

ARTICLE V.

THE EXPERT MINISTER, AND HIS TRAINING OF
HIS LAYMEN.

BY PROFESSOR GEORGE WALTER FISKE, OBERLIN, OHIO.

It ought to be a mere truism to say that Congregationalism must be saved by its *laymen*. Theoretically the Congregational Church is a pure democracy, composed only of laymen, with a universal priesthood of believers and no clergy class. Our ministerial dignity is really only the dignity of labor in an aristocracy of service. We are simple, unassuming ministers of the Lord Jesus Christ, not ordained to special powers, prerogatives, or dignities, but set apart to serve. Our ministry is not an order, a class, a caste, but simply an office,—the office merely of a leader among equals.

But we often forget this, and our overappreciative flocks sometimes help us to forget it; for some parsons are born to the cloth, some assume priestliness, and others have priestly honors thrust upon them. All of which is something else. It is not Congregationalism. In the strictest sense, theoretically we are all laymen. But practically we are clergymen. Our doctrine of utter ministerial democracy has become compromised by the common consensus of the character of the Christian ministry, and we are inevitably involved in the interdenominational composite photograph which modern life has put together and expects us measurably to live up to.

If this composite has some features strange to us, such as a Roman collar and a St. Andrews cross, a Lambeth waist-

coat and a Geneva gown, a Quaker hat, a smooth-shaven face, extra-long and Calvinistic, an Epworth tone, an orthodox unction and a general high-church *ensemble*,—our simon-pure Congregationalism may feel as uncomfortable in such a conglomeration of toggery as the stripling David; but modern society seems to expect us to play the part. Something like this they fancy the professional “elder” to be.

But if we ministers eschew all such accidentals, tags, earmarks of clericalism, and claim merely to be manly men among men, they at first wonder, then welcome, then embrace. The world does like a manly minister. It is merely bored by the professional parson. At present the ministry is traditionally regarded as “in orders”; but rapidly, I apprehend, the layman-minister is coming to his own.

Granted that, according to present standards, we must make a distinction between the ministers as a class, and the laymen; *then* it is far from a truism to say that Congregationalism *must be saved by its laymen*. Ministers have been increasingly regarded as clerics, paid to do the professional work of religion, until in some parishes in the frigid zone they have come to expect the pastor to do all the preaching, all the praying, all the prayer-meeting leading, the hand-shaking and forced smiling; all the parish-calling and sick-visiting, the dear-old-lady-comforting; all the peace-making—and it takes a cruse of precious ointment; about all the money-raising,—in fact, all the routine duties that can possibly have a religious character. If the minister in that kind of a church is not the prince of pack animals, you will have to find it in Missouri! No wonder he is breaking down under such a burden, with the weight of the inverted church pyramid leaning on him, the deacons and the trustees, the “Ecclesiastical Society,” the music committee, the women, the Sunday-school, the young peo-

ple, pressing on *him* for all manner of different duties, until he is flattened out thin.

It was said of a certain old-time minister that he could dive down deeper into his subject, stay under longer, and come up drier than any other man in the diving business. But if profundity was the sin of the old-time parson, we cannot plead guilty to-day. Our failing too often is superficiality, and sometimes we cannot help it. Few of us are in the diving business; we are skimmers. We are obliged, by the multifarious demands upon our time and strength, to spread ourselves out so thin that our blindest friends, with all their charity, can sometimes see the sandy bottom.

NECESSITY FOR LAY COÖPERATION.

In other words, our one-man ministry is breaking down under its burden, in trying to achieve the impossible. The church can never be saved by its one-man ministry; nor, in my judgment, even by a dual or a quadruple clergy corps. The Episcopalian churches in the great cities are doing splendid work, with their multiple ministry; and the Roman Church has ever shown its wisdom and its mercy in multiplying its highly specialized clergy and locating them strategically where they are most needed. But even the multiple ministry can never save the church for its best efficiency. A *layman* ministry, a broad layman service, with subdivision of labor according to special gifts, and with expert supervision by the true bishop, is the ideal for a genuinely effective church.

It will be recalled that this was the ideal of early English Congregationalism. The Pastor and the Teacher in a dual ministry shared the parochial cares, and special duties of pulpit and church functions. But they were aided, and their efficiency multiplied, by a committee of ruling elders, to lead the laymen in religious work.

Robert Brown in his first public statement thus outlines the system: "The Scriptural ordinary officers of such a church are a Pastor, a Teacher, one or more Elders, for oversight and counsel and redressing things amiss, one or more Relievers, and one or more Widows, all to be first tried and then duly chosen." Reliever was evidently Brown's word for Deacon. Henry Barrowe, the more aristocratic of the early fathers, carried this plural, lay ministry still farther, to the verge of presbyterial, but it broke down of its own weight, as too much authority was given the ruling elders, especially in matters of discipline.

The Cambridge Platform (1648) plainly declared that ruling elders were a vital part of the Congregational system, and defined their duties. But meager finances soon reduced the ministerial duet to a solo in most parishes; and ere long the disagreeable duties attached made it impossible in a democratic church to fill the ruling eldership, just as it is becoming difficult to make deacons to-day, unless the title is explicitly avoided.

The above discursus into antiquities is valueless, except to remind us how far from the ideal and the practice of the fathers our modern free churches have strayed, with their clerical ministry and shirking laymen. The situation clearly suggests a broader lay service. The churches must develop more trained, loyal laymen, both as officers and privates, to share many of the pastor's duties and to do countless other things that need doing and thus save the church from ineffectiveness. This idea is the main burden of my message: but, before I define and explain the details of my thought, let me call attention to a neglected function in the Congregational ministry.

AN ATROPHIED FUNCTION : THE LOCAL BISHOP.

Our theory is that all the several names in the New Testament referring to the minister—pastor, evangelist, teacher, elder, presbyter, bishop, etc.—are merely different titles for the same fact, different phases of a common ministry. They are not orders, grades, or ranks of clergy, but all essentially equal, and interchangeable.

The theory is a splendid one; but in fact we have emasculated our ministry by minimizing or losing *the bishop function*. We claim every Congregational minister to be a bishop. It is a fiction. Some are bishops; some are not; according to natural ability, personal initiative, responsibility faithfully accepted. We have largely interpreted this function to mean simply the spiritual oversight of souls, caring for the spiritual welfare of individuals,—and this of course is its most intimate element; but it is not the whole of it. The true bishop is an *administrator* as well as a cure. The foreign missionary and the home mission superintendent illustrate this function better. They are directing the work of many helpers. In many a mission station, a Congregational bishop-minister is overseeing the labors, guiding, instructing, inspiring, the work of twoscore or more native workers, and great efficiency results. The trained minister thus multiplies himself.

Likewise, in the local pastorate in our home churches, the work of the bishop is greatly needed. It should mean more than spiritual oversight, vastly important as this is. Let it mean also the marshaling of lay forces, the training of lay workers, encouraging and enlisting all the church-members who are willing to become recruits in his force instead of mere protoplasm in his field. A revival of the function of the local bishop is what I plead for; in other words, the training and directing of laymen in religious work by *trained pastors*

who are experts in administration. After my emphasis on the essential democracy and simplicity of our ministry, surely no one will imagine that I mean by bishop what the name has come to signify in episcopal churches. We who have prided ourselves on having "a church without a bishop and a land without a king" do not relish the thought of an ecclesiastical autocrat, however benevolent and pious he may be. But even in a layman's church the bishop function cannot safely be abandoned. Only let it be exercised in democratic fashion by a true Pastor-Bishop, fitted by nature and by special training tactfully and effectively to administer the work of a single parish.

I am not overlooking the fact that scores of conspicuously successful modern churches can be cited as splendid illustrations of the application to religion of the principles of modern business, with wise subdivision of skilled labor, conserving of assets and avoiding of waste, with the spirit of eager enterprise, of tactful generalship, and loyal, disciplined cooperation.

But many another church has not yet adapted itself to the new atmosphere. It is still listening passively to the voice of the past, simply hearing things said, and lazily trusting God to get things done. Such churches are ineffective, because, like a crew of workmen resting in the shade while their *overseer* is gone, *they have no bishop*. The bishop function in the pastor has been relegated to innocuous desuetude, overshadowed by the preacher function. It has become atrophied by disuse, while inactive laymen willingly acquiesce.

It may be suggested that it is unfair to blame the pastor for the inactivity or ineffectiveness of the laymen. It does seem unjust. Our sins of omission are sufficient for us, without the burden of others. And it is especially unjust because the ministers have inherited this neglect from the past. In less

exacting times, when church success was relatively easier, under less stress of competition, self-trained laymen were readily found to do the church's work reasonably well. But nowadays our life standards are everywhere raised so high, that in any line of effort—musical, literary, industrial, or religious—people are exceedingly loath to undertake a task for which they are not trained. This is particularly true of urban society, and life in the urban tract.

EMBARRASMENTS OF MODERN CRITICAL TASTE.

People will not ramble on in an inconsequential prayer-meeting harangue to-day, as they used to do. They either have something to say, and say it according to the higher demands of a more critical age, or they keep still. Thus many of them are discreetly quiet. Our silent times that occasionally occur in prayer-meetings need not indicate spiritual decadence. Perhaps they are three parts discretion, three parts modesty, and four parts mercy!

Fairly good musicians will not willingly play at a church entertainment or social now, for fear of this same high standard of taste; whereas, a generation ago, any slip of a girl who could safely wander from the routine of mere finger exercises and scales was willing to exploit her talent before a merciful and patient public. The like clemency was also extended to all grades of "piece" speakers. With perfect immunity from arrest, they spouted and gesticulated frantically, while the discriminating suffered and smiled, and others applauded. It was a merciful age!

Likewise, any pious person, in the easy-going past, was considered a proper candidate for a Sunday-school teacher. But since adolescent psychology was discovered, and the boy problem invented, and the Religious Education Association or-

ganized, and the "higher criticism" revealed, and religious pedagogy given a chair among the sciences, the case is getting quite different. We may interpret the common difficulty of securing Sunday-school teachers, not as unjustifiable shirking, but, again, three parts discretion, three parts modesty, and four parts mercy. People are sensing the demand for experts in this important field of religious education, and they modestly shun the "little parishes of eight," as Professor Merriam suggestively styles them.

People who are highly paid skilled laborers or trained professional men six days in the week—experts at something, anything you please, from baking bread to making a brief—will not willingly enlist on Sunday in the unskilled ranks of church blunderers, without some opportunity to satisfy their own critical judgment and attain their own high standard of service, through some course in expert training.

But meanwhile let it be said, with all deserved appreciation, while the church is waiting for the training of laymen for expert service, the only thing that keeps church machinery running with reasonable smoothness is the splendid self-sacrifice of many devoted laymen, who, though painfully aware of their personal deficiencies, realizing that somebody must do the church's work, are standing by their posts, for the honor of the Christ and the love of his church. All honor and great gratitude to such splendid Christian people, sentinels of faithfulness, though armed, maybe, with obsolete weapons,—those good maiden-ladies who are unskilfully but lovingly handling the boys' classes, breaking cheerfully all the laws of apperception, but sticking to the job with the tenacity of despair, until a trained worker comes along to relieve them. And all honor to the modest, consecrated brother who is willing to "fill in" as superintendent, until a better man can be found,—a man

with a better education, and some special training and experience fitting him for the post.

EXPERT TRAINING OF LAYMEN REQUIRED.

These hints are sufficient to remind us clearly of the arduous duty that is falling upon the shoulders of the ministry, the duty of training its laymen for the increasingly difficult tasks of the church. Many pastors are avoiding it,—some for lack of a definite plan, or real ability to achieve the results; others because of other duties which they fancy are more important or more pressing. Let us avoid the folly of the son of Erin, who, because he had a cord of wood to saw, split, and pile before night, thought he “hadn't time to file his saw”! It means an arduous task for the expert minister, the pastor-bishop, to stop and train his laymen; but until he does so, he will have to bear most of the burdens himself, which means needless nerve strain and premature age for the pastor, and slow success for a half-effective church. In proportion as ministers realize the possibilities of a cooperating force of trained laymen for transforming a church and dividing a minister's burdens, will they set about it, at all hazards, and at almost any sacrifice of time and effort, to train their laymen and their young people for the future welfare of the church. Let the Congregational bishop come back; back to the forefront in the pastor's work, as he selects his best material for helpers, trains them for their special service, and superintends and inspires their efforts. Then, much of the pastor's time, which now seems wasted, frittered away over trifles, will be saved for other duties, as this detail work is delegated to his corps of volunteer lay helpers, while he multiplies his usefulness through his administrative work, directing the services of the many.

Soon may it be said no longer that the minister is the only professional man who is his own office-boy; that in no other business is a two-thousand-dollar man suffered to do, and do frequently, the work which could be hired done at twenty cents per hour. Not that the minister is above the work, not at all; but it is simply an economic waste. He has more important work to do, like the manager of any enterprise to whom is committed grave responsibilities and only a twenty-four-hour day. Not even the most tireless and versatile minister can work himself in three eight-hour shifts.

The specific needs, in detail, for the training of laymen, are too numerous to be described in this brief paper. The main desideratum is to sense the problem, to feel the pressure of the modern demand, to find the opening for enlarged efficiency for the churches. Let me, however, take sufficient space to outline something of the details of my thought.

The old figure of the parish as the pastor's *field* and *force* is a very vital one. The first year in a pastorate will acquaint a man pretty thoroughly with the needs of his *field*. He will discover the more or less crude human material which he is to work on and with, which must be refined by the living Spirit of God, under his shepherding. He will gradually stumble upon the specific problems that are likely to hinder his success: the forces that are arrayed against the cause of righteousness in his parish; the hindrances and obstacles,—some natural, some human, some inherited from the past, some superficial—easy to overcome, others deep-seated—rooted in prejudice and in bitter grudge and strife; the local characters who are ring-leaders in opposition, or ridicule, or mere social competition. This year's experience will reveal to him the social castes, circles, classes, the gangs of boys and their heroes,

the secret springs of influence bearing reciprocally on different lives, the silken clue which leads through many a social maze and human enigma. He will come to know the secrets of many hearts, the working principles of many lives. He will learn their special talents, capacities, adaptabilities. In short, a year's study of his field, with all the discriminating care of the true sociologist, will reveal to a pastor the objects of his special service, and the subjects, the possible recruits who best can help him accomplish what is needing to be done. He will then be able to select, enlist, draft if necessary, his *force* out of his *field*.

The selection of suitable workers for special tasks is half the task. It requires insight, the prophetic vision, the intuitional knowledge of human nature, and keen sympathy with people. Every successful pastor who is a true bishop has this subtle talent.

Then the grouping of these selected leaders is speedily accomplished; it is always being accomplished,—it runs parallel with other activities in the busy pastorate. Let us mention some of the groups which must be trained, inspired with the pastor's vision and enthusiasm, and prepared for expert service.

DIFFERENT GROUPS FOR SPECIAL TRAINING.

There is, first, the group of older men and women who are the natural leaders in the councils of the church. Often they are surprisingly ignorant of the details of church polity and the methods of procedure at councils, associations, conferences, etc., and often of the proper conduct of local church affairs, or even the keeping of records and membership rolls. Here is the first step for the expert minister, to organize his church intelligently on a respectable working basis, with due regard for decency and order and denominational custom.

Having provided for the present, he next plans for the future. The natural leaders among the young people are diligently trained to assume responsibility as intelligent bearers of church burdens. Pastors' classes for the training of young people are needed both for training *for* church membership and training *in* church membership. Here is keen delight for a true young people's pastor, and the work pays rich dividends. There is hardly space to particularize; but the former naturally includes the careful instruction of young people in the fundamentals of the faith, leading them in the making of their own personal creed, and then guiding them tenderly and skilfully through the realities of an initial Christian experience, as with ever deepening purpose they are led to Christ for personal consecration and are prepared to take intelligently the Covenant of Christian Living.

Thereafter they should be trained to become efficient, intelligent church workers. Various possibilities offer, for personal development in Christian experience, for training in Sunday-school work, further Bible study, mission study in connection with the young people's movement; local sociological study, gathering the facts of the social status of the community, its resources, opportunities for religious and social work, and its special needs. A thorough study of this sort, conducted by the maturer young people, particularly young men, may furnish the basis for more definite church work than has before been done, adapted perfectly to specific local needs.

Akin to this is the training of the older men; and here is the expert minister's most delicate task. Hard-headed business men will not readily grant that the parson is an expert in anything except preaching and praying. They will take his instruction from the pulpit, because the retort courteous is not allowed. They will allow him usually unchallenged opinions

regarding the Bible or other ancient history; but when it comes to modern life, laymen will not often take points from their minister, unless he gradually prove to them that he knows his ground. The presumption is against him; yet they are usually open to conviction.

Nevertheless the church ought to lead public opinion more certainly than it does at present, and exert a positive influence for social righteousness in its local field in definite ways; and this will require the minister's enlistment of his laymen. Most of these matters I believe can best be handled in a discussion class, or privately in the minister's study, with a group of men assembled informally to consult about the facts and plan quietly to get results. This is really Christian training in right citizenship. Often the minister can do better through another party, a man more expert than himself in this field, whose earnest service he can enlist. But the minister must stand behind him.

The time is also at hand when the pastor must become an expert in church finance, and must train his laymen for more businesslike conduct of the business of the church. Of course, where competent laymen are doing this already, and the finances are well managed, the minister may be thankful that his help is not needed. But such churches now are increasingly few. Hundreds of churches are languishing because the finances are so miserably managed. Let the minister master the subject; understand all there is to be known about it; make himself the financial expert of his parish; and then gradually, quietly, train his laymen and encourage them to adopt approved methods for their church. It is too vital a matter to be neglected.

The training of laymen for personal work and Bible-class leadership is something of vast importance and of developing

promise. Laymen are pausing in the rush of business life, to reflect that they are setting the pace for the boys, that they are largely responsible for the moral standards of the young men of their community. The "Big Brother Movement" is steadily gaining ground. The children's courts and the volunteer probation officer system are appealing to consecrated laymen as good common sense. The demand, rightly based on sound pedagogy, that male Sunday-school classes should be manned by men teachers, virile men, busy men, is being met by a hesitating but sincere response, and a growing willingness for service. The more definitely religious phases of church men's club work are coming to the forefront. Men are tiring of the "fun and feed" plan for men's club "work," and are ready for a long advance to more distinctly religious service which will be worth a busy man's while.

But few of them know how. The expert pastor must teach them. This is one of the gravest and most strategic functions of the pastor-bishop. The wonderful success of Young Men's Christian Association Bible classes suggests that men are ready for this sort of work when rightly guided and inspired to undertake it. Herein is the ideal plan for male evangelization.

One of the most important functions of the pastor-bishop is the training of Sunday-school teachers. I have already alluded to it. A higher standard of teaching in the day schools, and a better pedagogy, have made this immediately necessary. The Sunday-school is stagnant now, without trained teachers. It is significant that the slow-moving International Committee have finally felt obliged to launch a plan for teacher training, a two-year course, designed to be reasonably thorough, which teachers may take and become accredited for their work as Sunday-school teachers, with a diploma

certifying their attainments. Here then is a task which the pastors will be forced very soon to assume, except in the few churches where a Sunday-school expert can be hired, a graduate of some School of Religious Pedagogy. It is to meet this vital need that the theological seminaries are quite generally establishing courses in Religious Education.

THE PASTOR: THE CHURCH SPECIALIST.

Many other matters might be mentioned. These I have suggested will suggest the rest. They will differ widely in different fields. *Adaptation to local conditions* should be the constant aim. But whatever may be the specific local need, in every Congregational church there is a distinct need of the local Congregational Bishop, to plan and administer the work of his church. He must be recognized as the *church specialist*. He is the expert undisputedly in Theology and Biblical Interpretation. Let him also be recognized as the expert in administration, in church finance, in religious pedagogy, et cetera. If he is not, let him speedily become such, for it is a vital part of his life business.

An occasional crisis, like a debt-raising campaign or a serious vacancy in his Sunday-school superintendency, or any other special emergency, may demand his personal service in these details which properly belong to laymen, but only once. Let him do it once if need be. Thereafter *he* is to blame, if he does not develop laymen to do this work, training them by the most approved modern methods, with minimum of friction and maximum of efficiency. Just as the efficient bishop, planning for his church's future, carefully trains new leaders and teachers in Sunday-school and young people's work, he should also train a few people of native ability and fitness, to whom he can intrust the details of the church

finances, the missionary interests, the keeping of rolls and records, and the broader denominational relations.

Until pastors attend more conscientiously to this supremely important work of developing and training lay leaders, the Congregational churches will continue to suffer, sometimes irreparably, during the interims between pastorates. But with a force of active laymen in every church not only devoutly consecrated to the work of the Kingdom, but also trained to do the work next at hand, then, pastorless churches will be able to maintain the enterprise aggressively while searching for their new leader, and half the next pastorate need not be wasted in merely regaining lost ground. Furthermore, the power of initiative and self-reliance which the trained laymen have developed in the interim will serve them well for increasing their future usefulness in the church.

Congregationalism can be saved by its laymen. With an expert minister loyally supported by such a force of trained and consecrated laymen, the church will be able, under our only master, Jesus Christ, triumphantly to do its great redemptive and constructive work in the community.