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On Choosing a Minister

What some of our contributors have recently said about "candidating," and the mutual relations of ministers and churches, illustrates the fact that there is a good deal of human nature, some of it not entirely sanctified, among ministers and church-members.

Almost every one who is acquainted with Protestant churches will admit that the ideal method of bringing ministers and churches into relation has not yet been discovered. The Methodists ostensibly have solved some features of this problem by committing the nomination of pastors to bishops and presiding elders, but actually we doubt whether things are so much better with them than with the other communions.

There are grave objections to throwing a pulpit open for a procession of candidates, any one of whom may secure the votes of a majority of the congregation by a star sermon, or by some trick of manner, or some taking peculiarity. On the other hand, there are equally solid reasons against intrusting the call of a minister, whom the congregation has not seen, to a committee. The best committee is not an infallible judge of the adaptation of a minister to a congregation. Some of the worst misfits in the pastorate have been made by this method. Neither are the congregationally organized churches prepared to entrust the selection of their ministers to a permanent council or a board of ministerial supply. The truth is that the personal factor has a large place in the adaptation of a minister to a church. And the selection of a pastor by a church is much like the choice of a man or woman for each other. Most men do not fall in love with the women their friends would choose for them. In social life one frequently hears the remark, "I wonder what A sees in B." There would be no occasion for wonder if the onlooker had A's eyes. But he has not got them and cannot get them.

On the whole, the method adopted by Plymouth Church, Brooklyn, in choosing a successor to Dr. Lyman Abbott, has much to commend it. A representative committee was chosen by the congregation. This committee, after full study of the situation and careful inquiry, united upon a nomination. The gentleman chosen was interviewed, and a good understanding was reached as to his acceptance of a possible call. Then he was invited to preach for a Sunday, after which the nomination was made to the church accompanied by the reasons for the choice. This method unites the advantage of a committee and a congregational election. The committee has an opportunity to study the situation and reach a calm judgment as to the availability of different men. The congregation has an opportunity to express its decision after the man has been seen and heard.

It may be urged that in case the congregation does not accept the recommendation of the committee the nominee is put in an unfortunate position. We do not quite see that. The position is no more unfortunate than that of any other defeated candidate for an office. And no man of right feeling wishes to serve a congregation that does not want him. On the other hand, a pastor who has been chosen by a large majority of the church works under peculiar advantages. Both he and the church are conscious of their mutual choice. That consciousness is a source of strength and confidence, and a guarantee of coöperation.

But, as we have suggested, no plan is perfect, and there are meddlers and troublers both in the pulpit and in the pew. There are comparatively few perfect ministers or laymen. We have to take things as they are. There is plenty of call for the patience and charity of ministers for churches and of churches for ministers. Most men and women could be more or less made over to their advantage. And both parties to this sacred relationship of the pastorate take the part of wisdom in not cherishing too extravagant expectations.

Permission is now given for Christian Missions in Khartoum. The Church Missionary Society is to occupy the ground.

Arrows Shot at a Venture.

By A. S. GUMBART, D. D.

"Children of God by faith in Jesus Christ."—Gal. 3:26.

The very fact that God has swung open the gates of salvation so wide as freely and lovingly to admit all who have faith in Jesus Christ has led men to criticize the gospel, and to declare its plan of salvation to be unreasonable. "Ah," men say, "if I could only understand the necessity for faith!" But the necessity for faith is best apprehended through its efficacy. Are there any evidences to prove that faith in Jesus Christ does bring into the lives of men something that does not come in any other way? Something that exercises upon them a power for good, something that makes men better and more useful? Does faith produce more Christlike lives? Does faith bring peace to the soul? Does faith bring men closer to God? Does faith help men to solve the problems of this life, and does it prepare them for the life to come? Does faith produce regenerated lives?

If Christian testimony and Christian experience count for anything, then we know that faith in Jesus Christ does all these things. Even when we approach this subject from a purely scientific standpoint we find that there is nothing but faith that brings men into harmony with God. By faith, and by faith alone, is the soul made consciously submissive to God. This is all that God asks, that we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Ethical Preaching and Dead Wood.

A Chicago pastor thinks that there is very little hope for his church or for the churches in general unless the ministers stop preaching doctrines and work for a moral revival. He is reported as saying that "the church should throw down the barriers of theological belief entirely; but it should emphasize most strenuously the great moralities on which all righteousness loving people stand." Perhaps it will not be impertinent to call attention to the fact that few preachers have been less doctrinal than this pastor himself, and yet his ethical preaching has not accomplished great results. His church numbers 850 members, but it is proposed to strike off 350 of them as "dead wood."

For our part, we are at a loss to understand what men have in mind when they contrast ethical with doctrinal preaching. The moment you begin to adduce reasons and motives for ethical conduct you are in the realm of doctrine, and if there is anything more barren than the reiteration of moral duties without any reference to reasons and motives we do not know what it is. The Sermon on the Mount probably would be called an ethical discourse, but it might with equal propriety be called a doctrinal sermon, for its doctrines are quite as prominent as its precepts, and there is not a precept in it that is not vitalized and enforced by its appropriate doctrine. Instead of drawing a false distinction between moral and doctrinal preaching, we should like to see a man of this pastor's ability devote himself for the next five years to preaching righteousness in connection with its sanctions as revealed in the New Testament. We venture to say that at the end of that time there would be less dead wood in this church.

Notes.

In India there is one Christian teacher to 275,000 of the population.

The newspapers of the better class are making a crusade against the gambling resorts in New York City. The police have moved to action, and several raids upon gambling places have been made. Investigation by the New York Times, has shown that the gamblers of that city have been paying a Tammany committee over \$3,000,000 a year for police protection.—Exchange.

Do you have a monthly missionary programme in your Sunday School? If not, why not?

The Pope, in a recent interview, said he daily prayed that President McKinley would offer mediation in the South African matter. If the Pope would mind his own business as well as President McKinley has in this matter, it would indicate good sense. The fact is the Pope and those about him are anti-British. Suggestions from them are an impertinence.—Exchange.

It is calculated that half the inhabitants of the world have not even heard the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Archbishop Bruchesi, head of the Roman Catholic Church in Montreal, is reported as having telegraphed the Premier asking him to stop the discussion in Parliament about the recent scenes in Montreal—"provoked," as he puts it, "by the McGill students." If the Archbishop, who is the head of Laval University, would teach the students at that institution to respect the British flag in a British country, he would not need to appeal for silence about their disloyal and disgraceful conduct.—Exchange.

In Bidar, India, alone there are 15,000,000 people without a preacher of the Gospel. "How can they hear without a preacher?" (Rom. 10: 14).

The king of Pondoland, a country joined to Cape Colony, has become a Christian, through the conversion of his chief officer, who was a noted drunkard.

One young man, an attendant in Cheung Mai hospital, receives wages of eight rupees a month equivalent to less than three dollars gold. From this amount he has during the past year supported himself and given ten rupees to mission work, besides contributing regularly each Sabbath.

It is said on the most excellent authority that the missionaries sent out by the Negroes of America to South Africa are very bitter in their denunciation of their treatment by the Boer officials, as contrasted with that at the hands of the British.

The Lord May Come.

The following lines were copied and sent to her Mother by the late Mrs. Straight of Cambridge shortly before her sad death at the Narrows, and seem a fitting preparation of mind for the call which so suddenly came. We also append a note from her hand.

"Busy servant in the vineyard,
Earnest soldier in the fray,
Cheer your heart and upward glancing,
Think the Lord may come to-day.

Weak and weary, troubled mourner,
Fearing danger in the way,
Be no longer sinful earing,
For the Lord may come to-day.

Are you busy, all too busy,
With the things that fade away,
Wealth or fame, or gain or pleasure,
Drop them, He may come to-day.

Or, an idler in the vineyard,
Others pass you on the way,
Wake and live as an immortal,
Lest the Lord may come to-day.

Is the blood upon your garments,
Have you on His pure array,
Naught can hide a guilty sinner,
If in light He came to-day.

Are you waiting for the Master?
He is surely on His way,
We can almost hear His footfall,
Blessed Jesus, come to-day.

"Ma, I thought these verses were so nice I would write them to you. What a glorious meeting! We shall meet to part no more. I do wish the Lord would come; we would be forever at rest, in the sweet calm of His presence, so blessed; free from the cares which so often oppress, when we see Jesus.

"God be with you till we meet again." Good bye.
From your loving daughter, with love and best wishes.