

**THE CURATE OF SHYRE. A  
RECORD OF PARISH REFORM,  
WITH ITS ATTENDANT RELIGIOUS  
AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

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The Curate of Shyre. A Record of Parish Reform, with Its Attendant Religious and Social Problems by Charles Anderson

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**CHARLES ANDERSON**

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A RECORD OF PARISH REFORM,  
WITH ITS ATTENDANT  
RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS.



BY THE REV.

CHARLES ANDERSON, M.A.

VICAR OF ST. JOHN'S, LIMEHOUSE.

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# THE CURATE OF SHYRE.

## CHAPTER I.

SHYRE yielded its full share of failings, such as are the too common inheritance of other provincial towns in these years of grace 1864-74. For instance, it might be fairly charged against it that it was dull, for it certainly did not offer "good society;" that it was damp, for it stood in a deep hollow, shut in by hills on every side; that it was dirty, for the streets were narrow and ill-paved, and the shopkeepers were "struggling," and not, as a class, wealthy; that it was unhealthy, for besides the damp and the dirt, there was poverty, with its accompanying sickness and over-crowding, in all the back streets, and with the exception of the "High Street" all the streets were back streets; that it was a gossiping town; what country town is not? for there is little else to do; that there was much religious discord, first between the dissenters and the churchmen, and next among the church members themselves—the rector, churchwardens, vestrymen, and parishioners; for the rector was not too popular,

the small tradesmen were not too reasonable, the poor were not too contented, and the church work was not too vigorous. In fact the religious vital energy of the place was below par, and hence could not throw out good stuff—bone, sinew, flesh, nerve. As an unhealthy wound in a scrofulous patient secretes poisonous, ulcerous matter, due to the deficiency of vital power, so in the body politic, where the religious vitality fails, what should have been sound organic structure, assumes unhealthy forms; and such was the “religious” life of Shyre, a spiritual scrofulous disease.

And yet Shyre was one of the most picturesque towns in all England. The view from the wooded hills, on any side, was magnificent; and the old town, with its numerous red-tiled roofs and the tall gray leaden spire of its church in the midst, added a beauty of its own to the scenery around, viewed from whatever point; the neighbouring villages, too, were famed for their picturesque character, and hence much frequented by artists; and there was a bright clear river which meandered through the many valleys, and seemed to meet the wanderer at every turn.

Such was the spot in which Alfred Austen found himself suddenly settled down as curate. The curacy had been named to him at a London dinner-party. On his visit to explore the ground, he found the rector an agreeable, gentlemanly man; the exquisite scenery around

was most fascinating, and the easy distance from town was a further attraction; so, taking all things into consideration, he determined to accept the curacy. The church was a fine old building, but not well-ordered; it looked one vast lumber-room of square high-backed pews and heavy old-fashioned galleries, the latter protruding between the massive arches on all sides. The pulpit stood like a towering monument within the building; when Austen first climbed up, and, leaning over the huge velvet cushion, looked down into the space below, he felt quite giddy. The service was sleepy in the extreme. The pew-holders dozed in their padded pews; the few poor sat cramped and lifeless on their hard benches; the clerk stimulated himself with a pinch of snuff before bestirring himself to give out the hymn; the school children woke up and slept again between their singing; the rector droned prayers, sermon, and notices, in one unbroken monotone; and when the service was ended, the "worshippers" crept out from the musty church into the bright daylight stupified, like wasps crawling from their nest half stifled by the smoking sulphur, lighted as a funeral pyre.

In conversation with Dr. Ansell, the rector, a bachelor of about eight-and-forty, Austen soon discovered that there was not much love or sympathy between him and his people. The new curate naturally wished to know something of the leading parishioners.