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THE PROTESTANT OUTLOOK.

IN certain quarters it is confidently affirmed that the force of Protestantism is almost spent. We are informed that what was once a mighty stream is coming to an ignoble end, wasting its waters in a hundred desultory channels, or disappearing in the barren sands of unbelief. All our English sacerdotalists maintain that Protestantism is a failure. It cannot preserve religion. Men must be Catholics or infidels; no other position is any longer tenable. It is what the controversialists of the Latin Church have always said. The more fanatical party at Rome seem to have dreamed that the late Pope, by holding a (so-called) Œcumenical Council, might give the *coup de grace* to the long-hated Protestantism which, in their estimation, had brought modern society to the brink of ruin. No one was, or professed to be, more sanguine on the point than Cardinal Manning. Shortly before the Council of the Vatican assembled, he wrote, "The Council of Trent fixed the epoch after which Protestantism never spread. The next General Council will probably date the period of its dissolution." * What egregious misstatement and miscalculation! Since the Council of Trent, Protestantism has spread enormously; and at this day it will bear more favourable comparison with its great rival than at any former period, as respects numerical, intellectual, political, or moral forces. And as to the Council of the Vatican, from which the Jesuits augured such great results, truly, so far as Protestantism is concerned, from the mountains in travail there has scarcely appeared anything so large as a mouse. The Council met and vaunted great things, and then dispersed; but no Reformed Church so much as quivered. In fact, the Council has been rather serviceable to Protestantism. It has managed to make the ecclesiastical system which has its centre at Rome more autocratic than ever—a result which provokes the watchfulness of European governments and the angry contempt of the democracy. It has propounded a

* "The Centenary of St. Peter and the General Council," p. 90.

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It is plain that, in our time, an irresistible stream of tendency carries the nations towards government of the people by the people—*i.e.*, by those whom they select and trust to act for their welfare and in their name; and the question presses, what mode or type of religion is to be associated with this movement, in order to give it steadiness and moral safety? It is impossible that this can be the religion which has its head and inspiration at the Vatican. Whatever one may think of the influence of the Roman Catholic Church on society at former periods—and it has not been always or only injurious—no one can say that it is fitted to be the counsellor of governments really popular, or the guardian of nations really free. It is the most tremendous instance the world can show of centralised authority; and its views of education, of liberty of the press, and of social and political life, are notoriously at variance with the ideas and claims of modern civilisation. We see, therefore, in more than one Continental country, a bitter, and, indeed, unavoidable conflict, between liberal and patriotic politicians on the one hand, and the forces of clericalism on the other.

But is Protestantism prepared to keep step with the life and hope of progressive nations, and to supply that moral and spiritual element, without which, society, however educated, corrupts and perishes? It is a question which statesmen in Italy, France, Belgium, and some even in Spain, are beginning to ask. At such a time, how desirable it is that Protestantism of a warm, evangelical type should be invigorated by all fair means in those Continental countries where Romanism, from intellectual and political rather than distinctly religious causes, is losing credit; and that, all the world over, it should refuse to league itself with reactionary policy, or to hallow the reign of ancient ignorance and arbitrary will, but should promote the equitable adjustment of social problems that cut deep into human welfare, and should befriend and consecrate the onward march of nations in the use of freedom, the practice of righteousness, and the love of peace!

DONALD FRASER.

THE WANING PRESTIGE OF THE MINISTRY.

IT is not the object of this paper to prove, nor will it be at all implied in it, that the prestige of the ministry is in all respects and everywhere lower than it has been in other days. It is not its object to show just where, or to what precise extent anywhere, the esteem in which the ministry has been held is declining. That there are no contrary tokens of increased respect and larger influence is not to be maintained. It is, however, assumed, as a thing not to be questioned, that to some extent, and in many parts of Christendom, the ministry does not enjoy the full consideration in which it has been held in former times.

It is assumed that the ministry encounters, frequently and widely, and in new forms, unfriendly and disparaging judgments, and is obliged to turn, for comfort and cheer, from men to the Lord who instituted it. The human judgment an apostle pronounces "a very small thing;" God's warrant for His servant's self-respect, this source of comfort and strength, is a satisfactory resource.

Signs are not far to seek that the minister's office is not magnified for him, either in society or in the Church itself, up to the measure of its right, or that of its frequent former experience. This condition of things not only works disastrously upon the present influence of the ministry, but also has a very direct and unfavourable bearing upon the prospects of the Church in this particular. In not a few of our communions, the young men who might formerly have been regarded as presumptive candidates for the sacred office are now largely looking in other directions. While a true ministry must always be one sought and called of God, and not one gained either by private tastes or public judgments and tendencies, the temper of the young men of the Church is no unimportant sign of the esteem in which the ministry is held. And this, in many of our religious bodies, is surely more discouraging at the present time than many tokens of light esteem on the side of culture and worldly society.

The object of this paper is to point out some of the causes of the condition of things of which these signs are exponents. They are in part external to the ministry itself, and also to the Church. To be aware of their existence, and of their unfavourable bearing upon the influence of the sacred office, can be only an advantage, even though it be impossible to remove or wholly to neutralise them. Another group of these malign influences is to be found within the Church, and even within the ministry, and should admit of easier and more complete remedy.

In the structure and temper of our modern society we find some of the causes which we are seeking to identify, and whose working we are attempting to trace.

1. It is of minor consequence, and yet not without its influence, that in many communities the social rank of the ministry is not what it once was. The sacred profession then carried with it, very generally, a patent at least of gentility. To be well born, and to belong to one of the learned professions, were in many places the two conditions of good social standing. And of the professions, the ministry was not the one least esteemed. Birth, under popular governments, if not under some monarchies, has come to be less valued. The ease with which access has been too often gained to the professions, and the frequent impossibility of recognising them as "learned" professions in the persons of many who belong to them, have worked in the same direction. On the other hand, wealth and success in business have been both disposed and allowed to challenge for themselves the consideration which belonged more exclusively to gentle blood and professional standing. As the result, the ministry, as

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an office, does not win for its incumbent the deference with which he was once socially regarded.

2. But, further, our age is in general less deferential than its predecessors towards station and official dignity. A century has wrought a great change in this respect; and while the offensive demonstrations of the French Revolution are not now reproduced, men's heads have never since uncovered themselves so readily, and, in general, the gesture and the mien by which respect for station is shown, are used almost universally in scantier measure. So far as this results from a disposition to attach a higher value to manhood, there is here a gain that cannot be easily measured—a gain due, in larger degree than unbelief admits, to the Gospel and its ministry. To the unqualified claim of absolute equality among men, the Gospel can never be made sponsor. The very Word of God, which is the original source of all true views of the worth of manhood and the nature of brotherhood, and their most reliable and effective champion, guards no less energetically and sacredly the rights of ranks and dignities. Yet it is not those only who question the apostolic prerogatives of Peter and Jude that seem never to have read their sharp denunciations of such as "speak evil of dignities." By other tokens than this freedom of speech towards authorities, the very piety of our time is shown to be by no means a reverent piety. Witness the manifold irreverence of our common public worship.

Levelling impulses and tendencies seem to pervade the atmosphere which the Church cannot avoid breathing, but she should watch and strive, with vigilance and energy wrought of God, against their deleterious, undevout, impious characteristics and workings. Manhood is not the only precious thing whose rights are to be guarded; and manhood is not protected by attempts to remodel the divinely-appointed conditions of its welfare.

There is much that is plausible and much that is true in the declaration by which our modern iconoclasm justifies its assault upon dignity and station—that things are to be estimated by what they are, and not by the place which they occupy. And yet nothing is more obvious than that many things are not what they are, except in the places for which they were designed. However this may be, the ministry is continually reminded, and often told in the most refreshing Saxon, that it must justify itself and exert its power by what it is internally and potentially, and not by making much claim as an office. It seems not to have occurred to this levelling spirit, that, denying to the ministry the prestige of dignity and rank, it ought at least to attempt a definition of the ministry that should not begin with the idea of appointment, station, and official right.

3. The relative learning of the ministry is very possibly not what it was formerly. The wider diffusion of education among the masses, and the multiplication of inducements to, and opportunities for, special attainments, impose upon the classes and professions that were the peculiar

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and privileged custodians of learning, the necessity of redoubled diligence, otherwise their vantage-ground is lost. As for the ministry itself, without debating the question whether our modern methods of theological education are altogether favourable to eminent learning, it cannot be doubted that many of the demands of the Church and of the age upon the ministry are decidedly unfavourable. The demand for popular talents and for numberless services makes learning an impossibility to all but the fewest and the rarest in the ministry of the Church. How a learning so solid, so varied, as to meet the requirements of these busy and exacting modern days, can be gained in the fragments of time left to one who has practically admitted the claims pressed upon him, with endless iteration, by pews, platform, Church machinery, pastoral work, social life, and—what not beside?—is a problem more easily propounded than solved favourably to learning. He who would accept these numberless inconsistent calls must pay the price of not being profound or complete in anything.

4. Another characteristic of the age which works unfavourably upon the esteem in which the ministry is held, is the wide-spread disposition to resent the assertion of authority in matters of belief. It would be easy to retort, that great names, or names that may be popular although not great, are used as spells to conjure with in philosophic or scientific coteries that are very suspicious of authority in religion. In the sphere of morals and religion, a part of the world is, beyond question, very suspicious of assertions and requirements made on the simple authority of God Himself, and loudly demands proofs and verifications. There are other men who crave a nearer and more palpable authority, and take the way to Rome.

The very nature of the Christian ministry, with the simple and only warrant for its existence, makes its proper and most characteristic utterances the announcements and demands of a supreme authority, and so bring it into instant and constant collision with the temper of which we are speaking. Where the world calls for intuitions, demonstrations, verifications, the legitimate and loyal ministry answers with a "Thus saith the Lord." Such a method of establishing truth and duty is, to the spirit of the age, illegitimate; and the prestige of a ministry that will not abdicate its highest function,—that of speaking as having authority,—waned as the spirit of the age prevails.

Other reasons for a decline in the estimation in which the ministry has been held, are to be found within the Church, and to some extent within the ministry itself.

1. Closely connected with that characteristic of the times to which attention was last directed, are the concessions which are too often made by the ministry to the temper of the age, in regard to the presentation and enforcement of revealed truth. These very properly and very surely impair the prestige of the ministry that will have recourse

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to them. A gospel adapted to the times by human adjustments is not the gospel that the times want. God's truths, put in God's way, are the truths that prove themselves adapted to all times ; and for the very reason that they are not for any specific times, but for man in his great universal needs. Men professing to follow Apostolic example often utterly mistake the spirit in which, the extent to which, and the methods by which, they are to " be made all things to all men, that by all means they may save some." Especially is it the gravest error, meriting the most ignominious failure, to present all things that are supernaturally revealed as being to all intents and purposes, or to any extent and purpose, revealed or discoverable in any other way. The ministry that is afraid to say, anywhere and everywhere, " Thus saith the Lord," is plainly not called of God to His service in the Gospel. The words that He bids men speak are to be spoken as by His bidding, and not so as to hide as much as possible the fact of the bidding. Change their warrant, and you inevitably change their import and effect. The critical question often is, Will men receive them and act upon them as from God? Their utterance on any other warrant is an uncommissioned utterance, a human venture, in a sphere whose interests are too momentous for the intrusions of adventure. When the ministry resorts to philosophy to meet philosophy,—as though the Gospel, not being a philosophy, needed sometimes to be represented by a substitute, sometimes to be aided by an adjunct,—it enters an arena in which it can look only for natural as distinguished from spiritual victories, and takes the risks which are incident to all human encounters.

When the ministry allows the circumstances and peculiarities of its own time to fill larger space in its view than the permanent necessities of man and the eternal conditions and elements of its Divine commission, it will naturally and naturalistically emphasise the mode of stating and enforcing truth more than the truth itself. It comes of necessity to rely upon the moulding and adapting work of the herald, rather than upon the substance of the king's overture. The result is made to turn, in fact, upon human tact more than upon the Divine wisdom. And the world itself, knowing whom the ministry claims to represent, awards the simple justice of light esteem, if not of more serious contempt and censure, to these human improvers upon Divine methods.

2. The multiplying and magnifying of lay agencies and activities in the Church tend, unless carefully watched and guarded, to the depreciation of the importance and the functions of the ministry.

This is an age in which the Church, most happily for itself and for the world, has come to a more vivid apprehension of the obligation of the whole body, and of every part, to serve its Lord. Individual activity and organised activity, on the part of private Christians, have engaged thought and developed results beyond the experience of many former ages. The one danger to which our subject calls attention is this—

that the satisfaction and strength and external success secured in connection with this diffused and quickened activity of the Church, may be misinterpreted. What had been wrongly imagined, or indolently suffered to be wholly within the sphere of ministerial activity, has been found in many particulars quite possible to private Christians. It is easy to pass, by reaction, from a condition of things in which the ministry was relied upon for too much, to a theory and practice that shall put away the counsel, guidance, and control which the Lord ordained for His Church.

The deeper breathing, the more vigorous pulse, the stronger arm, the more elastic step, satisfaction succeeding to weariness in work, new meanings discovered in the promises, new adequacy and adaptation found in the provisions of grace, are construed as tokens of a Divine approval of lay activity which only need further illustration in outward results. The responsibility for the old unprofitableness is adroitly transferred from the Church to the ministry, as though this had been the burden that kept down life. And so doctrines come to be practically held (the more dangerous because not formulated) that seriously limit the dignity and impair the power of the ministry.

Unordained evangelism,—and all the more because of signal blessings that have attended some of its conspicuous examples,—unless watched and regulated, with no jealousy for man, but all jealousy for God, will be a certain source of embarrassment to the ministerial office. There have been broached, in regard to the rights of laymen to administer, in emergencies, the sacraments of the Church, theories which, in some minds, involve a challenge of all peculiar privileges vested in the ministry with regard to these ordinances. The precarious tenure of the pastoral office in many parts of the Church, especially in America, with the consequent multiplication of responsibilities and duties upon the eldership and laity of such churches, tends in many ways to low estimates, both of the rights of, and the necessity for the ministry. The cheapness of more transient provision, the ease of escaping from unsatisfactory arrangements, and the facility with which fickle tastes can be gratified (though it be at the expense of all consecutive and solid ministrations), work with great effect against pastoral permanence, often against all pastoral relations whatsoever, and, as a last result, possibly against a fully ordained ministry. The religious press, a precious agency for good, makes it possible for most members of our congregations to read better sermons than they would hear, and they depreciate the spoken word. Sunday Schools, managed by Sunday-School Associations, which need not be constituted of, or controlled by Church members, are but an extreme illustration of an abounding associational work, which, by no means always in its design, but too often in its actual result, encroaches upon the functions both of the Church and its constituted authorities.

And so, in one way and another, from one side and another, within the Church itself, the ministry comes to be regarded too frequently as a

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very special thing, as of doubtful convenience. The principles distinctly avowed by Plymouth Brethren, and the tendencies which have reached full development among them, exist, at least in germ, in many another connection, and cannot be too early or too closely watched.

3. Sensationalism, in all its phases and measures, resorted to by the ministry as a means of helping out the unattractiveness and unpalatableness of the Gospel of the grace of God, has greatly contributed to bring the ministry into disrepute. Every pulpit buffoon is a fearful incubus upon the sacred office with which he is connected. And others who think themselves far removed from revolting excesses in the mode of their preaching, show the taint of this evil tendency, and cater to the taste which finds its grossest gratification at other hands than theirs.

“Men must be brought, unscriptural men, to hear the Gospel before they can be benefited by it. You must keep hearers in their pews, or you cannot address them with line upon line, precept upon precept. *Can that which is unsavoury be eaten without salt?*” Is the natural heart, then, a fortress to be taken by stratagem, Gospel forces being brought in disguise into a stronghold which supposes itself to be admitting familiar and welcome visitants? The spiritual tastes of the new man are, by some Indian jugglery, to be brought to life and fruitfulness by a new, consummate art, playing at first and for a time upon the old natural tastes. These human devices and tricks are employed—are they?—“that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.” Is it, then, a true conclusion that these artifices do not display, and should not be supposed to display, the wisdom of men, and therefore do not fall under the apostle’s stricture?

No rhetoric of the sensational ministry is more coruscating than that in which it declaims against the insipid and commonplace style of presenting truth, and sets forth the superior promise of a highly-seasoned Gospel. Nevertheless, the honest judgment of men will cling to the persuasion, that the pulpit which is in itself most invisible is most true to the Divine intention. Men are to be brought face to face with God for direct dealing with Him. And if, on the one hand, great care should be taken that the attention of men be not drawn away to the imperfections and deformities of God’s messengers, on the other hand, it is an impertinence and an irreverence to offer His truth and Spirit the aid of the petty devices of the sophist, the composer, the declaimer, or the clown.

Sensationalism attaching itself to the life of religious societies, or to Church work, if less offensive, because not thrusting itself into so close connection with the very voice of God in His direct address to men, is none the less a warrant for esteeming more lightly the ministry that resorts to it. To assume that God does not understand human nature—that men can add important, essential elements to the system of agencies by which God’s kingdom is to be built up—that the beauty and power of holiness in the Church need to be supplemented by attrac-

tions and expedients borrowed from high-pressure human societies—this shocks the sober and reverent mind.

The intrusion of this tendency, in any form whatever, into the domain of sacred things, disgusts the thoughtful portion of the Church. It provokes and justifies the scorn of the world, which is not to be made captive to Christ by any such shallow and unwholesome devices. It multiplies the difficulties of that portion of the ministry which, both from taste and from profound and solemn conviction, shrinks from the use of all such artifices. It repels from the ministry not a few of the choicest young men of the Church, who, finding what are the conditions of *éclat* and reputed success in too many communities, and unwilling to bend their necks to such a thralldom, or to discipline their powers to such uses, decide to serve God in other callings, sure that to this they are not called.

Two phenomena of our time, of serious aspect and growing proportions, claim attention before we dismiss our theme. They are in part an effect, in part a cause, of that waning prestige of the ministry of which we have been speaking. Both show themselves in different degrees of development. Both are complex phenomena. Both involve elements commanding respect—rights of ministers, and rights of congregations—with other elements whose existence, even in the slightest degree, threatens evil, and is evil. Both are complicated with factors supplied by the general condition of things in the world,—its rapid movement, its increased facilities for communication, its multiplied opportunities for comparisons and contrasts, its restlessness, its competitions, and other things involving disadvantage and peril, both to ministers and churches, in forms unknown to the staid and stationary days that were.

Let us look at the extremes. The ministry is represented as suffering at the hands of many Churches and congregations, not in sensibility and self-respect only, but in outward facilities and supports to a degree that limits its very ability to fulfil the office with which it has been divinely intrusted. Qualifications, of which no hint is given in the charter under which Church and ministry exist, are said to be imposed and forced into the foreground. Intelligence, piety, consecration, ripe experience, are lighter than air when compared with a fine person, a melodious voice, cultivated tastes, versatile talents, business capacity, power to draw money out of close pockets. Fastidiousness and caprice fasten upon these adventitious qualities in a degree quite disabling to many men who possess all the qualifications that the Word of God and the normal experience of the Church entitle any people, intent chiefly on spiritual blessings, to demand of the ministry. Pew-holders, and not Christ, are allowed to dictate the terms and the tenure of ministerial service; and the Church resolves itself into a shrewd business organisation, a fastidious audience, a corps of vigilant and jealous employers, wholly forgetful, it would seem, of the loving, living relations that should subsist between the Church and its ministry.

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On the other hand, Church and congregation complain that the chief concern of too many ministers seems to relate to the place where, and the conditions in which they will fulfil their Divine commission. They are fastidious; they are restless; they are intent upon large temporal conveniences in connection with the spiritual honours and rewards of their office. They gather in throngs at the doors of vacant churches that are eligible; they send specimen sermons, and resort to other strange devices to gain attention; they "settle" with ill-concealed mental reservations in regard to the length of their stay; they wait for something to turn up; they stand, hat in hand, ready on slight pretext, from within or from without, to depart to new adventures.

These extremes are too frequently and too vividly suggested by what actually occurs. Quiet ministries, full of mutual satisfaction, and rich in spiritual blessing, are much more rare than they were. Whether such evils shall be removed by wonders of grace or of spiritual judgment, like "a famine of hearing the words of the Lord," who can predict? The prestige and power of the ministry are as important, and should be as precious, to the Church, as to the ministry itself. Surely Church and ministry should present themselves before the Lord, and ask Him,—whose, in fact, this ministry is,—how it shall be fulfilled, how it shall be esteemed and sustained, if by it the body of Christ is to be edified and glorified.

CHARLES A. AIKEN.

DR. CHALMERS.

THE 17th of March was the hundredth anniversary of the birth of Thomas Chalmers. It was made the occasion, in Scotland, of much ardent commemoration and reminiscence. There used to be some measure of this even in Chalmers' own lifetime, at least among his students. These used to hold a public breakfast, and thereafter offer their formal congratulations to the Professor; the Irish students, of whom there were always many, wearing shamrock, inasmuch as Chalmers' birthday was also St. Patrick's day. But when the hundredth anniversary came round, it was felt that the time was come for the Scottish community to remember their countryman once more, and to recall to the younger generation, that has grown since he was taken away, the associations connected with his name.

The place in literature, especially in theological literature, which belongs to Chalmers, will be settled by the influence his works continue to exercise on the general mind, or, more adequately perhaps, by the rank which thinkers of various countries and schools assign to them. To the appreciation of that tribunal they may be safely left. His place in the history of our time must be gathered from the record of his life,