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MINISTERS AND THEIR CRITICS.

WE do not propose to offer an elaborate essay upon this suggestive theme, but only a few passing thoughts. Every body seems competent in our day to express an opinion about the office of the ministry and those who hold it. Some very good people, who are usually not lacking in self-esteem, think the office wholly unauthorized and unnecessary. They allege that Christ and his apostles instituted no order of ecclesiastics, that all believers constitute "a royal priesthood" and are fully commissioned to exercise the functions of the sacred office. With respect to ministers these hold the opinion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram who said to Moses and Aaron: "Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, and the Lord is among them; wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the Lord?" Doubtless there is such a thing as empty and impertinent clerical assumption, but it is equally true that there may be rude and criminal presumption on the part of the laity, and in the instance just referred to it is needless to say how the Lord ended the matter. All are familiar with the innuendoes and sneers of certain novelists and youthful scribblers who wish to make a cheap reputation for themselves by what they think smart hits at safe objects. Some journals, too, which might otherwise be counted respectable, persistently indulge in this weak form of folly. But a much more forcible and offensive class of critics are those who heartily hate the truth and therefore lose no opportunity of expressing their detestation of persons who specially represent it. To them all ministers are either imbeciles or cunning low-bred intriguing priests who pretend to piety, and preach simply for a living—Ecclesiastical unity and order are nothing but organized hypocrisy and priest-craft by which the world has too long been cursed. Formulated dogmas and elaborate creeds are the stuff in which mere theologians traffic, but which is destined speedily to pass away before the onward march of intelligence and the researches of science. Allied with these are critics of perhaps a slightly different order and better culture. They have

really studied a little science, and are consequently distressed at the ignorance of ministers in this respect. They occasionally favour the churches with their presence, but alas! they hear nothing new—it is always the same old gospel about sin and salvation, unless, indeed, with those progressive modest men who think it necessary to advertise in the daily press grotesque enigmas, as their subjects of discourse. The whole rich field of science is ignored by others, or, if touched, only in a fault-finding spirit. Ministers seem to be wedded to the narrow notion that men can only be saved through Jesus Christ, and that pure noble spirits, who care for none of these things but worship devoutly at the sacred shrine of science are exposed to ruin. This is intolerable! What can men of liberal education do but despise such preachers! So it is said.

Among ordinary devout church-going people also how many appear to have a special vocation to keep ministers right. Every city, village and congregation can boast of specialists in this department—men and women who are under the power of one dominant idea. And what strange methods they adopt in performing their chosen task? Very often their benevolent mission is fulfilled by talking to their neighbours in a confidential depreciatory tone of the one they profess to uphold; they sorrowfully tell of his many shortcomings with the understanding, of course, that the matter is to go no further, or, in order to observe due secrecy, they occasionally send him an anonymous letter abounding in religious phrases and scripture texts. And who in the parish, old or young, do not know how a sermon should be prepared and delivered? They have not studied Logic, or Rhetoric, or Theology, or even English Grammar, to say nothing of Greek and Hebrew. When they occasionally try a little composition in the form of letters to their friends, spelling is not to be thought of, beauties of style are treated with contempt, and the analysis of their sentences would puzzle our Professors of English literature. When they speak, it is in the same style strongly marked by some coarse provincial brogue, Scottish, English, Irish or Canadian. It matters not. They believe in the exercise of the right of private judgment in such minor matters, and they know what sermons should be and how they should be preached.

Now without naming and characterizing others engaged in this business, and leaving unnoticed the labors of learned Professors and of the ever increasing army of writers on Homiletics, as well as the vigilant care of Bishops and Presbyteries, it must be apparent that ministers are sufficiently looked after. We do not say that this is all unmerited and in vain, and that they never do anything to warrant just criticism. Possibly they do many things that would be better undone. They are human and have a fair share of the faults of the race. Nor do we think it wise in them or in others to attempt a defence of what is indefensible. If merchants, lawyers, doctors and legislators are justly