

Our Contributors.

WELL, WHAT OF IT?

BY KNOXIAN.

In one of his last and most meaty books the late Dr. Austin Phelps says it is a dangerous thing for the pulpit to reason in a style which prompts hearers to say at the close of the argument,

"WELL, WHAT OF IT?"

Assuming all that to be so—granting that your facts are facts, that your propositions are true and your conclusions drawn logically enough to please Whately—what of it? Neither facts nor argument concern me. They have no bearing upon my life. They do not improve my mind or touch my conscience. Supposing all you say is correct—*What of it?*

If a hearer can with any degree of fairness put that question at the end of a sermon, or even at the end of any considerable part of a sermon is there not reason to fear that there is something wrong with the sermon?

Is there a civilized man with a living conscience on the face of this earth to-day who can read one of Spurgeon's sermons and lay the book down and say: "*Well, what of it?*" You feel in your innermost soul that there is something of it—that there is very much of it, so much of it that you had better be careful what you do about it. Take any volume you please, let the volume open where it may, read any sermon that happens to come under your eye and neither at the end of the sermon, nor at the end of any one division of the sermon, can you say, *Well, what of it.* At the close of each division as well as at the end of the sermon there are always a few home thrusts that would keep almost any hearer from saying, *Well, what of it.*

Nobody ever thinks of saying to John McNeill at the end of a sermon—*Well, what of it.* The sharpest citizen in the American Republic would never get a chance to say to John Hall—*Well, what of it.* Did anybody ever ask Talmage that question? Felix didn't ask Paul, *What of it.* He was too frightened at the end of Paul's discourse to put a question of that kind. Agrippa may have thought of a number of things when he was "almost persuaded" but he never thought of saying—*Well, what of it.* When Nathan told that little parable of the ewe lamb to David, the king did not say with a curl of the royal lip—*Well, what of it.* The fact is preaching that prompts any reasonable man to say, *Well, what of it,* is weak preaching. It is wide of the mark. It does not touch humanity at any point. It may be located so far back in the centuries that no living man feels much interest in it. Sermons on heresies that prevailed two thousand years ago or on heretics that were dead or embalmed before the flood, are very likely to make hearers say—*Well, what of it.*

Brother Historicus has been reading up his Church history. Naturally enough his sermons run in the line of his reading. He thinks it might be for edification to give a sermon on some past doctrinal heresies so he takes a day on the Ebionites, the Elcesaites, the Marcosians, the Serpentians, the Artonites and several other ancient people of heterodox leanings. At the close of the discourse a parishioner of a practical turn whispers, *Well, what of it.* Can you blame him?

Another brother thinks he is endowed with special power to discuss and settle peculiar questions. One day he tackles the witch of Endor and after demolishing half-a-dozen or more theories gives his own with a *Q. E. D.* kind of an air. When he has proved to his own satisfaction that his theory is correct and broadly hinted that the questions involved are now settled for all time some hearer hungering for Gospel truth might be excused for saying, *Well, what of it.*

This third brother is much exercised about modern science, so much so that he puts a little in many of his sermons. He touches up Tyndall, handles Huxley, and dresses down Darwin in a way that satisfies himself if it does not feed his parishioners. As he finishes up a discourse somebody says, *Well, what of it.* Nobody here ever read a line of Huxley, or Tyndall, or Darwin.

Sound doctrine is essential to the prosperity—yes, to the very existence—of a congregation. No congregation, at least no Presbyterian congregation, can long keep together if doctrinal poison works in the minds of the people. And yet there are doctrines that need not be preached upon very often. How would an orthodox brother feel if at the close of a masterly sermon on sinless perfection some hearer of a practical turn should say, *Well, what of it.* Nobody here is in the slightest possible danger of ever becoming perfect.

A sermon on the baneful effects of undue religious excitement might under certain circumstances be a good thing. In fact circumstances might arise that would make it the duty of a pastor to give his people a few words of truth and soberness on that topic. Some congregations never need sermons of that kind. Fancy a minister preaching on the evil effects of religious excitement to a congregation half the hearers in which never take less than two sleeps during the service. At the close a hearer might be excused for saying, *Well, what of it.* There is no excitement here. Half of us have been asleep.

Not long ago we heard of a pastor who preached a powerful sermon on the sin of going to the theatre. There is no theatre nearer his congregation than one hundred and thirty or forty miles. At the close of that sermon almost any one

would feel tempted to say, *Well, what of it.* A theatre may be a bad place but there is none nearer than Toronto.

The same question sometimes comes into your mind when a man has talked to you for an hour. Supposing all he said were true—what of it.

You sometimes instantly say what of it when you read or dip into a book. Every line of the book may be true, but it may be truth so unimportant, so common-place, that you feel no interest in it. You have heard it a thousand times before and there was no earthly reason why it should have been printed in that book.

A newspaper that prompts you to say at the end of every news item, paragraph and editorial, *Well, what of it,* is not the best kind of a newspaper though it may be and often is much more respectable than one that publishes sensational falsehoods and libellous personalities to keep itself from being common-place.

PRESENT-DAY PAPERS.

AN ADEQUATE SUPPLY OF MINISTERS.

BY WILLIAM CAVEN, D.D., PRINCIPAL OF KNOX COLLEGE, TORONTO.

Though many agencies are employed in the advancement of the kingdom of Christ, none of these takes precedence of the ministry. Among the "gifts" bestowed upon His Church by the ascended Lord, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers hold a first place. In every period of the Church's history the closest connection is seen to exist between the ministry and the body of Christ. When persecution has made public acts of ministry almost impossible, extraordinary grace, bestowed through other channels, has compensated for the loss; but in quiet times the Church's growth in numbers, zeal and holiness has been largely conditioned on the efficiency of the ministry. Pious and able teachers are needed, but also an adequate supply of them. Whether we think of home or foreign work, this is obviously the case. As regards the functions of preaching—not to speak of pastoral work—large numbers of men are wanted; and nothing can be farther astray than the opinion of an ingenious critic of the ministry in Scotland, who is assuring the Church that a dozen or a score of really good preachers would be quite sufficient for that country.

At the present time many Churches, both in Europe and America, are complaining of an insufficiency of candidates for the ministry, and in several of these the evil is steadily increasing. What is the proper remedy? What should be done?

First of all we should pray "the Lord of the harvest that He would thrust forth labourers into His harvest." In His hands are the hearts of all men; and He both disposes men to offer for this service and bestows the spiritual endowments, without which all educational qualifications are in vain. When the hearts of men are moved with an exceeding love for the Saviour and with tender compassion for those who are perishing for lack of knowledge, they will assuredly say, Here are we, send us.

Fervent prayer should be offered not only for this immediate purpose, but also for the increase of spiritual life in every part of Christ's body; for when the Church is filled with life it is certain that she will abound in faith, love and true consecration; and even should worldly inducements all look in another direction, there will not be wanting those who will gladly embrace the toil and privations of the ministry. In the healthful organism every function will be properly discharged; there will be no redundancy and no defect. We cannot too much emphasize the fact that when young men are slow to offer themselves to the Lord in the ministry of the Word, there is reason for anxiety respecting the general condition of the Church's health. It cannot well be supposed that a Church in which "the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal," and in which "the Word of Wisdom," "the Word of Knowledge" and "faith" richly abound, should lack those who will be ready to preach the Gospel wherever their service may be required. Like Peter and Andrew, James and John, when called to leave their nets, they will not hesitate to forsake their earthly calling and follow the Master.

In most branches of the Church certain educational attainments are required of candidates for the ministry—a certain curriculum in Arts and Theology prescribed. The wisdom of this course is easily vindicated. A knowledge of the subjects usually embraced in such curriculum is most valuable as a mental discipline, and is intimately connected with efficiency in pulpit and pastoral work, and in general church administration. Nor can it be desirable that with the view of obtaining a larger supply of students for the ministry, less importance should be attached to their training, or the ideal of qualification lowered. Most churches have been seeking rather to elevate the standard; and when we have respect to the generally advanced condition of education in our day, and the relation of the various theological studies to the progress in other departments, we cannot doubt their wisdom in so doing. It were an evil day for the Church and the ministry when the opinion should prevail that a large and accurate knowledge of the Scriptures—of their original text and of the criticism and interpretation of the text—may be dispensed with, that the thorough study of doctrine is not required, that the careful study of Church history is unnecessary, and that

the method of constructing sermons does not need to be learned. But in the Churches which we have specially in view, the current is so strongly in the direction of not only maintaining the highest standard of ministerial education already reached, but elevating it still further, that it is unnecessary to dilate on this point.

Is it not possible, however, that there may be a want of elasticity and perfect adaptation in our methods of training men for the ministry, and that on this account we are excluding from the sacred office some whose services should not be declined? If this be so the matter should be very carefully considered.

I may be allowed to state the practice of the Church with which I am connected, the Presbyterian Church in Canada. This Church encourages in every way its students to take a complete university course before entering Theology, and a large majority of them are doing so. But a briefer Arts course of three years is arranged for those in whose case the Presbytery deems it most suitable; and a large number of devoted men whose age or financial circumstances stand in the way of university graduation are thus prepared for the study of Theology. The entrance examination of this briefer course, though including Greek, Latin and mathematics, is not so high as the matriculation examination in our Arts Colleges, and the course itself is shorter by one year. The students in this course are taught classics (the branch in which they can least profit by university teaching) by tutors connected with the theological schools, while Philosophy, Natural Science, Hebrew and whatever subjects are embraced in their curriculum are studied in colleges, which in Canada are, happily, in close proximity to these schools or seminaries. These students thus acquire a fair knowledge of the subjects in Arts which are most necessary in preparation for their special studies; and in the theological seminary their course is the same as that of graduates in Arts.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada has received excellent service from the class of ministers thus trained, and without them could never have extended its operations over its vast home mission field as it has been enabled to do. As already said, every encouragement is given to take a full course in Arts, and as the country advances an increasingly large proportion of the students do so; but our experience seems decidedly to tell us that the Church would suffer not a little were graduation in the university to be uniformly demanded.

The Canadian Church has a few ministers who by special permission of the General Assembly have been admitted to Theology without passing through either the larger or the shorter course in Arts. These are men who, in actual service, have discovered gifts which in the judgment of the Church clearly point towards the ministry. They receive the best training in Theology which their deficiency in literary acquirement will admit.

Should this brief statement make the slightest contribution toward the solution of a very important problem, its end will be gained.

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CONCERNING "LAPSED MASSES."

MR. EDITOR,—It is a long time since I have troubled you with any demands upon your space, so I can the more confidently ask you for a corner now. Not that I can claim any merit for my forbearance—matters more instant (though not more congenial) have filled my time.

I am moved to address you now by some words in a paragraph of news which you printed a few weeks ago. Here they are:—

Professor Robertson, of Glasgow, does not think that poverty has so much to do with non-church-going as some people suppose. Drink he believes to be a much more serious question. But there must be something more than that when it is found that a great number of the non-church-going are among the respectable artisan class earning good wages. He is convinced that what is at the bottom of the mischief is the blinding influence of this mercantile, money-making and luxury-seeking age, which only believes in what is seen.

Some grains of truth, doubtless, lie at the bottom of this—if it be deep enough to have any bottom! To those who refuse on the one hand to base their theories upon untested assumptions and, on the other, to abandon any theory because it appears likely to commit them to distasteful admissions, these calm, self-satisfied pronouncements of the doctrinaires would be vastly amusing—if only something less important than human souls was at stake! "Non-church-going," indeed! Is the professor quite sure, I wonder, that the men who whisper sly jokes to each other in the pews, and the girls who giggle in the choir, stand much higher than the "lapsed masses" in the estimation of Him who preached glad tidings to the poor? Would the weekly listening to an anthem and an essay make such a vast difference after all?

Go out in your own city of Toronto and look for them and I guarantee that you will find among the non-church-going, hundreds who are sober, industrious, intelligent, aye, and kind-hearted and true—men, too, who are continually making sacrifices for principle, and ready to make greater when the occasion comes. These men are in every city and wherever they are, they are struggling towards the light. Go to the Bible, and you find there that which is suited to their every need with a perfectness beyond all ingenuity of man to devise. Turn, then, to the Church whose handbook and standard this Bible is, and ask yourself how it happens that the curator of eternal truth is utterly out of sympathy with those whose hearts are hungering with a great hunger for just that en-