

Our Contributors.

DR. CUYLER ON PASTORAL VISITATION.

BY KNOXIAN.

Those who are familiar with Dr. Cuyler's contributions to the press will not find much that is new in his "How to be a Pastor." Like the last hundred pages of "Canada and the Canadian Question," the worthy Doctor's little book seems to shake hands with you and ask you if you don't recognize an old acquaintance. You candidly admit that you have seen the old acquaintance some place—perhaps several times. Still the book is stimulating, vitalizing, suggestive. A good pastor can hardly read it without becoming better, and if a careful reading does not make a poor one less poor there is not much hope for him. On every page there is ample evidence that the author had done and done successfully what he urges other pastors to do. That alone is a great thing in a work on any practical subject. A writer on homiletics who never knew how to preach himself is not of much use to his readers. The highest qualification for writing a book on pastoral work is to have done pastoral work successfully. Perhaps no minister in America ever did better pastoral work than Dr. Cuyler, and therefore all he says on the subject is well worth the careful attention of pastors, elders and people. We say people advisedly, for the people have much to do with the important branch of congregational work that we propose to discuss in this paper.

In one of his best chapters our author says to pastors. "If the tidings of serious sickness reach you from any dwelling, lose no time in getting there."

Good advice, Doctor, certainly. When disease or death darken any dwelling the pastor should be the first man there and the last to leave. But the worthy Doctor did well to say "if the tidings reach you." Ah, that "if" often makes all the difference in the world. If your aunt had been a man she would have been your uncle. If the eloquent Mr. Laurier had got a majority on the 5th of last month he would have been Premier of Canada. Those "ifs" spoil so many things. If the tidings come that serious sickness has invaded any home a good pastor goes at the earliest possible moment to that home and does all he can to help his suffering parishioners. He would be unworthy the honoured name of pastor if he did not. But supposing the tidings do not come, and oftener than otherwise in many congregations they do not, what then? Why, the pastor does not know, and simply because he does not know he does not go. Possibly he may do even a more unfortunate thing than not go. He might walk right past the dwelling in which the sickness is and not call. He may meet members of the family on the street and not ask about the sick member. He may even speak to members of the family on other subjects and say nothing about their trouble. Now all this is very unfortunate, but whose fault brings the misfortune? Not the minister's, certainly. He would have gone at once had he known there was serious illness in the house. Perhaps he would have risen at any hour in the night and have gone. Many a pastor has done so. But if the man did not know, how in the name of common sense could he go? Ministers are not omniscient. The doctor did not know until he was told. The neighbours did not know until they were told. Even the relatives not living in the house had to be told. Why on earth take for granted that the pastor can know without being told?

Dr. Cuyler says he never accepted the excuse, "you should have missed me out of church" as a sufficient reason for not telling him about sickness in his families. A man may be absent from church for any one of a dozen reasons. Besides a minister should worship in church as well as any other member of the congregation. He cannot worship and take the census of the congregation at the same time. He is not in the pulpit as a census enumerator. Counting the people is not worship. Looking around for absent parishioners is neither praise, nor prayer, nor preaching.

We have heard ministers boast that they could make a survey of the people and count the absentees during the singing. Singing is praise, or at least should be. Is it not the privilege and duty of the minister to praise God? Fancy a minister saying let us praise God by singing the 23rd Psalm, and as soon as the people began to sing he began to take the census.

The best way to explode many an error is to state it plainly. Let us try that plan on the census-in-church theory. Imagine a congregation singing Hymn 167 while the minister enumerates:—

Congregation sings. "Give me the wings of faith to rise"—

Minister (inwardly). Don't see Brown in church this morning.

Congregation. "Within the veil and see."

Minister: Smith is absent this morning again. Cannot get that man to attend regularly. Wonder what excuse he'll have to-morrow.

Congregation. "The saints above, how great their joys."

Minister. Robinson is not back yet. Will he ever get over that pet about his pew?

Congregation. "How bright their glories be."

Minister. Jones has never been in church since the election. Expected the Presbyterian vote, but did not get it.

Does this seem irreverent? Perhaps it does, but the irreverence is in the thing, not in the stating of it. If it is

right to do that sort of thing in church it cannot be wrong to give a literal description of what is done. The wrong must be divided between the parishioners who make it necessary for the minister to turn himself into a census enumerator when he ought to be praising God and the pastor who yields to the pressure.

The only time when a minister who worships can possibly take the census is when the office-bearers are taking the collection. It is very doubtful if he should do it then, and if the congregation is large and the minister a little short-sighted, he cannot do it even if he tries. We heard a man many years ago boast that his pastor on Sabbath mornings just before the invocation prayer looked over the entire congregation and saw at a glance who were absent. The only thing about that story that ever impressed us much was its extreme improbability. We doubt very much if the pastor, now an honoured professor of theology, ever spent the last moments before addressing God in counting up the absentees. If he did so then we know he does not do so now. Besides there would have been no use in counting at that time, for many of the people who used to worship in that church in those days never came in until long after the invocation prayer was over. If a minister feels that he can worship God devoutly and count the people at the same time, by all means let him do it. But let him not lecture the men for thinking about business or politics, or the women for looking at each other's spring bonnets if he deliberately counts the people instead of joining in "Jesus, lover of my soul."

An occasional minister may possibly be able to count the absentees without thinking of the causes of their absence, but the great majority cannot. The causes are not all spiritual, not even ecclesiastical. Sometimes they are only too well known, and thinking over them even for a moment may easily put a sensitive minister into a frame of mind utterly fatal to the edification of his congregation. Should the whole congregation be asked to suffer because one man who may have the sulks instead of sickness does not happen to be in church.

It is most unfortunate that it should be so difficult to do this important part of pastoral work—unfortunate for both pastor and people. The people need help in trouble, and the pastor gets his strongest hold upon their hearts by helping them as they pass through the furnace.

Is there no remedy? It is useless to speak of the minister doing all. No living pastor can keep the exact condition of hundreds of families before his mind every day. Elders can do much by keeping an eye on their districts and reporting cases of illness. The remedy, however, must come, if it ever does come, from the people themselves. When the people stop saying, "I thought you would know," or "I thought some person would tell you," or "I thought you would miss me out of church"—when they stop saying these things and deal as fairly with their pastor as they do with their doctor, there will be no more trouble. May a kind Providence speed the day.

THE DEAD LINE.

MR. EDITOR,—Will you allow me space to point out a dangerous tendency to which I fear our beloved Church in Canada is yielding. Namely, that ministers of the Gospel having reached the age of fifty or fifty-five are no longer to be regarded as fit candidates for a call from important congregations of our Church. This sentiment seems to be growing; Sessions are inclined to make it a rule not to call a minister who has passed the age of fifty. The young rising generation are educated into this idea, and what may we expect to be the result of such training? The Scripture says: "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." So it is with the Church. She may look for nothing else than that like sowing will produce like reaping. Among the results we may look for such as these. Many of her ablest and most faithful ministers will be discouraged at the thought of crossing the line of fifty, as thereafter they will be regarded as becoming disqualified for their work, when in reality many of them are at their best. Young men entering upon the work of the ministry cannot help thinking of the time when the dead-line of fifty has to be crossed over. Men passing through the intermediate stages, from thirty to fifty, cannot escape the shadows of the dreaded line. This ghost will haunt the ministry of the Presbyterian Church in Canada from the beginning to the end.

It is time to grapple with this superstition and nip it in the bud. This tendency is not the outcome of intelligence nor faith nor piety, but of ignorance, unbelief and pride. And certainly Presbyteries and Sessions ought not to countenance it, but give better advice and set a better example to our people.

Such a tendency is both unscriptural and unhistorical. Abraham's grandest life began after he was seventy-five. Moses after his eightieth year accomplished his mightiest work, and is it not a fact that the great majority of the noblest characters recorded in Scripture did their best work after the age of fifty. And does not this stand true also when applied to secular affairs? Take any profession or department of life you like. As a rule, are not our best judges men of fifty and over? Our best lawyers, statesmen, physicians, professors of universities and colleges, philosophers and scientists, commanders of armies, etc.?

Farmers as a rule are at their best at that age. And why should the ministers of the Presbyterian Church in Canada be made an exception in this respect? Are they such

a feeble race that, mushroom-like, they reach maturity physically, mentally and spiritually earlier than other men? And consequently as a class they must be placed at a discount after they pass that line? I am not aware that any other Church has made such a distinction in her ministry. The great Methodist Church of Canada has her itinerating system, but no deadline of fifty or fifty-five. The Church of England has her bishops, but no dead line. So with the Baptist Church. Nor am I aware that the Church of Rome in all her history has made a limit of this kind. The cast-iron time limit should receive no encouragement from our people. It is unworthy of the great Presbyterian Church. There are many causes that may lessen a minister's usefulness, but certainly the proposed time limit is not one of them. I have no doubt whatever but Mr. Mackay's notice of motion at the last meeting of the Toronto Presbytery was prompted from the most generous desire to solve a difficulty which is confessedly a very serious one, viz.: "How to secure employment for the ministers of our Church who have reached the age of fifty-five." Now I don't think Mr. Mackay's noble effort will succeed along this line—since the time limit call would be regarded as inferior to the time-honoured and historic call, and the ministers and congregations adopting this plan would be regarded as occupying an inferior place. If we are going to adopt the itinerating system at all, let us adopt it wholly, and if not wholly then not at all.

Can we not utilize the system that we have to better advantage? Can we not get our young men of the graduating classes in all our colleges to come to the help of the Church and solve this difficult problem for her? And to their credit be it said, many of them have done this in the past and many of them are doing it now. But I believe more might be done in this direction. If every young man on having completed his college course would ask himself the question, or rather ask the great Master, Where can I be most useful and best fitted to build up Thy cause, where are the hard fields and discouraging fields to be found, such as are neglected and even shunned—"here am I, send me." Such a spirit of unselfishness and consecration on the part of the young men of our Church would soon clear up the difficulty. The advanced in age and experience would have suitable fields of labour opening up for them, and the younger men in their turn would follow them. It would be the glory of our young men to lay foundations, resuscitate old decaying fields and revive the cause where it is dying or dead. This is something like the reformation that is greatly needed in our Church, to-day.

Surely it is a sad and humiliating sight to find so many applications sent in asking for a hearing, when a desirable and convenient charge presents itself; while a less favorable field receives but scanty attention. "My brethren, these things ought not so to be."

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PAPAL IDOLATRY.

MR. EDITOR,—After spending twenty-five years in the Church of Rome as one of her most devoted priests, it has pleased our merciful God to grant me, these last thirty-three years, to walk in the saving lights of the Gospel of Jesus Christ as a Presbyterian minister.

This tells you that I have had opportunities to study and understand those two systems of religion, as very few men ever had. Yes! Twenty-five years a priest of Rome followed by thirty-three years a Presbyterian minister! Who can show such a record in the whole world, to-day?

But the more I look upon those many years given to the service of the Pope of Rome as well as upon those consecrated to the preaching of the Gospel of Christ in the Presbyterian Church, the more I feel that I have a solemn duty to perform before going to my grave.

In a few days I will see the end of my eighty-two years of life. Death cannot be far away. My tomb is there, very near! It is in its presence that my God wants me to deliver both to the Roman Catholics and to the Protestants the solemn message which He has entrusted to me for their both.

To the Roman Catholics I will say, with a heart full of love, charity and compassion. Your religion is nothing else but the old Paganism of the Greeks, the Persians and the Romans mixed with a great deal of Judaism and a few fragments of Christianity. With the help of God I will show this so clearly that I hope you will see it.

To the Protestants of all classes but particularly to the ministers of the Gospel I feel constrained to say. One of the most deplorable things I have seen since I am in your midst is the strange ignorance in which many of you are kept about the errors, superstitions, idolatries, and unspeakable abominations which constitute the Roman Catholic religion of to-day. It is with an unspeakable sadness that I see the fulfilment of the prophecy of Christ who, evidently speaking of the present successful efforts of the bishops and priests of Rome to deceive the disciples of the Gospel all over the world, said: "Thou, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect." How many of our very elect not only among the Episcopalians, but even among the Presbyterians, have been deceived, these last thirty years, under our eyes!

It is too generally forgotten that Rome is as much the greatest danger ahead for the Church of Christ, to-day, as when she was reddening Europe with the blood of the millions of martyrs slaughtered at the feet of her gold, silver, brass, marble and wafer idols.