

CANVASSING FOR POSITION IN THE CHURCH.

An Essay read before the Sackville District Convention by Rev. W. Dobson.

Lobbying or electioneering for positions of prominence in the Christian Church, is the subject which has been assigned to me, by the Committee. This name, I take it, has been employed to designate certain acts, which have for some time past been practised by professing Christians, especially ministers. A subject so far reaching in its effects, and so baneful in its influence, requires a more lengthened discussion than the time allotted to the reading of this paper will permit. That such a state of things really does exist, is a fact too obvious to require proof, and which none are so hardy as to deny. In view of this, the question involuntarily forces itself upon us; is such a course honorable in any Christian, especially a minister of the gospel.

All canvassing for position in the Church assumes that there is opposition to our aspirations, and from those who have rights in common with ourselves; and that it must be removed, by influence so exerted that it will be brought to bear upon our opponents. Supposing, as I have said, that the opposition arises from one, who has rights in common with ourselves; then any policy to be successful in removing him out of our way must either attack his moral character, or his ability, or perhaps both. In the Methodist ministry where all are laboring for the same end, and where all have interests in common, the above named policy should not be even thought of, much less practised; for we are bound by every law of honour, to guard our brother's character as carefully as we would our own. It was upon this oneness of purpose in his disciples that Christ rested the ultimate triumph of his gospel: hence he prayed—"That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." Knowing all this, how often we find the most dishonorable means employed to obtain a position, which in the ordinary course of events another would have occupied. If the case be urgent, and the opposition strong, a caucus must be held, where the character and ability of our opponents must pass under review. Mistakes, which under ordinary circumstances would have remained unnoticed, are magnified into faults, and peculiarities, which in themselves were harmless, are represented as habitual sins. Even this, is not sufficient to produce the desired effect at all times. If the canvasser be for a popular circuit, the officials must be written to, and our talents set forth as modestly, as the exigency of the case will permit. Sometimes, it is much to our advantage to select our best sermon, and having effected an exchange with the pastor of the long-coveted circuit, deliver it in our most eloquent style. If this cannot be accomplished, it then becomes necessary to deliver a lecture or two, of which a glowing description must be given in the press. In fact, everything that is possible must be done to thwart our opponent and secure the position for ourselves. During all this time the poor brother who is being victimized remains unconscious of what is going on, never dreaming that his reputation and future prospects are being injured, simply to please a more ambitious man than himself. The above is not an imaginary case, but a relation of facts which have come under our own observation during the last eight or ten years. Such a course would be considered dishonorable in the highest degree, if pursued by our sharpest business men; and yet it is tolerated in the Christian ministry, where the very soul of honour should be found. Surely the time has arrived when, for the glory of God and the good of humanity, such practices should be frowned out of existence, and the teaching of Christ become our motto—"Do unto others as ye would that they should do unto you."

Again, is canvassing moral when practised in the Church? In order to appreciate the moral character of an action, one must first ascertain the moral quality of the motive which has prompted it; for the motive always gives colour to the action. If it can be shown that the principle by which an individual is actuated when canvassing for a popular circuit, or any other position of influence in the Church, is a sincere desire for the salvation of his fellow-men, one may without hesitation pronounce his motives pure. They are nearly akin to those which actuated the Apostle Paul, when he said, "The love of Christ constraineth us," or, "I am ready also to preach the Gospel to you that are at Rome also." We feel persuaded that such heaven-born principles could never prompt to actions other than purely moral. On the other hand, if the actuating principle be selfishness in any degree, the action must necessarily partake of all the immorality and sinfulness which characterize that passion. We mean by selfishness the pursuit of our own gratification, without due regard to, or in opposition to, the welfare of others. Of all the passions which disfigure the human soul, none has produced so much happiness and misery as selfishness. It has directly and indirectly dethroned monarchs, devastated nations, and almost deluged parts of our earth with blood. It can never be gratified, under any circumstances, except at the expense of others. Millions were slain in order to make Alexander a universal king and give Napoleon Bonaparte the mastery of Europe; and what is true of the military is also true of every department of human activity, where selfishness is the actuating motive. From a principle, so confessedly sinful, it would be absurd to look for other than actions of the most immoral character. After a careful consideration of the

many cases of lobbying which have come under our own observation, in the Methodist Church, at least, we are fully convinced that they originated in the above-named principle; and are, consequently, offensive to God and detrimental to the cause of Christianity. Selfishness is a many-headed monster, which may manifest itself in a hundred different forms. An undue longing for wealth or reputation, at the expense of others, is the same principle developed under the form of covetousness. This is the motive by which the minister is prompted, when canvassing for a position on the Stationing Committee, or a circuit with a salary of ten or fifteen hundred dollars a year. And he who remembers that covetousness is placed by inspiration in the same category with theft and adultery, may well doubt the morality of actions emanating from such a motive. It may be said by some that this is not always the motive; but that a firm conviction in the mind of the actor of his own superior qualifications for such a high and honorable position may impel him in such a course. This, however, is only selfishness manifested under the form of overweening conceit; and can only be the opinion of himself, for it were the opinion of the majority of his brethren, he would occupy the position as a matter of course, without effort of his own. To say that a man is blessed with overweening conceit is to place him in a most contemptible light before his fellow men, and to imply the lack of a well-balanced mind, as well as the absence of divine grace to keep him humble.

We are always prepared to apologize for a selfish course of action, when springing from a professedly unregenerated heart. The one is in harmony with the other. But the Christian professes to have been born again; through which change this sinful propensity is either broken, or wholly taken away, and a heavenly principle infused, which manifests itself according to such precepts as these "Love thy neighbor as thyself" "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another." If it be right to look for unhalloved actions from a sinful heart, it would be strange, indeed, if from a heart renewed by grace we were not to find actions which accord with the word of divine truth. Where life is, it will always manifest itself according to the laws of its nature; so where the love of God has been shed abroad in the soul, that love will always manifest itself according to the immutable laws of right. So universal is the belief in this principle that men, everywhere, expect the Christian's life to be in conformity to the precepts of revealed truth.

Electioneering for positions of influence, in the Church, is so opposed to every principle of the New Testament, as we have already shown, that he who is guilty of such conduct must not be surprised if men doubt his piety. The religion which inculcates the principle of selfishness, in any of its forms, is surely not the religion of Christ; and just in proportion as this element is tolerated within the Church the cause of our Redeemer will suffer. If, then, we would see our ministry blessed to the salvation of souls we must shun this pernicious evil as we would a deadly poison.

A HUSBAND'S RESPONSIBILITY.

The English House of Lords, in its judicial capacity, decided a case two or three weeks ago which has an interesting bearing upon the question of a husband's responsibility for debts incurred by his wife. The case was a suit brought by a firm of London drapers to recover money for goods furnished to the defendant's wife, a resident of Bradford. It was pleaded on behalf of the defendant that he and his wife came to a verbal agreement in 1869, in accordance with which she was to pledge his credit, but was to receive an annual allowance for providing clothes for herself and the children. This prohibition had continued without interruption down to the date when the plaintiffs sold their goods. On the other hand, the firm who brought the suit had no knowledge of the fact that the wife had been prohibited from pledging the husband's credit, but assumed, as any other tradesman would have done, that the husband of the lady who made the purchases was willing to pay for them, or could be made to pay. The case was first tried before a jury, and the only question which the Judge who tried it submitted to the jury was whether at the time the goods were ordered the husband had withdrawn from his wife authority to bind his credit, and had forbidden her to do so. The jury answered this question in the affirmative, and judgment was thereupon delivered for the defendant. The case was carried up before the Court of Appeal and the decision of the lower court was affirmed. The case was then taken up before the House of Lords, and the decision was again for the defendant. The principle on which this decision, thus thrice affirmed, was based, is that marriage does not in itself make the wife an agent of the husband, with power to contract debts on his credit. The authority of the wife depends, in the absence of any express provision, on the husband's previous conduct. If he has by a series of acts, such as the payment of debts, shown that he accepts the contracts made by his wife, he creates the agency. On the other hand, by continuously withholding such consent, he can revoke the agency. The hardship in the case under consideration is that the plaintiffs had not, and could not have had, any knowledge of the agreement entered into by the husband and wife. This was entirely a private compact, and the London merchants had no more reason for cross-examining this particular lady as to her right to pledge her husband's credit than in the case of

any other lady who might present herself in a similar way. It would clearly be disagreeable if not impossible for a tradesman to assure himself concerning the domestic status of all his lady customers before venturing to sell them goods. A firm which should make itself obnoxious by such a system might as well go out of business. The important point in this decision is that it does not make it necessary that the withdrawal of a husband's credit from a wife should be attended with the slightest publicity. He has only to admonish her in private and to steadily refuse to pay her bills, and the hapless tradesman, who is ignorant of this little domestic arrangement, and who fails to question the wife closely when she asks credit, must take the consequences.

PULPIT PREPARATION.

An old clergyman gives a list of very good rules for pulpit preparation, which may be of service to some of our younger brethren.

- 1. Keep your mind filled with Bible truth. Live in the atmosphere of the Bible. Let this truth possess you as well as you possess it.
2. Maintain a spirit of devotion. Live in the Spirit as well as in the Book. Truth becomes vivid only under his influence.
3. Select your texts early and let the mind become permeated with their truth.
4. Select subjects from your current trains of thought. You can easily dip from a stream on which you are sailing. You can talk most freshly on a theme that at present occupies your attention and engages your interest.
5. Fill your mind with the specific subjects on which you are to treat. The advice of Lyman Beecher to a class of theological students is pertinent; "Pump yourself full of the subject, knock out the bung and let nature caper." A full soul sets the whole mental and moral machinery in motion. It oils the tongue, sharpens the intellect and enkindles the passions, so that even dull men wax eloquent.
6. Put yourself in the best working order. Keep the body in utmost vigor and elasticity, by diet and outdoor exercise. Keep the mind awake by study. Above all keep the heart warm. The fire should never go out on your altar, but as Sunday approaches, the embers should be stirred to a fresh glow, Ruthenford used to pray all night before delivering his rapturous discourses; and Finney, not seldom, spent all day Saturday in fasting and prayer. Those who would bend the bow of Ulysses must first acquire his strength of arm, by contact with a higher source of power.

A BRAVE BOY.

A boy who kept twenty Indians at bay died of his wounds, a few days ago, at Denver, Col. Three days after the battle of White River, in which the gallant Thornburgh lost his life, Freeman Z. Wray, who was in charge of cattle forty-five miles north of White River Agency, was attacked by a band of savages. He contrived to get his rifle and to make so good a defence that they betook themselves to a ravine and besieged him at their leisure. After a while he got out of ammunition, and was forced to climb into a wagon to get a new supply. While he was executing this movement a bullet struck him in the calf of the leg, passing directly through. In another instant another bullet caught him at the hip and knocked him down. With a whoop and a yell the savages ran toward the spot, expecting to take their plucky foe prisoner. But they were again foiled, for Wray was only down temporarily, and getting to his feet again, scrambled into the wagon, where lay his ammunition. He pulled a sack of flour in front of him and piled a bag of beans on top of that, and took hold of such other articles within reach as made for him a barricade against the shower of balls that was promised. Rapidly cutting a hole in the canvas wagon cover he saw the Indians approaching. Leveling his rifle he fired at the foremost of his pursuers, without the ball taking effect. This threw the Indians into confusion, and they retreated to the walls of the ravine. They threw a hailstorm of bullets into the side of the wagon where the plucky boy lay entrenched. One of these leaden messengers caught young Wray in the right eye, crashing through his brain. The Indians finally retreated. After protracted delay the boy's wounds were dressed and the balls extracted, and after five months' nursing he seemed to be entirely well, although he had lost the use of one eye. One of his wounds broke out afresh eighteen months after the fight, and caused his death.

FAIRS AND FESTIVALS.

Rev. Sylvanus Stall, in his new book entitled "How to Pay Church Debts, and How to Keep Churches Out of Debt," after discussing the subject of Church entertainments, concludes by saying: "We know of no arguments in favor of such entertainments, and some of the arguments against them might be briefly stated as follows:

- "1 In proportion as they are more frequently used do they dispoil the Church of its spiritual power.
"2 Those who labor faithfully for the success of the enterprise are apt to suffer from unkind speech, or unjust suspicion, in the management of the finances.
"3 In most cases they are employed by christians who withhold from God that which he requires at their hands, while they seek to carry forward the work of the Church by drawing the needed funds from 'outsiders.' They covet the wealth of the wicked, and seek opportunity to gain their influence and money. 'Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever, therefore, will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.'
"4 If not universally, yet quite generally they alienate from the Church some of its most useful members.
"5 Whatever other effect these entertainments may have upon those who are not Church members, they surely will not lead poor sinners to the cross of Christ.
"6 Those most worldly minded in the congregation are sure to desire and apt to succeed in being at the head of these entertainments, and guard them as best we may, they are almost sure to intrude into them such features as are ruinous to the best interests of the Church; a disgusting song spoils the concert; a double entendre the exhibition, cordials, cider and cigars the picnic, a heterodox statement of irreligious sentiment the lecture—and on, through the whole list, the devil is determined to be in somewhere, or his personal friends will denounce the pastor as 'an old fogey,' get enraged because they cannot have their own way, dismember the congregation and then leave in disgust.
"Last, but by no means the least of all the evils, is the undeniable fact that church fairs, oyster suppers and the whole round of church entertainments are fatal to every impulse and principle of Christian benevolence.

In dwelling upon the startling increase in the number of criminals in New York, Mr. Henry Bergh says: "There are twelve thousand criminals in our State prisons, and eighty thousand more in our jails and penitentiaries, of whom New York City alone supplied fifty-five thousand. The criminal classes cost \$6,000,000 a year in New York, and there is one church to every two thousand citizens, and a rumshop to every seventy-five." Mr. Bergh says also that he can see but one alternative, if the authorities will not pull down and build greater prisons, and in that alternative, he recognizes the whipping-post. The terror of this scourge, he thinks, would more effectually deter the vicious than the prospects of warm quarters and satisfied hunger in our penal institutions. Perhaps the men whom Mr. Bergh would flog have never been subjected to the influences of moral suasion. To those who are not pessimists leading is looking upon as more successful than driving. We speak in behalf of criminals, and venture the remark, that among these are thousands who can be persuaded that even "virtue is its own reward."

WIT AND WISDOM.

Have you enjoyed a momentary intimacy with the sidewalk yet? We attract hearts by the qualities we display; we retain them by the qualities we possess. Let the youth who stands with a glass of liquor in his hand consider which he had better throw away—the liquor or himself. God gives food to every bird, but he does not bring it to their nest. In like manner he gives us our daily bread, but by means of daily work. "People ask me," says Old Sojourner Truth, "how I came to live so long and keep my mind, and I tell them it is 'because I think of the great things of God, not little things.' I don't fritter my mind away in caring for trifles." There was a Church-fair at Muncie, Arkansas, and photographs of the young women who were to serve at the stands were displayed in the windows of the stores, including those who were in character costumes. A traveling burlesque company came along at the same time, and portraits of blondes in tights were placed alongside the others. The pastor hastily removed the pictures of the Muncie girls. Then the theatrical manager placarded the actresses' pictures with: "These artists have no connection whatever with the amateur performance at the Baptist Church, and can only be seen at Labor Hall."

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