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◀ Editorial Comment ▶

It may be doubted whether any other question of controversy, not even the "Genesis *versus* Geology" dispute, has ever awakened as much fear and called forth as many direful prophecies as "The Higher Criticism," which its advocates usually prefer to call "The Historical Criticism." The greater part of this controversy has occurred within three decades. While it is still alive in some quarters there is much evidence to show that the acrimony is passing away, and a disposition is gaining to leave the questions at issue more and more to scholarly circles, and to those who are especially equipped to deal with them.

The Bible Still Remains

Meanwhile, with varying degrees of satisfaction, several things will be noted. One thing to be thankful for is that the prophecies that the higher criticism would lead its advocates to an abandonment of evangelical Christianity entirely, have not been fulfilled. The extreme and destructive criticism has not gained any permanent foothold. About all of the prominent advocates of the main critical positions are still working inside the lines of the church, and received and recognized as evangelical Christians.

Another thing should give even more gratification to all of us. The Bible has not been injured; its influence has not been unfavorably affected. On the contrary, during the last ten years of this controversy, and many would say largely because of it, interest in the Bible has risen to a height never before known in all its history. The Bible for the first time has become a college book, so that, as Mr. Cooper has shown in our pages, more than 80,000 college students are studying it regularly. Bible sales, never so large as now, outstrip the sales of any other printed book of the world. And it is the judgment of men who have the very best opportunities for observing that it is read and studied more intelligently and more sympathetically than ever it was before.

The lessons from these facts "he may run that readeth." There has never been any reason, save a lack of robust faith in God and man, for flying into panic over what men may seem to be doing to the Bible. The Bible is here, one of the great established facts of the universe; entrenched and impregnable by reason of its own values. Ought we not to welcome with a calm mind even the guesses and speculations, far more the researches and examinations to which any one anywhere would subject it? Over and over it has been shown that the apparent enemies of the Bible in their attacks on it have only established its truth more solidly. Much more, should we not maintain our faith, and the equipoise of our spirits as to the sincere efforts of professedly Christian men, who through many mistakes and failures are nevertheless bringing treasures new and old from the enduring Word of God? The balance of truth is grounded in the good sense, the faith, and the spiritual discernment of the whole body of believers, who are not in the least likely permanently to accept new errors or run after false gods.

◀ The Work of The Preacher ▶

THE MINISTER AND HIS LAYMEN

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A MINISTER is not a layman, whatever our theory about it. He may dress like one, eschewing the shirtless appearance and the choker collar. He may talk like one, smoke like one, lounge in the club like one, bustle off to his office every morning like one, and all the rest. But he is not a layman, and nobody thinks he is. He may not pretend to be any better than a layman religiously, may declare it in the pulpit and claim the right to do whatever the layman does; the layman may say that he thinks so too, that he does not believe in setting a preacher on a pedestal, that he thinks it is a time for the laymen to come forward—and all that. But neither of them really believes it or acts as tho it were true. The comparison is unfortunate, but I think of no other at the moment, that no ass ever yet got into a lion's skin without neglecting to tuck in an ear that gave him away.

That is a fundamental fact from which we may set out. A minister is radically like a layman, but he is markedly different, also. The difference is not accidental, not a matter of clothes and speech and habits of life. It does not prevent his being a good chum for his laymen, nor having perfect freedom in his relation with them. But they will always remember that he is the minister, and he will do well always to remember it. Perhaps it is gathered up for us in a sentence from a prayer which was offered in my behalf in a Sabbath morning prayer-meeting by one of my laymen: "Grant that he may go about among his people with the dignity that befits a man with a message from God, and with the humility that befits a man for whom Christ died." Humility and dignity; likeness and unlikeness; equality and leadership. Laymen do not forget the difference. You catch the note in the prayers and comments and manner of the best of them and the poorest of them. They know the minister in himself is only a man, clay like themselves, liable to sin and failure like themselves, but they expect him to be and they hope he is also some-

thing different, and the more their minister he is, the surer they are of his difference. It is well that we keep that difference clear in mind.

For one thing, a minister makes or he ought to make a constant appeal in behalf of the best part of every man. He is set to be a spiritual force. Partly he appeals by his words. I never lose my sense of wonder as I look out on the congregation that there are people who will actually sit there a solid half-hour while I talk; no other voice but mine being heard, and what I am saying they are hearing as tho it were worth their while. I am not surprized at people going to church, because many of them go without reference to a minister, to worship God. But I am prepared for the word of a correspondent in the West who says that in looking for a man for a pulpit where preaching is the thing, and being nice and good will not excuse a man from talking profound nonsense, he is amazed at the inadequacy and inanity of the preaching he is hearing in his visitations. All that is true. Why more men do not have sudden nosebleed just before a sermon and slip out is a great mystery—until you realize that they do not go to church to hear a man talk and explain his own opinions. They often think they are coming for that, but they do not keep coming when they feel so about the minister. He may rebuke them or encourage them, or what not, but he makes appeal to something in them which rises up to say: that man is right. His appeal is to the spiritual factors in life. He may put in all the philosophy and poetry and politics he pleases, so long as they catch that appeal. The minister is virtually the only man who makes that appeal by his words. The claim that the theater does it is nonsense. All the better plays enforce moral lessons, at least do not encourage immorality, but that is the purpose of very few of them. Recently I went to a performance of Grand Opera, where the finest singers of the world were in evidence. The story in the opera was one of utmost

loyalty and devotion under circumstances of grave peril. It carried the lesson of sweetest purity. To add beauty to the scene, however, at a certain stage of the play, out come a group of ballet dancers, so dressed that they would have been immediately arrested if they had been off the stage as appearing in indecent costume. They danced and pirouetted for some time with motions that would banish any girl from decent society. Meanwhile, the faithful, true-hearted lover was singing magnificently in the person of a man of whom it is currently said that there is nothing to him above his mouth or below his shoulders—a recognized libertine and profligate. Several others of the instructors in the school of purity and constancy were notoriously loose in their lives. That does not prove that the theater, of which this was a high instance, may not make the spiritual appeal. It only suggests that the appeal is purely accidental when it occurs at all.

On the other hand, the layman knows that if his minister is a worthy man he is making that appeal as the passion of his life. He is trying to keep men from forgetting God; and most other influences in their lives are making it easy to forget him. I said the minister is making that appeal by his words. He is doing it even more by his life—not by the things he does but by the very fact of his existence. There are certain things which few men will say or do before a man whom they know to be a minister. They do not count him a prig or a Miss Nancy, but they know he stands for the higher things just because he is a minister. Few men will swear or be vulgar or drunken before a minister even tho they do not know him. Some of our brethren, mostly our younger brethren, resent that fact. They do not want that. They want men to be themselves when they are around. Let them be cautious before ladies, but let them be just themselves before a minister. Yes; but what self shall we encourage in men—the lower or the higher? Is it the true self of a man to be profane and vulgar? Have we no interest in checking that lower self? We had better want that restraining influence. The solid reason for its existence you can see in the effect of some laymen themselves, before whom men are always their cleanest, best selves. I have an elder in my church who is peculiarly known for his high Christian character. Men act around him as tho he were a minister, be-

cause they know he has what the theory of the case assigns to all of us, sheer, simple goodness, loyalty to the highest ideals. God knows, and we know to our shame how often we fail our laymen, but we may thank God he lets us make that continual appeal by word and life to the higher, the spiritual part of their lives.

It is stated for us fairly in the familiar words of Paul to Timothy, commonly reading, "Be thou an example to the believers." The Greek is *τύπος τῶν πιστῶν*, a type of believers. A minister is meant to be, and in the sight of most laymen he actually is, a typical Christian. He constitutes a norm or standard of the Christian life. That is not by any choice of the minister. He would not have it so. But it is so. Parents can not get around his example. Boys and girls quote him as authority for anything they want to do, and when they do not want to follow his example in some point they excuse themselves because he is a minister and, of course, he is expected to be better.

It is a heavy burden on a minister's heart. But it is also his great opportunity. He can not meet a parishioner on the street or in his office or in his home without reminding him at least for the instant of the things for which the church stands. Sometimes his presence makes a man ashamed of something which is unworthy or adds to his pleasure in some fine thing he is doing or carries him over a hard place by his reminder of God, or turns his mind from purely temporal and engrossing tasks to the larger purposes of his life. The layman wants his minister when the spiritual things are pressing for recognition. In the hour of his great sorrow, in the pain of the great distress, he wants the one who stands in his mind for those greatest things. A man nearing his death wanted his pastor called, and when he came bade him not to talk to him: "Just sit by me and grip my hand, that is all." The talking was over. The being was all that was needed.

For the layman, again, the minister is a specialist in religious matters. He does much of the religious thinking of a good many people. He is expected to follow the movements of the world as they affect the kingdom of God, and to know where the duty of the church lies. The Laymen's Missionary Movement is a delayed response to the call of the pulpit for years past. Ministers have

been trying to shame their laymen out of their indifference for years. It is a safe guess that not a striking thing has been said during the whole campaign which has not been a commonplace in the thought of many ministers for a quarter of a century. They have urged systematic beneficence and larger giving and all the rest, and the laymen have taken it as a specialist's plea, to be discounted as the pleas of all specialists have to be discounted. There is only one escape from that discount. That is for the minister to keep his breadth as well as his especial interest. Some men are proud of being hobbyists. If they really are hobbyists, and are not simply saying so, then they are endangering the cause whose rocking-horse they are riding. They are expected instead to be able to see the fair proportion and relation between all the parts of the work—to be broad specialists. Always the minister in his effort to be broad risks being ineffective. It is hard to be broad and intense at the same time—hard, but the nearer he comes to it, the better he serves his laymen. They do not want him to know everything nor be active in everything that pertains to the kingdom of God, but they do expect him to be interested and ready to become intelligent about all its phases. At least, if they do not expect him to be all that, he helps them more when he is as much of a specialist as that implies.

But not a specialist in religious enterprises alone; the minister is the layman's specialist in theological and even ethical thought. They sit in judgment on what he says, of course, but his opinions have special weight. Here generalizations are very difficult. Perhaps we can not speak for all laymen, but some things lie in the nature of the case. If any man has time for thought on religion, time for careful and fair survey of old and new phases of truth, time to judge between conflicting theories, and for meditation of them, the minister is the man. He may feel he has too little time, but he has more than laymen have, and they expect his judgment to be worth considering. Take it by and large, thoughtful laymen are more conservative than ministers, and the aggressive liberalism of laymen is among those who are rather troubled than assured. A minister has no right to be theologically brash. Laymen do not ask him to close his mind to new phases of truth; some even like a new thing every day, but even these always have

their limit, and the man who sets out to please them will soon displease them. And, on the other hand, the man who never finds a new facet of truth will soon be an awful bore to laymen. Somewhere between, his path lies; treasure new and old he has to find. When he presents it, he must have regard to the fact that it is more important for men to accept it than for him to preach it. It would be a revelation to some ministers to realize that during the sermon the hearers are more to be considered than the preacher, that hearing means more than preaching. So it is only fair that he present his specialized truth with due regard to the hearer. One of my friends is troubled because a layman charges him with heresy because of a sermon which he preached and published. I have read the sermon again, and I see just what the layman means, and the good minister has himself to thank for the charge. Two or three sentences judiciously inserted, in absolute loyalty to all that the sermon means and the preacher believes, would have cleared the whole trouble. But the sermon was prepared to be preached rather than heard. Every minister ought to have in his study a jury of people of different kinds throughout his congregation, to whom he instinctively submits his argument before he presents it in public. It is not fair that he asks whether that jury of typical people, from judges to washerwomen, will like what he says, but it is fair that he ask whether he is giving them a fair chance at his meaning by full recognition of the point of view which he knows they take. He may want to change their point of view, but he can never do it until he has a clear understanding of it and a decent sympathy with it himself. No minister ever changed a layman's opinion while he thought that layman was a fool, nor while he disregarded or sneered at the opinions of the layman. He may confirm some men, but he will change no man by pretending to describe an old form of faith and characterizing it as atrocious or monstrous or ridiculous. The faiths by which men have lived and died, and in which they have developed great characters are never ridiculous nor monstrous, even tho they may be radically mistaken. Laymen do not seem to care much whether a minister is theologically liberal or conservative. Go to any city in the land and you can find conservative men

preaching to a handful and complaining that people have itching ears, and liberal men whining about the unresponsive people who will not come to hear because they are so hidebound. And you will find other conservative men with large congregations, and liberal men with just as large congregations. I think of a city in which are two very prosperous churches, both filled and active. The pastors are as far apart theologically as they can be without getting off the planet. The people are not different either, as our fiction usually declares. But those two ministers have one trait in common—that while they are religious specialists, they always seem to bear in mind the fact that they are dealing with hearers who are not specialists and they study to take their point of view. I believe the average layman could pass without discomfort from one church to the other—the average layman, I say, for, of course, the exceptional one would instantly note the difference.

The final fact which I now point out is that a minister is the layman's inspirer and leader in the work of the kingdom of God. He is a specialist in outward religion, that is, he does his work by inspiration in many cases. He can not do many things himself, nor lead in many movements. Some ministers are wearing out their lives trying to do everything or have a hand in everything. They are on committees and boards where they had better be represented by laymen, not because laymen can do the work better, but because they can leave the minister free for what he alone can do. But no layman likes his minister to be a nobody in religious movements. He does not like his church left out when others are in line. Sometimes his minister stands aloof and will not go in, but he does not remember that his laymen are often embarrassed before other laymen by having to explain his position. I shall not forget the sadness and shamefacedness of a layman who told his fellows in a meeting once that they could not count on his minister to take any interest in the thing proposed, and that he would have to go in alone. He loved his minister, and was loyal to him, and made a lame excuse for him, but his red face and hesitating manner showed that he felt the situation. And I remember the time when a layman said, in a similar meeting, that he was sure his minister could not do much, because he

was an awfully hard-worked man, but he would be interested in anything that would help along.

This is worth emphasizing now because some men are talking as tho the laymen had got hold of the missionary enterprise at last and would push it right along. They miss the meaning of the movement. In ninety-nine cases of every one hundred, the movement will go forward as the minister inspires it and continues to inspire it, or leads it out-and-out. With the rarest exceptions the movement will fail when the minister lies down on it. So will any movement in the church depend on the inspiration and in many cases on the leadership of the minister.

Therein lies a danger. He runs anything at his peril. If he wants to do all the work, the spirit of generosity among laymen will let him do it. Some of them will do no work, they nor their sons, nor their daughters, nor their man-servant, nor their maid-servant, except when a stranger within their gates has to be brought to the church on Sunday, when they work that modern combination of ox and ass, the automobile. But most laymen will work if they are inspired and led to it. The head of a department store said to his minister once: "I can not stop to find special work for special people. There's the work, let the man do it, or I fire him." But the minister can not fire him, tho he may himself fear being fired later. The minister has to find what the layman can do and guide him into it. He has the work that needs to be done and it has often to go undone or badly done because he simply can not find the man to do it. And that double task of matching work that needs doing to men who need something to do in the kingdom of God is almost the hardest the minister has on hand.

Some "Don'ts" for the Minister

Don't be late.

Don't leave the selection of the hymns to the choir director.

Don't consult with the choir leader or the ushers after the service has begun.

Don't sprawl about in the pulpit chair during the singing of the choir as if you were half dead with fatigue and had no interest in their contribution to the service of worship.

Don't sit down during the singing of the hymns, but stand and join with the choir and congregation.