

THE NEW DEPARTURE IN MINISTERIAL REQUIREMENTS.

The new departure, that is, on the part of the people as to what they demand in a minister. The gospel itself and the preaching of it have never and do not now call for any radical new departure; although what is demanded of the ministry as a qualification for the efficient discharge of its duties changes in some degree from time to time. That at present we are passing through a change in this respect is evident to all. Probably in calling to a vacant charge youth has always to a certain extent had a preference over age; but now amongst ourselves this craving for youth has gone so far as to have assumed almost the form of a morbid disease. This is acknowledged by all, and lamented by most. To show how far this has gone it is only necessary to say that remarks are often heard among our people to the effect that, at forty-five a man in the ministry is at, if not past his best, is old at fifty, and at sixty is only fit to be thrown aside. Had Paul to write his pastoral epistles now, and were he to do so in accordance with the prevailing taste, he would not say that one deserving the office of a bishop should be "grave", "not a novice"; but rather that he should be "jolly" and "the more of a novice the better."

Why this aversion to age and the ripe experience that usually comes with it in a calling, in which, above all others, one would naturally expect them to be prized? The ministers set aside on this account are not inferior in education to their juniors; they speak as well if it be with a more chastened and subdued fluency; they present the gospel as fully, clearly and forcibly as their younger brethren; and enriched with that ripeness and fullness of experience which is the garnered fruitage of years. The only reason that in most cases can be given for it is that contained in the old ditty:—

"I do not like you Dr. Fell,
The reason why I cannot tell;
But only this I know full well,
I do not like you Dr. Fell."

This state of matters universally felt and by the good deplored, is a most unfavorable indication as to the spiritual condition of the Church. It justly raises a doubt whether it is really the gospel preached in simplicity and with all earnestness and affection that the people want in a minister. If this be indeed what is wanted it is evident that they are really more concerned about the man through whom they get the message, than they are about the message itself. Facts well known to those conversant with the subject show that if the great apostle to the Gentiles, being such an one as "Paul the aged," were sent to some of our mission stations where there are a score or two of families, the clamors of whose desperate need have filled the land, he would get a very cold reception if he was not summarily rejected.

How this state of things has come about is a most important question for the Church to turn its attention to. It has been hinted by some that the lack of habits of study, and not keeping up to the times is the reason for the rejection of the older men and the preference for the younger. But it cannot for a moment be pretended that the younger men who are preferred are all studious, well-read, and up to the times. Something may be attributed to the general spirit of restlessness and love of change common to all new countries. Society has not yet crystallized into the fixed and regular habits and modes of thought that belong to an old country. Things are all in the formative state; and this condition of affairs affects the ministry as all else. A love of change and novelty is in the air, and nothing but what is new, and has on it the marks and the freshness of youth can be tolerated, or at least enjoyed. So far as this forms any part of the explanation, it must be left to time to effect a change. Unhappily, however, the preference for only youth in the ministry appears to be greater now than it was but a few years ago when things were newer, and the older they grow this preference becomes greater. In spite of all the cry for more men, is the supply at

home, at least, outrunning the demand? Again a new and native race is growing up and making itself felt in the Church and country, with ideas and tastes as to the ministry different from those of their fathers who were born and brought up in the Mother country. In their eyes the ministry was a very sacred calling, and the idea of a pastor, spiritual counsellor, guide and friend predominated very largely alongside that of the preacher and teacher. The spirit of deference towards their pastor in which they were trained, made them willing and glad to seek and accept his counsel; and accordingly the wisdom and gravity, the calmness, sobriety, and weight of years counted for much. It is different with Young Canada. Reverence is not a prominent trait in his character. He is self-sufficient, and when he does not resent Christian counsel, is not at all very conscious of needing it, and so age, years and experience are at a discount with him.

There was a time also, it may be added, when undoubtedly in the calling of a minister the needs and claims of the young were too much ignored. The pendulum has now swung to the opposite extreme; and what will please, draw or keep the young is often the main if not the wholly deciding question in choosing a pastor. Like draws to like. Where the voice of the young either directly or through their parents, turns the scale, it is naturally in favor of the young against the more mature. Parents have largely handed over the reins into the hands of their children, and they have quietly driven them off the field and much else along with them.

It is impossible not to notice also in this connection the great change that has come over the religious life of the people, in its outward aspects at least, within the memory of those not yet old. It used to be almost wholly confined to the preaching and hearing of the gospel on the Sabbath day, the Sunday-school, and the annual pastoral visitation. How different is it now! Preaching does not hold the place of monopoly it once did. "Who cares for preaching?" This rough question of a rustic expresses, more than one would like to believe, the feelings of multitudes. Religious life has with a vast number become largely a thing of socialities, of societies and organizations of every kind. Their name is legion. In the main their membership is made up of the younger portion of the church. These changed circumstances demand that a minister's time and work must be greatly taken up with overseeing managing, and guiding societies; and it is not unnatural that with the young, of whom they are chiefly made up, age should be felt to be somewhat unsympathetic, slow, repressive perhaps, and accordingly be pushed aside that younger men may be brought to the front; to be in their turn run off the stage when their day is done.

This state of things is likely to be attended with results which are very serious and far-reaching. Even already it has led to the existence in our church of a considerable body of unemployed ministers, not very contented in spirit, because they are conscious of being able for work; they wish to work, and yet by an unreasonable prejudice on the part of the people, or for the want of some adequate and yet one would think attainable means within the church of finding it for them, are cut off from work. What makes this so serious is that for many of these it means either an absolute necessity to turn to some new, uncongenial and precarious employment, or the keeping up a hand to hand, and often long and weary fight, with poverty. It frequently also causes men to remain in a congregation after they are conscious that their work in it is done, for fear that, should they resign, they will be cast adrift without work and without means. How pitiable is such a position! It must certainly deter many from entering the ministry whose qualities of head and heart would do honor to it, and be a blessing, when they see that at a time of life when in other professions men are thought capable of doing their best work, in the ministry their hold will have begun to be precarious, and soon they may be expected or called upon to step down and out.

The claims of those affected by the new departure spoken of will perforce command serious attention at some day not far distant; and surely if the mind of the church were once turned in earnest to this subject both pressing and important, there is wisdom enough in it to devise some remedy which would relieve what, if not a wrong is at least a most serious and growing evil; and prove at the same time a blessing to the church and the land in which we have our home, and whose best interests are so dear to our hearts.

THE AWAKENING IN JAPAN.

AN ENCOURAGING LETTER.

In the Japan Daily Mail for January 31st. is given a monthly summary from the Religious Press. From these extracts may be gathered a very good idea of the present condition of Christianity in this country.

In the first place it says "The Christian writers, almost without exception, are buoyant as they review the year, while the Buddhists are as a rule, hopeless, combative and complaining.

The Orthodox Christians mark the year 1892 as the beginning of a Christian revival. They see the conservative reaction in the nation losing force. They think that the rationalistic wave that for a time threatened disaster has lost its power. The liberal tendency is reported as checked, and churches consolidated. Religious and moral questions have aroused general interest. The problem of popular education has evoked healthy criticism of public morals. There were harmonious and promising issues to the various denominational conferences. Passivity in the churches has given way to activity. Practical work has supplanted theological discussion. The sceptical era has not yet passed, but "the light of a new age is shining in the heavens."

In a series of articles by the Rev. Mr. Yokoi on the Ethico-Religious Regeneration of Japan, the author says "Although many forms of religion exist in the world Christianity is evidently destined to lead among them, and at length to conquer all. Numbers are no guarantee of victory. Organization and methods of work are of chief importance. In these sources of power, Christianity is far superior to any other religion. In its aggressive literature, and by its missionaries, it is taking possession of the world. Its entrance into Oriental civilization is of course very difficult; but its advance cannot be long withstood.

"Japan is a great country, but it is not great enough to resist successfully a world movement. Jesus Christ has become the symbol of all that is noble and beneficent in modern civilization. The charities, the social reforms, such aims as those of the international peace societies, of the Red Cross Society, of temperance organizations and the like, owe their initiation and support to Christians. In the revival of the nationality of Japan, then, let the work be done in the name of Christ.

In Japan, Christianity is still small in the number of its adherents, but it should be observed that Christians are having a more and more decided influence upon society. There is much antagonism to Christianity certainly, but Buddhism is practically ruined, and Confucianism is only literature.

Many writers are now devoting much attention to the social and political needs of the empire. Many are urging the establishment of ethical codes, and the invigoration of patriotism.

"But appeals on behalf of ethics and patriotism are not enough. In the present temper of a large part of the nation the wish to have a clear reason for what we do is dominant. Why should we be patriotic, why loyal, why moral? Unless satisfying answers can be given to these questions we are not inclined to listen to our advisers. Christianity alone can give such answers.

"National greatness is not to be gained for ourselves alone, but that we may be enabled by our power and truth to help and to enlighten other peoples. God has given us fathers and kings; it is God's will that we should love and serve them.

"A fundamental revolution is now needed. There is a desire prevalent to reform politics, education, law, commerce, and literature. Our people are eager to make this nation the equal of America or England. No one thinks that Japan is without need of a great reformation, but we should have to be exceedingly active to pass in a generation the distance made in the West in five centuries.

"Before we can reach the end aimed at, we must purify the source of all our doings. An ethico-religious regeneration is the demand. This is not one of the many regenerations, but is the source of all true reform and progress. So long as this regeneration is not made, all attempts to better the present condition will fail. To-day, in a word, demands decision. We should resolutely face the necessity and accept it, give up Buddhism and Confucianism and adopt Christianity.

"The hour for a second revolution for Japan has come. Religion and morality must be regenerated. Now is no time of peace and order. Confusion is abroad, and preachers of Christianity should prepare for their work with this fact in mind."

"When Buddhism was first brought to this country its victory was easy. There was no established religion to confront it. When Confucianism appeared it had to deal with an uncultured people. But Japan holds a civilized people. This nation, it is admitted, is in some relations inferior to the peoples of the West, but in many things it has reached a high degree of civilization. In religious thought it is profound; sceptical speculations are widely influential; in politeness and social graces generally it has a refined and complex life.

"Our task is very difficult. The work of the last twenty years in the Japanese Christian Churches is like the play of childhood. These churches must be cared for, but we must look to a far greater future. We must not be content to go on as we have been going. Like Alexander the Great, we must give up our small successes and go ahead led by a great hope. Our work must be more complete than even that of Paul.

In reference to the Buddhist papers it further says "The Buddhists have been aroused to great activity lately. We can not say that there is much evidence of hopeful activity among them. They are as a rule pessimistic, querulous, exacting, under a memory of ancient privileges, and are determined, if possible, to stop the progress of Christianity. One of their papers demands that the Buddhist rites shall be revived in the Imperial Household. It also admonishes the students at the Unitarian school that their form of Christianity is only ornamenting itself with the doctrines of other religions, and really is but a Christian reformation. Its professed belief in the sympathy of religion is not sincere. The students are to be pitied, not blamed."

One Buddhist writer sees but little light for anything anywhere. "The annual retrospect is like a look into a ravine whose gloom is dense, and whose dangers are horrible to remember." His lament reads as follows, "The light of morality is gone, the nation's spirit is corrupt. All are conspiring to ruin the country. The national destruction has already begun. Can not Diogenes find one man?"

Another writer is somewhat more sanguine and says "In uncivilized lands and in remote ages Christianity conquered wherever it went, but the defects of Christianity should, in the present age, be replaced or supplemented by the excellences of Buddhism." The author then goes on to exalt Christ as the world's moral teacher. "It is the glory of mankind," he says, "that Jesus of Nazareth lived. Much that Christ taught will never decay. Sometimes the wonder arises, did Christ's teaching come from man or from above man? So rich in feeling was he as to weep; as minute conversation was he as a woman, as keen as lightning in the flashes of his soul. Every word, every phrase of Christ should influence us. In the four gospels the noblest and wisest morality of the world appears. So simple is it, so easily understood and applied. 'Love God and love man' as central principles, suffice to regenerate society and lead men to heaven. Christ's character and teachings stand forever."

And this from a Buddhist! What may we not expect after such a confession?

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Yokohama, Japan, February 6th., 1893.