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A modern ministry

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John Dillon Bronson
Boston University School
of Theology -
Class of '88

Classical Ministry

(J. D. Bronson,
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A MODERN MINISTRY.

BY DILLON BRANSON.

[Delivered at the Commencement exercises of Boston University, June 6.]

THE ministry in every age is neither a profession, an occupation; nor a trade; but an instinct, an irrepressible impulse. The candidate *thinks* perhaps he *would like* to plead before the bar; *believes* he is *adapted* to teach or fulfill the duties of a physician; but *feels* he *ought* to preach the Gospel. This vocation has certain requirements and rewards that are common to all times, but beyond these in our age are special demands and compensations.

We cannot say that the ministry of these times offers great financial reward. Though carefully collected statistics do show that the average preacher is better paid than the average lawyer in this country; though some who prepare eloquent discourses on the blessings of poverty are drawing \$5,000 a year and parsonage; and many who falsely asseverate that money is the root of all evil, are digging as hard as anybody to find the root; yet an honest man cannot adopt this, calling it a means to wealth. He simply gives himself, not by constraint, but willingly, not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind, with no consideration as to salary, relying upon his friends to see that his temporal wants are met.

We cannot say, again, that the ministry offers a life of ease. 'Tis true, and a pity, that

few of our preachers are dying from too much mental enterprise, but a lazy minister never called to preach unless by the devil. It is dishonest for a clergyman to defer his work till Saturday, and the one who is not faithful and diligent has no more right to draw his salary than the wood-chopper who goes into the forest and sits all day upon his log. We know of "clerical prigs" and "parsonettes" who wear white bravats, travel on half-fare tickets, loaf about the entire week and talk small talk on Sunday; but they are not real ministers, not servants of Jesus Christ, not accredited ambassadors from the court of heaven to this rebellious province of a world, for they know little of the country to which they have come, and, if it is possible, of the great government they pretend to represent. The tramp on the street is a worthy gentleman compared to the faithless preacher, who takes upon himself the most responsible and awful office under heaven, assumes control of men's spiritual interests, and never thinks of being as industrious as those who minister to our bodies, intellects or estates; who habitually sleeps in the pulpit, perpetrates poor jejune preaching, "daubs with untempered mortar," and utters only "words, words, words," never knowing one hour's distress, one sleepless night, because of the fearful doom which threatens millions of our race. Work is the divine behest to our ministry. "Work is the great life preserver." Work is the chorus of the ages, and rest is a fool's word unless it means but varied effort. Once again, we cannot say that the ministry of our times offers renown and position in state affairs, for "the ambassador of Christ miscalculates egregiously who competes for worldly titles," and the clergyman who strives for political honor usually falls as a politician, dies as a preacher, and over his hybrid remains the bird of despair croaks, "Nevermore."

No, the modern ministry does not enter wealth, ease, or political preferment, but some favorable things can be said of it worthy of at least a moment's consideration.

The preacher's vocation certainly has good historic foundation. The pulpit, unto which many of the most gifted of the race have separated themselves, has ever been the axis, the palladium, the oracle of our holy faith. It is the most human of all vocations; its main-spring is a desire to help men; the kind of holiness needed is spelled with *wh* — wholeness — making a man perfect in body and soul to be the medium of God's truth to other men. It is the manliest of all callings, and the preacher ought to hold his head erect and ask no "*ex-officio* reverence," no special class exemptions. The pulpit is no privilege box, no refuge for indigence and imbecility, no object of contemptuous charity, no catch-all for failures in other lines of work. It is both born of human need and ordained of God. The preacher has a Book of Law to interpret, grander, broader and sublimer than was ever formulated by human courts or tribunals, a something to minister unto, subtler and finer than any system of veins, nerves and muscles; he is an attorney of God, a physician of the soul, and he ought to be a self-respecting, manly man, a prince among his fellows. "He is the magistrate of conscience," the spiritual sovereign upon his throne. He is the shepherd of the flock, the steward of the household, the husbandman of the vineyard, the ambassador of peace, the "legate of the skies," the herald of good, the vehicle of divine influence, the conduit of God's truth. He is confined by no rut or routine, but has a platform the broadest under heaven, ample field for the development of brain and character; and he moves unhindered through the upper air of thought. His topics are numberless, his themes exalted, his aim sublime. All the material universe co-operates with him. The sciences are interlinked with his work, the fine arts are kindred; he is king over his environment, and as a bee gathers honey from flower to flower, so he gathers truth from cloud, hill, stone, and brook. He has the richest and most satisfactory relations to other men, fellowship in homes the purest and sweetest, study the most inspiring and unending. "He is at once a brother and a leader, a teacher and a fellow student. "His work reaches from the top of God's throne to the bottom of man's necessities." "His enthusiasm is that of a redeemed soul persuading other souls to be redeemed," his privilege to perpetuate the visible life of Jesus Christ.

Commensurate with the advantages of a modern ministry, and the requirements of the present day, in health and knowledge. He should proclaim what God bids him, and not to the rich in his congregation may want to hear; he needs, to feel as Latimer, who when warned to take heed because the king was present and would hear him, ascended the pulpit, soliloquizing: "Latimer, the King of Kings is here, and shall hear thee; take heed what thou sayest." The preacher needs to be a fisher of men and not of applause, of books, or abstract ideas. He needs not to define and defend a supreme Being seated on a throne of glaciers, but to make men acquainted with a God whose truest name is love; not to preach about Christ, but to preach Christ; not to read a nice, rose-tinted little essay, gently remonstrating with scientists a thousand miles distant and mummies three thousand years dead, but to deal straightforwardly with modern sin and the ignorant assumptions of to-day's agnostics, who know for a dead certainty that they don't know. The modern minister needs stability, intense conviction; if he doubts, he needs to get out of the orthodox pulpit till his opinions are settled. He needs singleness of aim, integrity, sincerity, benevolence, ambition, untiring application and patience to work as Noah did one hundred and twenty years without a convert. He needs to remember that religion is more than dying happy, and is adapted to others than dyspeptics and invalids. He must not mistake vehemence for eloquence, biliousness for piety, "perspiration for inspiration." A minister needs to be more before God than before the mirror of his people; "he has a high commission," and must match it with a high character," being blended with the truth he teaches, and presenting a gospel incarnate in himself; for God's theology is the man; the kind of orthodoxy that pleases Him is holy living, and holy living persistently pursued will lift a man up to the very throne of God.

70 A modern minister needs appropriate and particular adaptation. Preaching is a progressive thing, and the modes of presenting truth to the people are in a transition era. A modern minister must be adapted to the soul of the age, and must comprehend its

wants. Some tell us the pulpit is a profitable loiterer now, and the assertion may not be altogether false. The poor, shallow-pated attorney of old has given way to the modern lawyer, talented, cultured, diligent, conscientious. The pill-peddler of the past, whose clumsy skill undauntedly essayed to cover every need of the body from the field of the barber to that of the corn doctor, has yielded room to the tireless, eager specialist, who finds employment for a lifetime upon the eye, the ear, or the teeth alone. The old-fashioned, birch-wielding schoolmaster, who was the terror of every youngster, has been supplanted by the modern teacher, kind, patient, affectionate, who regards study as an act of worship, and instruction as the bringing to sunlight the flowers of the mind which shall bloom forever in the garden of God. We have the lawyer, the physician, and the teacher for the times; we need the preacher, too, one ready to exchange the old flint-lock for the Gatling gun that shoots four hundred times a minute, one in harmony with the spirit of his age, eager to adopt modern methods and utilize all progress. The preacher of to-day, if in unison with his times, has privileges unsurpassed. He works "on the top of the ages, in the acme of history." Never was the work so interesting, so stimulating and world-wide. "To live now is ten talents in hand." Our fathers toiled and struggled long; they painfully picked their way barefoot over deserts of burning sands and keen-edged rocks; we recline upon our cushions of velvet, are carried whither we will, and enter into the fruit of their labors.

Material and industrial progress have aided the ministry, especially in foreign lands. Our inventions have preached. Science has put her shoulder to the wheel and contracted the world until the very antipodes live next door; until we stand face to face with a heathendom ready to be moulded or marred, a society ripe for the gospel and sure to rot without it.

But there are also special opportunities for the modern mind to be set on fire by the church demands heroes at home as well as abroad. The preachers of America have their hands and arms full. The times are tumultuous, and worthy men are wanted to bear the standard. The pulpit has always been to the front. The pulpit led against slavery in the North. The pulpit sent the man to England in '62 who stood like a mountain before the tide of sympathy for the Confederacy and stemmed it. The pulpit will not be wanting now. It will have much to do in its own legitimate sphere with determining whether wealth shall continue to be "puffed up by its golden accident," and ride rough-shod over Lazarus at the gate; whether defaulting creditors in prominent positions shall be screened or scourged; whether red-mouthed anarchism shall be condoned or hanged; whether our great cities shall damn the nation or be redeemed; whether the colossal curse of the saloon shall be taxed or annihilated; and whether the names of all the fair women in these States shall weigh as much as the name of Pat Dougherty who runs a murder mill on North St., or whether that white hand shall be unshackled to vote, as that brave heart prays and hasten the millennium.

Will the ministry be true to its trust? Yes, the ministry has faith, and the very basis of heroism is faith in God. The young man then — and we'll soon include the young woman — the young man who faces these facts, these opportunities and responsibilities, who appreciates the world of discipline, influence about him and above him, and the world of struggling, groveling humanity below, and realizes that they ought, yea, *must*, be brought together, asks himself not, "Shall I be a minister?" but, "How can I help being a minister?" for thus building his life into humanity, thus living "the godly life for man's sake and the manly life for God's sake," he attains truest success, and can say with the grand old Doctor Guthrie, —

I live for Him who loves me,
For Him who knows me true,
For His skies that bend above me,
With deep, unfathomable blue,
For the right that needs assistance,
For the wrong that needs resistance,
For the future in the distance,
And the good that I can do.

