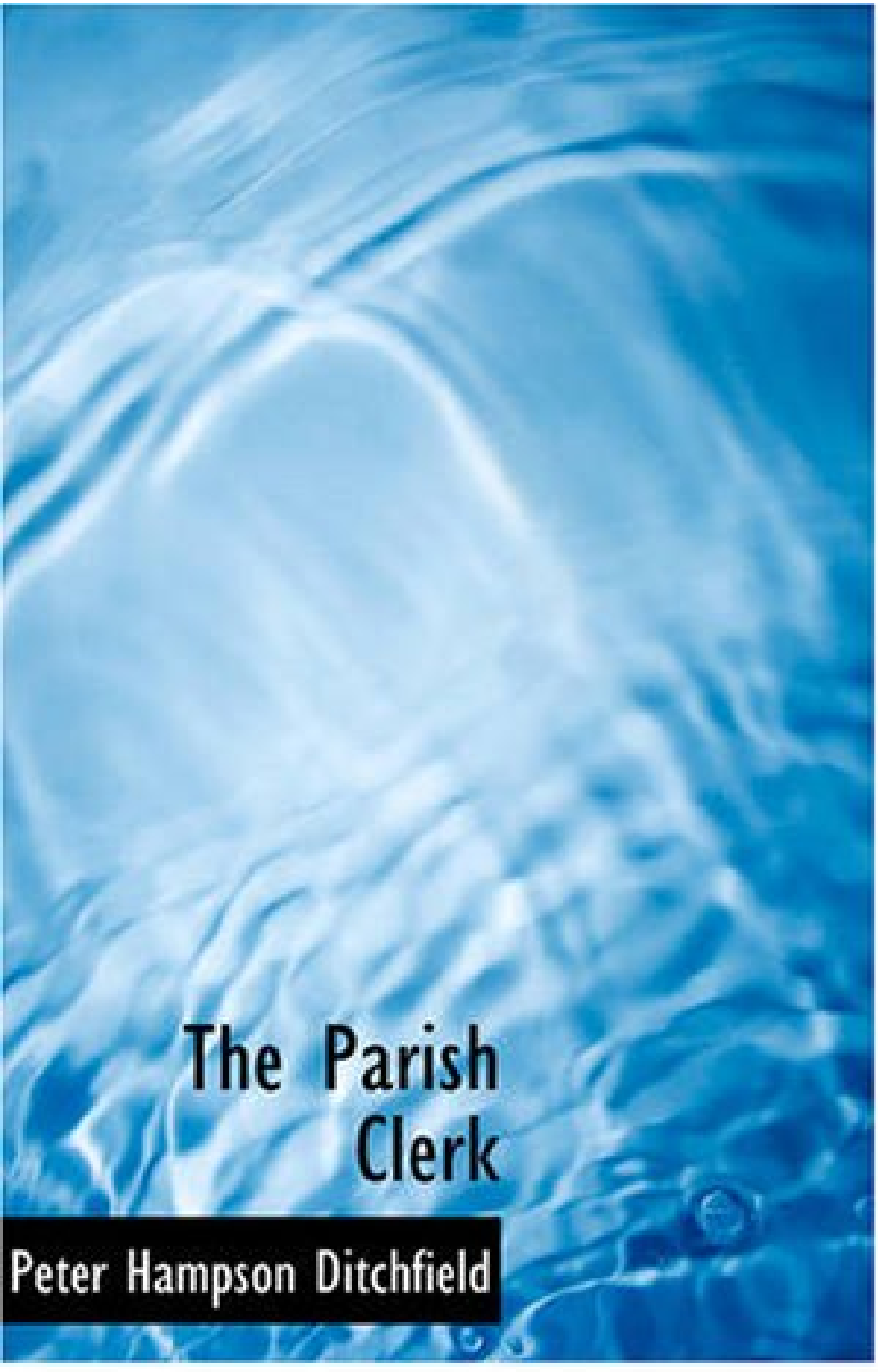

The Parish Clerk
Peter Hampson Ditchfield

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THE PARISH CLERK ***



THE PARISH CLERK. By Thomas Gainsborough, R.A.

THE PARISH CLERK

BY

P.H. DITCHFIELD

M.A., F.S.A.

WITH THIRTY-ONE ILLUSTRATIONS

First Published in 1907.

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PREFACE

The race of parish clerks is gradually becoming extinct. Before the recollection of their quaint ways, their curious manners and customs, has quite passed away, it has been thought advisable to collect all that can be gathered together concerning them. Much light has in recent years been thrown upon the history of the office. The learned notes appended to Dr. Wickham Legg's edition of *The Parish Clerk's Book*, published by the Henry Bradshaw Society, Dr. Atchley's *Parish Clerk and his Right to Read the Liturgical Epistle* (Alcuin Club Tracts), and other works, give much information with regard to the antiquity of the office, and to the duties of the clerk of mediæval times; and from these books I have derived much information. By the kindness of many friends and of many correspondents who are

personally unknown to me, I have been enabled to collect a large number of anecdotes, recollections, facts, and biographical sketches of many clerks in different parts of England, and I am greatly indebted to those who have so kindly supplied me with so much valuable information. Many of the writers are far advanced in years, when the labour of putting pen to paper is a sore burden. I am deeply grateful to them for the trouble which they kindly took in recording their recollections of the scenes of their youth. I have been much amused by the humorous stories of old clerkly ways, by the *facetiæ* which have been sent to me, and I have been much impressed by the records of faithful service and devotion to duty shown by many holders of the office who won the esteem and affectionate regard of both priest and people. It is impossible for me to publish the names of all those who have kindly written to me, but I wish especially to thank the Rev. Canon Venables, who first suggested the idea of this work, and to whom it owes its conception and initiation [1]; to the Rev. B.D. Blyn-Stoyle, to Mr. F.W. Hackwood, the Rev. W.V. Vickers, the Rev. W. Selwyn, the Rev. E.H. L. Reeve, the Rev. W.H. Langhorne, Mr. E.J. Lupson, Mr. Charles Wise, and many others, who have taken a kindly interest in the writing of this book. I have also to express my thanks to the editors of the *Treasury* and of *Pearson's Magazine* for permission to reproduce portions of some of the articles which I contributed to their periodicals, to the editor of *Chambers's Journal* for the use of an article on some north-country clerics and their clerks by a writer whose name is unknown to me, and to the Rev. J. Gaskell Exton for sending to me an account of a Yorkshire clerk which, by the kindness of the editor of the *Yorkshire Weekly Post*, I am enabled to

reproduce.

[1] Since the above was written, and while this book has been passing through the press, the venerable clergyman, Canon Venables, has been called away from earth. A zealous parish priest, a voluminous writer, a true friend, he will be much missed by all who knew him. Some months ago he sent me some recollections of his early days, of the clerks he had known, and his reflections on his long ministry, and these have been recorded in this book, and will now have a pathetic interest for his many friends and for all who admired his noble, earnest, and strenuous life.

THE PARISH CLERK

CHAPTER I

OLD-TIME CHOIRS AND PARSONS

A remarkable feature in the conduct of our modern ecclesiastical services is the disappearance and painless extinction of the old parish clerk who figured so prominently in the old-fashioned ritual dear to the hearts of our forefathers. The Oxford Movement has much to answer for! People who have scarcely passed the rubicon of middle life can recall the curious scene which greeted their eyes each Sunday morning when life was young, and perhaps retain a tenderness for old abuses, and, like George Eliot, have a lingering liking for nasal clerks and top-booted clerics, and sigh for the departed shades of vulgar errors.

Then and now--the contrast is great. Then the hideous Georgian "three-decker" reared its monstrous form, blocking out the sight of the sanctuary; immense pews like cattle-pens filled the nave. The woodwork was high and panelled, sometimes richly carved, as at Whalley Church, Lancashire, where some pews have posts at the corners like an old-fashioned four-posted bed. Sometimes two feet above the top of the woodwork there were brass rods on which slender curtains ran, and were usually drawn during sermon time in order that the attention of the occupants of the pew might not be distracted from devout meditations on the preacher's discourse--or was it to woo slumber? A Berkshire dame rather admired these old-fashioned pews, wherein, as she naively expressed it, "a body might sleep comfortable without all the parish knowin' on it."

It was of such pews that Swift wrote in his *Baucis and Philemon*:

"A bedstead of the antique mode,

Compact of timber many a load,
Such as our ancestors did use
Was metamorphosed into pews;
Which still their ancient nature keep
By lodging folks disposed to sleep."

The squire's pew was a wondrous structure, with its own special fire-place, the fire in which the old gentleman used to poke vigorously when the parson was too long in preaching. It was amply furnished, this squire's pew, with arm-chairs and comfortable seats and stools and books. Such a pew all furnished and adorned did a worthy clerk point out to the witty Bishop of Oxford, Bishop Wilberforce, with much pride and satisfaction. "If there be ought your lordship can mention to mak' it better, I'm sure Squire will no mind gettin' on it."

The bishop, with a merry twinkle in his eye, turned round to the vicar, who was standing near, and maliciously whispered:

"A card table!"

Such comfortable squires' pews still exist in some churches, but "restoration" has paid scanty regard to old-fashioned notions and ideas, and the squire and his family usually sit nowadays on benches similar to those used by the rest of the congregation.

Then the choir sat in the west gallery and made strange noises and sang curious tunes, the echoes of which we shall try to catch. No organ then pealed forth its reverent tones and awaked the church with dulcet harmonies: a pitch-pipe often the sole instrument. And then--what terrible hymns were sung! Well did Campbell say of Sternhold and

Hopkins, the co-translators of the Psalms of David into English metre, "mistaking vulgarity for simplicity, they turned into bathos what they found sublime." And Tate and Brady's version, the "Dry Psalter" of "Samuel Oxon's" witticism, was little better. Think of the poetical beauties of the following lines, sung with vigour by a bald-headed clerk:

> "My hairs are numerous, but few
> Compared to th' enemies that me pursue."

It was of such a clerk and of such psalmody that John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, in the seventeenth century wrote his celebrated epigram:

> "Sternhold and Hopkins had great qualms
> When they translated David's Psalms,
> To make the heart more glad;
> But had it been poor David's fate
> To hear thee sing and them translate,
> By Jove, 'twould have drove him mad."

When the time for singing the metrical Psalm arrived, the clerk gave out the number in stentorian tones, using the usual formula, "Let us sing to the praise and glory of God the one hundred and fourth Psalm, first, second, seving (seven), and eleving verses with the Doxology." Then, pulling out his pitch-pipe from the dusty cushions of his seat, he would strut pompously down the church, ascend the stairs leading to the west gallery, blow his pipe, and give the basses, tenors, and soprano voices their notes, which they hung on to in a low tone until the clerk returned to his place in the lowest tier of the

"three-decker" and started the choir-folk vigorously. Those Doxologies at the end! What a trouble they were! You could find them if you knew where to look for them at the end of the Prayer Book after Tate and Brady's metrical renderings of the Psalms of David. There they were, but the right one was hard to find. Some had two syllables too much to suit the tune, and some had two syllables too little. But it did not matter very greatly, and we were accustomed to add a word here, or leave out one there; it was all in a day's work, and we went home with the comfortable reflection that we had done our best.

But a pitch-pipe was not usually the sole instrument. Many village churches had their band, composed of fiddles, flutes, clarionets, and sometimes bassoons and a drum. "Let's go and hear the baboons," said a clerk mentioned by the Rev. John Eagles in his Essays. In order to preserve strict historical accuracy, I may add that this invitation was recorded in the year 1837, and therefore could have no reference to evolutionary theories and the Descent of Man. This clerk, who invariably read "Cheberims and Sepherims," and was always "a lion to my mother's children," looking not unlike one with his shaggy hair and beard, was not inviting a neighbour to a Sunday afternoon at the Zoo, but only to hear the bassoons.

When the clerk gave out the hymn or Psalm, or on rare occasions the anthem, there was a strange sound of tuning up the instruments, and then the instruments wailed forth discordant melody. The clerk conducted the choir, composed of village lads and maidens, with a few stalwart basses and tenors. It was often a curious performance. Everybody sang as loud as he could bawl; cheeks and elbows were at

their utmost efforts, the bassoon vying with the clarionet, the goose-stop of the clarionet with the bassoon--it was Babel with the addition of the beasts. And they were all so proud of their performance. It was the only part of the service during which no one could sleep, said one of them with pride--and he was right. No one could sleep through the terrible din. They were the most important officials in the church, for did not the Psalms make it clear, "The singers go before, and the minstrels" (which they understood to mean ministers) "follow after"? And then--those anthems! They were terrible inflictions. Every bumpkin had his favourite solo, and oh! the murder, the profanation! "Some put their trust in charrots and some in 'orses," but they didn't "quite pat off the stephany," as one of the singers remarked, meaning symphony. It was all very strange and curious.

Then followed the era of barrel-organs, the clerk's duty being to turn the handle and start the singing. He was the only person who understood its mechanism and how to change the barrels. Sometimes accidents happened, as at Aston Church, Yorkshire, some time in the thirties. One Sunday morning during the singing of a hymn the music came to a sudden stop. There was a solemn pause, and then the clerk was seen to make his way to the front of the singing gallery, and was heard addressing the vicar in a loud tone, saying, "Please, sor, an-ell 'as coom off." The handle had come off the instrument. At another church, in Huntingdonshire, the organ was hidden from view by drawn curtains, behind which the clerk used to retire when he had given out the Psalm. On one occasion, however, no sound of music issued from behind the curtains; at last, after a solemn pause, the clerk's quizzical face appeared, and his harsh voice shouted out, "Dang it,

she 'on't speak!" The "grinstun organ," as David Diggs, the hero of Hewett's *Parish Clerk* calls it, was not always to be depended on. Every one knows the Lancashire dialect story of the "Barrel Organ" which refused to stop, and had to be carried out of church and sat upon, and yet still continued to pour forth its dirge-like melody.

David Diggs may not have been a strictly historical character, but the sketch of him was doubtless founded upon fact, and the account of the introduction of the barrel-organ into the church of "Seatown" on the coast of Sussex is evidently drawn from life. A vestry meeting was held to consider about having a *quire* in church, and buying a barrel-organ with half a dozen simple Psalm tunes upon it, which Davy was to turn while the parson put his gown on, and the children taught to sing to. The clerk was ordered to write to the squire and ask him for a liberal subscription. This was his letter:

> "Mr Squir, sur,
>
> "Me & Farmer Field & the rest of the genelmen In vestri sembled Thinks the parson want parish Relif in shape of A Grindstun orgin betwin Survisses--i am to grind him & the sundy skool kildren is to sing to him wile he Gos out of is sete.
>
> "We liv It to yuresef wart to giv as we dont wont to limit yur malevolens
>
> "Your obedunt servunt

"DAVY DIGGS."

Of course this worthy scribe taught the children in the school, though writing was happily considered a superfluous accomplishment. He taught little beyond the Church Catechism and the Psalms, which he knew from frequent repetition, though he often wanted to imbue the infant minds entrusted to his charge with the Christening, Marriage, and Burial Services, and the Churching of Women, because he "know'd um by heart himself."

The barrel-organ was scarcely a great improvement upon the "cornet, flute, sackbut, psaltery"--I mean the violins, 'cellos, clarionets, and bassoons which it supplanted. The music of the village musicians in the west gallery was certainly not of the highest order. The instruments were often out of tune, and the fiddle-player and the flutist were often at logger-heads; but it was a sad pity when their labours were brought to an end, and the mechanical organ took their place. The very fact that all these players took a keen interest in the conduct of Divine service was in itself an advantage.

The barrel-organ killed the old musical life of the village. England was once the most musical nation in Europe. Puritanism tried to kill music. Organs were broken everywhere in the cathedrals and colleges, choirs dispersed and musical publications ceased. The professional players on violins, lutes, and flutes who had performed in the theatres or at Court wandered away into the villages, taught the rustics how to play on their beloved instruments in the taverns and ale-houses, and bequeathed their fiddles and clarionets to their rustic friends. Thus the rural orchestra had its birth, and right heartily did they

perform not only in church, but at village feasts and harvest homes, wakes and weddings. The parish clerk was usually their leader, and was a welcome visitor in farm or cottage or at the manor when he conducted his companions to sing the Christmas carols.

The barrel-organ sealed the fate of the village orchestra. The old fiddles were wanted no more, and were hung up in the cottages as relics of the "good old times." For a time the clerk preserved his dignity and continued to take his part in the music, turning the handle of the organ.

Then the harmonium came, played by the school-mistress or some other village performer. No wonder the clerk was indignant. His musical autocracy had been overthrown. At one church--Swanscombe, Kent--when, in 1854, the change had taken place, and a kind lady, Miss F----, had consented to play the new harmonium, the clerk, village cobbler and leader of parish orchestra, gave out the hymn in his accustomed fashion, and then, with consummate scorn, bellowed out, "Now, then, Miss F----, strike up!"

It would have been a far wiser policy to have reformed the old village orchestra, to have taught the rustic musicians to play better, than to have silenced them for ever and substituted the "grinstun" instrument.



The Village Choir.

Archbishop Tait once said that there is no one who does not look back with a kind of shame to the sort of sermons which were preached, the sort of clergymen
who preached them, the sort of building in which they preached them, and the sort of psalmody with which the service was ushered in. The late Mr. Beresford Hope thus describes the kind of service that went on in the time of George IV in a market town of Surrey not far from London. It was a handsome Gothic church, the chancel being cut off from the nave by a solid partition covered with verses and strange paintings, among which Moses and Aaron show in peculiar uncouthness. The aisles were filled with family pews or private boxes, raised aloft, and approached by private doors and staircases. These were owned by the magnates of the place, who were wont to bow their recognitions across the nave. There was a decrepit west gallery for the band, and the ground floor was crammed with

cranky pews of every shape. A Carolean pulpit stood against a pillar, with reading-desk and clerk's box underneath. The ante-Communion Service was read from the desk, separated from the liturgy and sermon by such renderings of Tate and Brady as the unruly gang of volunteers with fiddles and wind instruments in the gallery pleased to contribute. The clerk, a wizened old fellow in a brown wig, repeated the responses in a nasal twang, and with a substitution of *w* for *v* so constant as not even to spare the Beliefs; while the local rendering of briefs, citations, and excommunications included announcements by this worthy, after the Nicene Creed, of meetings at the town inn of the executors of a deceased duke. Two hopeful cubs of the clerk sprawled behind him in the desk, and the back-handers occasionally intended to reduce them to order were apt to resound against the impassive boards. During the sermon this zealous servant of the sanctuary would take up his broom and sweep out the middle alley, in order to save himself the fatigue of a weekday visit. Soon, however, the clerk and his broom followed Moses and Aaron, the fiddles and the bassoons into the land of shadows.

No sketch of bygone times, in which the clerk flourished in all his glory, would be complete without some reference to the important person who occupied the second tier in the "three-decker," and decked in gown and bands delivered somnolent sermons from its upper storey. Curious stories are often told of the careless parsons of former days, of their irreverence, their love of sport, their neglect of their parishes, their quaint and irreverent manners; but such characters, about whom these stories were told, were exceptional. By far the greater number lived well and did their duty and passed away, and

left no memories behind except in the tender recollections of a few simple-minded folk. There were few local newspapers in those days to tell their virtues, to print their sermons or their speeches at the opening of bazaars or flower-shows. They did their duty and passed away and were forgotten; while the parsons, like the wretch Chowne of the *Maid of Sker*, live on in anecdote, and grave folk shake their heads and think that the times must have been very bad, and the clergy a disgrace to their cloth. As with the clerk, so with his master; the evil that men do lives after them, the good is forgotten. There has been a vast amount of exaggeration in the accounts that have come down to us of the faithlessness, sluggishness, idleness, and base conduct of the clergy of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and perhaps a little too much boasting about the progress which our age has witnessed.

It would be an easy task to record the lives of many worthy country clergymen of the much-abused Hanoverian period, who were exemplary parish priests, pious, laborious, and beloved. In recording the eccentricities and lack of reverence of many clerics and their faithful servitors, it is well to remember the many bright lights that shone like lamps in a dark place.

It would be a difficult task to write a history of our parish priesthood, for reasons which have already been stated, and such a labour is beyond our present purpose. But it may be well to record a few of the observations which contemporary writers have made upon the parsons of their day in order to show that they were by no means a set of careless, disreputable, and unworthy men.

During the greater part of the eighteenth century there lived at Seathwaite, Lancashire, as curate, the famous Robert Walker, styled "the Wonderful," "a man singular for his temperance, industry, and integrity," as the parish register records.

Wordsworth alludes to him in his eighteenth sonnet on Durdon as a worthy compeer of the country parson of Chaucer, and in the seventh book of the *Excursion* an abstract of his character is given:

> "A priest abides before whose lips such doubts
> Fall to the ground, as in those days
> When this low pile a gospel preacher knew
> Whose good works formed an endless retinue;
> A pastor such as Chaucer's verse portrays,
> Such as the heaven-taught skill of Herbert drew,
> And tender Goldsmith crown'd with deathless praise."

The poet also gives a short memoir of the Wonderful Walker. In this occurs the following extract from a letter dated 1775:

"By his frugality and good management he keeps the wolf from the door, as we say; and if he advances a little in the world it is owing more to his own care than to anything else he has to rely upon. I don't find his inclination in running after further preferment. He is settled among the people that are happy among themselves, and lives in the greatest unanimity and friendship with them; and, I believe, the minister and

people are exceedingly satisfied with each other: and indeed, how should they be dissatisfied, when they have a person of so much worth and probity for their pastor? A man who for his candour and meekness, his sober, chaste, and virtuous conversation, his soundness in principle and practice, is an ornament to his profession and an honour to the country he is in; and bear with me if I say, the plainness of his dress, the sanctity of his manners, the simplicity of his doctrine, and the vehemence of his expression, have a sort of resemblance to the pure practice of primitive Christianity."

The income of his chapelry was the munificent sum of £17 10 s. He reared and educated a numerous family of twelve children. Every Sunday he entertained those members of his congregation who came from a distance, taught the village school, acted as scrivener and lawyer for the district, farmed, and helped his neighbours in haymaking and sheep-shearing, spun cloth, studied natural history, and, in spite of all this, was throughout a devoted and earnest parish priest. He was certainly entitled to his epithet "the Wonderful."

Goldsmith has given us a charming picture of an old-world parson in his *Vicar of Wakefield*, and Fielding sketches a no less worthy cleric in his portrait of the Rev. Abraham Adams in *his Joseph Andrews*. As a companion picture he drew the character of the pig-keeping Parson Trulliber, no scandalous cleric, though he cared more for his cows and pigs than he did for his parishioners.

"Hawks should not peck out hawks' e'en," and parsons should not scoff at their fellows; yet Crabbe was a little unkind in his description of country

parsons, though he could say little against the character of his vicar.

> "Our Priest was cheerful and in season gay;
> His frequent visits seldom fail'd to please;
> Easy himself, he sought his neighbour's ease.

> Simple he was, and loved the simple truth,
> Yet had some useful cunning from his youth;
> A cunning never to dishonour lent,
> And rather for defence than conquest meant;
> 'Twas fear of power, with some desire to rise,
> But not enough to make him enemies;
> He ever aim'd to please; and to offend
> Was ever cautious; for he sought a friend.
> Fiddling and fishing were his arts, at times
> He alter'd sermons, and he aimed at rhymes;
> And his fair friends, not yet intent on cards,
> Oft he amused with riddles and

charades,
Mild were his doctrines, and not one discourse
But gained in softness what it lost in force;
Kind his opinions; he would not receive
An ill report, nor evil act believe.

Now rests our vicar. They who knew him best
Proclaim his life t' have been entirely--rest.
The rich approved--of them in awe he stood;
The poor admired--they all believed him good;
The old and serious of his habits spoke;
The frank and youthful loved his pleasant joke;
Mothers approved a safe contented guest,
And daughters one who backed each small request;
In him his flock found nothing to condemn;
Him sectaries liked--he never troubled them;
No trifles failed his yielding mind to please,
And all his passions sunk in early

ease;
Nor one so old has left this world of sin
More like the being that he entered in."

A somewhat caustic and sarcastic sketch, and perhaps a little ill-natured, of a somewhat amiable cleric. Dr. Syntax is a good example of an old-world parson, whose biographer thus describes his laborious life:

"Of Church preferment he had none;
Nay, all his hope of that was gone;
He felt that he content must be
With drudging-in a curacy.
Indeed, on ev'ry Sabbath-day,
Through eight long miles he took his way,
To preach, to grumble, and to pray;
To cheer the good, to warn the sinner,
And if he got it,--eat a dinner:
To bury these, to christen those,
And marry such fond folks as chose
To change the tenor of their life,
And risk the matrimonial strife.
Thus were his weekly journeys made,
'Neath summer suns and wintry shade;
And all his gains, it did appear,
Were only thirty pounds a-year."

And when the last event of his hard-working life was over--

"The village wept, the hamlets round

Crowded the consecrated ground;
And waited there to see the end
Of Pastor, Teacher, Father, Friend."

Who could write a better epitaph?

Doubtless the crying evil of what is called "the dead period" of the Church's history was pluralism. It was no uncommon thing for a clergyman to hold half a dozen benefices, in one of which he would reside, and appoint curates with slender stipends to the rest, only showing himself "when tithing time draws near."

When Bishop Stanley became Bishop of Norwich in 1837 there were six hundred non-resident incumbents, a state of things which he did a vast amount of work to remedy. Mr. Clitherow tells me of a friend who was going to be married and who requested a neighbour to take his two services for him during his brief honeymoon. The neighbour at first hesitated, but at last consented, having six other services to take on the one Sunday.

An old clergyman named Field lived at Cambridge and served three country parishes--Hauxton, Newton, and Barnington. On Sunday morning he used to ride to Hauxton, which he could see from the high road to Newton. If there was a congregation, the clerk used to waggle his hat on the top of a long pole kept in the church porch, and Field had to turn down the road and take the service. If there was no congregation he went on straight to Newton, where there was always a congregation, as two old ladies were always present. Field used to turn his pony loose in the churchyard, and as he entered the church began the Exhortation, so that by the time he was robed he had progressed well through the

service. My informant, the Rev. M.J. Bacon, was curate at Newton, and remembers well the old surplice turned up and shortened at the bottom, where the old parson's spurs had frayed it.

It was this pluralism that led to much abuse, much neglect, and much carelessness. However, enough has been said about the shepherd, and we must return to his helper, the clerk, with whose biography and history we are mainly concerned.

CHAPTER II

THE ANTIQUITY AND CONTINUITY OF THE OFFICE OF CLERK

The office of parish clerk can claim considerable antiquity, and dates back to the times of Augustine and King Ethelbert. Pope Gregory the Great, in writing to St. Augustine of Canterbury with regard to the order and constitution of the Church in new lands and under new circumstances, laid down sundry regulations with regard to the clerk's marriage and mode of life. King Ethelbert, by the advice of his Witenagemote, introduced certain judicial decrees, which set down what satisfaction should be given by those who stole anything

belonging to the church. The purloiner of a clerk's property was ordered to restore threefold [2]. The canons of King Edgar, which may be attributed to the wise counsel of St. Dunstan, ordered every clergyman to attend the synod yearly and to bring his clerk with him.

[2] Bede's *Hist. Eccles.*, ii. v.

Thus from early Saxon times the history of the office can be traced.

His name is merely the English form of the Latin *clericus*, a word which signified any one who took part in the services of the Church, whether he was in major or minor orders. A clergyman is still a "clerk in Holy Orders," and a parish clerk signified one who belonged to the rank of minor orders and assisted the parish priest in the services of the parish church. We find traces of him abroad in early days. In the seventh century, the canons of the Ninth Council of Toledo and of the Council of Merida tell of his services in the worship of the sanctuary, and in the ninth century he has risen to prominence in the Gallican Church, as we gather from the inquiries instituted by Archbishop Hincmar, of Rheims, who demanded of the rural deans whether each presbyter had a clerk who could keep school, or read the epistle, or was able to sing.

In the decretals of Gregory IX there is a reference to the clerk's office, and his duties obtain the sanction of canon law. Every incumbent is ordered to have a clerk who shall sing with him the service, read the epistle and lesson, teach in the school, and admonish the parishioners to send their children to the church to be instructed in the faith. It was thus in ancient

days that the Church provided for the education of children, a duty which she has always endeavoured to perform. Her officers were the schoolmasters. The weird cry of the abolition of tests for teachers was then happily unknown.

The strenuous Bishop Grosseteste (1235-53), for the better ordering of his diocese of Lincoln, laid down the injunction that "in every church of sufficient means there shall be a deacon or sub-deacon; but in the rest a fitting and honest clerk to serve the priest in a comely habit." The clerk's office was also discussed in the same century at a synod at Exeter in 1289, when it was decided that where there was a school within ten miles of any parish some scholar should be chosen for the office of parish clerk. This rule provided for poor scholars who intended to proceed to the priesthood, and also secured suitable teachers for the children of the parishes.

It appears that an attempt was made to enforce celibacy on the holders of minor orders, an experiment which was not crowned with success. William Lyndewoode, Official Principal of the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1429, speaks thus of the married clerk:--

"He is a clerk, not therefore a layman; but if twice married he must be counted among laymen, because such an one is deprived of all clerical privilege. If, however, he were married, albeit not twice, yet so long as he wears the clerical habit and tonsure he shall be held a clerk in two respects, to wit, that he may enjoy the clerical privilege in his person, and that he may not be brought before the secular judges. But in all other respects he shall be considered as a layman."

In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the parish clerks became important officials. We shall see presently how they were incorporated into fraternities or guilds, and how they played a prominent part in civic functions, in state funerals, and in ecclesiastical matters. The Reformation rather added to than diminished the importance of the office and the dignity of the holder of it.



The Mediaeval Clerk.



The Clerk in Procession.

The continuity of the office is worthy of record. From the days of Augustine to the present time it has never ceased to exist. The clerk is the last representative of the minor orders which the ecclesiastical changes wrought in the sixteenth century have left us. Prior to the Reformation there were sub-deacons who wore alb and maniple, acolytes, the tokens of whose office

were a taper staff and small pitcher, ostiaries or doorkeepers corresponding to our verger or clerk, readers, exorcists, *rectores chori*, etc. This full staff would, of course, be not available for every country church, and for such parishes a clerk and a boy acolyte doubtless sufficed, though in large churches there were representatives of all these various officials. They disappeared in the Reformation; only the clerk remained, incorporating in his own person the offices of reader, acolyte, sub-deacon.

Indeed, if in these enlightened days any proof were needed of the historical continuity of the English Church, it would be found in the permanence of the clerk's office. Just as in many instances the same individual rector or vicar continued to hold his living during the whole period of the Reformation era, witnessing the spoliation of his church by the greedy Commissioners of Henry VIII and Edward VI, the introduction of the First Prayer Book of Edward VI, the revival of the "old religion" under Queen Mary, the triumph of Reformation principles under Queen Elizabeth; so did the parish clerk continue to hold office also. The Reformation changed many of his functions and duties, but the office remained. The old churchwardens' account books bear witness to this fact. Previous to the Reformation he received certain wages and many "perquisites" from the inhabitants of the parish for distributing the holy loaf and the holy water. At St. Giles's, Reading, in the year 1518-19, appears the item:

EXPENS. In p'mis paid for the dekays of the Clark's wages vis.

In the following year we notice:

WAGE. Paid to Harry Water Clerk for

> his wage for a yere ended at thannacon of our lady a° xi° ... xxvi s. viii d.

In 1545-6, Whitborne, the clerk, received 12 s. towards his wages, and he "to be bound to teche ij children free for the quere."

After the Reformation, in the same town we find the same clerk continuing in office. He no longer went round the parish bearing holy water, but the collecting of money for the holy loaf continued, the proceeds being devoted to the necessary expenses of the church. Thus in the Injunctions given by the King's Majesty's visitors to the clergy and laity resident in the Deanery of Doncaster in the second year of the reign of King Edward VI, appears the following:

"*Item*. The churchwardens of every Parish-Church shall, some one *Sunday*, or other Festival day, every month, go about the Church, and make request to every of the Parish for their charitable Contribution to the Poor; and the sum so collected shall be put in the Chest of Alms for that purpose provided. And for as much as the Parish-Clerk shall not hereafter go about the Parish with his Holy Water as hath been accustomed, he shall, instead of that labour, accompany the said Church-Wardens, and in a Book Register the name and Sum of every man that giveth any thing to the Poor, and the same shall intable; and against the next day of Collection, shall hang up somewhere in the Church in open place, to the intent the Poor having knowledge thereby, by whose Charity and Alms they be relieved, may pray for the increase and prosperity of the same [3]."

[3] *The Clerk's Book of 1549*, edited by J. Wickham Legg, Appendix IX, p. 95.

This is only one instance out of many which might be quoted to prove that the clerk's office by no means ceased to exist after the Reformation changes. I shall refer later on to the survival of the collection of money for the holy loaf and to its transference to other uses.

The clerk, therefore, appears to have continued to hold his office shorn of some of his former duties. He witnessed all the changes of that changeful time, the spoliation of his church, the selling of numerous altar cloths, vestments, banners, plate, and other costly furniture, and, moreover, took his part in the destruction of altars and the desecration of the sanctuary. In the accounts for the year 1559 of the Church of St. Lawrence, Reading, appear the items:

"Itm--for taking-downe the awlters and laying the stones, vs.

"To Loryman (the clerk) for carrying out the rubbish x d [4]."

[4] Rev. C. Kerry's *History of S. Lawrence's Church, Reading*, p. 25.

Indeed, the clerk can claim a more perfect continuity of office than the rector or vicar. There was a time when the incumbents were forced to leave their cure and give place to an intruding minister appointed by the Cromwellian Parliament. But the clerk remained on to chant his "Amen" to the long-winded prayers of some black-gowned Puritan. That is a very realistic

scene sketched by Sir Walter Besant when he describes the old clerk, an ancient man and rheumatic, hobbling slowly through the village, key in hand, to the church door. It was towards the end of the Puritan regime. After ringing the bell and preparing the church for the service, he goes into the vestry, where stood an ancient black oak coffer, the sides curiously graven, and a great rusty key in the lock. The clerk (Sir Walter calls him the sexton, but it is evidently the clerk who is referred to) turns the key with difficulty, throws open the lid, and looks in.

"Ay," he says, chuckling, "the old surplice and the old Book of Common Prayer. Ye have had a long rest; 'tis time for you both to come out again. When the surplice is out, the book will stay no longer locked up." He draws forth an old and yellow roll. It was the surplice which had once been white. "Here you be," he says; "put you away for a matter of twelve year and more, and you bide your time; you know you will come back again; you are not in any hurry. Even the clerk dies; but you die not, you bide your time. Everything comes again. The old woman shall give you a taste o' the suds and the hot iron. Thus we go up and thus we go down." Then he takes up the old book, musty and damp after twelve years' imprisonment. "Fie," he says, "thy leather is parting from thy boards, and thy leaves they do stick together. Shalt have a pot of paste, and then lie in the sun before thou goest back to the desk. Whether 'tis Mass or Common Prayer, whether 'tis Independent or Presbyterian, folk mun still die and be buried--ay, and married and born--whatever they do say. Parson goes and Preacher comes; Preacher goes and Parson comes; but Sexton stays." He chuckles again, puts back the surplice and the book, and locks the coffer [5].

[5] *For Faith and Freedom*, by Sir Walter Besant, chap. 1.

Like many of his brethren, he had seen the Church of England displaced by the Presbyterians, and the Presbyterians by the Independents, and the restoration of the Church. His father, who had been clerk before him, had seen the worship of the "old religion" in Queen Mary's time, and all the time the village life had been going on, and the clerk's work had continued; his office remained. In village churches the duties of clerk and sexton are usually performed by the same person. Not long ago a gentleman was visiting a village church, and was much struck by the remarks of an old man who seemed to know each stone and tomb and legend. The stranger asking him what his occupation was, he replied:

"I hardly know what I be. First vicar he called me clerk; then another came, and he called me virgin; the last vicar said I were the Christian, and now I be clerk again."

The "virgin" was naturally a slight confusion for verger, and the "christian" was a corrupt form of sacristan or sexton. All the duties of these various callings were combined in the one individual.

That story reminds one of another concerning the diligent clerk of R----, who, in addition to the ordinary duties of his office, kept the registers and acted as groom, gardener, and footman at the rectory. A rather pompous rector's wife used to like to refer at intervals during a dinner-party to "our coachman says," "our gardener always does this," "our footman is ...," leaving the impression of a somewhat large establishment. The dear old rector

used to disturb the vision of a large retinue by saying, "They are all one--old Corby, the clerk."

One of the chief characteristics of old parish clerks, whether in ancient or modern times, is their faithfulness to their church and to their clergyman. We notice this again and again in the biographies of many of these worthy men which it has been a privilege to study. The motto of the city of Exeter, *Semper fidelis*, might with truth have been recorded as the legend of their class. This fidelity must have been sorely tried in the sad days of the Commonwealth period, when the sufferings of the clergy began, and the poor clerk had to bid farewell to his beloved pastor and welcome and "sit under" some hard-visaged Presbyterian or Puritan preacher.

Isaac Walton tells the pathetic story of the faithful clerk of the parish of Borne, near Canterbury, where the "Judicious" Hooker was incumbent. The vicar and clerk were on terms of great affection, and Hooker was of "so mild and humble a nature that his poor clerk and he did never talk but with both their hats on, or both off, at the same time."

This same clerk lived on in the quiet village until the third or fourth year of the Long Parliament. Hooker died and was buried at Borne, and many people used to visit his monument, and the clerk had many rewards for showing his grave-place, and often heard his praises sung by the visitors, and used to add his own recollections of his holiness and humility. But evil days came; the parson of Borne was sequestered, and a Genevan minister put into his good living. The old clerk, seeing so many clergymen driven from their homes and churches, used to say, "They have sequestered so many good men, that I doubt if my

good Master Hooker had lived till now, they would have sequestered him too."

Walton then describes the conversion of the church into a Genevan conventicle. He wrote: "It was not long before this intruding minister had made a party in and about the said parish that was desirous to receive the sacrament as at Geneva: to which end, the day was appointed for a select company, and forms and stools set about the altar or communion table for them to sit and eat and drink; but when they went about this work, there was a want of some joint-stools which the minister sent the clerk to fetch, and then to fetch cushions. When the clerk saw them begin to sit down, he began to wonder; but the minister bade him cease wondering and lock the church door: to whom he replied, 'Pray take you the keys, and lock me out: I will never more come into this church; for men will say my Master Hooker was a good man and a great scholar; and I am sure it was not used to be thus in his days': and report says this old man went presently home and died; I do not say died immediately, but within a few days after. But let us leave this grateful clerk in his quiet grave."

Another faithful clerk was William Hobbes, who served in the church and parish of St. Andrew, Plymouth. Walker, in his *Sufferings of the Clergy*, records the sad story of his death. During the troubles of the Civil War period, when presumably there was no clergyman to perform the last rites of the Church on the body of a parishioner, the good clerk himself undertook the office, and buried a corpse, using the service for the Burial of the Dead contained in the Book of Common Prayer. The Puritans were enraged, and threatened to throw him into the same grave if he came there again with his

"Mass-book" to bury any body: which "worked so much upon his Spirits, that partly with Fear and partly with Grief, he Died soon after." He died in 1643, and the accounts of the church show that the balance of his salary was paid to his widow.

Many such faithful clerks have devoted their years of active life to the service of God in His sanctuary, both in ancient and modern times; and it will be our pleasurable duty to record some of the biographies of these earnest servants of the Church, whose services are too often disregarded.

I have mentioned the continuity of the clerk's office, unbroken by either Reformation changes or by the confusion of the Puritan regime. We will now endeavour to sketch the appearance of the mediæval clerk, and the numerous duties which fell to his lot.

Chaucer's gallery of ancient portraits contains a very life-like presentment of a mediæval clerk in the person of "Jolly Absolon," a somewhat frivolous specimen of his class, who figures largely in *The Miller's Tale*.

> "Now was ther of that churche a parish clerk
> The which that was y-cleped [6] Absolon.
> Curl'd was his hair, and as the gold it shone,
> And strutted [7] as a fannë large and broad;
> Full straight and even lay his folly shode. [8]
> His rode [9] was red, his eyen grey as goose,
> With Paulë's windows carven on his

shoes. [10]
In hosen red he went full febishly. [11]
Y-clad he was full small and properly,
All in a kirtle of a light waget; [12]
Full fair and thickë be the pointës set.
And thereupon he had a gay surplice,
As white as is the blossom on the rise. [13]
A merry child he was, so God me save;
Well could he letten blood, and clip, and shave,
And make a charter of land and a quittance.
In twenty manners could he trip and dance,
After the school of Oxenfordë tho', [14]
And with his leggës castë to and fro;
And playen songës or a small ribible; [15]
Thereto he sung sometimes a loud quinible. [16]
And as well could he play on a gitern. [17]
In all the town was brewhouse nor tavern
That he not visited with his solas, [18]
There as that any gaillard tapstere [19] was.
This Absolon, that jolly was and gay

Went with a censor on the holy day,
Censing the wivës of the parish fast:
And many a lovely look he on them cast,

Sometimes to show his lightness and mast'ry
He playeth Herod on a scaffold high."

[6] Called.

[7] Stretched.

[8] Head of hair.

[9] Complexion.

[10] His shoes were decked with an ornament like a rose-window in old St. Paul's.

[11] Daintily.

[12] A kind of cloth.

[13] A bush.

[14] The Oxford school of dancing is satirised by the poet.

[15] A kind of fiddle.

[16] Treble.

[17] Guitar.

[18] Sport, mirth.

[19] Tavern-wench.

I fear me Master Absolon was a somewhat frivolous clerk, or his memory has been traduced by the poet's pen, which lacked not satire and a caustic but good-humoured wit. Here was a parish clerk who could sing well, though he did not confine his melodies to "Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." He wore a surplice; he was an accomplished scrivener, and therefore a man of some education; he could perform the offices of the barber-surgeon, and one of his duties was to cense the people in their houses. He was an actor of no mean repute, and took a leading part in the mysteries or miracle-plays, concerning which we shall have more to tell. He even could undertake the prominent part of Herod, which doubtless was an object of competition among the amateurs of the period. Such is the picture which Chaucer draws of the frivolous clerk, a sketch which is accurate enough as far as it goes, and one that we will endeavour to fill in with sundry details culled from medieval sources.

Chaucer tells us that Jolly Absolon used to go to the houses of the parishioners on holy days with his censer. His more usual duty was to bear to them the holy water, and hence he acquired the title of *aquæbajalus*. This holy water consisted of water into which, after exorcism, blest salt had been placed, and then duly sanctified with the sign of the cross and sacerdotal benediction. We can see the clerk clad in his surplice setting out in the morning of Sunday

on his rounds. He is carrying a holy-water vat, made of brass or wood, containing the blest water, and in his hand is an *aspergillum* or sprinkler. This consists of a round brush of horse-hair with a short handle. When the clerk arrives at the great house of the village he first enters the kitchen, and seeing the cook engaged on her household duties, he dips the sprinkler into the holy-water vessel and shakes it towards her, as in the accompanying illustration. Then he visits the lord and lady of the manor, who are sitting at meat in their solar, and asperges them in like manner. For his pains he receives from every householder some gift, and goes on his way rejoicing. Bishop Alexander, of Coventry, however, in his constitutions drawn up in the year 1237, ordered that no clerk who serves in a church may live from the fees derived from this source, and the penalty of suspension was to be inflicted on any one who should transgress this rule. The constitutions of the parish clerks at Trinity Church, Coventry, made in 1462, are a most valuable source of information with regard to the clerk's duties.

The following items refer to the orders relating to the holy water:

> "Item, the dekyn shall bring a woly water stoke with water for hys preste every Sonday for the preste to make woly water.
>
> "Item, the said dekyn shall every Sonday beyr woly water of hys chyldern to euery howse in hys warde, and he to have hys duty off euery man affter hys degre quarterly."

At the church of St. Nicholas, Bristol, in 1481, it was ordered that the "Clerke to ordeynn spryngals [20] for the church, and for him that visiteth the Sondays and dewly to bere his holy water to euery howse Abyding soo convenient a space that every man may receive hys Holy water under payne of iiii d. tociens quociens."

[20] Bunches of twigs for sprinkling holy water.



The Clerk Bearing Holy Water And Asperging The Cook.



The Clerk Bearing Holy Water And Asperging The Lord And Lady.

At Faversham a set of parish clerk's duties of the years 1506, 1548, and 1593 is preserved. In the rules ordained for his guidance in the first-mentioned year he with his assistant clerk is ordered to bear holy

water to every man's house, as of old time hath been accustomed; in case of default he shall forfeit 8 d.; but if he shall be very much occupied on account of a principal feast falling on a Sunday or with any pressing parochial business, he is to be excused.

A mighty dissension disturbed the equanimity of the little parish of Morebath in the year 1531 and continued for several years. The quarrel arose concerning the dues to be paid to the parish clerk, a small number of persons refusing to pay the just demands. After much disputing they finally came to an agreement, and one of the items was that the clerk should go about the parish with his holy water once a year, when men had shorn their sheep to gather some wool to make him a coat to go in the parish in his livery. There are many other items in the agreement to which we shall have occasion again to refer. Let us hope that the good people of Morebath settled down amicably after this great "storm in a tea-cup"; but this godly union and concord could not have lasted very long, as mighty changes were in progress, and much upsetting of old-established custom and practice.

The clerk continued in many parishes to make his accustomed round of the houses, and collected money which was used for the defraying of the expenses of public worship; but he left behind him his sprinkler and holy-water vat, which accorded not with the principles and tenets, the practice and ceremonies of the reformed Church of England.

This was, however, one of the minor duties of the mediæval clerk, and the custom of giving offerings to him seems to have started with a charitable intent. The constitutions of Archbishop Boniface of

Canterbury issued in 1260 state:

"We have often heard from our elders that the benefices of holy water were originally instituted from a motive of charity, in order that one of their proper poor clerks might have exhibitions to the schools, and so advance in learning, that they might be fit for higher preferment."

He had many other and more important duties to perform, duties requiring a degree of education far superior to that which we are accustomed to associate with the holders of his office. We will endeavour to obtain a truer sketch of him than even that drawn by Chaucer, and to realise the multitudinous duties which fell to his lot, and the great services he rendered to God and to his Church.

CHAPTER III

THE MEDIÆVAL CLERK

At the present time loud complaints are frequently heard of a lack of clergy. Rectors and vicars are sighing for assistant curates, the vast populations of our great cities require additional ministration, and the mission field is crying out for more labourers to reap the harvests of the world. It might be well in

this emergency to inquire into the methods of the mediæval Church, and observe how the clergy in those days faced the problem, and gained for themselves tried and trusty helpers.

One method of great utility was to appoint poor scholars to the office of parish clerk, by a due discharge of the duties of which they were trained to serve in church and in the parish, and might ultimately hope to attain to the ministry. This is borne out by the evidence of wills wherein some good incumbent, grateful for the faithful services of his clerk, bequeaths either books or money to him, in order to enable him to prepare himself for higher preferment. Thus in 1389 the rector of Marum, one Robert de Weston, bequeaths to "John Penne, my clerk, a missal of the New Use of Sarum, if he wishes to be a priest, otherwise I give him 20 s." In 1337 Giles de Gadlesmere leaves "to William Ockam, clerk, two shillings, unless he be promoted before my death." Evidently it was no unusual practice in early times for the clerk to be raised to Holy Orders, his office being regarded as a stepping-stone to higher preferment. The status of the clerk was then of no servile character.

A canon of Newburgh asked for Sir William Plumpton's influence that his brother might have a clerkship [21]. Even the sons of kings and lords did not consider it beneath the dignity of their position to perform the duties of a clerk, and John of Athon considered the office of so much importance that he gave the following advice to any one who held it:

[21] *Plumpton Correspondence*, Camden Society, 1839, P. 66, *temp*. Henry VII.

"Whoever you may be, although the son of king, do not blush to go up to the book in church, and read and sing; but if you know nothing of yourself, follow those who do know."

It is recorded in the chronicle of Ralph de Coggeshall that Richard I used to take great delight in divine service on the principal festivals; going hither and thither in the choir, encouraging the singers by voice and hand to sing louder. In the *Life of Sir Thomas More*, written by William Roper, we find an account of that charming incident in the career of the great and worthy Lord Chancellor, when he was discovered by the Duke of Norfolk, who had come to Chelsea to dine with him, singing in the choir and wearing a surplice during the service of the Mass. After the conclusion of the service host and guest walked arm in arm to the house of Sir Thomas More.

"God's body, my Lord Chancellor, what turned Parish Clerk? You dishonour the King and his office very much," said the Duke.

"Nay," replied Sir Thomas, smiling, "your grace may not think that the King, your master and mine, will be offended with me for serving his Master, or thereby account his service any way dishonoured."

We will endeavour to sketch the daily and Sunday duties of a parish clerk, follow in his footsteps, and observe his manners and customs, as they are set forth in mediæval documents.

He lived in a house near the church which was specially assigned to him, and often called the clerk's house. He had a garden and glebe. In the churchwardens' accounts of St. Giles's Church, Reading, there is an item in 1542-3:--"Paid for a

latice to the clerkes hous ii s. x d." There was a clerk's house in St. Mary's parish, in the same town, which is frequently mentioned in the accounts (A.D. 1558-9).

"RESOLUTES for the guyet Rent of the Clerkes Howse xii d. 1559-60.

"RENTES to farme and at will. Of the tenement at Cornyshe Crosse called the clerkes howse by the yere vi s. viii d."

It appears that the house was let, and the sum received for rent was part of the clerk's stipend. This is borne out by the following entry:--

"Md' that yt ys aggreed that the clerke most have for the office of the sexten But xx s. That ys for Ringing of the Bell vs for the quarter and the clerkes wayges by the howse [22]."

> [22] *Churchwardens' Accounts of St. Mary's, Reading*, by F.N.A. and A.G. Garry, p. 42.

Doubtless there still remain many such houses attached to the clerkship, as in the Act of 7 & 8 Victoria, c. 59, sect. 6, it is expressly stated that any clerk dismissed from his office shall give up any house, building, land, or premises held or occupied by virtue or in respect of such office, and that if he fail to do so the bishop can take steps for his ejection therefrom. Mr. Wickham Legg has collected several other instances of the existence of clerks' houses. At St. Michael's Worcester, there was one, as in 1590 a sum was paid for mending it. At St. Edmund's, Salisbury, the clerk had a house and garden in 1653. At Barton Turf, Norfolk, three acres are known as

"dog-whipper's land," the task of whipping dogs out of churches being part of the clerk's duties, as we shall notice more particularly later on. The rent of this land was given to the clerk. At Saltwood, Kent, the clerk had a house and garden, which have recently been sold [23].

> [23] *The Clerk's Book of 1549*, edited by J. Wickham Legg, lvi.

Archbishop Sancroft, at Fressingfield, caused a comfortable cottage to be built for the parish clerk, and also a kind of hostelry for the shelter and accommodation of persons who came from a distant part of that large scattered parish to attend the church, so that they might bring their cold provisions there, and take their luncheon in the interval between the morning and the afternoon service.

There was a clerk's house at Ringmer. In the account of the beating of the bounds of the parish in Rogation week, 1683, it is recorded that at the close of the third day the procession arrived at the Crab Tree, when the people sang a psalm, and "our minister read the epistle and gospel, to request and supplicate the blessing of God upon the fruits of the earth. Then did Mr. Richard Gunn invite all the company to *the clerk's house*, where he expended at his own charge a barrell of beer, besides a plentiful supply of provisions: and so ended our third and last day's perambulation [24]."

> [24] *Social Life as told by Parish Registers*, by T.F. Thiselton-Dyer, p. 197.

In his little house the clerk lived and tended his

garden when he was not engaged upon his ecclesiastical duties. He was often a married man, although those who were intending to proceed to the higher orders in the Church would naturally be celibate. Pope Gregory, in writing to St. Augustine of Canterbury, offered no objections to the marriage of clerks. Lyndewoode shows a preference for the unmarried clerk, but if such could not be found, a married clerk might perform his duties. Numerous wills are in existence which show that very frequently the clerk was blest with a wife, inasmuch as he left his goods to her; and in one instance, at Hull, John Huyk, in 1514, expresses his wish to be buried beside his wife in the wedding porch of the church [25].

> [25] Injunction by John Bishop of Norwich (1561), B. i b., quoted by Mr. Legg in *The Parish Clerk's Book*, p. xlii.

One courageous clerk's wife did good service to her husband, who had dared to speak insultingly of the high and mighty John of Gaunt. He held office in the church of St. Peter-the-Less, in the City of London, in 1378. His wife was so persevering in her behests and so constant in her appeals for justice, that she won her suit and obtained her husband's release [26].

> [26] Riley's *Memorials of London*, 1868, p. 425.

We have the picture, then, of the mediæval clerk in his little house nigh the church surrounded by his wife and children, or as a bachelor intent upon preferment poring over his Missal, if he did not sometimes emulate the frivolous feats of Chaucer's

"Jolly Absolon."

At early dawn he sallied forth to perform his earliest duty of opening the church doors and ringing the day-bell. The ringing of bells seems to have been a fairly constant employment of the clerk, though in some churches this duty was mainly performed by the sexton, but the aid of the clerk was demanded whenever it was needed. According to the constitution of the parish clerks at Trinity Church, Coventry, made in 1462, he was ordered every day to open the church doors at 6 a.m., and deliver to the priest who sang the Trinity Mass a book and a chalice and vestment, and when Mass was finished to see that these goods of the church be deposited in safety in the vestry. He had to ring all the people in to Matins, together with his fellow-clerk, at every commemoration and feast of IX lessons, and see that the books were ready for the priest. Again for High Mass he rang and sang in the choir. At 3 p.m. he rang for Evensong, and sang the service in the south side of the choir, his assistant occupying the north side. On weekdays they sang the Psalms and responses antiphonally, and on Sundays and holy-days acted as *rectores chori*, each one beginning the verses of the Psalms for his own side. He had to be very careful that the books were all securely locked up in the vestry, and the church locked at a convenient hour, having searched the building to see lest any one was lying in any seat or corner. On Sundays and holidays he had to provide a clerk or "dekyn" to read the gospel at High Mass. The sweeping of the floor of the church, the cleaning of the leaden roofs, and sweeping away the snow from the gutters "leste they be stoppyd," also came under his care. The bells he also kept in order, examining the clappers and bawdricks and ropes, and reporting

to the churchwardens if they required mending. His assistant had to grease the bells when necessary, and find the materials. He had to tend the lamp and to fetch oil and rychys (rushes), and fix banners on holidays, fold up the albs and vestments. On Saturdays and on the eve of saints' days he had to ring the noon-tide bell, and to ring the sanctus bell every Sunday and holy-day, and during processions.

Special seasons brought their special duties, and directions are minutely given with regard to every point to be observed. On Palm Sunday he was ordered to set a form at the priory door for the stations of the Cross, so that a crucifix or rood should be set there for the priest to sing *Ave rex*. He had to provide palms for that Sunday, watch the Easter sepulchre "till the resurrecion be don," and then take down the "lenten clothys" about the altar and the rood. In Easter week, when a procession was made, he bore the chrismatory. At the beginning of Lent he was ordered to help the churchwardens to cover the altar and rood with "lentyn clothys" and to hang the vail in the choir. The pulley which worked this vail is still to be seen in some churches, as at Uffington, Berks. For this labour the churchwardens were to give money to the clerk for drink. The great bell had to be rung for compline every Saturday in Lent. At Easter and Whit-Sunday the clerk was required to hang a towel about the font, and see that three "copys" (copes) be brought down to the font for the priests to sing *Rex sanctorum*.

It was evidently considered the duty of the churchwardens to deck the high altar for great festivals, but they were to have the assistance of the clerk at the third peel of the first Evensong "to aray the hye awter with clothys necessary for it." Perhaps

this duty of the churchwardens might with advantage be revived.

Sheer Thursday or Maundy Thursday was a special day for cleansing the altars and font, which was done by a priest; but the clerk was required to provide a birch broom and also a barrel in order that water might be placed in it for this purpose. On Easter Eve and the eve of Whit-Sunday the ceremony of cleaning the altar and font was repeated. Flagellation was not obsolete as a penance, and the clerk was expected to find three discipline rods.

In mediæval times it was a common practice for rich men to leave money or property to a church with the condition that Masses should be said for the repose of their souls on certain days. The first Latin word of a verse in the funeral psalm was *dirige* ("direct my steps," etc.), and this verse was used as an antiphon to those psalms in the old English service for the dead. Hence the service was called a *dirige*, and we find mention of "Master Meynley's dirige," or as it is spelt often "derege," the origin of the word "dirge." Those who attended were often regaled with refreshments--bread and ale--and the clerk's duty was to serve them with these things.

We have already referred to his obligations as regards his bearing of holy water to the parishioners, a duty which brought him into close relationship with them. Another custom which has long since passed away was that of blessing a loaf of bread by the priest, and distributing portions of it to the parishioners. Sometimes this distribution took place in church, as at Coventry, where one of the clerks, having seen the loaf duly cut, gave portions of it to the assembled worshippers in the south aisle, and the

other clerk performed a like duty in the north aisle. The clerk received some small fee for this service, usually a halfpenny. Berkshire has several evidences of the existence of the holy loaf.

In the accounts of St. Lawrence's Church, Reading, in 1551, occurs the following notice:

"At this day it was concluded and agreed that from henceforth every inhabitant of the parish shall bear and pay every Sunday in the year 5 d. for every tenement as of old time the Holy Loaf was used to be paid and be received by the parish clerk weekly, the said clerk to have every Sunday for his pains 1 d. And 4 d. residue to be paid and delivered every Sunday to the churchwardens to be employed for bread and wine for the communion. And if any overplus thereof shall be of such money so received, to be to the use of the church; and if any shall lack, to be borne and paid by the said churchwardens: provided always, that all such persons as are poor and not able to pay the whole, be to have aid of such others as shall be thought good by the discretion of the churchwardens."

With the advent of Queen Mary the old custom was reverted to, as the following item for the year 1555 plainly shows:

"Rec. of money gathered for the holy lofe ix s. iiij d."

At St. Mary's Church there is a constant allusion to this practice from the year 1566-7 to 1617-18, after which date the payment for the "holilofe" seems to have been merged in the charge for seats. In 1567-8 the following resolution was passed:

"It is agreed that the clerk shall hereafter gather the

Holy Loaf money, or else to have nothing of that money, and to gather all, or else to inform the parish of them that will not pay."

There seems to have been some difficulty in collecting this money; so it was agreed in 1579-80 that "John Marshall shall every month in the year during the time that he shall be clerk, gather the holy loaf and thereof yield an account to the churchwardens."

Subsequently we constantly meet with such records as the following:

"It'm for the holy loffe xiii s. vi d."

Ultimately, however, this mode of collecting money for the providing of the sacred elements and defraying other expenses of the church was, as we have said, abandoned in favour of pew-rents. The clerk had long ceased to obtain any benefit from the custom of collecting this curious form of subscription to the parochial expenses.

An interesting document exists in the parish of Stanford-in-the-Vale, Berkshire, relating to the holy loaf. It was evidently written during the reign of Queen Mary, and runs as follows:--

"Here following is the order of the giving of the loaves to make holy bread with videlicit of when it beginneth and endeth, what the whole value is, in what portions it is divided, and to whom the portions be due, and though it be written in the fifth part of the division of the book before in the beginning with these words (how money shall be paid towards the charges of the communion) ye shall understand that in the time of the Schism when this Realm was

divided from the Catholic Church, the which was in the year of our Lord God in 1547, in the second year of King Edward the Sixth, all godly ceremonies and good uses were taken out of the church within this Realm, and then the money that was bestowed on the holy bread was turned to the use of finding bread and wine for the communion, and then the old order being brought unto his [its] pristine state before this book was written causeth me to write with this term [27]."

> [27] The spelling of the words I have ventured to modernise.

The order of the giving of the loaves is then set forth, beginning at a piece of ground called Ganders and continuing throughout the parish, together with names of the parishioners. The collecting of this sum must have been an arduous part of the clerk's duty. "And thus I make an end of this matter," as the worthy clergyman at Stanford-in-the-Vale wrote at the conclusion of his carefully drawn up document [28].

> [28] A relic of this custom existed in a small town in Dorset fifty years ago. At Easter the clerk used to leave at the house of each pew-holder a packet of Easter cakes--thin wafery biscuits, not unlike Jewish Pass-over cakes. The packet varied according to the size of the family and the depth of the master's purse. When the fussy little clerk called for his Easter offering, at one house he found 5 s. waiting for him, as a kind of payment for five cakes. The

> shilling's were quickly transferred to the clerk's pocket, who remarked, "Five shilling's is handsome for the clerk, sir; but the vicar only takes gold."
>
> The custom of the clerk carrying round the parish Easter cakes prevailed also at Milverton, Somerset, and at Langport in the same county.

In addition to his regular wages and to the dues received for delivering holy water and in connection with the holy loaf, the clerk enjoyed sundry other perquisites. At Christmas he received a loaf from every house, a certain number of eggs at Easter, and some sheaves when the harvest was gathered in. Among the documents in the parish chest at Morebath there is a very curious manuscript relating to a prolonged quarrel with regard to the dues to be paid to the clerk. This took place in the year 1531 and lasted until 1536. This document throws much light on the customary fees and gifts paid to the holder of this office. After endless wrangling the parishioners decided that the clerk should have "a steche of clene corn" from every household, if there should be any corn; if not, a "steche of wotis" (oats), or 3 d. in lieu of corn. Also 1 d. a quarter from every household; at every wedding and funeral 2 d.; at shearing time enough wool for a coat. Moreover, it was agreed that he should have a clerk's ale in the church house. It is well known that church ales were very common in medieval times, when the churchwardens bought, and received presents of, a large quantity of malt which they brewed into beer.

The village folk collected other provisions, and assembled in the church house, where there were spits and crocks and other utensils for dressing a feast. Old and young gathered together; the churchwardens' ale was sold freely. The young folk danced, or played at bowls or practised archery, the old people looking gravely on and enjoying the merry-making. Such were the old church ales, the proceeds of which were devoted to the maintenance of the poor or some other worthy object. An arbour of boughs was erected in the churchyard called Robin Hood's Bower, where the maidens collected money for the "ales." The clerk in some parishes, as at Morebath, had "an ale" at Easter, and it was agreed that "the parish should help to drink him a cost of ale in the church house," which duty doubtless the village folk carried out with much willingness and regularity.



The Old Church-House At Hurst. Berkshire Now The Castle Inn.



The Old Church-House At Uffington. Berks Now Used As A School.

Puritanism gradually killed these "ales." Sabbatarianism lifted up its voice against them. The gatherings waxed merry, sometimes too merry, so the stern Puritan thought, and the ballad-singer sang profane songs, and the maidens danced with light-footed step, and it was all very wrong because they were breaking the Sabbath; and the ale was strong, and sometimes people drank too much, so the critics said. But all reasonable and sober-minded folk were not opposed to them, and in reply to some inquiries instituted by Archbishop Laud, the Bishop of Bath and Wells made the following report:

> "Touching clerke-ales (which are lesser church-ales) for the better maintenance of Parish-clerks they have been used (until of late) in divers places, and there was great reason for them; for in poor country parishes, where the wages of the clerk is very small, the people thinking it unfit that the clerk should duly attend at church and lose by his office, were wont to send in Provisions, and then feast with him,

> and give him more liberality than their quarterly payments would amount unto in many years. And since these have been put down, some ministers have complained unto me, that they are afraid they shall have no parish clerks for want of maintenance for them."

Mr. Wickham Legg has investigated the subsequent history of this good Bishop Pierce, and shows how the Puritans when they were in power used this reply as a means of accusation against him, whereby they attempted to prove that "he profanely opposed the sanctification of the Lord's Day by approving and allowing of profane wakes and revels on that day," and was "a desperately profane, impious, and turbulent Pilate."

It is well known that the incomes of the clergy were severely taxed by the Pope, who demanded annates or first-fruits of one year's value on all benefices and sundry other exactions. The poor clerk's salary did not always escape from the rapacity of the Pope's collectors, as the story told by Matthew Paris clearly sets forth:

"It happened that an agent of the Pope met a petty clerk carrying water in a little vessel, with a sprinkler and some bits of bread given him for having sprinkled some holy water, and to him the deceitful Roman thus addressed himself:

"'How much does the profits yielded to you by this church amount to in a year?' To which the clerk, ignorant of the Roman's cunning, replied:

"'To twenty shillings, I think.'

"Whereupon the agent demanded the percentage the Pope had just demanded on all ecclesiastical benefices. And to pay that sum this poor man was compelled to hold school for many days, and by selling his books in the precincts, to drag on a half-starved life."

This story discloses another duty which fell to the lot of the mediæval clerk. He was the parish schoolmaster--at least in some cases. The decretals of Gregory IX require that he should have enough learning in order to enable him to keep a school, and that the parishioners should send their children to him to be taught in the church. There is not much evidence of the carrying out of this rule, but here and there we find allusions to this part of a clerk's duties. Inasmuch as this may have been regarded as an occupation somewhat separate from his ordinary duties as regards the church, perhaps we should not expect to find constant allusion to it. However, Archbishop Peckham ordered, in 1280, that in the church of Bakewell and the chapels annexed to it there should be *duos clericos scholasticos* carefully chosen by the parishioners, from whose alms they would have to live, who should carry holy water round in the parish and chapels on Lord's Days and festivals, and minister *in divinis officiis*, and on weekdays should keep school [29]. It is said that Alexander, Bishop of Coventry, in 1237, directed that there should be in country villages parish clerks who should be schoolmasters.

[29] If that is the correct translation of *profestis diebus disciplinis scolasticis indulgentes*. Dr. Legg thinks that it

may refer to their own education.

It is certain--for the churchwarden accounts bear witness to the fact--that in several parishes the clerks performed this duty of teaching. Thus in the accounts of the church of St. Giles, Reading, occurs the following:

> Pay'd to Whitborne the clerk towards his wages and he to be bound to teach ij children for the choir ... xij s.

At Faversham, in 1506, it was ordered that "the clerks or one of them, as much as in them is, shall endeavour themselves to teach children to read and sing in the choir, and to do service in the church as of old time hath been accustomed, they taking for their teaching as belongeth thereto"; and at the church of St. Nicholas, Bristol, in 1481, this duty of teaching is implied in the order that the clerk ought not to take any book out of the choir for children to learn in without licence of the procurators. We may conclude, therefore, that the task of teaching the children of the parish not unusually devolved upon the clerk, and that some knowledge of Latin formed part of the instruction given, which would be essential for those who took part in the services of the church.

Nor were his labours yet finished. In John Myrc's *Instructions to Parish Priests*, a poem written not later than 1450, a treatise containing good sound morality, and a good sight of the ecclesiastical customs of the Middle Ages, we find the following lines:

> "When thou shalt to seke [30] *gon*

Hye thee fast and *go* a-non;
For if thou tarry thou dost amiss,
Thou shalt guyte [31] that soul I wys.
When thou shalt to seke gon,
A clene surples caste thee on;
Take thy stole with thee ry't, [32]
And put thy hod ouer thy sy't [33]
Bere thyne ost [34] a-nout thy breste
In a box that is honeste;
Make thy clerk before thee synge,
To bere light and belle ringe."

[30] Sick.

[31] Quiet.

[32] Right.

[33] Sight.

[34] Host.

It was customary, therefore, for the clerk to accompany the priest to the house of the sick person, when the clergyman went to administer the Last Sacrament or to visit the suffering. The clerk was required to carry a lighted candle and ring a bell, and an ancient MS. of the fourteenth century represents him marching before the priest bearing his light and his bell. In some town parishes he was ordered always to be at hand ready to accompany the priest on his errands of mercy. It was a grievous offence for a clerk to be absent from this duty. In the parish of St. Stephen's, Coleman Street, the clerks were not allowed "to go or ride out of the town without special licence had of the vicar and

churchwardens, and at no time were they to be out of the way, but one of them had always to be ready to minister sacraments and sacramentals, and to wait upon the Curate and to give him warning." This custom of the clerk accompanying the priest when visiting the sick was not abolished at the Reformation. *The Parish Clerk's Guide*, published by the Worshipful Company of Parish Clerks in 1731, the history of which it will be our privilege to investigate, states that the holders of the office "are always conversant in Holy Places and Holy Things, such as are the Holy Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper; yea and in the most serious Things too, such as the Visitation of the Sick, when we do often attend, and at the Burial of the Dead."



The Clerk Accompanying The Priest When Visiting The Sick



The Clerk Attending The Priest, Who Is Administering The Last Sacrament

Occupied with these numerous duties, engaged in a service which delighted him, his time could never have hung heavy on his hands. Faithful in his dutiful services to his rector, beloved by the parishioners, a welcome guest in cot and hall, and serving God with all his heart, according to his lights, he could doubtless exclaim with David, *Laetus sorte mea*.

CHAPTER IV

THE DUTIES OF READING AND SINGING

The clerk's highest privilege in pre-Reformation times was to take his part in the great services of the church. His functions were very important, and required considerable learning and skill. When the songs of praise echoed through the vaulted aisles of the great church, his voice was heard loud and clear leading the choirmen and chanting the opening words of the Psalm. As early as the time of St. Gregory this duty was required of him. In giving directions to St. Augustine of Canterbury the Pope ordered that clerks should be diligent in singing the Psalms. In the ninth century Pope Leo IV directed that the clerks should read the Psalms in divine service, and in 878 Archbishop Hincmar of Rheims issued some articles of inquiry to his Rural Deans,

asking, among other questions, "Whether the presbyter has a clerk who can keep school, or read the epistle, or is able to sing as far as may seem needful to him?"

A canon of the Council of Nantes, embodied in the Decretals of Pope Gregory IX, settled definitely that every presbyter who has charge of a parish should have a clerk, who should sing with him and read the epistle and lesson, and who should be able to keep school and admonish the parishioners to send their children to church to learn the faith [35]. This ordinance was binding upon the Church in this country as in other parts of Western Christendom, and William Lyndewoode, Official Principal of the Archbishop of Canterbury, when laying down the law with regard to the marriage of clerks, states that the clerk has "to wait on the priest at the altar, to sing with him, and to read the epistle." A notable quarrel between two clerks, which is recorded by John of Athon writing in the years 1333-1348, gives much information upon various points of ecclesiastical usage and custom. The account says:

> [35] Decr. Greg. IX. Lib. III. tit. i. cap. iii., quoted by Dr. Cuthbert Atchley in *Alcuin Club Tracts*, IV.

"Lately, when two clerks were contending about the carrying of holy water, the clerk appointed by the parishioners against the command of the priest, wrenched the book from the hands of the clerk who had been appointed by the rector, and who had been ordered to read the epistle by the priest, and hurled him violently to the ground, drawing blood [36]."

> [36] John of Athon, *Constit. Dom.*

> *Othoboni*, tit. *De residentia archipreb. et episc.*: cap. *Pastor bonus*: verb *sanctæ obedientiæ*.

A very unseemly disturbance truly! Two clerks righting for the book in the midst of the sanctuary during the Eucharistic service! Still their quarrel teaches us something about the appointment and election of clerks in the Middle Ages, and of the duty of the parish clerk with regard to the reading of the epistle.

In 1411 the vicar of Elmstead was enjoined by Clifford, Bishop of London, to find a clerk to help him at private Masses on weekdays, and on holy days to read the epistle.

In the rules laid down for the guidance of clerks at the various churches we find many references to the duties of reading and singing. At Coventry he is required to sing in the choir at the Mass, and to sing Evensong on the south side of the choir; on feast days the first clerk was ordered to be *rector chori* on the south side, while his fellow performed a like duty on the north side. On every Sunday and holy day the latter had to read the epistle. At Faversham the clerk was required to sing at every Mass by note the Grail at the upper desk in the body of the choir, and also the epistle, and to be diligent to sing all the office of the Mass by note, and at all other services. Very careful instructions were laid down for the proper musical arrangements in this church. The clerk was ordered "to set the choir not after his own brest (= voice) but as every man being a singer may sing conveniently his part, and when plain song faileth one of the clerks shall leave faburdon [37] and keep plain song unto the time the choir be set again." A

fine of 2 d. was levied on all clerks as well as priests at St. Michael's, Cornhill, who should be absent from the church, and not take their places in the choir in their surplices, singing there from the beginning of Matins, Mass and Evensong unto the end of the services. At St. Nicholas, Bristol, the clerk was ordered "to sing in reading the epistle daily under pain of ii d."

> [37] *Faburdon* = faux-bourdon, a simple kind of counterpoint to the church plain song-, much used in England in the fifteenth century. Grove's *Dictionary of Music*.

These various rules and regulations, drawn up with consummate care, together with the occasional glimpses of the mediæval clerk and his duties, which old writers afford, enable us to picture to ourselves what kind of person he was, and to see him engaged in his manifold occupations within the same walls which we know so well. When the daylight is dying, musing within the dim mysterious aisle, we can see him folding up the vestments, bearing the books into their place of safe keeping in the vestry, singing softly to himself:

> "*Et introibo ad altare Dei; ad Deum qui loetificat juventutem meam*."

The scene changes. The days of sweeping reform set in. The Church of England regained her ancient independence and was delivered from a foreign yoke. Her children obtained an open Bible, and a liturgy in their own mother-tongue. But she was distressed and despoiled by the rapacity of the commissioners of the Crown, by such wretches as Protector Somerset,

Dudley and the rest, private peculation eclipsing the greediness of royal officials. Froude draws a sad picture of the halls of country houses hung with altar cloths, tables and beds quilted with copes, and knights and squires drinking their claret out of chalices and watering their horses in marble coffins. No wonder there was discontent among the people. No wonder they disliked the despoiling of their heritage for the enrichment of the Dudleys and the *nouveaux riches* who fattened on the spoils of the monasteries, and left the church bare of brass and ornament, chalice and vestment, the accumulation of years of the pious offerings of the faithful. No wonder there were risings and riots, quelled only by the stern and powerful hand of a Tudor despot.

But in spite of all the changes that were wrought in that tumultuous time, the parish clerk remained, and continued to discharge many of the functions which had fallen to his lot before the Reformation had begun. As I have already stated, his duties with regard to bearing holy water and the holy loaf were discontinued, although the collecting of money from the parishioners was conducted in much the same way as before, and the "holy loaf" corrupted into various forms--such as "holy looff," "holie loffe," "holy cake," etc.--appears in churchwardens' account books as late as the beginning of the seventeenth century.

As regards his main duties of reading and singing we find that they were by no means discontinued. From a study of the First Prayer Book of Edward VI, it is evident that his voice was still to be heard reading in reverent tones the sacred words of Holy Scripture, and chanting the Psalms in his mother-tongue instead of in that of the Vulgate. The rubric in the communion service immediately before the epistle

directs that "the collectes ended, the priest, or he that is appointed, shall read the epistle, in a place assigned for the purpose." Who is the person signified by the phrase "he that is appointed"? That question is decided for us by *The Clerk's Book* recently edited by Dr. J. Wickham Legg, wherein it is stated that "the priest or clerk" shall read the epistle. The injunctions of 1547 interpret for us the meaning of "the place assigned for the purpose" as being "the pulpit or such convenient place as people may hear." Ability to read the epistle was still therefore considered part of the functions of a parish clerk, and the whole lesson derived from a study of *The Clerk's Book* is the very important part which he took in the services. As the title of the book shows, it contains "All that appertein to the clerkes to say or syng at the Ministracion of the Communion, and when there is no Communion. At Confirmacion. At Matrimonie. The Visitacion of the Sicke. The Buriall of the Dedde. At the Purification of Women. And the first daie of Lent."

He began the service of Holy Communion by singing the Psalm appointed for the introit. In the book only the first words of the part taken by the priest are given, whereas all the clerk's part is printed in full. He leads the responses in the Lesser Litany, the *Gloria in excelsis*, the Nicene Creed. He reads the offertory sentences and says the *Ter Sanctus*, sings or says the *Agnus Dei*, besides the responses. In the Marriage Service he said or sang the Psalm with the priest, and responded diligently. As in pre-Reformation times he accompanied the priest in the visitation of the sick, and besides making the responses sang the anthems, "Remember not, Lord, our iniquities," etc., and "O Saviour of the world, save us, which by thy crosse and precious blood hast redeemed us, help us, we beseech thee, O God." In

the Communion of the Sick the epistle is written out in full, showing that it was the clerk's privilege to read it. A great part of the service for the Burial of the Dead was ordered to be said or sung by the "priest or clerk," and "at the communion when there was a burial" he apparently sang the introit and read the epistle. In the Communion Service the clerk with the priest said the fifty-first Psalm and the anthem, "Turn thou us, O good Lord," etc. In Matins and Evensong the clerk sang the Psalms and canticles and made responses, and from other sources we gather that he used to read either one or both of the lessons. In some churches he was called the dekyn or deacon, and at Ludlow, in 1551, he received 3 s. 4 d. for reading the first lesson.

In the accounts of St. Margaret's, Westminster, there is an item in the year 1553 for the repair of the pulpit where, it is stated, "the curate and the clark did read the chapters at service time."

Archbishop Grindal, in 1571, laid down the following injunction for his province of York: "That no parish clerk be appointed against the goodwill or without the consent of the parson, vicar, or curate of any parish, and that he be obedient to the parson, vicar, and curate, specially in the time of celebration of divine service or of sacraments, or in any preparation thereunto; and that he be able also to read the first lesson, the Epistle, and the Psalms, with answers to the suffrages as is used, and also that he endeavour himself to teach young children to read, if he be able so to do." When this archbishop was translated to Canterbury he issued very similar injunctions in the southern province. Other bishops followed his example, and issued questions in their dioceses relating to clerkly duties, and these

injunctions show that to read the first lesson and the epistle and to sing the Psalms constituted the principal functions of a parish clerk.

Evidences of the continuance of this practice are not wanting [38]. Indeed, within the memory of living men at one church at least the custom was observed. At Keighley, in the West Riding of Yorkshire, some thirty or forty years ago the parish clerk wore a black gown and bands. He read the first lesson and the epistle. To read the latter he left his seat below the pulpit and went up to the altar and took down the book: after reading the epistle within the altar rails he replaced the book and returned to his place. At Wimborne Minster the clerk used to read the Lessons.

> [38] cf. *The Parish Clerk's Book*, edited by Dr. J. Wickham Legg, F.S.A., and *The Parish Clerk and his right to read the Liturgical Epistle*, by Cuthbert Atchley, L.R.C.P., M.R.C.S. *(Alcuin Club Tracts*, IV).

Although it is evident that at the present time the clerk has a right to read the epistle and one of the lessons, as well as the Psalms and responses when they are not sung, it was perhaps necessary that his efforts in this direction should have been curtailed. When we remember the extraordinary blunders made by many holders of the office in the last century, their lack of education, and strange pronunciation, we should hardly care to hear the mutilation of Holy Scripture which must have followed the continuance of the practice. Would it not be possible to find men qualified to hold the office of parish clerk by education and powers of

elocution who could revive the ancient practice with advantage to the church both to the clergyman and the people?

Complaints about the eccentricities and defective reading and singing of clerks have come down to us from Jacobean times. There was one Thomas Milborne, clerk of Eastham, who was guilty of several enormities; amongst others, "for that he singeth the psalms in the church with such a jesticulous tone and altisonant voice, viz: squeaking like a gelded pig, which doth not only interrupt the other voices, but is altogether dissonant and disagreeing unto any musical harmony, and he hath been requested by the minister to leave it, but he doth obstinately persist and continue therein." Verily Master Milborne must have been a sore trial to his vicar, almost as great as the clerk of Buxted, Sussex, was to his rector, who records in the parish register with a sigh of relief his death, "whose melody warbled forth as if he had been thumped on the back with a stone."

The Puritan regime was not conducive to this improvement of the status or education of the clerk or the cultivation of his musical abilities. The Protectorate was a period of musical darkness. The organs of the cathedrals and colleges were taken down; the choirs were dispersed, musical publications ceased, and the gradual twilight of the art, which commenced with the accession of the Stuarts, faded into darkness. Many clerks, especially in the City of London, deserve the highest honour for having endeavoured to preserve the true taste for musical services in a dark age. Notable amongst these was John Playford, clerk of the Temple Church in 1652. Benjamin Payne, clerk of St. Anne's, Blackfriars, in 1685, the author of *The Parish Clerk's Guide*, wrote of Playford as "one to whose memory all parish clerks owe perpetual thanks for their furtherance in the knowledge of psalmody." The *History of Music*, by Hawkins, describes him as "an honest and friendly man, a good judge of music, with some skill in composition. He contributed not a little to the art of printing music from letterpress types. He is looked upon as the father of modern psalmody, and it does not appear that the practice has much improved." The account which Playford gives of the clerks of his day is not very satisfactory, and their sorry condition is attributed to "the late wars" and the confusion of the times. He says:

"In and about this great city, in above a hundred parishes there are but few parish clerks to be found that have either ear or understanding to set one of these tunes musically, as it ought to be, it having been a custom during the late wars, and since, to chuse men into such places more for their poverty

than skill and ability, whereby that part of God's service hath been so ridiculously performed in most places, that it is now brought into scorn and derision by many people." He goes on to tell us that "the ancient practice of singing the psalms in church was for the clerk to repeat each line, probably because, at the first introduction of psalms into our service great numbers of the common people were unable to read." The author of *The Parish Clerk's Guide* states that "since faction prevailed in the Church, and troubles in the State, Church music has laboured under inevitable prejudices, more especially by its being decried by some misguided and peevish sectaries as popery and anti-Christ, and so the minds of the common people are alienated from Church music, although performed by men of the greatest skill and judgment, under whom was wont to be trained up abundance of youth in the respective cathedrals, that did stock the whole kingdom at one time with good and able songsters." The Company of Parish Clerks of London [to the history and records of which we shall have occasion frequently to refer] did good service in promoting the musical training of the members and in upholding the dignity of their important office. In the edition of *The Parish Clerk's Guide* for 1731, the writer laments over the diminished status of his order, and states that "the clerk is oftentimes chosen rather for his poverty, to prevent a charge to the parish, than either for his virtue or skill; or else for some by-end or purpose, more than for the immediate Honour and Service of Almighty God and His Church."

If that was the case in rich and populous London parishes, how much more was it true in poor village churches? Hence arose the race of country clerks who stumbled over and miscalled the hard words as

they occurred in the Psalms, who sang in a strange and weird fashion, and brought discredit on their office. Indeed, the clergy were not always above suspicion in the matter of reading, and even now they have their detractors, who assert that it is often impossible to hear what they say, that they read in a strained unnatural voice, and are generally unintelligible. At any rate, modern clergy are not so deficient in education as they were in the early years of Queen Elizabeth, when, as Fuller states in his *Triple Reconciler*, they were commanded "to read the chapters over once or twice by themselves that so they might be the better enabled to read them distinctly to the congregation." If the clergy were not infallible in the matter of the pronunciation of difficult words, it is not surprising that the clerk often puzzled or amused his hearers, and mangled or skipped the proper names, after the fashion of the mistress of a dame-school, who was wont to say when a small pupil paused at such a name as Nebuchadnezzar, "That's a bad word, child! go on to the next verse."

Of the mistakes in the clerk's reading of the Psalms there are many instances. David Diggs, the hero of J. Hewett's *Parish Clerk*, was remonstrated with for reading the proper names in Psalm lxxxiii. 6, "Odommities, Osmallities, and Mobbities," and replied: "Yes, no doubt, but that's noigh enow. Seatown folk understand oi very well."

He is also reported to have said, "Jeball, Amon, and Almanac, three Philistines with them that are tired." The vicar endeavoured to teach him the correct mode of pronunciation of difficult words, and for some weeks he read well, and then returned to his former method of making a shot at the proper

names.

On being expostulated with he coolly replied:

"One on us must read better than t'other, or there wouldn't be no difference 'twixt parson and clerk; so I gives in to you. Besides, this sort of reading as you taught me would not do here. The p'rishioners told oi, if oi didn't gi' in and read in th' old style loike, as they wouldn't come to hear oi, so oi dropped it!"

An old clerk at Hartlepool, who had been a sailor, used to render Psalm civ. 26, as "There go the ships and there is that lieutenant whom Thou hast made to take his pastime therein."

"Leviathan" has been responsible for many errors. A shoemaker clerk used to call it "that great leather-thing." From various sources comes to me the story, to which I have already referred, of the transformation of "an alien to my mother's children" into "a lion to my mother's children."

A clerk at Bletchley always called caterpillars *saterpillars*, and in Psalm lxviii. never read JAH, but spelt it J-A-H. He used to summon the children from their places to stand in single file along the pews during three Sundays in Lent, and say, "Children, say your catechayse."

Catechising during the service seems to have been not uncommon. The clerk at Milverton used to summon the children, calling out, "Children, catechise, pray draw near."

The clerk at Sidbury used to read, "Better than a bullock that has horns *enough*"; his name was Timothy Karslake, commonly called "Tim," and when

he made a mistake in the responses some one in the church would call out, "You be wrong, Tim."

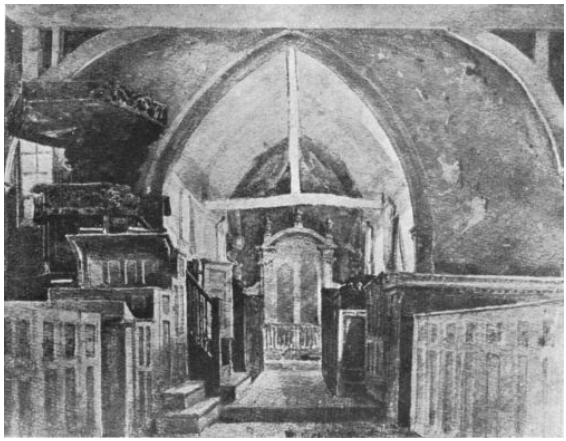
Sometimes a little emphasis on the wrong word was used to express the feelings engendered by private piques and quarrels. There were in one parish some differences between the parson and the clerk, who showed his independence and proud spirit when he read the verse of the Psalm, "If I *be* hungry, I will not tell *thee*," casting a rather scornful glance at the parson.

Another specimen of his class used to read "Ananias, Azarias, and Mizzle," and one who was reading a lesson in church (Isaiah liv. 12), "And I will make thy windows of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles," rendered the verse, "Thy window of a gate, and thy gates of crab ancles."

Another clerk who was "not much of a scholard" used to allow no difficulty to check his fluency. If the right word did not fall to his hand he made shift with another of somewhat similar sound, the result frequently taxing to the uttermost the self-control of the better educated among his hearers. He was ill-mated to a shrewish wife, and one was sensible of a thrill of sympathy when, without a thought of irreverence, and in all simplicity, he rolled out, instead of "Woe is me, that I am constrained to dwell with Mesech!" "Woe is me, that I am constrained to dwell with *Missis*!"

Old age at length puts an end to the power of the most stalwart clerks. That must have been a very pathetic scene in the church at East Barnet which few of those present could have witnessed without emotion. The clerk was a man of advanced age. He always conducted the singing, which must have been

somewhat monotonous, as the 95th and the 100th Psalm (Old Version) were invariably sung. On one occasion, after several vain attempts to begin the accustomed melody, the poor old man exclaimed, "Well, my friends, it's no use. I'm too old. I can't sing any more."



Old Beckenham Church.

It was a bitter day for the old clerks when harmoniums and organs came into fashion, and the old orchestras conducted by them were abandoned. Dethroned monarchs could not feel more distressed.

The period of the decline and fall of the status of the old parish clerks was that of the Commonwealth, from 1640 to 1660. During the spacious days of Elizabeth and the early Stuarts they were considered most important officials. In pre-Reformation times the incumbents used to receive assistance from the chantry priests who were required to help the parson when not engaged in their particular duties. After the

suppression of the chantries they continued their good offices and acted as assistant curates. But the race soon died out. Then lecturers and special preachers were frequently appointed by corporations or rich private individuals. But these lecturers and preachers were a somewhat independent race who were not very loyal to the parsons and impatient of episcopal control, and proved themselves rather a hindrance than a help. In North Devon [39] and doubtless in many other places the experiment was tried of making use of the parish clerks and raising them to the diaconate. Such a clerk so raised to major orders was Robert Langdon (1584-1625), of Barnstaple, to whose history I shall have occasion to refer again. His successor, Anthony Baker, was also a clerk-deacon. The parish clerk then attained the zenith of his power, dignity, and importance.

> [39] *The Parish Clerks of Barnstaple*, 1500-1900, by Rev. J.F. Chanter (Transactions of the Devonshire Association).

After the disastrous period of the Commonwealth rule he emerges shorn of his learning, his rank, and status. His name remained; his office was recognised by legal enactments and ecclesiastical usage; but in most parishes he was chosen on account of his poverty rather than for his fitness for the post. So long as the church rates remained he received his salary, but when these were abolished it was found difficult in many parishes to provide the funds. Hence as the old race died out, the office was allowed to lapse, and the old clerk's place knows him no more. Possibly it may be the delectable task of some future historian to record the complete revival of the office, which would prove under proper

conditions an immense advantage to the Church and a valuable assistance to the parochial clergy.

CHAPTER V

THE CLERK IN LITERATURE

The parish clerk is so notable a character in our ecclesiastical and social life, that he has not escaped the attention of many of our great writers and poets. Some of them have with gentle satire touched upon his idiosyncrasies and peculiarities; others have recorded his many virtues, his zeal and faithfulness. Shakespeare alludes to him in his play of *Richard II*, in the fourth act, when he makes the monarch face his rebellious nobles, reproaching them for their faithlessness, and saying:

> "God save the King! will no man say Amen?
> Am I both priest and clerk? Well then, Amen.
> God save the King! although I be not he;
> And yet, Amen, if Heaven do think him me."

An old ballad, *King Cophetua and the Beggar-Maid*, contains an interesting allusion to the parish clerk, and shows the truth of that which has already been pointed out, viz. that the office of clerk was often considered to be a step to higher preferment in the Church. The lines of the old ballad run as follows:

"The proverb old is come to passe,
The priest when he begins his masse
Forgets that ever clarke he was;
He knoweth not his estate."

Christopher Harvey, the friend and imitator of George Herbert, has some homely lines on the duties of clerk and sexton in his poem *The Synagogue*. Of the clerk he wrote:

"The Churches Bible-clerk attends
Her utensils, and ends
Her prayers with Amen,
Tunes Psalms, and to her Sacraments
Brings in the Elements,
And takes them out again;
Is humble minded and industrious handed,
Doth nothing of himself, but as commanded."

Of the sexton he wrote:

"The Churches key-keeper opens the door,
And shuts it, sweeps the floor,
Rings bells, digs graves, and fills them up again;
All emblems unto men,
Openly owning Christianity

> To mark and learn many good lessons by."

In that delightful sketch of old-time manners and quaint humour, *Sir Roger de Coverley*, the editor of *The Spectator* gave a life-like representation of the old-fashioned service. Nor is the clerk forgotten. They tell us that "Sir Roger has likewise added five pounds a year to the clerk's place; and that he may encourage the young fellows to make themselves perfect in the Church services, has promised, upon the death of the present incumbent, who is very old, to bestow it according to merit." The details of the exquisite picture of a rural Sunday were probably taken from the church of Milston on the Wiltshire downs where Addison's father was incumbent, and where the author was born in 1672. Doubtless the recollections of his early home enabled Joseph Addison to draw such an accurate picture of the ecclesiastical customs of his youth. The deference shown by the members of the congregation who did not presume to stir till Sir Roger had left the building was practised in much more recent times, and instances will be given of the observance of this custom within living memory.

Two other references to parish clerks I find in *The Spectator* which are worthy of quotation:

> "*Spectator*, No. 372.
>
> "In three or four taverns I have, at different times, taken notice of a precise set of people with grave countenances, short wigs, black cloaths, or dark camblet trimmed black, with mourning gloves and hat-

bands, who went on certain days at each tavern successively, and keep a sort of moving club. Having often met with their faces, and observed a certain shrinking way in their dropping in one after another, I had the unique curiosity to inquire into their characters, being the rather moved to it by their agreeing in the singularity of their dress; and I find upon due examination they are a knot of parish clerks, who have taken a fancy to one another, and perhaps settle the bills of mortality over their half pints. I have so great a value and veneration for any who have but even an assenting *Amen* in the service of religion, that I am afraid but these persons should incur some scandal by this practice; and would therefore have them, without raillery, advise to send the florence and pullets home to their own homes, and not to pretend to live as well as the overseers of the poor.

"HUMPHRY TRANSFER.

"*Spectator*, No. 338.

"A great many of our church-musicians being related to the theatre, have in imitation of their epilogues introduced in their favourite voluntaries a sort of music quite foreign to the design of church

> services, to the great prejudice of well-disposed people. These fingering gentlemen should be informed that they ought to suit their airs to the place and business; and that the musician is obliged to keep to the text as much as the preacher. For want of this, I have found by experience a great deal of mischief; for when the preacher has often, with great piety and art enough, handled his subject, and the judicious clerk has with utmost diligence called out two staves proper to the discourse, and I have found in myself and in the rest of the pew good thoughts and dispositions, they have been all in a moment dissipated by a merry jig from the organ loft."

Dr. Johnson's definition of a parish clerk in his Dictionary does not convey the whole truth about him and his historic office. He is defined as "the layman who reads the responses to the congregation in church, to direct the rest." The great lexicographer had, however, a high estimation of this official. Boswell tells us that on one occasion "the Rev. Mr. Palmer, Fellow of Queens' College, Cambridge, dined with us. He expressed a wish that a better provision were made for parish clerks. Johnson: 'Yes, sir, a parish clerk should be a man who is able to make a will or write a letter for anybody in the parish.'" I am afraid that a vast number of our good clerks would have been sore puzzled to perform the first task, and the caligraphy of the letter would in many cases have

been curious.

That careful delineator of rural manners as they existed at the end of the eighteenth century, George Crabbe, devotes a whole poem to the parish clerk in his nineteenth letter of *The Borough*. He tells of the fortunes of Jachin, the clerk, a grave and austere man, fully orthodox, a Pharisee of the Pharisees, and detecter and opposer of the wiles of Satan. Here is his picture:

> "With our late vicar, and his age the same,
> His clerk, bright Jachin, to his office came;
> The like slow speech was his, the like tall slender frame:
> But Jachin was the gravest man on ground,
> And heard his master's jokes with look profound;
> For worldly wealth this man of letters sigh'd,
> And had a sprinkling of the spirit's pride:
> But he was sober, chaste, devout, and just,
> One whom his neighbours could believe and trust:
> Of none suspected, neither man nor maid
> By him were wronged, or were of him afraid.
> There was indeed a frown, a trick of state
> In Jachin: formal was his air and gait:

> But if he seemed more solemn and less kind
> Than some light man to light affairs confined,
> Still 'twas allow'd that he should so behave
> As in high seat, and be severely grave."

The arch-tempter tries in vain to seduce him from the right path. "The house where swings the tempting sign," the smiles of damsels, have no power over him. He "shuns a flowing bowl and rosy lip," but he is not invulnerable after all. Want and avarice take possession of his soul. He begins to take by stealth the money collected in church, putting bran in his pockets so that the coin shall not jingle. He offends with terror, repeats his offence, grows familiar with crime, and is at last detected by a "stern stout churl, an angry overseer." Disgrace, ruin, death soon follow; shunned and despised by all, he "turns to the wall and silently expired." A woeful story truly, the results of spiritual pride and greed of gain! It is to be hoped that few clerks resembled poor lost Jachin.

A companion picture to the disgraced clerk is that of "the noble peasant Isaac Ashford [40]," who won from Crabbe's pen a gracious panegyric. He says of him:

> "Noble he was, contemning all things mean,
> His truth unquestioned, and his soul serene.

If pride were his, 'twas not their vulgar pride,
Who, in their base contempt, the great deride:
Nor pride in learning--though by Clerk agreed,
If fate should call him, Ashford might succeed."

[40] *The Parish Register*, Part III.

He paints yet another portrait, that of old Dibble [41], clerk and sexton:

"His eightieth year he reach'd still undecayed,
And rectors five to one close vault conveyed.

His masters lost, he'd oft in turn deplore,
And kindly add,--'Heaven grant I lose no more!'
Yet while he spake, a sly and pleasant glance
Appear'd at variance with his complaisance:
For as he told their fate and varying worth,
He archly looked--'I yet may bear thee forth.'"

[41] *The Parish Register*, Part III.

George Herbert, the saintly Christian poet, who sang on earth such hymns and anthems as the angels sing in heaven, was no friend of the old-fashioned duet between the minister and clerk in the conduct of divine service. He would have no "talking, or sleeping, or gazing, or leaning, or half-kneeling, or any undutiful behaviour in them." Moreover, "everyone, man and child, should answer aloud both Amen and all other answers which are on the clerk's and people's part to answer, which answers also are to be done not in a huddling or slubbering fashion, gaping, or scratching the head, or spitting even in the midst of their answer, but gently and pausably, thinking what they say, so that while they answer 'As it was in the beginning, etc.,' they meditate as they speak, that God hath ever had his people that have glorified Him as well as now, and that He shall have so for ever. And the like in other answers."

Cowper's kindliness of heart is abundantly evinced by his treatment of a parish clerk, one John Cox, the official of the parish of All Saints, Northampton. The poet was living in the little Buckinghamshire village of Weston Underwood, having left Olney when mouldering walls and a tottering house warned him to depart. He was recovering from his dread malady, and beginning to feel the pleasures and inconveniences of authorship and fame. The most amusing proof of his celebrity and his good nature is thus related to Lady Hesketh:

"On Monday morning last, Sam brought me word that there was a man in the kitchen who desired to speak with me. I ordered him in. A plain, decent, elderly figure made its appearance, and being desired

to sit spoke as follows: 'Sir, I am clerk of the parish of All Saints in Northampton, brother of Mr. Cox the upholsterer. It is customary for the person in my office to annex to a bill of mortality, which he publishes at Christmas, a copy of verses. You will do me a great favour, sir, if you will furnish me with one.' To this I replied: 'Mr. Cox, you have several men of genius in your town, why have you not applied to some of them? There is a namesake of yours in particular, Cox, the Statuary, who, everybody knows, is a first-rate maker of verses. He surely is the man of all the world for your purpose.' 'Alas, sir, I have heretofore borrowed help from him, but he is a gentleman of so much reading that the people of our town cannot understand him.'

"I confess to you, my dear, I felt all the force of the compliment implied in this speech, and was almost ready to answer, Perhaps, my good friend, they may find me unintelligible too for the same reason. But on asking him whether he had walked over to Weston on purpose to implore the assistance of my muse, and on his replying in the affirmative, I felt my mortified vanity a little consoled, and pitying the poor man's distress, which appeared to be considerable, promised to supply him. The waggon has accordingly gone this day to Northampton loaded in part with my effusions in the mortuary style. A fig for poets who write epitaphs upon individuals! I have written *one* that serves *two hundred* persons."

Seven successive years did Cowper, in his excellent good nature, supply John Cox, the clerk of All Saints in Northampton, with his mortuary verses [42], and when Cox died, he bestowed a like kindness on his successor, Samuel Wright.

[42] Southey's *Works of Cowper*, ii. p. 283.

These stanzas are published in the complete editions of Cowper's poems, and need not be quoted here. They begin with a quotation from some Latin author--Horace, or Virgil, or Cicero--these quotations being obligingly translated for the benefit of the worthy townsfolk. The first of these stanzas begins with the well-known lines:

"While thirteen moons saw smoothly run
  The Nen's barge-laden wave,
All these, life's rambling journey done,
  Have found their home, the grave."

Another verse which has attained fame runs thus:

"Like crowded forest trees we stand,
  And some are mark'd to fall;
The axe will smite at God's command,
  And soon will smite us all."

And thus does Cowper, in his temporary rôle, point the moral:

"And O! that humble as my lot,
  And scorned as is my strain,
These truths, though known, too much forgot,
  I may not teach in vain.

"So prays your clerk with all his heart,

And, ere he quits his pen,
Begs you for once to take his part,
And answer all--Amen."

Again, in another copy of verses he alludes to his honourable clerkship, and sings:

"So your verse-man I, and clerk,
Yearly in my song proclaim
Death at hand--yourselves his mark--
And the foe's unerring aim.

"Duly at my time I come,
Publishing to all aloud
Soon the grave must be our home,
And your only suit a shroud."

On one occasion the clerk delayed to send a printed copy of the verses; so we find the poet writing to his friend, William Bagot:

"You would long since have received an answer to your last, had not the wicked clerk of Northampton delayed to send me the printed copy of my annual dirge, which I waited to enclose. Here it is at last, and much good may it do the readers!"

Let us hope that at least the clerk was grateful.

Yet again does the poet allude to the occupant of the lowest tier of the great "three-decker," when he in the opening lines of *The Sofa* depicts the various seekers after sleep. After telling of the snoring nurse, the sleeping traveller in the coach, he continues:

"Sweet sleep enjoys the curate in his desk,
The tedious rector drawling o'er his

head;
And sweet the clerk below--"

a pretty picture truly of a stirring and impressive service!

Cowper, if he were alive now, would have been no admirer of *Who's Who*, and poured scorn upon any

"Fond attempt to give a deathless lot
To names ignoble, born to be forgot."

Beholding some "names of little note" in the *Biographia Britannica*, he proceeded to satirise the publication, to laugh at the imaginary procession of worthies--the squire, his lady, the vicar, and other local celebrities, and chants in his anger:

"There goes the parson, oh! illustrious spark!
And there, scarce less illustrious, goes the clerk."

The poet Gay is not unmindful of the

"Parish clerk who calls the hymns so clear";

and Tennyson, in his sonnet to J.M.K., wrote:

"Our dusty velvets have much need of thee:
Thou art no sabbath-drawler of old saws,
Distill'd from some worm-canker'd homily;
But spurr'd at heart with fiercest

energy
To embattail and to wall about thy cause
With iron-worded proof, hating to hark
The humming of the drowsy pulpit-drone
Half God's good Sabbath, while the worn-out clerk
Brow-beats his desk below."

In the gallery of Dickens's characters stands out the immortal Solomon Daisy of *Barnaby Rudge*, with his "cricket-like chirrup" as he took his part in the social gossip round the Maypole fire. Readers of Dickens will remember the timid Solomon's visit to the church at midnight when he went to toll the passing bell, and his account of the strange things that befell him there, and of the ringing of the mysterious bell that told the murder of Reuben Haredale.

In the British Museum I discovered a fragmentary collection of ballads and songs, made by Mr. Ballard, and amongst these is a song relating to a very unworthy follower of St. Nicholas, whose memory is thus unhappily preserved:

THE PARISH CLERK

A NEW COMIC SONG

Tune--THE VICAR AND MOSES

Here rests from his labours, by consent of his neighbours,
A peevish, ill-natur'd old clerk;

Who never design'd any good to mankind,
For of goodness he ne'er had a spark.
Tol lol de rol lol de rol lol.

But greedy as Death, until his last breath,
His method he ne'er failed to use;
When interr'd a corpse lay, Amen he'd scarce say,
Before he cry'd Who pays the dues?

Not a tear now he's dead, by friend or foe shed;
The first they were few, if he'd any;
Of the last he had more, than tongue can count o'er,
Who'd have hang'd the old churl for a penny.

In Levi's black train, the clerk did remain
Twenty years, squalling o'er a dull stave;
Yet his mind was so evil, he'd swear like the devil,
Nor repented on this side the grave.

Fowler, Printer, Salisbury.

That extraordinary man Mr. William Hutton, who died in 1813, and whose life has been written and his works edited by Mr. Llewellyn Jewitt, F.S.A., amongst his other poems wrote a set of verses on *The Way to Find Sunday without an Almanack*. It tells the

story of a Welsh clergyman who kept poultry, and how he told the days of the week and marked the Sundays by the regularity with which one of his hens laid her eggs. The seventh egg always became his Sunday letter, and thus he always remembered to sally forth "with gown and cassock, book and band," and perform his accustomed duty. Unfortunately the clerk was treacherous, and one week stole an egg, with dire consequences to the congregation, which had to wait until the clergyman, who was engaged in the unclerical task of "soleing shoes," could be fetched. The poem is a poor trifle, but it is perhaps worth mentioning on account of the personality of the writer.

There is a charming sketch of an old clerk in the *Essays and Tales* of the late Lady Verney. The story tells of the old clerk's affection for his great-grandchild, Benny. He is a delightfully drawn specimen of his race. We see him "creeping slowly about the shadows of the aisle, in his long blue Sunday coat with huge brass buttons, the tails of which reached almost to his heels, shorts and brown leggings, and a low-crowned hat in his hand. He was nearly eighty, but wiry still, rather blind and somewhat deaf; but the post of clerk is one considered to be quite independent and irremovable, *quam diu se bene gesserit*, during good behaviour--on a level with Her Majesty's judges for that matter. Having been raised to this great eminence some sixty years before, when he was the only man in the parish who could read, he would have stood out for his rights to remain there as long as he pleased against all the powers and principalities in the kingdom--if, indeed, he could have conceived the possibility of any one, in or out of the parish, being sufficiently irreligious and revolutionary to dispute his

sovereignty. He was part of the church, and the church was part of him--his rights and hers were indissolubly connected in his mind.

"The Psalms that day offered a fine field for his Anglo-Saxon plurals and south-country terminations; the 'housen,' 'priestesses,' 'beasteses of the field,' came rolling freely forth from his mouth, upon which no remonstrances by the curate had had the smallest effect. Was he, Michael Major, who had fulfilled the important office 'afore that young jackanapes was born, to be teached how 'twere to be done?' he had observed more than once in rather a high tone, though in general he patronised the successive occupants of the pulpit with much kindness. 'And this 'un, as cannot spike English nayther,' he added superciliously concerning the north-country accent of his pastor and master."

On weekdays he wore a smock-frock, which he called his surplice, with wonderful fancy stitches on the breast and back and sleeves. At length he had to resign his post and take to his bed, and was not afraid to die when his time came. It is a very tender and touching little story, a very faithful picture of an old clerk [43].

> [43] *Essays and Tales*, by Frances Parthenope Lady Verney, p. 67.

Passing from grave to gay, we find Tom Hood sketching the clerk attending on his vicar, who is about to perform a wedding service and make two people for ever happy. He christens the two officials "the joiners, no rough mechanics, but a portly full-blown vicar with his clerk, both rubicund, a peony paged by a pink. It made me smile to observe the

droll clerical turn of the clerk's beaver, scrubbed into that fashion by his coat at the nape."

Few people know Alexander Pope's *Memoir of P.P., Clerk of this Parish*, which was intended to ridicule Burnet's *History of His Own Time*, a work characterised by a strong tincture of self-importance and egotism. These are abundantly exposed in the *Memoir*, which begins thus:

"In the name of the Lord, Amen. I, P.P., by the Grace of God, Clerk of this Parish, writeth this history.

"Ever since I arrived at the age of discretion I had a call to take upon me the Function of a Parish Clerk, and to this end it seemed unto me meet and profitable to associate myself with the parish clerks of this land, such I mean as were right worthy in their calling, men of a clear and sweet voice, and of becoming gravity."

He tells how on the day of his birth Squire Bret gave a bell to the ring of the parish. Hence that one and the same day did give to their own church two rare gifts, its great bell and its clerk.

Leaving the account of P.P.'s youthful amours and bouts at quarter-staff, we next find that:

"No sooner was I elected into my office, but I layed aside the gallantries of my youth and became a new man. I considered myself as in somewise of ecclesiastical dignity, since by wearing of a band, which is no small part of the ornaments of our clergy, might not unworthily be deemed, as it were, a shred of the linen vestments of Aaron.

"Thou mayest conceive, O reader, with what concern I perceived the eyes of the congregation fixed upon

me, when I first took my place at the feet of the Priest. When I raised the Psalm, how did my voice quiver with fear! And when I arrayed the shoulders of the minister with the surplice, how did my joints tremble under me! I said within myself, 'Remember, Paul, thou standest before men of high worship, the wise Mr. Justice Freeman, the grave Mr. Justice Tonson, the good Lady Jones.' Notwithstanding it was my good hap to acquit myself to the good liking of the whole congregation, but the Lord forbid I should glory therein."

He then proceeded to remove "the manifold corruptions and abuses."

1. "I was especially severe in whipping forth dogs from the Temple, all except the lap-dog of the good widow Howard, a sober dog which yelped not, nor was there offence in his mouth.

2. "I did even proceed to moroseness, though sore against my heart, unto poor babes, in tearing from them the half-eaten apple, which they privily munched at church. But verily it pitied me, for I remembered the days of my youth.

3. "With the sweat of my own hands I did make plain and smooth the dog's ears throughout our Great Bible.

4. "I swept the pews, not before swept in the third year. I darned the surplice and laid it in lavender."

The good clerk also made shoes, shaved and clipped hair, and practised chirurgery also in the worming of dogs.

"Now was the long expected time arrived when the Psalms of King David should be hymned unto the

same tunes to which he played them upon his harp, so I was informed by my singing-master, a man right cunning in Psalmody. Now was our over-abundant quaver and trilling done away, and in lieu thereof was instituted the sol-fa in such guise as is sung in his Majesty's Chapel. We had London singing-masters sent into every parish like unto excisemen."

P.P. was accused by his enemies of humming through his nostrils as a sackbut, yet he would not forgo the harmony, it having been agreed by the worthy clerks of London still to preserve the same. He tutored the young men and maidens to tune their voices as it were a psaltery, and the church on Sunday was filled with new Hallelujahs.

But the fame of the great is fleeting. Poor Paul Philips passed away, and was forgotten. When his biographer went to see him, his place knew him no more. No one could tell of his virtues, his career, his excellences. Nothing remained but his epitaph:

"O reader, if that thou canst read,
  Look down upon this stone;
Do all we can, Death is a man
  That never spareth none."

CHAPTER VI

CLERKS TOO CLERICAL. SMUGGLING DAYS AND SMUGGLING WAYS

It is perhaps not altogether surprising that in times when ordained clergymen were scarce, and when much confusion reigned, the clerk should occasionally have taken upon himself to discharge duties which scarcely pertained to his office. Great diversity of opinion is evident as regards the right of the clerk to perform certain ecclesiastical services, such as his reading of the Burial Service, the Churching of Women, and the reading of the daily services in the absence of the incumbent. In the days of Queen Elizabeth, judging from the numerous inquiries issued by the bishops at their visitations, one would imagine that the parish clerk performed many services which pertained to the duties of the parish priest. It is not likely that such inquiries should have been made if some reports of clerks and readers exceeding their prescribed functions had not reached episcopal ears. They ask if readers presume to baptize or marry or celebrate Holy Communion. And the answers received in several cases support the surmise of the bishops. Thus we read that at Westbere, "When the parson is absent the parish clerk reads the service." At Waltham the parish clerk served the parish for the most as the vicar seldom came there. At Tenterden the service was read by a layman, one John Hopton, and at Fairfield a reader served the church. This was the condition of those parishes in 1569, and doubtless many others were similarly situated.

The Injunctions of Archbishop Grindal, issued in 1571, are severe and outspoken with regard to lay

ministration. He wrote as follows:

> "We do enjoin and straitly command, that from henceforth no parish clerk, nor any other person not being ordered, at the least, for a deacon, shall presume to solemnize Matrimony, or to minister the Sacrament of Baptism, or to deliver the communicants the Lord's cup at the celebration of the Holy Communion. And that no person, not being a minister, deacon, or at least, tolerated by the ordinary in writing, do attempt to supply the office of a minister in saying divine service openly in any church or chapel."

In the Lincoln diocese in 1588 the clerk was still allowed to read one lesson and the epistle, but he was forbidden from saying the service, ministering any sacraments or reading any homily. In some cases greater freedom was allowed. In the beautiful Lady Chapel of the Church of St. Mary Overy there is preserved a curious record relating to this:

> "Touching the Parish Clerk and Sexton all is well; only our clerk doth sometimes to ease the minister read prayers, church women, christen, bury and marry, being allowed so to do.
>
> "December 9. 1634."

Bishop Joseph Hall of Exeter asked in 1638 in his visitation articles, "Whether in the absence of the

minister or at any other time the Parish Clerk, or any other lay person, said Common Prayer openly in the church or any part of the Divine Service which is proper to the Priest?"

Archdeacon Marsh, of Chichester, in 1640 inquires: "Hath your Parish Clerk or Sexton taken upon him to meddle with anything above his office, as churching of women, burying of the dead, or such like?"

During the troublous times of the Commonwealth period it is not surprising that the clerk often performed functions which were "above his office," when clergymen were banished from their livings. We have noticed already an example of the burial service being performed by the clerk when he was so rudely treated by angry Parliamentarians for using the Book of Common Prayer. Here is an instance of the ceremony of marriage being performed by the parish clerk:

> "The marriages in the Parish of Dale Abbey were till a few years previous to the Marriage Act, solemnized by the Clerk of the Parish, at one shilling each, there being no minister."

This Marriage Act was that passed by the Little Parliament of 1653, by which marriage was pronounced to be merely a civil contract. Banns were published in the market-place, and the marriages were performed by Cromwell's Justices of the Peace whom, according to a Yorkshire vicar, "that impious and rebell appointed out of the basest Hypocrites and dissemblers with God and man." The clerks' marriage ceremony was no worse than that of the justices.

Dr. Macray, of the Bodleian Library, has discovered the draft of a licence granted by Dr. John Mountain, Bishop of London, to Thomas Dickenson, parish clerk of Waltham Holy Cross, in the year 1621, permitting him to read prayers, church women, and bury the dead. This licence states that the parish of Waltham Holy Cross was very spacious, many houses being a long distance from the church, and that the curate was very much occupied with his various duties of visiting the sick, burying the dead, churching women, and other business belonging to his office; hence permission is granted to Thomas Dickenson to assist the curate in reading prayers in church, burying dead corpses, and to church women in the absence of the curate, or when the curate cannot conveniently perform the same duty in his own person.

Doubtless this licence was no solitary exception, and it is fairly certain that other clerks enjoyed the same privileges which are here assigned to Master Thomas Dickenson. He must have been a worthy member of his class, a man of education, and of skill and ability in reading, or episcopal sanction would not have been given to him to perform these important duties.

It is evident that parish clerks occasionally at least performed several important clerical functions with the consent of, or in the absence of the incumbents, and that in spite of the articles in the visitations of some bishops who were opposed to this practice, episcopal sanction was not altogether wanting.

The affection with which the parishioners regarded the clerk is evidenced in many ways. He received from them many gifts in kind and money, such as eggs and cakes and sheaves of corn. Some of them

were demanded in early times as a right that could not be evaded; but the compulsory payment of such goods was abolished, and the parishioners willingly gave by courtesy that which had been deemed a right.

Sometimes land has been left to the clerk in order that he may ring the curfew-bell, or a bell at night and early morning, so that travellers may be warned lest they should lose their way over wild moorland or bleak down, and, guided by the sound of the bell, may reach a place of safety.

An old lady once lost her way on the Lincolnshire wolds, nigh Boston, but was guided to her home by the sound of the church bell tolling at night. So grateful was she that she bequeathed a piece of land to the parish clerk on condition that he should ring one of the bells from seven to eight o'clock each evening during the winter months.

There is a piece of land called "Curfew Land" at St. Margaret's-at-Cliffe, Kent, the rent of which was directed to be paid to the clerk or other person who should ring the curfew every evening in order to warn travellers lest they should fall over the cliff, as the unfortunate donor of the land did, for want of the due and constant ringing of the bell.

In smuggling days, clerks, like many of their betters, were not immaculate. The venerable vicar of Worthing, the Rev. E. K. Elliott, records that the clerk of Broadwater was himself a smuggler, and in league with those who throve by the illicit trade. When a cargo was expected he would go up to the top of the spire, which afforded a splendid view of the sea, and when the coast was clear of preventive officers he would give the signal by hoisting a flag.

Kegs of contraband spirits were frequently placed inside two huge tombs which have sliding tops, and which stand near the western porch of Worthing church.

The last run of smuggled goods in that neighbourhood was well within the recollection of the vicar, and took place in 1855. Some kegs were taken to Charman Dean and buried in the ground, and although diligent search was made, the smugglers baffled their pursuers.

At Soberton, Hants, there is an old vault near the chancel door. Now the flat stone is level with the ground; but in 1800 it rested on three feet of brickwork, and could be lifted off by two men. Here many kegs of spirit that paid no duty were deposited by an arrangement with the clerk, and the stone lifted on again. This secret hiding-place was never discovered, neither did the curate find out who requisitioned his horse when the nights favoured smugglers.

In the wild days of Cornish wreckers and wrecking, both priest and clerk are said to have taken part in the sharing of the tribute of the sea cast upon their rockbound coast. The historian of Cornwall, Richard Polwhele, tells of a wreck happening one Sunday morning just before service. The clerk, eager to be at the fray, announced to the assembled parishioners that "Measter would gee them a holiday."

I will not vouch for the truth of that other story told in the *Encyclopædia of Wit* (1801), which runs as follows:

"A parson who lived on the coast of Cornwall, where one great business of the inhabitants is plundering

from ships that are wrecked, being once preaching when the alarm was given, found that the sound of the wreck was so much more attractive than his sermon, that all his congregation were scampering out of church. To check their precipitation, he called out, 'My brethren, let me entreat you to stay for five words more'; and marching out of the pulpit, till he had got pretty near the door of the church, slowly pronounced, 'Let us all start fair,' and ran off with the rest of them."

An old parishioner of the famous Rev. R. S. Hawker once told him of a very successful run of a cargo of kegs, which the obliging parish clerk allowed the smugglers to place underneath the benches and in the tower stairs of the church. The old man told the story thus:

> "We bribed Tom Hockaday, the sexton, and we had the goods safe in the seats by Saturday night. The parson did wonder at the large congregation, for divers of them were not regular churchgoers at other times; and if he had known what was going on, he could not have preached a more suitable discourse, for it was, 'Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess.' It was one of his best sermons; but, there, it did not touch us, you see; for we never tasted anything but brandy and gin."

In such smuggling ways the clerk was no worse than his neighbours, who were all more or less involved in

the illicit trade.

The old Cornish clerks who used to help the smugglers were a curious race of beings, remarkable for their familiar ways with the parson. At St. Clements the clergyman one day was reading the verse, "I have seen the ungodly flourish like a *green bay* tree," when the clerk looked up with an inquiring glance from the desk below, "How can that be, maister?" He was more familiar with the colour of a bay horse than the tints of a bay tree.

At Kenwyn two dogs, one of which belonged to the parson, were fighting at the west end of the church; the parson, who was then reading the second lesson, rushed out of the pew and went down and parted them. Returning to his pew, and doubtful where he had left off, he asked the clerk, "Roger, where was I?" "Why, down parting the dogs, maister," replied Roger.

Two rocks stand out on the South Devon coast near Dawlish, which are known as the Parson and Clerk. A wild, weird legend is told about these rocks--of a parson who desired the See of Exeter, and often rode with his clerk to Dawlish to hear the latest news of the bishop who was nigh unto death. The wanderers lost their way one dark night, and the parson exhibited most unclerical anger, telling his clerk that he would rather have the devil for a guide than him. Of course, the devil or one of his imps obliged, and conducted the wanderers to an old ruined house, where there was a large company of disguised demons. They all passed a merry night, singing and carousing. Then the news comes that the bishop is dead. The parson and clerk determine to set out at once. Their steeds are brought, but will not budge a

step. The parson cuts savagely at his horse. The demons roar with unearthly laughter. The ruined house and all the devils vanish. The waves are overwhelming the riders, and in the morning the wretches are found clinging to the rocks with the grasp of death, which ever afterwards record their villainy and their fate.

Among tales of awe and weird mystery stands out the story of the adventures of Peter Priestly, clerk, sexton, and gravestone cutter, of Wakefield, who flourished at the end of the eighteenth century. He was an old and much respected inhabitant of the town, and not at all given to superstitious fears. One Saturday evening he went to the church to finish the epitaph on a stone which was to be in readiness for removal before Sunday. Arrived at the church, where he had his workshop, he set down his lantern and lighted his other candle, which was set in a primitive candlestick formed out of a potato. The church clock struck eleven, and still some letters remained unfinished, when he heard a strange sound, which seemed to say "Hiss!" "Hush!" He resumes his work undaunted. Again that awful voice breaks in once more. He lights his lantern and searches for its cause. In vain his efforts. He resolves to leave the church, but again remembers his promise and returns to his work. The mystic hour of midnight strikes. He has nearly finished, and bends down to examine the letters on the stone. Again he hears a louder "Hiss!" He now stands appalled. Terror seizes him. He has profaned the Sabbath, and the sentence of death has gone forth. With tottering steps Peter finds his way home and goes to bed. Sleep forsakes him. His wife ministers to him in vain. As morning dawns the good woman notices Peter's wig suspended on the great chair. "Oh, Peter," she cries, "what hast thou been

doing to burn all t' hair off one side of thy wig?" "Ah! bless thee," says the clerk, "thou hast cured me with that word." The mysterious "hiss" and "hush" were sounds from the frizzling of Peter's wig by the flame of the candle, which to his imperfect sense of hearing imported things horrible and awful. Such is the story which a writer in Hone's *Year Book* tells, and which is said to have afforded Peter Priestly and the good people of merry Wakefield many a joke.

The *Year Book* is always full of interest, and in the same volume I find an account of a most worthy representative of the profession, one John Kent, the parish clerk of St. Albans, who died in 1798, aged eighty years. He was a very venerable and intelligent man, who did service in the old abbey church, long before the days when its beauties were desecrated by Grimthorpian restoration, or when it was exalted to cathedral rank. For fifty-two years Kent was the zealous clerk and custodian of the minster, and loved to describe its attractions. He was the friend of the learned Browne Willis. His name is mentioned in Cough's *Sepulchral Monuments of Great Britain*, and his intelligence and knowledge noticed, and Newcombe, the historian of the abbey, expressed his gratitude to the good clerk for much information imparted by him to the author. The monks could not have guarded the shrine of St. Alban with greater care than did Kent protect the relics of good Duke Humphrey. His veneration for all that the abbey contained was remarkable. A story is told of a gentleman who purloined a bone of the Duke. The clerk suspected the theft but could never prove it, though he sometimes taxed the gentleman with having removed the bone. At last, just before his death, the man restored it, saying to the clerk, "I could not depart easy with it in my possession."

Kent was a plumber and glazier by trade, in politics a staunch partisan of "the Blues," and on account of his sturdy independence was styled "Honest John." He performed his duties in the minster with much zeal and ability, his knowledge of psalmody was unsurpassed, his voice was strong and melodious, and he was a complete master of church music. Unlike many of his confrères, he liked to hear the congregation sing; but when country choirs came from neighbouring churches to perform in the abbey with instruments, contemptuously described by him as "a box of whistles," the congregation being unable to join in the melodies, he used to give out the anthem thus: "Sing *ye* to the praise and glory of God...." Five years before his death he had an attack of paralysis which slightly crippled his power of utterance, though this defect could scarcely be detected when he was engaged in the services of the church. Two days before his death he sang his "swan-song." Some colours were presented to the volunteers of the town, and were consecrated in the abbey. During the service he sang the 20th Psalm with all the strength and vivacity of youth. When his funeral sermon was preached the rector alluded to this dying effort, and said that on the day of the great service "Nature seemed to have reassumed her throne; and, as she knew it was to be his last effort, was determined it should be his best." The body of the good clerk, John Kent, rests in the abbey church which he loved so well, in a spot marked by himself, and we hope that the "restoration," somewhat drastic and severe, which has fallen upon the grand old church, has not obscured his grave or destroyed the memorial of this worthy and excellent clerk.

CHAPTER VII

THE CLERK IN EPITAPH

The virtues of many a parish clerk are recorded on numerous humble tombstones in village churchyards. The gratitude felt by both rector and people for many years of faithful service is thus set forth, sometimes couched in homely verse, and occasionally marred by the misplaced humour and jocular expressions and puns with which our forefathers thought fit to honour the dead. In this they were not original, and but followed the example of the Greeks and Romans, the Italians, Spaniards, and French. This objectionable fashion of punning on gravestones was formerly much in vogue in England, and such a prominent official as the clerk did not escape the attention of the punsters. Happily the quaint fancies and primitive humour, which delighted our grandsires in the production of rebuses and such-like pleasantries, no longer find themselves displayed upon the fabric of our churches, and the "merry jests" have ceased to appear upon the memorials of the dead. We will glance at the clerkly epitaphs of some of the worthies who have held the office of parish clerk who were deemed deserving of a memorial.

In the southern portion of the churchyard attached to St. Andrew's Church, Rugby, is a plain upright stone

containing the following inscription:

In memory of
Peter Collis
33 years Clerk of
this Parish
who died Feb'y 28th 1818
Aged 82 years

[Some lines of poetry follow, but these unfortunately are not now discernible.]

At the time Peter held office the incumbent was noted for his card-playing propensities, and the clerk was much addicted to cock-fighting. The following couplet relating to these worthies is still remembered:

No wonder the people of Rugby are all in the dark,
With a card-playing parson and a cock-fighting clerk.

Peter's father was clerk before him, and on a stone to his memory is recorded as follows:

In memory of
John Collis Husband of
Eliz: Collis who liv'd in
Wedlock together 50 years
he served as Parish Clerk 41 years
And died June 19th 1781 aged 69 years

Him who covered up the Dead
Is himself laid in the same bed
Time with his crooked scythe hath

made
Him lay his mattock down and spade
May he and we all rise again
To everlasting life AMEN.

The name Collis occurs amongst those who held the office of parish clerk at West Haddon. The Rev. John T. Page, to whom I am indebted for the above information [44], has gleaned the following particulars from the parish registers and other sources. The clerk who reigned in 1903 was Thomas Adams, who filled the position for eighteen years. He succeeded his father-in-law, William Prestidge, who died 24 March, 1886, after holding the office fifty-three years. His predecessor was Thomas Collis, who died 30 January, 1833, after holding the office fifty-two years, and succeeded John Colledge, who, according to an old weather-beaten stone still standing in the churchyard, died 12 September, 1781. How long Colledge held office cannot now be ascertained. Here are some remarkable examples of long years of service, Collis and Prestidge having held the office for 105 years.

[44] cf. *Notes and Queries*, Tenth Series, ii., 10 September, 1904, p. 215.

In Shenley churchyard the following remarkable epitaph appears to the memory of Joseph Rogers, who was a bricklayer as well as parish clerk:

Silent in dust lies mouldering here
A Parish Clerk of voice most clear.
None Joseph Rogers could excel
In laying bricks or singing well;

Though snapp'd his line, laid by his rod,
We build for him our hopes in God.

A remarkable instance of longevity is recorded on a tombstone in Cromer churchyard. The inscription runs:

Sacred to the memory of David Vial who departed this life the 26th of March, 1873, aged 94 years, for sixty years clerk of this parish.

At the village church of Whittington, near Oswestry, there is a well-known epitaph, which is worth recording:

March 13th 1766 died Thomas Evans, Parish Clerk, aged 72.

Old Sternhold's lines or "Vicar of Bray"
Which he tuned best 'twas hard to say.

Another remarkable instance of longevity is that recorded on a tombstone in the cemetery of Eye, Suffolk, erected to the memory of a faithful clerk:

Erected to the memory of
George Herbert
who was clerk of this parish for more than 71 years
and who died on the 17th May 1873
aged 81 years.

This monument

Is erected to his memory by his grateful
Friend
the Rev. W. Page Roberts
Vicar of Eye.

Herbert must have commenced his duties very early in life; according to the inscription, at the age of ten years.

At Scothorne, in Lincolnshire, there is a sexton-ringer-clerk epitaph on John Blackburn's tombstone, dated 1739-40. It reads thus:

Alas poor John
Is dead and gone
Who often toll'd the Bell
And with a spade
Dug many a grave
And said Amen as well.

The Roes were a great family of clerks at Bakewell, and the two members who occupied that office at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century seem to have been endowed with good voices, and with a devoted attachment to the church and its monuments. Samuel Roe had the honour of being mentioned in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, and receives well-deserved praise for his care of the fabric of Bakewell Church, and his epitaph is given, which runs as follows:

To
The memory of
SAMUEL ROE
Clerk
of the Parish Church of Bakewell,
which office
he filled thirty-five years

with credit to himself
and satisfaction to the inhabitants.
His natural powers of voice,
in clearness, strength, and sweetness
were altogether unequalled.
He died October 31st, 1792
Aged 70 years

The correspondent of the *Gentleman's Magazine* wrote thus of this faithful clerk:

> "Mr. Urban,
>
> "It was with much concern that I read the epitaph upon Mr. Roe in your last volume, page 1192. Upon a little tour which I made in Derbyshire in 1789, I met with that worthy and very intelligent man at Bakewell, and in the course of my antiquarian researches there, derived no inconsiderable assistance from his zeal and civility. If he did not possess the learning of his namesake, your old and valuable correspondent [45], I will venture to declare that he was not less influenced by a love and veneration for antiquity, many proofs of which he had given by his care and attention to the monuments of the church which were committed to his charge; for he united the characters of sexton, clerk, singing-master, will-maker, and schoolmaster. Finding that I was quite alone, he requested permission to wait upon me at the inn in the

> evening, urging as a reason for this request that he must be exceedingly gratified by the conversation of a gentleman who could read the characters upon the monument of Vernon, the founder of Haddon House, a treat he had not met with for many years. After a very pleasant gossip we parted, but not till my honest friend had, after some apparent struggle, begged of me to indulge him with my name."
>
> [45] T. Row stands for T*he* R*ector* O*f* W*hittington*, the Rev. Samuel Pegge. cf. *Curious Epitaphs*, by W. Andrews, p. 124.

To this worthy clerk's care is due the preservation of the Vernon and other monuments in Bakewell Church. Mr. Andrews tells us that "in some instances he placed a wooden framework to keep off the rough hands and rougher knives of the boys and young men of the congregation. He also watched with special care the Wenderley tomb, and even took careful rubbings of the inscriptions [46]."

> [46] W. Andrews, *Curious Epitaphs*, p. 124.

The inscription on the tomb of the son of this worthy clerk proves that he inherited his father's talents as regards musical ability:

Erected
In remembrance of
PHILIP ROE

Who died 12th September, 1815,
Aged 52 years.

The vocal Powers here let us mark
Of Philip our late Parish Clerk,
In church none ever heard a Layman
With a clearer voice say 'Amen'!
Who now with Hallelujahs sound
Like him can make this roof rebound?
The Choir lament his Choral Tones
The Town--so soon Here lie his Bones.
Sleep undisturb'd within thy peaceful shrine
Till Angels wake thee with such notes as thine.

The last two lines are a sweet and tender tribute truly to the memory of this melodious clerk.

A writer in *All the Year Round* [47], who has been identified as Cuthbert Bede, the author of the immortal *Verdant Green*, tells of the Osbornes and Worrals, famous families of clerks, quoting instances of the hereditary nature of the office. He wrote as follows concerning them:

[47] No. 624, New Series, p. 83.

"As a boy I often attended the service at Belbroughton Church, Worcestershire, when the clerk was Mr. Osborne, tailor. His family had been parish clerks and tailors since the time of Henry VIII, and were lineally descended from William Fitz-Osborne, who in the twelfth century had been

deprived by Ralph Fitz-Herbert of his right to the manor of Bellam, in the parish of Bellroughton. Often have I stood in the picturesque churchyard of Wolverley, Worcestershire, by the grave of the old parish clerk, whom I well remember, old Thomas Worrall, the inscription on whose monument is as follows:

> Sacred to the memory of
> THOMAS WORRALL,
> parish clerk of Wolverley for a period of
> forty-seven years.
> Died A.D. 1854, February 23rd.
> He served with faithfulness in humble sphere
> As one who could his talents well employ,
> Hope that when Christ his Lord shall reappear,
> He may be bidden to his Master's joy.
>
> This tombstone was erected to the memory of the deceased
> by a few parishioners in testimony of his worth, April 1855.
>
> Charles R. Somers Cocks,
> Vicar.

It may be noted of this worthy clerk that, with the exception of a week or two before his death, he was never absent from his Sunday and weekday duties in the forty-seven years during which he held office.

He succeeded his father, James Worrall, who died in 1806, aged seventy-nine, after being parish clerk of Wolverley for thirty years. His tombstone, near to that of his son, was erected "to record his worth both in his public and private character, and as a mark of personal esteem--p. 1. F.H. and W.C. p.c." I am told that these initials stand for F. Hustle, and the Rev. William Callow, and that the latter was the author of the following lines inscribed on the monument, which are well worth quoting:

> If courtly bards adorn each statesman's bust
> And strew their laurels o'er each warrior's dust,
> Alike immortalise, as good and great,
> Him who enslaved as him who saved the State,
> Surely the Muse (a rustic minstrel) may
> Drop one wild flower upon a poor man's clay.
> This artless tribute to his mem'ry give
> Whose life was such as heroes seldom live.
> In worldly knowledge, poor indeed his store--
> He knew the village, and he scarce knew more.
> The worth of heavenly truth he justly knew--
> In faith a Christian, and in practice too.
> Yes, here lies one, excel him ye who can:

Go! imitate the virtues of that man!

The famous "Amen" epitaph at Crayford, Kent, is well known, though the name of the clerk who is thus commemorated is sometimes forgotten. It is to the memory of one Peter Snell, who repeated his "Amens" diligently for a period of thirty years, and runs as follows:

Here lieth the body of
Peter Snell,
Thirty years clerk of this Parish.
He lived respected as a pious and mirthful man,
and died on his way to church to assist at a wedding,
on the 31st of March, 1811,
Aged seventy years.

The inhabitants of Crayford have raised this stone to his cheerful memory, and as a tribute to his long and faithful services.

The life of this clerk was just threescore and ten,
Nearly half of which time he had sung out Amen.
In his youth he had married like other young men,
But his wife died one day--so he chanted Amen.
A second he took--she departed--what then?
He married and buried a third with Amen.

Thus his joys and his sorrows were treble, but then
His voice was deep base, as he sung out Amen.
On the horn he could blow as well as most men,
So his horn was exalted to blowing Amen.
But he lost all his wind after threescore and ten,
And here with three wives he waits till again
The trumpet shall rouse him to sing out Amen.



Old Scarlett.

The duties of sexton and parish clerk were usually performed by one person, as we have already frequently noticed, and therefore it is fitting that we should record the epitaph of Old Scarlett, most famous of grave-diggers, who buried two queens,

both the victims of stern persecution, ill-usage, and Tudor tyranny--Catherine, the divorced wife of Henry VIII, and poor sinning Mary Queen of Scots. His famous picture in Peterborough Cathedral, on the wall of the western transept, usually attracts the chief attention of the tourist, and has preserved his name and fame. He is represented with a spade, pickaxe, keys, and a whip in his leathern girdle, and at his feet lies a skull. In the upper left-hand corner appear the arms of the see of Peterborough, save that the cross-keys are converted into cross-swords. The whip at his girdle appears to show that Old Scarlett occupied the position of dog-whipper as well as sexton. There is a description of this portrait in the *Book of Days,* wherein the writer says:

> "What a lively effigy--short, stout, hardy, self-complacent, perfectly satisfied, and perhaps even proud of his profession, and content to be exhibited with all its insignia about him! Two queens had passed through his hands into that bed which gives a lasting rest to queens and to peasants alike. An officer of death, who had so long defied his principal, could not but have made some impression on the minds of bishop, dean, prebends, and other magnates of the cathedral, and hence, as we may suppose, the erection of this lively portraiture of the old man, which is believed to have been only once renewed since it was first put up. Dr. Dibdin, who last copied it, tells us that 'old Scarlett's jacket and

trunkhose are of a brownish red, his stockings blue, his shoes black, tied with blue ribbons, and the soles of his feet red. The cap upon his head is red, and so also is the ground of the coat armour.'" Beneath the portrait are these lines:

YOU SEE OLD SCARLETTS PICTURE STAND ON HIE
BUT AT YOUR FEETE THERE DOTH HIS BODY LYE
HIS GRAVESTONE DOTH HIS AGE AND DEATH TIME SHOW
HIS OFFICE BY THEIS TOKENS YOU MAY KNOW
SECOND TO NONE FOR STRENGTH AND STURDYE LIMM
A SCARBABE MIGHTY VOICE WITH VISAGE GRIM
HEE HAD INTER'D TWO QUEENES WITHIN THIS PLACE
AND THIS TOWNES HOUSEHOLDERS IN HIS LIVES SPACE
TWICE OVER: BUT AT LENGTH HIS OWN TURNE CAME
WHAT HE FOR OTHERS DID FOR HIM THE SAME
WAS DONE: NO DOUBT HIS SOUL DOTH LIVE FOR AYE
IN HEAVEN: THOUGH HERE HIS BODY CLAD IN CLAY.

On the floor is a stone inscribed "JULY 2 1594 R.S. ætatis 98." This painting is not a contemporary

portrait of the old sexton, but a copy made in 1747.

The sentiment expressed in the penult couplet is not uncommon, the idea of retributive justice, of others performing the last offices for the clerk who had so often done the like for his neighbours. The same notion is expressed in the epitaph of Frank Raw, clerk and monumental mason, of Selby, Yorkshire, which runs as follows:

> Here lies the body of poor FRANK RAW
> Parish clerk and gravestone cutter,
> And this is writ to let you know
> What Frank for others used to do
> Is now for Frank done by another [48].

[48] *Curious Epitaphs*, by W. Andrews, p. 120.

The achievement of Old Scarlett with regard to his interring "the town's householders in his life's space twice over," has doubtless been equalled by many of the long-lived clerks whose memoirs have been recorded, but it is not always recorded on a tombstone. At Ratcliffe-on-Soar there is, however, the grave of an old clerk, one Robert Smith, who died in 1782, at the advanced age of eighty-two years, and his epitaph records the following facts:

> Fifty-five years it was, and something more,
> Clerk of this parish he the office bore,
> And in that space, 'tis awful to declare,

> Two generations buried by him were [49]!
>
> [49] *Ibid.* p. 121.

It is recorded on the tomb of Hezekiah Briggs, who died in 1844 in his eightieth year, the clerk and sexton of Bingley, Yorkshire, that "he buried seven thousand corpses [50]."

> [50] *Notes and Queries*, Ninth Series, xii. 453.

The verses written in his honour are worth quoting:

> Here lies an old ringer beneath the cold clay
> Who has rung many peals both for serious and gay;
> Through Grandsire and Trebles with ease he could range,
> Till death called Bob, which brought round the last change.
>
> For all the village came to him
> When they had need to call;
> His counsel free to all was given,
> For he was kind to all.
>
> Ring on, ring' on, sweet Sabbath bell,
> Still kind to me thy matins swell,
> And when from earthly things I part,
> Sigh o'er my grave and lull my heart.

These last four lines strike a sweet note, and are far superior to the usual class of monumental poetry. I will not guarantee the correct copying of the third

and fourth lines. Various copyists have produced various versions. One version runs:

> Bob majors and trebles with ease he could bang,
> Till Death called a bob which brought the last clang.

In Staple-next-Wingham, Kent, there is a stone to the memory of the parish clerk who died in 1820, aged eighty-six years, and thus inscribed:

> He was honest and just, in friendship sincere,
> And Clerk of this Parish for sixty-seven years.

At Worth Church, Sussex, near the south entrance is a headstone, inscribed thus:

> In memory of John Alcorn, Clerk and Sexton of this parish, who died Dec. 13: 1868 in the 81st year of his age.
>
> Thine honoured friend for fifty three full years,
> He saw each bridal's joy, each Burial's tears;
> Within the walls, by Saxons reared of old,
> By the stone sculptured font of antique mould,
> Under the massive arches in the glow,
> Tinged by dyed sun-beams passing to and fro,
> A sentient portion of the sacred

place,
A worthy presence with a well-worn face.
The lich-gate's shadow, o'er his pall at last
Bids kind adieu as poor old John goes past.
Unseen the path, the trees, the old oak door,
No more his foot-falls touch the tomb-paved floor,
His silvery head is hid, his service done
Of all these Sabbaths absent only one.
And now amidst the graves he delved around,
He rests and sleeps, beneath the hallowed ground.

Keep Innocency, and take heed unto the thing that is right, For that shall bring a man peace at the last. Psalm XXXVII. 38.

There is an interesting memorial of an aged parish clerk in Cropthorne Church, Worcestershire, an edifice of considerable note. It consists of a small painted-glass window in the tower, containing a full-length portrait of the deceased official, duly apparelled in a cassock.

There is in the King's Norton parish churchyard an old gravestone the existence of which I dare say a good many people had forgotten until recently, owing to the inscription having become almost illegible. Within the past few weeks it has been

renovated, and thus a record has been prevented from dropping out of public memory. The stone sets forth that it was erected to the memory of Isaac Ford, a shoemaker, who was for sixty-two years parish clerk of King's Norton, and who died on 10 July, 1755, aged eighty-five years. Beneath is another interesting inscription to the effect that Henry Ford, son of Isaac, who died on 11 July, 1795, aged eighty-one, was also parish clerk for forty years. The two men thus held continuous office for one hundred and two years. This is a famous record of long service, though it has been surpassed by a few others, our parish clerks being a long-lived race.

At Stoulton Church a clerk died in 1812, and it is recorded on his epitaph that "He was clerk of this parish more 30 years and much envied." It was not his office or his salary which was envied, but "a worn't much liked by the t'others," and yet followed the verse:

> A loving' husband, father dear,
> A faithful friend lies buried here.

An epitaph without a "werse" was considered very degrading.

CHAPTER VIII

THE WORSHIPFUL COMPANY OF PARISH CLERKS

The story of the City companies of London has many attractions for the historian and antiquary. When we visit the ancient homes of these great societies we are impressed by their magnificence and interesting associations. Portraits of old City worthies and royal benefactors gaze at us from the walls, and link our time with theirs, when they, too, strove to uphold the honour of their guild and benefit their generation. Many a quaint old-time custom and ceremonial usage linger on within the old halls, and there too are enshrined cuirass and targe, helmet, sword and buckler, which tell the story of the past, and of the part the companies played in national defence or in the protection of civic rights. Turning down some dark alley and entering the portals of one of their halls, we are transported at once from the busy streets and din of modern London into a region of old-world memories which has a fascination that is all its own.



Entrance to the Hall of the Company of Parish Clerks.

This is not the place to discuss the origin of guilds and City companies, which can trace back their descent to Anglo-Saxon times and were usually of a religious type. They were the benefit societies of ancient days, institutions of self-help, combining care for the needy with the practice of religion, justice, and morality. There were guilds exclusively religious, guilds of the calendars for the clergy, social guilds for the purpose of promoting good fellowship, benevolence, and thrift, merchant guilds for the regulation of trade, and frith guilds for the promotion of peace and the establishment of law and order.

In this goodly company we find evidences at an early date of the existence of the Fraternity of Parish Clerks. Its long and important career, though it ranked not with the Livery Companies, and sent not its members to take part in the deliberations of the

Common Council, is full of interest, and reflects the greatest credit on the worthy clerks who composed it.

In other cities besides London the clerks seem to have formed their guilds. As early as the time of the *Domesday Survey* there was a clerks' guild at Canterbury, wherein it is stated "*In civitate Cantuaria habet achiepiscopus* xii burgesses and xxxii mansuras which the clerks of the town, *clerici de villa*, hold within their gild and do yield xxxv shillings."

The first mention of the company carries us back to the early days of Henry III, when in the seventeenth year of that monarch's reign (A.D. 1233), according to Stow, they were incorporated and registered in the books of the Guildhall. The patron saint of the company was St. Nicholas, who also extended his patronage to robbers and mariners. Thieves are dubbed by Shakespeare as St. Nicholas's clerks [51], and Rowley calls highwaymen by the same title. Possibly this may be accounted for by the association of the light-fingered fraternity with Nicholas, or Old Nick, a cant name for the devil, or because *The Golden Legend* tells of the conversion of some thieves through the saint's agency. At any rate, the good Bishop of Myra was the patron saint of scholars, and therefore was naturally selected as tutelary guardian of clerks.

[51] *Henry IV*, act ii. sc. 1.

In 1442 Henry VI granted a charter to "the Chief or Parish Clerks of the City of London for the honour and glory of Almighty God and of the undefiled and most glorious Virgin Mary, His Mother, and on account of that special devotion, which they

especially bore to Christ's glorious confessor, St. Nicholas, on whose day or festival we were first presented into this present world, at the hands of a mother of memory ever to be revered." The charter states that they had maintained a poor brotherhood of themselves, as well as a certain divine service, and divine words of charity and piety, devised and exhibited by them year by year, for forty years or more by part; and it conferred on them the right of a perpetual corporate community, having two roasters and two chaplains to celebrate divine offices every day, for the King's welfare whether alive or dead, and for the souls of all faithful departed, for ever. By special royal grace they were allowed, on petitioning His Majesty, to have the charter without paying any fine or fee.

Seven years later a second charter was granted, wherein it is stated that their services were held in the Chapel of Mary Magdalene by the Guildhall. "Bretherne and Sisterne" were included in the fraternity. Bad times and the Wars of the Roses brought distress to the community, and they prayed Edward IV to refound their guild, allowing only the maintenance of one chaplain instead of two in the chapel nigh the Guildhall, together with the support of seven poor persons who daily offered up their prayers for the welfare of the King and the repose of the souls of the faithful. They provided "a prest, brede, wyne, wex, boke, vestments and chalise for their auter of S. Nicholas in the said chapel." The King granted their request.



The Master's Chair at the Parish Clerks' Hall.

The original home of the guild was in Bishopsgate. Brewers' Hall was, in 1422, lent to them for their meetings. But the old deeds in the possession of the company show that as early as 1274 they acquired property "near the King's highway in the parish of St. Ethelburga, extending from the west side of the garden of the Nuns of St. Helen's to near the stone wall of Bishopsgate on the north, in breadth from the east side of William the Whit Tawyer's to the King's highway on the south." These two highways are now known as Bishopsgate Street and Camomile Street. They had property also at Finsbury on the east side of Whitecross Street. Inasmuch as the guild did not in those early days possess a charter and was not incorporated, it had no power to hold property; hence the lands were transmitted to individual members of the fraternity [52]. After their incorporation in 1442 the trustees of the lands and possessions were all clerks. Another property belonged to them at Enfield.

[52] The transmission of the property is carefully traced in *Some Account of Parish Clerks*, by Mr. James Christie, p. 78. He had access to the company's muniments.

The chief possession of the clerks was the Bishopsgate property. It consisted of an inn called "The Wrestlers," another inn which bore the sign of "The Angel," and a fair entry or gate near the latter which still bears the name Clerks' Place. Wrestlers' Court still marks the site of the old inn--so conservative are the old names in the city of London. Passing through the entry we should have seen seven modest almshouses for the brethren and sisters of the guilds. Beyond these was the hall of the company. It consisted of a parlour (36 ft. by 14 ft.), with three chambers over it. The east side with fan glasses overlooked the garden, 72 ft. in length by 21 ft. wide. The west side was lined with wainscot. The actual hall adjoined, a fine room 30 ft. by 25 ft., with a gallery at the nether end, with a little parlour at the west end. A room for the Bedell, a kitchen with a vault under it, larder-rooms, buttery, and a little house called the Ewery, completed the buildings. It must have been a very delightful little home for the company, not so palatial as that of some of the greater guilds, but compact, charming, and altogether attractive.

But evil days set in for the City companies of London. Spoliation, greed, destruction were in the air. Churches, monasteries, charities felt the rude hand of the spoiler, and it could scarcely be that the rich corporations of the City should fail to attract the covetous eyes of the rapacious courtiers. They were forced to surrender all their property which had been

used for so-called "superstitious" purposes, and most of them bought this back with large sums of money, which went into the coffers of the King or his ministers. The Parish Clerks' Company fared no better than the rest. Their hall was seized by the King, or rather by the infamous courtiers of Edward VI, and sold, together with the almshouses, to Sir Robert Chester in 1548. He at once took possession of the property, but the clerks protested that they had been wrongfully despoiled, and again seized their rightful possessions. In spite of the sympathy and support of the Lord Mayor, who "communed with the wardens of the Great Companies for their gentle aid to be granted to the parish clerks towards their charges in defence of their title to their Common Hall and lands," the clerks lost their case, and were compelled to give up their home or submit to a heavy fine of 1000 marks besides imprisonment. The poor dispossessed clerks were defeated, but not disheartened. In the days of Queen Mary they renewed their suit, and "being likely to have prevailed, Sir Robert Chester pulled down the hall, sold the timber, stone and land, and thereupon the suit was ended"--very summary conclusion truly!

The Lord Mayor and his colleagues again showed sympathy and compassion for the dispossessed clerks, and offered them the church of the Hospital of St. Mary of Bethlehem in 1552 for their meetings. They did not lack friends. William Roper, whose picture still hangs in the hall of the company, the son-in-law of Sir Thomas More, was a great benefactor, who bequeathed to them some tenements in Southwark on condition that they should distribute £4 among the poor prisoners in Newgate and other jails. He was the biographer of Sir Thomas More, and died in 1577.

In 1610 the clerks applied for a new charter, and obtained it from James I, under the title of "The Parish Clerks of the Parishes and Parish Churches of the City of London, the liberties thereof and seven out of nine out-parishes adjoining." They were required to make returns for the bills of mortality and of the deaths of freemen. The masters and wardens had power granted to them to examine clerks as to whether they could sing the Psalms of David according to the usual tunes used in the parish churches, and whether they were sufficiently qualified to make their weekly returns. In 1636 a new charter was granted by Charles I, and again in 1640, this last charter being that by which the company is now governed. By this instrument their jurisdiction was extended so as to include Hackney and the other fifteen out-parishes, and they gained the right of collecting their own wages, and of suing for it in the ecclesiastical courts, and of printing the bills of mortality.

Soon after the company lost their hall through the high-handed proceedings of Sir Robert Chester, they purchased or leased a new hall, which was situated at the north-east corner of Brode Lane, Vintry, where they lived from 1562, until the Great Fire in 1666 again made them homeless. The Sun Tavern in Leadenhall Street, the Green Dragon, Queenhythe, the Quest House, Cripplegate, the Gun, near Aldgate, and the Mitre in Fenchurch Street, afforded them temporary accommodation. In 1669 they began to arrange for a new hall to be built off Wood Street, which was completed in 1671, and has since been their home. Various sums of money have been voted at different times for its repair or embellishment. It has once been damaged by fire, and on another occasion severely threatened. In 1825 the entrance

into Wood Street was blocked up and the entrance into Silver Street opened. The hall has been a favourite place of meeting for several other companies--the Fruiterers' Company, the Tinplate Workers' Company, the Society of Porters, and other private companies have been their tenants.



Portrait of William Roper.
Son-In-Law And Biographer Of Sir Thomas More,
Benefactor Of The Clerks' Company



The Grant Of Arms To The Company Of Parish

Clerks.]

I had recently the privilege of visiting the Parish Clerks' Hall, and was kindly conducted there by Mr. William John Smith, the "Father" of the company, and a liberal benefactor, whose portrait hangs in the hall. He has been three times master, and his father and grandfather were members of the fraternity.

The premises consist of a ground floor with cellars, which are let for private purposes, and a first floor with two rooms of moderate size. The old courtyard is now covered with business offices. Over the court-room door stands a copy of the Clerks' Arms, which are thus described: "The feyld azur, a flower de lice goulde on chieffe gules, a leopard's head betwen two pricksonge bookes of the second, the laces that bind the books next, and to the creast upon the healme, on a wreathe gules and azur, an arm, from the elbow upwards, holding a pricking book, 30th March, 1582." These are the arms "purged of superstition" by Robert Cook, Clarencieux Herald, on the aforementioned date. The company's motto is, *Unitas Societatis Stabilitas*. The arms over the court-room door have the motto *Pange lingua gloriosa*, which is accounted for by the fact that this copy of the clerks' heraldic achievement formerly stood over the organ in the hall. This organ is a small but pleasant instrument, and was purchased in 1737 in order to enable the members to practise psalmody. Several portraits of worthy clerks adorn the walls. Amongst them we notice that of William Roper, a benefactor of the company, whose name has been already mentioned.

The portrait of John Clarke shows a firm, dignified

old man, who was the parish clerk of St. Michael's, Cornhill, in 1805, and wrote extracts from the minute-books of the company. The picture was presented to the company in 1827. There are other portraits of worthy clerks, of Richard Hust, who died in 1835, and was a great benefactor of the company and the restorer of the almshouses; of James Mayhew (1896), and of William John Smith (1903).

In one of the windows is the portrait, in stained glass, of John Clarke, parish clerk of Bartholomew-the-Less, London, master of the company, A.D. 1675, *ætatis suæ* 45. He is represented with a dark skull cap on his head, long hair, a moustache, and a large falling band or collar.

There are also portraits in stained glass of Stephen Penckhurst, parish clerk of St. Mary Magdalene, Fish Street, London, master in 1685; of James Maddox, parish clerk of St. Olive's, Jury, master in 1684; of Nicholas Hudles, parish clerk of St. Andrew's, Undershaft, twice master, in 1674 and 1682; of Thomas Williams, parish clerk of St. Mary Magdalene, Bermondsey, master in 1680; of Robert Seal, parish clerk of St. Gregory, master in 1681; of William Disbrow, parish clerk of St. Vedast, Foster Lane, and of St. Michael Le Querne, master in 1674; and of William Hornbuck, parish clerk of St. James, Clerkenwell, master in 1679.

One of the windows has a curious emblematical representation of music and its effects, showing King David surrounded by cherubs. The royal arms of the time of Charles II, the arms of the company, the arms of the Prince of Wales, and a portrait of Queen Anne also appear in the windows.

The master's chair was presented by Samuel

Andrews, master in 1716, which date appears on the back together with the arms of the company, the crest being an arm raised bearing a scroll on which is inscribed the ninety-fourth Psalm. The seat of the chair is cane webbing. Psalm x. is inscribed on the front, and below is the fleur-de-lis.



Stained Glass Window At The Hall Of The Parish Clerks' Company

There is an interesting warden's or clerk's chair, made of mahogany, dating about the middle of the eighteenth century, and some walnut chairs fashioned in 1690.

Amongst other treasures I noticed an old Dutch chest, an ancient clock, the gift of the master and wardens in 1786, a reprint of Visscher's View of London in 1616, the grant of arms to the company, a panel painting of the Flight into Egypt, and the Orders and Rules of the company in 1709.

A snuff-box made of the wood of the *Victory*, mounted in silver, is one of the clerks' valued possessions, and they have a goodly store of plate, in spite of the fact that they, like many of their distinguished brethren, the Livery Companies of the City, have been obliged at various critical times in their history to dispose of their plate in order to meet the heavy demands upon their treasury. They still possess their pall, which is used on the occasion of the funeral of deceased members, and also "two garlands of crimson velvet embroidered" bearing the date 1601, which were formerly used at the election of the two masters. The master now wears a silver badge, the gift of Richard Perkins in 1879, which bears the inscription: *Hoc insigne in usum Magistri D.D. Richardus Perkins, SS. Augustini et Fidis Clericus, his Magistri 1878, 1879*.

By far the most interesting document in the possession of the company is the Bede Roll, which contains a list of the members of the fraternity from the time of Henry VI. The writing is magnificent, and the lettering varies in colours--red, blue, and black ink having been used. Amongst the distinguished names of the honorary members I noticed John Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk, and Richard Neville, Earl of Salisbury.

The company, by the aid of generous benefactors, looks well after the poor widows of clerks and the decayed brethren, bestowing upon them adequate pensions for their support in their indigence and old age. These benefactions entrusted to the care of the company, and the gifts by its members of plate and other treasures, show the affectionate regard of the parish clerks for their ancient and interesting

associations, which has done much to preserve the dignity of the office, to keep inviolate its traditions, and to improve the status of its members.



A Page Of The Bede Roll Of The Parish Clerks' Company

CHAPTER IX

THE CLERKS OF LONDON: THEIR DUTIES AND PRIVILEGES

A brief study of the history of the Parish Clerks' Company has already revealed the important part which its members played in the old City life of London. They were intimately connected with the Corporation. The clerks held their services in the Guildhall Chapel, and were required on Michaelmas Day to sing the Mass before the Lord Mayor, aldermen, and commoners before they went to the election of a new Lord Mayor. As early as the days of the famous Richard Whittington, on the occasion of his first election to the mayoralty, which as the popular rhyme says he held three times, we hear of their services being required for this great function.

In the year 1406 it was ordered that "a Mass of the Holy Ghost should be celebrated with solemn music in the chapel annexed to the Guildhall, to the end that the same commonalty by the grace of the Holy Spirit might be able peacefully and amicably to nominate two able and proper persons to be mayor of the City for the ensuing year, the same Mass, by the ordinance of the Chamberlain for the time being, to be solemnly chanted by the finest singers, in the chapel aforesaid and upon that feast."

And when the Mass was no longer sung in the chapel of the Guildhall, they still chanted the Psalms and anthems before and after divine service and sermon, sometimes with the help of "two singing men of Paul's," who received twelvepence apiece for their pains; and sometimes the singing was done by a convenient number of the Clerks' Company most skilful in singing, and deemed most fit by the master and wardens to perform that service.

They were in great request at the great and stately funerals of the sixteenth century, going before the hearse and singing with their surplices hanging on their arms till they came to the church. The changes wrought by the Reformation strongly affected their use. In the early years of the century we can hear them chanting anthems, dirige, and Mass; later on they sing "the Te Deum in English new fashion, Geneva wise--men, women and all do sing and boys."

These splendid funerals were a fruitful source of income to the Clerks' Company. We see Masters William Holland and John Aungell, clerks of the Brotherhood of St. Nicholas, with twenty-four persons and three children singing the Masses of Our Lady, the Trinity and Requiem at the interment of Sir Thomas Lovell, the sage and witty counsellor of King Henry VIII and Constable of the Tower, while sixty-four more clerks met the body on its way and conducted it to its last resting-place at Holywell, Shoreditch. Perhaps it was not without some satisfaction that the clerks took a prominent part in the burial of the Duke of Somerset, the iniquitous spoiler of their goods. In the ordinances of the companies issued in 1553, very minute regulations are laid down with regard to the fees for funerals and the order in which each clerk should serve. At the burials of "noble honourable, worshipful men or women or citizens of the City of London," the attendance of the clerks was limited to the number asked for by the friends of the deceased. No person was to receive more than eight-pence. The beadle might charge fourpence for the use of the hearse cloth. An extra charge of fourpence could be made if the clerks were wanted both in the afternoon and in the forenoon for the sermon or other service. The bearers might have twopence more than the usual

wage. Each clerk was to have his turn in attending funerals, so that no one man might be taken for favour or left out for displeasure.

The records of these gorgeous funerals, which are preserved in Machyn's diary and other chronicles, reveal the changes wrought by the spread of Reformation principles and Puritan notions. In Mary's reign they were very magnificent, "priests and clerks chanting in Latin, the priest having a cope and the clerk the holy water sprinkle in his hand." The accession of Elizabeth seems at first to have wrought little change, and the services of the Clerks' Company were in great request. On 21 October, 1559, "the Countess of Rutland was brought from Halewell to Shoreditch Church with thirty priests and clarkes singing," and "Sir Thomas Pope was buried at Clerkenwell with two services of pryke song [53], and two masses of requiem and all clerkes of London." "Poules Choir and the Clarkes of London" united their services on some occasions. Funeral sermons began to be considered an important part of the function, and Machyn records the names of the preachers. Even though such keen Protestants as Coverdale, Bishop Pilkington, Robert Crowley, and Veron preached the sermons, twenty clerks of the company were usually present singing. Machyn much disliked the innovations made by the Puritan party, their singing "Geneva wise" or "the tune of Genevay," men, women, and children all singing together, without any clerk. Here is a description of such a funeral on 7 March, 1559: "And there was a great company of people two and two together, and neither priest nor clarke, the new preachers in their gowns like laymen, neither singing nor saying till they came to the grave, and afore she was put in the grave, a collect in English, and then put in the grave,

and after, took some earth and cast it on the corse, and red a thyng ... for the sam, and contenent cast the earth into the grave, and contenent read the Epistle of St. Paul to the Stesselonyans the ... chapter, and after they sang *Pater noster* in English, bothe preachers and other, and ... of a new fashion, and after, one of them went into the pulpit and made a sermon." Machyn especially disliked the preacher Veron, rector of St. Martin's, Ludgate, a French Protestant, who had been ordained by Bishop Ridley, and was "a leader in the change from the old ecclesiastical music for the services to the Psalms in metre, versified by Sternhold and Hopkins [54]."

[53] The notes of the harmony were pricked on the lines of music.

[54] *Some Account of Parish Clerks*, by J. Christie, p. 153.

The clerks indirectly caused the disgrace and suspension of Robert Crowley, vicar of St. Giles, Cripplegate, and prebendary of St. Paul's Cathedral, a keen Puritan and hater of clerkly ways. He loathed surplices as "rags of Popery," and could not bear to see the clerks marching in orderly procession singing and chanting. A funeral took place at his church on 1 April, 1566. A few days before, the Archbishop of Canterbury had issued his Advertisements ordering the use of the surplice. The friends of the deceased had engaged the services of the parish clerks, who, believing that the order with regard to the use of surplices applied to them as well as to the clergy, appeared at the door of the church attired according to their ancient usage. A scene occurred. The angry Crowley met them at the door and bade them take off those "porter's coats." The deputy of the ward

supported the vicar and threatened to lay them up by the feet if they dared to enter the church in such obnoxious robes. There was a mighty disturbance. "Those who took their part according to the queen's prosedyngs were fain to give over and tarry without the church door." The Lord Mayor's attention was called to this disgraceful scene. He complained to the archbishop. The deputy of the ward was bound over to keep the peace, and Crowley was ordered to stay in his house, and for not wearing a surplice was deprived of his living, to which he was again appointed twelve years later [55]. The clerks triumphed, but their services at funerals soon ceased. Puritan opinions spread; no longer did the clerks lead the singing and processions at funereal pageants, and a few boys from Christ's Hospital or school children took their places in degenerate days.

[55] *Some Account of Parish Clerks*, by J. Christie, p. 154.

The Parish Clerks' Company were not a whit behind other City companies in their love of processions and pageantry, and their annual feasts and elections were conducted with great ceremony and magnificence. The elections took place on Ascension Day, and the feast on the following Monday. The clerks in 1529 were ordered to come to the Guildhall College on the Sunday before Whit-Sunday to Evensong clad in surplices, and on the following day to attend Mass, when each man offered one halfpenny. When Mass was over they marched in procession wearing copes from the Guildhall to Clerks' Hall, where the feast was held. Fines were levied for absence or non-obedience to these observances. Machyn describes the accustomed usages in Mary's reign as follows: "The sixth of May was a goodly evensong at Yeldhall

College with singing and playing as you have heard. The morrow after was a great Mass at the same place by the same Fraternity, when every clerk offered a halfpenny. The Mass was sung by divers of the Queen's Chapel and children. And after Mass was done every clerk went their procession, two and two together, each having a surplice, a rich cope and a garland. After them fourscore standards, streamers and banners, and every one that bare had an albe, or else a surplice, and two and two together. Then came the waits playing, and then between, thirty Clarkes again singing *Salva festa dies*. So there were four quires. Then came a canopy, borne by four of the masters of the Clarkes over the Sacrament with a twelve staff torches burning, up St. Lawrence Lane and so to the further end of Cheap, then back again by Cornhill, and so down to Bishopsgate, into St. Albrose Church, and there they did put off their copes, and so to dinner every man, and then everyone that bare a streamer had money, as they were of bigness then." A very striking procession it must have been, and those who often traverse the familiar streets of the City to-day can picture to themselves the clerks' pageant of former times, which wended its way along the same accustomed thoroughfares.



The Organ At The Parish Clerks Hall

But times were changing, and religious ceremonies changed too. Less pomp and pageantry characterise the celebrations of the clerks. There is the Evensong as usual, and a Communion on the following day, followed by a dinner and "a goodly concert of children of Westminster, with viols and regals." A little later we read that the clerks marched clad in their liveries, gowns, and hoods of white damask. Copes are no longer recognised as proper vestments. Standards, banners, and streamers remain locked up in the City's treasure-house, and Puritan simplicity is duly observed. But the clerks lacked not feasting. Besides the election dinner, there were quarterly dinners, and dinners for the wardens and assistants. Time has wrought some changes in the mode of celebrating election day and other festive occasions. Sometimes "plain living and high thinking" were the watchwords that guided the principles of the company. Processions and gown-wearing have long been discontinued, but in its essential character the election day is still observed, though pomp and pageantry no longer form important features of its

ceremonial.

We have seen that the parish clerks of London were in great request on account of their musical abilities. In 1610 the masters and wardens were called upon to examine all those who wished to be admitted into the honourable company, as to whether they could read the Psalms of David according to the usual tunes used in the parish churches. The finest singers chanted Mass in pre-Reformation times in the Guildhall at the election of the Lord Mayor. In order to improve themselves in this part of their duties, the parish clerks soon after the Restoration of the monarchy, in 1660, provided themselves with an organ in order to perfect themselves in the art of chanting. The minute book of the company tells that it was acquired "the better to enable them to perform a service incumbent upon them before the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of the City on Michaelmas Day, and also the better to enable them who already are, or hereafter shall be, parish clerks of the City in performing their duties in the several parishes to which they stand related." Here the clerks used to meet on Tuesday afternoons for a regular weekly practice in music, and for many years an organist was appointed by the company to assist the brethren in their cultivation of psalmody. The selection of psalms specially suited for each Sunday in the year was made by the company and set forth in *The Parish Clerks' Guide*, in order that the special teaching of the Sunday, as set forth in the Collect, Epistle, and Gospel, might be duly followed in the Psalms.

Another important duty which the parish clerks of London, and also in some provincial towns, discharged was the publishing of the bills of mortality for the City. This duty is enjoined in their

charter of 1610. The corporation required from them returns of the deaths of freemen in their respective parishes, and also returns of the number of deaths and christenings. The records of the City of London contain a copy of the agreement, made in 1545-6 between the Lord Mayor and the Parish Clerks' Company, which provides that "They shall cause all clerks of the City to present to the common crier the name and surname of any freeman that shall die having any children under the age of 21 years." The Chamberlain was instructed to pay to the company 13 s. 4 d. yearly for their services. The custody of all orphans, with that of their lands and goods, had been entrusted to the City by the charter of Richard III, and this agreement was made in order to enable the "City Fathers" to faithfully discharge their duties in looking after children of deceased freemen. In spite of many difficulties, especially after the Great Fire which rendered thousands homeless and scattered the population, the clerks continued to perform this duty, though not always to the satisfaction of their employers, until the beginning of the eighteenth century, when the custom seems to have lapsed.



London 2 From the 27 of December to the 3 of January. 1665

Bur. Plag.

S' Allhan Woodstreets 1
Allhallows Barking
Allhallows Bread-ſtreet
Allhallows Great 1
Allhallows Honylane 1
Allhallows Lefs
Allhallows Lombardſtreet 1
Allhallows Stayning
Allhallows the Weſt
S' Alphage
S' Andrew Hubbard 1
S' Andrew Undershaft 1
S' Andrew Wardrobe 1
S' Ann Aldersgate 1
S' Ann Blackfryers 1
S' Antholins Parish
S' Auſtin Parish
S' Bartholmew Exchange
S' Bennet Fynck 1
S' Bennet Gracechurch
S' Bennet Paulwharf 1
S' Bennet Sherehog 1
S' Botolph Billingſgate 1
Chriſt Church
S' Chriſtophers
S' Clement Eaſtcheap
S' Dionis Backchurch 1
S' Dunſtan Eaſt
S' Edmond Lumbardſt.
S' Ethelburge
S' Faith
S' Fofter
S' Gabriel Fenchurch

S' George Botolphlane
S' Gregories by S' Paulс 1
S' Hellens
S' James Dukes place 1
S' John Garlickhithe 1
S' John Bayoll 1
S' John Evangelift
S' John Zachary 1
S' Kathrine Colemans
S' Kathrine Cracchurch
S' Lawrence Jewry
S' Lawrence Pountney
S' Leonard Eaſtcheap 1
S' Leonard Foſterlane 1
S' Magnus Parifh 1
S' Margaret Lothbury 1
S' Margaret Mofes 1
S' Margaret New-fhrſt
S' Margaret Pattens
S' Mary Abchurch 1
S' Mary Aldermanbury 1
S' Mary Alderſgate 1
S' Mary Le Bow
S' Mary Bothaw
S' Mary Colechurch
S' Mary Hill
S' Mary Magdalen 1
S' Mary Mounthaw 1
S' Mary Somerſet 1
S' Mary Woolchurch
S' Mary Woolnoth

S' Mervin Lodgelane
S' Michael Cornhill 1
S' Michael Crooked-lane
S' Michael Paternoſter
S' Michael Queenhithe 1
S' Michael Royall
S' Michael Wood-ſtreet 1
S' Michael Bramſhaw
S' Michael Pulletty
S' Nicholas Acons
S' Nicholas Colenby
S' Nicholas Olaves
S' Olave Hardſtreet 2
S' Olave Jewry 1
S' Olave Silverſtreet 1
S' Pancras Soperlane
S' Peter Cheap
S' Peter Cornhill
S' Peter Paulschurch
S' Peter Poore 1
S' Steven Colemanſtreet 1
S' Steven Walbrook
S' Swithin
S' Thomas Apoſtles
Trinity Parish 1

Buried in 97 Parifhes within the Walls 66 Plague 0

S' Andrew Holborne 17
S' Bartholmew Great
S' Bartholmew Leſs 5
S' Bridge
Bridewell Precinct 6
S' Botolph Aldergate 6

S' Botolph Aldgate 17
S' Botolph Billingſgate 10
S' Dunſtan Weſt 7
S' George Southwark 1
S' Gyles Cripplegate 33
S' Olave Southwark 15

Stepney Southwark 10
S. Sepulchres Parish 17
S' Thomas Southwark 1
Tuttle Mounſt
Artillt Pitfields

Buried in 16 Parifhes without the Walls and at the Pefthouſe 116 Plague 0

S' Giles in the Fields 16
Ashery Parish 5
S' James Clerkenwell 9
S' Kath. at the Tower 1

Lambeth Parish 4
S' Leonard Shore ditch 1
S' Magdalen Bermondſey 4
S' Mary Newington 17

S' Mary Hill 1
Rotherith Parish
Saynes Parish 11

Buried in the 13 out Parifhes in Middlefex and Surrey 103 Plague 0

S' Clements Dane 13
S' Paul Covent Garden 1

S' Martin in the fields 17
S' Mary Savoy 1

S' Margrit Weſtminſter 14
The reſt of the Pariſh

Buried in the 5 Parifhes in the Fort and Liberties of Weſtminſter 45 Plague 0

B 2

A Page Of An Early Bill Of Mortality Preserved At The Hall Of The Parish Clerks Company

The earliest bills of mortality now in existence date back to the time of Henry VIII, when the clerks were required to furnish information with regard to the deaths caused by plague, as well as those resulting from other causes. The returns of the victims of plague are occasionally very large. In 1562, 20,372 persons died, of which number 17,404 died from the plague. The burial grounds of the City became terribly overcrowded, and the parish clerks were ordered to report upon the space available in the City churchyards. They also were appointed to see to "the shutting up of infected houses and putting papers on the doors."

An early "Bill of Mortality" is preserved at the Hall. It tells of "the Number of those who dyed in the Citie of London and Liberties of the same from the 28th of December 1581 to the 17th of December 1582, with the Christenings. And also the number of all those who have died of the plague in every parish

particularly. Blessed are the Dead." There is also preserved a number of the weekly bills of mortality. Referring to the year of the Great Plague, 1665, these documents show that at the beginning of the pestilence in April, during one week only fifty-seven persons died; whereas in September the death-roll had reached the enormous number of 6544.

The company seems to have been a useful agency for carrying out all kinds of duties connected with gathering the statistics of mortality, nor do they seem to have been overpaid for their trouble. In the early years of the seventeenth century £ 3. 6 s. 8 d. was all that they received. In 1607 the sum was increased to £8, inasmuch as they were ordered to furnish a bill to the Queen and the Lord Chancellor as well as to the King. Some clerks endeavoured to make illicit gains by supplying the public with "false and untrue bills," or distributing some bills for each week before they had been sent to the Lord Mayor; and any brother who "by any cunning device gave away, dispersed, uttered, or declared, or by sinister device cast forth at any window, hole, or crevice of a wall any bills or notes" before the due returns had been sent to the Lord Mayor, was ordered to pay a fine of 10 s. and other divers penalties.

The methods of making out these returns are very curious, and did not conduce to infallible accuracy. In each parish there were persons called searchers, ancient women who were informed by the sexton of a death, and whose duty it was to visit the deceased and state the cause of death. They had no medical knowledge, and therefore their diagnosis could only have been very conjectural. This they reported to the parish clerk. The clerk made out his bill for the week, took it to the Hall of the company, and

deposited it in a box on the staircase. All the returns were then tabulated, arranged, and printed, and when copies had been sent to the authorities, others were placed in the hands of the clerks for sale.

The system was all very excellent and satisfactory, but its carrying out was defective. Negligent clerks did not send their returns in spite of admonition, caution, fine, or brotherly persuasion. The searchers' information was usually unreliable. Complications arose on account of the Act of the Commonwealth Parliament requiring the registration of births instead of baptisms, of civil marriages, and banns published in the market place; also on account of the vast mortality caused by the Great Plague, the burials in the large common pits and public burial grounds, and the opposition of the Quakers to inspection and registration. All these causes contributed to the issuing of unreliable returns. The company did their best to grapple with all these difficulties. They did not escape censure, and were blamed on account of the faults of individual clerks. The contest went on for years, and was only finally settled in 1859, when the last bills of mortality were issued, and the Public Registration Act rendered the work of the clerks, which they had carried on for three centuries to the best of their skill and ability, unnecessary. In the Guildhall Library are preserved a large number of the volumes of these bills which the industry of the clerks of London had issued with so much perseverance and energy under difficult circumstances, and they form a valuable and interesting collection of documents illustrative of the old life of the City.

One happy result of the duty laid upon the clerks of issuing bills of mortality in the City of London was

that they were allowed to set up a printing press in the Hall of their company. The licence for this press was obtained in 1625, and in the following year it was duly established with the consent of the authorities. It was no easy task in the early Stuart times to obtain leave to have a printing press, and severe were the restrictions laid down, and the penalties for any violation of any of them. The Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London had mighty powers over the Press, and the clerks could not choose their printer save with the approval of these ecclesiastical dignitaries.

Very strict regulations were laid down by the company in order to prevent any improper use being made of the productions of their press. The door of the chamber containing their printing machine was provided with three locks; the key of the upper lock was placed in the charge of the upper master, that of the middle lock was in the custody of the upper warden, while the key of the lower lock was kept by the under warden. They appointed one Richard Hodgkinson as their printer in 1630, with whom they had much disputing. Six years later one of their own company, Thomas Cotes, parish clerk of Cripplegate Without, was chosen to succeed him. Richard Cotes followed in 1641, and then a female printer carried on the work, Mrs. Ellinor Cotes, probably the widow of Richard.

The Great Fire caused the destruction of the clerks' press; but a few years later a prominent member of the company, whose portrait we see in the Hall, Mr. John Clarke, procured for them another press with type, and Andrew Clarke was appointed printer. He was succeeded by Benjamin Motte, whose widow carried on the work after his death. An intruding

printer, appointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London without the consent of the company, one Humphreys, made his appearance, much to the displeasure of the clerks, who objected to be dictated to with regard to the choice of their own official. Litigation ensued, but in the end Humphreys was appointed. He was not a satisfactory printer, and was careless and neglectful. The clerks reprimanded him and he promised amendment, but his errors continued, and after a petition was presented to the Archbishop and the Bishop of London by the company, he was compelled to resign.



Interior Of The Hall Of The Parish Clerks Company

The increase of newspapers and the publication of the bills of mortality in their sheets taken from the records of the clerks materially affected the sale of the company's issue of the same, and efforts were made in Parliament to obtain a monopoly for the company. This action was costly, and no benefit was derived. After the removal of the unsatisfactory Humphreys the printing of the company passed into the hands of the Rivingtons, a name honoured

amongst printers and publishers for many generations. Mr. Charles Rivington was printer for the clerks in 1787, his brother being a bookseller in St. Paul's Churchyard, to whose son's widow, Mrs. Anne Rivington, the office passed in 1790. The printing of the bills of mortality was carried on by the company until 1850, having been conducted by the Rivington family for over sixty years [56].

> [56] I am indebted for this list of printers to Mr. James Christie's *Some Account of Parish Clerks*.

In addition to their statistical returns, the Company of Parish Clerks are responsible for some other and more important works which reflect great credit upon them. Foremost among them is a book entitled:

"*New Remarks of London*; or, a Survey of the Cities of London and Westminster, of Southwark and part of Middlesex and Surrey within the circumference of the Bills of Mortality." It contains "an account of the situation, antiquity, and rebuilding of each church, the value of the Rectory or Vicarage, in whose gifts they are, and the names of the present incumbents or lecturers. Of the several vestries, Hours of Prayer, Parish and Ward Officers, Charity and other schools, the number of Charity Children, how maintained, educated and placed out apprentices, or put to service. Of the Almshouses, Workhouses and Hospitals. The remarkable Places and Things in each Parish, with the limits or Bounds, Streets, Lanes, Courts, and numbers of Houses. An alphabetical table of all the Streets, Courts, Lanes, Alleys, Yards, Rows, Rents, Squares, etc. within the Bills of Mortality, shewing in which Liberty or Freedom they are, and an easy method of finding them. Of the

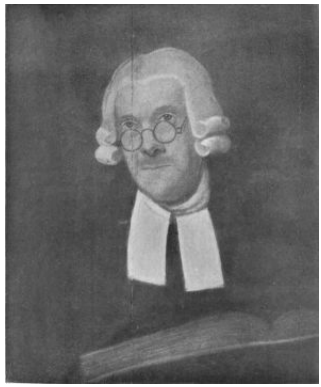
several Inns of Court, and Inns of Chancery, with their several Buildings, Courts, Lanes, etc.

"Collected by the Company of Parish-Clerks to which is added the Places to which Penny Post Letters are sent, with proper Directions therein. The Wharfs, Keys, Docks, etc. near the River Thames, of water-carriage to several Cities, Towns, etc. The Rates of Watermen, Porters of all kinds and Carmen. To what Inns Stage Coaches, Flying Coaches, Waggons and Carriers come, and the days they go out. The whole being very useful for Ladies, Gentlemen, Clergymen, Merchants, Tradesmen, Coachmen, Chair-men, Carmen, Porters, Bailiffs and others.

"London, Printed for E. Midwinter at *the*

Looking Glass and three Crowns in St Paul's

Churchyard MDCCXXXII."



Portrait Of John Clarke, Parish Clerk Of The Church Of St. Michael. Cornhill

This is a wonderfully interesting little book. Each clerk compiled the information for his own parish and appended his name. Most carefully is the information contained in the book arranged, and the volume is a most creditable production of the worshipful company.

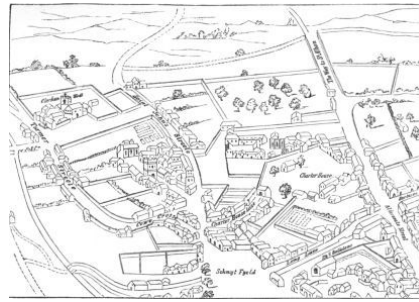
Amongst the books preserved in the Hall is another volume, entitled "*London Parishes*; containing an account of the Rise, Corruption, and Reformation of the Church of England." This was published by the parish clerks in 1824.

CHAPTER X

CLERKENWELL AND CLERKS' PLAYS

Parish clerks are immortalised by having given their name to an important part of London. Clerkenwell is the *fons clericorum* of the old chronicler, Fitz-Stephen. It is the Clerks' Well, the syllable *en* being the form of the old Saxon plural. Fitz-Stephen wrote in the time of King Stephen: "There are also round London on the northern side, in the suburbs, excellent springs, the water of which is sweet, clear, salubrious, 'mid glistening pebbles gliding playfully; amongst which Holywell, Clerkenwell, (*fons clericorum*), and St. Clement's Well are of most note, and most frequently visited, as well by the scholars from the schools as by the youth of the City when they go out to take air in the summer evenings."

It was then, and for centuries later, a rural spot, not far from the City, just beyond Smithfield, a place of green sward and gently sloping ground, watered by a pleasant stream, far different from the crowded streets of the modern Clerkenwell. It was a spot famous for athletic contests, for wrestling bouts and archery, and hither came the Lord Mayor, sheriffs, and aldermen at Bartholomew Fair time to witness the sports, and especially the wrestling.



Old Map Of Clerkenwell

But that which gave to the place its name and chief glory was the fact that once a year at least the parish clerks of London came here to perform their mystery plays and moralities. "Their profession," wrote Warton [57], "employment and character, naturally dictated to this spiritual brotherhood the representation of plays, especially those of the scriptural kind, and their constant practice in shows, processions, and vocal music easily accounts for their address in detaining the best company which England afforded in the fourteenth century at a religious farce for more than a week." These plays were no ordinary performances, no afternoon or evening entertainment, but a protracted drama lasting from three to eight days. In the reign of Richard II, A.D. 1391, the clerks were acting before the King, his Queen, and many nobles. The performances continued for three days, and the representations were the "Passion of Our Lord and the Creation of the World," which so well pleased the King that he commanded £10, a very considerable sum of money in those days, to be paid to the clerks of the parish churches and to divers other clerks of the City of London. Here is the record of his gift:

"*Issue Roll*, Easter, 14 Ric. II.

"11 July. To the clerks of the parish churches and to divers other clerks of the city of London. In money paid to them in discharge of £10 which the Lord the King commanded to be paid to them of his gift on account of the play of the 'Passion of Our Lord and the Creation of the World' by them performed at Skynnerwell after the feast of St. Bartholomew last past. By writ of Privy Seal amongst the mandates of this term--£10."

[57] *English Poetry*, vol. ii. p. 397.

Skinners' Well was close to the Clerks' Well, and it was so called, so Stow informs us, "for that the Skinners of London held there certain plays yearly of Holy Scripture,"

A few years later, in the succeeding reign, 10 Henry IV, A.D. 1409, the fraternity of clerks were again performing at the same place. Stow says: "In the year 1409 was a great play at Skynners' Welle, neere unto Clarkenwell, besides London, which lasted eight daies, and was of matter from the creation of the world; there were to see the same the most part of the nobles and gentles in England"--a mighty audience truly, which not even Sir Henry Irving could command in his farewell performances at Drury Lane.



A Mystery Play At Chester (From A Print After A Painting By T. Uwins)

These religious plays or mysteries were a powerful means for instructing the people; and if we had lived in mediæval times, we should not have needed to fly to Ober-Ammergau in order to witness a Passion Play. In the streets of Coventry or Chester, York, or Tewkesbury, Witney, or Reading, or on the Green at Clerkenwell, we could have seen the appealing spectacle; and though sometimes the actors lapsed into buffoonery, and the red demons carrying souls to hell's mouth created merriment rather than terror, and though realism was carried to such a pitch that Adam and Eve appeared in a state of nature, yet many of the spectators would carry away with them pious thoughts and some grasp of the facts of Scripture history, and of the mysteries of the faith. Originally the plays were performed in churches, but owing to the gradually increased size of the stage and the more elaborate stage effects, the sacred buildings were abandoned as the scenes of mediæval drama. Then the churchyard was utilised for the

purpose. The clergy no longer took part in the pageants, and in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the people liked to act their plays in the highways and public places as at Clerkenwell. The guilds and fraternities in many places provided the chief actors, and in towns where there were many guilds and companies, each company performed part of the great drama, the movable stage being drawn about from street to street. Thus at York the story of the Creation and the Redemption was divided into forty-eight parts, each part being acted by a guild, or group of companies. The Tanners represented God the Father creating the heavens, angels and archangels, and the fall of Lucifer and the disobedient angels. Then the Plasterers showed the Creation of the Earth, and the work of the first five days. The Card-makers exhibited the Creation of Adam of the clay of the earth, and the making of Eve of Adam's rib, thus inspiring them with the breath of life. The Fall, the story of Cain and Abel, of Noah and the Flood, of Moses, the Annunciation and all Gospel history, ending with the Coronation of the Virgin and the Final Judgment.

The stage upon which the clerks performed their plays, according to Strutt, consisted of three platforms, one above another. On the uppermost sat God the Father surrounded by His angels. He was represented in a white robe, and until it was discovered how injurious the process was, the actor who played the part used to have his face gilded. On the second platform were the glorified saints, and on the lowest men who had not yet passed from life. On one side of the lowest platform was hell's mouth, a dark pitchy cavern, whence issued the appearance of fire and flames, and sometimes hideous yellings and noises in imitation of the howlings and cries of

wretched souls tormented by relentless demons. From this yawning cave the devils constantly ascended to delight the spectators and afford comic relief to the more serious drama. The three stages were not always used. Archdeacon Rogers, who died in 1595, left an account of the Chester play which he himself saw, and he wrote that the stage was a high scaffold with two rooms, a higher and a lower, upon four wheels. In the lower the actors apparelled themselves, and in the higher they played. But this was a movable stage on wheels. The clerks' stage would, doubtless, be a fixed structure, and of a more elaborate construction.

The dresses used by the actors were very gorgeous and splendid, though little care was bestowed upon the appropriateness of the costumes. The words of the play of the Creation differ in the various versions which have come down to us. Strutt thinks that the clerks' play, acted before "the most part of the nobles and gentles in England," was very similar to the Coventry play, which cannot compare in grandeur and vigour with the York play discovered in the library of Lord Ashburnham, and edited by Miss Toulmin Smith [58]. But as the north-country dialect of the York version would have been difficult for the learned clerks of London to pronounce, their version would doubtless resemble more that of Coventry than that of York. The first act represents the Deity seated upon His throne and speaking as follows:

Ego sum Alpha et Omega, principium et finis.
My name is knowyn, God and Kynge;
My work to make now wyl I wende;
In myselfe resteth my reynenge,
It hath no gynnyng, ne no ende,

And all that evyr shall have beynge
  Is closed in my mende; [59]
When it is made at my lykynge
  I may it save, I may it shende [60]
After my plesawns." [61]

[58] Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1885. A portion of this is published in Mr. A.W. Pollard's *English Miracle Plays*.

[59] Mind.

[60] Destroy.

[61] Pleasure.

At the close of this oration, which consists of forty lines, the angels enter upon the upper stage, surround the throne of the Deity, and sing from the *Te Deum*:

Te Deum laudamus, te dominum confitemur.

The Father bestows much honour and brightness on Lucifer, who is full of pride. He demands of the good angels in whose honour they are singing their songs of praise. Are they worshipping God or reverencing him? They reply that they are worshipping God, the mighty and most strong, who made them and Lucifer. Then Lucifer daringly usurps the seat of the Almighty, and receives the homage of the rebellious angels. Then the Father orders them and their leader to fall from heaven to hell, and in His bliss never more to dwell. Then does Lucifer reply:

"At thy byddyng y wyl I werke,

And pass from joy to peyne and smerte.
Now I am a devyl full derke,
That was an angel bryght.
Now to Helle the way I take,
In endless peyn'y to be put;
For fere of fyr apart I quake
In Helle dongeon my dene is dyth."

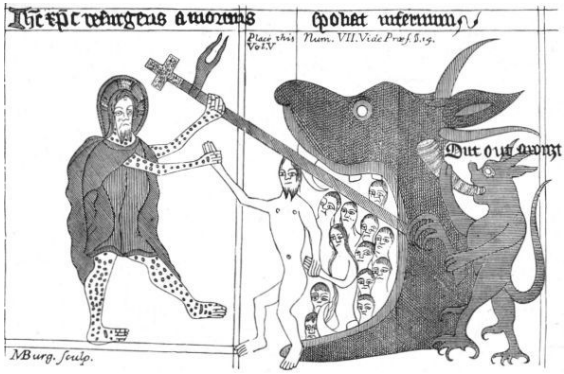
Then the Devil and his angels sink into the cavern of hell's mouth.

We cannot follow all the scenes in this strange drama. The final representation included the Descent into Hell, or the Harrowing of Hell, as it was called, when the soul of Christ goes down into the infernal regions and rescues Adam and Eve, Abraham, Moses, and the saints of old. The *Anima Christi* says:

"Come forth, Adam and Eve, with the,
And all my fryends that herein be;
In Paradyse come forth with me,
In blysse for to dwell.
The fende of hell that is your foe,
He shall be wrappyd and woundyn in woo;
Fro wo to welth now shall ye go,
With myrth ever mo to melle."

Adam replies:

"I thank the Lord of thy grete grace,
That now is forgiven my great trespase;
No shall we dwell in blyssful place."



The Descent into Hell.

The accompanying print of the Descent into Hell was engraved by Michael Burghers from an ancient drawing for our Berkshire antiquary, Thomas Herne.

Modern buildings have obliterated the scene of this ancient drama acted by the clerks of London, but some traces of the association of the fraternity with the neighbourhood can still be found. The two famous conventual houses, for which Clerkenwell was famous, the nunnery of St. Mary and the priory of St. John of Jerusalem, founded in 1100, have long since disappeared. Clerks' Close is mentioned in numerous documents, and formed part of the estate belonging to the Skinners' Company, where Skinner Street now runs. Clerks' Well was close to the modern church of St. James's, Clerkenwell, which occupies the site of the church and nunnery of St. Mary *de fonte clericorum*, which once possessed one of the six water-pots in which Jesus turned the water into wine. Vine Street formerly delighted in the name Mutton Lane, which is said to be a corruption of

meeting or moteing lane, referring to the clerks' mote or meeting place by the well. When Mr. Pink wrote his history of Clerkenwell forty years ago, there was at the east side of Ray Street a broken iron pump let into the front wall of a dilapidated house which showed the site of Clerks' Well. In 1673 the spring and plot of ground were given by the Earl of Northampton to the poor of the parish, but the vestry leased the spring to a brewer. Strype, writing in 1720, states that "the old well at Clerkenwell, whence the parish had its name, is still known among the inhabitants. It is on the right hand of a lane that leads from Clerkenwell to Hockley-in-the-Hole, in a bottom. One Mr. Crosse, a brewer, hath this well enclosed; but the water runs from him, by means of a watercourse above-mentioned, into the said place. It is enclosed with a high wall, which was formerly built to bound in Clerkenwell Close; the present well (the conduit head) being also enclosed by another lower wall from the street. The way to it is through a little house, which was the watch-house. You go down a good many steps to it. The well had formerly ironwork and brass cocks, which are now cut off; the water spins through the old wall. I was there and tasted the water, and found it excellently clear, sweet, and well tasted."

In 1800 a pump was erected on the east side of Ray Street to celebrate the parish clerks' ancient performances, which were immortalised in raised letters of iron with this inscription:

> A.D. 1800. William Bound, Joseph Bird, Churchwardens. For the better accommodation of the neighbourhood, this pump was removed to the spot where it now

> stands. The spring by which it is supplied is situated four feet eastward, and round it, as history informs us, the Parish Clerks of London in remote ages commonly performed sacred plays. That custom caused it to be denominated Clerks'-Well, and from which this parish derived its name. The water was greatly esteemed by the Prior and Brethren of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem and the Benedictine Nuns in the neighbourhood.

Hone, in his *Ancient Mysteries*, describes this pump, which in his day, A.D. 1832, stood between an earthenware shop and the abode of a bird-seller, and states that the monument denoting the histrionic fame of the place, and alluding to the miraculous powers of the water for healing incurable diseases, remains unobserved beneath its living attractions. "The present simplicity of the scene powerfully contrasts with the recollection of its former splendour. The choral chant of the Benedictine Nuns, accompanying the peal of the deep-toned organ through their cloisters, and the frankincense curling its perfume from priestly censers at the altar, are succeeded by the stunning sounds of numerous quickly plied hammers, and the smith's bellows flashing the fires of Mr. Bound's ironfoundry, erected upon the unrecognised site of the convent. The religious house stood about half-way down the declivity of the hill, which commencing near the church on Clerkenwell Green, terminates at the River Fleet. The prospect then was uninterrupted by houses, and the people upon the rising ground could

have had an uninterrupted view of the performances at the well."

In the parish there is a vineyard walk, which marks the site of the old vineyard attached to the priory of St. John. The cultivation of the vine was carried on in many monasteries. In 1859, in front of the old Vineyard Inn, a signboard was set up which stated that "This house is celebrated from old associations connected with the City of London. After the City clerks partook of the water of Clerks' Well, from which the parish derives its name, they repaired hither to partake of the fruit of the finest English grapes." This was an ingenious contrivance on the part of the landlord to solicit custom. It need hardly be stated that the information given on this signboard was incorrect. Before the Reformation there were few inns, and the old Vineyard Inn can scarcely claim such a remote ancestry.

When miracle plays ceased to be performed the clerks did not desert their old quarters. It is, indeed, stated that the ancient society of parish clerks became divided; some turned their attention to wrestling and mimicry at Bartholomew Fair, whilst others, for their better administration, formed themselves into the Society of the Mayor, Aldermen, and Recorder of Stroud Green, assembling in the Old Crown at Islington; but still "saving their right to exhibit at the Old London Spaw, formerly Clerks' Well, when they might happen to have learned sheriffs and other officers to get up their sacred pieces as usual." Even so late as 1774 the members of this ancient society were accustomed to meet annually in the summer time at Stroud Green, and to regale themselves in the open air, the number of

persons assembling on some occasions producing a scene similar to that of a country wake or fair. These assemblies had no connection with the Worshipful Company of Parish Clerks.

CHAPTER XI

THE CLERKS AND THE PARISH REGISTERS

A study of an old parish register reveals a remarkable variation in the style and character of the handwriting. We see in the old parchment pages numerous entries recorded in a careless scribble, and others evidently written by the hand of a learned and careful scholar. The rector or vicar ever since the days of Henry VIII, when in 1536 Vicar-General Thomas Cromwell ordered the keeping of registers, was usually supposed to have recorded the entries in the register. Cromwell derived the notion of ordering the keeping of the registers from his observation of the records kept by the Spanish priests in the Low Countries where he resided in his youth. Archbishop Ximenes of Toledo instituted a system of registration in Spain in 1497, and this was carried on by the Spanish priests in the Netherlands, and thus laid the foundation of that system which Thomas Cromwell introduced to this country and which has continued

ever since.

But not all these entries were made by the incumbents. There is good evidence that the parish clerks not infrequently kept the registers, especially in later times, and from the beginning they were responsible for the facts recorded. The entries do not seem to have been made when the baptism, marriage, or burial took place. Cromwell's edict required that the records of each week should be entered in the register on the following Sunday, in the presence of the churchwardens. It seems to have been the custom for the clerk or vicar to write down particulars of the baptism, marriage, or burial in a private memorandum book or on loose sheets of paper at the time of the ceremony. Afterwards these rough notes were copied into the register book. Sometimes this was done each week; but human nature is fallible; the clerk or his master forgot sometimes to make the required entries in the book. Days and weeks slipped by; note-books and scraps of paper were mislaid and lost; the spelling of the clerk was not always his strongest point; hence mistakes, omissions, inaccuracies were not infrequent. Sometimes the vicar did not make up his books until a whole year had elapsed. This was the case with the poor parson of Carshalton, who was terribly distressed because his clerk would not furnish him with the necessary notes, and mightily afraid lest he should incur the censure of his parishioners. Hence we find the following note in his register, dated 10 March, 1651:

> "Good reader, tread gently:
>
> "For though these vacant years may seem to make me guilty of thy

censure, neither will I excuse myself from all blemishe; yet if thou doe but cast thine eye upon the former pages and see with what care I have kept the Annalls of mine owne time, and rectifyed sundry errors of former times, thou wilt begin to think ther is some reason why he that began to build so well should not be able to make an ende.

"The truth is that besyde the miserys and distractions of these ptermitted years which it may be God in his owne wisdom would not suffer to be kept uppon record, the special ground of that permission ought to be imputed to Richard Finch, the p'rishe Clarke, whose office it was by long pscrition to gather the ephemeris or dyary by the dayly passages, and to exhibit them once a year to be transcribed into this registry; and though I have often called upon him agayne and agayne to remember his chadge, and he always told me that he had the accompts lying by him, yet at last p'ceaving his excuses, and revolving upon suspicion of his words to put him home to a full tryall I found to my great griefe that all his accompts were written in sand, and his words committed to the empty winds. God is witness to the truth of this apologie, and that I made it knowne

> at some parish meetings before his own face, who could not deny it, neither do I write it to blemishe him, but to cleere my own integritie as far as I may, and to give accompt of this miscarryage to after ages by the subscription of my hand [62]."
>
> [62] *Social Life as told by Parish Registers*, by T.F. Thiselton-Dyer, p. 57.

We may hope that all clerks were not so neglectful as poor Richard Finch, whose name is thus handed down as an "awful example" to all careless clerks. The same practice of the parish clerks recording the particulars of weddings, christenings, and burials seems to have prevailed at St. Stephen's, Coleman Street, London, in 1542, as the following order shows:

> "They shall every week certify to the curate and the churchwardens all the names and sir-names of them that be wedded, christened, and buried in the same parish that week *sub pena* of a 1 d. to be paid to the churche."

In this case the curate doubtless entered the items in the register as they were delivered to him.

At St. Margaret's, Lothbury, the clerk seems to have kept the register himself. Amongst the ordinances made by "the hole consent of the parrishiners" in 1571, appears the following:

> "Item the Clarcke shall kepe the

> register of cristeninge weddinge and burynge perfectlye, and shall present the same everie Sondaie to the churche wardens to be perused by them, and shall have for his paines in this behaufe yearelye 0. 03. 4."

It is evident that in some cases in the sixteenth century the clerk kept the register. But in far the larger number of parishes the records were inserted by the vicar or rector, and in many books the records are made in Latin. The "clerk's notes" from which the entries were made are still preserved in some parishes.

In times of laxity and confusion wrought by the Civil War and Puritan persecution, the clerk would doubtless be the only person capable of keeping the registers. In my own parish the earliest book begins in the year 1538, and is kept with great accuracy, the entries being written in a neat scholarly hand. As time goes on the writing is still very good, but it does not seem to be that of the rector, who signs his name at the foot of the page. If it be that of the clerk, he is a very clerkly clerk. The writing gradually gets worse, especially during the Commonwealth period; but it is no careless scribble. The clerk evidently took pains and fashioned his letters after the model of the old court-hand. An entry appears which tells of the appointment of a Parish Registrar, or "Register" as he was called. This is the announcement:

> "Whereas Robt. Williams of the p ish of Barkham in the County of Berks was elected and chosen by the Inhabitants of the same P ish to be their p ish Register, he therefore ye

> sd Ro: Wms was approved and sworne this sixteenth day of Novemb.. 1653
>
> Snd R. Bigg."

Judging from the similarity of the writing immediately above and below this entry, I imagine that Robert Williams must have been the old clerk who was so beloved by the inhabitants that in an era of change, when the rector was banished from his parish, they elected him "Parish Register," and thus preserved in some measure the traditions of the place. The children are now entered as "borne" and not baptised as formerly.

The writing gradually gets more illiterate and careless, until the Restoration takes place. A little space is left, and then the entries are recorded in a scholarly handwriting, evidently the work of the new rector. Subsequently the register appears to have been usually kept by the rector, though occasionally there are lapses and indifferent writing appears. Sometimes the clerk has evidently supplied the deficiencies of his master, recording a burial or a wedding which the rector had omitted. In later times, when pluralism was general, and this living was held in conjunction with three or four other parishes, the rector must have been very dependent upon the clerk for information concerning the functions to be recorded. Moreover, when a former rector who was a noted sportsman and one of the best riders and keenest hunters in the county, sometimes took a wedding on his way to the meet, he would doubtless be so eager for the chase that he had little leisure to record the exact details of the

names of the "happy pair," and must have trusted much to the clerk.

Some of the private registers kept by clerks are still preserved. There is one at Pattishall which contains entries of births, marriages, and burials, and was probably commenced in 1774, that date being on the front page together with the inscription: "John Clark's Register Book." The writing is of a good round-hand character, and far superior to the caligraphy of many present-day clerks. The book is bound in vellum [63]. The following entry, taken from the end of the volume, is worth recording:

> "London, March 31th
>
> "Yesterday the Rev'd Mr Hetherington ... transferred. 20,000 £. South-Sea Annuities into the Names of S'r Henry Banks Kn't. Thos Burfoot, Joseph Eyre, Thos Coventry, and Samuel Salt. Esqu'rs in Trust to pay always to 50 Blind people, Objects of, Charity, not being Beggars, nor receiving, Alms from the Parish, 10 £. each for their lives, it may be said with great propriety of this truly benevolent Gentleman that 'he hath displeased abroad, and given to the poor and is Righteousness remaineth for ever; his Horn shall exalted with Honour.'"

[63] By the information of the Rev. B.W. Blyn-Stoyle, who has most kindly assisted me in many ways in discovering quaint records of old

clerks.

Amongst the register books of Wednesbury there is a volume bound in parchment bearing this inscription:

> "This Book seems to be the private register of Alexander Bunn, Parish Clerk, because it corresponds with another bearing the same dates; the private accounts written in this book by the said A. Bunn seem to corroborate my opinion.
>
> "A.B. Haden
>
> "Vicar of Wednesbury
>
> "August 7th 1782."

These accounts appear to be of items incurred by the parish clerk in his official capacity, and which were due to him in repayment from the churchwardens. The accompanying remarks of this old Wednesbury parish clerk are often quaint and interesting.

The following extracts will show the nature of the book and of the systematic record the good clerk kept of his expenditure. The only item about which there is some uncertainty is the amount "spent at Freeman's Coming from Visitation." Is it possible that he was so much excited or intoxicated that he could not remember?

> "1737. Land tax to hon. Adenbrook 0. 0. 11 Acount
>
> What Mary Tunks as ad. Redy money 4/-, for a

hapern 2/-, for caps 1/6 and for shoes 2/6, and for
ye werk 6 d. Stokins and sues mendering 6 d, and
for string 2 d, and for a Gound 3/-, and for ale for
Hur father 2 d, for mending Gound 8 d, for stokens
10 d, for more Shuse strong 2/6, Shift mending
and maken 5 d, for Hur mother 1/6, for a Shift
2/7."

To this day old Wednesbury natives say "hapern" for apron, and "sues" for shoes.

"Sep. the 10th, 1745, then recd of Alex. Bunn the sum of
six pounds for one year's rent due at Midsmar.
Last past Ellin Moris. Wm. Selvester and his
man the first wick 14/-. Mr. Butler and Gilbut
Wrigh, church wardens for the year 1741, due to
Alex Bunn as under. Ringing for the Visitation
2/-, spent at Roshall, going to the visitation 1/6-,
spent at Henery Rutoll 1/-, paid at Litchfield to
the Horsbox (?) 6 d, Wm. Aston Had Ale at my
House 6 d, for Micklmas Supeles washing and

lining 1/8, for Ringing for the 11th of October
5/-, for Ringing for the 30th of October 5/-, for
half year's wages Due June ye 24 £ 1 12 s. 6.
Ringing for the 5th November, for washing the
Supelis and Lining and Bread at Chrsmus 1/3,
for Easter Supelis washing and Lining and Bread
1/8, for Joyle for the Clock and Bells 2/6, for
Leader for the 4th Bell Clapper 5 d, Ringing for
the 23rd of April 5/-, for making the Levy 2/-,
for a hors to Lichfield 11/6, pd John Stack
going to Dudley 2 times for the Clockman 1/-.
For a monthly (?) meeting to Ralph Momford
Sep. the 15th 2/-, Spent at freeman's Coming from
the Visitation-----" [64]

[64] *Olden Wednesbury*, by F.W. Hackwood, who kindly sent me this information.

But we have grievous things to record with regard to the clerks and the registers, not that they were to blame so much as the proper custodians, who neglected their duties and left these precious books in the hands of ignorant clerks to be preserved in

poor overcrowded cottages. But the parish clerks sinned grievously. One Phillips, clerk of Lambeth parish, ran away with the register book, so Francis Sadler tells us in his curious book, *The Exaction and Imposition of Parish Fees Discovered*, published in 1738, "whereby the parish became great sufferers; and in such a case no person that is fifty years old, and born in the parish, can have a transcript of the Register to prove themselves heir to an estate." Moreover, Master Sadler, who was very severe on parish clerks, tells of the iniquities of the Battersea clerk who used to register boys for girls and girls for boys, and not one-half of the register book, in his time, was correct and authentic, as it ought to be.

What shall be said of the carelessness of an incumbent who allowed the register to be kept by the clerk in his poor cottage? When a gentleman called to obtain an extract from the book, the clerk produced the valuable tome from a drawer in an old table, where it was reposing with a mass of rubbish. Another old parchment register was discovered in a cottage in a Northamptonshire parish, some of the pages of which were tacked together as a covering for the tester of a bedstead. The clerk in another parish followed the calling of a tailor, and found the old register book useful for the purpose of providing himself with measures. With this object he cut out sixteen leaves of the old book, which he regarded in the light of waste paper.

A gentleman on one occasion visited a church in order to examine the registers of an Essex parish. He found the record for which he was searching, and asked the clerk to make the extract for him. Unfortunately this official had no ink or paper at hand with which to copy out the entry, and casually

observed:

"Oh, you may as well have the leaf as it is," and without any hesitation took out his pocket-knife, cut out the leaf and gave the gentleman the two entire pages [65].

> [65] *History of Parish Registers*, by Burn; *Social Life as told by Parish Registers*, by T.F. Thiselton-Dyer, p. 2.

Another scandalous case was that of the clerk who combined his ecclesiastical duties with those of the village grocer. The pages of the parish register he found most useful for wrapping up his goods for his customers. He was, however, no worse than the curate's wife, who ought to have known better, and who used the leaves of the registers for making her husband's kettle-holders.

What shall be said for the guardians of the church documents of Blythburgh, Suffolk? The parish chest preserved in the church was at one time full of valuable documents in addition to very complete registers. So Suckling, the historian of Suffolk, reported. Alas! these have nearly all disappeared. Scarcely anything remains of the earliest volume of the register which concludes with the end of the seventeenth century, and the old deeds have gone also. How could this terrible loss have occurred? It appears that a parish clerk, "in showing this fine old church to visitors, presented those curious in old papers and autographs with a leaf from the register, or some other document, as a memento of their visit [66]."

[66] *Social Life as told by Parish Registers*; also *Standard*, 8 Jan., 1880.

Another clerk was extremely popular with the old ladies of the village, and used to cut out the parchment leaves of the registers and present them to his old lady friends for wrapping their knitting pins. He was also the village schoolmaster, as many of his predecessors had been, but this wretch used to cover the backs of his pupil's lesson-books with leaves of parchment taken from the parish chest. Another clerk found the leaves of the registers very useful for "singeing a goose."

The value of old registers for proving titles to estates and other property is of course inestimable. Sometimes incomes of thousands of pounds depend upon a little entry in one of these old books, and it is terrible to think of the jeopardy in which they stand when they rest in the custody of a careless clerk or apathetic vicar.

The present writer owes much to the faithful care of a good clerk, who guarded well the registers of a defunct City church of London. My father was endeavouring to prove his title to an estate in the north country, and had to obtain the certificates of the births, deaths, and marriages of the family during about a century. One wedding could not be proved. Report stated that it had been a runaway marriage, and that the bride and bridegroom had fled to London to be married in a City church. My father casually heard of the name of some church where it was thought that the wedding might have taken place. He wrote to the authorities of that church. It had, however, ceased to exist. The church had disappeared, but the old clerk was alive and knew

where the books were. He searched, and found the missing register, and the chain of evidence was complete and the title to the property fully established, which was confirmed after much troublesome litigation by the Court of Chancery.

Sometimes litigants have sought to remove troublesome entries in those invaluable books which record with equal impartiality the entrance into the world and the departure from it of peer or peasant. And in such dramas the clerk frequently appears. The old man has to be bribed or cajoled to allow the books to be tampered with. A stranger arrives one evening at Rochester, and demands of the clerk to be shown the registers. The stranger finds the entry upon which much depends. In its present form it does not support his case. It must be altered in order to meet his requirements. The clerk hovers about the vestry, alert, vigilant. He must be got rid of. The stranger proposes various inducements; the temptation of a comfortable seat in a cosy corner of the nearest inn, a stimulating glass, but all in vain. There is something suspicious about the stranger's looks and manners; so the clerk thinks. He sticks to his elbow like a leech, and nothing can shake him off. At length the stranger offers the poor clerk a goodly bribe if only he will help him to alter a few words in that all-important register. I am not sure whether the clerk yielded to the temptation.

There was a still more dramatic scene in the old vestry of Lainston Church, where a few years previously a Miss Chudleigh had been married to Lieutenant Hervey. This young lady, who was not remarkable for her virtue, arrived one day at the church accompanied by a fascinating friend who, while Mrs. Hervey examined the register, exercised

her blandishments on the clerk. She expressed much interest in the church, and asked him endless questions about its architecture, the state of his health, his family, his duties; and while this little by-play was proceeding Mrs. Hervey was carefully and noiselessly cutting out the page in the register which contained the entry of her marriage. Having removed the tell-tale page she hastily closed the book, summoned her fascinating friend, and hastened back to London. The clerk, still thinking of the beautiful lady who had been so friendly and given him such a handsome present, locked the safe, and never discovered the theft. But time brought its revenge. Lieutenant Hervey succeeded unexpectedly to the title of the earldom of Bristol. His wife was overcome with remorse. By her foolish scheme she had sacrificed a coronet. That missing paper must be restored; and so the lady pays another visit to Lainston Church, on this occasion in the company of a lawyer. The old clerk unlocks again the parish chest. The books are again produced; confession is made of the former theft; the lawyer looks threateningly at the clerk, and tells him that if it should ever be discovered he will suffer as an accomplice; and then, with the promise of a substantial bribe, the clerk consents to give his aid. The missing paper is produced and deftly inserted in its former place in the book, and Miss Chudleigh becomes the Countess of Bristol. It is a curious story, but it has the merit of being true. Many strange romances are bound up within the stained and battered parchment covers of an old register.

Sometimes the clerk seems to have recorded in the register book some entries which scarcely relate to ecclesiastical usages or spiritual concerns. Agreements or bargains were inserted occasionally,

and the fact that it was recorded in the church books testified to the binding nature of the transaction. Thus in the book of St. Mary Magdalene, Cambridge, in the year 1692, it is announced that Thomas Smith promises to supply John Wingate "with hatts for twenty shillings the yeare during life." Mr. Thiselton-Dyer, who records this transaction in his book on *Social Life as told by Parish Registers*, conjectures with evident truth that the aforenamed men made this bargain at an ale-house, and the parish clerk, being present, undertook to register the agreement.

A most remarkable clerk lived at Grafton Underwood in the eighteenth century, one Thomas Carley, who was born in that village in 1755, having no hands and one deformed leg. Notwithstanding that nature seemed to have deprived him of all means of manual labour, he rose to the position of parish schoolmaster and parish clerk. He contrived a pair of leather rings, into which he thrust the stumps of his arms, which ended at the elbow, and with the aid of these he held a pen, ruler, knife and fork, etc. The register books of the parish show admirable specimens of his wonderful writing, and I have in my possession a tracing made by Mr. Wise, of Weekley, from the label fixed inside the cover of one of the large folio Prayer Books which used to be in the Duke of Buccleuch's pew before the church was restored, and were then removed to Boughton House. These books contain many beautifully written papers, chiefly supplying lost ones from the Psalms. The writing is simply like copper-plate engraving. In the British Museum, amongst the "additional MSS." is an interleaved edition of Bridge's *History of Northamptonshire*, bound in five volumes. In the fourth volume, under the account of Grafton Underwood, some particulars have been inserted of the life of this extraordinary

man, with a water-colour portrait of him taken by one of his pupils, E. Bradley. There is also a specimen of his writing, the Lord's Prayer inscribed within a circle about the size of a shilling. There is also in existence "a mariner's compass," most accurately drawn by him. He died in 1823.

CHAPTER XII

THE CLERK AS A POET

The parish clerk, skilled in psalmody, has sometimes shown evidences of true poetic feeling. The divine afflatus has occasionally inspired in him some fine thoughts and graceful fancies. His race has produced many writers of terrible doggerel of the monumental class of poetry; but far removed from these there have been some who have composed fine hymns and sweet verse.

An obscure hymn-writer, whose verses have been sung in all parts of the world, was Thomas Bilby, parish clerk of St. Mary's Church, Islington, between the years 1842 and 1872. He was the parish schoolmaster also, and thus maintained the traditions of his office handed down from mediæval times. Before the days of School Boards it was not unusual

for the clerk to teach the children of the working classes the three R's and religious knowledge, charging a fee of twopence per week for each child. Mrs. Mary Strathern has kindly sent me the following account of the church wherein Thomas Bilby served as clerk, and of the famous hymn which he wrote.

The church of St. Mary's, Islington, was not internally a thing of beauty. It was square; it had no chancel; the walls were covered with monuments and tablets to the praise and glory of departed parishioners. On three sides it had a wide gallery, the west end of which contained the organ, with the Royal Arms as large as life in front. On either side below the galleries were double rows of high pews, and down the centre passage a row of open benches for the poor. Between these benches and the altar, completely hiding the altar from the congregation, stood a huge "three-decker." The pulpit, on a level with the galleries, was reached by a staircase at the back; below that was "the reading desk," from which the curate said the prayers; and below that again, a smaller desk, where, Sunday after Sunday, for thirty years, T. Bilby, parish clerk and schoolmaster, gave out the hymns, read the notices, and published the banns of marriage. He was short and stout; his hair was white; he wore a black gown with deep velvet collar, ornamented with many tassels and fringes; and he carried a staff of office.

It was a great missionary parish. The vicar, Daniel Wilson, was a son of that well-known Daniel Wilson, sometime vicar of Islington, and afterwards Bishop of Calcutta. The Church Missionary College, where many young missionaries sent out by the Church Missionary Society are trained, stood in our midst; and it was within St. Mary's Church the writer saw

the venerable Bishop Crowther, of the Niger, ordain his own son deacon. Mr. Bilby had at one time been a catechist and schoolmaster in Sierra Leone, and was full of interesting stories of the mission work amongst the freed slaves in that settlement. He had a magic lantern, with many views of Africa, and of the churches and schools in the mission fields, and often gave missionary lectures to the school children. It was on one of these occasions, when he had been telling us about his work abroad, and how he soon got to know when a black boy had a dirty face, that he said: "While I was in Africa, I composed a hymn, and taught the black children to sing it; and now there is not a Christian school in any part of the world where my hymn is not known and sung. I will begin it now, and you will all sing it with me." Then the old man began:

"Here we suffer grief and pain."

Immediately every child in the room took it up, and sang with might and main:

"Here we meet to part again;
In heaven we part no more."

We had always thought the familiar words were as old as the Bible itself, and could scarcely believe they had been written by our own old friend.

Soon after that memorable night, the old man began to get feeble; his place in the church and schools was frequently filled by "Young Bilby," as he was familiarly called; and in 1872, aged seventy-eight, the old parish clerk was gathered to his fathers, and his son reigned in his stead.

The other day a copy of a Presbyterian hymn-book

found its way into my house, and there I found "Here we suffer grief and pain." I turned up the index which gives the names of authors, wondering if the compilers knew anything of the source from whence it came, and found the name "Bilby"; but who "Bilby" was, and where he lived, is known to very few outside the parish, where the name is a household word, for Mr. Bilby's son is still the parish clerk of St. Mary, Islington, and through him we learn that his father composed the *tune* as well as the words of "Here we suffer grief and pain."

As the hymn is not included in *Hymns Ancient and Modern* or some other well-known collection, perhaps it will be well to print the first two verses. It is published in John Curwen's *The Child's Own Hymn Book*:

"Here we suffer grief and pain;
Here we meet to part again:
In heaven we part no more.

O! that will be joyful,
Joyful, joyful, joyful,
O! that will be joyful!
When we meet to part no more!

"All who love the Lord below,
When they die to heaven will go,
And sing with saints above.
O! that," etc.

A poet of a different school was Robert Story, schoolmaster and parish clerk of Gargrave, Yorkshire. He was born at Wark, Northumberland, in 1795, but migrated to Gargrave in 1820, where he remained twenty years. Then he obtained the

situation of a clerk in the Audit Office, Somerset House, at a salary of £90 a year, which he held till his death in 1860. His volume of poems, entitled *Songs and Lyrical Poems*, contains some charming verse. He wrote a pathetic poem on the death of the son of a gentleman at Malham, killed while bird-nesting on the rocks of Cam Scar. Another poem, *The Danish Camp*, tells of the visit of King Alfred to the stronghold of his foes, and has some pretty lines. "O, love has a favourite scene for roaming," is a tender little poem. The following example of his verse is of a humorous and festive type. It is taken from a volume of his productions, entitled *The Magic Fountain, and Other Poems*, published in 1829:

"Learn next that I am parish clerk:
A noble office, by St. Mark!
It brings me in six guineas clear,
Besides *et cæteras* every year.
I waive my Sunday duty, when
I give the solemn deep Amen;
Exalted then to breathe aloud
The heart-devotion of the crowd.
But oh, the fun! when Christmas chimes
Have ushered in the festal times,
And sent the clerk and sexton round
To pledge their friends in draughts profound,
And keep on foot the good old plan,
As only clerk and sexton can!
Nor less the sport, when Easter sees
The daisy spring to deck her leas;
Then, claim'd as dues by Mother Church,
I pluck the cackler from the perch;

Or, in its place, the shilling clasp
From grumbling dame's slow opening grasp.
But, Visitation Day! 'tis thine
Best to deserve my native line.
Great day! the purest, brightest gem
That decks the fair year's diadem.
Grand day! that sees me costless dine
And costless quaff the rosy wine,
Till seven churchwardens doubled seem,
And doubled every taper's gleam;
And I triumphant over time,
And over tune, and over rhyme,
Call'd by the gay convivial throng,
Lead, in full glee, the choral song!"

The writers of doggerel verses have been numerous. The following is a somewhat famous composition which has been kindly sent to me by various correspondents. My father used to tell us the rhymes when we were children, and they have evidently become notorious. The clerk who composed them lived in Somersetshire [67], and when the Lord Bishop of the Diocese came to visit his church, he thought that such an occasion ought not to be passed over without a fitting tribute to the distinguished prelate. He therefore composed a new and revised version of Tate and Brady's metrical rendering of Psalm lxvii., and announced his production after this manner:

"Let us zing to the Praze an' Glory of God part of the zixty-zeventh Zalm; zspeshul varshun zspesh'ly 'dapted vur t'cazshun.

"W'y 'op ye zo ye little 'ills?

And what var du 'ee zskip?
Is it a'cause ter prach too we
Is cum'd me Lord Biship?

"W'y zskip ye zo ye little 'ills?
An' whot var du 'ee 'op?
Is it a'cause to prach too we
Is cum'd me Lord Bishop?

"Then let us awl arize an' zing,
An' let us awl stric up,
An' zing a glawrious zong uv praze;
An' bless me Lord Bishup."

[67] Another correspondent states that the incident occurred at Bradford-on-Avon in 1806. Mr. Francis Bevan remembers hearing a similar version at Dover about sixty years ago. Can it be that these various clerks were plagiarists?

A somewhat similar effusion was composed by Eldad Holland, parish clerk of Christ Church, Kilbrogan parish, Bandon, County Cork, in Ireland. This church was built in 1610, and has the reputation of being the first edifice erected in Ireland for the use of the Church of Ireland after the Reformation. Bandon was originally colonised by English settlers in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, and for a long time was a noted stronghold of Protestantism. This fact may throw light upon the opinions and sentiments of Master Holland, an original character, whose tombstone records that "he departed this life ye 29th day of 7ber 1722." When the news of the victory of William III reached Bandon there were great rejoicings, and Eldad paraphrased a portion of the morning service

in honour of the occasion. After the first lesson he gave out the following notice:

"Let us sing to the praise and glory of William, a psalm of my own composing:

"William is come home, come home,
William home is come,
And now let us in his praise
Sing a *Te Deum*."

He then continued: "We praise thee, O William! we acknowledge thee to be our king!" adding with an impressive shake of the head, "And faith, a good right we have, for it was he who saved us from brass money, wooden shoes and Popery." He then resumed the old version, and reverently continued it to the end [68].

[68] This information was kindly sent to me by Mr. Robert Clarke, of Castle Eden, Durham, who states that he derived the information from *The History of Bandon*, by George Bennett (1869). My father used to repeat the following version:

"King William is come home,
Come home King William is come;
So let us then together sing
A hymn that's called *Te D'um*."

I am not sure which version is the better poetry! The latter corresponds with the version composed by Wesley's clerk at Epworth, old John; so Clarke in his memoirs of the Wesley family records.

In a parish in North Devon [69] there was a poetical clerk who had great reverence for Bishop Henry Phillpotts, and on giving out the hymn he proclaimed his regard in this form: "Let us sing to the glory of God, and of the Lord Bishop of Exeter." On one occasion his lordship held a confirmation in the church on 5 November, when it is said the clerk gave out the Psalm in the usual way, adding, "in a stave of my own composing":

"This is the day that was the night
  When the Papists did conspire
To blow up the King and Parliament House
  With Gundy-powdy-ire."

[69] My kind correspondent, the Rev. J.B. Hughes, abstains from mentioning the name of the parish.

My informant cannot vouch for the truth of this story, but he can for the fact that when Bishop Phillpotts on another occasion visited the church his lordship was surprised to hear the clerk give out at the end of the service, "Let us sing in honour of his lordship, 'God save the King.'" The bishop rose somewhat hastily, saying to his chaplain, "Come along, Barnes; we shall have 'Rule, Britannia!' next."

Cuthbert Bede tells the story of a poetical clerk who was much aggrieved because some disagreeable and naughty folk had maliciously damaged his garden fence. On the next Sunday he gave out "a stave of his own composing":

> "Oh, Lord, how doth the wicked man;
> They increases more and more;
> They break the posts, likewise the rails
> Around this poor clerk's door."

He almost deserved his fate for barbarously mutilating a metrical Psalm, and was evidently a proper victim of poetical justice.

A Devonshire clerk wrote the following noble effort:--

> "Mount Edgcumbe is a pleasant place
> Right o'er agenst the Ham-o-aze,
> Where ships do ride at anchor,
> To guard us agin our foes. Amen."

Besides writing "hymns of his own composing," the parish clerk often used to give vent to his poetical talents in the production of epitaphs. The occupation of writing epitaphs must have been a lucrative one, and the effusions recording the numerous virtues of the deceased are quaint and curious. Well might a modern English child ask her mother after hearing these records read to her, "Where were all the bad people buried?" Learned scholars and abbots applied their talents to the production of the Latin verses inscribed on old brass memorials of the dead, and clever ladies like Dame Elizabeth Hobby sometimes

wrote them and appended their names to their compositions. In later times this task seems to have been often undertaken by the parish clerk with not altogether satisfactory results, though incumbents and great poets, among whom may be enumerated Pope and Byron, sometimes wrote memorials of their friends. But the clerk was usually responsible for these inscriptions. Master John Hopkins, clerk at one of the churches at Salisbury at the end of the eighteenth century, issued an advertisement of his various accomplishments which ran thus:

> "John Hopkins, parish clerk and undertaker, sells epitaphs of all sorts and prices. Shaves neat, and plays the bassoon. Teeth drawn, and the Salisbury Journal read gratis every Sunday morning at eight. A school for psalmody every Thursday evening, when my son, born blind, will play the fiddle. Specimen epitaph on my wife:
>
> > My wife ten years, not much to my ease,
> > But now she is dead, in cælo quies.
>
> Great variety to be seen within. Your humble servant, John Hopkins."

Poor David Diggs, the hero of Hewett's story of *The Parish Clerk*, used to write epitaphs in strange and curious English. Just before his death he put a small piece of paper into the hands of the clergyman of the

parish, and whispered a request that its contents might be attended to. When the clergyman afterwards read the paper he found the following epitaph, which was duly inscribed on the clerk's grave:

> "Reader Don't stop nor shed no tears
> For I was parish clerk For 60 years;
> If I lived on I could not now as Then
> Say to the Parson's Prases A loud Amen."

A very worthy poetical clerk was John Bennet, shoemaker, of Woodstock. A long account of him appears in the *Lives of Illustrious Shoemakers*, written by W.E. Winks. He inherited the office of parish clerk from his father, and with it some degree of musical taste. In the preface to his poems he wrote: "Witness my early acquaintance with the pious strains of Sternhold and Hopkins, under that melodious psalmodist my honoured Father, and your approved Parish Clerk." This is addressed to the Rev. Thomas Warton, Professor of Poetry at Oxford, and sometime curate of Woodstock, to whose patronage and ready aid John Bennet was greatly indebted. Southey, who succeeded Warton in the Professorship, wrote that "This Woodstock shoemaker was chiefly indebted for the patronage which he received to Thomas Warton's good nature; for my predecessor was the best-hearted man that ever wore a great wig." Certainly the list of subscribers printed at the beginning of his early work is amazingly long. Noblemen, squires, parsons, great ladies, all rushed to secure the cobbler-clerk's poems, which were published in 1774. The poems consist mainly of simple rhymes or rustic themes, and are not without merit or humour. He is very modest and humble about his poetical powers, and tells that his

reason for publishing his verses was "to enable the author to rear an infant offspring and to drive away all anxious solicitude from the breast of a most amiable wife." His humour is shown in the conclusion of his Dedication, where he wrote:

"I had proceeded thus far when I was called to measure a gentleman of a certain college for a pair of fashionable boots, and the gentleman having insisted on a perusal of what I was writing, told me that a dedication should be as laconic as the boots he had employed me to make; and then, taking up my pen, added this scrap of Latin for a Heel-piece, as he called it, to my Dedication:

> "*Jam satis est; ne me Crispini scrinia lippi*
> *Compilasse putes, vertum non amplius*."

The cobbler poet concludes his verses with the humorous lines:

> "So may our cobler rise by friendly aid,
> Be happy and successful in his trade;
> His awl and pen with readiness be found,
> To make or keep our understandings sound."

Later in life John Bennet published another volume, entitled *Redemption*. It was dedicated to Dr. Mavor, rector of Woodstock. It is a noble poem, far exceeding in merit his first essay, and it is a remarkable and wonderful composition for a self-taught village shoemaker. The author-clerk died and was buried at Woodstock in 1803.

A fine character and graceful poet was Richard Furness [70], parish clerk of Dore, five miles from Shalfield, a secluded hamlet. He was then styled "The Poet of the Peak," of sonorous voice and clear of speech, the author of many poems, and factotum supreme of the village and neighbourhood. Two volumes of his poems have been published. He combined, like many of his order, the office of parish clerk with that of schoolmaster, his schoolroom being under the same roof as his house. Thither crowds flocked. He was an immense favourite. The teacher of children, healer of all the lame and sick folk, the consoler and adviser of the troubled, he played an important part in the village life. His accomplishments were numerous. He could make a will, survey or convey an estate, reduce a dislocation, perform the functions of a parish clerk, lead a choir, and write an ode. This remarkable man was born at Eyam in 1791, the village so famous for the story of its plague, in an old house long held by his family. Over the door is carved:

R. 1615. F

[70] *Biographical Sketches of Remarkable People*, by Spencer T. Hall.

When a boy he was very fond of reading, and studied mathematics and poetry. *Don Quixote* was his favourite romance. His father would not allow him to read at night, but the student could not be prevented from studying his beloved books. In order to prevent the light in his bedroom from being seen in other parts of the house, he placed a candle in a large box, knelt by its side, and with the lid half closed few rays of the glimmering taper could reach the window or

door. When he grew to be a man he migrated to Dore, and there set up a school, and began that active life of which an admirable account is given by Dr. G. Calvert Holland in the introduction of *The Poetical Works of Richard Furness*, published in 1858. In addition to other duties he sometimes discharged clerical functions. The vicar of the parish of Dore, Mr. Parker, was somewhat old and infirm, and sometimes found it difficult to tramp over the high moors in winter to privately baptize a sick child. So he often sent his clerk to perform the duty. On dark and stormy nights Richard Furness used to tramp over moor and fell, through snow and rain to some lonely farm or moorland cottage in order to baptize some suffering infant. On one occasion he omitted to ascertain before commencing the service whether the child was a boy or a girl. Turning to the father in the midst of a prayer, when the question whether he ought to use *his* or *her* had to be decided, he inquired, "What sex?" The father, an ignorant labourer, did not understand the meaning of the question. "Male or female?" asked the clerk. Still the father did not comprehend. At last the meaning of the query dawned upon his rustic intelligence, and he whispered, "It's a mon childt."

Thus does Richard Furness in his poems describe his many duties:

> "I Richard Furness, schoolmaster, Dore,
> Keep parish books and pay the poor;
> Draw plans for buildings and indite
> Letters for those who cannot write;
> Make wills and recommend a proctor;
> Cure wounds, let blood with any

doctor;
Draw teeth, sing psalms, the hautboy play
At chapel on each holy day;
Paint sign-boards, cast names at command,
Survey and plot estates of land:
Collect at Easter, one in ten,
And on the Sunday say Amen."

He wrote a poem entitled *Medicus Magus, or the Astrologer*, a droll story brimming over with quiet humour, folk-lore, philology and archaic lore. Also *The Ragbag*, which is dedicated to "John Bull, Esq." The style of his poetry was Johnsonian, or after the manner of Erasmus Darwin, a bard whom the present generation has forgotten, but whose *Botanic Garden*, published in 1825, is full of quaint plant-lore and classical allusions, if it does not reach the highest form of poetic talent. Here is a poem by our clerkly poet on the Old Year's funeral:

"The clock in oblivion's mouldering tower
By the raven's nest struck the midnight hour,
And the ghosts of the seasons wept over the bier
Of Old Time's last son--the departing year.

"Spring showered her daisies and dews on his bed,
Summer covered with roses his shelterless head,
And as Autumn embalmed his bodiless form,

Winter wove his snow shroud in his Jacquard of storm;
For his coffin-plate, charged with a common device,
Frost figured his arms on a tablet of ice,
While a ray from the sun in the interim came,
And daguerreotyped neatly his age, death, and name.
Then the shadowing months at call
Stood up to bear the pall,
And three hundred and sixty-five days in gloom
Formed a vista that reached from his birth to his tomb.
And oh, what a progeny followed in tears--
Hours, minutes, and moments--the children of years!
Death marshall'd th' array,
Slowly leading the way,
With his darts newly fashioned for New Year's Day."

Richard Furness died in 1857, and was buried with his ancestors at Eyam. He thus sang his own requiem shortly before he passed away:

"To joys and griefs, to hopes and fears,
To all pride would, and power could do,
To sorrow's cup, to pity's tears,
To mortal life, to death adieu."

I will conclude this chapter on poetical clerks with a

sweet carol for Advent, written by Mr. Daniel Robinson, ex-parish clerk of Flore, Weedon, which is worthy of preservation:

A CAROL FOR ADVENT

"Behold, thy King cometh unto thee."--MATTHEW xxi. 5.

Behold, thy King is coming
  Upon this earth to reign,
To take away oppression
  And break the captive's chain;
Then trim your lamps, ye virgins,
  Your oil of love prepare,
To meet the coming Bridegroom
  Triumphant in the air.

Behold, thy King is coming,
  Hark! 'tis the midnight cry,
The herald's voice proclaimeth
  The hour is drawing nigh;
Then go ye forth to meet Him,
  With lamps all burning bright,
Let sweet hosannahs greet Him,
  And welcome Him aright.

Go decorate your churches
  With evergreens and flowers,

And let the bells' sweet music
  Resound from all your towers;
And sing your sweetest anthems,
  For lo, your King is nigh,
While songs of praise are soaring
  O'er vale and mountain high.

Let sounds of heavenly music
  From sweet-voiced organs peal,
While old and young assembling
  Before God's "Altar" kneel;
In humble adoration
  Let each one praise and pray,
And give the King a welcome
  This coming Christmas Day.

CHAPTER XIII

THE CLERK GIVING OUT NOTICES

After the Nicene Creed in the Book of Common Prayer occurs a rubric with regard to the giving out of notices, the observance of Holy-days or Feasting-days, the publication of Briefs, Citations and Excommunications, which ends with the following words:

"And nothing shall be proclaimed or published in the Church, during the time of Divine Service, but by the Minister; nor by him any thing but what is prescribed in the Rules of this Book, or enjoined by the King or by the Ordinary of the place."

This rubric was added to the Prayer Book in the revision of 1662, and doubtless was intended to correct the undesirable practice of publishing all kinds of secular notices during the time of divine service. Dr. Wickham Legg has unearthed an inquiry made in an archidiaconal visitation in 1630, relating to the proclamation of lay businesses made in church, when the following question was asked:

"Whether hath your Parish Clerk, or any other in Prayers time, or before Prayers or Sermon ended, before the people departed, made proclamation in your church touching any goods strayed away or wanting, or of any Leet court to be held, or of common-dayes-works to be made, or touching any other thing which is not merely ecclesiasticall, or a Church-businesse?"

In times of Puritan laxity it was natural that notices sacred and profane should be indiscriminately mingled, and the rubric mentioned above would be sorely needed when church order and a reverent service were revived. But in spite of this direction the practice survived of not very strictly confining the notices to the concerns of the Church.

An aged lady, Mrs. Gill, who is now eighty-four years of age, remembers that between the years 1825 and 1835, in a parish church near Welbeck Abbey, the clerk used to announce the date of the Duke of Rutland's rent-day. Another correspondent states that after service the clerk used to take his stand on one

of the high flat tombstones and announce sales by auction, the straying of cattle, etc., and Sir Walter Scott wrote that at Hexham cattle-dealers used to carry their business letters to the church, "when after service the clerk was accustomed to read them aloud and answer them according to circumstances."

Mr. Beresford Hope recollected that in a Surrey town church the notices given out by the clerk included the announcement of the meetings at the principal inn of the town of the executors of a deceased duke.

In the days of that extraordinary free-and-easy go-as-you-please style of service which prevailed at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century, the most extraordinary announcements were frequently made by the clerk, and very numerous stories are told of the laxity of the times and the quaintness of the remarks of the clerk.

An old Shropshire clerk gave out on Easter Day the following extraordinary notice:

"Last Friday was Good Friday, but we've forgotten un; so next Friday will be."

Another clerk gave out a strange notice on Quinquagesima Sunday with regard to the due observance of Ash Wednesday. He said: "There will be no service on Wednesday--'coss why? Mester be going hunting, and so beeze I!" with triumphant emphasis. He is not the only sporting clerk of whom history speaks, and in the biographies of some worthies of the profession we hope to mention the achievements of a clerkly tailor who denied himself every luxury of life in order to save enough money to buy and keep a horse in order that he might follow

the hounds "like a gentleman."

Sporting parsons have furnished quite a crop of stories with regard to strange notices given out by their clerks. Some of them are well known and have often been repeated; but perhaps it is well that they should not be omitted here.

About the year 1850 a clerk gave out in his rector's hearing this notice: "There'll be no service next Sunday, as the rector's going out grouse-shooting."

A Devonshire hunting parson went to help a neighbouring clergyman in the old days when all kinds of music made up the village choir. Unfortunately some difficulty arose in the tuning of the instruments. The fiddles and bass-viol would not accord, and the parson grew impatient. At last, leaning over the reading-desk and throwing up his arms, he shouted out, "Hark away, Jack! Hark away, Jack! Tally-ho! Tally-ho! [71]"

> [71] *Mumpits and Crumpits*, by Sarah Hewitt, p. 175.

Another clerk caused amusement and consternation in a south-country parish and roused the rector's wrath. The young rector, who was of a sporting turn of mind, told him that he wanted to get to Worthing on a Sunday afternoon in time for the races which began on the following day, and that therefore there would be no service. This was explained to the clerk in confidence. The rector's horror may be imagined when he heard him give out in loud sonorous tones: "This is to give notice, no suvviss here this arternoon, becos measter meyans to get to Worthing to-night to be in good toime for reayces to-morrow mornin'."

Old Moody, of Redbourn, Herts, was a typical parish clerk, and his vicar, Lord Frederick Beauclerk, and the curate, the Rev. W.S. Wade, were both hunting parsons of the old school. One Sunday morning Moody announced, just before giving out the hymn, that "the vicar was going on Friday to the throwing off of the Leicestershire hounds, and could not return home until Monday next week; therefore next Sunday there would not be any service in the church on that day." Moody was quite one of the leading characters of the place, whose words and opinions were law.

No one in those days thought of disputing the right or questioning the conduct of a rector closing the church, and abandoning the accustomed services on a Sunday, in order to keep a sporting engagement.

That other notice about the fishing parson is well known. The clerk announced: "This is to gi notus, there won't be no surviss here this arternoon becos parson's going fishing in the next parish." When he was remonstrated with after service for giving out such a strange notice, he replied:

"Parson told I so 'fore church."

"Surely he said officiating--not fishing?" said his monitor. "The bishop would not be pleased to hear of one of his clergy going fishing on a Sunday afternoon."

The clerk was not convinced, and made a clever defence, grounded on the employment of some of the Apostles. The reader's imagination will supply the gist of the argument.

Another rector, who had lost his favourite setter, told

his clerk to make inquiries about it, but was much astonished to hear him give it out as a notice in church, coupled with the offer of a reward of three pounds if the dog should be restored to his owner.

The clerk of the sporting parson was often quite as keen as his master in following the chase. It was not unusual for rectors to take "occasional services," weddings or funerals, on the way to a meet, wearing "pink" under their surplices. A wedding was proceeding in a Devonshire church, and when the happy pair were united and the Psalm was just about to be said, the clerk called out, "Please to make 'aste, sir, or he'll be gone afore you have done." The parson nodded and looked inquiringly at the clerk, who said, "He's turned into the vuzz bushes down in ten acres. Do look sharp, sir [72]."

> [72] This story is told by Mrs. Hewett in her *Peasant Speech of Devon*, but I have ventured to anglicise the broad Devonshire a little, and to suggest that the scene could scarcely have taken place on a Sunday morning, as Mrs. Hewett suggests in her admirable book.

The story is told of a rector who, when walking to church across the squire's park during a severe winter, found a partridge apparently frozen to death. He placed the poor bird in the voluminous pocket of his coat. During the service the warmth of the rector's pocket revived the bird and thawed it back to life; and when during the sermon the rector pulled out his handkerchief, the revived bird flew vigorously away towards the west end of the church. The clerk, who sat in his seat below, was not

unaccustomed to the task of beating for the squire's shooting parties, called out lustily:

"It be all right, sir; I've marked him down in the belfry."

The fame of the Rev. John Russell, the sporting parson of Swymbridge, is widespread, and his parish clerk, William Chapple, is also entitled to a small niche beneath the statue of the great man. The curate had left, and Mr. Russell inserted the following advertisement:

"Wanted, a curate for Swymbridge; must be a gentleman of moderate and orthodox views."

The word *orthodox* rather puzzled the inhabitants of Swymbridge, who asked Chapple what it meant. The clerk did not know, but was unwilling to confess such ignorance, and knowing his master's predilections, replied, "I 'spects it be a chap as can ride well to hounds."

The strangest notice ever given out in church that I ever have heard of, related to a set of false teeth. The story has been told by many. Perhaps Cuthbert Bede's version is the best. An old rector of a small country parish had been compelled to send to a dentist his set of false teeth, in order that some repairs might be made. The dentist had faithfully promised to send them back "by Saturday," but the Saturday's post did not bring the box containing the rector's teeth. There was no Sunday post, and the village was nine miles from the post town. The dentist, it afterwards appeared, had posted the teeth on the Saturday afternoon with the full conviction that their owner would receive them on Sunday morning in time for service. The old rector bravely

tried to do that duty which England expects every man to do, more especially if he is a parson and if it be Sunday morning; but after he had mumbled through the prayers with equal difficulty and incoherency, he decided that it would be advisable to abandon any further attempts to address his congregation on that day. While the hymn was being sung he summoned his clerk to the vestry, and then said to him, "It is quite useless for me to attempt to go on. The fact is, that my dentist has not sent me back my artificial teeth; and as it is impossible for me to make myself understood, you must tell the congregation that the service is ended for this morning, and that there will be no service this afternoon." The old clerk went back to his desk; the singing of the hymn was brought to an end; and the rector, from his retreat in the vestry, heard the clerk address the congregation as follows:

"This is to give notice! as there won't be no sarmon, nor no more service this mornin', so you'd better all go whum (home); and there won't be no sarvice this afternoon, as the rector ain't got his artful teeth back from the dentist!"

This story so amused George Cruikshank that he wanted to make an illustration of it. But the journal in which it ought to have appeared was very short-lived. Hence Cruikshank's drawing was lost to the world.

The clerk is a firm upholder of established custom. "We will now sing the evening hymn," said the rector of an East Anglian church in the sixties. "No, sir, it's doxology to-night." The preacher again said, "We'll sing the evening hymn." The clerk, however, persisted, "It's doxology to-night"; and doxology it

was, in spite of the parson's protests.

In the days when parish notices with reference to the lost, stolen, or strayed animals were read out in church at the commencement of the service, the clerk of a church [my informant has forgotten the name of the parish] rose in his place and said:

"This is to give notice that my Lady ---- has lost her little dog; he comes to the name of Shock; he is all white except two patches of black on his sides and he has got--eh?--what?--yes--no--upon my soul he has got four eyes!" It should have been sore eyes, but the long *s* had misled the clerk.

The clerk does not always shine as an orator, but a correspondent who writes from the Charterhouse can vouch for the following effort of one who lived in a village not a hundred miles from Harrow about thirty years ago.

There was a tea for the school children, at which the clerk, a farm labourer, spoke thus: "You know, my friends, that if we wants to get a good crop of anything we dungs the ground. Now what I say is, if we wants our youngsters to crop properly, we must see that they are properly dunged--- put the larning into them like dung, and they'll do all right."

The subject of the Disestablishment of the Church was scarcely contemplated by a clerk in the diocese of Peterborough, who, after the amalgamation of two parishes, stated that he was desired by the vicar to announce that the services in each parish would be morning and evening to *all eternity*. It is thought that he meant to say *alternately*.

I have often referred to the ancient clerkly method of

giving out the hymns. It was a terrible blow to the clerk when the parsons began to interfere with his prerogative and give out the hymns themselves. All clerks did not revenge themselves on the usurpers of their ancient right as did one of their number, who was very indignant when a strange clergyman insisted on giving out the hymns himself. In due course he gave out "the fifty-third hymn," when out popped the old clerk's head from under the red curtains which hung round the gallery, and which gave him the appearance of wearing a nightcap, and he shouted, "That a baint! A be the varty-zeventh."

The following account of a notice, which was scarcely authorised, shows the homely manners of former days. It was at Sapiston Church, a small village on the Duke of Grafton's estate. The grandfather of the present Duke was returning from a shooting expedition, and was passing the church on Sunday afternoon while service was going on. The Duke quietly entered the vestry, and signed to the clerk to come to him. The Duke gave the man a hare, and told him to put it into the parson's trap, and give a complimentary message about it at the end of the service. But the clerk, knowing his master would be pleased at the little attention, could not refrain from delivering both hare and message at once before the whole congregation. At the close of the hymn before the sermon he marched into a prominent position holding up the gift, and shouted out, "His Grace's compliments, and, please sir, he's sent ye a hare."

In giving out the hymns or Psalms many difficulties of pronunciation would often arise. One clerk had many struggles over the line, "Awed by Thy gracious word." He could not manage that tiresome first word, and always called it "a wed." The old metrical

version of the Psalm, "Like as the hart desireth the water-brooks," etc. is still with us, and a beautiful hymn it is:

"As pants the hart for cooling streams
When heated in the chase."

A Northumbrian clerk used to give out the words thus:

"As pants the 'art for coolin' streams
When 'eated in the chaise,"

which seems to foreshadow the triumph of modern civilisation, the carted deer, a mode of stag-hunting that was scarcely contemplated by Tate and Brady.

CHAPTER XIV

SLEEPY CHURCH AND SLEEPY CLERKS

There was a time when the Church of England seemed to be asleep. Perhaps it may have been that "tired nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep," was only preparing her exhausted energies for the unwonted activities of the last half-century; or was it the sleep that presaged death? Her enemies told her so in plain and unvarnished language. Her friends, too, said that

she was folding her robes to die with what dignity she could. Lethargy, sloth, sleep--a dead, dull, dreary sleep--fell like a leaden pall upon her spiritual life, darkening the light that shone but vaguely through the storied panes of her mediæval windows, while a paralysing numbness crippled her limbs and quenched her activity.

Such scenes as Archbishop Benson describes as his early recollection of Upton, near Droitwich, were not uncommon. The church was aisleless, and the middle passage, with high pews on each side, led up to the chancel-arch, in which was a "three-decker," fifteen feet high. The clerk wore a wig and immense horn spectacles. He was a shoemaker, dressed in black, with a white tie. In the gallery sat "the music"--a clarionet, flute, violin, and 'cello. The clerk gave out the "Twentieth Psalm of David," and the fiddlers tuned for a moment and then played at once. Then they struck up, and the clerk, absolutely alone, in a majestic voice which swayed up and down without regard to time or tune, sang it through like the braying of an ass; not a soul else joined in; the farmers amused and smiling at each other. Such scenes were quite usual.

In Cornwall affairs were worse. In one church the curate-in-charge had to be chained to the altar rails while he read the service, as he had a harmless mania, which made him suddenly flee from the church if his own activities were for an instant suspended, as, for example, by a response. The churchwarden, a farmer, kept the padlock-key in his pocket till the service was safely over, and then released the imprisoned cleric. At another Cornish church the vicar's sister used to read the lessons in a deep bass voice.

Congregations were often very sparse. Few people attended, and perhaps none on weekdays, unless the clerk was in his place. On such occasions the parson was tempted to emulate the humour of Dean Swift, who at the first weekday service that he held after his appointment to the living of Laracor, in the diocese of Meath, after waiting for some time in vain for a congregation, began the service, addressing his clerk, "Dearly beloved Roger, the scripture moveth you and me in sundry places," etc.

When the Psalms were read, you heard the first verse read in a mellifluous and cultured voice. Perhaps it was the evening of the twenty-eighth day of the month, and you listened to the sacred words of Psalm cxxxvii., "By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept, when we remembered thee, O Sion." Then followed a bellow from a raucous throat: "Has fur ur 'arp, we 'anged 'em hup hupon the trees that hare thurin." And then at the end of the Lord's Prayer, after every one had finished, the same voice came drowsily cantering in: "For hever and hever, Haymen." Sometimes we heard, "Let us sing to the praise and glory of God the 'undred and sixtieth Psalm--*'Ymn 'ooever."* The numbers of the hymns or Psalms were scored on the two sides of a slate. Sometimes the functionary in the gallery forgot to turn the slate after the first hymn. "Let us sing," began the clerk--(pause)--"Turn the slate, will you, if you please, Master Scroomes?" he continued, addressing the neglectful person.

The singing was no mechanical affair of official routine--it was a drama. "As the moment of psalmody approached a slate appeared in front of the gallery, advertising in bold characters the Psalm about to be sung. The clerk gave out the Psalm, and then

migrated to the gallery, where in company with a bassoon and two key-bugles, a carpenter understood to have an amazing power of singing 'counter,' and two lesser musical stars, formed the choir. Hymns were not known. The New Version was regarded with melancholy tolerance. 'Sternhold and Hopkins' formed the main source of musical tastes. On great occasions the choir sang an anthem, in which the key-bugles always ran away at a great pace, while the bassoon every now and then boomed a flying shot after them." It was all very curious, very quaint, very primitive. The Church was asleep, and cared not to disturb the relics of old crumbling inefficiency. The Church was asleep, the congregation slept, and the clerk often slept too.

Hogarth's engraving of *The Sleeping Congregation* is a parable of the state of the Church of England in his day. It is a striking picture truly. The parson is delivering a long and drowsy discourse on the text: "Come unto Me, all ye that labour, and I will give you rest." The congregation is certainly resting, and the pulpit bears the appropriate verse: "I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain." The clerk is attired in his cassock and bands, contrives to keep one eye awake during the sermon, and this wakeful eye rests upon a comely fat matron, who is fast asleep, and has evidently been meditating "on matrimony," as her open book declares. A sleepy church, sleepy congregation, sleepy times!

Many stories are told of dull and sleepy clerks.

A canon of a northern cathedral tells me of one such clerk, whose duty it was, when the rector finished his sermon, to say "Amen." On a summer afternoon, this aged official was overtaken with drowsiness, and as

soon as the clergyman had given out his text, slept the sleep of the just. Sermons in former years were remarkable for their length and many divisions.

After the "firstly" was concluded, the preacher paused. The clerk, suddenly awaking, thought that the discourse was concluded, and pronounced his usual "Arummen." The congregation rose, and the service came to a close. As the gathering dispersed, the squire slipped half a crown into the clerk's hand, and whispered: "Thomas, you managed that very well, and deserve a little present. I will give you the same next time."



The Sleeping Congregation By Hogarth

At Eccleshall, near Sheffield, the clerk, named Thompson, had been, in the days of his youth, a good cricketer, and always acted as umpire for the village team. One hot Sunday morning, the sermon being very long, old Thompson fell asleep. His dream

was of his favourite game; for when the parson finished his discourse and waited for the clerk's "Amen," old Thompson awoke, and, to the amazement of the congregation, shouted out "Over!" After all, he was no worse than the cricketing curate who, after reading the first lesson, announced: "Here endeth the first innings."

Every one has heard of that Irish clerk who used to snore so loudly during the sermon that he drowned the parson's voice. The old vicar, being of a good-natured as well as a somewhat humorous turn of mind, devised a plan for arousing his lethargic clerk. He provided himself with a box of hard peas, and when the well-known snore echoed through the church, he quietly dropped one of the peas on the head of the offender, who was at once aroused to the sense of his duties, and uttered a loud "Amen."

This plan acted admirably for a time, but unfortunately the parson was one day carried away by his eloquence, gesticulated wildly, and dropped the whole box of peas on the head of the unfortunate clerk. The result was such a strenuous chorus of "Amens," that the laughter of the congregation could not be restrained, and the peas were abolished and consigned to the limbo of impractical inventions. Possibly the story may be an invention too.

One of the causes which tended to the unpopularity of the Church was the accession of George IV to the throne of England. "Church and King" were so closely connected in the mind of the people that the sins of the monarch were visited on the former, and deemed to have brought some discredit on it. Moreover, the King by his first act placed the loyal members of the Church in some difficulty, and that was the order to

expunge the name of the ill-used, if erring, Queen Caroline from the Prayers for the Royal Family in the Book of Common Prayer.

One good clergyman, Dr. Parr, vicar of Hatton, placed an interesting record in his Prayer Book after the required erasure: "It is my duty as a subject and as an ecclesiastic to read what is prescribed by my Sovereign as head of the Church, but it is not my duty to express my approbation." The sympathy of the people was with the injured Queen, and they knew not how much the clergy agreed with them. During the trial popular excitement ran high. In a Berkshire village the parish clerk "improved the occasion" by giving out in church "the first, fourth, eleventh, and twelfth verses of the thirty-fifth Psalm" in Tate and Brady's New Version:

> "False witnesses with forged complaints
> Against my truth combined,
> And to my charge such things they laid
> As I had ne'er designed."

These words he sang most lustily.

Cowper mentions a similar application of psalmody to political affairs in his *Task*:

> "So in the chapel of old Ely House
> When wandering Charles who meant to be the third,
> Had fled from William, and the news was fresh,
> The simple clerk, but loyal, did announce,

> And eke did rear right merrily, two staves
> Sung to the praise and glory of King George."

It was not an unusual thing for a parish clerk to select a psalm suited to the occasion when any special excitement gave him an opportunity. Branston, the satirist, in his *Art of Politicks* published in 1729, alluded to this misapplication of psalmody occasionally made by parish clerks in the lines:

> "Not long since parish clerks with saucy airs
> Apply'd King David's psalms to State affairs."

In order to avoid this unfortunate habit, a country rector in Devonshire compiled in 1725 "Twenty-six Psalms of Thanksgiving, Praise, Love, and Glory, for the use of a parish church, with the omission of all the imprecatory psalms, lest a parish clerk or any other should be whetting his spleen, or obliging his spite, when he should be entertaining his devotion."

Sometimes the clerks ventured to apply the verses of the Psalms to their own private needs and requirements, so as to convey gentle hints and suggestions to the ears of those who could supply their needs. Canon Ridgeway tells of the old clerk of the Church of King Charles the Martyr at Tunbridge Wells. His name was Jenner. He was a well-known character; he used to have a pipe and pitch the tune, and also select the hymns. It was commonly said that the congregation always knew when the lodgings in his house on Mount Sion were unlet; for when this was the case he was wont to give out the Psalm:

"Mount Sion is a pleasant place to dwell."

At Great Yarmouth, until about the year 1850, the parish clerk was always invited to the banquets or "feasts" given by the corporation of the borough; and he was honoured annually with a card of invitation to the "mayor's feast" on Michaelmas Day. On one occasion the mayor-elect had omitted to send a card to the clerk, Mr. David Absolon, who was clerk from 1811 to 1831, and had been a member of the corporation and common councillor previous to his appointment to his ecclesiastical office. On the following Sunday, Master David Absolon reminded his worship of his remissness by giving out the following verse, directing his voice at the same time to the mayor-elect:

Let David his accustomed place
In thy remembrance find."

The words in Tate and Brady's metrical version of Psalm cxxxii. run thus:

"Let David, Lord, a constant place
In Thy remembrance find [73]."

[73] *History of St. Nicholas' Church, Great Yarmouth*, by the present Clerk, Mr. Edward J. Lupson, p. 24.

In the same town great excitement used to attend the election of the mayor on 29 August in each year. Before the election the corporation attended service in the parish church, and the clerk on these occasions gave out for singing "the first two staves of the fifteenth Psalm:

"Lord, who's the happy man," etc.

The passing of the Municipal Act changed the manner and time of the election, but it did not take away the interest felt in the event. As long as Tate and Brady's version of the Psalms was used in the church, that is until the year 1840, these "two staves" were annually sung on the Sunday preceding the election [74].

[74] *Ibid.*, p. 23.

In these days of reverent worship it seems hardly possible that the beautiful expressions in the psalms of praise to Almighty God should ever have been prostituted to the baser purposes of private gain or municipal elections.

Sleepy times and sleepy clerks--and yet these were not always sleepy; in fact, far too lively, riotous, and unruly. At least, so the poor rector of Hayes found them in the middle of the eighteenth century. Such conduct in church is scarcely credible as that which was witnessed in this not very remote parish church in not very remote times. The registers of the parish of Hayes tell the story in plain language. On 18 March, 1749, "the clerk gave out the 100th Psalm, and the singers immediately opposed him, and sung the 15th, and bred a disturbance. *The clerk then ceased.*" Poor man, what else could he have done, with a company of brawling, bawling singers shouting at him from the gallery! On another occasion affairs were worse, the ringers and others disturbing the service, from the beginning of the service to the end of the sermon, by ringing the bells and going into the gallery to spit below. On another occasion a fellow came into church with a pot of

beer and a pipe, and remained smoking in his pew until the end of the sermon [75]. *O tempora! O mores!* as some disconsolate clergymen wrote in their registers when the depravity of the times was worse than usual. The slumbering congregation of Hogarth's picture would have been a comfort to the distracted parson.

> [75] *Antiquary*, vol. xviii, p. 65. Quoted in *Social Life as told by Parish Registers*, p. 54.

To prevent people from sleeping during the long sermons a special officer was appointed, in order to banish slumber when the parson was long in preaching. This official was called a sluggard-waker, and was usually our old friend the parish clerk with a new title. Several persons, perhaps reflecting in their last moments on all the good advice which they had missed through slumbering during sermon time, have bequeathed money for the support of an officer who should perambulate the church, and call to attention any one who, through sleep, was missing the preacher's timely admonition. Richard Dovey, of Farmcote, in 1659 left property at Claverley, Shropshire, with the condition that eight shillings should be paid to, and a room provided for, a poor man, who should undertake to awaken sleepers, and to whip out dogs from the church of Claverley during divine service [76].

> [76] *Old English Customs and Curious Bequests*, S.H. Edwards (1842), p. 220.

John Rudge, of Trysull, Staffordshire, left a like bequest to a poor man to go about the parish church

of Trysull during sermon to keep people awake, and to keep dogs out of church [77]. Ten shillings a year is paid by a tenant of Sir John Bridges, at Chislett, Kent, as a charge on lands called Dog-whipper's Marsh, to a person for keeping order in the church during service [78], and from time immemorial an acre of land at Peterchurch, Herefordshire, was appropriated to the use of a person for keeping dogs out of church, such person being appointed by the minister and churchwardens.

[77] *Ibid.*, p. 221.

[78] *Ibid.*, p. 222.

Mr. W. Andrews, Librarian of the Hull Institute, has collected in his *Curiosities of the Church* much information concerning sluggard-wakers and dog-whippers. The clerk in one church used a long staff, at one end of which was a fox's brush for gently arousing a somnolent female, while at the other end was a knob for a more forcible awakening of a male sleeper. The Dunchurch sluggard-waker used a stout wand with a fork at the end of it. During the sermon he stepped stealthily up and down the nave and aisles and into the gallery marking down his prey. And no one resented his forcible awakenings.

The sluggard-waker and dog-whipper appear in many old churchwardens' account-books. Thus in the accounts of Barton-on-Humber there is an entry for the year 1740: "Paid Brocklebank for waking sleepers 2 s. 0." At Castleton the officer in 1722 received 10 s. 0 [79]. The clerk in his capacity of dog-whipper had often arduous duties to perform in the old dale churches of Yorkshire when farmers and shepherds frequently brought their dogs to church. The animals

usually lay very quietly beneath their masters' seat, but occasionally there would be a scrimmage and fight, and the clerk's staff was called into play to beat the dogs and produce order.

> [79] The reader will find numerous entries relating to this subject in the work of Mr. W. Andrews to which I have referred.

Why dogs should have been ruthlessly and relentlessly whipped out of churches I can scarcely tell. The Highland shepherd's dog usually lies contentedly under his master's seat during a long service, and even an archbishop's collie, named Watch, used to be very still and well-behaved during the daily service, only once being roused to attention and a stately progress to the lectern by the sound of his master's voice reading the verse "I say unto all, Watch." But our ancestors made war against dogs entering churches. In mediæval and Elizabethan times such does not seem to have been the case, as one of the duties of the clerks in those days was to make the church clean from the "shomeryng of dogs." The nave of the church was often used for secular purposes, and dogs followed their masters. Mastiffs were sometimes let loose in the church to guard the treasures, and I believe that I am right in stating that chancel rails owe their origin to the presence of dogs in churches, and were erected to prevent them from entering the sanctuary. Old Scarlett bears a dog-whip as a badge of his office, and the numerous bequests to dog-whippers show the importance of the office.

Nor were dogs the only creatures who were accustomed to receive chastisement in church. The clerk was usually armed with a cane or rod, and woe

betide the luckless child who talked or misbehaved himself during service. Frequently during the course of a long sermon the sound of a cane (the Tottenham clerk had a split cane which made no little noise when used vigorously) striking a boy's back was heard and startled a sleepy congregation. It was all quite usual. No one objected, or thought anything about it, and the sermon proceeded as if nothing had happened. Paul Wootton, clerk at Bromham, Wilts, seventy years ago performed various duties during the service, taking his part in the gallery among the performers as bass, flute serpent, an instrument unknown now, etc., pronouncing his Amen *ore rotundo* and during the sermon armed with a long stick sitting among the children to preserve order. If any one of the small creatures felt that *opere in longo fas est obrepere somnum*, the long stick fell with unerring whack upon the urchin's head. When Mr. Stracey Clitherow went to his first curacy at Skeyton, Norfolk, in 1845, he found the clerk sweeping the whole chancel clear of snow which had fallen through the roof. The font was of wood painted orange and red. The singers sat within the altar rails with a desk for their books inside the rails. There was a famous old clerk, named Bird, who died only a year or two ago, aged ninety, and, as Mr. Clitherow informed Bishop Stanley, was the best man in the parish, and was well worthy of that character.

Even in London churches unfortunate events happened, and somnolent clerks were not confined to the country. A correspondent remembers that in 1860, when St. Martin's-in-the-Fields was closed for the purpose of redecorating, his family migrated to St. Matthew's Chapel, Spring Gardens (recently demolished), where one hot Sunday evening one of the curates of St. Martin's was preaching, and in the

course of his sermon said that it was the duty of the laity to pray that God would "endue His ministers with righteousness." The clerk was at the moment sound asleep, but suddenly aroused by the familiar words, which acted like a bugle call to a slumbering soldier, he at once slid down on the hassock at his feet and uttered the response "And make Thy chosen people joyful." My informant remarks that the "chosen people" who were present became "joyful" to an unseemly degree, in spite of strenuous efforts to restrain their feelings.

Sometimes the clerk was not the only sleeper. A tenor soloist of Wednesbury Old Church eighty years ago used to tell the story of the vicar of Wednesbury, who one very sultry afternoon retired into the vestry, which was under the western tower, to don his black gown while a hymn was being sung by the expectant congregation. The hymn having been sung through, and the preacher not having returned to ascend the pulpit, the clerk gave out the last verse again. Still no parson. Then he started the hymn, directing it to be sung all through again; but still the vicar returned not. At last in desperation he gave out that they "would now sing," etc. etc., the 119th Psalm. Mercifully before they had all sunk back into their seats exhausted the long-lost parson made his hurried reappearance. The poor old gentleman had dropped into an arm-chair in the vestry, and overcome by the heat had fallen soundly asleep. As to the clerk, he could not leave his seat to go in search of him; there was no precedent for both vicar and clerk to be away from the three-decker before the service was brought to a close.

The old clerk is usually intensely loyal to the Church and to his clergyman, but there have been some

exceptions. An example of a disloyal clerk comes from the neighbourhood of Barnstaple.

A parish clerk, apparently religious and venerable, held his position in a village church in that district for thirty years. He carried out his duties with regularity and thoroughness equalled only by the parish priest. This old clerk would frequently make remarks--not altogether pleasing--about Nonconformists, whom he summed up as a lot of "mithudy nüzenses" (methodist nuisances).

A new rector came and brought with him new ideas. The parish clerk would not be required for the future. As soon as the old clerk heard this he attached himself to a local dissenting body and joined with them to worship in their small chapel. This, after thirty years' service in the Church and a bitter feeling against Nonconformists, is rather remarkable.

In the forties there was a sleepy clerk at Hampstead, a very portly man, who did ample justice to his bright red waistcoat and brass buttons. The church had a model old-time three-decker. The lower deck was occupied by the clerk, the upper deck by the reader, and the quarter-deck by the preacher. The clerk, during the sermon, would often fall asleep and make known his state by a snore. Then the reader would tap his bald head with a hymn-book, whereupon he would wake up and startle the congregation by a loud and prolonged "Ah-men."

We are accustomed now to have our churches beautifully decorated with flowers and fruits and holly and evergreens at the great festivals and harvest thanksgiving services. Sometimes on the

latter occasions our decorations are perhaps a little too elaborate, and remind one of a horticultural show. No such charge could be brought against the old-fashioned method of church decoration. Christmas was the only season when it was attempted, and sprigs of holly stuck at the corners of the old square pews in little holes made for the purpose were always deemed sufficient. This was always the duty of the clerk. Later on, when a country church was found to be elaborately decorated for Christmas and the clerk was questioned on the subject, he replied, shaking his head, "Ah! we're getting a little High Church now." At Langport, Somerset, the pews were similarly adorned on Palm Sunday with sprigs of the catkins from willow trees to represent palms.

I have already mentioned some instances of clerks who were sometimes elated by the dignity of the office and full of conceit. Wesley enjoyed the experience of having a conceited clerk at Epworth, who not only was proud of his singing and other accomplishments, but also of his personal appearance. He delighted to wear Wesley's old clerical clothes and especially his wig, which was much too big for the insignificant clerk's head. John Wesley must have had a sense of humour, though perhaps it might have been exhibited in a more appropriate place. However, he was determined to humble his conceited clerk, and said to him one Sunday morning, "John, I shall preach on a particular subject this morning, and shall choose my own psalm, of which I will give out the first line, and you will proceed and repeat the next as usual." When the time for psalmody arrived Wesley gave out, "Like to an owl in ivy bush," and the clerk immediately responded, "That rueful thing am I." The members of

the congregation looked up and saw his small head half-buried in his large wig, and could not restrain their smiles. The clerk was mortified and the rector gratified that he should have been taught a lesson and learned to be less vain.

Old-fashioned ways die hard. Only seven years ago the incumbent of a small Somerset parish found when in the pulpit that he had left his spectacles at home. Casting a shrewd glance around, he perceived just below him, well within reach, one of his parishioners who was wearing a large pair of what in rustic circles are termed "barnacles" tied behind his head. Stretching down, the parson plucked them from the astonished owner's brow, and, fitting them on his clerical nose, proceeded to deliver his discourse. Thenceforward the clerk, doubtless fearing for his own glasses, never failed to carry to church a second pair wherewith to supply, if need be, his coadjutor's shortcomings.

Another and final story of sleepy manners comes to us from the north country. A short-sighted clergyman of what is known as the "old school" was preaching one winter afternoon to a slumberous congregation. Dusk was falling, the church was badly lighted, and his manuscript difficult to decipher. He managed to stumble along until he reached a passage which he rendered as follows: "Enthusiasm, my brethren, enthusiasm in a good cause is an excellent--excellent quality, but unless it is tempered with judgment, it is apt to lead us--apt to lead us--Here, Thomas," handing the sermon to the clerk, "go to the window and see what it is apt to lead us into."

CHAPTER XV

THE CLERK IN ART

The finest portrait ever painted of a parish clerk is that of Orpin, clerk of Bradford-on-Avon, Wilts, whose interesting old house still stands near the grand parish church and the beautiful little Saxon ecclesiastical structure. This picture is the work of Thomas Gainsborough, R.A., and is now happily preserved in the National Gallery. Orpin has a fine and noble face upon which the sunlight is shining through a window as he turns from the Divine Book to see the glories of the blue sky.

"Some word of life e'en now has met
  His calm benignant eye;
Some ancient promise breathing yet
  Of immortality.
Some heart's deep language which the glow
  Of faith unwavering gives;
And every feature says 'I know
  That my Redeemer lives.'"

The size of this canvas is four feet by three feet two inches. Orpin is wearing a blue coat, black vest, white neck-cloth, and dark breeches. His hair is grey and curly, and falls upon his shoulders. He sits on a gilt-nailed chair at a round wooden table, on which

is a reading-easel, supporting a large volume bound in dark green, and labelled "Bible, Vol. I." The background is warm brown.

Of this picture a critic states: "The very noble character of the worthy old clerk's head was probably an additional inducement to Gainsborough to paint the picture, Seldom does so fine a subject present itself to the portrait painter, and Gainsborough evidently sought to do justice to his venerable model by unusual and striking effect of lighting, and by more than ordinary care in execution. It might almost seem like impertinence to eulogise such painting, as this canvas contains painting which, unlike the works of Reynolds, seems fresh and pure as the day it left the easel; and it would be still more futile to attempt to define the master's method."

The history of the portrait is interesting. It was painted at Shockerwick, near Bradford, where Wiltshire, the Bath carrier, lived, who loved art so much that he conveyed to London Gainsborough's pictures from the year 1761 to 1774 entirely free of charge. The artist rewarded him by presenting him with some of his paintings, *The Return from Harvest, The Gipsies' Repast*, and probably this portrait of Orpin was one of his gifts. It was sold at Christie's in 1868 by a descendant of the art-loving carrier, and purchased for the nation by Mr. Boxall for the low sum of £325.

The mediæval clerk appears in many ancient manuscripts and illuminations, which show us, better than words can describe, the actual duties which he was called upon to perform. The British Museum possesses a number of pontificals and other

illustrated manuscripts containing artistic representations of clerks. We see him accompanying the priest who is taking the last sacrament to the sick. He is carrying a taper and a bell, which he is evidently ringing as he goes, its tones asking for the prayers of the faithful for the sick man's soul. This picture occurs in a fourteenth-century MS. [6 E. VI, f. 427], and in the same MS. we see another illustration of the priest administering the last sacrament attended by the clerk [6 E. VII, f. 70].



The Clerk Attending The Priest At Holy Baptism



The Clerk Attending The Priest At Holy Baptism

Another illustration shows the priest baptizing an

infant which the male sponsor holds over the font, while the priest pours water over its head from a shallow vessel. The faithful parish clerk stands by the priest. This appears in the fifteenth-century MS. Egerton, 2019, f. 135.

In the MS. of Froissart's Chronicle there is an illustration of the coronation procession of Charles V of France. The clerk goes before the cross-bearer and the bishop bearing his holy-water vessel and his sprinkler for the purpose of aspersing the spectators. We have already given two illustrations taken from a fourteenth-century MS. in the British Museum, which depict the clerk, as the *aquæbajalus*, entering the lord's house and going first into the kitchen to sprinkle the cook with holy water, and then into the hall to perform a like duty to the lord and lady as they sit at dinner.

There is a fine picture in a French pontifical of the fifteenth century, which is in the British Museum (Tiberius, B. VIII, f. 43), of the anointing and coronation of a king of France. An ecclesiastical procession is represented meeting the king and his courtiers at the door of the cathedral of Rheims, and amongst the dignitaries we see the clerk bearing the holy-water vessel, the cross-bearer, and the thurifer swinging his censer. The clerk wears a surplice over a red tunic.

One other of these mediæval representations of the clerk's duties may be mentioned. It is a fifteenth-century French MS. in the British Museum (Egerton, 2019, f. 142), and represents the last scenes of this mortal life. The absolution of the penitent, the administration of the last sacrament, the woman mourning for her husband and arranging the grave-

clothes, the singing of the dirige, the burial, and the reception of the soul of the departed by our Lord in glory. The clerk appears in several of these scenes. He is kneeling behind the priest in the administration of the last sacrament. Robed in surplice and cope he is chanting the Psalms for the departed, and at the burial he is holding the holy-water vessel for the asperging of the corpse.

There are several paintings by English artists which represent the old-fashioned clerk in all his glory in his throne in the lowest seat of the "three-decker." Perhaps the most striking is the satirical sketch of the pompous eighteenth-century clerk as shown in Hogarth's engraving of *The Sleeping Congregation*, to which I have already referred. As a contrast to Hogarth's *Sleeping Congregation* we may place Webster's famous painting of a village choir, which is thoroughly life-like and inspiring. The old clerk with enrapt countenance is singing lustily. The musicians are performing on the 'cello, clarionet, and hautboy, and the singers are chanting very earnestly and very vigorously the strains of some familiar melody. The picture is a very exact presentment of an old village choir of the better sort.



The Duties Of A Clerk At A Death And Funeral



The Vicar Of Wakefield By W.P. Frith

It was perhaps such a choir as this that an aged friend remembers in a remote Cornish village. It was a mixed choir, led by a 'cello, flute, and clarionet. Tate and Brady's version of the Psalms was used

alternately with a favourite anthem arranged by some of the members. "We'll wash our hands," the basses led off in stentorian tones. Then the tenors followed. Then the trebles in shrill voices--"washed hands." Finally, after a pause, the whole choir shouted triumphantly, "in innocenc*ee*"; and the congregation bore it, my friend naïvely remarks. The orchestra on one occasion struck work. Only the clerk, who played his 'cello, remained faithful. To prove his loyalty he appeared as usual, gave out a hymn of many verses, and sang it through in his clear bass voice, to the accompaniment of his instrument.

It was not an unusual thing for the clerk to be the only chorister in a village church, and then sometimes strange things happened. There was a favourite tune which required the first half of one of the lines to be repeated thrice. This led to such curious utterances as "My own sal," called out lustily three times, and then finished with "My own salvation's rock to praise." The thrice-repeated "My poor poll" was no less striking, but it was only a prelude to "My poor polluted heart." A chorus of women and girls in the west gallery sang lustily, "Oh for a man," *bis, bis*--a pause--"A mansion in the skies." Another clerk sang "And in the pie" three times, supplementing it with "And in the pious He delights." Another bade his hearers "Stir up this stew," but he was only referring to "This stupid heart of mine." Yet another sang lustily "Take Thy pill," but when the line was completed it was heard to be "Take Thy pilgrim home."

Returning to the artistic presentment of clerks, there is a fine sketch of one in Frith's famous painting of the Vicar of Wakefield, whose gentle manners and

loving character as conceived by Goldsmith are admirably depicted by the artist. Near the vicar stands the faithful clerk, a dear old man, who is scarcely less reverend than his vicar.

There is an old print of a portion of the church of St. Margaret, Westminster, which shows the Carolian "three-decker," a very elaborate structure, crowned by a huge sounding-board. The clergyman is officiating in the reading desk, and a very nice-looking old clerk, clad in his black gown with bands, sits below. There is a pompous beadle with his flowing wig and a mace in an adjoining pew, and some members of the congregation appear at the foot of the "three-decker," and in the gallery. It is a very correct representation of the better sort of old-fashioned service.

The hall of the Parish Clerks' Company possesses several portraits of distinguished members of the profession, which have already been mentioned in the chapter relating to the history of the fraternity. By the courtesy of the company we are enabled to reproduce some of the paintings, and to record some of the treasures of art which the fraternity possesses.



Portrait Of Richard Hunt
The Restorer Of The Clerks' Almshouses

CHAPTER XVI

WOMEN AS PARISH CLERKS

A woman cannot legally be elected to the office of parish clerk, though she may be a sexton. There was the famous case of *Olive* v. *Ingram* (12 George I) which determined this. One Sarah Bly was elected sexton of the parish of St. Botolph without Aldersgate by 169 indisputable votes and 40 which were given by women who were householders and paid to the church and poor, against 174 indisputable votes and 20 given by women for her male rival. Sarah Bly was declared elected, and the Court upheld the appointment and decreed that women could vote on such elections.

Cuthbert Bede states that in 1857 there were at least three female sextons, or "sextonesses," in the City of London, viz.: Mrs. Crook at St. Mary the Virgin, Aldermanbury; Mrs. E. Worley at St. Laurence, Jewry, King Street; and Mrs. Stapleton at St. Michael's, Wood Street. In 1867 Mrs. Noble was sextoness of St. John the Baptist, Peterborough. The *Annual Register* for 1759 mentions an extraordinary centenarian sextoness:

> Died, April 30th, Mary Hall, sexton of Bishop Hill, York City, aged one hundred and five; she walked about and retained her senses till within three days of her death.

Evidently the duties of her office had not worn out the stalwart old dame.

Although legally a woman may not perform the duties of a parish clerk, there have been numerous instances of female holders of the office. In the census returns it is not quite unusual to see the names of women returned as parish clerks, and we have many who discharge the duties of churchwarden, overseer, rate-collector, and other parochial offices.

One Ann Hopps was parish clerk of Linton about the year 1770, but nothing is known of her by her descendants except her name. Madame D'Arblay speaks in her diary of that "poor, wretched, ragged woman, a female clerk" who showed her the church of Collumpton, Devon. This good woman inherited her office from her deceased husband and received the salary, but she did not take the clerk's place in the services on Sunday, but paid a man to perform that part of her functions.

The parish register of Totteridge tells of the fame of Elizabeth King, who was clerk of that place for forty-six years. The following extract tells its own story:

> March 2nd, 1802, buried Elizabeth King, widow, for 46 years clerk of this parish, in the 91st year of her age, who died at Whetstone in the

> Parish of Finchley, Feb. 24th.
>
> N.B.--This old woman, as long as she was able to attend, did constantly, and read on the prayer-days, with great strength and pleasure to the hearers, though not in the clerk's place; the desk being filled on the Sunday by her son-in-law, Benjamin Withall, who did his best [80].
>
> [80] Burn's *History of Parish Registers*, p. 129.

Under the shade of the episcopal palace at Cuddesdon, at Wheatley, near Oxford, about sixty-five years ago, a female clerk, Mrs. Sheddon, performed the duties of the office which had been previously discharged by her husband. At Avington, near Hungerford, Berks, Mrs. Poffley was parish clerk for a period of twenty-five years at the beginning of the last century. About the same time Mary Mountford was parish clerk of Misterton, near Crewkerne, Somersetshire, for upwards of thirty years. A female clerk was acting at Igburgh, Norfolk, in 1853; and at Sudbrook, near Lincoln, in 1830, a woman also officiated and died in the service of the Church. Nor was the office confined to rural women of the working class. Mr. Ellacombe remembered to have seen "a gentle-woman acting as parish clerk of some church in London."

There are doubtless many other instances of women serving as parish clerks, and one of my correspondents remembers a very remarkable example.

In the village of Willoughton, Lincolnshire, more than seventy years ago, there lived an old dame named Betty Wells, who officiated as parish clerk. For many years Betty sat in the lowest compartment of the three-decker pulpit, reading the lessons and leading the responses, and, with the exception of ringing the church bell, fulfilling all the duties of clerk.

But Betty was also looked upon as a witch, and several stories are told of how she made things very unpleasant for those who offended her.

One day there had been a christening at which Betty had done her share; but by some unfortunate oversight she was not invited to the feast which took place afterwards. No sooner had the guests seated themselves at the table than a great cloud of soot fell down the chimney smothering all the good things, so that nothing could be eaten. Then, too late, they remembered that Betty Wells had not been invited, and perfectly confident were they that she had had her revenge by spoiling the feast.

One of the farmers let Betty have straw for bedding her pig in return for manure. When one of his men came to fetch the manure away, she thought he had taken too much. So she warned him that he would not go far--neither did he, for the cart tipped right over. And that was Betty again!

We know Betty had a husband, for we hear that one evening when he came home from his work his wife had ever so many tailors sitting on the table all busily stitching. When John came in they vanished.

A few people still remember Betty Wells, and they

shake their heads as they say, "Well, you see, the old woman had a very queer-looking eye," giving you to understand that it was with that particular eye she worked all these wonders.

The story of Betty Wells has been gleaned from scraps supplied by various old people and collected by Miss Frances A. Hill, of Willoughton. The unfortunate christening feast took place after the baptism of her father, and the story was told to her by an old aunt, now dead, who was grown up at the time (1830) and could remember it all distinctly. The people who told Miss Hill about Betty and her weird witch-like ways fully believed in her supernatural powers.

Another Betty, whose surname was Finch, was employed at the beginning of the last century at Holy Trinity Church, Warrington, as a "bobber," or sluggard-waker [81]. She was the wife of the clerk, and was well fitted on account of her masculine form to perform this duty which usually fell to the lot of the parish clerk. She used to perambulate the church armed with a long rod, like a fishing-rod, which had a "bob" fastened to the end of it. With this instrument she effectually disturbed the peaceful slumbers of any one who was overcome with drowsiness. The whole family of Betty was ecclesiastically employed, as her son used to sing:

"My father's a clerk,
  My sister's a singer,
My mother's a bobber,
  And I am a ringer."

[81] W. Andrews, *Curiosities of the Church*, p. 176.

One of my correspondents tells of another female clerk who officiated in a dilapidated old church with a defective roof, and who held an umbrella over the unfortunate clergyman when he was reading the service, in order to protect him from the drops of rain that poured down upon him.

Doubtless in country places there are many other churches where female clerks have discharged the duties of the office, but history has not, as far as I am aware, recorded their names or their services. Perhaps in an age in which women have taken upon themselves to perform all kinds of work and professional duties formerly confined to men alone, we may expect an increase in the number of female parish clerks, in spite of legal enactments and other absurd restrictions. Since women can be churchwardens, and have been so long ago as 1672, sextons, overseers and registrars of births, and much else, and even at one time were parish constables, it seems that the pleasant duties of a parish clerk might not be uncongenial to them, though they be debarred by law from receiving the title and rank of the office.

CHAPTER XVII

SOME YORKSHIRE CLERKS

During many years of the time that the Rev. John Torre occupied the rectory of Catwick, Thomas Dixon [82] was associated with him as parish clerk. He is described as a little man, old-looking for his age, and in the later years of his life able to walk only with difficulty. These peculiarities, however, did not prevent his winning a young woman for his wife. Possibly she saw the sterling character of the man, and admired and loved him for it.

> [82] This account of the clerks Dixon and Fewson was sent by the Rev. J. Gaskell Exton, and is published by the permission of the editor of the *Yorkshire Weekly Post*.

Dixon was strongly attached to the rector, so much so, that to him neither the rector nor the things belonging to the rector, whether animate or inanimate, could do wrong. He had a watch, and even though it might not be one of the best, a watch was no small acquisition to a working man of his time. He did not live in the days of the three-and-sixpenny marvel, or of the half-crown wonder, now to be found in the pocket of almost every schoolboy. Dixon's watch was of the kind worn by the well-known Captain Cuttle, which Dickens describes as being "a silver watch, which was so big and so tight in the pocket that it came out like a bung" when its owner drew it from the depths to see the time. It must, consequently, have cost many half-crowns, but yet as timekeeper it was somewhat of a failure. In this, too, it resembled that of the famous captain of which its proud possessor, as everybody knows, used to say, "Put you back half-an-hour every morning, and about another quarter towards the afternoon, and you've a watch that can be equalled by a few

and excelled by none." Dixon, therefore, when asked the time of day, was usually obliged to go through an arithmetical calculation before he could reply.

On Sunday, however, all was different; he then had no hesitation whatever in at once declaring the correct time. For every Sunday morning he put his watch by the rector's clock, and it mattered not how far the rector's clock might be fast or slow, what that clock said was the true time for Dixon. And though the remonstrances of the parishioners might be loud and long, they were all in vain, for according to the rector's clock he rang the church bells, and so the services commenced. He loved the rector, therefore the rector's clock could not be wrong. Evidently Dixon was capable of strong affection, a quality of no mean moral order.

Before the enclosure of parishes was common, and their various fields separated by hedges or other fences; before, too, the ordnance survey with its many calculations was an accomplished fact, much more measuring of land in connection with work done each year was required than at present. It was a necessity, therefore, that each village should have in or near it a man skilled in the science of calculation. Consequently, the acquirement of figures was fostered, and so in the earlier part of the nineteenth century almost every parish could produce a man supposed to be, and who probably was, great in arithmetic. Catwick's calculator was Dixon, and he was generally thought by his co-villagers to be as learned a one as any other, if not more so.

He had, however, a great rival at Long Riston. This was one Richard Fewson, who, like Dixon, was clerk of his parish; but while Dixon was a shopkeeper

Fewson kept the village school.

Fewson's modes of punishing refractory scholars were somewhat peculiar. Either a culprit was hoisted on the back of another scholar, or made to stoop till his nose entered a hole in the desk, and when in one or other of these positions was made to feel the singular sensation caused by a sound caning on that particular part of his anatomy which it is said "nature intends for correction." Sometimes, too, an offender was made to sit in a small basket, to the cross handle of which a rope had been tied, and by this means he was hoisted to a beam near the roof of the school. Here he was compelled to stay for a longer or shorter period, according to the offence, knowing that, if he moved to ease his crippled position, the basket would tilt and he would fall to the floor.

On one occasion, with an exceptionally refractory pupil, his mode of punishment was even more peculiar still. Having told all the girls to turn their faces to the wall--and not one of them, so my informant, one of the boys, said, would dare to disobey the order--he chalked the shape of a grave on the floor of the schoolroom. He then made the boy, an incorrigible truant, strip off all his clothes, and when he stood covered only in nature's dress, told him in solemn tones that he was going to bury him alive and under the floor. One scholar was then sent for a pick, and when this was fetched, another was sent for a shovel. By the time they were both brought, the truant was in a panic of fear, the end hoped for. The master then sternly asked the boy if he would play truant again, to which the boy quickly answered no. On this, he was allowed to dress, being assured as he did so that if ever again he stopped from school without leave he should certainly be

buried alive, and so great was the dread produced, the boy from that time was regularly found at school.

If parents objected to these punishments, they were simply told to take their children from school, which, as Fewson was the only master for miles around, he knew they would be loath to do. Fewson taught nearly all the children of the district whose parents felt it necessary that they should have any education. He is said to have turned out good scholars in the three R's, his curriculum being limited to these subjects, with, for an extra fee, mensuration added.

But Fewson, if he did not teach it, felt himself to be well up in astronomy. One summer, an old boy of his told me, he got the children--my informant amongst the number--to collect from their parents and others for a trip to Hornsea. When the money was all in he complained that the amount was insufficient for a trip, and suggested that a telescope he had seen advertised should be bought with the money. If this were done, he promised that those who had subscribed should have the telescope in turn to look through from Saturday to Monday. The telescope was purchased, and each subscriber had it once, and then it was no more seen. From that time it became the entire property of the master. The children never again collected for a trip, and small wonder.

Fewson was a good singer and musician generally, so in addition to his office as clerk he held the position of choirmaster. At church on Sunday he sat at the west end, the boys of the village sitting behind him, and it was part of his duty to see that they behaved themselves decorously. Should a boy make any disturbance Fewson's hand fell heavily on the offender's ears, and so sharply that the sound of the

blows could be heard throughout the church. Such incidents as this were by no means uncommon in churches in the days when Fewson and Dixon flourished, and they were looked upon as nothing extraordinary, for small compunction was felt in the punishment of unruly urchins.

I have been told of another clerk, for instance, who dealt such severe blows on the heads of boys, who behaved in the least badly, with a by no means small stick, that, like Fewson's, they, too, resounded all over the church. This clerk was known as "Old Crack Skull," and there were many others who might as appropriately have borne the name.

As parish clerk, Fewson attended the Archdeacon's visitation with the churchwardens, whose custom it was on each such occasion to spend about £3 in eating and drinking. On the appointment of a new and reforming churchwarden this expenditure was stopped, and for the first time Fewson returned to Riston sober. Here he looked at the churchwarden and sorrowfully said, "For thirty years I have been to the visitation and always got home drunk; Sally will think I haven't been." He then turned into the public-house, and afterwards reached home in the condition Sally, his wife, would expect.



The Church Of St. Margaret, Westminster

Insobriety was the normal condition of Fewson after school hours. It was his invariable custom to visit the public-house each evening, where he always found a clean pipe and an ounce of tobacco ready for him. Here he acted as president of those who forgathered, being by virtue of his wisdom readily conceded this position. His favourite drink was gin, and of this he imbibed freely; leaving for home about ten o'clock, which he found usually only after many a stumble and sometimes a fall. He, however, managed to save money, with which he built himself a house at Arnold, adorning it, as still to be seen, with the carved heads of saints and others, begged from the owners of the various ancient ecclesiastical piles of the neighbourhood. He died about seventy years ago, and was buried at Riston.

Between Dixon and Fewson there was much friendly strife with regard to the solving of hard arithmetical

problems. This contest was no mere private matter. It was entered into with great zest by the men of both the villages concerned; the Catwickians and the Ristonians each backing their man to win. "A straw shows which way the wind blows," we say, and herein we may feel a breathing of the Holderness man's love of his clan, an affection which has done much to develop and to strengthen his character.

Dixon was employed by the harvesters and others to measure the land which they had reaped, or on which they had otherwise worked. When the different measurements had been taken, he, of course, had to find the result. For this, he needed no pen, ink, or paper, nor yet a slate and pencil. He made his calculations by a much more economic method than these would supply. He sat down in the field he had measured, took off his beaver hat, and, using it as a kind of blackboard, with a piece of chalk worked out the result of his measurements on its crown.

Dixon must have been a man of resources, as are most Holderness men where the saving of money is concerned. I have heard it said that the spirit of economy has so permeated their character that it has influenced even their speech. "So saving are they," say some, "that the definite article, *the*, is never used by them in their talk." But this is a libel; another and a truer reason may be found for the omission in their Scandinavian origin.

Another parish clerk who held office at a church about five miles from Catwick, by trade a tailor, was a noted character and remarkable for his parsimonious habits. He is described as having been a very little man and of an extremely attenuated

appearance. The story of his economy during his honeymoon, when the happy pair stayed in some cheap town lodgings, is not pleasing.

His great effort in saving, however, resulted from his sporting proclivities. Tailor though he was, he conceived a great desire to be a mighty hunter. So strong did this passion burn within him that he made up his mind, sooner or later, to hunt, and with the best, in a red coat, too. He therefore began to save with this object in view. Denying himself every luxury and most other things which are usually counted necessaries, for long he lived, it is said, on half a salt herring a day with a little bread or a few vegetables in addition. By doing so, he was able to put almost all he earned to the furtherance of the purpose of his heart. This went on till he had saved £200. Then he felt his day was come. He bought a horse, made himself the scarlet coat, and went to the hunt as he thought a gentleman should. His hunting lasted for two seasons, when, the money he had saved being spent, he went back to his trade, at which he worked as energetically as ever.

At the west end of the nave of Catwick Church formerly was erected a gallery. In this loft, as it was commonly called, the musicians of the parish sang or played. Various instruments, bassoon, trombone, violoncello, cornet, cornopean, and clarionet, flute, fiddle, and flageolet, or some of their number, were employed, calling to mind the band of Nebuchadnezzar of old. The noise made in the tuning of the instruments to the proper pitch may be readily imagined. Now, the church possesses an organ, and the choirmen and boys have their places in the chancel, while the musicians of the parish occupy the front seats of the nave. This arrangement is

eminently suitable for effectually leading the praises of the people, but not perhaps more so, its noise notwithstanding, than the former style; indeed, I am somewhat doubtful if the new equals the old. The old certainly had the merit of engaging most, if not all, the musicians of the village in the worship of the church.

At the east end of the nave, in the days of the loft, stood a kind of triple pulpit, commonly called a three-decker. It was composed of three compartments, the second above and behind the first, and the third similarly placed with regard to the second. The lowest, resting on the floor, was the place for the clerk, the middle was for the parson when reading the prayers and Scriptures, and the highest for the parson when preaching. Such pulpits are now almost as completely things of the past as the old warships from which, in derision, they got their name. Once only have I read the service and preached from a three-decker, and then the clerk did not occupy the position assigned to him. Dixon, however, always used the little desk at the foot of the Catwick pulpit, and from it took his share of the service.

It was part of his duty, as clerk, to choose and to give out the number of the hymns. Now Dixon, like Fewson, was a singer, and felt that the choir could not get on without the help of his voice in the gallery when the hymns were sung. Consequently, he then left his box and went to the singing loft; but, to save time, as he marched down the aisle from east to west, and as he mounted the steps of the gallery, he slowly and solemnly announced the number of the hymn and read the lines of the first verse. When the hymn was sung, our bird-like clerk came down again

from the heights of the loft and returned to his perch at the base of the pulpit.

Nowadays, we should consider such proceedings very unseemly, but it would have been thought nothing of in the days of Dixon. Scenes, according to our ideas, much more grotesque were then of frequent occurrence. We have already looked on at least one; here is another which took place in the neighbouring church of Skipsea one Sunday afternoon some sixty years ago, and in connection with singing. The account was given to me by a parishioner of about eighty years of age, who was one of the choirmen on the occasion.

The leading singer, he said, there being no instrument, started a tune for the hymn. It would not fit the words, and he soon came to a full stop, and choir and congregation with him. At this, one of the congregation, in a voice that could be heard the whole church over, called out, "Give it up, George! Give it up!" "No, no," said the vicar in answer, leaning over his desk, "No, no, George, try again! try again!" George tried again, and again failed. But the vicar still encouraged him with "Have another try, George! Have another try! You may get it yet!" George tried the third time, and now hit upon a right tune; and to the general delight the hymn was sung through.

Without doubt, in the days of our forefathers the services of the Church were conducted with the greatest freedom. But we may not judge those who preceded us by our own standard, nor yet apart from the time in which they lived.

When two young people of Catwick or its neighbourhood feel they can live no longer without

each other, they in local phrase "put in the banns." They then, of course, expect to have them published, or again in local idiom "thrown over the pulpit." On all such occasions, according to a very old custom, after the rector had read out the names, with the usual injunction following, from the middle compartment of the three-decker, Dixon would rise from his seat below, and slowly and clearly cry out, "God speed 'em weel" (God speed them well). By this pious wish he prayed for a blessing on those about to be wed, and in this the congregation joined, for they responded with Amen.

Dixon was the last of the Catwick clerks to keep this custom. Much more recently, however, than the time he held office, members of the congregation, usually those seated in the loft, on the publication of the banns of some well-known people, have called out the time-honoured phrase. But it is now heard no more. The custom has gone into a like oblivion to that of the parish clerk himself, once so important a person, in his own estimation if in that of no other, both in church and parish. "The old order changeth."

Thomas Dixon died at Catwick when sixty-seven years of age. He was buried in the churchyard on January 2, 1833, and by the Rev. John Torre, the rector he served so faithfully.

When Sydney Smith went to see the out-of-the-way Yorkshire village of Foston-le-Clay, to which benefice he had been presented, his arrival occasioned great excitement. The parish clerk came forward to welcome him, a man eighty years of age, with long grey hair, thread-bare coat, deep wrinkles, stooping gait, and a crutch stick. He looked at the new parson for some time from under his grey shaggy eyebrows,

and talked, and showed that age had not quenched the natural shrewdness of the Yorkshireman.

At last, after a pause, he said, striking his crutch stick on the ground:

"Master Smith, it often stroikes moy moind that folks as come frae London be such fools. But you," he added, giving Sydney Smith a nudge with his stick, "I see you be no fool." The new vicar was gratified.

Yorkshiremen are keen songsters, and *fortissimo* is their favourite note of expression. "Straack up a bit, Jock! straack up a bit," a Yorkshire parson used to shout to his clerk, when he wanted the Old Hundredth to be sung. Well do I remember a delightful old clerk in the Craven district, who used to give out the hymn in the accustomed form with charming manner. He liked not itinerant choirs, which were not uncommon forty or fifty years ago, and used to migrate from church to church, and sometimes to chapel, in the district where the members lived. One of these choirs visited the church where the Rev. ---- Morris was rector, and he was directed to give out the anthem which the itinerant strangers were prepared to sing. He neither knew nor cared what an anthem was; and he gave the following somewhat confused notice:

"Let us sing to the praise and glory of God the fiftieth Psalm, *while you folks sing th' anthem*," casting a scornful glance at the wandering musicians in the opposite gallery.

Missionary meetings and sermons were somewhat rare in those days, but the special preacher for missions, commonly called the deputation, who performs for lazy clerics the task of instructing the

people about work in the mission field--a duty which could well be performed by the vicar himself--had already begun his itinerant course. The congregation were waiting in the churchyard for his arrival, when the old Yorkshire vicar, mentioned above, said to his clerk, "Jock, ye maunt let 'em into th' church; the dippitation a'n't coom." Presently two clergymen arrived, when the clerk called out, "Ye maunt gang hoame; t' deppitation's coom." The old vicar made an excellent chairman, his introductory remarks being models of brevity: "T' furst deppitation will speak!" "T' second deppitation will speak!" after which the clerk lighted some candles in the singing gallery, and gave out for an appropriate hymn, "Vital spark of heavenly flame."

A writer in *Chambers's Journal* tells of a curious class of clergymen who existed forty years ago, and were known as "Northern Lights," the light from a spiritual point of view being somewhat dim and flickering. The writer, who was the vicar for twenty-five years of a moorland parish, tells of several clerks who were associated with these clerics, and who were as quaint and curious in their ways as their masters [83]. The village was a hamlet on the edge of the Yorkshire moors, near the confines of Derbyshire. Beside the church was a public-house kept by the parish clerk, Jerry, a dapper little man, who on Sundays and funeral days always wore a wig, an old-fashioned tailed coat, black stockings, and shoes with buckles. His house was known as "Heaven's Gate," where the farmers from the neighbouring farms used to drink and stay a week at a time. Jerry used to direct the funerals, make the clerkly responses, and then provide the funeral party with good cheer at his inn. His invitation was always given at the graveside in a high-pitched falsetto voice, and the formula ran in

these words, and was never varied:

"Friends of the corpse is respectfully requested to call at my house, and partake then and there of such refreshments as is provided for them."

> [83] By the kindness of the editor of *Chambers's Journal* I am permitted to retell some of the stories of the manners of these clerks and parsons.

Much intemperance and disorder often followed these funeral feastings. An old song long preserved in the district depicts one of these funerals, which was by no means a one-day affair, but sometimes lasted several days, during which the drinking went on. The inn was perhaps a necessity in this out-of-the-world place, but it was unfortunately a great temptation to the inhabitants, and to the old Northern Light parson who preceded the vicar whose reminiscences we are recording. Here in the inn the old parson sat between morning and afternoon service with a long clay pipe in his mouth and a glass of whisky by his side. When the bells began to settle and the time of service approached, he would send Jerry to the church to see if many people had arrived. When Jerry replied:

"There's not many comed yet, Mr. Nowton," the parson would say:

"Then tell them to ring another peal, Jerry, and just fill up my glass again."

The communion plate was kept at the inn under Jerry's charge. Three times a year it was used, and the circumstances were disgraceful. Four bottles of port wine were deemed the proper allowance on communion days, and after a fractional quantity had

been consumed in the church, the rest was finished by the churchwardens at the inn. One of these churchwardens drank himself to death after the communion service. He was a big man with a red face, and was always present when a bear was baited at the top of the hill above the village. One day the bear escaped and ran on to the moor; everybody scattered in all directions, and several dogs were killed before the bear was caught.

The successor of Jerry as clerk, but not as publican, was a rough, honest individual who was called Dick. When excited he had two oaths, "By'r Lady!" and "By the mass!" but as he always pronounced this last word *mess*, it was evident he did not understand the nature of the oath he used. He had a rough-and-ready way of doing things, and when handing out hymn-books during service he used to throw a book up to an applicant in the gallery to save the trouble of walking up the stairs in proper fashion. He talked the broadest Yorkshire dialect, and it was not always easy to understand him. This was particularly the case when, in his capacity as clerk, he repeated the responses at the funeral service.

A tremendous snowfall happened one winter, and the roads were all blocked. It was impossible for any one to go to church on the Sunday morning following the fall, as the snow had not been cleared away. It was necessary for the vicar, however, to get there, as he had to read out the banns of marriage which were being published; so, putting on fishing-waders to protect himself from the wet snow, he succeeded with some difficulty in getting through the drifts. In the churchyard, standing before the church clock, he found Dick intently gazing at it, so he asked him if it was going. His reply was laconic: "Noa; shoo's froz."

He and the vicar then went into the church, and the necessary publication of banns was read in the presence of the clerk alone.

In those days it was necessary that the wedding service should be all over by twelve o'clock, and it was most important that due notice should be given of the date of the wedding, a matter about which Dick was sometimes rather careless.

The vicar had gone into Derbyshire for a few days to fish the River Derwent. He was fishing a long distance up the stream when he heard his name called, and saw his servant running towards him, who said that a wedding was waiting for him at the church. Dick had forgotten to give due notice of this event. The vicarage trap was in readiness, but the road over the Derbyshire Peak was rough and steep, the pony small, the distance ten miles, and the vicar encumbered with wet clothes. The chance of getting to the church before twelve o'clock seemed remote. But the vicar and pony did their best; it was, however, half an hour after the appointed time when they reached the church. Glancing at the clock in the tower, the vicar, to his astonishment, found the hands pointing to half-past eleven. The situation was saved, and the service was concluded within the prescribed time. The vicar turned to the clerk for an explanation. "I seed yer coming over the hill," he said, "and I just stopped the clock a bit." Dick was an ingenious man.

There was another character in the parish quite as peculiar as Dick, and he was one of the principal singers, who sat in the west gallery. He had formerly played the clarionet, before an organ was put into the church. During service he always kept a red

cotton handkerchief over his bald head, which gave him a decidedly comic appearance.

On one occasion the clergyman gave out a hymn in the old-fashioned way: "Let us sing to the praise and glory of God the twenty-first hymn, second version." Up jumped the old singer and shouted, "You're wrang, maister; it's first version." The clergyman corrected himself, when the singer again rose: "You're wrang agearn; it's twenty-second hymn." Without any remark the clergyman corrected the number, and the man again jumped up: "That's reet, mon, that's reet." When the old singer died his widow was very anxious there should be some record on his tombstone of his having played the clarionet in church; so above his name a trumpet-shaped instrument was carved on the stone, and some doggerel lines were to be added below. The vicar had great difficulty in persuading the family to abandon the lines for the text, "The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised."

A neighbouring vicar was on one occasion taking the duty of an old man with failing eyesight, and Dick reminded him before the afternoon service that there was a funeral at four o'clock. "You must come into the church and tell me when it arrives," he told the clerk, "and I will stop my sermon." It was the habit of the old clergyman to relapse into a strong Yorkshire dialect when speaking familiarly, and this will account for the brief dialogue which passed between him and Dick as he stood at the lectern. In due course the funeral arrived at the church gates, and the first intimation the congregation inside the church had of this fact was the appearance of Dick, who noisily threw open the big doors of the south porch. He then stood and beckoned to the

clergyman, but his poor blind eyes could not see so far. Dick then came nearer and waved his hat before him. This again met with no response. Then he got near enough to pluck him by the arm, which he did rather vigorously, shouting at the same time, "Shoo's coomed." "Wha's coomed?" replied the clergyman, relapsing into his Yorkshire speech. "Funeral's coomed," retorted Dick. "Then tell her to wait a bit while I finish my sermon"; and the old man went quietly on with his discourse.

Another instance of Dick's failing to give proper notice of a service was as follows; but on this occasion it was not really his fault. Some large reservoirs were being made in the parish, and nearly a thousand navvies were employed on the works. These men were constantly coming and going, and very often they brought some infectious disorder which spread among the huts where they lived. One day a navvy arrived who broke out in smallpox of a very severe kind, and in a couple of days the man died, and the doctor ordered the body to be buried the moment a coffin could be got. It was winter-time, and the vicar had ridden over to see some friends about ten miles away. As the afternoon advanced it began to rain very heavily, and he decided not to ride back home, but to sleep at his friend's house. About five o'clock a messenger arrived to say a funeral was waiting in the church, and he was to come at once. He started in drenching rain, which turned to sleet and snow as he approached the moor edges. It was pitch-dark when he got off his horse at the church gates, and with some difficulty he found his way into the vestry and put a surplice over his wet garments. He could see nothing in the church, but he asked when he got into the reading-desk if any one was there. A deep voice answered, "Yes, sir;

we are here"; and he began the service, which long practice had taught him to repeat by heart. When about half-way through the lesson he saw a glimmer of light, and Dick entered the church with a lantern, which he placed on the top of the coffin. It was a gruesome scene which the lantern brought into view. There was the coffin, and before it, in a seat, four figures of the navvy-bearers, and Dick himself covered with snow and as white as if he wore a surplice. They filed out into the churchyard, but the wind had blown the snow into the grave, and this had to be got out before they could lower the body into it. The navvies, who were kind-hearted fellows, explained that they could give no notice of the funeral beforehand, and they quite understood the delay was no fault of the vicar's or Dick's.

Dick was, in spite of his faults, an honest and kind-hearted man, and his death, caused by a fall from a ladder, was much regretted by his good vicar. On his death-bed the old clerk sent for his favourite grandson, who succeeded him in his office, and made this pathetic request: "Thou'lt dig my grave, Jont, lad."

With Dick the last of the "Northern Lights" flickered out. Nothing now remains in the village recalling those old times. The village inn has been suppressed, and the drinking bouts are over. The old church has been entirely restored, and there is order and decency in the services. The strange thing is that it should have been possible that only forty years ago matters were in such a state of chaos and disorder, and in such need of drastic reformation.

Another Yorkshire clerk flourished in the thirties at Bolton-on-Dearne named Thomas Rollin, commonly

called Tommy. He used to render Psalm cii. 6: "I am become a *pee-li-can* in the wilderness, and an owl in the *dee-sert*." Tommy was a tailor by trade, and made use of a ready-reckoner to assist him in making up his accounts, and his familiarity with that useful book was shown when reading the second verse of the forty-fifth Psalm, which Tommy invariably read: "My tongue is the pen of a *ready-reckoner*," to the immense delight of the youthful members of the congregation.

CHAPTER XVIII

AN OLD CHESHIRE CLERK AND SOME OTHER WORTHIES

It is nearly fifty years since I used to attend the quaint old parish church at Lawton, Cheshire, situate half-way between Congleton and Crewe. It is a lonely spot, "miles from anywhere," having not the vestige of a village, and the congregation was formed of well-to-do farmers, who came from the scattered farmsteads. How well I remember the old parish clerk and the numerous duties which fell to his lot! He united in his person the offices of clerk, sexton, beadle, church-keeper, organist, and ringer. The organ was of the barrel kind, and no one knew how

to manipulate the instrument or to change the barrels, except the clerk. He had also to place ten decent loaves in a row on the communion table every Sunday morning, which were provided by a charitable bequest for the benefit of the poor widows of the parish. If the widows did not attend service to curtsy for them, the loaves were given to any one who liked to take them. Old Clerk Briscall baked them himself. He kept a small village shop about two miles from the church. He was also the village shoemaker. A curious system prevailed. As you entered the church, near the large stove you would see a long bench, and under this bench a row of boots and shoes. If any one wanted his boots to be mended, he would take them to church with him and put them under the bench. These were collected by the cobbler-clerk, carried home in a sack, and brought back on the following Sunday neatly and carefully soled and heeled. It would seem strange now if on entering a church our eyes should light upon a row of farmers' dirty old boots and the freshly-mended evidences of the clerk's skill. All this took place in the fifties. In the sixties a new vicar came. The old organ wheezed its last phlegmatic tune; it was replaced by a modern instrument with six stops, and a player who did his best, but occasioned not a little laughter on account of his numerous breakdowns. The old high pews have disappeared, nice open benches erected, the floor relaid, a good choir enlisted, and everything changed for the better.

The poor old clerk must have been almost overwhelmed by his numerous duties, and was often much embarrassed and exasperated by the old squire, Mr. C.B. Lawton, who was somewhat whimsical in his ways. This gentleman used to enter

the church by his own private door, and go to his large, square, high-panelled family pew, and when the vicar gave out the hymn, he used often to shout out, "Here, hold on! I don't like that one; let's have hymn Number 25," or some such effort of psalmody. This request, or command, used to upset the organ arrangement, and the poor old clerk had to rummage among his barrels to get a suitable tune, and the operation, even if successful, took at least ten minutes, during which time a large amount of squeaking and the sounds of the writhing of woodwork and snapping of sundry catches were heard in the church. But the congregation was accustomed to the performance and thought little of it. (John Smallwood, 2 Mount Pleasant, Strangeways, Manchester.)

Caistor Church, Lincolnshire, famous for the curious old ceremony of the gad-whip, was also celebrated for its clerk, old Joshua Foster, who was officiating there in 1884 at the time of the advent of a new vicar. Trinity Sunday was the first Sunday of the new clergyman, who sorely puzzled the clerk by reading the Athanasian Creed. The old man peered down into the vicar's family pew from his desk, casting a despairing glance at the wife of the vicar, who handed him a Prayer Book with the place found, so that he could make the responses. He was very economical in the use of handkerchiefs, and used the small pieces of paper on which the numbers of the metrical psalm were written. In vain did the wife of the vicar present him with red-and-white-spotted handkerchiefs, which were used as comforters. The church was lighted with tallow candles--"dips" they were called--and at intervals during the service Joshua would go round and snuff them. The snuffers soon became full, and it was a matter of deep

interest to the congregation to see on whose head the snuff would fall, and to dodge it if it came their way.

The Psalms of Tate and Brady's version were sung and were given out with the usual preface, "Let us sing to the praise and glory of God the 1st, 2nd, 5th, 8th, and 20th verses of the ---- Psalm with the Doxology." How that Doxology bothered the congregation! The Doxologies were all at the end of the Prayer Book, and it was not always easy to hit the right metre; but that was of little consequence. A word added if the line was too short, or omitted if too long, required skill, and made all feel that they had done their best when it was successfully over. After the old clerk's death, he was succeeded by his son Joshua, or Jos-a-way, as the name was pronounced, whose son, also named Joshua the third, became clerk, and still holds the office.

The predecessor of the vicar was a pluralist, who held Caistor with its two chapelries of Holton and Clixby and the living of Rothwell. He was non-resident, and the numerous churches were served by a curate. This man was a great smoker, and used to retire to the vestry to don the black gown and smoke a pipe before the sermon, the congregation singing a Psalm meanwhile. One Sunday he had an extra pipe, and Joshua told him that the people were getting impatient.

"Let them sing another Psalm," said the curate.

"They have, sir," replied the clerk.

"Then let them sing the 119th," replied the curate.

At last he finished his pipe, and began to put on the black gown, but its folds were troublesome, and he

could not get it on.

"I think the devil's in the gown," muttered the curate.

"I think he be," dryly replied old Joshua.

That the clerk was often a person of dignity and importance is shown by the recollections of an old parishioner of the rector of Fornham All Saints, near Bury St. Edmunds. "Mr. Baker, the clerk," of Westley, who flourished seventy years ago, used to hear the children their catechism in church on Sunday afternoons. "Ah, sir, I often think of what he told us, that the world would not come to an end till people were killed *wholesale*, and now think how often that happens!" She was probably not alluding to the South African or the Japanese war, but to railway accidents, as she at once told her favourite story of her solitary journey to Newmarket, when on her return she remarked, "If I live to set foot on firm ground, never no more for me."

The old clerk used to escort the boys and girls to their confirmation at Bury, and superintended their meal of bread, beer, and cheese after the rite. There was no music at Westley, except when Mr. Humm, the clerk of Fornham, "brought up his fiddle and some of the Fornham girls." Nowadays, adds the rector, the Rev. C.L. Feltoe, the clerks are much more illiterate than their predecessors, and, unlike them, non-communicants.

Another East Anglian clerk was a quaint character, who had a great respect for all the old familiar residents in his town of S----, and a corresponding contempt for all new-comers. The family of my informant had resided there for nearly a century, and had, therefore, the approval of the clerk. On one

occasion some of the family found their seat occupied by some new people who had recently settled in the town. The clerk rushed up, and in a loud voice, audible all over the church, exclaimed:

"Never you mind that air muck in your pew. I'll soon turn 'em out. The imperent muck, takin' your seats!"

The family insisted upon "the muck" being left in peace, and forbade the eviction.

The old clerk used vigorously a long stick to keep the school children in order. He was much respected, and his death universally regretted.

Fifty years ago there was a dear, good old clerk, named Bamford, at Mangotsfield Church, who used to give out the hymns, verse by verse. The vicar always impressed upon him to read out the words in a loud voice, and at the last word in each verse to pitch his voice. The hymn, "This world's a dream," was rendered in this fashion:

> "This world's a *drame,* an empty shoe,
> But this bright world to which I goo
> Hath jaays substantial an' sincere,
> When shall I wack and find me THEER?"

William Smart, the parish clerk of Windermere in the sixties, was a rare specimen. By trade an auctioneer and purveyor of Westmorland hams, he was known all round the countryside. He was very patronising to the assistant curates, and a favourite expression of his was "me and my curate." When one of his curates first took a wedding he was commanded by the clerk,

"When you get to 'hold his peace,' do you stop, for I have something to say." The curate was obedient, and stopped at the end of his prescribed words, when William shouted out, "God speed them well!"

This unauthorised but excellent clerkly custom was not confined to Windermere, but was common in several Norfolk churches, and at Hope Church, Derbyshire, the clerk used to express the good wish after the publication of the banns.

The old-fashioned clerk was usually much impressed by the importance of his office. Crowhurst, the old clerk at Allington, Kent, in 1852, just before a wedding took place, marched up to the rector, the Rev. E.B. Heawood, and said:

"If you please, sir, the ceremony can't proceed."

"Why not? What do you mean?" asked the surprised rector.

"The marriage can't take place, sir," he answered solemnly, "'cos I've lost my specs."

Fortunately a pupil of the rector's came forward and confessed that he had hidden the old man's spectacles in a hole in the wall, and the ceremony was no longer delayed.

At Bromley College the same clergyman had a curious experience, when the clerk was called to assist at a service for the Churching of Women. As it was very unusually performed there, he was totally at a loss what service to find, and asked in great perturbation:

"Please, sir, be I to read the responses in the services for the Queen's Accession?"

The same service sadly puzzled the clerk at Haddington, who was in the employment of the then Earl of W----. One Sunday Lady W---- came to be churched, when in response to the clergyman's prayer, "O Lord, save this woman, Thy servant," the clerk said, "Who putteth her ladyship's trust in Thee."

The Rev. W.H. Langhorne tells me some amusing anecdotes of old clerks. Once he was preaching in a village church for home missions, and just as he was reaching the pulpit he observed that the clerk was preparing to take round the plate. He whispered to him to wait till he had finished his sermon. "It won't make a ha'porth o' difference," was the encouraging reply. But at the close of the sermon there was another invitation to give additional offerings, which were not withheld.

In the old days when *Bell's Life* was the chief sporting paper, a hunting parson was taking the service one Sunday morning and gave out the day of the month and the Psalm. The clerk corrected him, but the rector again gave out the same day and was again corrected. The rector, in order to decide the controversy, produced a copy of *Bell's Life* and handed it to the clerk, who then submitted. It is not often, I imagine, that a sporting paper has been appealed to for the purpose of deciding what Psalms should be read in church.

One very wet Sunday Mr. Langhorne was summoned to take an afternoon service several miles distant from his residence. The congregation consisted of only half a dozen people. After service he said to the clerk that it was hardly worth while coming so far. "We might have done with a worse 'un," was his reply.

That reminds me of another clerk who apologised to a church dignitary who had been summoned to take a service at a small country church. The form of the apology was not quite happily expressed. He said, "I am sorry, sir, to have brought such a gentleman as you to this poor place. A worse would have done, if we had only known where to find him!"

The new vicar of D---- was calling upon an old parishioner, who said to him: "Ah! I've seen mony changes. I've seen four vicars of D----. First there was Canon G----, then there was Mr. T----, who's now a bishop, and then Mr. F---- came, and now you've coom, and we've wossened (worsened) every toime."

A clerk named Turner, who officiated at Alnwick, was a great character, and in spite of his odd ways was esteemed for his genuine worth and fidelity to the three vicars under whom he served. He looked upon the church and parish as his own, and used to say that he had trained many "kewrats" in their duties. His responses in the Psalms were often startling. Instead of "The Lord setteth up the meek," he would say, "The Lord sitteth upon the meek." "The great leviathan" he rendered "the great live thing." "Caterpillars innumerable" he pronounced "caterpilliars innumerabble." When a funeral was late he scolded the bearers at the churchyard gate.

At Wimborne Minster, Dorset, there used to be three priest vicars, and each of them had a clerk. It was the custom for each of the priest vicars to take the services for a week in rotation, and the first lesson was always read by "the clerk of the week," as he was called. On Sundays, when there was a celebration of the Holy Communion, the "clerk of the week" advanced to the lectern after the sermon was

finished, and said, "All who wish to receive the Holy Communion, draw near." These words, in the case of one worthy, named David Butler, were always spoken in a high-pitched, drawling voice, and finished off with a kick to the rearwards of the right leg.

The old clerk at Woodmancote, near Henfield, Sussex, was a very important person. There was never any committee meeting but he attended. So much so, that one day in church leading the singing and music with voice and flute, when it came to the "Gloria" he sang loudly, "As it was in the committee meeting, is now, and ever shall be ..."

An acquaintance remarked to him afterwards that the last meeting he attended must have been a rather long one!

A story is told of the clerk at West Dean, near Alfriston, Sussex. Starting the first line of the Psalm or hymn, he found that he could not see owing to the failing light on a dark wintry afternoon. So he said, "My eyes are dim, I canna see," at which the congregation, composed of ignorant labourers, sang after him the *same* words. The clerk was wroth, and cried out, "Tarnation fools you all must be." Here again the congregation sang the same words after the clerk.

Strange times, strange manners!

A writer in the *Spectator* tells of a clerk who, like many of his fellows, used to convert "leviathan" into "that girt livin' thing," thus letting loose before his hearers' imagination a whole travelling menagerie, from which each could select the beast which most struck his fancy. This clerk was a picturesque

personality, although, unlike his predecessor, he had discarded top-boots and cords for Sunday wear in favour of black broadcloth. When not engaged in marrying or burying one of his flock, he fetched and carried for the neighbours from the adjacent country town, or sold herrings and oranges (what mysterious affinity is there between these two dissimilar edibles that they are invariably hawked in company?) from door to door. During harvest he rang the morning "leazing bell" to start the gleaners to the fields, and every night he tolled the curfew, by which the villagers set their clocks. He it was who, when the sermon was ended, strode with dignity from his box on the "lower deck" down the aisle to the belfry, and pulled the "dishing-up bell" to let home-keeping mothers know that hungry husbands and sons were set free. Folks in those days were less easily fatigued than they are now. Services were longer, the preacher's "leanings to mercy" were less marked, and congregations counted themselves ill-used if they broke up under the two hours. The boys stood in wholesome awe of the clerk, as well they might, for his eye was keen and his stick far-reaching. Moreover, no fear of man prevented him from applying the latter with effect to the heads of slumberers during divine service. By way of retaliation the youths, when opportunity occurred, would tie the cord of the "tinkler" to the weathercock, and the parish on a stormy night would be startled by the sound of ghostly, fitful ting-tangs. To Sunday blows the clerk, who was afflicted with rheumatism, added weekday anathemas as he climbed the steep ascent to the bell-chamber and the yet steeper ladder that gave access to the leads of the tower. The perpetual hostility that reigned between discipliner and disciplined bred no ill will on either

side. "Boys must be boys" and "He's paid for lookin' arter things" were the arguments whereby the antagonists testified their mutual respect, in both of which the parents concurred; and his severity did not cost the old man a penny when he made his Easter rounds to collect the "sweepings." It may, perhaps, be well to explain that the "sweepings" consisted of an annual sum of threepence which every householder contributed towards the cleaning of the church, and which represented a large part of the clerk's salary [84].

[84] *Spectator*, 14 October, 1905.

The Rev. C.C. Prichard recollects a curious old character at Churchdown, near Gloucester, commonly pronounced "Chosen" in those days.

This old clerk was only absent one Sunday from "Chosen" Church, and then he was lent to the neighbouring church of Leckhampton. Instead of the response "And make Thy chosen people joyful," mindful of his change of locality he gave out with a strong nasal twang, "And make Thy Leck'ampton people joyful." The Psalms were somewhat a trouble to him, and to the congregation too. One verse he rendered "Like a paycock in a wild-dook's nest, and a howl in the dessert, even so be I." He was a thoroughly good old man, and brought up a large family very respectably.

I remember the old clerk, James Ingham, of Whalley Church, Lancashire. It is a grand old church, full of old dark oak square pews, and the clerk was in keeping with his surroundings. He was a humorous character, and had a splendid deep bass voice. He used to show people over the ruined abbey, and his

imagination supplied the place of accurate historical information. Some American visitors asked him what a certain path was used for. "Well, marm," said James, "it's onsartin: but they do say the monks and nuns used to walk up and down this 'ere path, arm-in-arm, of a summer arternoon."

It is recorded of one Thomas Atkins, clerk of Chillenden Church, Kent, that he used to leave his reading-desk at the commencement of the General Thanksgiving and proceed to the west gallery, where he gave out the hymn and sang a duet with the village cobbler, in which the congregation joined as best they could. He walked very slowly down the church, and said the Amen at the end of the Thanksgiving wherever he happened to be, and that was generally half-way up the gallery stairs, whence his feeble voice, with a good *tremolo*, used to sound like the distant baaing of a sheep. It was a strange and curious performance.

Miss Rawnsley, of Raithby Hall, Spilsby, gives some delightful reminiscences of a most original specimen of the race of clerks, old Haw, who officiated at Halton Holgate, Lincolnshire. He was a curious mixture of worldly wisdom and strong religious feeling. The former was exemplified by his greeting to a cousin of my correspondent, just returned from his ordination.

He said, "Now, Mr. Hardwick, remember thou must creep an' crawl along the 'edge bottoms, and then tha'ill make thee a bishop."

He was a strong advocate of Fasting Communion. No one ever knew whence he derived his strong views on the subject. The rector never taught it. Probably

his ideas were derived from some long lingering tradition. When over seventy years of age he set out fasting to walk six miles to attend a late celebration at a distant church on the occasion of its consecration. Nothing would ever induce him to break his fast before communicating; and on this occasion he was picked up in a dead faint, his journey being only half completed.

On Wednesdays and Fridays he always went into the church at eleven o'clock and said the Litany aloud. When asked his reason, he said, "I've gotten an ungodly wife and two ungodly bairns to pray for, sir." He once asked one of the rector's daughters to help him in the *Parody* of the Psalms he was making; and on another occasion requested to have the old altar-cloth, which had just been replaced by a new one, "to make a slop to dig the graves in, and no sacrilege neither."

At Sutton Maddock, Shropshire, there was a clerk who used to read "*Pe*-li-*can* in the wilderness," and the usual "*Howl* in the *Des*art," and "Teach the *Se*nators wisdom," and when the Litany was said on Wednesdays and Fridays declared that it was not in his Prayer Book though he took part in it every Sunday. When a kind lady, Miss Barnfield, expressed a wish that his wife would get better, he replied, "I hope her will or *summat*."

At Claverley, in the same county, on one Sunday, the rector told the clerk to give notice that there would be no service that afternoon, adding *sotto voce*, "I am going to dine at the Paper Mill." He was rather disgusted when the clerk announced, "There will be no Diving Service this arternoon, the Parson is going to dine at the Peaper Mill." The clerk was no

respecter of persons, and once marched up to the rector's wife in church and told her to keep her eyes from beholding vanity.

The Rev. F.A. Davis tells me of a story of an illiterate clerk who served in a Wiltshire church, where a cousin of my informant was vicar. A London clergyman, who had never preached or been in a country church before, came to take the duty. He was anxious to find out if the people listened or understood sermons. His Sunday morning discourse was based on the text St. Mark v. 1-17, containing the account of the healing of the demoniacally possessed persons at Gadara, and the destruction of the herd of swine. On the Monday he asked the clerk if he understood the sermon. The clerk replied somewhat doubtfully, "Yes." "But is there anything you do not quite understand?" said the clergyman; "I shall be only too glad to explain anything I can, so as to help you." After a good deal of scratching the back of his head and much hesitating, the clerk replied, "Who paid for them pigs?"



William Hinton, A Wiltshire Worthy
Drawn By The Rev. Julian Charles Young

Many examples I have given of the dry humour of old clerks, which is sometimes rather disconcerting. A stranger was taking the duty in a church, and after service made a few remarks about the weather, asserting that it promised to be a fine day for the haymaking to-morrow. "Ah, sir," replied the clerk, "they do say that the hypocrites can discern the face of the sky."

The Rev. Julian Charles Young, rector of Ilmington, in his *Memoir of Charles Mayne Young, Tragedian*, published in 1871, speaks of the race of parish clerks who flourished in Wiltshire in the first half of the last century. Instead of a nice discrimination being exercised in the choice of a clerk, it seems to have been the rule to select the sorriest driveller that could be found--some "lean and slippered pantaloon, with spectacles on nose and pouch at side,"

"triumphant over time,
And over tune, and over rhyme"--

who by his snivelling enunciation of the responses and his nasal drawlings of the A--mens, was sure to provoke the risibility of his hearers. Mr. Young's own clerk was, however, a very worthy man, of such lofty aspirations and of such blameless purity of life, that in making him Nature made the very ideal of a village clerk and schoolmaster, and then "broke the mould." His grave yet kindly countenance, his well-proportioned limbs encased in breeches and gaiters of corded kerseymere, and the natural dignity of his carriage, combined "to give the world assurance of" a bishop rather than a clerk. It needed familiarity with his inner life to know how much simpleness of purpose and simplicity of mind and contentment and piety lay hid under a pompous exterior and a phraseology somewhat stilted.

His name was William Hinton, and he dwelt in a small whitewashed cottage which, by virtue of his situation as schoolmaster, he enjoyed rent free. It stood in the heart of a small but well-stocked kitchen garden. His salary was £40 per annum, and on this, with perhaps £5 a year more derived from church fees, he brought up five children in the greatest respectability, all of whom did well in life. They regarded their father with absolute veneration. By the side of the labourer who only knew what he had taught him, or of the farmer who knew less, he was a giant among pygmies--a Triton among minnows.

When Mr. Young went to the village, with the exception of a Bible, a Prayer Book, a random tract or two, and a *Moore's Almanac*, there was scarcely a book to be found in it. The rector kindly allowed his

clerk the run of his well-stocked library. Hinton devoured the books greedily. So receptive and imitative was his intellect that his conversation, his deportment, even his spirit, became imbued with the individuality of the author whose writings he had been studying. After reading Dr. Johnson's works his conversation became sententious and dogmatic. *Lord Chesterfield's Letters* produced an airiness and jauntiness that were quite foreign to his nature. His favourite authors were Jeremy Taylor, Bacon, and Milton. After many months reverential communion with these Goliaths of literature he became pensive and contemplative, and his manner more chastened and severe. The secluded village in which he dwelt had been his birthplace, and there he remained to the day of his death. He knew nothing of the outer world, and the rector found his intercourse with a man so original, fresh, and untainted a real pleasure. He was physically timid, and the account of a voyage across the Channel or a journey by coach filled him with dread. One day he said to Mr. Young, "Am I, reverend sir, to understand that you voluntarily trust your perishable body to the outside of a vehicle, of the soundness of which you know nothing, and suffer yourself to be drawn to and fro by four strange animals, of whose temper you are ignorant, and are willing to be driven by a coachman of whose capacity and sobriety you are uninformed?" On being assured that such was the case, he concluded that "the love of risk and adventure must be a very widely-spread instinct, seeing that so many people are ready to expose themselves to such fearful casualties." He was grateful to think that he had never been exposed to such terrific hazards. What the worthy clerk would have said concerning the risks of motoring somewhat baffles imagination.

When just before the opening of the Great Western Railway line the Company ran a coach through the village from Bath to Swindon, the clerk witnessed with his own eyes the dangers of travelling. The school children were marshalled in line to welcome the coach, bouquets of laurestina and chrysanthema were ready to be bestowed on the passengers, the church bells rang gaily, when after long waiting the cheery notes of the key-bugle sounded the familiar strains of "Sodger Laddie," and the steaming steeds hove in sight, an accident occurred. At a sharp turn just opposite the clerk's house the swaying coach overturned, and the outside passengers were thrown into the midst of his much-prized ash-leaf kidneys. The clerk fled precipitately to the extreme borders of his domain, and afterwards said to the rector, "Ah, sir, was I right in saying I would never enter such a dangerous carriage as a four-horse coach? I assure you I was not the least surprised. It was just what I expected."

When the first railway train passed through the village he was overwhelmed with emotion at the sight. He fell prostrate on the bank as if struck by a thunder-bolt. When he stood up his brain reeled, he was speechless, and stood aghast, unutterable amazement stamped upon his face. In the tone of a Jeremiah he at length gasped out, "Well, sir, what a sight to have seen: but one I never care to see again! How awful! I tremble to think of it! I don't know what to compare it to, unless it be to a messenger despatched from the infernal regions with a commission to spread desolation and destruction over the fair land. How much longer shall knowledge be allowed to go on increasing?"

The rector taught the clerk how to play chess, to

which game he took eagerly, and taught it to the village youths. They played it on half-holidays in winter and became engrossed in it, manufacturing chess-boards out of old book-covers and carving very creditable chessmen out of bits of wood. When he was playing with his rector one evening he lost his queen and at once resigned, saying, "I consider, reverend sir, that chess without a queen is like life without a female."

Hinton knew not a word of Latin, but he had a pedantic pleasure in introducing it whenever he could. Genders were ever a mystery to him, though with the help of a dictionary he would often substitute a Latin for an English word. Thus he used the signatures "Gulielmus Hintoniensis, Rusticus Sacrista," and when writing to Mrs. Young he always addressed her as "Charus Domina." On this lady's return after a long absence, the clerk wrote in large letters, "Gratus, gratus, optatus," and dated his greeting, "Martius quinta, 1842." A funeral notice was usually sent in doggerel.

The following letter was sent to the rector's unmarried sister:

"*Januarius Prima*, 1840.

"CHARUS DOMINA,

"That the humble Sacrista should be still retained on the tablets of your memory is an unexpected pleasure. Your gift, as a criterion of your esteem, will be often looked at with delight, and be carefully preserved, as a memorial of your friendship; and for which I beg to return my sincere thanks. May the meridian sunshine of happiness brighten your days

through the voyage of life; and may your soul be borne on the wings of seraphic angels to the realms of bliss eternal in the world to come is the sincere wish and fervent prayer of Charus Domina, your most obedient, most respectful, most obliged servant,

"GULIELMUS HINTONIENSIS,

"*Rusticus Sacrista*.
"GRATITUDE

"A gift from the virtuous, the fair, and the good,
From the affluent to the humble and low,
Is a favour so great, so obliging and kind,
To acknowledge I scarcely know how.
I fain would express the sensations I feel,
By imploring the blessing of Heaven
May be showered on the lovely, the amiable maid,
Who this gift to Sacrista has given.
May the choicest of husbands, the best of his kind,
Be hers by the appointment of Heaven!
And may sweet smiling infants as pledges of love
To crown her connubium be given."

The following is a characteristic note of this worthy clerk, which differs somewhat from the notices usually sent to vicars as reminders of approaching

weddings:

"REV. SIR,

"I hope it has not escaped your memory that the young couple at Clack are hoping to offer incense at the shrine of Venus this morning at the hour of ten. I anticipate the bridegrooms's anxiety.

"RUSTICUS SACRISTA."

He was somewhat curious on the subject of fashionable ladies' dresses, and once asked the rector "in what guise feminine respectability usually appeared at an evening party?" When a low dress was described to him, he blushed and shivered and exclaimed, "Then methinks, sir, there must be revelations of much which modesty would gladly veil." He was terribly overcome on one occasion when he met in the rector's drawing-room one evening some ladies who were attired, as any other gentlewomen would be, in low gowns.

William Hinton was, in spite of his air of importance and his inflated phraseology, a simple, single-minded, humble soul. When the rector visited him on his death-bed, he greeted Mr. Young with as much serenity of manner as if he had been only going on a journey to a far country for which he had long been preparing. "Well, reverend and dear sir. Here we are, you see! come to the nightcap scene at last! Doubtless you can discern that I am dying. I am not afraid to die. I wish your prayers.... I say I am not afraid to die, and you know why. Because I know in whom I have believed; and I am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day." A little later he said, "Thanks,

reverend sir! Thanks for much goodwill! Thanks for much happy intercourse! For nearly seven years we have been friends here. I trust we shall be still better friends hereafter. I shall not see you again on this side Jordan. I fear not to cross over. Good-bye. My Joshua beckons me. The Promised Land is in sight."

This worthy and much-mourned clerk was buried on 5 July, 1843.

CHAPTER XIX

THE CLERK AND THE LAW

The parish clerk is so important a person that divers laws have been framed relating to his office. His appointment, his rights, his dismissal are so closely regulated by law that incumbents and churchwardens have to be very careful lest they in any way transgress the legal enactments and judgments of the courts. It is not an easy matter to dismiss an undesirable clerk: it is almost as difficult as to disturb the parson's freehold; and unless the clerk be found guilty of grievous faults, he may laugh to scorn the malice of his enemies and retain his office while life lasts.

It may be useful, therefore, to devote a chapter to the

laws relating to parish clerks--a chapter which some of my readers who have no liking for legal technicalities can well afford to skip.

As regards his qualifications the clerk must be at least twenty years of age, and known to the parson as a man of honest conversation, and sufficient for his reading, writing, and for his competent skill in singing, "if it may be [85]." The visitation articles of the seventeenth century frequently inquire whether the clerk be of the age of twenty years at least.

[85] Canon 91 (1603).

The method of his appointment has caused much disputing. With whom does the appointment rest? In former times the parish clerk was always nominated by the incumbent both by common law and the custom of the realm. This is borne out by the constitution of Archbishop Boniface and the 91st Canon, which states that "No parish clerk upon any vacation shall be chosen within the city of London or elsewhere, but by the parson or vicar: or where there is no parson or vicar, by the minister of that place for the time being; which choice shall be signified by the said minister, vicar or parson, to the parishioners the next Sunday following, in the time of Divine Service."

But this arrangement has often been the subject of dispute between the parson and his flock as to the right of the former to appoint the clerk. In pre-Reformation times there was a diversity of practice, some parishioners claiming the right to elect the clerk, as they provided the offerings by which he lived. A terrible scene occurred in the fourteenth century at one church. The parishioners appointed a

clerk, and the rector selected another. The rector was celebrating Mass, assisted by his clerk, when the people's candidate approached the altar and nearly murdered his rival, so that blood was shed in the sanctuary.

Custom in many churches sanctioned the right of the parishioners, who sometimes neglected to exercise it, and the choice of clerk was left to the vicar. The visitations in the time of Elizabeth show that the people were expected to appoint to the office, but the episcopal inquiries also demonstrate that the parson or vicar could exercise a veto, and that no one could be chosen without his goodwill and consent.

The canon of 1603 was an attempt to change this variety of usage, but such is the force of custom that many decisions of the spiritual courts have been against the canon and in favour of accustomed usage when such could be proved. It was so in the case of *Cundict* v. *Plomer* (8 Jac. I) [86], and in *Jermyn's Case* (21 Jac. I).

> [86] *Ecclesiastical Law*, Sir R. Phillimore, p. 1901.

At the present time such disputes with regard to the appointment of clerks are unlikely to arise. They are usually elected to their office by the vestry, and the person recommended by the vicar is generally appointed. Indeed, by the Act 7 & 8 Victoria, c. 49, "for better regulating the office of Lecturers and Parish Clerks," it is provided that when the appointment is by others than the parson, it is to be subject to the approval of the parson. Owing to the difficulty of dismissing a clerk, to which I shall

presently refer, it is not unusual to appoint a gentleman or farmer to the office, and to nominate a deputy to discharge the actual duties. If we may look forward to a revival of the office and to a restoration of its ancient dignity and importance, it might be possible for the more highly educated man to perform the chief functions, the reading the lessons and epistle, serving at the altar, and other like duties, while his deputy could perform the more menial functions, opening the church, ringing the bell, digging graves, if there be no sexton, and the like.

It is not absolutely necessary that the clerk, after having been chosen and appointed, should be licensed by the ordinary, but this is not unusual; and when licensed he is sworn to obey the incumbent of the parish [87].

[87] *Ibid.*, 1902.

We have recorded some of the perquisites, fees and wages, which the clerk of ancient times was accustomed to receive when he had been duly appointed. No longer does he receive accustomed alms by reason of his office of *aquæbajalus*. No longer does he derive profit from bearing the holy loaf; and the cakes and eggs at Easter, and certain sheaves at harvest-tide, are perquisites of the past.

The following were the accustomed wages of the clerk at Rempstone in the year 1629 [88]:

[88] *The Clerks' Book*, Dr. Wickham Legg, lv.

"22nd November, 1629.

"The wages of the Clarke of the

> Parish Church of Rempstone. At Easter yearely he is to have of every Husbandman one pennie for every yard land he hath in occupation. And of every Cottager two pence.
>
> "Furthermore he is to have for every yard land one peche of Barley of the Husbandman yearely.
>
> "Egges at Easter by Courtesie.
>
> "For every marriage two pence. And at the churching of a woman his dinner.
>
> "The said Barley is to be payed between Christmasse and the Feast of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary."

Clerk's Ales have vanished, too, together with the cakes and eggs, but his fees remain, and marriage bells and funeral knells, christenings and churchings bring to him the accustomed dues and offerings. Tables of Fees hang in most churches. It is important to have them in order that no dispute may arise. The following table appears in the parish books of Salehurst, Sussex, and is curious and interesting:

> "April 18, 1597.
>
> "Memorandum that the duties for Churchinge of women in the parishe of Salehurst is unto the minister ix d. 0 b. and unto the Clarke ij d.

"Item the due unto the minister for a marriadge is xxj d. And unto the Clarke ij d. the Banes, and iiij d. the marriadge.

"Item due for burialls as followeth
To the Minister in the Chancell . . xiii s. iiij d.
To the Clarke in the Chancell . . vi s. viiij d.
To the Parish in the Church . . . vi s. viii d.
To the Clarke in the Church . . . v s. o d.
To the Clarke in the churchyard for great coffins . . . . . ii s. vi d.
For great Corses uncoffined . . . ii s. o d.
For Chrisomers and such like coffined . i s. iiii d.
And uncoffined . . . . . xij d.
For tolling the passing bell and houre . i s.
For ringing the sermon bell an houre . i s. 0 d.
To the Clarke for carrying the beere . iiij d.
If it be fetched . . . . . ij d.

"Item for funerals the Minister is to have the mourning pullpit Cloth and the Clarke the herst Cloth.

> "Item the Minister hathe ever chosen the parishe Clarke and one of the Churchwardens and bothe the Sydemen.
>
> "Item if they bring a beere or poles with the corps the Clarke is to have them.
>
> "If any Corps goe out of the parish they are to pay double dutyes and to have leave.
>
> "If any Corps come out of another parish to be buryed here, they are to pay double dutyes besides breakinge the ground; which is xiij s. 4 d. in the church, and vi s. viii d. in the churchyard.
>
> "For marryage by licence double fees both to the Minister and Clarke [89]."
>
> [89] *Sussex Archæological Collections*, 1873, vol. xxv. p. 154.

In addition to the fees to which the clerk is entitled by long-established custom, he receives wages, which he can recover by law if he be unjustly deprived of them. Churchwardens who in the old days neglected to levy a church rate in order to pay the expenses of the parish and the salary of the clerk, have been compelled by law to do so, in order to satisfy the clerk's claims.

The wages which he received varied considerably.

The churchwardens' accounts reveal the amounts paid the holders of the office at different periods. At St. Mary's, Reading, there are the items in 1557:

> "Imprimis the Rent of the Clerke's howse . . . . . vi s. viii d."
>
> "Paid to Marshall (the clerk) for parcell of his wages that he was unpaide . . v s."

In 1561 the clerk's wages were 40 s., in 1586 only 20 s. At St. Giles's, Reading, in 1520, he received 26 s. 8 d., as the following entry shows:

> "Paid to Harry Water Clerk for his wage for a yere ended at thannacon (the Annunciation) of Our Lady. xxvi s. viii."

The clerk at St. Lawrence, Reading, received 20 s. for his services in 1547. Owing to the decrease in the value of money the wages gradually rose in town churches, but in the eighteenth century in many country places 10 s. was deemed sufficient. The sum of £10 is not an unusual wage at the present time for a village clerk.

The dismissal of a parish clerk was a somewhat difficult and dangerous task. In the eyes of the law he is no menial servant--no labourer who can be discharged if he fail to please his master. The law regards him as an officer for life, and one who has a freehold in his place. Sixty years ago no ecclesiastical court could deprive him of his office, but he could be

censured for his faults and misdemeanours, though not discharged. Several cases have appeared in the law courts which have decided that as long as a clerk behaves himself well, he has a good right and title to continue in his office. Thus in *Rex* v. *Erasmus Warren* (16 Geo. III) it was shown that the clerk became bankrupt, had been guilty of many omissions in his office, was actually in prison at the time of his amoval, and had appointed a deputy who was totally unfit for the office. Against which it was insisted that the office of parish clerk was a temporal office during life, that the parson could not remove him, and that he had a right to appoint a deputy. One of the judges stated that though the minister might have power of removing the clerk on a good and sufficient cause, he could never be the sole judge and remove him at pleasure, without being subject to the control of the court. No misbehaviour of consequence was proved against him, and the clerk was restored to his office.

In a more recent case the clerk had conducted himself on several occasions by designedly irreverent and ridiculous behaviour in his performance of his duty. He had appeared in church drunk, and had indecently disturbed the congregation during the administration of Holy Communion. He had been repeatedly reproved by the vicar, and finally removed from his office. But the court decided that because the clerk had not been summoned to answer for his conduct before his removal, a mandamus should be issued for his restoration to his office [90].

[90] *Ecclesiastical Law*, Sir R. Phillimore, p. 1907.

No deputy clerk when removed can claim to be

restored. It will be gathered, therefore, that an incumbent is compelled by law to restore a clerk removed by him without just cause, that the justice of the cause is not determined in the law courts by an *ex-parte* statement of the incumbent, and that an accused clerk must have an opportunity of answering the charges made against him. If a man performs the duties of the office for one year he gains a settlement, and cannot afterwards be removed without just cause.

An important Act was passed in 1844, to which I have already referred, for the better regulating the office of lecturers and parish clerks. Sections 5 and 6 of this Act bear directly on the method of removal of a clerk who may be guilty of neglect or misbehaviour. I will endeavour to divest the wording of the Act from legal technicalities, and write it in "plain English."

If a complaint is made to the archdeacon, or other ordinary, with regard to the misconduct of a clerk, stating that he is an unfit and improper person to hold that office, the archdeacon may summon the clerk and call witnesses who shall be able to give evidence or information with regard to the charges made. He can examine these witnesses upon oath, and hear and determine the truth of the accusations which have been made against the clerk. If he should find these charges proved he may suspend or remove the offender from his office, and give a certificate under his hand and seal to the incumbent, declaring the office vacant, which certificate should be affixed to the door of the church. Then another person may be elected or appointed to the vacant office: "Provided always, that the exercise of such office by a sufficient deputy who shall duly and faithfully

perform the duties thereof, and in all respects well and properly demean himself, shall not be deemed a wilful neglect of his office on the part of such church clerk, chapel clerk, or parish clerk, so as to render him liable, for such cause alone, to be suspended or removed therefrom."

A special section of the Act deals with such possessions as clerks' houses, buildings, lands or premises, held by a clerk by virtue of his office. If, when deprived of his office, he should refuse to give up such buildings or possessions, the matter must be brought before the bishop of the diocese, who shall summon the clerk to appear before him. If he fail to appear, or if the bishop should decide against him, the bishop shall grant a certificate of the facts to the person or persons entitled to the possession of the land or premises, who may thereupon go before a justice of the peace. The magistrate shall then issue his warrant to the constables to expel the clerk from the premises, and to hand them over to the rightful owners, the cost of executing the warrant being levied upon the goods and chattels of the expelled clerk. If this cost should be disputed, it shall be determined by the magistrate. Happily few cases arise, but perhaps it is well to know the procedure which the law lays down for the carrying out of such troublesome matters.

The law also takes cognizance of the humbler office of sexton, the duties of which are usually combined in country places with those of the parish clerk. The sexton is, of course, the sacristan, the keeper of the holy things relating to divine worship, and seems to correspond with the *ostarius* in the Roman Church. His duties consist in the care of the church, the

vestments and vessels, in keeping the church clean, in ringing the bells, in opening and closing the doors for divine service, and to these the task of digging graves and the care of the churchyard are also added. He is appointed by the churchwardens if his duties be confined to the church, but if he is employed in the churchyard the appointment is vested in the rector. If his duties embrace the care of both church and churchyard, he should be appointed by the churchwardens and incumbent jointly [91].

[91] *Ecclesiastical Law*, p. 1914.

Many cases have come before the law courts relating to sextons and their election and appointment. He does not usually hold the same fixity of tenure as the parish clerk, he being a servant of the parish rather than an officer or one that has a freehold in his place; but in some cases a sexton has determined his right to hold the office for life, and gained a mandamus from the court to be restored to his position after having been removed by the churchwardens.

The law has also decided that women may be appointed sextons.

CHAPTER XX

RECOLLECTIONS OF OLD CLERKS AND THEIR WAYS

Personal recollections of the manners and curious ways of old village clerks are valuable, and several writers have kindly favoured me with the descriptions of these quaint personages, who were well known to them in the days of their youth.

The clerk of a Midland village was an old man who combined with his sacred functions the secular calling of the keeper of the village inn. He was very deaf, and consequently spoke in a loud, harsh voice, and scraps of conversation which were heard in the squire's high square box pew occasioned much amusement among the squire's sons. The Rev. W.V. Vickers records the following incidents:

It was "Sacrament Sunday," and part of the clerk's duty was to prepare the Elements in the vestry, which was under the western tower. Apparently the wine was not forthcoming when wanted, and we heard the following stage-aside in broad Staffordshire: "Weir's the bottle? Oh! 'ere it is, under the teeble (table) all the whoile."

Another part of his duty was to sing in the choir, for which purpose he used to leave the lower deck of the three-decker and hobble with his heavy oak stick to the chancel for the canticles and hymns, and having swelled the volume of praise, hobble back again, a pause being made for his journey both to and fro. Not only did he sing in the choir but he gave out the hymns. This he did in a peculiar sing-song voice with up-and-down cadences: "Let us sing (low) to the

praise (high) and glory (low) of God (high) the hundredth (low) psalm (high)." Very much the same intonation accompanied his reading of the alternate verses of the Psalms.

On one occasion a locum tenens, who officiated for a few weeks, was *stone* deaf. Hence a difficulty arose in his knowing when our worthy, and the congregation, had finished each response or verse. This the clerk got over by keeping one hand well forward upon his book and raising the fingers as he came to the close. This was the signal to the deaf man above him that it was *his* turn! The old man, by half sitting upon a table in the belfry, could chime the four bells. It was his habit, instead of going by his watch, to look out for the first appearance of my father's carriage (an old-fashioned "britska," I believe it was called, with yellow body and wheels and large black hood, and so very conspicuous) at a certain part of the road, and then, and not till then, commence chiming. It was a compliment to my father's punctuality; but what happened when, by chance, he failed to attend church I know not--but such occasions were rare [92].

[92] In olden days it seems to have been the usual practice in many churches to delay service until the advent of the squire. Every one knows the old story of how, through some inadvertence, the minister had not looked out to see that the great man was in his accustomed pew. He began, "When the wicked man--" The parish clerk tugged him by his coat, saying, "Please, sir, he hasn't come yet!" As to whether the clergyman

> took the hint and waited for "the wicked man" history sayeth not. Another clerk told a young deacon, who was impatient to begin the service, "You must wait a bit, sir, we ain't ready." He then clambered on the Communion table, and peered through the east window, which commanded a view of the door in the wall of the squire's garden. "Come down!" shouted the curate. "I can see best where I be," replied the imperturbable clerk; "I'm watching the garden door. Here she be, and the squire." Whereupon he clambered down again, and without much further delay the service proceeded.

Our *parish* church we seldom attended, for the simple reason that the aged vicar was scarcely audible; but there the clerk, after robing the vicar, mounted to the gallery above the vestry, where, taking a front seat, he watched for the exit of the vicar (whose habit it was to wait for the young men, who also waited in the church porch for him to begin the service!), and then, taking his seat at the organ, commenced the voluntary. It was his duty also to give out the hymns. I have known him play an eight-line tune to a four-line verse (or psalm--we used Tate and Brady), repeating the words of each verse twice!

The organ produced the most curious sounds. In course of time the mice got into it, and the churchwardens, of whom the clerk was one, approached the vicar with the information, at the

same time venturing a hint that the organ was quite worn out and that a harmonium would be more acceptable to the congregation than the present music. His reply was that a harmonium was not a sufficiently sacred instrument, and added, "Let a mouse-trap be set at once." #/

Robert Dicker, quondam cabinet-maker in the town of Crediton, Devon, reigned for many years as parish clerk to the, at one time, collegiate church of the same town. He appears to have fulfilled his office satisfactorily up to about 1870, when his mind became somewhat feeble. Nevertheless, no desire was apparent to shorten the days of his office, as he was regular in his attendance and musically inclined; but when he began to play pranks upon the vicar it became necessary to consider the advisability of finding a substitute who should do the work and receive half the pay. One of his escapades was to stand up in the middle of service and call the vicar a liar; at another time he announced that a wedding was to take place on a certain day. The vicar, therefore, attended and waited for an hour, when the clerk affirmed that he must have dreamed it! Dicker was given to the study of astronomy, and it is related that he once gave a lecture on this subject in the Public Rooms. There is close to the town a small park in memory of one of the Duller family. A man one night was much alarmed when walking therein to discover a bright light in one of the trees, and, later, to hear the voice of the worthy clerk, who addressed him in these words: "Fear not, my friend, and do not be affrighted. I am Robert Dicker, clerk of the parish. I am examining the stars." Another account alleges that he affirmed himself to be "counting the stars." Whichever account is the true one, it will be gathered that he was already "far gone."

Another of his achievements was the conversion of a barrel organ, purchased from a neighbouring church, into a manual, obtaining the wind therefor by a pedal arrangement which worked a large wheel attached to a crank working the bellows. On all great festivals and especially on Christmas Day he was wont to rouse the neighbourhood as early as three and four o'clock, remarking of the ungrateful, complaining neighbours that they had no heart for music or religion.

The wheel mentioned above was part of one of his tricycle schemes. His first attempt in cycle-making resulted in the construction of a bicycle the wheels of which resembled the top of a round deal table; this soon came to grief. His second endeavour was more successful and became a tricycle, the wheels of which were made of wrought iron and the base of a triangular shape. Upon the large end he placed an arm-chair, averring that it would be useful to rest in whenever he should grow weary! Then, making another attempt, he succeeded in turning out (being aided by another person) a very respectable and useful tricycle upon which he made many journeys to Barnstaple and elsewhere.

However, just as an end comes to everything that is mortal, so did an end come to our friend the clerk; for, as so many stories finish, he died in a good old age, and his substitute reigned in his stead.

The following reminiscences of a parish clerk were sent by the Rev. Augustus G. Legge, who has since died.

It is reported of an enthusiastic archæologian that he blessed the day of the Commonwealth because, he

said, if Cromwell and all his destructive followers had never lived, there would have been no ruins in the country to repay the antiquary's researches. And the converse of this is true of a race of men who before long will be "improved" off the face of the earth, if the restoration of our parish churches is to go on at the present rate. I allude to the old parish clerks of our boy-hood days. Who does not remember their quaint figures and quainter, though somewhat irreverent, manner of leading the responses of the congregation? It is well indeed that our churches, sadly given over to the laxity and carelessness of a bygone age, should be renovated and beautified, the tone of the services raised, and the "bray" of the old clerks, unsuited to the devotional feelings of a more enlightened day, silenced, but still a shade of regret will be mingled with their dismissal, if only for the sake of the large stock of amusing anecdotes which their names recall.

My earliest recollections are connected with old Russell [93], my father's clerk. He was a little man but possessed of a consequential manner sufficient for a giant. A shoemaker by trade, his real element was in the church. His conversation was embellished by high-flown grandiloquence, and he invariably walked upon the heels of his boots. This latter peculiarity, as may well be imagined, was the cause of a most comical effect whenever he had occasion to leave his seat and clatter down the aisle of the church. How often when a boy did I make my old nurse's sides shake with laughter by imitating old Russell's walk! His manner of reading the responses in the service can only be compared to a kind of bellow--as my father used to say, "he bellowed like a calf"--and his rendering of parts of it was calculated to raise a smile upon the lips of the most devout. The

following are a few instances of his perversions of the text. "Leviathan" under his quaint manipulation became "leather thing," his trade of shoemaker helping him, no doubt, to his interpretation. Whether he had ever attended a fish-dinner at Greenwich and his mind had thus become impressed with the number and variety of the inhabitants of the deep, history does not record, but, be that as it may, "Bring hither the tabret" was invariably read as "Bring hither the turbot." "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego" did service for "Ananias, Azarias, and Misael" in the "Benedicite," and "Destructions are come to a perpetual end" was transmogrified into "*parental* end" in the ninth Psalm. My father once took the trouble to point out and try to correct some of his inaccuracies, but he never attempted it again. Old Russell listened attentively and respectfully, but when the lecture was over he dismissed the subject with a superior shake of the head and the disdainful remark, "Well, sir, I have heerd tell of people who think with you." Never a bit though did he make any change in his own peculiar rendering of the Bible and Book of Common Prayer.

> [93] Old Russell, for many years clerk of the parish of East Lavant in the county of Sussex.

There was one occasion on which he especially distinguished himself, and I shall never forget it. A farmyard of six outbuildings abutted upon the church burial ground, and it was but natural that all the fowls should stray into it to feed and enjoy themselves in the grass. Amongst these was a goodly flock of guinea-fowls, which oftentimes no little disturbed the congregation by their peculiar cry of "Come back! come back! come back!" One Sunday

the climax of annoyance was reached when the whole flock gathered around the west door just as my father was beginning to read the first lesson. His voice, never at any time very strong, was completely drowned. Whereupon old Russell hastily left his seat, book in hand, and clattering as usual on his heels down the aisle disappeared through the door on vengeance bent. The discomfiture of the offending fowls was instantly apparent by the change in their cry to one more piercing still as they fled away in terror. Then all was still, and back comes old Russell, a gleam of triumph on his face and somewhat out of breath, but nevertheless able without much difficulty to take up the responses in the canticle which followed the lesson. Scarcely, however, had the congregation resumed their seats for the reading of the second lesson when the offending flock again gathered round the west door, and again, as if in defiant derision of Russell, raised their mocking cry of "Come back! come back! come back!" And back accordingly he went clatter, clatter down the aisle, a stern resolution flashing from his eye, and causing the little boys as he passed to quail before him. Now it so happened that the lesson was a short one, and, moreover, Russell took more time, making a farther excursion into the churchyard than before, in order if possible to be rid entirely of the noisy intruders. Just as he returned to the church door, this time completely breathless, the first verse of the canticle which followed was being read, but Russell was equal to the occasion. All breathless as he was, without a moment's hesitation, he opened his book at the place and bellowed forth the responses as he proceeded up the church to his seat. The scene may be imagined, but scarcely described: Russell's quaint little figure, the broad-rimmed spectacles on his

nose, the ponderous book in his hands, the clatter of his heels, the choking gasps with which he bellowed out the words as he laboured for breath, and finally the sudden disappearance of the congregation beneath the shelter of their high pews with a view to giving vent to their feelings unobserved--all this requires to have been witnessed to be fully appreciated.

It chanced one Sunday that a parishioner coming into church after the service had begun omitted to close the door, causing thereby an unseemly draught. My father directed Russell to shut it. Accordingly, book in hand and with a thumb between the leaves to keep the place, he sallied forth. But, alas! in shutting the door the thumb fell out and the place was lost, and after floundering about awhile to find, if possible, the proper response, he at length made known to the congregation the misfortune which had befallen him by exclaiming aloud, "I've lost my place or *summut*."

A very amusing incident once took place at a baptism. The service proceeded with due decorum and regularity till my father demanded of the godfather the child's name. The answer was so indistinctly given that he had to repeat the question more than once, and even then the name remained a mystery. All he could make out was something which sounded like "Harmun," the godfather indignantly asserting the while that it was a "Scriptur" name. In his perplexity my father turned to Russell with the query: "Clerk, do you know what the name is?" "No, sir. I'm sure I don't know, unless it be he at the end of the prayer," meaning "Amen." The result was that the child was otherwise christened, and after the ceremony was over my father, placing a Bible in the

godfather's hands, requested him to find the "Scriptur" name, as he called it, when, having turned over the leaves for some time, he drew his attention to *wicked Haman*. The child's escape, therefore, was most fortunate. Old Russell has now slept with his fathers for many years, and the few stories which I have related about him do not by any means exhaust the list of his oddities. Many of the parishioners to this day, no doubt, will call to mind the quaint way in which, if he thought any one was misbehaving himself in church, he would rise slowly from his seat with such majesty as his diminutive stature could command, and shading his spectacles with his hand, gaze sternly in the offending quarter; how on a certain Communion Sunday he forgot the wine to be used in the sacred office, and when my father directed his attention to the omission, after sundry dives under the altar-cloth he at last produced a common rush basket, and from it a black bottle; how on another Sunday, being desirous to free the church from smoke which had escaped from a refractory stove, he deliberately mounted upon the altar and remained standing there while he opened a small lattice in the east window. All these circumstances will, no doubt, be recalled by some one or other in the parish. But, gentle reader, be not overharsh in passing judgment upon him. I verily believe that he had no more desire to be irreverent than you or I have. The fault lay rather in the religious coldness and carelessness of those days than in him. He was liked and respected by every one as a harmless, inoffensive, good-hearted old fellow, and I cannot better close this brief account of some of his peculiarities than by saying--as I do with all my heart--Peace to his ashes!

Mr. Legge's baptismal story reminds me of a friend who was christening the child of a gipsy, when the name given was "Neptin." This puzzled him sorely, but suddenly recollecting that he had baptized another gipsy child "Britannia," without any hesitation he at once named the infant "Neptune." Mr. Eagles was once puzzled when the sponsor gave the name "Acts." "'Acts!' said I. 'What do you mean?' Thinks I to myself, I will *ax* the clerk to spell it. He did: A-C-T-S. So Acts was the babe, and will be while in this life, and will be doubly, trebly so registered if ever he marries or dies. Afterwards, in the vestry, I asked the good woman what made her choose such a name. Her answer *verbatim*: 'Why, sir, we be religious people; we've got your on 'em already, and they be caal'd Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and so my husband thought we'd compliment the apostles a bit.'"

Mr. Legge adds the following stories:

My first curacy was in Norfolk in the year 1858, a period when the old style of parish clerk had not disappeared. On one occasion I was asked by a friend in a neighbouring parish to take a funeral service for him. On arriving at the church I was received by a very eccentric clerk. It seemed as if his legs were hung upon wires, and before the service began he danced about the church in a most peculiar and laughable manner, and in addition to this he had a hideous squint, one eye looking north and the other south. The service proceeded with due decorum until we arrived at the grave, when those who were preparing to lower the coffin in it discovered that it had not been dug large enough to receive it. This of course created a very awkward pause while it was made larger, and the chief mourner utilised it by

gently remonstrating with the clerk for his carelessness. In reply he gave a solemn shake of his head, cast one eye into the grave and the other at the chief mourner, and merely remarked, "Putty (pretty) nigh though," meaning that the offence after all was not so very great, as he had almost accomplished his task. Obliged to keep my countenance, I had, as may be imagined, some difficulty.

A very amusing incident once took place when I had a couple before me to be married. All went well until I asked the question, "Who giveth this woman to be married to this man?" when an individual stepped forward, and snatching the ring out of the bride-groom's hand, began placing it on a finger of the bride. As all was confusion I signed to the old clerk to put matters straight. Attired in a brown coat and leather gaiters, with spectacles on his nose, and a large Prayer Book in his hands, he came shuffling forward from the background, exclaiming out loud, "Bless me, bless me! never knew such a thing happen afore in all my life!" The service was completed without any further interruption, but again I had a sore difficulty in keeping my countenance.

Many years ago ecclesiastical matters in Norfolk were in a very slack state--rectors and vicars lived away from their parishes, subscribing amongst them to pay the salary of a curate to undertake the church services. As his duties were consequently manifold some parishes were without his presence on Sunday for a month and sometimes longer. The parish clerk would stand outside the church and watch for the coming parson, and if he saw him in the distance would immediately begin to toll the bell; if not, the parish was without a service on that day.

It happened on one of these monthly occasions that on the arrival of the parson at the church he was met by the clerk at the door, who, pulling his forelock, addressed him as follows: "Sir, do yew mind a prachin in the readin' desk to-day?" "Yes," was the reply; "the pulpit is the proper place." "Well, sir, you see we fare to have an old guse a-sittin' in the pulpit. She'll be arf her eggs to-morrow; 'twould be a shame to take her arf to-day."

The pulpit was considered as convenient a place as any for the "old guse" to hatch her young in.

Canon Venables contributes the following:

The first parish clerk I can in the least degree remember was certainly entitled to be regarded as a "character," albeit not in all moral respects what would be called a moral character. Shrewd, clever, and better informed than the inhabitants of his little village of some eighty folk, he was not "looked up to," but was regarded with suspicion, and, in short, was not popular, while treated with a certain amount of deference, being a man of some knowledge and ability. The clergyman was a man of excellent character, learned, a fluent *ex-tempore* preacher, and one who liked the services to be nicely conducted. He came over every Sunday and ministered two services. In those days the only organ was a good long pitch-pipe constructed principally of wood and, I imagine, about twelve inches in length. But upon the parish clerk devolved the onerous (and it may be added in this case sonorous) duty of starting the hymn and the singing. In those days few could read, and the method was adopted (and I know successfully adopted a few years later) of announcing two lines of the verse to be sung, and sometimes the

whole verse. But Mr. W.M. was unpopular, and people did not always manifest a willingness to sing with him.

At last a crisis came. The hymn and psalm were announced. The pitch-pipe rightly adjusted gave the proper keynote, and the clerk essayed to sing. But from some cause matters were not harmonious and none attempted to help the clerk.

With a scowl not worthy of a saint, the offended official turned round upon the congregation and closed all further attempts at psalm-singing by stating clearly and distinctly, "I shan't sing if nobody don't foller." This man was deposed ere long, and deservedly, if village suspicions were truthful.

After which, I think, he usually came just inside the church once every Sunday, but never to get further than to take a seat close to the door. He died at a great age. Two or three of his successors were worthy men. One of them would carefully recite the Psalms for the coming Sunday within church or elsewhere during the week, and he read with proper feeling and good sense.

Another of the same little parish, well up in his Bible, once helped the very excellent clergyman at a baptism in a critical moment. "Name this child." "Zulphur." This was not a correct name. Another effort, "Sulphur." The clergyman was in difficulty. The clerk was equal to the occasion, for the parson was well up in his Bible too.

"Leah's handmaid," suggested the clerk. "Zilpah, I baptize thee," said the priest, and all was well.

In that church the few farmers who met to levy a

poor-rate and do other parochial work insisted on doing so within the chancel rails, using the holy table as the writing-desk, and the assigned reason for so doing was that, being apt to quarrel and dispute over parish matters, there would be no danger *at such a place* as this of using profane language. All in the diocese of Oxford.

It was in the twenties that I must have seen old P.W. (the parish clerk) and two other men in the desk singing to "Hanover," with a certain apparent self-complacency in nice smock-frocks, "My soul, praise the Lord, speak good of His Name," etc. The little congregation listened with seeming contentment, and it is worth recording that the parson always preached in the surplice. I suppose Pusey was a boy at that time, but the custom in this church was not a novelty, whether right or wrong.

It was not the clerk's fault that the hour of service was hastened by some seventy minutes one afternoon, so that one or two invariably late worshippers were astounded to be driven backwards from the church by the congregation returning from service. But so it was. The really well-meaning kind-hearted parson was withal a keen sportsman and a worthy gentleman, and with his "long dogs" and man was on his horse and away for Illsley Downs race course to come off next day, and his dogs (they won) must not be fatigued. Old P.W., the clerk, reached a good age, an inoffensive man.

I was rather interested when residing in my parish in grand old Yorkshire to observe two steady-looking and rather elderly men, each aided by a strong walking-stick, coming to church with praiseworthy regularity and reverence. I found, on making their

acquaintance, that they were brothers who had recently come into the parish, natives of "the Peak," or of the locality near the Peak, which was not many miles distant from my parish.

Since I heard from their lips the story which I am about to relate, I have heard it told, *mutatis mutandis*, as happening in sundry other parishes, until one rather doubts the genuineness of the record at all. But as they recounted it it ran as follows, and I am sure they believed what they told me.

Some malicious person or persons unknown entered the church, and having seized the rather large typed Prayer Book used by the clerk, who was somewhat advanced in years, they observed that the words "the righteous shall flourish like" were the last words at the bottom of the page, whereupon they altered the next words on the top of the following page, and which were "the palm tree," into "a green bay horse"; and, the change being carefully made, the result on the Sunday following was that the well-meaning clerk, studiously uttering each word of his Prayer Book, found himself declaring very erroneous doctrine. "Hulloa," cried he; "I must hearken back. This'll never do." Now I cannot call to mind the name of the parish. It was not Chapel-in-the-Frith. Was it Mottram-in-Longdendale? I really cannot remember. But these two old men asserted that thenceforward it became a saying, "I must hearken back, like the clerk of--."

I recollect preaching one weekday night (and people would crowd the churches on weekday evenings fifty years ago far more readily than they do now) at some wild place in Lancashire or Yorkshire, I think Lancashire. I was taken to see and stand upon a

stepping stone outside the church, and close against the south wall of the sacred edifice, upon which almost every Sunday the clerk, as the people were leaving church, ascended and in a loud voice announced any matters concerning the parish which it appeared desirable to proclaim. In this way any intended sales were made known, the loss of sheep or cattle on the moors was announced, and almost anything appertaining to the secular welfare of the parishioners was made public. I do not state this to criticise it. It was in some degree a recognition of the charity which ought to realise the sympathy in each other's welfare which we ought all to display. It was in those primitive times and localities a specimen of the simplicity and well-meant interest in the welfare of the neighbour as well as of oneself, although perhaps the secular sometimes did much to extinguish the spiritual.



Sunday Morning
From a photograph by Messrs. W.A. Mansell and Co

Few people now realise what a business it was to light up a church, say, eighty years ago. But the

worthy old clerk, in a wig bestowed on him by the pious and aged patron, is hastening to illuminate his church with old-fashioned candles, in which he is aided not a little by his faithful wife, who, like Abraham's wife, regarded her husband as her lord and responded to the name of Sarah. The good old man--and he was a good old man--was perhaps a little bit "flustered and flurried," for the folk were gathering within the sacred temple, and W.L. was anxious to complete his task of lighting the loft, or gallery. "I say, Sally, hand us up a little taste of candle," cried her lord, and Sarah obeyed, and the illumination was soon complete.

But, really, few men "gave out" or announced a hymn with truer and more touching and devout feeling than did that old clerk. I am one of those who do not think that all the changes in the ministration of Church services are, after experience had, desirable. I think that in many instances the lay clerk ought to have been instructed in the performance of his duties, to the profit of all concerned. And I deem that this proceeding would have been a far wiser proceeding than any substitution of the man or his function. There is ancient authority for a clerk or clerks. It is wise to secure work to be attended to in the functions of divine service for as many laymen as possible, consistent with principle and propriety. W.L. was an old man when I saw him, but I can hear him now as with a pathos quite touching and teaching, because done so simply and naturally, he announced, singing:

"Salvation, what a glorious theme,
  How suited to our need.
The grace that rescues fallen man
  Is wonderful indeed."

And though he pronounced the last word but one as if spelt "woonderful," I venture to say that the "giving out" of that verse by that aged clerk with his venerable wig and with a voice trembling a little by age, but more by natural emotion, was preferable to many modern modes of announcing a hymn.

It was common to say "Let us sing, to the praise and glory of God." It is common to be shocked, nowadays, by such an invitation. Are we as reverent now as then? Do we sing praises with understanding better? I think it is not so.

I knew a very respectable man, W.K., a tailor by trade, a well-conducted man, but who felt the importance of his office to an extent that made him nervous, or (what is as bad) made him fancy he was nervous. The church was capacious, and the population over two thousand.

A large three-decker, though the pulpit was at a right angle with the huge prayer-desk and the clerk's citadel below, well stained and varnished, formed an important portion of the furniture of the church, the whole structure, as we were reminded by large letters above the chancel arch, having been "Adorn'd and beautified 1814," the names of the churchwardens being also recorded. This clerk was observed frequently, during the service, to stoop down within his little "pew" as if to imbibe something. He was inquired of as to his strange proceeding, when he frankly stated that he felt the trials of his duties to be so great, that he always fortified himself with a little bottle containing some gin and some water, to which bottle he made frequent appeals during the often rather lengthy services. He had to proclaim the notices of vestry

meetings of all kinds, as well as to give out the hymns; but what astonishes me is that he baptized many infants at their homes instead of the most excellent vicar, when circumstances made it difficult for the really good vicar to attend.

I saw him, one first Sunday in Lent, stand up on the edge of his square box or pew, and conduct a rather long consultation with the vicar, a very spiritually minded, excellent man, upon which we were put through the whole Commination Service which, though appointed for Ash Wednesday, was wholly neglected until it lengthened out the Sunday morning of the first *in* but not *of* Lent, and having nothing to do with the forty days of Lent.

The well-conducted man lived to a good age, and after his death a rather costly stained glass window was erected to his memory under the active influence of a new vicar. When privately engaged in church he wore his usual silk hat, though not approving of any one so behaving.

I recollect, in a large church in a large town, the clerk, arrayed (properly, I think) in a suitable black gown, giving out the hymn, in a tone to be regretted, but where the obvious remedy was not to dethrone the clerk, but rather to have just suggested the propriety of reading the entire verse, as well as of avoiding a tone lugubrious on the occasion.

It was Easter Day, and the hymn quite appropriate, but not so *rendered* as the clerk heavily and drearily announced:

> "The Lord is risen indeed,
> And are the tidings true?"

as if there might exist a doubt about this glorious fact.

Pity that he did not enter into the spirit of the verse and add:

> "Yes! we beheld the Saviour bleed,
> And saw Him rising too."

Within about ten miles nearer to Windsor Castle the clerk of a church in which not a few nobility usually worshipped, was altogether at fault in his "H's," as he exhorted the people to sing, "The Heaster Im with the Allelujer, *h*et the *h*end of *h*every line." Other clerks may have done the same. He did it, I know well.

Throughout the whole of my very imperfect ministry I have sought to practise catechising in church every Sunday afternoon, and very strongly desire to urge the practice of it in every church every Sunday.

It is one of the most difficult parts of the glorious ministry since the time of St. Luke that can engage the attention of the ordained ministers of Christ's Church. It needs to be done well. It ought not to be a very nice, simple sermonette. This, though very beautiful, is not catechising. Perhaps, if at once followed by questions upon the sermonette, it might thus become very useful. But a catechesis in which the catechist simply tells a simple story or gives an amusing anecdote, or when questioning, so puts his inquiries that "yes" and "no" are the listless replies that are drawn forth from the lads and girls, is not interesting or profitable. Whenever I have the opportunity I go to an afternoon catechetical service. Some failed by being made into the time of a small preachment; some because in a few minutes the

catechist easily asked questions and then answered them himself. Others were really magnificent, securing the attention and drawing forth answers admirably. Was it the great bishop Samuel Wilberforce who said, "A boy may preach, but it takes a man to catechise"?

I cannot boast of being a good catechist; but I know that catechising costs me more mental exhaustion (alas! with sad depression under a sense of trial of temper and failure) than any sermon. But I will say to any clergyman, *My dear brother, catechise; try, persevere, keep on. It will not be in vain. But secure an answer*. If need be, become a cross-examining advocate for Christ, and don't give up until you have made the catechumens, by dint of a variety of ways of putting the question, give the answer you desired. You have made them think and call memory into play, and made them feel that they "knew it all the time," if only they had reflected. And you have given them a "power of good."

But what has all this to do with a clerk? Well, I want to tell what made me *try* to be a good catechist, and what makes me, over eighty-three years of age, *still wish* to become such, though the incident must have happened some seventy years ago, for I recollect that on the very Sunday we crossed the Greta my father whispered to me as we were on the bridge that it was the poet Southey who was close to us, as he as well as our little family and a goodly congregation were returning from Crosthwaite Church in the afternoon. For "oncers" were unknown in those times, neither by poets and historians like Southey, nor by travellers such as we were. We had attended morning service. A stranger officiated. His name was *Bush*, and this is important. A family "riddle" impressed the name

upon me. "Why were we all like Moses to-day?" "We had heard the word out of a Bush," was the reply. But at the afternoon service I was deeply impressed. The Rev. M. Bush having read the lessons, came out of the prayer-desk, and to my amazement and great interest catechised the children and others.

I thought to myself that the practice was excellent, and felt that if ever I became a clergyman (of which honour there was very small probability), I would obey the Prayer Book and catechise. Since then I have catechised ten, twenty, fifty young people, and not infrequently five hundred to one thousand, and rarely two to three thousand on a Sunday afternoon, often, however, much exhausted (having to preach in the evening) and dreadfully cast down at my own failure in not catechising better.

Decades rolled on. A lovely effigy of Southey occupied his place in Crosthwaite Church, and I found myself again amidst the enchanting views of and about Derwentwater. The morning was wet, but I resolved to go as soon as it cleared up in order to find "th' ould clerk," and inquire of him touching the catechising of perhaps forty years ago. I was told that he had resigned, that he lived still at no very great distance. I think he was succeeded by his son as clerk. After some trouble I found my aged friend, and told him that very many years ago I was at the church when Southey, the poet, was there, and I wanted to know if the catechising was continued. "There never has been any catechising here," said the worthy old sacristan. "Forgive me, I heard it myself." "I tell thee there never was no catechising here. I lived here all these years, and was clerk for nearly all the time." "I cannot help that," I said; "I am sure there was catechising in your church on a Sunday when I,

a boy, was here." The old Churchman became testy, and my pertinacity made him irate, as he thundered out that "never had there been catechising in that church in all his day." I rose to leave him, telling him that I was very disappointed, but that I was *confident* that I did not invent this story, and, I added, the name of the parson was Bush. "*Bush, Bush, Bush!* Well, there was a clergyman of that name come here four Sundays, many a year ago, when the vicar was from home; and now I come to think of it, he did catechise on the Sunday afternoon. But he is the only man that ever did so here. There's been no catechising in this church, except then." We parted good friends after what I felt to be a most singular interview, far more interesting, I fear, to me than to any who may read this unadorned tale, and especially the many folks who probably but for this I should never have catechised.

But I hope the old clerk of Crosthwaite's declaration will not long be true of any church of the Anglican Communion, "There's been no catechising here." My success as a preacher, or catechist, or parish priest has not been great, but this does not greatly surprise me, while sorrowing that so it has been. But I think it likely that the incident at Crosthwaite Church was a chief cause of my trying to be a catechist, and I conclude by saying to any one in holy orders, or preparing to receive them. Make catechising an important effort in your ministry.

It was a small parish. The vicar was a learned man, and an authority as an antiquary, and a man of high character. On a certain Sunday morning I was detailed to perform all the "duties" of Morning Prayer. Doubtless I was too energetic in my efforts at preaching, for my "action" proved, almost to an

alarming extent, that the huge pulpit cushion had not been "dusted" for a lengthy period. But it was at the very commencement of divine service that the clerk demonstrated his originality in the proper discharge of his duties. "I stands up in yonder corner to ring the bells, and as soon as you be ready you gives me a kind of nod like, and then I leaves off ringing and comes to my place as clerk." Nothing could work better, and the clerk of B----- d and I parted at the close of divine service on very amicable terms.

Mr. F.S. Gill, aged 86, has many recollections of old clerks and their ways. In a parish in Nottinghamshire there was an old clerk who was nearly blind. There were two services on Sunday in summer, and only morning service in winter. The clerk knew the morning Psalms quite well by heart, but not so the evening Psalms. On one occasion when his verse should have been read, he was unable to recollect it. After a pause the clergyman began to read it, when the clerk, who occupied the box below that of the vicar, looked up, saying, "Nay, nay, master, I've got it now."

Another time, when an absent-minded curate omitted the ante-Communion service and appeared in his black gown in the pulpit, the clerk was indignant, and went up to remonstrate. Knocking at the pulpit door and no notice being taken of him, he proceeded to pull the black gown, and made the curate come down, change his robes, and complete the service in the orthodox fashion.

In another Notts church, during service, there was an encounter between two clerks. The regular clerk having been taken ill was unequal to his duties for some weeks, and appointed a man to carry them out for him. On the restoration to health of the real clerk he came into church to resume his duties, but found the man he had appointed occupying the box--the so-called desk. Whereupon they had a scuffle in the aisle.

The Rev. William Selwyn recollects the following incidents in the parish of F-----, near Cambridge:

Here up to the end of the sixties and well into the seventies a most quaint service was in fashion. The morning service began with a metrical Psalm--Tate and Brady--led by the clerk (of these more hereafter). This being ended, the vicar commenced the service always with the sentence "O Lord, correct me"--never any other. Then all things went on in the regular course till the end of the Litany, when the clerk would be heard stamping down the church and ascending the gallery in order to be ready for the second metrical Psalm. That ended, the vicar would commence with the ante-Communion service from the *reading-desk*. This went on in due course till the end of the Nicene Creed, when without sermon, prayers, or blessing, the morning service came to an abrupt termination. The afternoon service was identical, save that it ended with a sermon and the blessing.

But the chief peculiarity was the clerk and the singing. The metrical Psalm chosen was invariably one for the day of the month whatever it might be.

The clerk would give it out, "Let's sing to the praise and glory of God," and then would read the first two lines. The usual village band--fiddle, trombone, etc. etc.--would accompany him, which thing done, the next two lines would follow, and so on. Usually the number of verses was four, but sometimes the clerk would go on to six, or even seven. Once, I remember, this led to a somewhat ludicrous result. It was the seventh day of the month, consequently the thirty-fifth was the metrical Psalm to be sung. I think my late revered relative, Canon Selwyn, learnt then with astonishment, as I did myself, of the existence of the following lines within the folds of the Prayer Book:

> "And when through dark and slippery ways
> They strive His rage to shun,
> His vengeful ministers of wrath
> Shall goad them as they run."

It is hard to think that such a service could have been possible within seven miles of a University town, and I need hardly say it was very trying to the younger ones.

In the afternoon the band migrated to the dissenting chapel. On one occasion the band failed to appear, and the clerk was left alone. However, he made the best of it, with scant support from the congregation, so turning to them at the end, said in a loud voice, "Thank you for your help!"

THE PARISH OF BROMFIELD, SALOP.

From these ludicrous scenes it is refreshing to turn to a service which, though primitive, was conducted

with the utmost reverence and decency. When I was instituted in 1866 all the singing was conducted, and most reverently conducted, under the auspices of the clerk. He was a handsome man, with a flowing beard, magnificent bass voice, and a wooden leg. With two or three sons, daughters, and others in the village he carried on the choir, and though there were only hymns, nothing could be better. Of its kind I have seldom heard anything better. They had to yield to the inexorable march of time, but I parted from them with regret. Though we now have a surpliced choir of men and boys, with a trained organist and choirmaster, I always look back to my good old friend with his daughters and their companions, who were the leaders of the singing in the early days of my incumbency.



The Parish Clerk Of Quedgeley

The Rev. Canon Hemmans tell his reminiscences of Thomas Evison, parish clerk of Wragby, Lincolnshire,

who died in 1865, aged eighty-two years. He speaks of him as "a dear old friend, for whom I had a profound regard, and to whom I was grateful for much help during my noviciate at my first and only curacy."

Thomas Evison was a shoemaker, and in his early years a great pot-house orator. Settled on his well-known corner seat in the "Red Lion," he would be seen each evening smoking his pipe and laying down the law in the character of the village oracle. He must have had some determination and force of character, as one evening he laid down his pipe on the hob and said, "I'll smoke no more." He also retired from his corner seat at the inn, but he was true to his political opinions, and remained an ardent Radical to the last. This action showed some courage, as almost all the parish belonged to the squire, who was a strong Tory of the old school. Canon Hemmans was curate of Wragby with the Rev. G.B. Yard from 1851 to 1860, succeeding the present Dean of St. Paul's. Mr. Yard was a High Churchman, a personal friend of Manning, the Wilberforces, R. Sibthorpe, and Keble, and when expounding then unaccustomed and forgotten truths, he found the clerk a most intelligent and attentive hearer. Evison used to attend the daily services, except the Wednesday and Friday Litany, which service was too short for him. During the vicar's absence Canon Hemmans, who was then a deacon, found the clerk a most reliable adviser and instructor in Lincolnshire customs and words and ways of thought. When he was baptizing a child privately, the name Thirza was given to the child, which he did not recognise as a Bible name. He consulted Evison, who said, "Oh, yes, it is so; it's the name of Abel's wife." On the next day Evison bought a book, Gesner's *Death of Abel*, a translation

of some Swedish or German work, in which the tragedy of the early chapters of Genesis is woven into a story with pious reflections. This is not an uncommon book, and the clerk said these people believed it was as true as the Bible, because it claimed to be about Bible characters.

Evison was a diligent reader of newspapers, which were much fewer in his day, and studied diligently the sermons reported in the local Press. He was much puzzled by the reference to "the leg end" of the story of the raising of Lazarus in a sermon preached by the Bishop of London, afterwards Archbishop Tait. A reference to Bailey's Dictionary and the finding of the word *legend* made matters clear. Of course he miscalled words. During the Russian War he told Mr. Hemmans that we were not fighting for "territororial possessions," and he always read "Moabites and Hungarians" in his rendering of the sixth verse of the 83rd Psalm.

After the resignation of Mr. Yard in 1859 a Low Churchman was appointed, who restored the use of the black gown. Mr. Hemmans had to preach in the evening of the first Sunday, and was undecided as to whether he ought to continue to use the surplice. He consulted Evison, whose brave advice was, "Stick to your colours."

The clerk stuck stoutly to his Radical principles, and one day went to Lincoln to take part in a contested election. On the following Sunday the vicar spoke of "the filthy stream of politics." The old man was rather moved by this, and said afterwards, "Well, I am not too old to learn." Though staunch to his own principles, he was evidently considerate towards the opinions of others. He used to keep a pony and gig,

and his foreman, one Solomon Bingham, was a local preacher. When there came a rough Sunday morning the kind old clerk would say: "Well, Solomon, where are you going to seminate your schism to-day? You may have my trap." Canon Hemmans retains a very affectionate regard for the memory of the old clerk.

Mrs. Ellen M. Burrows sends me a charming description of an old-fashioned service, and some clerkly manners which are worth recording.

From twenty-five to thirty years ago the small Bedfordshire village of Tingrith had quaint customs and ceremonies which to-day exist only in the memory of the few.

The lady of the manor was perhaps best described by a neighbouring squire as a "potentate in petticoats."

Being sole owner of the village, she found employment for all the men, enforced cleanliness on all the women, greatly encouraged the industry of lace-making and hat-sewing, paid for the schooling of the children, and looked after the morals of everybody generally.

Legend has it that one ancient schoolmaster whom this good lady appointed was not overgood at spelling, and would allow a pupil to laboriously spell out a word and wait for him to explain. If the master could not do this he would pretend to be preoccupied, and advise the pupil to "say 'wheelbarrow' and go on."

On a Sunday each and every cottager was expected at church. The women sat on one side of the centre aisle and the men on the other, the former attired in clean cotton gowns and the latter in their Sunday

smocks.

The three bells were clanged inharmoniously until a boy who was stationed at a point of vantage told the ringer "she's a-comin'." Then one bell only was rung to announce the near arrival of the lady of the manor.

The rector would take his place at the desk, and the occupants of the centre aisle would rise respectfully to their feet in anticipation.

A white-haired butler and a younger footman--with many brass buttons on their coat-tails--would fling wide the double doors and stand one on either side until the old lady swept in; then one door was closed and the other only left open for less-important worshippers to enter. As she passed between the men and women to the big pew joining the chancel screen, they all touched their forelocks or dropped curtsies before resuming their seats. Before this aristocratic personage began her devotions she would face round and with the aid of a large monocle, which hung round her neck on a broad black ribbon, would make a silent call over, and for the tardy, or non-arrivals, there was a lecture in store. The servants of her household had the whole of one side aisle allotted to their use. The farmers had the other. There were two "strangers' pews," two "christening pews," and the rest were for the children. When a hymn was given out the schoolmaster would vigorously apply a tuning-fork to his knee, and having thus got the key would start the tune, which was taken up lustily by the children round him. This was all the singing they had in the service. The clerk said all the amens except when he was asleep. The rector was never known to preach

more than ten minutes at a time, and this was always so simple an exposition of the Scripture that the most illiterate could understand.

But no pen can pay tribute enough to the sweet earnestness of those little sermons, or, having heard them, ever go away unimpressed.

At the end of the service no one of the congregation moved until the lady of the manor sailed out of the great square pew. Then the men and women rose as before and bowed and bobbed as she passed down the aisle. The two menservants again flung wide the double doors and stood stiffly on either side as she passed out; then sedately walked home behind her at a respectful distance.

On each Good Friday the male community of the villagers were given a holiday from their work, and a shilling was the reward for every man who made his appearance at the eleven o'clock service; needless to say, it was well attended.

Another church (Newport Pagnell, Bucks) in an adjoining county--probably some years previous to this date--was lighted by tallow candles stuck in tin sconces on the walls, and twice during the service the clerk went round with a pair of long-handled snuffers to "smitch," as he called it, the wicks of these evil-smelling lights.

For his own better accommodation he had a candle all to himself stuck in a bottle, which he lighted when about to sing a hymn, and with candle in one hand and book in the other, and both held at arm's length, he would bellow most lustily and with reason, for he was supposed to lead the singing. This

finished he would blow out his candle with most audible vigour, and every one in his neighbourhood would have their handkerchiefs ready to drop their noses into.

This same clerk also took up his stand by the chancel steps with a black rod in his hand, and with tremendous importance marched in front of the rector down the aisle to the vestry under the belfry, and waited outside while the clergyman changed his surplice for a black cassock, then escorted him again to the pulpit stairs.

The Rev. E.H.L. Reeve, rector of Stondon Massey, Essex, contributes the following excellent stories of old-time services.

The Rev. Thomas Wallace was rector of Listen, in Essex, from 1783, the date of his father's death, onward. The following story is well authenticated in the annals of the family, and must belong to the latter part of the eighteenth century or the commencement of the nineteenth century.

It was, of course, a well-established custom in those old times for the church clerk to give out the number of the hymn to be sung, which he did with much unction and long preamble. The moments thus employed would be turned to account in the afternoon by the officiating clergyman, who would take the opportunity of retiring to the vestry to exchange his surplice for his academic gown wherein to preach.

On one occasion Mr. Wallace left his sermon, through inadvertence, at home; and, finding himself in the vestry, considered, perhaps, that the chance of

escape was too good to be lost. At any rate, he let himself out into the churchyard, and returned no more! He may possibly have been unable to find a discourse, but these are details with which we are not concerned. The clerk and congregation with becoming loyalty lengthened out the already dreary hymn by sundry additions and doxologies to give their pastor time to don his robes, and it was long ere they perceived the true cause of his delay. They were somewhat nettled, as one may suppose, at being thus befooled, and here lies the gist of our story. Next Sunday the clerk did not give out the second hymn at the usual time, but waited in solemn silence till Mr. Wallace had returned in his black gown from the vestry and ascended the pulpit stairs. Then, and not till then, he closed the pulpit door with a slam; and, *keeping his back against it*, called out significantly, and with a tone of exultation in his voice, "We've got him, my boys; *now* let us sing to the praise and glory of God," etc.

William Wren held the office of church clerk at Stondon Massey in Essex for thirty-six years, from 1853 to 1889. He was a rough, uneducated man, but with a certain amount of native talent which raised him above the level of the majority of his class. I can see him now in his place Sunday after Sunday, rigged out in a suit of my father's cast-off clerical garments--a kind of "set-off" to him at the lower end of the church. In his earlier days Wren had played a flute in the village instrumental choir, and to the last he might be heard whiling away spare moments on a Sunday in the church (for he brought his dinner early in the morning and bivouacked there all day!) recalling to himself the departed glories of ancient time. He turned the handle of the barrel organ in the west gallery from the time of its purchase in 1850 to

that of its disappearance in 1873, but I do not think that he ever appreciated this rude substitution of mechanical art for cornet, dulcimer, and pipe.

He led the hymns and read the Psalms, and repeated the responses with much fervour; perpetuating (long after it had ceased to be correct) the idea that he alone could be relied upon. Should the preacher inadvertently close his discourse with the sacred name either as part of a text or otherwise, a fervent "Amun" was certain to resound through the building, either because long custom had led him to regard the appendage as indispensable to it, or because like an old soldier suddenly roused to "attention," he awoke from a stolen slumber to jerk himself into the mental attitude most familiar to him. This last supposition, however, is a libel upon his fair character. I cannot believe that Wren ever slept on duty. He kept near to him a long hazel stick, wherewith to overawe any of the younger members of the congregation who were inclined either to speak or titter. On Wednesdays and Fridays in Lent, when the school attended morning service, and, in the absence of older people, occupied the principal seats instead of their Sunday places in the gallery, Wren's rod was frequently called into active play, and I have heard the stick resound on the luckless head of many an offending culprit.

Let me give one closing story of him on one of those weekday mornings.

It was St. John the Evangelist's Day, and a few of us met at church for matins. It was thought well to introduce a hymn for the festival (our hymn book in those days was Mercer's Church Psalter and Hymn Book) and Wren was to take charge, as usual, of the barrel-organ. My father gave out hymn 292 at the

appointed place, but only silence followed. Again "292," and then came a voice from the west gallery, "The 283rd!" My father did not take the hint, and again, rather unfortunately, hazarded "Hymn 292." This was too much for our organist, who called in still louder tones, "'Tis the 283rd I tell you!" Fortunately, we were a small company, but matters would have been the same, I dare say, on a Sunday.

In the vestry subsequently Wren explained to my father, "You know there are *two Johns*; the 292nd hymn belongs to John the *Baptist's* Day; *this* is John the *Evangelist's*."

The confusion once over my father was much amused with the incident, and frequently entertained friends with it afterwards, when I am bound to say it did not lose its richness of detail. "Don't I keep a-telling on you?" was the fully developed question, as I last remember hearing the story told. The above, however, I can vouch for as strictly correct, being one of the select party privileged to witness the occurrence.

Mr. Frederick W. Hackwood, the historian of Wednesbury, has kindly sent the following description of the famous clerks of that place:

The office of parish clerk in Wednesbury has been held by at least two remarkable characters. "Old George Court," as he was called--and by some who are still alive--held the post in succession to his grandfather for a great number of years. His grandfather was George Watkins, in his time one of the principal tradesmen in the town. His hospitable house was the place of entertainment for a long succession of curates-in-charge and other officiating

ministers for all the long years that the vicar (Rev. A. Bunn Haden) was a non-resident pluralist. But the position created by this state of things was remarkable. Watkins and the small coterie who acted with him became the absolute and dominant authority in all parochial matters. One curate complained of him and his nominee wardens (in 1806) that "these men had been so long in office, and had become so cruel and oppressive," that some of the parishioners resolved at last to dismiss them. The little oligarchy, however, was too strong to be ousted at any vestry that ever was called. As to the elected officials, the same curate records in a pamphlet which he published in his indignation, that "on Christmas Day, during divine service, the churchwardens entered the workhouse with constables and bailiffs, and a multitude of men equally pious with themselves, and turned the governor and his wife into the snow-covered streets." Another measure of iniquity laid to their charge was their "cruelty to Mr. Foster," the master of the charity school held in the old Market Cross, "a man of amiable disposition, and a teacher of considerable merit." These aggressive wardens grazed the churchyard for profit, looked coldly upon a proposal to put up Tables of Benefactions in the church, and altogether acted in a manner so high-handed as to call forth this historic protest. Although the fabric of the church was in so ruinous a condition that the rain streamed through the roof upon the head of our clerical pamphleteer as he was preaching, all these complaints were to no purpose. When the absentee vicar was appealed to he declared his helplessness, and one sentence in his reply is significant; it was thus: "It is as much as my life is worth to come among them!" Allowance must be made for party

rancour. It is probable that Watkins was but the official figure-head of this dominant party, and he is said to have been a man of real piety; and after holding the office of parish clerk for sixty years, he at last died in the vestry of the church he loved so much.

As a certified clerk George Court held the office as long as his grandfather before him. He was a man of the bluff and hearty sort, thoroughly typical of old Wednesbury, of Dutch build, yet commanding presence, in language more forcible than polite, and not restrained in the use of his strong language even by the presence of an austere and iron-willed vicar. The tales told of him are numerous enough, but are scarcely of the kind that look well in cold print. Although fond of the good things of this world himself, he could occasionally be very severe on the high feeding and deep drinking proclivities of "You--singers and ringers"! He was never known to fail in scolding any funeral procession that had kept him waiting at the church gates too long, and that in language as loud as it was vigorous. He, like his predecessor, was the autocrat of the parish.

The last of the long line of parish clerks who occupied the bottom desk of the fine old Jacobean three-decker was Thomas Parkes. He died in 1884. The peculiar resonant nasal twang with which he sang out the "Amens" gave rise to a sharp newspaper correspondence in the *Wednesbury Observer* of 1857. Another controversy provoked by him was at the opening of the cemetery in 1868, when as vestry clerk he claimed a fee of 9 d. on every interment. The resistance of the Nonconformists led to an amicable compromise.

Mr. Wise, of Weekley, the author of several works on Kettering and the neighbourhood, tells me of an extraordinary incident which happened in a Sussex parish church when he was a boy about seventy years ago. The clerk was a decayed farmer who had a fine voice, but who was noted for his intemperate habits. He went up as usual to the singers' gallery just before the sermon and gave out the metrical Psalm. The Psalm was sung, the sermon commenced, when suddenly from the gallery rose the words of a popular song, given by a splendid tenor voice:

> "Oh, give my back my Arab steed,
> My Prince defends his right,
> And I will ..."

"Some one, please, remove that drunken man from the gallery," the clergyman quietly said. It was afterwards found that some mischievous persons had promised the clerk a gallon of ale if he would sing a song during the sermon.

Miss Elton, of Bath, tells me of the clerk of Bierton, near Aylesbury, of which her father had sole charge for a time at the end of the forties. His predecessor had been a Mr. Stephens. The place had been neglected, and church matters were at a low ebb. Mr. Elton instituted a service on Saints' Days, which was quite an innovation at that time, and the first of these was held on St. Stephen's Day. The old clerk came into the vestry after the service and said, "I be sorry, sir, to hear the unkid (= awful) tale of poor Mussar (Mister) Stephens. He be come to a sad end surely." He had evidently confounded the first martyr, St. Stephen, with the late curate of the parish, having apparently never heard of the former.

A new vicar had been appointed to a parish about eight miles from Oxford, who had been for many years a Fellow of his college, and in consequence knew little of village folk or parochial matters. Dr. A. was much disturbed to find that so few of the villagers attended church, and consulted the clerk on the subject, who suggested that it might encourage the people to attend if Dr. A. was to offer to give sixpence a Sunday to all who came to church. The plan was tried and found to succeed; the congregations improved rapidly, and the church was well filled, to Dr. A.'s satisfaction. But after a while the numbers fell off, and to Dr. A.'s chagrin people left off attending church. He again called the clerk into his counsels, and asked what could be the reason of the falling off of the congregation, as he had always given sixpence every Sunday, as he promised, to all who came to the service. "Well, sir," said the clerk, "it is like this: they tells me as how they finds they *can't do it for the money*."

The following reminiscences are supplied by the Rev. W. Frederick Green, and are worthy of record:

I well remember the parish clerk of Woburn, in Bedfordshire, more than sixty years ago. His name was Joe Brewer--a bald-headed, short, stumpy man, who wore black knee-breeches, grey stockings, and shoes. He was also the town crier. He always gave out the hymns from the front of the west gallery. "Let us sing to the praise and glory of God, hymn--" Once I heard him call out instead, "O yes! O yes! O yes! This is to give notice," and then, recollecting he was in church, with a loud "O crikey!" he began "Let us sing," etc.

Collections in church were made by him in a china

soup plate from each pew. Ours was a large square family pew. One Sunday my brother put into the plate a new coin (I think a florin), which Brewer had never seen before, and which he thought was a token or medal, and thinking my brother was playing a trick upon him, said in a loud voice, "Now, Master Charles, none of them larks here."

I have also seen him at afternoon service (there was no evening service in those days), when it unexpectedly came on too dark for the clergyman to see his MS. in the pulpit, go to the altar--an ordinary table with drawers--throw up the cloth, open a drawer, take out two candles and a box of matches, go up the pulpit stairs, fix them in the candlesticks, and light them.

During the winter months part of his duty was to tend the fire during service in the Duke of Bedford's large curtained, carpeted pew in the chancel.

When I was a boy I was staying in Northamptonshire, and went one Sunday morning into a village church for service (I think it was Fotheringhay). There was a three-decker, and the clerk from his desk led the singing of the congregation, which he faced. There was no musical instrument of any kind. The hymn, which of course was from Tate and Brady, was the metrical version of Psalm xlii. The clerk gave out the Psalm, then read the first line to the congregation, then sang it solo, and then the congregation sang it altogether; and so on line after line for the whole eleven verses.

More attention must have been paid in those days to the requirement of the ninety-first Canon, that the clerk should be known, if may be, "for his competent skill in singing."

In 1873 I was curate-in-charge of an out-of-the-way Norfolk village. On my first Sunday I had an early celebration at 8 a.m. I arrived in church about 7.45, and to my amazement saw five old men sitting round the stove in the nave with their hats on, smoking their pipes. I expostulated with them quite gently, but they left the church before service and never came again. I discovered afterwards that they had been regular communicants, and that my predecessor always distributed the offertory to the poor present immediately after the service. When these men in the course of my remonstrance found that I was not going to continue the custom, they no longer cared to be communicants.

In 1870, in Norfolk, I went round with the rural dean visiting the churches. At one church the only person to receive the rural dean was the parish clerk, who was ready with the funeral pall to put over the rural dean's horse whilst waiting outside the church.

It was this same church which, in preparation for the rural dean's visit, had been recently and completely whitewashed throughout. Not only the walls and pillars, but also the pews, the school forms, the pulpit, and also the altar itself, a very small four-legged deal table without any covering. I suppose this was done by the churchwardens to conceal the dilapidated condition of everything; but they had omitted to remove the grass which was growing in the crevices of the floor paving.

Mr. Moxon (deceased), formerly rector of Hethersett, in Norfolk, told me that he had once preached for a friend in a Norfolk village church with the woman clerk holding an umbrella over his head in the pulpit throughout the sermon, because of the "dreep."

Miss E. Lloyd, of Woodburn, Crowborough, writes:

About the year 1833 a gentleman bought an estate in North Yorkshire, seven miles from any town, and built a house there. The parish was small, having a population of about a hundred souls, the church old and tumbledown, reeking with damp; the rain came through the roof; the seats were worm-eaten, and centipedes, with other like vermin, roamed about them near the wall. The vicar was non-resident, and an elderly curate-in-charge ministered to this parish and another in the neighbourhood. The customs of the church were much the same as those described by Canon Atkinson in his *Forty Years in a Moorland Parish* as existing on his arrival at Danby. There was no vestry. The surplice (washed twice a year) was hung over the altar rails, within which the curate robed, his hat or any parcel he happened to have in his hand being put down for the time on the Holy Table. The men sat for the most part together, the farmers and young men in the singing-loft, the labourers below, and the women in front. The wife of the chief yeoman farmer--an excellent and superior woman--still kept up the habit of "making a reverence" to the altar before she entered her pew. The surplice, which hung in the church all through the week, was apt to get very damp. On one occasion, when a strange clergyman staying at the Hall took the service, he declined to wear it, as it was so wet.

"He wadn't pit it on," said the old clerk Christopher (commonly called "Kitty") Hill. "I reckon he was afeard o' t' smittle" (infection).

The same clergyman, when he went up to the altar for the Communion Service, knelt down, as his habit

was, at the north end for private prayer whilst the congregation were singing a metrical Psalm (Old or New Version). On looking up he saw that Kitty Hill had followed him within the rails and was kneeling at the opposite end of the Holy Table staring at him with round eyes full of amazement at this unusual act of devotion. Both the curate and the clerk spoke the broadest Yorkshire. Psalm xxxii. 4 was thus rendered by Kitty: "Ma-maasture is like t' doong i' summer." He was an old man and quite bald, and used to sit in his desk with a blue-spotted pocket-handkerchief spread over his head, occasionally drawing down a corner of it for use, and then pulling it straight again. If the squire happened to come late to church--a thing which did not often happen--the curate would pause in his reading and apologise: "Good morning, Mr. ----. I am sorry, sir, that I began the service. I thought you were not coming this morning." One sentence of the sermon preached on the death of King William IV long remained in the memory of some of his young hearers: "Behold the King in all his pomp and glory, soodenly toombled from his high elevation, and mingled wi' the doost!"

In 1845 a new church was built on the old site, a new curate came, Kitty Hill died, and was succeeded in his office by his widow, who did all that she could do of the clerk's work, and showed remarkable taste in decorating the church at Christmas. No clerk was needed for the responses, as the congregation joined heartily in the service, and there was a much better attendance than there is now. She died in the early fifties.

Amongst other varied readings of the Psalms that of an old parish clerk at Hartlepool may be given. He had been a sailor, and used to render Psalm civ. 26

as "There go the ships, and there is that lieutenant whom Thou hast made to take his pastime therein."

The late Dr. Gatty, in his record of *A Life at One Living*, mentions that at Ecclesfield, as in many other places, the office of parish clerk was hereditary. The last holder of the office, who used to sit in his desk clad in a black bombazine gown, was a publican by trade, a decent, honest man, who during the fifty-one years he was clerk was only twice absent from service. He died in 1868, and the offices of clerk and sexton were then united and held by one person.

The register books of Weybridge, Surrey, were kept for a great part of the eighteenth century by the parish clerks, the son succeeding his father in office for three or four generations.

Now probably the clerks are no more clerks but vergers; and as a Yorkshireman remarked, "*Verging* is a very honourable profession."

The portrait of John Gray, sometime clerk in Eton College Chapel, taken in his gown as he stood in his desk, has been engraved, and is well known to old Etonians.

Few people possess the gift of humour in the same degree as the late Bishop Walsham How, and his stories of the race of parish clerks and vergers must not be omitted, and are here published by permission of his son, Mr. F.D. How, editor of *Lighter Moments*.

When I was a deacon, and naturally shy, I was visiting my aunts at Workington, where my grandfather had been rector, and was asked to preach on Sunday evening in St. John's, a wretched modern church--a plain oblong with galleries, and a

pulpit like a very tall wineglass, with a very narrow little straight staircase leading up to it, in the middle of the east part of the church. When the hymn before the sermon was given out I went as usual to the vestry to put on the black gown. Not knowing that the clergyman generally stayed there till the end of the hymn, I emerged as soon as I had vested myself and walked to the pulpit and ascended the stairs. When nearly at the summit, to my horror I discovered a very fat beadle in the pulpit lighting the candles. We could not possibly pass on the stairs, and the eyes of the whole congregation were upon me. It would be ignominious to retreat. So after a few minutes' reflection I saw my way out of the difficulty, which I overcame by a very simple mechanical contrivance. I entered the pulpit, which exactly fitted the beadle and myself, and then face to face we executed a rotary movement to the extent of a semicircle, when the beadle finding himself next the door of the pulpit was enabled to descend, and I remained master of the situation.

At Uffington, near Shrewsbury, during the incumbency of the Rev. J. Hopkins, the choir and organist, having been dissatisfied with some arrangement, determined not to take part in the service. So when the clerk, according to the usual custom of those days, gave out the hymn, there was a dead silence. This lasted a little while, and then the clerk, unable to bear it, rose up and appealed to the congregation, saying most imploringly, "Them as *can* sing *do* ye sing: it's misery to be a this'n" (Shropshire for "in this way").

At Wolstanton, in the Potteries, there was a somewhat fussy verger called Oakes. On one

occasion, just at the time of the year when it was doubtful whether lights would be wanted or no, and when they had not yet been lighted for evening service, a stranger, who was a very smart young clergyman, was reading the lessons and had some difficulty in seeing. He had on a pair of delicate lavender kid gloves. The verger, perceiving his difficulty, went to the vestry, got two candles, lighted them, and walked to the lectern, before which he stood solemnly holding the candles (without candlesticks) in his hands. This was sufficiently trying to the congregation, but suddenly some one rattled the latch of the west door, when Oakes, feeling that it was absolutely necessary to go and see what was the matter, thrust the two candles into the poor young clergyman's delicately gloved hands, and left him!

At the church of Stratfieldsaye, where the Duke of Wellington was a regular attendant, a stranger was preaching, and the verger when he ended came up the stairs, opened the pulpit door a little way, slammed it to, and then opened it wide for the preacher to go out. He asked in the vestry why he had shut the door again while opening it, and the verger said, "We always do that, sir, to wake the duke."

A former young curate of Stoke being very anxious to do things rubrically, insisted on the ring being put on the "fourth finger" at a wedding he took. The woman resisted and said, "I would sooner die than be married on my little finger." The curate said, "But the rubric says so," whereupon the *deus ex machinâ* appeared in the shape of the parish clerk, who stepped forward and said, "In these cases, sir, the thoomb counts as a digit."

A gentleman going to see a ritualistic church in London was walking into the chancel when an official stepped forward and said, "You mustn't go in there." "Why not?" said the gentleman. "I'm put here to stop you," said the man. "Oh! I see," said the gentleman; "you're what they call the *rude* screen, aren't you?"

A clergyman in the diocese of Wakefield told me that when first he came to the parish he found things in a very neglected state, and among other changes he introduced an early celebration of the Holy Communion. An old clerk collected the offertory, and when he brought it up to the clergyman he said, "There's eight on 'em, but two 'asn't paid."

A verger was showing a lady over a church when she asked him if the vicar was a married man. "No, ma'am," he answered, "he's a chalybeate."

A verger showing a large church to a stranger, pointed out another man and said, "That is the other verger." The gentleman said, "I did not know there were two of you," and the verger replied, "Oh, yes, sir, he werges up one side of the church and I werges up the other."

On my first visit to Almondbury to preach, the verger came to me in the vestry and said, "A've put a platform in t' pulpit for ye; you'll excuse me, but a little man looks as if he was in a toob." (N.B. To prevent undue inferences I am five feet nine inches in height.)

One of the speakers at the meeting of the Catholic

Truth Society at Bristol (Sept., 1895) told a story of a pious Catholic visiting Westminster Abbey, and kneeling in a quiet corner for private devotion, when he was summoned in stentorian tones to come and view the royal tombs and chapels. "But I have seen them," said the stranger, "and I only wish to say my prayers." "Prayers is over," said the verger. "Still, I suppose," said the stranger, "there can be no objection to my saying my prayers quietly here?" "No objection, sir!" said the irate verger. "Why, it would be an insult to the Dean and Chapter."

The Rev. M.E. Jenkins writes his remembrances of several old clerks.

There was dear old Robert Livesay, of Blackburn parish church, whom every one knew, his large rubicund face beaming with good nature and humour--a very kindly old soul. In 1870 I was appointed to an old-world Dale's parish, which had one of the real old Yorkshire clerks, Frank Hutchinson. He was lame and blind in one eye, and well do I recall his sonorous and tremulous response, his love for the Psalms (Tate and Brady's); he "reckoned nought o' *Hymns Ancient and Modern*." I used generally to find him with a long pipe in the vestry on my return from afternoon service. He was a great authority on the ancient history of the parish, and was formerly schoolmaster. He had brought up most respectably a large family of sons and daughters on the smallest means, many of whom still survive. I had a great respect for the old man, and so he had for me. He was very great at leading that peculiarly dirge-like wail at the huge Yorkshire funerals. I never could quite make out any words, but as a singularly effective and musical cadence in a

minor key, it was no doubt a survival, as I once heard Canon Atkinson say, the famous vicar of Danby, my immediate neighbour on the moors. At last I attended Frank Hutchinson daily in his prolonged decay, and received his solemn blessing and commendation on my work; and he received at my hand a few hours before his death his last communion, surrounded by all his children and grandchildren, in his small bedroom, by the light of a single candle. I can still see his thin face uplifted. It is thirty-five years ago, and I can still hear the striking of his lucifer match in the midst of the afternoon service, and see him holding up close to his own eye the candle and the book, and can hear his tremulous "Amen," quite independent of the choral one sung by a small choir in the chancel. He was great in epitaphs. A favourite one, which he would recite *ore rotunda*, was:

> "Let this record, what few vain marbles can,
> Here lies an honest man."

Another, which, by the way, is in Egton churchyard, ran as follows:

> "Life is but a winter's day;
> Some breakfast and away,
> Others to dinner stop and are full fed,
> The oldest man but sups and goes to bed."

He was a genuine old Dalesman of a type passed away. His spirits really never survived the abolition of the stringed instruments in the western gallery with its galaxy of village musicians. "I hugged bass

fiddle for many a year," he once told me. Peace be to his memory.

Canon Atkinson tells of his good and harmless but "feckless" parish clerk and schoolmaster at Danby, whom, when about to take a funeral, he discovered sitting in the sunny embrasure of the west window, with his hat on, of course, and comfortably smoking his pipe. The clerk was a brother of the old vicar of Danby, and they seem to have been a curious and irreverent pair. The historian of Danby, in his *Forty Years in a Moorland Parish*, fully describes his first visit to the clerk's school, and the strange custom of weird singing at funerals to which Mr. Jenkins alludes.

Another north-country clerk-schoolmaster was obliged to relinquish his scholastic duties and make way for a certified teacher. One day he heard the new master tell his pupils: "'A' is an indefinite article. 'A' is one, and can only be applied to one thing. You cannot say a cats or a dogs; but only a cat, a dog." The clerk at once reported the matter to his rector. "Here's a pretty fellow you've got to keep school! He says that you can only apply the article 'a' to nouns of the singular number; and here have I been singing 'A--men' all my life, and your reverence has never once corrected me."

Communicated by Mrs. Williamson, Lydgate Vicarage:

The old parish clerk of Radcliffe was secretary of the races committee, and would hurry out of church to attend these meetings. Mr. Foxley, the rector, was told of this weakness of his clerk, so one Wednesday

evening, when the rector knew there was a meeting, he got into the pulpit (a three-decker was then in the church), and began his sermon. Half an hour went by, then the clerk began to be restless. Another half-hour passed; the clerk looked up from his seat under the pulpit, but still the rector went on preaching. It was too late then for the race-course meeting. So when the sermon was at length finished, the clerk got up and gave out "the 'undred and nineteenth Psalm from yend to yend. He's preached all day, and we'll sing all neet" (night).

At Westhoughton Church, Lancashire, there was a clerk of the old school, one Platt, who just before the sermon would stretch his long arm and offer his snuff-box to his old friend Betty, and to other cronies who happened to be in his immediate neighbourhood.

The clerk at Stratfieldsaye, who was a character, once astonished a strange clergyman who was taking the duty. The choir sat in the gallery, and the numbers were few on that Sunday. "Mon I 'elp them chaps? they be terrible few," said the clerk. The clergyman quite agreed that he should render them his valuable assistance, and sit in the gallery. Presently a man came in late, and was kneeling down to say his private prayer, when the clergyman was horrified to see the clerk deliberately rise in the gallery and throw a book at the man's head. When remonstrated with after service the clerk replied carelessly, "Oh, it were only my way o' telling him to sing up, as we were terrible short this marning."

CHAPTER XXI

CURIOUS STORIES

The old clerk of Clapham, Bedford, Mr. Thomas Maddams, always used to read his own version of Psalm xxxix. 12: "Like as it were a moth fretting in a garment." Apparently his idea was of a moth annoyed at being in a garment from which it could not escape.

A parish clerk (who prided himself upon being well read) occupied his seat below the old "three-decker" pulpit, and whenever a quotation or an extract from the classics was introduced into the sermon he, in an undertone, muttered its source, much to the annoyance of the preacher and amusement of the congregation. Despite all protests in private, the thing continued, until one day, the vicar's patience being exhausted, he leant over the pulpit side and immediately exclaimed, "Drat you; shut up!" Immediately, in the clerk's usual sententious tone, came the reply, "His own." (William Haggard, *Liverpool Daily Post*.)

N.B. I have heard this story before, and in a different key:

The preacher was a young, bumptious fellow, fond of quoting the classics, etc. One day a learned classic

scholar attended his service, and was heard to say, after each quotation, "That's Horace," "That's Plato," and such-like, until the preacher was at his "wits' ends" how to quiet the man. At last, leaning over the pulpit, he looked the man in the face, and is reported to have said, "Who the devil are you?" "That's his own!" was the prompt response.

In one of the village churches near Honiton, in 1864, the usual duet between the parson and clerk had been the custom, when the vicar appealed to the congregation to take their part. In a little while they took courage, and did so. This annoyed the clerk, and he could not make the responses, and made so many mistakes that the vicar drew his attention to the matter. He replied, with much irritation, "How can *I* do the service with a lot of men and women a-buzzing and a-fizzing about me?"

A somewhat similar story is told of another church:

An old gentleman, now in his eightieth year, remembers attending Romford Church when a youth, and says that at that time (1840) the parish clerk was a person who greatly magnified his office. On one occasion he checked the young man for audibly responding, on the ground that he, the clerk, was the person to respond audibly, and that other people were to respond inaudibly.

Communicated by Miss Emily J. Heaton, of Sittingbourne:

My father lived and worked as the clergyman of a parish until he was eighty-nine years of age. He remembered a clerk in a Yorkshire parish in the time

of one of the Georges. The clergyman said the versicle, "O Lord, save the King," and the clerk made no reply. The prayer was repeated, but still no answer. He then touched the clerk, who sat in the desk below, and who replied:

"A we'ant! He won't tak tax off 'bacca!"

Communicated by Mr. Frederick Sherlock:

I remember as a lad attending a church which owned a magnificent specimen of the parish clerk. He used to wear a dress-coat, and it was his practice to follow the clergy from the vestry, and while the vicar and curate were saying their private prayers in the reading-desk in which they both sat together, the venerable clerk with measured tread passed down the centre of the church affably smiling and bowing right and left to such of the parishioners as were in his favour. In due course he arrived in the singers' gallery, where he had the place of honour under the organ: the good old man was leading soloist, which we well knew when Jackson's *Te Deum* was sung on the greater festivals, for there was always a solemn pause before the venerable worthy quavered forth his solo.

It was a pew-rented church, and once a quarter strangers were startled, when the vicar from his place in the reading-desk had announced the various engagements of the week, to hear the clerk's majestic voice from his place in the gallery add, "And *I* beg to announce" (with a marked emphasis on the *I*) "that the churchwardens will attend in the vestry on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday next, at eight o'clock, for the purpose of receiving pew rents and

letting seats for the ensuing quarter."

As touching parish clerks, it is of interest to recall that William Maybrick was clerk of St. Peter's, Liverpool, from 1813-48. He had two sons, William, who became clerk, and Michael, who was organist at St. Peter's for many years. William Maybrick, junior, had also two sons, James, whose name was so much before the public owing to the circumstances surrounding his death, and Michael, better known as "Stephen Adams," the famous composer and singer.

The following is a curious letter from a parish clerk to his vicar after giving notice to quit the latter's service. He was clerk of the parish of Maldon, Essex.

DEAR AND REV. SIR,

I avail myself of the opportunity of troubling your honour with these lines, which I hope you will excuse, which is the very sentiments of your humble servant's heart. Ignorantly, rashly, but reluctantly, I gave you warning to leave your highly respected office and most amiable duty, as being your servant, and clerk of this your most well wished parish, and place of my succour and support.

But, dear Sir, I well know it was no fault of yours nor from any of my most worthy parishioners. It were because I thought I were not sufficiently paid for the interments of the silent dead. But will I be a Judas and leave the house of my God, the place where His Honour dwelleth for a few pieces of money? No. Will I be a Peter and deny myself of an office in His Sanctuary and cause me to weep bitterly? No. Can I be so unreasonable as to deny, if I like and am well, to ring that solemn bell that speaks the departure of

a soul? No. Can I leave digging the tombs of my neighbours and acquaintances which have many a time made me shudder and think of my mortality, when I have dug up the mortal remains of some perhaps as I well knew? No. And can I so abruptly forsake the service of my beloved Church of which I have not failed to attend every Sunday for these seven and a half years? No. Can I leave waiting upon you a minister of that Being that sitteth between the Cherubim and flieth upon the wings of the wind? No. Can I leave the place where our most holy services nobly calls forth and says, "Those whom God have joined together" (and being as I am a married man) "let no man put asunder"? No. And can I leave that ordinance where you say then and there "I baptize thee in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost," and he becomes regenerate and is grafted into the body of Christ's Church? No. And can I think of leaving off cleaning at Easter the House of God in which I take such delight, in looking down her aisles and beholding her sanctuaries and the table of the Lord? No. And can I forsake taking part in the service of Thanksgiving of women after childbirth when mine own wife has been delivered ten times? No. And can I leave off waiting on the congregation of the Lord which you well know, Sir, is my delight? No. And can I forsake the Table of the Lord at which I have feasted I suppose some thirty times? No. And, dear Sir, can I ever forsake you who have been so kind to me? No. And I well know you will not entreat me to leave, neither to return from following after you, for where you pray there will I pray, where you worship there will I worship. Your Church shall be my Church, your people shall be my people and your God my God. By the waters of Babylon am I to sit down and weep and leave thee, O

my Church! and hang my harp upon the trees that grow therein? No. One thing have I desired of the Lord that I will require even that I may dwell in the House of the Lord and to visit His temple. More to be desired of me, O my Church, than gold, yea than fine gold, sweeter to me than honey and the honeycomb.

Now, kind Sir, the very desire of my heart is still to wait upon you. Please tell the Churchwardens all is reconciled, and if not, I will get me away into the wilderness, and hide me in the desert, in the cleft of the rock. But I hope still to be your Gehazi and when I meet my Shunamite to say "All, all is well." And I will conclude my blunders with my oft-repeated prayer, "Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen."

P.S. Now, Sir, I shall go on with my fees the same as I found them, and will make no more trouble about them, but I will not, I cannot leave you, nor your delightful duties.

Your most obedient servant,

GEORGE G---- G.

The Rev. E. G----, Vicar of Maldon.

Communicated by the Rev. D. C. Moore:

In the parish of Belton, Suffolk, there died in 1837 a man named Noah Pole. He had been clerk for sixty years. He wore a smock-frock; gave out all notices--strayed horse, a found sheep, etc. He was known by the nickname of "*Never, never* shall be," for in this way he had for sixty years perverted the last part of the "Gloria," "now and ever shall be."

In the parish of Lowestoft, Suffolk, in the forties the parish clerk's name was Newson (would-be wits called him "Nuisance"). He was arrayed in a velvet-trimmed robe and bore himself bravely. The way in which he mouthed "Let us sing to the glory of God" was wonderful. But the chief amusement he afforded was the habit of hiding his face in his hands during each prayer, then towards the ending his head would rise till it rested on his thumbs, and then came out sonorously, "Awl-men."

At St. Mary's, Southtown (near Great Yarmouth), in the late thirties, etc., a man named Nolloth was clerk. He was celebrated for the uncertainty of his "H's." For example: "Let us sing to the praise and glory of God the Heighty-heighth ymn."

At Gorleston (the mother church of St. Mary's, named above) a tailor named Bristow was clerk. He was a very small man, and he had a son he wished to succeed him. The clerk's desk was pretty wide and they sat together. I can see them (sixty years after), one leaning on his right arm, the other on his left; and when the time came, the duet was *Ah*-men from the elder and A-men from the younger, one in "tenor" the other "treble." We schoolboys used to say "Big pig, little pig."

Nicholson, the clerk of St. Bees, if any student was called away in term, invariably gave out Psalm cvii., fourth part, "They that in ships with courage bold." In those days there were no trains and no hymns.

At Barkham there is an old clerk who succeeded his father half a century ago.

During the rebuilding of the church his sire, whose name was Elijah, once visited a neighbouring parish church, and arrived rather late, just when the rector was giving out the text: "What doest thou here, Elijah?" Elijah gave a respectful salute, and replied: "Please, sur, Barkham Church is undergoing repair, so I be cumed 'ere!"

Canon Rawnsley tells a pathetic little story of an old clerk who begged him not to read the service so fast: "For you moòst gie me toime, Mr. Rawnsley, you moòst i'deed. You moòst gie me toime, for I've a graaceless wife an' two godless soons to praày for."

Hawker tells a story of the parish clerk at Morwenstow whose wife used to wash the parson's surplices. He came home one night from a prolonged visit at the village inn, the "Bush," and finding his wife's scolding not to his mind and depressing, he said, "Look yere, my dear, if you doan't stop, I'll go straight back again." She did not stop, so he left the house; but the wife donned one of the surplices and, making a short cut, stood in front of her approaching husband. He was terrified; but at last he remembered his official position, and the thought gave him courage.

"Avide, Satan!" he said in a thick, slow voice.

The figure made no answer.

"Avide, Satan!" he shouted again. "Doan't 'e knaw I be clerk of the parish, bass-viol player, and taicher of the singers?"

When the apparition failed to be impressed the clerk turned tail and fled. The ghost returned by a short

cut, and the clerk found his wife calmly ironing the parson's surplice. He did not return to the "Bush" that night.

The old parish clerk of Dagenham had a habit when stating the names to be entered into the register of saying, *Plain* Robert or John, etc., meaning that Robert, etc., was the only Christian name. On one occasion a strange clergyman baptized a child there, and being unable to hear the name as given by the parents, looked inquiringly at the clerk. "Plain Jane, sir," he called out in a stentorian voice. "What a pity to label the child thus," the clergyman rejoined; "she might grow up to be a beautiful girl." "Jane *only*, I mean," explained the clerk.

All clergymen know the difficulty of changing the names of the sovereign and the Royal Family at the commencement of the reign of a new monarch.

In a certain parish in the south of England (the name of which I do not know, or have forgotten), at the time of the accession of Her late Majesty Queen Victoria, the rector charged his clerk to make the necessary alterations in the Book of Common Prayer required by the sex of the new sovereign. The clerk made all the needed alterations with the greatest care as regards both titles and pronouns; but not only this, he carried on the changes throughout the Psalter. Consequently, on the morning of the fourth day of the month, for instance, the rector found Psalm xxi. rendered thus: "The Queen shall rejoice in Thy strength, O Lord: exceeding glad shall She be of Thy salvation," and so on throughout the course of the Psalms and the whole of the Psalter. Also in the prayer for the Church Militant, when prayer is made for all Christian kings, princes, etc., the distracted

vicar found the words changed into "Queen, Princesses, etc." After all, the clerk showed his thoroughness, but nothing short of a new Prayer Book could satisfy the needs of the vicar [94].

[94] From the information of Miss Marion Stirling, who heard the story from Prebendary Thornton.

Canon Gregory Smith tells the following story of a clerk in Herefordshire, who flourished half a century ago:

In the west-end gallery of the old-fashioned little church were musicians with fifes, etc. etc. Sometimes, if they started badly in a hymn, the clerk would say to the congregation, "Beg pardon, gents; we'll try again."

As I left home one day, the clerk ran after me. "But, sir, who'll take the duty on St. Swithin's Day?"

Once or twice, being somnolent, on a hot afternoon he woke up suddenly with a loud "Amen" in the middle of the sermon.

When I said good-bye to him, having resigned the benefice, he said, very gravely, "God will give us another comforter."

An old country clerk in showing visitors round the churchyard used to stop at a certain tombstone and say:

"This 'ere is the tomb of Thomas 'Ooper and 'is eleven wives."

One day a lady remarked: "Eleven? Dear me, that's rather a lot, isn't it?"

The old man looked at her gravely and replied: "Well, mum, yer see it wus an' 'obby of 'is'n."

The Rev. W.D. Parish, in his *Dictionary of the Sussex Dialect*, tells of a friend of his who had been remonstrating with one of his parishioners for abusing the parish clerk beyond the bounds of neighbourly expression, and who received the following answer: "You be quite right, sir; you be quite right. I'd no ought to have said what I did; but I döant mind telling you to your head what I've said so many times behind your back. We've got a good shepherd, I says, an excellent shepherd, but he's got an unaccountable bad dog."

Some seventy or eighty years ago at Thame Church, Buckinghamshire, the old-fashioned clerk had a much-worn Prayer Book, and the parson and he made a duet of the responses, the congregation not considering it necessary or even proper to interfere. When the clerk happened to come to a verse of the Psalms with words missing he said "riven out" (pronounced oot), and the parson finished the verse; this was taken quite as a matter of course by the congregation.

In a Lancashire church, when the rector was about to publish the banns of marriage, the book was not in its usual place. However, he began: "I publish the banns of marriage ... I publish ... the banns"--when the clerk looked up from the lowest box of the "three-decker," and said in a tone not *sotto voce*, "'Twixt th' cushion and th' desk, sur."

Prayer Book words are sometimes a puzzle to illiterate clerks. At the present time in a Berkshire

church the clerk always speaks of "Athanasian's Creed," and of "the Anthony-Communion hymn."

His views of art are occasionally curious. An odd specimen of his race was showing to some strangers a stained-glass window recently erected in memory of a gentleman and lady who had just died. It was a two-light window with figures of Moses and Aaron. "There they be, sir, but they don't much feature the old couple," said the clerk, who regarded them as likenesses of the deceased.

A clergyman on one occasion had some trouble with his dog. This dog emulated the achievements of Newton's "Fido," and tore and devoured some leaves of the parson's sermon. The parson was taking the duty of a neighbour, and feared lest his mutilated discourse would be too short for the edification of the congregation. So after the service he consulted the clerk. "Was my sermon too long to-day?" "No," replied the clerk. "Then was it too short?" "Nay, you was jist about right." Much relieved, the parson then told the clerk the story of the dog's misdemeanours, and of his fear lest the sermon should prove too short. The old clerk scratched his head and then exclaimed, with a very solemn face, "Ah! maister ----, our parson be a grade sight too long to plaise us. Would you just give him a pup?"

A writer in *Notes and Queries* tells a story of an old-fashioned service, and with this we will conclude our collection of curious tales.

A lady friend of the writer still living, and the daughter of a clergyman, assured him that in a country parish, where the church service was

conducted in a very free-and-easy, go-as-you-please sort of way, the clerk, looking up at the parson, asked, "What shall we do next, zurr?"

CHAPTER XXII

LONGEVITY AND HEREDITY--THE DEACON-CLERKS OF BARNSTAPLE

There are numerous instances of the hereditary nature of the clerk's office, which has frequently been passed on from father to son through several generations. I have already mentioned the Osbornes of Belbroughton, Worcestershire, who were parish clerks and tailors in the village from the time of Henry VIII, and the Worralls of Wolverley in the same county, whose reign extended over a century.

David Clarkson, the parish clerk of Feckenham, died in 1854, and his ancestors occupied the same office for two centuries. King's Norton had a famous race of clerks, of the name of Ford, who also served for the same period. The Fords were a long-lived family, as two of them held the office for 102 years. Cuthbert Bede mentions also the following remarkable instances of heredity:

The Roses were parish clerks at Bromsgrove from

"time out of mind." The Bonds were parish clerks at St. Michael's, Worcester, for a century. John Tustin had in 1856 been clerk of Broadway for fifty-two years, his father and grandfather having previously held the office. Charles Orford died at Oldswinford December 28th, 1855, aged seventy-three years, having been parish clerk from his youth, and having succeeded his father in that capacity: he was succeeded by his son Thomas Orford, who was again succeeded by his own son William, one of the present vergers in this church, aged seventy years. All these examples are taken from parishes in Worcestershire. An extraordinary instance of longevity and heredity occurs in the annals of the parish of Chapel-en-le-Frith, Derbyshire. Peter Bramwell, clerk of the parish, died in 1854, after having held the office for forty-three years. His father Peter Bramwell was clerk for fifty years, his grandfather George Bramwell for thirty-eight years, his great-great-grandfather George Bramwell for forty years, and his great-great-great-grandfather Peter Bramwell for fifty-two years. The total number of years during which the parish was served by this family of clerks was 223, and by only five members of it, giving an average of forty-four years and nine months for each--a wonderful record truly!

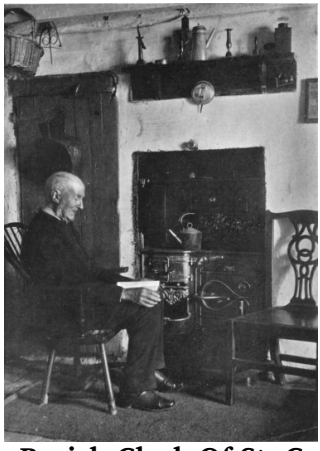
Nor are these instances of the hereditary nature of the office, and of the fact that the duties of the position seem to contribute to the lengthened days of the holders of it, entirely passed away. The riverside town of Marlow, Buckinghamshire, furnishes an example of this. Mr. H.W. Badger has occupied the position of parish clerk for half a century, and a few months ago was presented by the townspeople with an illuminated address, together with a purse of fifty-five sovereigns, in recognition of his long term of

service and of the esteem in which he is held. He was appointed in 1855 in succession to his father, Henry Badger, appointed in 1832, who succeeded his grandfather, Wildsmith Badger, who became parish clerk in 1789.

The oldest parish clerk living is James Carne, who serves in the parish of St. Columb Minor, Cornwall, and has held the office for fifty-eight years. He is now in his hundred and first year, and still is unremitting in attention to duty, and regularly attends church. He followed in the wake of his father and grandfather, who filled the same position for fifty-four years and fifty years respectively.

Mr. Edward J. Lupson is the much-respected parish clerk of Great Yarmouth, who is a great authority on the history of the important church in which he officiates, and is the author of several books. He has written an excellent guide to the church of St. Nicholas, and a volume entitled *Cupid's Pupils*, compiled from the personal "recollections of a parish clerk who assisted at ten thousand four hundred marriages and gave away eleven hundred and thirty brides"--a wonderful record, which, as the book was published seven years ago, has now been largely exceeded. The book is brightly written, and abounds in the records of amusing instances of nervous and forgetful brides and bride-grooms, of extraordinary blunders, of the failings of inexperienced clergy, and is a full and complete guide to those who contemplate matrimony. His guide to the church he loves so well is admirable. It appears there is a clerks' book at Great Yarmouth, which contains a number of interesting notes and memoranda. The clerks of this church were men of importance and position in the town. In 1760 John Marsh, who succeeded Sampson

Winn, was a town councillor. He was succeeded in 1785 by Mr. Richard Pitt, the son of a former mayor, and he and his wife and sixteen children were interred in the north chancel aisle, where a mural monument records their memories. The clerks at this period, until 1831, were appointed by the corporation and paid by the borough. In 1800 Mr. Richard Miller resigned his aldermanic gown to accept the office. Mr. David Absolon (1811-31) was a member of the corporation before receiving the appointment. Mr. John Seaman reigned from 1831 to 1841, and was followed by Mr. James Burman, who was the last clerk who took part in that curious duet with the vicar, to which we have often referred. He was an accomplished campanologist and composed several peals. In 1863 Mr. Lupson was appointed, who has so much honoured his office and earned the respect of all who know him. The old fashion of the clerk wearing gown and bands is continued at Great Yarmouth.



James Carne, Parish Clerk Of St. Columb-Minor, Cornwall.

The Oldest Living Clerk.

Mr. Lupson tells of his strange experiences when conducting visitors round the church, and explaining to them the varied objects of interest. What our clerks have to put up with may be news to many. I will give it in his own words:

Although a congenial and profitable engagement, it was often felt to be weary work, talking about the same things many times each day week after week: and anything but easy to exhibit the freshness and retain the vivacity that was desirable. Fortunately the monotony of the recital found considerable relief from the varied receptions it met with. Among the many thousand individuals, of all grades and classes, from the highest to the lowest, thus come in contact with, a diversified and wide range of characters was inevitable. The vast majority happily consisted of persons with whom it was pleasant to spend half an hour within the sacred walls, so gratified were they with what they saw and heard: some proving so enthusiastic, and showing such absorbing interest, that at every convenient halting-place they would take a seat, and comfortably adjust themselves as if preparing to hear an address from a favourite preacher. Occasionally, however, we had to endure the presence of persons who appeared to be suffering from disordered livers, or had nettles in their boots, so restless and dissatisfied were they. Scarcely anything pleased them. Undesirable individuals would sometimes be discovered in the midst of otherwise pleasant parties. Of such may be mentioned those who knew of much finer churches they could really admire. Whenever we heard the

preface--"There's one thing strikes me in this church"--we were prepared to hear a depreciatory remark of some kind. Some would take pleasure in breaking the sequence of the story by anticipating matters not then reached, and causing divers interruptions. Others would annoy by preferring persistent speaking to listening. It was trying work going round with, and explaining to, persons from whom nothing but mono-syllables could be drawn, either through nervousness, or from realising their exalted status to be miles above the person who was supposing himself able to interest them. Anything but desirable persons were they who, after going round the church, returned with other friends, and then posed as men whose knowledge of the building was equal, if not a shade superior, to that of the guide. Some parties would waste the time, and try one's patience by having amongst them laggards, to whom explanations already given had to be repeated. But we must pass by others, and proceed. The mind would sometimes find diversion by observing the idiosyncrasies, and detecting the pretensions of individuals. Gradually gaining acquaintance as we proceeded, we occasionally discovered some were aping gentility: some assuming positions that knew them not, and some claiming talents they did not possess. We will unmask a specimen of the latter class. A man, who was unaccompanied by friends, wished to see the church he had heard so much of. He seemed about thirty years of age; was a made-up exquisite, looking very imposing, peering as he did through gold-rimmed spectacles. His talents were of such an order he could not think of hiding them. He had learned Hebrew, not from printed books, as ordinary scholars are wont to do, but from MSS., and found it so easy a

matter, it "only took two hours," and it was simply "out of curiosity" that he undertook it. Before mentally placing this paragon among the classics, we showed him our MS. Roll (exquisitely written, as many visitors are aware, in unpointed Hebrew), and asked him to read a few words. This was indeed pricking the bubble. Tell it not in Gath, but publish we will, the discovery we instantly made. Our Hebrew scholar had forgotten that Hebrew ran from right to left! and worse still, he even shook his intellectual head, and gravely confessed that he "wasn't quite sure but that the Roll was written in Greek."

Other sources of relief to the mind jaded with constant repetition arose from the peculiar remarks that were made, and the strange questions that were often asked.

The organ has been a source of wonderment to multitudes who had never seen or heard of a divided organ. Wonderful stories had reached the ears of some respecting it.

"Is this the organ that was wrecked?" "Is this the organ that was dug out of the sea?" "Is this the organ that was taken out of the Spanish galleon?" "Wasn't this organ smuggled out of some ship?" "Didn't it belong to Handel?" "Wasn't this organ made for St. Peter's at Rome?" With confidence says one, "This organ really belongs to the continent; it was confiscated in some war." Whilst another as confidently asserts that "it was built in Holland for one of the English cathedrals, and the vessel that conveyed it was caught in a storm and wrecked upon Yarmouth beach; it was then taken possession of by the inhabitants and erected in this church." Others,

wishing to show their intimate knowledge of this instrument, have told their friends that the trumpet, which is a solid piece of wood, held by the angel at the summit of the northern organ-case, is only blown at the death of a royal person. And a lady, instead of informing her friend that it was a *vox humana* stop, called it a *vox populi*.

We were asked by one, "Did this organ break the windows? I was told a festival service was going on, the organist blew the trumpet stop, and broke the windows." Another inquiry was, "Who invented the pedals of this organ? We were told that quite a youth believed that pedals would improve it. He added them, and to the day of his death, whenever he was within a few miles of Yarmouth, he would come and hear them." In our hearing one man informed another that "this organ has miles of piping running somewhere about the town underground." The queries we have had to answer have been exceedingly numerous. Looking at the enclosure containing the console of the organ, a visitor wished to know whether the organist sat inside there. Another asked whether it was the vestry. One who saw great possibilities in such an organ inquired, "Can he play this organ in any other place beside the key-board?" The pulpit being of so unique a character has had a full share of attention, and no lack of admirers. Gazing at it with eyes filled with wonderment, a woman said to her daughter, "Maria, you're not to touch not even the pews." Everything within sight of such a structure she held sacred. Astonished at its internal capacity, another asked, "Do all the clergy sit in it?" Not realising its true character and intent, a lady wished to know, "By whom was this monument erected?" As we had long since ascertained how impossible it was to please

everybody, we were not surprised to find dissatisfied critics presenting themselves. One of this class said, "It looks like a tomb, and smells like a coffin." Another, with sarcastic wit, said, "Moses looks like some churchwarden who would have to be careful how he ate his soup." We append a few more questions we have had to answer:

"Was this church built by St. Nicholas?"

"Does this church stand in four parishes?"

"How many miles is it round the walls of this church?"

"How many does this hold? We were told it holds 12,000."

A clergyman asked, "Where are the bells? Are they in the tower?"

"Haven't you a Bible 3000 years old?"

"Haven't you a Bible that turns over its own leaves?"

"Who had the missing leaves of this (Cranmer's) Bible?"

"Is this the Bible that was chained in Brentwood Church?"

A lady pointing to the font asked, "Is that the Communion Table?"

An elderly lady at the brass lectern inquired, "Is this the clerk's seat?"

A man standing looking over the Communion rails wished to know, "What part of the church do you call this?"

"Was one of the giants buried in the churchyard?"

"Where is the gravestone where a man, his wife, and twenty-five children were buried? I saw it when I was here some years ago, and forget on which side of the church it is."

A young man gazing at the top of the lofty flagstaff just inside the churchyard gates, asked, "Was that erected to the memory of a shipwrecked crew?"

With such extraordinary exhibitions of blatant ignorance can a worthy clerk regale himself, but they must be very trying at times.

Mr. Lupson has also written *The Friendly Guide to the Parish Church and other places of interest in the neighbourhood, The Rows of Great Yarmouth; why so constructed*, and some devotional works.

He is also the author of the following additional verse to the National Anthem, sung on the occasion of the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria:

"Long life our Queen has seen:
Glorious her reign has been:
  Secure her throne!
Her subjects' joy and pride,
God's Word be still her guide:
Long may she yet abide
  Empress and Queen!"

The sons of parish clerks have sometimes attained to high dignity in the Church. The clerk of Totnes, Devonshire, had a son who was born in 1718, and who became the distinguished author and theologian, Dr. Kennicott. On one occasion he went to preach at the church in his native village, where

his father was still acting as clerk. The old man insisted upon performing his accustomed duties, placing the surplice or black gown on his son's shoulders, and sitting below him in the clerk's lowly desk. The mother of the scholar was so overcome with joy at hearing him preach, that she fainted and was carried out of the church insensible. Cuthbert Bede records that he was acquainted with two eminent clergymen who were the sons of parish clerks. One of them was a learned professor of a college and an author of repute, and the other was attended by his father in the same manner as Dr. Kennicott was by his.

Sometimes our failures are the stepping-stones to success in life. The celebrated Dr. Prideaux, Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford and Bishop of Worcester in 1641, was the son of poor parents at Harford, near Totnes. He applied for the post of parish clerk at Ugborough, but failed to obtain the appointment. He was much disappointed, and in despair wandered to Oxford, where he became a servitor at Exeter College, and ultimately attained to the position of rector or head of his college. When he became bishop, he was accustomed to say, "If I could have been clerk of Ugborough, I had never been bishop of Worcester."

The history of the clerks of Barnstaple (1500-1900) has been traced by the Rev. J.F. Chanter [95], and the record is remarkable as showing their important status, and how some were raised to the diaconate, and in difficult times rendered good service to the Church and the incumbents. The first clerk of whom any trace can be found was Thomas Hunt (1540-68). He appears in the register books as *clericus de hoc opido*, and in the churchwardens' accounts for 1564

there is an entry, "Item to Hunt the clerke paid for lights 2 s. 8 d." He was succeeded by his son, John Hunt (1564-84). Robert Langdon flourished as clerk from 1584 to 1625, when spiritual matters were at a low ebb in the parish. The vicar was excommunicated in 1589. His successor quickly resigned, and the next vicar was soon involved in feuds with some of his puritanically inclined parishioners. The quarrel was increased by the unworthy conduct of Robert Smyth, a preacher and lecturer who was appointed and paid by the corporation, and cared little for vicar or bishop. He was an extreme Puritan, and had a considerable following in the parish. His refusal to wear a surplice, though ordered to do so by the bishop, brought the dispute to a head. He was inhibited, but his followers retorted by accusing the vicar of being a companion of tipplers and fooling away his time with pipe and tabor, and finally bringing an accusation against him, on account of which the poor man was cited before the High Commission Court. The charge came to nothing, and Smyth for a time conformed and wore his surplice. Then some of the Puritan faction refused to accept the vicar's ministrations, and two of them were tried at the assizes and sent to gaol. "If they would rather go to gaol than church," said the town clerk, "much good may it do them. I am not of their mind." Passive resisters were not encouraged in those days. But the relations between vicar and lecturer continued strained, and the former bethought him of his faithful clerk, Robert Langdon, as a helper in the ministry. He applied to the bishop to raise him to the diaconate, and this was done, Langdon being ordained deacon on 21 September, 1606, by William Cotton, Bishop of Exeter. The record of this notable

event, the ordination of a parish clerk, thus appears in the ordination register of the diocese:

> "In festo Matthæi Apostoli Dominus Episcopus in ecclesia parochiali de Silfertone xxi mo die Septembris 1606 ordines sacros celebrando ordinavit, sequuntur Diaconi tunc et ibidinem ordinati videlicet Robertus Langdon de Barnestapli."
>
> [95] *Transactions of the Devonshire Association for the Advancement of Science, Literature, and Art*, 1904, xxxvi. pp. 390-414.

Langdon remained parish clerk and deacon nineteen years, and the register contained the record of his burial, "Robert Langdon deacon 5th July 1625." He seems to have brought peace to the troubled mind of his vicar, whose tombstone declares:

> "Many are the troubles of the Righteous
> But the Lord delivereth out of all."

Langdon used to keep the registers, and he began to record in them a series of notes on passing events which add greatly to the interest of such volumes. Thus we find an account of a grievous fire at Tiverton in 1595, a violent storm at Barnstaple in 1606, and a great frost in the same year; another fire at Tiverton in 1612, and the scraps of Latin which appear show that he was a man of some education.

Anthony Baker reigned from 1625 to 1646, who had also been ordained deacon prior to his appointment

to Barnstaple, and belonged to an old yeoman family. He was popular with the people, who presented him with a new gown. He saw the suspension of his vicar by the Standing Committee, and probably died of the plague in 1646, when the town found itself without vicar, deacon, or clerk. The plague was raging, people dying, and no one to minister to them. No clergyman would come save the old vicar, Martyn Blake, who was at length allowed by the Puritan rulers to return, to the great joy of the inhabitants. He appointed Symon Sloby (1647-81), but could not get him ordained deacon, as bishops and ordination were abhorred and abolished by the Puritan rulers. Sloby was appointed "Register of Barnestapell" during the Commonwealth period. He saw his vicar ejected and carried off to Exeter by some of the Parliamentary troopers and subsequently restored to the living, and records with much joy and loyalty the restoration of the monarchy. He served three successive vicars, records many items of interest, including certain gifts to himself with a pious wish for others to go and do likewise, and died in a good old age.

Richard Sleeper succeeded him in 1682, and reigned till 1698. He conformed to the more modern style of clerk of an important parish, a dignified official who attended the vicar and performed his duties on Sunday, occupying the clerk's desk. Of his successors history records little save their names. William Bawden, a weaver, was clerk from 1708 to 1726, William Evans 1726 to 1741, John Taylor 1741 to 1760, John Comer 1760 to 1786, John Shapcote 1786 to 1795, Joseph Kimpland 1795 to 1798, who was a member of an old Barnstaple family and was succeeded by his son John (1798-1832), John Thorne (1832-1859), John Hartnoll (1859-1883), and

William Youings 1883 to 1901.

This is a remarkable record, and it would be well if in all parishes a list of clerks, with as much information as the industrious inquirer can collect, could be so satisfactorily drawn up and recorded, as Mr. Chanter has so successfully done for Barnstaple. The quaint notes in the registers written by the clerk give some sort of key to his character, and the recollections of the oldest inhabitants might be set down who can tell us something of the life and character of those who have lived in more modern times. We sometimes record in our churches the names of the bishops of the see, and of the incumbents of the parish; perhaps a list of the humbler but no less faithful servants of the Church, the parish clerks, might be added.

Often can we learn much from them of old-world manners, superstitions, folk-lore, and the curious form of worship practised in the days of our forefathers. My own clerk is a great authority on the lore of ancient days, of bygone hard winters, of weather-lore, of the Russian war time, and of the ways of the itinerant choir and orchestra, of which he was the noted leader. Strange and curious carols did he and his sons and friends sing for us on Christmas Eve, the words and music of which have been handed down from father to son for several generations, and have somewhat suffered in their course. His grandson still performs for us the Christmas Mumming Play. The clerk is seventy years of age, and succeeded his father some forty years ago. Save for "bad legs," the curse of the rustic, he is still hale and hearty, and in spite of an organ and surpliced choir, his powerful voice still sounds with a resonant "Amen." Never does he miss a Sunday

service.

We owe much to our faithful clerks. Let us revere their memories. They are a most interesting race, and your "Amen clerk" is often more celebrated and better known than the rector, vicar, patron or squire. The irreverence, of which we have given many alarming instances, was the irreverence of the times in which they lived, of the bad old days of pluralist rectors and itinerant clerics, when the Church was asleep and preparing to die with what dignity she could. We may not blame the humble servitor for the faults and failings of his masters and for the carelessness and depravity of his age. We cannot judge his homely ways by the higher standard of ceremonial and worship to which we have become accustomed. Charity shall hide from us his defects, while we continue to admire the virtues, faithfulness and devotion to duty of the old parish clerk, who retains a warm place in our hearts and is tenderly and affectionately remembered by the elder generation of English Churchpeople.

CHAPTER XXIII

CONCLUSION

The passing of the parish clerk causes many reflections. For a thousand years he has held an important position in our churches. We have seen him robed in his ancient dignity, a zealous and honoured official, without whose aid the services of the Church could scarcely have been carried on. In post-Reformation times he continued his career without losing his rank or status, his dignity or usefulness. We have seen him the life and mainstay of the village music, the instructor of young clerics, the upholder of ancient customs and old-established usages. We have regretted the decay in his education, his irreverence and absurdities, and have amused ourselves with the stories of his quaint ways and strange eccentricities. His unseemly conduct was the fault of the dullness, deadness, and irreverence of the age in which he lived, rather than of his own personal defects. In spite of all that can be said against him, he was often a very faithful, loyal, pious, and worthy man.

His place knows him no more in many churches. We have a black-gowned verger in our towns; a humble temple-sweeper in our villages. The only civil right which he retains is that the prospectors of new railways are obliged to deposit their plans and maps with him, and well do I remember the indignation of my own parish clerk when the plans of a proposed railway, addressed to "the Parish Clerk," were delivered by the postman to the clerk of the Parish Council. It was a wrong that could scarcely be righted.

I would venture to suggest, in conclusion, that it might be worth while for the authorities of the Church to consider the possibility of a revival of the office. It would be a great advantage to the Church

to restore the parish clerk to his former important position, and to endeavour to obtain more learned and able men for the discharge of the duties. The office might be made again a sphere of training for those who wish to take Holy Orders, wherein a young man might be thoroughly educated in the duties of the clerical profession. It would be an immense assistance to an incumbent to have an active and educated layman associated with him in the work of the parish, in teaching, in reading and serving in church, and in visiting the sick. Like the clerk of old, he would be studying and preparing for ordination, and there could be no better school for training than actual parish work under the supervision of an earnest and wise rector.

The Church has witnessed vast changes and improvements during the last fifty years. The poor clerk has been left to look after himself. The revival of the office and an improvement in the position and education of the holders of it would, I fully believe, be of an immense advantage to the Church and a most valuable assistance to the clergy.

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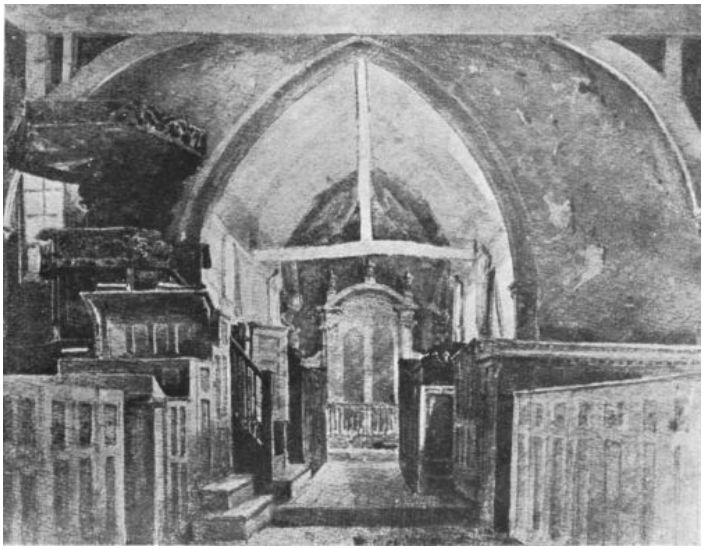
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London 2 From the 27 of December to the 3 of January. 1664

	Bur.	Plag.
St Allhan Woodstreet	2	
Allhallows Barking	1	
Allhallows Breadstreet		
Allhallows Grass	1	
Allhallows Honylane		
Allhallows Lesse		
Allhallows Lumbardstreet	1	
Allhallows Staining		
Allhallows the Wall		
St Alphage		
St Andrew Hubbard	1	
St Andrew Undershaft	2	
St Andrew Wardrobe	4	
St Ann Aldersgate		
St Ann Blackfryers	4	
St Anthonies Parish		
St Austins Parish		
St Bartholomew Exchange		
St Benet Fynck	2	
St Benet Gracechurch		
St Benet Paulswharf	2	
St Benet Sherehog	1	
St Botolph Billingsgate	2	
Christ Church	1	
St Christophers		
St Clement Eastcheap		
St Dionis Backchurch	1	
St Dunstan East	3	
St Edmund Lumbardst.		
St Ethelbrough		
St Faith		
St Father		
St Gabriel Fenchurch		
St George Botolphlane		
St Gregory by St Paul	4	
St Helen		
St James Dukes place	1	
St James Garlickhithe	1	
St John Bepist	1	
St John Evangelist		
St John Zachary	1	
St Katherine Colemanst		
St Katherine Coechurch		
St Lawrence Jewry		
St Lawrence Pountney		
St Leonard Eastcheap	1	
St Leonard Fosterlane	1	
St Magnus Parish	3	
St Margaret Lothbury	1	
St Margaret Mofes	1	
St Margaret Newfishst.		
St Margaret Pattens		
St Mary Abchurch	1	
St Mary Aldermanbury		
St Mary Aldermary	2	
St Mary le Bow		
St Mary Bothaw		
St Mary Colechurch		
St Mary Hill		
St Mary Mounthaw	1	
St Mary Somersetst	1	
St Mary Stayning		
St Mary Woolchurch		
St Mary Woolnoth		
St Martin Ironmongerlane	1	
St Martin Ludgate	2	
St Martin Organs		
St Martin Outwich		
St Martin Vintrey		
St Mathew Fridaystreet		
St Maudlin Milkstreet		
St Maudlin Oldfishstreet		
St Michael Bassishaw		
St Michael Cornhil		
St Michael Crookedlane		
St Michael Querenhithe		
St Michael Quern	1	
St Michael Royal		
St Michael Woodstreet	2	
St Mildred Breadstreet		
St Mildred Poultrey		
St Nicholas Acons		
St Nicholas Colesby		
St Nicholas Olaves		
St Olave Hartstreet	2	
St Olave Jewry		
St Olave Silverstreet	2	
St Pancras Soperlane		
St Peter Cheap		
St Peter Cornhil		
St Peter Paulswharf		
St Peter Poor	3	
St Steven Colemanstreet	2	
St Steven Walbrook		
St Swithin	4	
St Thomas Apostles		
Trinity Parish	3	

Buried in the 97 Parishes within the Walls — 66 Plague — 0

St Andrew Holborn	17	St Botolph Aldgate	17	Saviours Southwark	10
St Bartholomew Great		St Botolph Bishopsgate	10	S Sepulchres Parish	17
St Bartholomew Leffe	3	St Dunstan Weſt	7	St Thomas Southwark	3
St Bridge	6	St George Southwark	5	Trinity Minories	
Bridewel Precinct		St Giles Cripplegate	33	At the Pesthouſe	
St Botolph Aldersgate	6	St Olave Southwark	15		

Buried in the 16 Parishes without the Walls and at the Pesthouſe — 136 Plague — 0

St Giles in the Fields	16	Lambeth Parish	4	St Mary Hlington	
Stepney Parish	5	St Leonard Shoreditch	6	St Mary Whitechapel	17
St James Clerkenwel	9	St Magdalen Bermondſy	4	Redriffe Parish	
St Kath. near the Tower	1	St Mary Newington	7	Stepney Parish	33

Buried in the 12 out Parishes in Middleſex and Surrey — 102 Plague — 0

St Clements Dane	12	St Martin in the Field	17	St Margaret Weſtminſter	14
St Paul Covent Garden		St Mary Savoy	2	Without at the Pesthouſe	

Buried in the 5 Parishes in the City and Liberties of Weſtminſter — 45 Plague — 0

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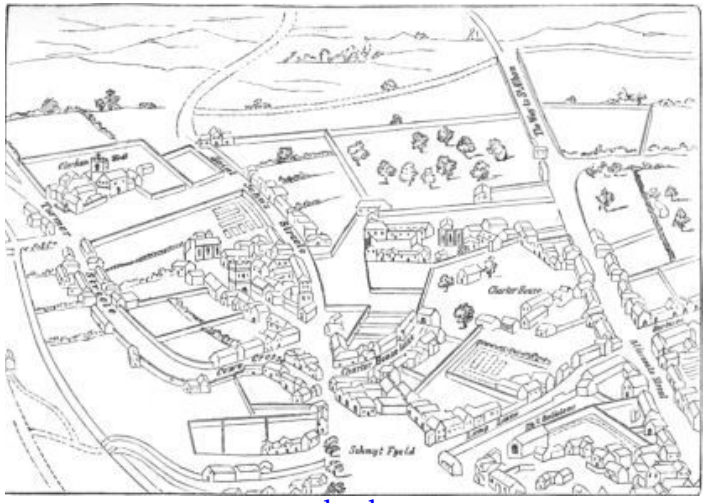
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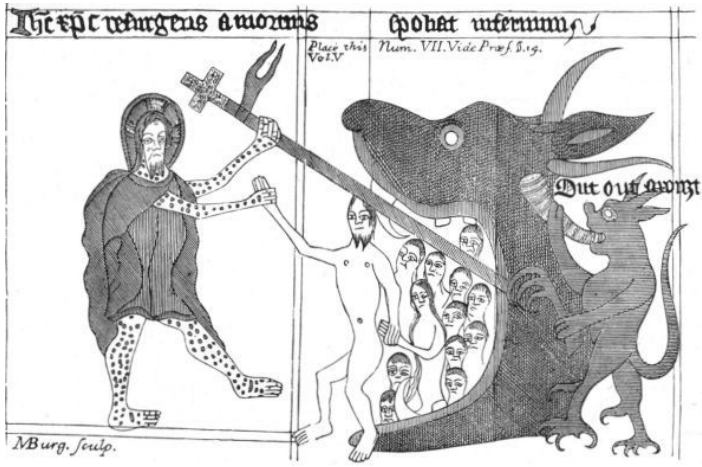
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