MAKING USE OF OPPORTUNITIES.

By the Rev. C. C. Dobson, M.A., Vicar of St. Mary-in-the-Castle, Hastings.

THE Editor has asked me to write an article, giving some account of our parochial work, and more especially of the permanent exhibition of sacred and missionary models maintained by the church on the sea-front for visitors to Hastings. The parish has, from its situation and history, afforded exceptional opportunities of witnessing in more ways than one, and it is only in a spirit of humility, and a deep sense of thanksgiving to God, that I accede to his request, in the hope that our experiences may prove helpful, and a stimulus to others. Some of the opportunities afforded to St. Mary-in-the-Castle Church are unique, and could not be imitated by others, but few churches probably exist, which do not provide opportunities of some sort. It is often not the want of opportunity that is lacking, but the failure to see and utilize it. Some, however, of the open doors which we have entered, can, I feel sure, be entered by others in their own spheres.

St. Mary-in-the-Castle Church lies nestling in the Cliff on the sea-front at Hastings, with the ruined Castle towering over it on the Cliff above. It was built a hundred years ago to replace the ruined church lying within the Castle walls above it. For the purpose of building it, the Cliff, much of which had crumbled since the castle was built under William the Conqueror, was levelled down, and the church erected in circular form, the nave nestling in the hollowed-out rock, and its huge circular gallery resting on a shelf of rock behind and above it. Its situation at once reminds one of its mission, to build upon the Rock of Ages.

In former years there were few other churches in the town, and a substantial population resided around it. With such famed preachers as Thomas Vores and Frederick Whitfield, the hymn-writer, it drew crowded congregations, and filled a big place in the Evangelical world. But times have altered. Other churches have been built, and its surroundings have become largely shops, or boarding-houses. To-day its mission is largely to the holiday visitors to the town. This has been recently realized, as well as the fact that in numberless unnoticed ways the church could be made to appeal to visitors. There was its situation on the sea-front, and its unique shape and construction. Behind it was the Castle, with its romantic story of its first church, deanery, and college of Canons. There King Rufus held his court, and Archbishop Anselm fearlessly denounced to his face the sins of the court. There Anselm consecrated a Bishop of Lincoln. There Rufus defied the Pope by degrading a Bishop appointed by the Pope. There Thomas à Becket presided as Dean over the College of Canons, and at a later date an Archbishop of Canterbury defied King Henry III, and made an entry " by stealth " into the Castle, for the purpose of excom-

municating some of the Canons, who resisted his authority. There a band of the clergy broke into the Castle dungeon, and rescued a prisoner condemned to death. After giving him sanctuary in the church for a week, they smuggled him across the channel to France, and safety.

These and other facts were entirely unknown both to the congregation and visitors, and the first duty consisted in making the story known by means of an attractive illustrated booklet. Such a handbook, moreover, could be made to speak a message besides giving bare facts. The condemned prisoner, for instance, and his rescue, sanctuary, and ultimate escape, constituted a parable.

Here may I suggest that in hundreds of ancient churches much may be done to create an interest, both among the congregation and visitors, by a careful setting forth of facts concerning the church and its history. Old registers contain abundant material of all sorts, from which lessons may be drawn. A small leaflet in the Porch should be available for every one who enters, together with a box for missions. In our own case the history of the ancient parish has provided numberless pulpit illustrations and references, and has created an evergrowing interest, and is drawing visitors in increasing numbers, besides having awakened a new-found love among the residents.

The most precious possession of the church, however, was never realized until a few months ago, and now draws literally hundreds of visitors to the Church during summer, namely, a spring of water flowing directly out of the rock.

When the Church was built a hundred years ago, this spring was carefully preserved. The wall of the church was built against the Cliff at this point, and the water, collected in a small rock cavity, was utilized to supply the church's needs. The gallery rests upon this rock so that the water flows out actually in the Church under the gallery. No one, however, realized the symbolic beauty of the possession, namely, that every child was baptized with "living water" from the rock, and that it symbolized the work of the Church, to offer "the Living water" to the souls of men. Hidden away in the dark under the gallery, its very existence was almost forgotten, and its surroundings became the dumping-ground of the rubbish of the Church. Recently, however, I was led to draw attention to its symbolism. Every one then wanted to see it. The rubbish was cleared away, electric light installed, and the rock basin formed into an attractive grotto with ferns and evergreens.

Its very story was seen to constitute a parable. On Calvary the "Fountain for sin and uncleanness" was opened. Over it was built up the Christian Church. But somehow gradually formalism, priestcraft, and materialism largely obscured it, and the simple spirituality of the early church was lost. Then, in the middle ages, the dust and rubbish of superstition, worship of images and relics, sale of indulgencies, and false teaching marred it. With the Reformation came an awakening. The rubbish was cleared away,

and the " Water of Life " was once more offered in all its purity to mankind.

More recently the public analyst was asked to analyse the water of our spring, and he pronounced it a pure and wholesome spring for drinking, and rich in minerals. These again were analysed, and another parable unfolded itself. The very minerals prove to be symbolic.

Sodium reminds us that the Water of Life makes men the salt of the earth. " Have salt in yourselves," said Our Lord.

Calcium suggests the generation of heat, and the Water of Life infuses the warmth of divine Love into the soul.

Magnesium suggests electric energy, attractive power, and brilliant light. The Water of Life energizes in the Master's Service, makes us attractive to others, and constitutes us lights in the world.

Iron reminds one that Christ can strengthen the will to resist evil.

Finally, Silica, the transparency of every jewel, is a reminder, that those who drink of the Water of Life become God's Jewels.

Over the spring hang two texts : " If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." " Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again, but whoso drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst."

Every week, and on Sundays, visitors view this spring, drink its waters, and learn its lessons.

I now turn to a unique work, which experience has shown can probably be widely imitated in various forms, and seems to open a new door for evangelistic and missionary effort. The whole story of our exhibition of sacred and missionary models is one of miraculously answered prayer.

Right in front of the Church, actually on the parade, is a block of buildings. Every one strolling along the parade passes either in front or behind these buildings. In this block of buildings was a small chapel, which came to an end. We managed to secure it on lease. In winter time it is used for general church purposes, but the main purpose we had in view was to open it during summer as an exhibition and Christian literature depôt.

At the outset we decided that it should be run on faith, no charge for admission being made, and no one should be asked to give or buy anything. Three anxious problems faced us at the start : Would people visit it ? Would we meet expenses, estimated at £2 10*s*. per week ? Would we find workers to carry it on all through the summer ? Then there was the question of models. The missionary societies were of course able to help us in this direction, but, apart from their help, some of an evangelistic character were also needed. While thinking over the plan I received a letter from Rev. Evan Hopkins of Eastbourne, saying he had at his disposal a large model of Herod's Temple, made by an uncle, and asking if I could suggest a use for it. He knew nothing of what was in our mind, but this gave us a start. My knowledge of the Garden Tomb, Jerusalem, enabled me to make an attractive model, which

tellingly illustrates the whole story of the Resurrection. A relative found in her cupboard a small box containing some little Chinese figures. They proved to be a Chinese funeral procession, and, tastily set out, they tell of all the false ideas of the Chinese regarding death and hereafter. A visit on my part to the catacombs at Rome resulted in a model of a section, which speaks of the simple faith, heroism, and martyrdoms of the early church. A visitor, seeing this model, sent me a set of linen sheets containing diagrams and illustrations of the tablets and inscriptions.

Passing casually through Bristol I found, in an old curiosity shop, a beautifully made and costly model of ancient Jerusalem, which I was able to secure. I cannot regard it as chance that the one person in the country, who so specially needed this model, should have been the one, who thus so apparently casually came across it. It has proved of never ceasing interest, and even a child can speak about it to visitors giving simple facts, whereas, for the deeper student, it enables lectures on excavation work at Jerusalem, and recent discoveries, and developments in the city, to be given. The story of Passion week can be told from it with vivid reality. Besides these models of an evangelistic character, a few missionary models from societies have brought the work of the foreign field to the notice of visitors.

Besides the models a few tables of carefully selected literature, both missionary and evangelistic were provided, and the Christian Colportage Society, whose agent attends weekly, was given a special table. Coming to the three problems which faced us at the outset: the depôt was placed in charge of Miss Waller, Sister of the Bishop of Madras, and round her have gathered a band of workers who have never failed. Two and sometimes three are on duty every morning and afternoon. Workers, who shrink from speaking in the ordinary way, have found they can do so with a model to help them, and many have thus gained confidence. As regards finances, the estimated cost of £2 10*s*. per week was to be met by a box for depôt expenses, placed near the door, and a small profit on literature. The sales, however, were never to be pressed, and the box was to remain quite unobtrusive. The first year saw a profit of 2*s*. 4*d*. Last year some £10 was sent to Missions, and this year a larger profit seems assured.

Finally, the question as to whether visitors would enter, has found its answer. Figures, based on counting on certain days, show that the first year about 15,000 visitors entered. Last year the total was some 20,000, and this number has certainly been exceeded this year. Seven hundred and fifty-one entered on Easter Monday alone.

A volume might be written about the conversations held with visitors, and the work done. These have included christian scientists, spiritualists, Jews, attracted by the models of Herod's Temple and the Tabernacle, agnostics, and Roman Catholics, etc. Tracts suitable for these, and for different forms of religious doubt or difficulty, are always available.

By this effort we have proved that people can be won through the eye; that those who will not stop, and listen, at an ordinary open-air service, will listen, when there is something to look at, and when definite knowledge is to be imparted. Although it is true that the situation is specially exceptional for such an effort, yet we feel sure that in any place, where people are at leisure, or are sight-seeing, or have any time on their hands, such an effort can succeed. I know of several historic churches, visited annually by thousands of sightseers, where such a small exhibition would do good, and add to the interest of the visitors. Even where models cannot be used, opportunities exist of getting the right kind of literature into people's hands. In our case the Scripture Gift Mission has kept us well supplied, and it has been a real eye-opener to find how many Bibles are purchased, or Gospels accepted free, and asked for. Large numbers of Yiddish Gospels have found their way into the hands of Jews, and many Roman Catholics have accepted portions of Scripture.

In every watering-place every form of show and worldly amusement is offered to visitors. Why not offer something of a higher kind of the description of our Exhibition. If I can afford any guidance, I shall be only too ready to reply to any who care to write to me.

A PIONEER MISSIONARY AMONG THE MAORIS, 1850 TO 1879. Being the Letters and Journals of Thomas Samuel Grace. New Zealand: *G. H. Bennett and Co., Ltd., Palmerston North.* (London Agents: *Messrs. Simpkin, Marshall & Co., Ltd.*) 10*s.* 6*d.* net.

The glory of children are their fathers! The publication of these memoirs is overdue, but it is fortunate that at last they have been printed so that the Christians of New Zealand can read the story of these devoted pioneer-missionaries, and that friends, too, of the C.M.S. may be reminded of men and women whose names are in danger of being forgotten. Mr. Grace, who came of Huguenot stock, gave up a lucrative business to study for Holy Orders and was ordained in 1848 to the Curacy of Tideswell, in the Peak district. He had offered himself to the C.M.S. and soon after he was "Priested" he and his wife set out for New Zealand, where they arrived on the 9th of July, 1850, and where they worked with untiring devotion, courage and patience, until his death in May, 1879. He was the first white man to establish himself in the centre of the North Island, and those who affect to think that missionaries have "a good time" will find in these pages the story of a strenuous life, full of difficulties and dangers. In 1865 Mr. Grace narrowly escaped a cruel death when his beloved friend the Rev. C. S. Volkner was murdered. This record of service is worthy of a place among many well-known chronicles of lives spent in devoted witness for the Master. There are fifteen portraits and illustrations which add to the interest of the book.

S. R. C.