

Pastor and People.

An Address to St. Stephen's Congregation, St. John, N. B., by Rev. W. P. Begg, on the occasion of Induction of Rev. D. McRae.

It falls to me to address you as a people in relation to your pastor. My subject is an old and often handled one, and one, I presume, on which you think you need no special exhortation. I will take so much for granted, and address you briefly, avoiding all details. And as your ideas of what a minister is, or should be, may affect your conduct in relation to your pastor, I may start with the question, In what light are we to regard the clergy?

There are various ways in which ministers as a class may be regarded, and have been regarded, in the course of history. Putting aside the view, as one which is too extreme to be generally held, that they are only so many expensive encumbrances to society, and obstructions on the whole to intellectual progress and moral freedom, there is the old and still widely prevailing belief that they are priestly intercessors and mediators between God and man, having power to open the Kingdom of Heaven to men, or to send them to hell at pleasure, to bind or to loose as they see fit or have an interest in so doing. Wherever there is an approximation to such a belief, the clergy, of course, will be regarded with a corresponding awe and reverence, and the people will be all obedience—obsequious and submissive to the Church to any extent. In such a state of things, the clergy may almost always have their own way, any indication of a wish on their part being generally enough to have it fulfilled; for their will is thought to be the will of Heaven.

The clergy, in such a view, are the veritable kings and rulers of men, and it is easy to see that, where it is held, they must have a tremendous power for good or for ill. But there is a tendency now-a-days, in some Protestant communities and sections of the Church, to swing to an equal extreme in an opposite direction; and, from regarding the clergy as the rightful rulers and masters of men, and of the people over whom they have been severally set as pastors,

some are beginning to feel and to speak as if they were only the people's servants, to be hired and dismissed at pleasure, according as fancy or caprice may dictate. They would like, apparently, to hire their minister from year to year, or from month to month, like any domestic or common labourer; and if they fulfil their engagement by paying him what they promised, they seem to think they have done remarkably well, and that no one has any right to complain.

It might be a matter for discussion as to which of these two states of feeling and belief is the more degrading—for I should say that they both originate from and indicate a very low spiritual state of mind and heart, and that, on the whole, they must tend to perpetuate and produce such a state; but if I were asked for my opinion as to which of them was likely to be the more productive of evil to mankind, I believe I would say the latter—that which make the clergy merely the servants of their people. Though its general tendency may be bad, there is a possibility of rising in and by the former view to the noblest and purest devotion; and the feelings which it fosters are essentially religious, though it may be in a very low degree; but the produce of the latter is likely to be nothing but irreligion and irreverence—or pure indifference to the higher life, or a scoffing infidelity. And it is better, I should say, that the Church, with her learning and her wisdom, as a corporate body should rule, though it should be through a pope, than that the direction of the affairs of the sanctuary should be in the hands of some ignorant and conceited, meddling lay individual and self-appointed ruler, as in the latter case it might and would very often be.

But without further comment on these opposite views, and passing over all the gradations and shades of opinion that lie between, I think that the common distinction between clergy and laity is radically wrong, and that it has been productive of much evil in the past; and the more we live in the spirit of our holy religion and of the kingdom where all are kings and priests to God, the more, I think, shall we lose that distinction in the sense of the unity in life and privileges of all who are believers. With respect to office, the ministry will probably