

THE FRATERNAL.

The Editor will be glad to have the offer of short papers on matters of interest to men in the ministry, and also brief communications in the form of correspondence. The latter must be really brief and to the point. Short reports from county and other fraternal will be especially welcome.

Vol. II., No. 10.

JANUARY, 1909.

Editorial Notes.

In addition to the note in the Baptist Times of January 1st we offer a very sincere apology for the delay in the issue of the December number of the "Fraternal." It should have been in the hands of the subscribers by the twentieth of the month; the most convenient publishing date. A machinery accident and the pressure of Christmas work, alone prevented that.

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We still need the best support that the men of our ministry can give, in order that this little venture may live. The editor is grateful for appreciative words from various sources; and he begs for still larger support and interest.

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It is due to our contributor, Berkeley G. Collins, to say that his article of this month's issue, was in type long before the recent outbreak of discussion on chapel politics. The question was, in his and the editor's judgment, worthy of careful discussion, and in the quieter atmosphere of our magazine it could be dealt with adequately, in spirit if not in quantity. Short comments on the matter will help very much to make it useful.

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Four requests were received for "Matthew Henry" and it has been awarded. The incident suggests how useful a brother could be, who, living in a town where

second-hand books are plentiful, could collect standard works for some of the isolated brethren. A vast quantity of thoroughly sound and profitable volumes could be gathered together by anyone with a little fund at his disposal. It is not easy to see at a glance how they could be distributed: but it should not be impossible to do it. Any sum of money so spent would go immeasurably farther than if spent on new books.

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It is not out of place here to bespeak a careful consideration for any and all schemes which may be formulated in the interests of our churches and ministry. The near future will doubtless see many suggestions made for easing the great pressure which rests upon both ministers and churches. We shall not expect rash words or actions from the many men to whom the problem is personally a painful one. Still less shall we expect those of a happier lot to turn away in careless indifference. Our modern independency is but a relic of an older and more substantial one. We ought to leave nothing undone, and certainly nothing should be despised, which would tend to make the common life of our churches more stable and happy.

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News from the larger Fraternal and Associations is not reaching the editor with anything like the readiness which we had anticipated. Our space certainly is limited, but the organ of the B.M.F.U. would be a more really live thing if it could have occasional brief paragraphs of news from these centres. Will some brethren respond.

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There must be in possession of many brethren short papers which have been read at Fraternal gatherings of ministers. The editor of "The Fraternal" would be glad to see some of these for use in these pages.

The Minister in Politics.

Perhaps there is no subject that stands in more need of ventilation at the present time than the relation of the Christian ministry to the social and political questions of the day. It must be admitted that the subject is a very difficult one. We are realising more and more clearly that all life is one, and that hard and fast lines can be drawn nowhere. Just as the various sciences are seen to depend on and to merge into one another, so we are seeing that no line can be drawn between religion and politics, that religion in so far as it is real and dynamic has to do with the whole round of human activity. The day of "water-tight compartments" has gone for ever. And perhaps the greatest and most significant, certainly one of the most hopeful facts in the modern world, is the wide acknowledgment that all social problems at bottom are ethical, and that their solution is impossible without spiritual forces. Further, it cannot be other than a matter for thanksgiving, that the thoughts of men are increasingly directed towards some reconstruction of society, or at least towards such reforms as shall remove the heaviest burdens from the poor, and bring hope and joy into lives darkened by want and misery. Christians can rejoice in this spirit of helpfulness unfeignedly, because the modern "social conscience" is a Christian product. It is Christ who made the difference between the ancient and the modern world, in so far as the new is more humane than the old; and it is surely the movements of His spirit that are quickening men's hearts to-day. Again, there can be no doubt that the recent criticism of the Bible, more especially of the Old Testament, has resulted in a deepened sense of the connection between religion and national affairs. The prophets stand before us to-day, not as mysterious media of still more mysterious predictions, but as men of flesh and blood who addressed themselves to the problems of their own time, and who voiced the

condemnation of God upon social injustice and national crime. It is natural then that a ministry that is essentially prophetic should feel called upon to enter the arena of public life, and deal with the questions that are agitating the public mind and conscience. Indeed, no ministry can be vital which is out of touch with such matters, nor can any message be really inspired which has no light for men who are wrestling with the problems of the time. To these considerations must be added the fact that men are demanding that the Christian Church should show itself more sensitive to social evils than it has done in the past. Thoughtful leaders of the working classes complain that the churches have little sympathy with the aspirations of the multitude; and it is undoubtedly true that large sections of the people regard the churches as bulwarks of a system which they believe to be unjust. We are far from admitting that this suspicion is justified, but we must admit that tremendous pressure is being brought to bear upon the churches, and therefore on the ministers, to identify themselves with the social movement. It is very largely believed and asserted that unless they preach a "social gospel," the churches will be swept on one side by a triumphant democracy.

It is in no hostile spirit that we venture to suggest that in all this there lies a real peril, and that the ministry in its eagerness to fulfil the demands, or what it takes to be the demands of the time, may sacrifice its real usefulness. We are speaking, of course, of ministers in their official capacity and not as private citizens, when we submit that they have no right to pose as politicians or as social reformers; that they have no right to use their pulpits or to exercise their religious authority for the furtherance or advocacy of their own political or social creeds. In political matters history provides a warning the ministry ought always to bear in mind. It was the claim of the ministry of Scotland to a direct voice in the politics of the period that led to Dunbar. It was to men who claimed to be speaking the Word of God that Cromwell

wrote, "Is it therefore infallibly agreeable to the Word of God, all that you say? I beseech you, in the bowels of Christ, think it possible you may be mistaken." And it was concerning their right to control the civil Government that he said in memorable words, "We look on ministers as helpers of, not lords over, God's people." Unfortunately, as we think, there is a strong tendency in this direction at the present time. We have heard an eloquent divine preaching on the necessity of granting Home Rule to Ireland, and another condemning the Indian Government for the partition of Bengal! Ministers are teaching their hearers to look to them for guidance, not only in spiritual things, but in matters concerning which they have no more information, perhaps less, than some of those they address.

We contend that these ventures into the political realm injure the ministry in the respect of men. For one thing, if ministers pose at any time as authorities on disputed political questions, then if at other times they are silent, they lay themselves open to the charge of cowardice. For another, ministers are human. They cannot fail to be influenced by the political party to which, as citizens, they own allegiance, and there is, at least, some ground for the suspicion that their utterances on these matters are inspired by party zeal. And again, they cannot justify their claim to speak authoritatively on these questions, and the plain man is bound to challenge their right to do so. There are other considerations which ought to weigh heavily with the minister. We have heard that a lady who "sat under" a venerable leader, was always glad when there was a Liberal Government in office; for then her minister, being satisfied that the country was in safe hands, turned his attention to other and more helpful things. We know of a younger man who boasted that he had driven all the Tories out of his church! Surely a ministry which thus divides men according to their political creeds is anything but Christian. It is a great condemnation of any church, that a man should be debarred from worship,

or what comes to the same thing, should feel that he is out of place, on account of his politics. And where a minister poses as a political authority this is the inevitable consequence. It is not cowardice that ought to lead a Christian minister to keep his political creed to himself as far as his pulpit is concerned, it is love for the brethren and a true sense of his calling as the messenger of God to human souls.

Much the same thing can be said about ministerial advocacy of or opposition to Socialism and Social Reform. It is as well for us to look facts in the face, and the real fact is that ministers, with very few exceptions, are not competent to judge on such matters. We lately heard one of the strongest and most enlightened preachers of the day declare that on no subject is there more shallow nonsense spoken from the pulpit than on this subject of socialism. We believe this is absolutely true. Socialism is an economic creed, which may or may not be true. But obviously it cannot be helpfully discussed by anyone who has not made a special study of economics. It needs a full acquaintance with social facts and forces which few ministers can claim. What must an educated layman feel when he hears his minister advocating or denouncing a social creed he is quite sure he does not understand? And even if the minister has made a study of economics, we submit that he is travelling far out of his province when he ventures either to bless or condemn the theories of social reform. But the grave danger is, that in his natural desire for popularity he should degenerate into a mere demagogue. We fear there are signs of this. The working classes are not immaculate, their selfishness and evil habits call loudly for correction and rebuke. But few dare say so. It is much easier and safer to denounce the millionaire and the capitalist, the House of Lords and the "smart set." We are convinced that one reason for the arrested progress of the church is that it does not act as a conscience for the people, but too often as a mere sounding-board for their grievances. We are

not pleading for withdrawal from the world. As we have already said we rejoice in the new spirit that is moving in society, because we believe it is essentially Christian. But we are convinced that the people do not want what is called the "social gospel." They certainly want to feel that the church is in touch with them, that the message of the pulpit has a direct bearing on their lives and problems; they want to hear that religion is not deaf and blind to their needs. But we do not believe that they want to hear amateur politicians and social reformers in the pulpit.

The truth is, as we conceive it, that the Christian church has another mission to perform. And the Christian ministry has a higher function. We are not experts in politics, we are, in so far as we are true ministers, experts in the spiritual life. We have to proclaim a message from God, which is one through all times. We have to hold up to men true ideals, and to insist that love must be the inspiration of all life that pretends to be Christian. It is ours primarily, not to make a state, but to make men; not to build up a new social order, but to foster that type of character without which no social order can endure. We have to redeem society, it is true. But it is by sending forth from our churches redeemed men. We must show clearly that salvation is a matter of character, that the saved man must love his fellows, and that the Christian spirit must permeate all his life and operate in all his activities. In doing this we shall do the greatest, indeed, the most necessary service to our time. It is ours to provide the spirit, not to make the programme; to awaken the soul which will take to itself a body. If we confine our energies to this work instead of playing with matters beyond us, when we are forced to speak to the people as a whole, and driven by God to deliver a special message to our day, we shall then speak with authority and men will listen. Two of the greatest preachers of the day, Jowett of Birmingham, and Brown of Ferme Park, rarely appear on political platforms, their opinions on social questions

are rarely heard. But when they do speak it is with authority. No suspicion of ignorance or party spirit attaches to them. It is their self-repression that gives them power. If the ministry as a whole dealt less with the things of earth and more with the things of the spiritual life, when it is forced to speak of earthly things, it will be with the authentic voice of God.

B. G. COLLINS.

Bluntisham.

Our Figures and our Future.

The decline in the figures of church membership, shown by the Annual Report of both the Congregational and the Baptist Union, is being made the occasion for haranguing Nonconformity as a whole on its shortcomings. Some of the comments on the situation emanate from quarters to which political progress and religious freedom are alike obnoxious, and in which the Free Churches have never been forgiven for their effective intervention in the last General Election. Others come from those of our own number to whom our churches and our principles are dear, and who are sincerely grieved at the appearance of failure and decline. Both classes of critics, however, agree in attributing the lack of increase to an undue absorption of our leaders and of the churches generally in political questions. We are accused of having forsaken the word of God in order to serve tables, and are told that the decrease in our figures is the inevitable result.

Concerning these criticisms, there are two things to be said:

(1). In the first place it is a gross injustice to speak of the past action of the churches in terms of blame and reproach. Much attention has undoubtedly been given to political questions during the past few years, and it was inevitable and right that it should be so. In the presence of such facts as the Boer War,

the Education Act of 1902, and the Licensing Act of 1904, it was impossible for us, as ministers and churches, to be either silent or inactive. Questions of humanity, morality, and religious freedom were essentially involved. As Christians and Nonconformists we were bound to deal with these things, and we could only do so effectively along the lines of political action. But, while our action has been political, it has never been partisan. To cast reproach on those of our leaders who, during the past few years, have led us in the fight at much cost to themselves is both foolish and cruelly unjust.

(2). On the other hand, there is every reason that we should frankly recognise that the exceptional attention recently given to political questions has, to some extent, diverted our energy from the essential work of the church. There has been no fault for which anybody is to be blamed—we should have deserved blame if we had acted otherwise than we did. But there has been a calamity that may well be deplored. We are now called to repair that calamity by every means in our power. The note of personal religion must again be emphasised. Conversions must be more earnestly sought, not by great organised missions, but by persistent evangelistic preaching and by the personal efforts of our church members. Stress must again be laid on the fact that the essential foundation of the Christian life is a personal reconciliation to God through the love and sacrifice of the Saviour, and that the essential fruit of that life is a constant and personal effort to lead others into a similar experience. With the Drink and Education questions left as they are, and with the cry of the over-employed, the under-paid, and the unemployed ringing in our ears, churches and ministers must still go on speaking boldly on questions which are called political. But let us accept the reminder that social progress depends on individual regeneration more than on anything else. It is for genuine conversion to a consecrated life, and a widespread renewal of the sense of personal indebted-

ness and dedication to Christ, that we must work and pray. By this alone can the churches prosper and increase; by this alone can the kingdom of God, in any of its aspects, really come.

QUARTUS.

A Letter to our Brethren of the Prayer Union.

Memorial Hall,
Farringdon Street, London.
January 1st, 1909.

Dear Brethren,

On this, the first Sunday morning of the New Year, I salute you; and also your wives in their Prayer Union. May God bless you and enrich you with all the blessings of His goodness.

I have prayed for you, and with you, this morning; but I have been conscious of late that there has been a sensible slackening in our bond of mutual intercession, on the Lord's Day morning. I may be wrong, though the heart is very sensitive to the tides of the spiritual world. I begin to question whether our amalgamation with "The Fraternal" has brought about a lessened concern in the smaller circle of Brotherhood, of which our Prayer Union consisted. Have we spread ourselves to lose our strong impact? But surely the inclusion of the members of "The Fraternal" should have added to the weight of the numbers that grasp the rope.

In any case, let us all renew our vows of consecration to our Lord, and of prayerful love to each other. Nothing will more produce and nourish our love than constant intercession. When you pray for a man or a group of men, you are almost insensibly attracted to them. Prayer bridges the gulf between the more and the less cultured, between those that minister to town and to country congregations, between

the minister in the Homeland and the missionary among the heathen.

Let us give ourselves to prayer, also, dear brethren, because of the urgent need of our churches. The constant decrease in our statistics, notwithstanding the abundance of our machinery, convinces us that our spiritual forces are in need of rejuvenating. Much prayer, much blessing; little prayer, little blessing, seems to be the rule. It is only when we are living the throne-life ourselves, that we can have whatsoever we ask. A friend of mine, a retired minister, spends eight hours a day in intercessory prayer; and he believes that, in this, he is doing more for the kingdom of God than in the days of his prime.

Please pray for me. In March I start for Turkey, Singapore, China, Japan, Canada, to refresh and help our brethren in the ministry. Let us work till the last beam fades! Let us burn to the end of the candle! My love to you and yours.

Yours most sincerely,

F. B. MEYER.

Mr. Gladstone on Preaching.

If I rise to say a few words upon this interesting occasion I assure you that my main purpose—perhaps it ought to be my only purpose—is to convey to your minds the great respect and sympathy which I feel for the aims of these meetings. We are here upon common ground. If there are differences among us, I am one of those who think that it is the business of any man of a manful character to sink those differences upon proper occasions, only let him upon all occasions take care that they never become to him a cause of bitterness and evil-speaking. But we are here upon common ground, with a great and mighty function, belonging from the first especially, almost exclusively, to revealed religion—a function the efficacy

of which must undoubtedly depend in the main upon the matter which is preached. We are here as Christians—and you are fitter, I have no doubt, to impress that upon me—and it is the preaching of Christ our Lord which is the secret and substance and centre and heart of all preaching, not merely of facts about Him and notions about Him, but of His person, His work, His character, His simple yet unfathomable sayings—here lies the secret, the art of preaching. I am not here to touch upon those solemn portions of the subject which are more fitly in the hands of others, as I understand the purpose you are proceeding upon is this conception, which I take to be a true one—that, independently of its great and sacred aim and of the matter to be taught, preaching is an art, and that in the careful consideration of that art lie many secondary but not unimportant means for the more complete and perfect attainment of the end. With these we are all familiar. We know that the word—not in its theoretical sense, but as the briefest mode of expressing the art of business and conversation—the word in man is a great instrument of power. As long as 3,000 years ago, among those ancient forefathers of the Greek nation, from whom we have still in many things much to learn, and in whom we find a multitude of points of sympathy, it is most remarkable that the great orator, the great poet, who has commemorated their deeds, and who lived in a time of turbulence and war, nevertheless places one other instrument of power upon a level with the sword, and that is the word proceeding from the mouth of man. Well, now, this word has to be consecrated to aims most high and solemn, which were in great part hidden from the men of those days; but the more high and solemn the aim the greater ought to be the care that the means for attaining such an end are carefully considered and wisely employed. Now, it is difficult on this occasion to avoid, yet I am unwilling to assume, the character of a critic; for it appears we have only the choice of criticising the preacher or criticising the

hearer. But I cannot avoid expressing my strong concurrence in that which was said by your respected pastor, Dr. Parker, and by Mr. Sawyer. I think that upon the whole—at least, I speak of the religious body with which I am chiefly conversant—I think the pulpit gets somewhat less than justice from those who sit beneath it. Anyhow, that complaint of “commonplaces” is one, doubtless, very often urged with truth, but sometimes urged without sufficient warranty or justification. Dr. Parker has well told us that the most essential elements and constituents of life are in those commonplaces of life, and while he spoke I bethought myself of what I take to be the truth, that the real reason in a large number of cases—though I by no means say in all—why the declarations from the pulpit are thought to be “commonplaces” is because there is some deficiency in that healthy appetite by which they ought to be received by the pew. He reminded me of an illustration, which I think is apposite, in one of the short but beautiful poems by Gray—and Gray never wrote anything which was not beautiful—in which he describes the case of an invalid whose recovered health just enables him to go forth from his house and return to the beginnings, at least, of common life:

“The common air, the sun, the skies,
“To him were opening Paradise.”

What can be more common than the air, the sun, the skies? But to him they were “opening Paradise,” not because they were anything more in themselves than they were for multitudes who wandered under them unheeding and ungrateful, but because by the stern lesson of his privations he had learnt how precious they were, and returning energy and health made him know the high value of those blessings; and so I am convinced that in proportion as that healthy appetite can be encouraged and stimulated the range of these complaints of “commonplaces” will be greatly and materially narrowed. I deny not that there are cases in which they may apply. But here I will remind

you of an old couplet of one of our sacred poets—I mean the excellent George Herbert:

“The worst of preachers have something good; if all
want sense
“God takes a text and preacheth patience.”

So much for the subject of commonplaces.

(To be concluded.)

The above speech was made at an open conference on preaching, held at the City Temple, at a date unknown to the editor, but about twenty years ago. It was an impromptu utterance in all probability, and reveals the many sidedness of the old statesman. It is printed here, for its own intrinsic value, as well as for the sake of the name it bears.

The Notice Board.

Baptist Ministers' Fraternal Union MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS became due on January 1st, these, together with the subscription for "The Fraternal," 2s. 6d. in all (minimum), should be sent to the Hon. Secretary: B. Vernon Bird, "Struan," Stevenage.

Applications for benefits of the Benevolent Section of the BOOK FUND, and Membership in the Mutual Benefit Fund, and all general correspondence should also be sent to the Hon. Secretary.

Enquiries *re* Books, Orders, and Deposits for the BOOK FUND, should be addressed to: The Secretary B.M.F.U. Book Fund, 4, Southampton Row, W.C.

MUTUAL BENEFIT FUND SUBSCRIPTIONS after a member has received notice of the acceptance of his application, should be made payable to "The Treasurer of the B.M.M.B.F.," crossed & Co.,

and sent to Rev. J. H. French, 86, Hampton Road, Forest Gate, E.

In no case should subscriptions be sent to the Editor of "The Fraternal."

MEMBERSHIP.

The names of eight brethren, some of whom have become missionaries, have been withdrawn from the Baptist Handbook List of Ministers, and therefore by Art. ii. (1) of our Constitution, from our list of members. Probably they will become Associates. One Associate, James Mursell, becomes a member by his name once more being amongst the ministers in the British Isles. Adelaide's loss, our gain.

The new Handbook, therefore, accounts for the reduction of our membership by seven.

The following seven new members have enrolled:

HURN, Arthur, Little Leigh.
 MORRISON, Robert Boyd, Upper Parkstone.
 NEAL, Frederick, A.T.S., Boxmoor.
 NICHOLAS, William Daniel, Treharris.
 POTTER, Frank, Harston.
 WILLIAMS, Thomas Edward, Treharris.
 WILLSTEAD, George, Blackfield, Fawley.

So that our membership remains at the figure reached last month, 487.

BOOK FUND.

Deposits received from October 1st to December 31st, 1908: Nos. 5, 4/8; 6, 12/5; 7, 3/2/3½; 9, 10/-; 15, 7/8; 23, 5/-; 25, 3/5/-; 29, 3/3/-; 31, 12/7; 33, 1/r/-; 34, 10/-; 39, 2/3; 40, 5/-; 41, 16/3; 42, 2/6; 43, 5/2; 44, 10/. Total, £16 13s. 9½d.

Half gross profits credited to members will be announced next month.

A bonus of five per cent. on deposits received during the same period was credited to the accounts of members admitted to the Benevolent Section, as follows: Nos. 5, 2/4; 6, 6/2; 9, 5/-; 15, 3/10; 23, 2/6; 24, 2/- (a bonus which was omitted through over-

sight in a previous quarter); 25, 1/12/6; 29, 1/11/6; 33, 10/-; 44, 5/-. Total, £5 os. 10d.

An illustration of the advantage of the Benevolent Section is afforded in the case of those wishing to buy the New Bible Dictionary, in one volume, who obtain this through the Fund, aided by the rebate and the Benevolent Section, at a cost to them of 12/4 net, it is to be issued in a few days at £1 net.

For the convenience of applicants for benefit in this Fund, the Secretary will in future send to them a printed form to fill up, stating the ground of their claim on the Fund.

At the meeting of Committee on 19th January, the Hon. Secretary reported that he had received from Mrs. Trafford (per J. H. Rushbrooke, M.A.) a valuable gift of 113 second-hand books, for distribution amongst members of the Fund. The list includes books of great value to ministers, amongst them being the 14 vols. of Lange's Commentary, and the five vols. of Alford's Greek Testament. He also received sometime ago, the large folio Bible, beautifully illustrated, by Messrs. Virtue and Co., from Mr. J. A. Meen. The Committee have these books at their disposal, they will not all be given at once, but will be kept in hand until careful plans for their distribution are complete.

At the last meeting of Committee several grants of Dr. McLaren's and other books were given.

N.B.—Members having received vols. of Dr. McLaren's Expositions, by grants from the Book Fund Committee, can obtain the odd vols. required to complete the sets of which the vols. granted form a part, at 4s. per vol. net, by making special application through the Hon. Secretary.

ANNUAL MEETING of the Baptist Ministers' Fraternal Union.—As at present arranged this will be on Tuesday, of Spring Assembly week, viz., April 27th. NOMINATIONS for Officers and Committee should reach the Hon. Secretary not later than March 31st next.