

## THE DEAD-LINE IN THE MINISTRY.

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SEVERAL years ago a grim spectre—from certain latitudes down East—made its appearance, bearing on its brassy brow the inscription, "The ministerial dead-line of fifty!" It set some feeble knees to shaking, and it raised a panic among the supply committees of vacant pulpits and pastorless flocks. As this ill-favored creature is still roaming abroad, like its paternal ancestor "seeking whom it may devour" it may be well to challenge it with one or two pertinent questions.

First of all, why that word "*ministerial*?" We do not remember to have heard of a legal, or medical, or political, or commercial, dead-line. These secular callings seem to have escaped the affliction entirely, or have it so mildly as not to awaken any commiseration. In all these pursuits long experience and wide observation are a positive advantage.

Where there is a baffling case of disease, people are very apt to send for the old doctor who is familiar with about every disease that flesh is heir to. In an important law suit, the clients must needs call in some veteran who carries in his head the decisions of a hundred courts.

When France invaded Germany twenty-five years ago, three old heads were put together—Emperor William, Bismarck and Von Moltke—the opposing force was swept away like chaff on a threshing floor.

The most extraordinary statesman now living performed nearly all his most marvellous feats in Parliament and on the hustings after he had passed the line of three-score. John Quincy Adams became the terror of all his foes on the floor of Congress after he began to be known as "*the old man eloquent*." In regard to the legal, medical, literary, political or mercantile pursuits, no one seems to have ever discovered this ghost of a "dead line" lurking behind the fiftieth milestone on the journey of life.

The one profession that is invaded by this spectre is the Christian ministry. If you inquire of the believers in this new fangled theory, they will probably tell you that the nervous system of ministers is apt to show some signs of exhaustion at the age of fifty or thereabouts. According to this miserable materialistic view, the real power of an ambassador of Jesus Christ does not lie in biblical knowledge, or a sanctified heart and holy character, or the indwelling of the Divine Spirit; his power lies chiefly in the nerves and in the cells of the brain.

The theory is that these physical (or animal) forces reach their maximum at about fifty, and then their unhappy possessor strikes the "dead line." He has reached his meridian, and henceforth his sun is on the decline! Churches inoc-

ulated with this pestilent idea conclude that it is "extra hazardous" to call any minister to their pulpit if his family record shows that he has been in this world as long as most men have when they are elected to the Governor's chair of a commonwealth, or to the Presidency of the United States.

Jockeys examine the teeth of a horse before making a purchase; and the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ are often subjected to a similar process. A Christian minister is to be estimated, like a horse, by the fire in his nerves, and the amount of "go" in his physical temperament. If he cannot "thrill" his auditors as he once did, if he is not equal to making new departures to "suit the times," if he cannot attract auditors by fresh novelties, then according to these theological physiologists he has passed the dead line, and like a basket of unmarketable eggs, he has survived his usefulness. What chance would "Paul the aged" stand with some modern supply committees, or with deputations who go out foraging for candidates?

If the ministry is the one profession to be subjected to this new statute of limitations, why put the mark at the age of fifty? As a simple matter of fact, this idea is perfectly preposterous, as numberless cases will certify.

We need not go back to such illustrious examples as Thomas Chalmers leading the exodus of the Free Church of Scotland at sixty-three, and John Wesley still holding the helm of Methodism at eighty-seven.

Let us only look around to see the men who are at the front to-day. By common consent there is no clergyman on this continent who by the combination of varied scholarship, lofty character and brilliant oratory is quite the peer of Dr. Richard S. Storrs; yet all his finest achievements of pulpit, platform or the press have been wrought between the ages of fifty and seventy-five! The prince of British preachers, Dr. Alexander McLaren, has lately passed his seventieth birthday, and my beloved old friend, Dr. Newman Hall, at four-score, has just completed one of the most fruitful years of his heaven-blessed labors.

We need not waste time or space by calling the roll of the men who are shepherding the largest flocks, or producing the richest discourses, or carrying the greatest weight in all ecclesiastical assemblies; they are chiefly the men whose mental and spiritual fiber has been compacted by at least half a century of experience in the conflicts of life.

The obstacles which a faithful and truly evangelical ministry have to encounter in these days of increasing materialism are becoming more and more formidable.

If, in addition to these obstacles, there is to be