

Our Contributors.

CONCERNING MANIFEST MINISTERIAL INEFFICIENCY.

BY KNOXIAN

The action that is being taken by the Free Church of Scotland, in regard to what is called "Manifest Ministerial Inefficiency" may lead to discussion and perhaps to similar action on this side of the water. The term "Manifest Ministerial Inefficiency" is rather cumbersome. It is slightly Johnsonian in its ring, but as most ecclesiastics dearly love high-sounding words, it may be allowed to pass with a very slight examination. "Manifest Ministerial Inefficiency" Manifest to whom? There is probably not a minister on earth that somebody does not consider inefficient. To whom is the minister's inefficiency to be made manifest? To his friends? They don't believe he is inefficient. To his enemies? They declared him inefficient before there was any evidence of inefficiency. To his Presbytery? Half, or three fourths of his Presbytery may not be any more efficient than the unfortunate on trial.

The principal, or perhaps only difference between the man on trial and most of his judges may be that they got an easier place than he got. Providence assigned them comparatively easy work and assigned him very difficult work; and because they *think* they have done their easy work better than he has done his difficult and almost impossible work, they will convict him of inefficiency! That is almost what a trial for ministerial inefficiency would amount to in the Presbyterian Church in Canada.

We once heard an efficient minister described by one who now makes ministers as "a minister that the people like." What people? The Lord's people or the other party? Had Paul been tried by that standard, it would have gone hard with him. Paul had a highly cultured and aristocratic audience at Athens, but most of them mocked him. The Athens people did not like him. He was not popular as a city preacher. They stoned him out of Iconium. Had there been a Presbytery in Iconium, they might have tried the apostle for "Manifest Ministerial Inefficiency." For some reason or another he didn't take with the Iconium people. He tried hard and we are told spoke "boldly" but it was no use. Perhaps if he had spoken less "boldly" he would have been more popular.

Before going to Iconium, he and Barnabas tried to do some work in Antioch. The Antioch people did not like him. We have a synopsis of the sermon Paul preached there, and certainly it was a very able effort. Instead of making the people like him, it stirred up the old man in them, and they drove Paul and his companions out of the place. And not only were the men of Antioch opposed to Paul. The "devout and honourable women" helped the chief men of the city in persecuting the apostle. And when the devout and honourable women turn against a preacher, his usefulness is gone. Had there been a Presbytery of Antioch, they might have tried the apostle for "Manifest Ministerial Inefficiency."

When they were stoned out of Iconium, Paul and his companion went to Derbe and Lystra, to see what they could do in the cities. At Lystra Paul preached and healed a cripple and the work seemed to start well. The apostle, however, had scarcely more than made a good beginning, when some people from Antioch and Iconium followed him up and stirred up the people of Lystra against him. These Antioch and Iconium people were a good deal like the lovely people of modern days, who follow up a minister from one congregation to another, and either try to keep him from getting a call, or hurt him after he has been settled in his new congregation. They were more honourable, however, than their modern imitators. They went and attended to the matter personally in broad day light, whilst their modern imitators stab in the dark by sending anonymous letters, or post cards, or communications marked "strictly private."

The effect of the visit of this deputation from Antioch and Iconium upon the Lystra people was very bad. They stoned Paul and drew him out of the city, supposing he was dead. It is a good thing for the world and the Church that they were mistaken in regard to the amount of vitality possessed by the

apostle. Paul did his best in Lystra, but he did not succeed. Had there been a Presbytery there they might have convicted him of "Manifest Ministerial Inefficiency." In these three cities, Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, Paul was decidedly unpopular. He was quite as unpopular in many other places. Had he been a candidate for a call in any of these cities he would not have had the ghost of a chance. Perhaps the only place where he could have come anything near getting a call would have been in Ephesus; and even there, Demetrius might have brought influence to bear on some of the Church people that would prevent the apostle from entering the pastoral relation.

The Master once said to His friends "Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you." If the standard of ministerial efficiency is to be the likes and dislikes of any and every kind of people, that passage should be changed to read "Woe unto you when all men don't speak well of you." There is a tremendous fuss made in the Church if anybody proposes to change a line or two in the Confession of Faith. Practically, we are in danger of changing a few things in a much higher authority than the Westminster Standards. One of these things is the standard by which the efficiency of a Gospel minister is tried. His very faithfulness in the discharge of duty may create dislike on the part of many people, and this dislike may easily run the good man out of his manse and pulpit.

SERMONS PREACHED IN ST. ANDREW'S CHURCH, QUEBEC.*

Every one who has ever heard Dr. Cook in the pulpit will expect much, in taking up this volume of sermons published at the close of a long ministry, and edited by the preacher himself. And no one who knows what good preaching is will be disappointed in making acquaintance with these sermons, each one presenting some important aspect of truth, in a thoughtful, sober-minded and most suggestive manner. The lover of sensation and eccentricity in preaching, the mere seeker of novelty, will find nothing to gratify them here; for this preacher could not stoop to the *ad captandum* methods which win for some "popular preachers" an ephemeral influence. For this reason, his audience will probably be limited to the more thoughtful class of readers, but in that class he ought to command an appreciative public outside of those to whom the volume is affectionately inscribed, and by whom it will doubtless be most prized;—all namely, "who have been, or are, members of St. Andrew's Church, Quebec."

One thing that will impress the careful reader of these sermons is that, in some respects at least, they are *model* sermons. There is a true ideal of art in a sermon as in any other literary production, on whatever subject—and these sermons have artistic merit, as well as the pre-eminent merit of truth. Each sermon is complete so far as it goes. It has a clear outline of the particular truth to be presented, which can easily be grasped on the most cursory glance at its contents, while this outline is filled in with so much thought and completeness that the careful reader will find his enjoyment of it hardly satisfied by a single perusal.

Of this characteristic, the first two sermons of the volume furnish excellent examples. "Christ the Lamb of God," and "Christ the Revealer of God." The first approaches the great central mystery of the Gospel in a calm, reverent and thoughtful spirit, very different from the crude and shallow presentations of it which we often meet with, from the friends as well as the foes of Christianity. After showing how a sin-burdened soul needs to have something done *for* it, and *in* it, in relieving from conscious guilt, and awakening new feelings and desires, he goes on to say.

Why should it appear strange that it is not given us to know all the reasons which rendered necessary such a sacrifice? It is enough for us to know that the law was magnified and made honourable by it, and is it not a great and worthy end to contemplate and accomplish, to give lustre and dignity, and a more sacred right, as it were, of obligation to that law, holy, just and good, which is the expression of God's will? It is enough for us to know, as a matter of experience, that the faith of this sacrifice has served and does serve to slay the enmity of the natural mind, and create in the soul the very source and fountain of all virtue, the love of God. And as to God's taking pleasure in the sufferings of the holy Saviour, that the Scriptures say not. But

* Sermons Preached in St. Andrew's Church, Quebec. By John Cook, D.D., LL.D. (Montreal: Dawson Brothers.)

He takes pleasure—as if there be any conformity in the moral nature of God with that of man, He must do in the spectacle of virtue, exhibited among these sufferers, the patience, the fortitude, the meekness, the magnanimity of Him who gave Himself for us.

From the second sermon, "Christ the Revealer of God," the following sentences may be taken as giving the leading and central thought of the sermon.

No man hath seen God, at any time, nor can any man figure what God is. But on Jesus the eyes of men did look, and the pen of man, under the guidance of the good Spirit of God, has recorded what man saw in Him. And from that record and by its help, it is still possible for us to call up before our minds, and to contemplate the holy Saviour of mankind, as He appeared in the unruffled calmness of a nature which was at once unspotted in purity and overflowing with tenderness. Divine power, wisdom and goodness, all in exercise for man's behoof, shone forth in the actions of His daily life, and in His whole execution of the great work for which He came.

Several of the sermons might be more especially cited as being more peculiarly adapted to the wants of our own age, as distinguished from others—an adaptation by no means too common in the average sermon. When some of our leading philosophers are absolutely glorifying the selfish principle so far as to make morality synonymous with a refined selfishness,—the sermon on "Christ's Mission to Earth" well shows what is the leading feature of His kingdom,—a truth to which even the nominally "Christian world" is only beginning to wake up. How many of our "adherents," or even of our communicants—not to go farther still—if judged by their ordinary "life and conversation," could be supposed heartily to hold and realize the following expression of what ought to be a very commonplace of Christianity:

A Christian is a servant, a minister—another name for a servant. He is one who labours for others, whose heart is not engrossed with selfish aims and pursuits, but glows with social tenderness for all mankind, whose religion is not of that selfish kind which contemplates only his own salvation, but which has regard also for the moral and spiritual good of others; who does not say, in regard of any object or enterprise of benevolence, with the wicked Cain: "Am I my brother's keeper?" but who gladly seeks to profit by and improve every opportunity of usefulness. I tell you,—this disposition to serve, to minister, to be useful to others, useful in your day and generation according to the measure of your capacities and opportunities, useful when active exertion is required, and useful when self-denial and sacrifice are required—is as essential to the Christian character, as necessary an attribute of a true and faithful subject of Christ's kingdom on earth, as is humility. A selfish Christian! a Christian taken up only with his own immediate interests, a Christian not prompt to minister to others, or not casting about to seek the means of usefulness in the world and in the Church, why the very idea is absurd. How should such a one be a follower or a subject of Him, who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many?

Another sermon on "How Christ's Doctrine is to be Tested," contains truths which it would be well for all "unbelievers" to consider, and also for those who, giving a merely nominal assent themselves, hastily condemn others whose difficulties are caused by a more honest and sincere consideration than their own. Two quotations will illustrate this:

What the text states [St. John vii. 17] is simply this: "Honestly purpose, honestly seek and strive to do what you feel and believe to be the will of God, and in so doing you shall come to a sound conclusion on the question, if you entertain it whether the doctrine of the Gospel be of God or of man." But—how is it that this doing of the will of God—thus being truly and honestly minded to do it—can tell on the point, whether Christ's doctrine was human or divine? To this, what if we should simply answer, *Try*; put the matter to the test of experiment. There can be no harm in trying. There is positive good in trying; it is a positive duty to try. The required disposition, the required effort, may have a bearing on this great matter; nay, it may have just such bearing on it as the text indicates, though no one should be able to tell *how*. To try costs a man only to give up sin—sin against God and his own conscience. There will be gain in that, even though his doubts should not be resolved. But they will be resolved. He was the Truth who spoke the text, and He came for the revelation of the truth. His words will not fall to the ground; and he who is honestly minded to do the will of God will not fail ultimately to come to an assured conviction in regard to the doctrine of Christ; and to the conviction that it was not Christ's as man, but the Father who sent Him.

The thoughtless and heartless assent, which multitude give to Christian truth, does not make them followers of Christ, nor will it entitle them to be partakers of His glory. One great part of public preaching and teaching has long been to distinguish and to make the distinction to be felt and acknowledged between such careless assent and the honest convictions of the understanding and the heart, which alone can sanctify and save. But circumstances seem to be arising which will do this better and more effectually than the lessons of the pulpit. Christianity to all appearances is approaching another great crisis in its now long history. The revival of faith in the end of the last century, is giving perhaps we should rather say, has given—place to a revival of the old scepticism, old though appearing in new forms and hosts of learned and subtle and inveterate enemies.