

*a community called ...*

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A PLEA  
FOR THE  
SUPERANNUATES

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## A PLEA FOR THE SUPERANNUATES.

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“WHY not take up a collection for worn-out doctors or lawyers?” asked an intelligent layman, as the claims of the superannuated preachers were urged upon him.

I shall try to answer this question candidly and fairly.

Let me say, then, that the financial compact of the Methodist preacher with his Church differs essentially from the compact of any other worker with those whom he serves.

He relinquishes his right to go where he pleases or where he can do the best. The pastoral work of the Church is mapped out by men familiar with the preachers and the charges. These men lay the whole case before the bishop, a man chosen to his high office for his executive ability, and who has no per-

sonal interest in the matter save a desire for the good of the work at large. The bishop appoints the preachers to their fields of labor, and they go, ninety-nine times out of a hundred, without a murmur, although often the appointment is a disappointment, and the year's pastorate a long struggle with poverty.

Thus it comes to pass that every year brings severe privations to many preachers, privations which under other circumstances they would not endure for a moment; but they are loyal sons of the Church, going not where they will, but where they are sent. There is a house of worship to be built, a debt to be paid, a society to be founded, a failure to be retrieved. Some one must go, and some one does go, and toil and suffer; and all this without a murmur.

There are pleasant and profitable pastorates in the Church—positions desirable even from

a worldly point of view. But under our system it is perhaps unavoidable that these should be held from year to year by a few men, while other men, not less worthy, spend their entire ministry upon the poorer charges. This is not a matter of favoritism but of necessity. Men of good executive ability, fine scholarship, exceptional pulpit talent, pleasing social qualities, or fine personal appearance are in demand. The stronger churches insist on their right to have such men as their pastors. The appointing power sends to the important churches the men who by the possession of these qualities are most likely to succeed—men who have proved their fitness by succeeding in other important fields.

However proper all this may be it bears hard upon the man who lacks, or who is supposed to lack, some or all of these desirable qualities, and who therefore is not in demand in the stronger pulpits, and so from year to

year barely receives a support. He has gone not where he could do the best for himself, but where he was sent. He may have been one of the most unselfish, self-sacrificing, and holy of men. Indeed, only such would be likely to endure what he has endured, and we are sure that no mercenary motive has called him to the ministry. But old age finds him rich in grace and an heir of the kingdom indeed, but so poor in this world's goods, so disabled with the work done, that he must suffer unless the Church, which he served so unselfishly and well, shares its abundance with him.

Another peculiarity of the Methodist preacher's compact with the Church is that he repudiates all legal claim upon the Church for compensation for his work, accepting what the Church is willing or able to give him. This is so, not because the Church has refused to allow such a claim, but because the ministry

has refused to accept it lest it should interfere with the greatest efficiency of the Church. Perhaps no part of our polity has been more criticised than just this; but after all it is right. The preacher comes to his charge not because he is called, but because he is sent. He works not because the Church hires him, but because the bishop has appointed him. He therefore makes no bargain with his church, nor the church with him. Now, so long as the appointing power is what it is, this must be so; for if the Church is to be legally holden for the salary of the preacher it would be no more than just that each church should have a decisive voice in the choice of its pastor. But if this were so the plan of the itinerancy would be radically changed and our Church cease to be a Methodist Church.

But while all this may be true this part of the compact often bears hard upon the preacher and hardest where the need is greatest. A

glance at a Conference Minutes, picked up at random, will illustrate this. In this we find a deficiency of over \$5,400 in the preachers' salaries, not one cent of which is reported as deficient on the salaries of men receiving over \$800. The poorer men lose it all. One preacher with a salary of \$500 loses—that is fails to receive—\$125; another, with a salary of \$400, loses \$116; another, with a salary of \$425, loses \$222; and still another loses \$250 out of a nominal salary of \$600. Very often these poor and delinquent charges, like Pharaoh's lean kine, eat up the savings of more prosperous years; and it is sadly true that it is when a man is growing old that he finds himself on such poor and delinquent charges, where the provision made for old age is slowly eaten up, the treasured life-insurance lapses, the little home is mortgaged and lost, and the careful, saving man or his widow approaches old age penniless.



The class of charges of which we write often take cruel advantage of their compact with the preacher. A preacher is sent to such a place. He finds a debt to be raised, or a house of worship or a parsonage to be built. Perhaps his herculean task is doubled by business depression, financial failure, or the removal of important members. But he attacks the work before him. He gives far beyond his means so as to aid and encourage others. He seeketh not his own, and, as the old proverb goes, "If a man doesn't look out for himself, who is going to look out for him?" Who indeed? The officary of the church have their hands already more than full—or empty, rather. Likely enough the preacher has sacrificed his popularity in his extreme effort to serve his church. So the year closes. The building is erected. The church is clear of debt—that is, excepting what is owed the preacher; and that—well, that isn't collectable, you know! The

preacher goes to Conference with full heart and empty purse. He has received some fine promises, however; even telegrams follow him, saying, "Be patient with us and we will pay thee all." He is patient. He has need to be. He finds that promises are not performances, and even telegrams, from "leading members" at that, are not negotiable paper. Better times come to that *promising* charge. The debt that sat upon it like a nightmare is gone. The new house attracts a better class of attendants. Business brightens. Factories are erected. The church becomes the center of a stirring, thriving community. But happy is it for the pastor who was so large a factor in this prosperity if he be not reminded of that son of Jacob who once befriended a certain butler in his sore distress; but when prosperity came to that butler, we read, "The chief of the butlers remembered not Joseph, but forgot him." There are multitudes of prosper-

ous churches to-day which in the sight of God owe thousands of dollars to their pastors of other years and on which the claim of the superannuates is not a matter of grace but of debt.

The compact of the itinerant preacher with his Church prevents him from growing up with a community into easy circumstances. Three years, or five, may be long enough for a minister to serve one charge, but it is not long enough to make profitable investment of his savings. He cannot, like the farmer, put his money into land, and thus assure profitable returns for his labor and a provision for old age as well. He cannot build up a business as the merchant does, both because of his frequent removals and because, in this sense, "no man can serve two masters." He is at a disadvantage as compared with other professional men. The successful physician or lawyer grows in the estimation of the community,

and down to old age retains a lucrative position. But, owing to his compact with the Church, the preacher finds himself as old age approaches not where he won his victories and did his best work, but crowded into some strange and obscure corner by younger and perhaps abler men. His laurels, like himself, are in the sere and yellow leaf; those who knew him at his best, his spiritual sons and daughters, attracted perhaps to the great business centers and adding their influence to make up the prosperity of powerful churches—these are far away, and it is forgotten that he ever was any thing else than the queer, shattered, and feeble old man he seems to be.

A word with you, my prosperous friend: God has abundantly blessed your efforts. You are a rich man now, and, thank God, you are not making bad use of the wealth which a kind providence, and God working in you to will and to do, have secured you. I am

glad you are supporting your own church liberally. Dr. Chrysostom, your pastor, is a splendid man and worthy of the liberal support you are giving him. I am glad that you are considering the claims of higher education, and that you are founding scholarships and endowing chairs in your university. I am glad that your heart is in the work of the missionary at home and abroad, and that your contributions are steady and free toward all these truly great and good causes. But there may be an old man somewhere, pinched and poorly clad, to whom you owe more, perhaps, than to any other man living. You may have had many teachers, but only one father in Christ, and this is he. His voice first awakened your better nature, his hand led you from darkness to light. How much of your prosperity you owe to that good man's influence you may never know. He has borne you in his heart as your mother bore you in her arms.

You may find him at the Conference, rising in his place and taking a very thin envelope from the hands of the Conference steward. You would not offer the contents of that envelope to your cash-boy for a year's work, but it is all his living. Now, I find no fault that your liberal donations are adding to the comfort and efficiency of your eloquent and popular pastor. First-class talent like that of Dr. Chrysostom, and other eminent lights of the pulpit, demands first-class pay. But let me whisper a word in your ear: The crumbs from their tables would make glad the heart of the man who led you to God.

A part of the consideration for which the Methodist preacher consents to waive his just rights is the tacit promise of the Church that if he live to old age he will be cared for, and if he be happy enough to die in the work, his dependent family will be cared for. It is greatly to the advantage of the Church that

the preacher should waive his rights and hold himself in readiness to go where he may be sent, without questioning as to his support. It is a more questionable advantage, but one that the churches are not slow to avail themselves of, that, to a church indebted to its pastor, the end of his pastorate brings a jubilee in which all debts of that sort are remitted. But these privileges of the church are very costly to the preacher. Hundreds of thousands of dollars poured into the superannuates' funds would not make good the actual loss that comes to the Methodist preacher through his peculiar compact with the Church. He has loyally kept his part of the compact, and it is a matter of mere justice that the Church keep its covenant with him.

But some man will say, "Why don't he go to work?" Why does not the worn-out preacher go into business? What Methodist preacher able to "go into business" would leave his

beloved employment for one for which he is unfitted by nature and by life-long culture? Why, rather, does not the worn-out business man go into the ministry? There is need enough of men who have accumulated a competency to man the pulpits of the poorer churches. And what a pleasant change it would be! The farmer accustomed all his life to hard work would no doubt find a change to the easy life of the preacher as good as a rest or better; why does not he, when worn out on the farm, retire to the pulpit? Why? Because he *is* "worn out," and that is the reason why the worn-out preacher cannot go into business or retire to a farm—he is *worn out*.