, of 10,000, or of 20,000? Single-handed, he cannot possibly reach or visit those multitudes; he will be utterly unable to check drunkenness and impurity; he will have time for little beyond the actual round of his duties in the church itself. But, further, he not only cannot do so vast a work, but it is not in the least his exclusive duty to do it. If I cherish high hopes for the Church of England, it is because of the more general awakenment to the fact that it was not the clergy only who were bidden to help the wounded Samaritans who live in such multitudes on the world's wayside. Christians have begun to recognise more fully than of old that it was not the clergy only to whom it was said at the awful last assize, 'I was hungry, and ye gave Me no meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave Me no drink; sick and in prison, and ye did not minister unto Me;' and not for the clergy only that pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father was defined to be this—to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world. Gladly would I see broken down in all directions the notion—so absolutely false, so entirely inexcusable in any Christian man—that the clergy are set apart to do *his* share in the advancement of God's kingdom, to enable him to be comfortable, to salve his conscience, to give him a full acquittance of his duties to the sinful and the wretched; to discharge for him, by proxy, all his obligations to his neighbour and to the world. Gladly would I see torn down, and trampled into the dust, the epicurean fancy that when a layman has put into the hands of his clergyman his few conventional shillings or pounds, the thousandth part perhaps of his income, he is

scot free of all necessity on his part for Christian effort to heal the deadly hurt, or to set right the intolerable wrong. It is nothing but a convenient fiction, nothing but a false subterfuge, to act on the tacit assumption that it is not the special function, or professional business, of any except the clergy to consider the poor, to rescue the fallen, to convert the criminal. No! ten thousand times no! It is not the duty of the clergy only, but of all Christians. The function of the clergy is to serve in holy places, to minister in holy things, to preach the Word, to administer the Sacraments, to study, and to deliver, the oracles of God. The further burden thrown upon them to an extent almost incalculable—the burden of administering alms; of organising institutions; of looking after the material welfare of the poor; of serving tables; above all, of raising the funds for such a multitude of charities—the common duties of the Church Beneficent—all this burden ought not to fall on them so heavily as it does. It ought to be shared with them by multitudes, who now do not so much as touch it with one of their fingers. It ought to be—Christ meant it to be—the burden, the sacerdotal burden of all unselfish, of all trusty souls. For, indeed, as you all know well, the New Testament applies the word ‘priests’ and the word ‘priesthood’ never to any separated caste, never to any spiritual order of Christians, but to all Christians, to all alike. You know that, as applied to Christians, the word occurs but in S. Peter and in S. John. ‘Ye,’ says S. Peter, ‘ye’—all Christians—‘are a holy priesthood’; and ‘they,’ says S. John, ‘they’—all true Christians—‘shall be kings and priests of God and of Christ.’ Therefore, the duties of all Christians are priestly duties; and let them look well to it that they be not like that dainty, indifferent priest who, passing by on the other side, would not so much as glance at the poor dying wayfarer, or (even worse) at the frosty-hearted Levite, who, after staring at him, went on his way to do his round of external services, as though the misery of the helpless were no affair of his. If you believe S. Peter and S. John, you—you, the Christian laity no less than we—are ordained by the hands of invisible consecration. If priests have general duties as priests, those duties are also yours; not, indeed, to minister at the altar, which they only may do who to that holy ministry have been called of God as was Aaron, but yet to offer incense—the incense of holy prayer; and sacrifices—the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving; the offering of yourselves—bodies, souls, and spirits—as a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice to God. And how can you thus do your duty to God whom

you have not seen, unless, as a part of the very law of your lives, you do your duty to your brother, made in the image of God, whom you have seen? Many of you in this Mission have been doing so, and we thank God for it; and, therefore, all the more do we hope for the day when no Christian in England, above all no young man, will feel that he is doing his duty, will feel other than utterly discontented with himself unless—as Sunday-school teacher, or as district visitor, or as member of choir, or as helper among the young—he can point to some definite religious work that he is doing for the good of others in the Church of God, outside the slightly-expanded egotism of his domesticity, or the narrow routine of his profession.

As part of his great work of amelioration, S. Francis of Assisi admitted as Tertiaries into his order, multitudes of all ranks, from princes down to peasants, who could not indeed take, nor ought to take, monastic vows, but could yet cheerfully bind themselves by the great self-denying ordinances of the Christian life, and devote themselves, to their utmost ability, to the service of others. If the Church of England is to keep pace with the needs of the time—if she is ever to claim and to reclaim the vast masses of her population—we want an ever-increasing army of such Tertiaries, of men and women who have said each to their own heart, ‘Give Him of thine own—of thy time, of thy talents, of thy possession, of thy service. Give Him of thine own, for both thou and thine are His.’

And so, my friends, let us thank God for the results which, whether known to us or unknown, we believe and are sure that this Mission has achieved; let us thank God that He has put it into the hearts of His Church in this city to make the effort; let us thank Him that so many of His people have willingly offered themselves to fulfil the long-neglected priestly duties of the English laity. Yea, we thank Him! We trust that, by His grace, from henceforth, many more will be, in the words of the old Rabbi, swift as eagles, bold as lions, bounding as stags, to do the will of our Father who is in heaven.

We trust that we and they may evermore be more vitally impressed with the truth that it is to us—to all of us alike—that the Lord of the harvest has entrusted the gathering of the harvest; and that ‘the work is long; the opportunity is short; the labourers are remiss; the necessity is urgent; the reward is great.’









