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I. Literary.

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY.

BY REV. PEYTON H. HOGE, D. D.

I.

Where Egypt's sacred river creeps
Along its plenteous plains;
Where rise its monumental heaps
And colonnaded fanes;
Where History, Art and Science scored
In sculptured wall their record old,
And in a myriad tombs were stored
Treasures of knowledge yet untold;
Where Power has reached its loftiest state
And millions cringed before the great;
A people known to God
The path of sorrow trod,
And in hard bondage wrought, and mourned their bitter fate.

II.

The silent stars look down—
Look down and give no sign;
Dumb is the oracle of On,
Dumb is Osiris' shrine;
And Memnon's sunrise song
To them no answer brings;
In vain for them his notes prolong,
In vain for them he sings;

THE LABORERS ARE FEW.

BY REV. R. C. REED, D. D.

On nothing, except on the Spirit of God, is the church so dependent as on preachers of the gospel. We hardly need to make this exception, because preachers are the agency through which the Spirit works. Preachers can do nothing without the Spirit; the Spirit will do nothing without preachers. "It hath pleased God through the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." "Faith cometh by hearing," "but how shall they hear without a preacher?" It is of God's own appointment that the church is dependent on preachers. It can carry on no aggressive work without them; nor can it hold the ground already occupied without them. A prime essential, an absolute necessity, to the prosperity of the church is an adequate supply of preachers. Unless the supply is in excess of the demand, any decrease in the number of candidates for the ministry bodes disaster.

The statement that the ranks of the ministry have in recent years been overcrowded has been made. Certain facts have been adduced to prove the statement true. But with vast destitutions in our Home Mission fields calling for laborers, and myriad millions of heathen, to whom the name of Christ is yet unknown, pleading, "by the mute eloquence of their miseries," for the Bread of Life, there is no need to give the statement serious consideration. There may be ground to complain of the quality, but not of the quantity of preachers. There has never been, there is never likely to be, an overcrowding of the ranks with men divinely called to the ministry.

We shall confine our thoughts to the narrow bounds of the Southern Presbyterian Church. At no time in our history have we had anything like an adequate supply of preachers. For many years we have had five hundred or more churches on our rolls that could have no preachers because there were none to have; or if at any time they had supplies, it was by emptying other five hundred pulpits. Again for many years we have added churches more rapidly than ministers. At our slow rate of progress in the matter of conquering new territory, we have pushed

our organization more rapidly than we have furnished the supply for its need. Hence the roll of vacant churches grows longer and longer. An urgent need, an ever-pressing need, is a large addition to our preaching force. Let us have better preachers, more earnest, more self-sacrificing preachers, by all means; but also, by all means, let us have more preachers. A vacant church means a decaying church. A constant shifting of preachers from field to field, creating just as many vacancies as they fill, means a spasmodic kind of life. An adequate supply of preachers means enough to care for all of our organizations, and a number above that as large as the church will support for service in home and foreign fields. We have never had anything like such a supply.

A decrease, then, in the number of candidates is for our church a serious matter. We can ill afford any decrease. But as a matter of fact the decrease has been very marked. Our church reached its maximum of candidates in 1894. That year the number was 445. From that date, the decline has been steady until the figure reached this year is 317. In six years the loss aggregates 128, nearly 29 per cent. The average loss is 21 per annum, but last year the loss was 30, showing a decided increase in the ratio of loss.

To size up the situation another fact must be taken into consideration; the number of communicants has been increasing all the while. In 1894 our communicants were 199,167. These gave us 445 candidates, 1 to every 447. Our communicants now are 225,890. These give us 317 candidates, 1 to 700. In proportion, therefore, to communicants, the decrease instead of being 29 per cent. is 37 per cent. We are falling more than one-third short of the standard of 1894. If this state of affairs continues for any considerable length of time, the result can be nothing less than the cessation of all progress, and then positive decline in every department of church life and of Christian activity.

What are the causes of this long continued and serious decrease in the number of candidates? Only an inspired man could give us an answer on which we could rest with a perfect assurance of its accuracy. We can merely offer a few suggestions.

1. It can hardly be questioned that the proximate cause is a falling of the spiritual temperature in the church. Our life is not as vigorous as it was six years ago. An evidence of this is that our percentage of growth was 7 per cent. in 1894, as against

4 per cent. last year. A large proportion of those who enter the ministry are born in revivals. The Synod of Philadelphia split in two in 1745 on the subject of revivals. The half that favored revivals was formed into the Synod of New York. At the end of twelve years the two halves came together again, and it was found on comparing notes that the half that opposed revivals had fewer ministers than it had at the separation, while the other half had increased its number of ministers more than threefold. It is true that this threefold growth was not altogether from within, but the growth from within was far greater in the Synod of New York than in that of Philadelphia. The Cumberland Presbyterian Church had its origin in a revival, and the occasion of its origin was that the revival gave birth to more preachers than could be trained by the regulation methods for service in the church. It may be set down with a good degree of certainty that a low tone of spiritual life is in large measure responsible for the decline in the number of our candidates.

2. Perhaps 95 per cent. of our ministers are from the country churches. These churches are suffering from the drift of population to the cities. Owing to this drift, while our church is growing in numbers, the growth is not among the people that give us our preachers. Not only do the country churches suffer from the drift of population to the cities, but they are the great sufferers from the scarcity of preachers. There are not enough to go around, and the town and city churches get the lion's share. There is a drift of preachers to the cities.

Of course, this cause cannot account, to any marked extent, for the sudden and startling drop in the last six years. But it is a cause that is perpetually operative, and is worthy of serious consideration. The decline of our country churches means the dwindling of our crop of preachers.

3. It is gravely suggested by a thoughtful observer of the times that the "dead line" repels young men from the ministry. They shrink from entering a calling, in which their age will begin to tell against them by the time they have passed their fortieth birthday; in which growing experience, and enlarging attainments, and developing spiritual gifts are not regarded as an offset to cumulative years.

4. Again it is suggested that inadequate support acts as a deterrent; that young men lack the courage to face the prospect of

grinding and hopeless poverty. We give these suggestions, 3 and 4, for what they are worth, without expressing an opinion as to the weight to which they are entitled.

5. We venture one other suggestion, closely related to the first: the church is not duly concerning herself to keep up the supply. Preachers are not setting forth the character and claims of the ministerial office. The church is not looking out her choice young men, and asking the Lord to send them forth. Parents are not consecrating their sons to this work.

This brings us to a brief consideration of the duty of the church. If disaster overtakes the church from this cause, she will have herself to blame. Note two or three plain scriptural facts.

1. God is Lord of the harvest field. To him, and to him alone, belongs the right to select the laborers and to send them forth into his harvest. No one has the right to go unless he receives his appointment from God. We cannot learn this truth too well, nor lay it too much to heart.

2. God, however, suspends his purpose to provide the laborers on our prayers. "Pray ye, therefore, the Lord of the harvest." This, like all his other gifts to his church, is to be had for the asking, but not without the asking. Six years of constant, unslacking decrease in the number of laborers appeal to the church to go down on her knees before God. Dire disaster threatens, and this is the way in which our Saviour bids us to avert it. Not more clearly are we shut up to prayer as the means for obtaining the Holy Spirit than we are shut up to prayer as the means for obtaining preachers.

3. There is a pledge that God will answer our prayer in the command to offer it. Jesus would not send us to the throne of grace for this particular thing, if it were not certainly to be had by our going there for it.

4. Furthermore, Jesus reveals his own heart in bidding us pray. As our divine Intercessor, he will add his name to our petition, and then it cannot fail. "Him the Father heareth always." Knowing in advance that his compassionate heart is on our side, what stronger assurance could we have?

5. We must help to answer our own prayers. We shall greatly err if we think our responsibility is discharged when we have sent our petition heavenward. As a rule God calls men into the

ministry as he calls them into the kingdom, through the efforts as well as through the prayers of his people. He will use the truth to reach their consciences and hearts, and it rests on us to bring the truth into contact with them. The last Assembly acted wisely in adopting the report of one of its committees: "That in view of the decreasing number of candidates for the ministry, your committee suggests the importance of urging upon all our churches the duty of seriously looking within their borders to see if there may not be those who are really called of God to preach the word, but who are refusing to respond; and that ministers now in the work be urged to speak of it as the noblest calling God ever offers to men, and urge the 'first-fruits' in all their fields to inquire of the Lord, if he will not honor them by using them in the same work to which he gave his Son and holy men of old." The Assembly erred by defect in not urging that prayer to the Lord of the harvest be conjoined with this search for the young men. "*Ask* and ye shall receive, *seek* and ye shall find.

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