



Preachers in Politics

FOR the life of me I cannot see why there should be any objection to the appearance of the Preacher in politics. In fact, I cannot see how the conscientious and intelligent Preacher can keep out of politics. There is a school of opinion, apparently, which looks upon the modern Preacher much as the Romans regarded their Vestals Virgins—that is, as a sacrosanct order set aside to keep alight the sacred fire. They were not supposed to mingle with the world or to care aught for its perplexities and troubles. Cooped up in a diminutive marble palace under the shelter of the Palatine, they tended the flame entrusted to their care, believing that thereby they best served the State. All through the ages, we have had orders of this character. That is, they have devoted themselves to meditation and inward examination and adoration of the Most High. But these secluded devotees are of quite a different order from the Preacher. The Preacher's business is to go out and lead men aright.

AND why should the Preacher still his tongue at the very time when his fellow countrymen usually most need light and leading? Why should he thunder against the sins of politicians dead and buried and mummified for a thousand years; but cover his mouth with a coward hand when confronted with the sins of politicians who are actively misleading the very people who sit in the pews and listen to him? Is it because these living politicians can hit back? If so, then the Preacher of to-day has mightily degenerated from the Preacher of the days of Elijah and John the Baptist. I think if you will run over in your mind the list of the names of great Preachers who left their impress upon their times

and are still remembered in history, you will find that they preached concerning contemporary politics to the very men and women who were involved in them. Thomas a Becket and Wolsey, John Knox and John Calvin, Bossuet and Savonarola, Wendell Phillips and Bishop Ireland, Egerton Ryerson and Principal Grant—all clergymen who meddled with politics, and all men who will never be forgotten.

A CLERGYMAN is supposed to have a conscience. If he lacks this organ, he is not well-equipped for his profession. A lawyer might as well try to do business with the said organ in place. Moreover, a clergyman is supposed to have intelligence. He probably reads the newspapers. He knows what is going on in politics—which is simply the government of his country. Now, when his intelligence conveys to his mind the impression that a certain thing is proposed in politics which is either very right or very wrong, his conscience—unless it is carefully jogged—will begin to growl. And what is a clergyman to do when his conscience growls? I think he is bound to pass the "growl" on. If he tries to silence his conscience and impress upon it that here is a whole area of possible moral decisions of which it is to take no note, his conscience is very liable to get discouraged or confused or somnolent—and the first thing that the cowardly clergyman knows, he will not be able to tell right from wrong without the help of a Bible Commentator. This may be all right so long as he confines his attention to incidents which happened not later than the first century of the Christian era; but there is a lot in modern life to which he will have no guide.

A live clergyman is in constant touch with his fellow-men. If he is not alive, he ought to confine his labours to conducting the funerals

of other "dead ones." That is a nice, quiet job, which will keep him from meddling with politics—or religion. But if he is alive and in touch with humanity about him, he might as well try to ignore its perplexities in the matter of politics as to ignore an epidemic which had seized the community. Would you say that a Preacher should arraign dishonesty for forty-eight weeks out of the year, and then announce some fine Sunday—"For the next month, I shall not refer to dishonesty from this pulpit, because there is an election coming on in which a number of dishonest men are running—and any references to this particular sin might be regarded as meddling with politics." Of course, you would do nothing of the sort. You would contend rather that he ought to bring his Old Testament politics up to date, and to tell you exactly what he thinks about any modern men or measures whose appearance introduces moral issues.

"MORAL issues." Let us not boggle over that fence. Let us not attempt to decide what issues are "moral" and what are not. We might have trouble. The best way out of it is to invite the Preacher to give us his considered opinion on all issues; and let us take that opinion for what it is worth. He is a citizen. He has a vote; and, on polling day, he will cast it—unless he is a shirk. Why should he, then, of all men, be debarred from telling us how he is going to vote, and why? The very fact that he is more likely to be disinterested than the average man is a reason in favour of his intervention—not against it. Some tell us that he exercises too much influence when he speaks. If he exercises any more influence than is properly his, that is not his fault—that is the fault of the pew. We should not gag him for the fault of the pew—we should disfranchise an unintelligent pew. Others say that this intervention will "hurt religion." If it hurts religion to bring it into contact with life and employ it as a guide to humanity in the selection of the right course at moments of crisis, then the sooner we fatally hurt religion of that useless description, the better will it be for the people who are being "gold-bricked" into paying for it. The religion which cost Wolsey his position, Knox some little courage, and John the Baptist his head, is the only kind worth paying for—or living by.

THE MONOCLE MAN.



WILL HE TRY THE ELECTION RAPIDS?

SIR ROBERT BORDEN: "NEITHER WHITNEY NOR ROBLIN GOT UPSET—WONDER IF I'D BETTER TRY?"