

The Rev. William Charles Howell, M.A.

Greatness is the dream of many and the realization of few. Like the spot where the rainbow touches the ground, it is nearly always one field ahead. Yet if a man does not achieve the intense satisfaction of gaining fame during his lifetime, surely the next best thing to so doing is to win the esteem and respect of others; and that as a result of a consistent endeavour to spend his life in striving to be of real use in the world.

A life of assiduous and arduous work for the benefit of others has been that spent by the Rev. William Charles Howell, M.A., who was for forty years Vicar of Holy Trinity, Tottenham, and who upon leaving the district after some fifty years passed within its borders had the proud consciousness that while he left many friends he had not a single enemy, and this not because he had refrained from approaching the vortex of public life, but because while ever striving to help with matters of public import, he was known to always have the courage of his opinions, the vigorous expression of his thoughts being ever tempered by his breadth of view and the kindly manner which had so great an influence during his long work in Tottenham in making him revered and admired by all who came into contact with him.

Throughout the whole of his work in Tottenham, the Rev. W. C. Howell always evinced a very warm interest in the welfare of the working classes, whose sympathy and respect he enjoyed, and in a quiet way, without any great parade, he preserved the true status of his high office, finding the fulfilment of the Church's mission in the promotion of general happiness, in encouraging right sentiments respecting human brotherhood, as well as in the propagation of those principles on which he relies for vanquishing mortal and eternal grief.

Upon leaving Brasenose College, Oxford, where he graduated in Honours in the First Class in Mathematics and Physics in 1840, the Rev. W. C. Howell was ordained in 1842, having his first curacy at Uxbridge. In 1850 he went as Curate to the parish church of All Hallows, Tottenham, a church which has many ancient associations In 1865 Mr. Howell was preferred to the living of Holy Trinity, a parish which was formed out of All Hallows. The church, which was consecrated May 26th, 1830, was erected from the designs of Mr. Savage, and was built at a cost of about £5,000. This was the first ecclesiastical partition which occurred in Tottenham, and it proved to be the forerunner of tremendous changes.

There are few clergymen who can claim to have been more intimately acquainted with the altered conditions of life around outer London during the latter half of the nineteenth century than the Rev. W. C. Howell. When he first came to Tottenham it was a charming rural retreat from London, being mainly inhabited by the well-to-do, who found there the quiet and rest they were denied in the City. These members of the wealthy and cultured classes lived in commodious, old-fashioned residences, and in most parts of the district delightful sylvan views were to be enjoyed. But by the time Mr. Howell left Tottenham in 1904 a complete change had come over the place. Serried streets of houses had sprung up; a huge working class population had arrived and crowds of London poor, ousted from the more squalid parts of the City, had migrated into the parish. Simultaneously, an exodus had taken place of the old-established families from the district. So far-reaching were the changes brought about, that four times during Mr. Howell's vicariate of Holy Trinity he was instrumental in yielding up portions of his parish and assisting in the creation of four entirely new ecclesiastical districts necessitated by the constantly increasing needs of the new population incessantly surging into Tottenham. But notwithstanding these surrenders, when Mr. Howell left Holy Trinity in 1904, the parish contained then a larger population than he found there in 1865.

When he first arrived in Tottenham, Holy Trinity parish occupied about a square mile of area. Some four or five years before Mr. Howell became Vicar, a slice was cut off Holy Trinity for the making of St. Ann's parish. At that time, the neighbourhood of Stamford Hill was a particularly select one, the Church folk including a number of people who could afford to keep carriages. Thus St. Ann's started its career as a separate parish being regarded as the wealthy ecclesiastical district. But how times have changed! St. Ann's is to-day known as one of the poorest and most crowded parts of Tottenham. The four districts which were partly formed from Holy Trinity during Mr. Howell's incumbency are those of Christchurch, St. Mary's, St. Peter's, and St. Philip the Apostle, and at the time this volume is going to press the permanent church of St. Philip the Apostle, in Philip Lane, is being completed in a district which Mr. Howell well remembers as being entirely composed of fields.

Of course, the cutting off of each portion of the parish adds considerably to the anxieties of a parish priest, because it means the loss of church workers, as well as of church revenue. But Mr. Howell is a born organiser, and each time he quickly gathered together his forces and saw to it that the temporary depletion was quickly turned into a source of strength and that the health and power of the mother parish were improved rather than weakened by the change.

Realizing keenly that the future of the Church depends absolutely upon the training of the young, the Rev. W. C. Howell was always assiduous in the cause of public elementary education, paying careful attention to the needs and necessities

of the children. For twenty five years he carried on three day schools in connection with his parish and with the support of local church people. So staunchly was he upheld that he always managed to keep the finances of the schools perfectly straight, although in chatting over these reminiscences, he smilingly recalled the fact that on one occasion their balance in hand diminished to the low figure of sevenpence. Their expenses were always heavy, for in those days, amongst other things, they had to pay £20 a year rent for the school at Willow Walk.

When the School Boards came into existence, Mr. Howell saw in the new regime fresh incentive to further efforts. He was a member of the first Tottenham School Board and retained his seat for eighteen years, during which time he was practically the vice-chairman of the Board. In the course of those busy years, owing to the rapid growth of the district and its then union with Wood Green for elementary educational purposes, the detail involved in the duties of this position were very heavy indeed. Many and many a late evening had to be devoted to Committee and Board work and throughout this long spell Mr. Howell stuck valiantly to his task, ever keenly alert to see that the best interests of the children were insured, and always acting with a broad, impartial mind for the welfare of all the scholars and of no one particular class.

But it was not only in matters of elementary education that Mr. Howell proved a vigilant and ever watchful guide, for he is also one of the Governors, at present the oldest surviving Life Governor (we are writing in August, 1906), of the Tottenham Grammar School, having been continuously in office since 1873

Another striking tribute to Mr. Howell's worth was made by the Rev. Prebendary Hobson, Rural Dean, who, in speaking of Mr. Howell's work, said — "When I first came to Tottenham, Mr. Howell was a fine old English gentleman, and he is a little older, a little finer, and no less a gentleman now."

In presenting to Mr. Howell the cheque for one hundred guineas and the illuminated album containing the names of the subscribers, which was tangible proof of the esteem and affection felt for him, Mr. Joseph Howard said that they all regretted losing Mr. Howell. He had been with them a long time, first as Curate at the parish church, and then for nearly forty years as Vicar of Holy Trinity. They knew how well he had occupied that position, and were glad of an opportunity for showing their respect and regard for him. They had known him in various capacities — as a fine old English gentleman; as a scholar of great erudition; as a man who had occupied various public positions with great credit to himself and advantage to the parish and, above all, as a Minister of the Christian religion. He had devoted himself manfully to the services of the Church and the welfare of the people, especially the children. They all hoped he would be spared many years to enjoy the leisure which he had earned so well and that he would be enabled to devote himself to those pursuits in which he was so much interested.

The address which was presented to Mr. Howell, read as follows :—

Address presented to the Rev. W. C. Howell, M.A., Oxon., on the occasion of his retirement from the incumbency of Holy Trinity, Tottenham, together with a cheque for one hundred guineas from the parishioners of Tottenham and the congregation of Holy Trinity. The address is presented to the Rev. W. C. Howell, MA, Vicar, by some of his many friends in testimony of their admiration of his great and varied talents and in loving appreciation of the genial and amiable disposition he has consistently manifested during his ministry for more than half a century amongst them.
Tottenham, 6th October, 1904.

In the course of his speech of thanks the Rev. W. C. Howell referred to the intellectual pursuits in which he hoped to interest himself in his new home. In making a passing mention of some of the work which he had already achieved, he spoke of the task which he had undertaken with other members of the Gilbert Club, of translating the famous *De Magnete* of William Gilbert, of Colchester, the father of the science of electricity and physician to Queen Elizabeth. After years of labour this translation was completed and the work published in 1900.

At a previous meeting, the girls of the Green School, a few old scholars and the teachers presented Mr. Howell with an easy chair with double leg rest action, while another evidence of the far-reaching nature of his work was seen when some twenty deaf and dumb adults of North London whose afflictions he had earnestly endeavoured to alleviate, asked his acceptance of a silver entree dish. Other reminders which Mr. Howell possesses of the place his earnest work forged for him in the hearts of those to whom he ministered so long and so truly, are a walking stick mounted in ivory and silver, which was given him by the members of the Choir; a wooden porringer mounted in silver, with silver spoon, from the boys of the Sunday School, and a George III silver tankard from the members of the Mothers' Meeting.

For some years Mr. Howell has been a member of and an attendant at the meetings of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, besides having been for a long period a member of and contributor to the proceedings of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society and the Essex Field Club, of the Council of which latter he is also a member. Not content with merely gathering up knowledge for his own use, Mr. Howell, during the course of his long ministry, delivered many series of lectures in his own parish, as well as in other places in England and also on the

Continent, on Ecclesiastical, Astronomical, Archaeological and other scientific subjects. These lectures were illustrated by experiments and diagrams, Mr. Howell's aim always being to trace as far as possible the Power, Wisdom, and Goodness of the Creator in the works of Nature.

From the above brief notice of a life spent in doing good to others it will be seen that Mr. Howell has well won the peaceful retirement in Regent's Park Road, where he now lives with his family. In Tottenham the loving tribute which always follows the mention of his name shows that he has indeed gained the reward of a patient endeavour to be guided ever by the spirit expressed in George Herbert's lines :—

*Be useful where thou livest, that they may
Both want and wish thy pleasing presence still.
Kindness, good part, great patience are the way
To compass this. Find out men's wants and will,
And meet them there. All worldly joys grow less
To the one joy of doing kindliness.*