

THE PREACHER'S PLAINT.

The insistent cry of the Rev. Byron Beall to the secular press to inform the Christian ministry what it shall do to save the church, imports a wobbly condition, either of the ministry or the church, or both, which, unasked, THE CONSERVATIVE would not have ventured to point out. Presuming Mr. Beall's assumption that the church is in an inefficient and unhealthy condition to be correct, THE CONSERVATIVE does not think that it can be cured, or much helped by any specific that itself or any other doctor could prescribe. The trouble is owing to a condition and not to a theory; and THE CONSERVATIVE fails to see anything unnatural or abnormal in this condition. The ministry and the church, like other social institutions, are the products of demand and supply, which have arisen in the regular evolution of society. This evolution, having been unusually rapid during the last quarter century, and religion and the church being naturally slow in growth and development, it would not be remarkable if there should be more than the usual lack of adaptation of these institutions to the rest of the social organism, of which they are a component, or that they should be over-straining to "catch up" in the adapting process. Religion, as ordinarily understood, is based in the main upon mystery and emotion. Rationalism and commercialism—which latter is the striving for earthly comforts—are the leading and overpowering influences of present social conditions, and they have wrenched the more progressive people away from the old notions of religion. There is, thus, the same confusion in the religious as there is in the commercial world. The priests of religion and the priests of industrialism are straining themselves just now, much more than commonly, to adapt their methods to the new and rapidly changing conditions. Society is making over religion just as it is making over commercial rules, customs and systems; and THE CONSERVATIVE sees no efficacy in or need for artificial plans and specifications for what is bound to be, (in the long run), a natural and gradual process of growth and adjustment. Society is getting the sort of preachers and preaching that it demands. The minister and the merchant alike, and inevitably, under our competitive system, strive to furnish the wares which "the trade" requires; and about the only pertinent observation to be made anent this condition is, "Whatever is right." THE CONSERVATIVE takes it that Brother Beall and the rest of his craft are as apt to "sense" the demands of their constituency as merchants are in finding out the wants of their customers. Of course the minister of religion as well as the minister of material merchandise ought to be honest, intelligent and discriminating; but

these are platitudes which will be taken for granted, without our prescription or advice.

There seems to be no reason to expect that the church will ever regain its former dominance, or that there will be any general or marked revival of religious sentiment. There seems to be a growing feeling that the more intelligent people have outgrown religion in the old and usual sense of the word. A large proportion of those who dominate and lead in the affairs of life show no signs that they entertain any religious sentiment. Partially through the force of inertia and partially to adapt their discourse to the less critical and less intelligent classes who largely compose their congregations, the ministers still preach dogmas and inculcate beliefs which are quite generally ignored or openly flouted outside the walls of the church. On the other hand, preaching in the orthodox churches is now largely devoted to explaining away or apologizing for the old beliefs, and the formerly accepted teachings of the Bible and the creeds. For example, the "Encyclopedia Biblica," a new work, edited by eminent ministers of the English orthodox churches, after playing havoc with the old notions and beliefs, touching the historical value of the Old Testament, seriously questions the story of Christ's resurrection and ascension, and asks whether there are "any credible elements to be found in the gospels at all." The London Spectator observes that the German "higher critic," Dr. Adolf Harnack, "holds up in one hand to our admiration, the perfect flower of the Christian faith and hope, while with the other hand he cuts away their roots." The constant exhibition of the pouring of new wine into old bottles which the present day pulpit affords, is far from reassuring or acceptable to people of intelligence and rational tendencies, who are becoming more and more numerous. The result is that they give the church the go-by, and it is thus left in the hands of the less virile and progressive classes.

The prevailing sensational advertising of their services by the ministers, which is repulsive to people of discriminating taste and judgment, illustrates the foregoing observation. No doubt those who are attached to the churches are benefitted by them; and so the devices and methods employed to attract and entertain may not be sweepingly condemned. We regret the fact that our booksellers sell a hundred copies of "Munsey's" or the "historical novels," to every one of the magazines or books which contain fiction or other matter of a high order; but on the whole, we think that it is better for people to read the "trash" of "Munsey's" and the "historical novels" than not to read at all.

There are no specifics or hard and fast rules for operating or improving the

churches. As one of the institutions of society they will go on, adapting themselves to it by the force of their whole environment. These various parts of the social organism are interactive in their influence, each contributing to the shaping of all the rest.

RESTRICTED MONOPOLIES.

The slightest consideration should make it evident that the production of some commodities may be absolutely monopolized; that is, may be wholly within the control of single individuals, without giving those individuals the least power to oppress their fellow-men. In other cases, it is equally clear that any possibilities in the direction of advancing prices are closely restricted. One or the other of these things will occur whenever there is an alternative commodity that can be used with approximately, equal satisfaction and which can be supplied at about the same cost. Thus prices of many food products are inter-dependent and mutually regulative, for slight variations in the price of one will often lead to the general substitution of another. A sufficient advance in the price of common lumber will lead to the use of brick, stone or concrete, for building purposes; high prices for anthracite lead to the use of bituminous coal; and many now use the wines of California instead of those of France, on account of differences in their cost. In all these cases, it is evident that the existence of the possible substitute limits the price of the article for which it is an alternative. The effectiveness of this limit depends upon the degree of ease with which the substitute can be made, and the extent in which the purpose of the article formerly used is really served by that to be put in its place. In the instances that have been mentioned, it is clear that the substitution cannot be effected without some friction due to preconceptions, and in some of them there would be a genuine loss on account of the change. The transportation of freight offers one of the most evident examples of facility in substitution of this kind, that is anywhere available. For example, the great corn market of Peoria, Ill., may obtain supplies from Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, Illinois and other regions. When corn is sold in Peoria, it is not merely the corn that is paid for, but that corn plus transportation from the point at which it was raised, to Peoria. Thus, while there is no substantial difference in the article desired by the purchasers, and hence, no preference for one supplying region rather than another, the transportation is of many kinds and may be supplied by many different agencies. If the lines from one region charge too much, their commodity, transportation from that region, will be unsalable at the high price, and that from another region, more reasonably