

THE CLAIMS OF THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY UPON THE MEN OF THE CHURCH

By Rev. Geo. C. Pidgeon, D.D., Professor of Practical Theology, Westminster Hall, Vancouver, Canada.

The subject of Men for the Ministry is always an important one. First, because God's best gifts to His church are His prophets. Every great movement for the uplift of humanity has been inaugurated by the call and equipment of some man who could interpret the spiritual need of his generation and then discern God's purpose of grace toward it. The prophet to his generation is always its greatest benefactor. Now the prophet is invariably found among those who give their whole time to God's service. Either they are chosen from among that class, or, after their call, they straightway enter its ranks. The man whose soul is possessed with the consciousness of his divine mission and commission cannot divert his energies into any other channel. The man in whom God speaks is not willing to let other things pre-occupy his mind. This means that the cause he serves must support him while he concentrates all his powers on its advancement. The supply, therefore, of men of that class adequate in number and ability is the chief need of any people, because it is through them first that God conveys His special message to that age. If it is of supreme importance that every generation should know God's mind toward them—and on this its salvation hangs—it is of equal importance that there be prophetic souls raised up through whom that mind should be made known.

This subject is important also because of the church's need of leadership. The church is a divine institution. It is the one altruistic and spiritual organization in the world. Christ, who founded it, still works through it as He does through no other. It is the source which supplies every other good cause with the spirit and power for its work. As one has said: "It is the root; they are the branches." Now, the church's efficiency in any period depends upon its leaders. Without generals the army of the living God degenerates into a mob. Without men of vision and power to organize and inspire her forces the church is doomed to defeat. It may be urged against this that God is His people's help. True, but God works through men.

Take the church in any locality, and how much of its efficiency depends on its adaptability. If it understands the people's peculiar need and temper and is able to fit its forms and means into the situation as it finds it, success is assured; but if it attempts to meet one set of conditions with methods devised for a totally different state of affairs, failure is certain. And originality and independence in suiting means to ends in any district must come, either from or through the minister. Either he must be the source of the new idea, or, if others are the source, the channel through which it is conveyed to the people. No matter how able and willing his helpers may be, they have neither the authority nor the opportunity to lead strongly along these lines.

Still more necessary is it that the pastor strike the inspiring note that rallies the whole church to service. Many a dispirited army has been fired with an all-conquering enthusiasm by its general's burning words and heroic example.