

The Baptist Union Vice-Presidency.

The welcome election of Mr. H. L. Taylor draws attention to the frequency with which laymen are now elected to the denomination's highest position. In the twenty years from 1898 to 1917, the Presidents were 12 pastors, 4 college principals, 1 secretary, 3 laymen. The succeeding twenty years have witnessed a remarkable change—7 pastors, 2 college principals, 2 secretaries, 9 laymen. It may be questioned if this decline in the proportion of pastors is in the best interests of the denomination. Various circumstances have contributed to the change; three are outstanding.

(a) *The quality of the laymen.*—Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century our denomination produced laymen who rendered distinguished service. Names such as Morton Peto, E. B. Underhill, Joseph Brooke, Edward Mounsey, A. T. Bowser, A. H. Baynes, Henry Wood and others readily occur to the mind. But we should search the denominational annals in vain for laymen who, in ability and devotion, excelled the nine who have been elected to the Presidency in the last two decades. Herbert Marnham, John Chown, T. R. Glover, T. S. Penny, A. R. Doggart, Arthur Newton, Alfred Ellis, H. Ernest Wood, H. L. Taylor—preachers, statesmen, scholars, committee-men, diaconal experts, it is good that they have been honoured.

(b) *The increase in the personal membership vote.*—In the main the Vice-President is elected by the votes of (i) pastors, (ii) churches, (iii) personal members. Nos. 1 and 2 have remained fairly constant in the last twenty years, but the votes of personal members have doubled, from over 1,100 to over 2,200. The officers of the Union deserve heartiest thanks for their zeal in securing this increase, which is valuable both on financial grounds and because it reveals the widespread confidence Baptists have in their Union. But personal members are overwhelmingly “lay,” and although doubtless they cast their votes with wise discretion, it is possible that their preponderance tends to the advantage of the lay candidates.

(c) *The method of election.*—It would be idle to suggest that the alternative vote is universally popular. It is not easy to understand, and it appears to give an undue value to the second, third, fourth and other choices. It has the advantage that one ballot settles the matter; but it is disconcerting to realise that the candidate who is No. 1 at the end of the first count may be near the bottom when the second, third and fourth class votes have been transferred. Any better system almost certainly would involve two ballots.

S. J. P.