

THE NEW PRINCETON REVIEW.

61st Year.

SEPTEMBER, 1886.

No. 5.

GENIUS.

A WRITER nowadays hardly makes choice of such a topic as this, unless with due occasion. Even then he leniently recalls the feeling of his schoolboy days, when he sat before a theme—Virtue, Industry, or Ambition—justly out of sorts with his task, if not with his teacher, and much in doubt how to begin it. But I am moved to touch upon the present subject, and in a measure guided, by the striking declaration of one whose original works, no less than his present occupancy of an official chair of criticism, make him a conspicuous authority. No opinion, however striking and unexpected, can fail to receive attention when advanced by Mr. Howells with all his honesty and humor, and in a style so agreeable as to commend him to the favor of even those against whom his gentle shafts of satire are directed.

Not long since, then, our favorite novelist gave a hearing to those who have supported claims, of various parties, to the possession of Genius. He forthwith nonsuited them, on the ground that there was no cause of action. Instead of arguing for an apportionment of the estate indicated by the aforesaid designation, we have, as if claimants to some hypothetical Townley or Hyde inheritance, to face a judicial decision, based upon evidence satisfactory to the Court at least, that such a thing does not exist and never has existed. He finds that there is no such “puissant and admirable prodigy . . . created out of the common.” It is as much of a superstition as the Maelstrom of Malte-Brun; it is a mythical and fantastic device, kept up for the intimidation of modest and overcredulous people. Conformably to this decision, and in frequent

COUNTRY CHURCHES IN NEW ENGLAND.

IT was Saturday afternoon in October. The yellow of the daylight was fading into the gray of evening as I drove down a long hill and struck a valley road by the side of a strong stream. It had been a hard day on the horses and they were tired.

October days in New England are sometimes harder on horses than the dog-days. The sirocco atmosphere of the desert is often reproduced very closely in our north country. This had been a day not unlike one of the days familiar to desert travellers when the Khamseen wind begins, or is about to begin, but has not yet become strong and desiccating. So I let the horses walk slowly along the road, now level and dusty, now golden with thickly-strewn maple leaves.

On both sides of the valley hills rose, covered with the splendor of the autumnal forests, never more splendid than in this autumn of 1885. The valley itself was narrow, but there were farm-houses in all directions, and the land on either side of the stream, a broad level, was divided into fields, some green and dotted with grazing cattle, some straw-colored with shocks of corn and rich in the magnificence of great pumpkins still scattered where they had grown. Certainly there is no crop in the world which presents such a gorgeous view of the wealth of the soil as an American corn-field when the corn has been shocked and has left the yellow pumpkins exposed to view.

The horses loitered along. On the left of the road was a graveyard. Years ago I had driven this road. I remembered that I then saw, near the front fence, a solitary grave, over which was the sorrowful epitaph of a young girl. We had wondered then who she was and what her history, and had suggested many fanciful explanations of the story hinted at in the inscription. The horses remembered it also; for when they came in front of the spot they stopped precisely where I had checked them then. The grave was no longer solitary. By the side of the girl of eighteen now lay her father and her mother. For their names were on the stone at her grave and on the stones at their graves.

Here, then, as in so many country graveyards, was a gathered family. There must have been great sorrow when the girl died. That much the simple epitaph assured us. There was, perhaps less, perhaps more sorrow, possibly there were willingness and joy, when later, the old folks, one at a time, left the farm-house for the graveyard, the weariness of labor for the peacefulness of rest.

To the traveller along any road such a group of graves by the road-side is necessarily a subject of interest. Graves are always publications, when rounded up and marked with stones. Howsoever retiring and unknown has been the life, however impertinent it would have been in the traveller to invade the privacy of that life, when the life is over and the memorial tablet stands in the light of day and the moonlight and starlight, always telling all who come that "such an one is dead," then the passer-by is invited to ask, who was this, and what can you tell me about him or her? The dead thus become public property.

There was, therefore, no impropriety in seeking to know more about this young New England girl, of whom we read on her tombstone these lines:

" Dearly beloved while on earth,—
 Deeply lamented at death,—
 Borne down by two cruel oppressors,
 Distracted and dead."

She died more than thirty years ago. It was only four years ago that her father, almost ninety years old, was buried by her; and a few months afterward her mother, nearly eighty, joined them in silence. It was in a valley miles away from any railway. Surely any one living hereabouts can tell us their story. We rattled along the road swiftly a mile or a mile and a half, and came to the first of a few scattered houses making a small village. A man was at work in front of his house. I pulled up and asked him the story of the family. He had no idea what I was asking about, had not seen the grave, knew nothing about it.

"What did you say was the name on the gravestuns?"

I told him. He said he had never heard the name, and did not know of any people of that name in this part of the country.

I drove on and tried again, with a man standing near his house. He could give me no information. I drove on again and met a bright-looking young man, walking down the road-side, pulled up,

and accosted him. He was minister of—I think he said a Free-will Baptist Church—perhaps it was some other—he had only been a few years there—he had never heard of the name, of the young girl's epitaph, of the family. So I gave it up. For it was growing toward the dark, and my horses made quick time onward for the last five miles of the day's drive, while we talked of this illustration of the change which has come into the social character of New England in country places.

Time was when all the people for miles around could tell you the story of every mound in the graveyard, and of all that was hidden under it. For in those times there was a community of interest, a social life, which included all the inhabitants of large sections of the country. People were more or less dependent on one another, and had more or less attachment to and affection for one another.

In those days on a Sunday morning, when from miles away in all directions the people came in wagons, or on foot, to the church, everybody knew everybody. If one were missing from any pew in the full house, it was very certain that after the service all the rest of the congregation would learn whether Susan or Timothy were sick, and if not, why he or she was not in the regular place. If any one were sick in any house all the country-side would know it, and know it with kindest sympathy.

I remember, years ago, driving one day twenty-seven miles down a New Hampshire road, along which were only scattered farm-houses. Before I started in the morning, from a house where I had passed the night, I heard the family asking a teamster who was passing northward, "Did you hear anything about Mrs. Bell?" and his reply, "They said she was very low." It made little impression on my mind, but, a few miles on, a farmer came out and hailed me, and asked me if I had heard how Mrs. Bell was. I repeated what I had heard the teamster say, and drove on, thinking the sick woman was in some farm-house behind me. Again, at a watering-trough, where I waited while two other teams watered, I heard their drivers talk of Mrs. Bell; one said he heard she was dying, and the other said it would be hard on Tom and the little girls.

It was at twenty-three miles from my starting-place that I passed a yellow cottage near the road-side, and saw three men standing in front of it, looking somehow very solemn and sad. An impulse took me. I stopped my horses close up to the fence, and asked them if this was where Mrs. Bell was sick. It was where she had died an hour ago.

Thus all along the road, and along many cross-roads, away up into the mountain passes, and down the slopes on the other side, wherever within twenty or thirty miles there was ground cleared for a farm and humanity was enduring the curse of labor, all the people knew of the sickness of the farmer's wife, the mother of the boy and girls, and all sorrowed with them.

I do not think this is an uncommon instance of what was the social condition of the country before railroads had penetrated it. Certain it is, that no family could accomplish their final emigration, and be buried in the graveyard, without all the inhabitants, for miles around, knowing their names and something of their history.

I do not pretend to any closer acquaintance with country life and social condition than others, except what comes from extensive travel over New England roads with my own horses, spending much time among the people in all parts of Vermont and New Hampshire. For a great many years it has been our pleasant custom to spend at least a month in the spring and a month in the autumn in carriage travel. We rarely know in the morning where we shall rest at night, but we rarely fail to find the hospitality of a good country inn, clean rooms, and tables loaded with luxuries. Such travel is vastly more free from annoyances than in England, Scotland, or any country on the other continent. New Hampshire and Vermont hotels, on the great lines of travel, are fully equal to European hotels in like locations; and the small inns, on unfrequented roads, are infinitely better than the small inns of any other country. I speak from ample experience. There are few roads in the northern part of New Hampshire, or in all Vermont, with which my horses are not acquainted. This travel has made us somewhat familiar with such indications of local and general character as travellers find whose enjoyment consists in becoming acquainted with the customs and the thinking and talking ways of the inhabitants.

I have no hesitation in saying that the change indicated in the local incident which I have related is marked throughout the two States. That it is equally so in other sections of the country is probable. It is in considerable measure due to the introduction of railroads.

That old community of interests and sympathies prevailing in districts was not only an important social factor, but it was of great value as an element in the political structure and growth of a self-governing people. As a rule, in old times, the people in the country

had more thought about their selectmen, and questions of local, town, or county government than about general politics. They concerned themselves little about the government of the State, beyond sending an honest and trusted member of their own community to the Legislature. They concerned themselves not at all about the affairs of other States, and thought but little about, because they scarcely felt the existence of, the general government at Washington. Political subjects form no part of the purpose of this sketch, except that it should be always remembered that a great feature in the solidity of a democratic form of government is that enjoyment and appreciation of true liberty which a people have when they feel least the general government and pay most attention to home and local affairs.

When railways began to penetrate New England, the immediate social effects began to be visible in ways that can be illustrated by what seem to be trivial, but are important things. The country store in the little village, or at the cross-roads, had supplied the wants of all the people around. But Mrs. Jones had gone down by rail to the large town, or to the city, and appeared in church on Sunday morning with a new hat or shawl, such as no one could match. Hitherto the wives and daughters of the country had been content with neat and clean attire, making over and retrimming and freshening up the old hats from year to year, making their own dresses, or employing the seamstress whom every one knew. Mrs. Some-one-else seeing Mrs. Jones's striking apparel, hesitated next Sunday to go to church with her old hat; and several others felt as she did. New hats or no church became a subject of quiet discussion of each with herself. There was a break in the old custom of going to church, a new consideration introduced. It was a trifle, but it was extended in its ultimate effect on the Sunday morning gatherings. Shopping at the country store fell off, and the custom of going once or twice a year to the city for purchases became general with those who could afford it. Distinctions in styles of dress resulted in repelling many from such public places as the church, and little rivalries among young people produced sad changes in their relations to each other.

I have mentioned this among the influences, touching the women-folk, because they have most power over social relations. But the same effects were produced on the men, to some extent, and others too, which were much more serious, especially on the younger generation.

The growth of population had been largely in this way. The New England farmer was never a rich man. He had little chance to lay up money. His children were his wealth; and I say it with emphasis, there was—there is nowhere on earth a family of greater wealth in all that wealth can be, the full supply of wants and desires, than in the small home of a New England farmer with wife and children, hard toil, contentment—and not a hundred dollars in the world. When the boys and girls grew up their parents expected them to marry, and somewhere near by or farther away in the State, the young people were helped by their parents to purchase land for clearing and settling. Some of the young people, of course, went away to cities or distant places in those days. But not as when the railroad came, and made the city practically as near to the farm as the county town had formerly been. Now the boys became ambitious to get employment in populous neighborhoods. They lost all liking for the uneventful life on the farm. They went down the railway—got places on the railroad itself—found places for their old companions; and so in short time the farmers' sons ceased to reënforce the race of farmers, and went into the great flood of humanity which forms the crowded life of cities. How very few of them made success of life it does not concern us now to tell. Always the reported success of one overshadowed thought of the many who failed, and the custom was established among the sons of the country of going away from home to obtain employment.

So was insured that result which is beginning to attract the notice of statesmen, the decrease of population in the rural districts; a decrease which would be alarmingly apparent, but for the increase in cities and manufacturing towns, largely due to importation of labor.

Another fact must be noted here. The idea once prevailed that railroads would increase the value of farms. The farmer had the conviction that better access to a market would add to the money worth of his laborious product. But he did not know that while it brought him nearer to a market, it brought others also nearer, and that the rail which passed his farm and extended to the Far West would flood the market with the produce of rich prairie farms. He learned it by sad experience. He could not grow and deliver produce at the sea-coast as cheaply as the farmer a thousand miles farther away. Hence farm property decreased in value as an immediate consequence of railway extension. A farmer in Vermont told me

last autumn that he had to pay for a car-load to Boston the same price which was paid from Buffalo.

One and another and another farmer abandoned the struggle in New England. He sold his farm for whatever it would fetch, often very little, generally I think to his neighbor. The purchaser took into cultivation what part of it was best, or what he could handle with most ease in addition to his own fields, and let the rest go back to brush and nature. From this comes one of the most striking features of the scenes along New England roads that I have travelled, the frequency of deserted and ruined farm-houses. These are not few, not exceptional; I have often counted five, sometimes seven, once I think eight such houses, totally abandoned, doorless and windowless, in a day's drive of twenty-five miles. Often and often I stop my horses, go into the tangle of brush and agrimony and weeds which mark the spot where was once the flower-garden of the farmer's wife and daughters, and gather a handful of flowers from the old plants that send up mournful blossoms among their invading enemies. In the spring, I break boughs of lilac blossoms from tall old bushes which fill the air with a peculiar fragrance dear to the old man who was once a country boy. In the autumn, I find the various-colored "zinnia," and sometimes the "live-forever"; and once there was a great patch of exquisite myosotis, "forget-me-nots," in luxuriant bloom, wandering out from under the fence and in the turf by the road-side, with strange persistence in a plant both foreign and somewhat delicate.

Do you know how much of the pathos of life there is in such a garden? Do you know how very hard was the labor, how barren of joy the life of the farmer's wife; how much of her little happiness she put into her flower-garden? How mournful the parting from it was, when poverty or a restless family compelled her to move away?

Now and then we see a deserted and ruinous church. It is always a strange sight. I remember one, standing in a large old and full graveyard. It looked as if it had served for the worship of a great congregation who were all lying peacefully around it now, no one left to pray or praise in it. I looked in through the broken window, and saw the cold ruinous interior; no sign of prayer or song for many years. Before the pulpit stood the bier on which in years past the congregation had been one by one carried from the door of the church to the graves close by it.

Another day I drove by a large church with a tower, in which a

bell hung exposed to the weather. Stopping at a house near by to inquire about the road, I also asked about the church, and learned that it was closed some years ago in consequence of a quarrel among the membership, and had not been used since. For awhile they rang the curfew bell at nine o'clock. But that had long been silent.

And this brings us to what are perhaps the most important changes which have taken place in the social and associating character of the people in parts of New England. While the influences which have been named here aided in producing social changes, the far more effective cause of these changes is to be found in the religious education of the people.

The Puritan Sunday, as some call it, is a day belonging to past history. The custom of all the people, young and old, assembling on Sunday for the worship of God no longer exists in a large part of the country. One who goes about, week after week, from village to village, and church to church, is painfully impressed with the emptiness of church buildings on Sundays.

The resulting effect on the social relations of populations is great. A certain disintegration has taken place. People no longer know each other as their predecessors did. That sympathy of which we spoke, which pervaded great tracts of country, bringing inhabitants into more or less close relations and feelings of mutual interest if not of affection, was in large measure the effect of church relations. Every one of the several generations who lie close together around that ruined church had been in the habit of seeing every other one of the generation, older or younger, at church on Sunday morning. They met and talked, between services, in the graveyard where they are all now gathered silent together. They will all know one another when they awake.

That element in the social condition of the country is pretty much all gone. And it is gone for this, more than for any other reason, because people don't go to church as they used to. Population has decreased, but not so much as to account for the change, which is very marked. This change is one of most serious import, whether we view it as religious men or as patriots and political economists.

There should be no need to discuss the subject of religion and religious institutions as related to the political conditions of a country like ours. But of late years its transcendent importance has been very generally lost sight of. At no time in our history has it been more necessary to bring churchmen and laymen, and serious men

who have no relations with churches, to the consideration of this subject. Men look everywhere for barriers to interpose against the advance of socialism and communism. There are but two possible defences—the one very untrustworthy, physical force; the other omnipotent, the religion of a people.

Men seek to effect moral reform by legislation and police forces, but there is no hope of moral elevation except it be founded on religion. The Church is the one only moral reform society.

Only superficial political economists leave the religious forces, at work among a people, out of account in estimating their conduct and judging their powers. So far as cohesion in the masses is concerned this is the most important of all considerations. While separate denominational relations produce what seem to be separate and segregated cohesions, in larger or smaller groups and bodies, there are certain fundamental religious principles which are common to many denominations and are a bond of union of common interest and common enthusiasm. It is a pity that men of various denominations calling themselves Christians do not recognize this truth more clearly. Intelligent observers, viewing Christianity from the position of the outside student, recognize the practical unity of the faith which is the foundation of that great power in the history of men which is called Christianity. The millions in this country who to themselves and among themselves seem hopelessly divided as Protestants and Romanists, as Presbyterians and Episcopalians and Baptists and Methodists, as members of a great variety of unions, each and every one called a church, when seen by the philosophic eye of the student of social forces, are recognized as a united body of men and women, all under one leader and one law, all controlled by one grand principle—"the power of an endless life."

Thus whatever battles among themselves may be going on, however rancorous may be the enmities which they exhibit on questions of the real presence, the forms of baptism, free will, falling from grace, let an attack be made on the supremacy over men, the Lordship and sovereignty of their Leader, or on their duty of obedience to him as against obedience to human powers and laws, and they are as one soul and body, a united force, the heaviest force which has moved individuals and nations for the past two thousand years. Men on either side of the question will hang, burn, and torture one another for differing in opinion as to how Christ saves them, and the same men will die side by side to defend the faith that Christ does save them.

Sagacious leaders of men have recognized this value of religion as an element of political power in all times. The history of the Christian church is full of examples, from our own times back to the days of Constantine, when the relations of the Church to the State were first established.

Whatever may have been the other motives of Constantine in cultivating Christianity without accepting baptism into the Church for himself, it is clear enough that he was a shrewd politician, and recognized the political importance of the fast spreading religion of Christ.

His empire was not only distracted by civil war, but it lacked wholly the cohesive power of religion among the people. The old religions of Rome were lifeless. They had ceased to have the quality of religion in its very meaning as a word, whether that meaning were as Cicero had defined it, "omnia quæ ad cultum Deorum pertinent," or as others defined it, a bond of restraint, a conservative sentiment. The fact remains in history that the Roman Empire was consolidated by the power of a religion acting among the forces which, without its presence, would have either failed wholly, or would have effected but a temporary success. The beginning of the history of Christianity as an element to be considered in the political history and future of nations is in the reign of Constantine. He is no wise historian or politician who fails to recognize its paramount importance in looking at the visible past in Europe or seeking to look into the obscurity before us in America. The history of European civilization ancient and modern is to all intents and purposes a history of religion. So in a far future will be much of the history of our country seen by the eyes of the calm historian. The Church has been a constant power.

By the Church we shall not be understood as meaning any one of the many denominations by which Christians call themselves. The word is English, not ecclesiastical, as some foolishly try to make it. We use it in the sense of one of the Websterian definitions, meaning the collective body of those who acknowledge Christ as their Saviour.

No one can doubt the power which the Church as a unit has exercised in the whole history of our own institutions. If it were nowhere else visible, it stands out in strong light in the prevailing sense of moral right and wrong, the universal doctrine of submission to law, the recognition and defence of the family and social system which underlies the political system. The laboring man who hears

clamorous politicians seeking his vote by pretentious efforts to open places of amusement for him on Sunday, should know that the laws which give him Sunday and its rest, and prevent open manufactories and public works on one day in seven, are the gift of the Church to the world, and that Sunday is preserved to him only by the religion of that Church. The setting apart of one day in seven as a special day is a religious, not a political invention. Those who are most active in secularizing Sunday, and those who most vehemently demand amusements for the people so that they shall have it as a day of rest and recreation, seem strangely oblivious of the fact that the day exists among Christian nations as a day of rest solely because the Church believes and teaches that on that day the crucified, dead, and buried Saviour of men rose from the grave and by his resurrection accomplished the whole work of the salvation of man. It is to the Church that we owe the existence of our Sunday, and the Church alone can preserve it for working-men and for all men. Once deprive the day of its religious character, and all the exertions of moralists and philanthropists and humanitarians will be powerless to keep it distinct from Saturday and Monday. It is idle to talk of the "religion of humanity" in face of the fact that the religion of humanity has no God but force, no relationships among men except as determined by superior and inferior strength or cunning. The religion of humanity is no foundation for social or political associations. Built on it, human institutions would not outlast the first light breeze of discontent. Subjection to a higher power, against whom man is powerless, is the sentiment, essential in the minds of men to make them permanent subjects of any form of human government. Communism, which in its extreme development denies all rights of government, must of course and does deny all gods.

Men live with death before them. The certain fact, the only certain fact in the future career of a man, whatever his employments and enjoyments, is a mighty power in affecting his conduct: has always, among all peoples, been the mightiest of powers in affecting human character. Only now and then can one be found among myriads who lives without any influence on his life from his knowledge that his time is short and his works and possessions and surroundings are only temporary. The myriads not only steadily keep in mind that they are to die, but, consciously or unconsciously ask, with profound interest, "What after that?"

Every man asks that question a thousand times more often than

those who surround him imagine. Most men have common sense; and it is common sense to ask it. The Church has answered this question to Americans for two centuries, and they have very generously accepted its answer, "After that the judgment." The sense of responsibility to a judge has been a part of the educated sense of Americans. It is not only a part of their character, but the distinguishing part, which separates the good citizen from the enemy of society and government. It has been not only preached in the pulpits, but taught in the household, ingrained into the hearts and lives of children, who have grown to maturity and died, always under its influence.

The power of the Church has gone much farther in impressing character. The institutions which the Church has sustained, charities innumerable, the public worship of God, the setting apart of one day in seven as a day different from the other six, duties of parents, of children, of neighbors, of friends and enemies, reverence for things sacred, all the constitutents of pure and useful life, have been impressed on American minds and stamped into American character.

Sunday has had more value in this country than merely as a day of rest. It has been a power in forming American character. It has called a pause to men in whatever pursuit. It has kept before men always the knowledge of a great authority regulating their affairs. Those who were brought up under the strict law of what is called the Puritan Sunday, sometimes look back from early manhood with intense dislike to its iron restraints imposed on the jubilant spirits of their youth. But as they grow older and more thoughtful, they recognize at least the priceless discipline of the day, its effect on the formation of mind, its lessons which hurt so much in entering that they are never to be forgotten. No wandering life prevails to lead them away from the effects of those days: nor are there among the sons of men in this world of labor and pain any who look back with such intense yearning for the home rest as those men who out from the anxieties and agonies and sins of mature life, howsoever gilded its surroundings, send longings of heart to the old fireside, where the Bible was the only Sunday book and the *Pilgrim's Progress* was almost the only week-day fiction.

Scorn it, as may those who never knew what it was, the Puritan Sunday made men, thinking men, strong men, who in the world looked always to something beyond the approval of their fellows,

felt always that there was somewhere some one who knew what they were in their hearts. It made a large part of what is worthy in our institutions and our men, in New England and New York, in Virginia and the Carolinas, and throughout the growing Union.

Certainly it is worthy of profoundest consideration whether any and what changes have taken place in the relations of the people to the Church which has exerted such influences for good among them. A traveller through the country may concern himself profitably with observing the condition of such an institution, a centre of cohesion, interest, affection in the community, a teacher to old and young of principles in life which all men, religious and irreligious alike, approve.

Within the past ten years I have rested over Sunday, wherever it chanced that I found myself on a Saturday evening. It is always easy to find an inn near a country church, sometimes in a small village, sometimes in a group of houses not large enough to be called a village, at a cross-roads, occasionally in a large village. I have thus been in at least fifty, perhaps a hundred, perhaps more, country churches, of various denominations, in New Hampshire and Vermont, at Sunday morning and evening services.

Nearly all of these were old buildings, erected many years ago. The seating capacities varied, some having pews with seats for a hundred and fifty, others much larger, built to accommodate congregations of two, three, or four hundred. They were probably built with direct reference to the numbers attending church at the time.

It has been a very rare occurrence in my experience to see, on a bright June or October Sunday morning, as many as fifty persons in a church. I have counted ten congregations of less than forty-five where I have counted one of a larger number. The women always outnumber the men, in all kinds of weather. Children form a large part of every assembly. In a rural district where one church served the purposes of a population of about six hundred, the church attendance was forty-three, and I was told it was a fair average attendance. In a large manufacturing village a venerable Congregational church had seats for three hundred and fifty. The morning congregation numbered forty-eight. The clergyman gave notice of an evening service, the first of a series of special sermons. I attended, and was one of forty-seven listeners. This instance may serve as an example of what we find very generally the case.

It may be that my travels have led me from week to week and year to year among exceptional populations. But the truth stands that these churches represent populations of many thousand Americans, and the testimony is therefore not to be rejected as valueless. There is no disputing the fact that in these districts the people have lost the habit of going to church.

One of the most significant sights we meet with, a very common sight, is a large country church behind which are rows of sheds for horses, once built because they were needed, but now ruins. The families who once came in their wagons, or buggies, or carriages, from miles around, no longer come; perhaps have moved away and their successors are not church-goers. The building of new churches of various denominations will not explain these facts. New England families are not apt to change their nominal church relations. And the facts exist in localities where but one church building now, as in old times, invites the attendance of the people in a large section of country.

It is not the purpose of this paper to theorize about the causes of the change which seems to have taken place in the relation of local populations to the Church. But there are facts which will help those who seek the causes.

Perhaps memory deceives me, and there was not so much more devotion in the Sunday gatherings of fifty years ago than now. But as a rule there is very little now. The people do not appear to come together for worship. The experience of ages teaches that people who are religiously educated will habitually assemble regularly for the worship of their God, doing it both as a pleasure and a duty. It is not easy to induce men and women to assemble once or twice a week, for months, years, lifetimes, to hear lectures, essays, sermons, however instructive or eloquent. This is specially true of the young. In the large majority of country congregations it is quite evident that the people assembled have little idea of any purpose of personal worship. There was a time when controversy ran high about the proper posture in prayer. It proved that men had at least the conviction that some specific outward sign of inward humility was proper. It is now the general custom to ignore all outward formalities. It is rare, in "orthodox" churches, to see any one even bow the head or close the eyes while the minister prays. In many churches all the congregation sit bolt upright and stare at the man in the pulpit, or look

around. A striking custom prevails in many churches, where a choir, located at the end opposite to the pulpit, does the singing. All the people, old and young, rise, turn their backs to the pulpit and look at the choir, in silence, while that part of the service is performed. One is tempted in this connection to speak of the doggerel stuff which has taken the place of the old psalms and hymns which were once the grand liturgy of the Church of every denomination. But whatever it is, the people stare and listen. It is evident that they have come to see and hear, to use eyes and ears only ; not to take part in the services.

There was an old institution, known to former generations, now very rare, to wit, the pastor. The minister was once, sometimes at least, the pastor of a flock as well as the teacher in the pulpit and the leader in public worship.

The influence of the faithful pastor was one of the most powerful on social and religious character. He knew every man and woman, boy and girl, in all the parish or district in which his church stood. He won by affection while he warned with plain words. He asserted his high office, the commission of his Master whose work he was about. He compelled respect, not to himself, but to the Prince whose ambassador he was, whose commands he was sent to proclaim. Some, many, most of the people, and even those who professed no religion, loved him, and looked to him with reverence, and felt the effect of his presence in the community. Over the young he exerted a powerful and restraining influence. They grew up under his eye. To a certain extent he was, in the parish, the visible presence of a power unseen but acknowledged, higher than human laws or social opinions, a great power by which old and young were to be sometime judged and arranged in place for eternity. Of course, it cannot be said that all pastors were equally influential ; but every one was more or less so. The pastoral office in the Church was therefore an element of no small account in the community.

To a great extent it has disappeared. It is now widely the custom in these New England congregations to hire a minister from year to year. His business is to run the machinery of the church, whatever that may be. Like any other "hired man," he is expected to do the work for his employer. His chief duty is to preach one or two sermons on Sunday. The business contract is often made a very close one. The people get the minister as cheaply as they can, and, paying low, in general get their money's worth.

I am coming now to a subject of some delicacy for a layman. But I intend to speak plainly, for the matter is serious. It may be assumed that every sensible man, whatever his religious sentiments, agrees in this, that it is most desirable to restore and preserve to the Church its moral and religious power in the community. It is plain enough that that power is on the wane in some parts of the country. The causes will not be known unless frank words are spoken by those who have opportunities of observation.

I speak of some of the clergy in the pulpits of the New England country churches of which I have been writing. It is unnecessary to compare them as a class with the clergy of old time. Enough to estimate them as they are.

The standard of ability in the clerical profession is far from high. One might hesitate, in expressing such an opinion, lest he subject himself to a charge of assuming to judge in a science of which he is not master. But there is no question of theology or of science in the matter. A large majority of the sermons which the traveller hears preached are devoid of theological significance, and are utter trash. Many of them are below the intellectual level of the people to whom they are preached. Young men who were but a little while ago learning to read, who have been put through a short course of study in a theological seminary, the only value of which is in teaching them how to go on for years and learn something—are sent out with certificates of office and trust which are substantially identical with diplomas of the degree of S.T.D., and are placed at once in that office of awful responsibility, the cure of souls.

I am confident that had I space here to report a score of sermons I have heard within the past year or two in the pulpits of "orthodox" churches, some readers would appreciate the temptation I am under to use very severe words.

Have you any responsibility in this work of manufacturing complete clergymen and turning them out fitted to the work of eternal moment which they are sent to do? Have you, who read this, whatever be your station in any church, an idea that I, a layman, have no right to express opinions thus frankly on the way you do your work in furnishing the ministry of the Word to the people? I beg your pardon; I have more interest in it than you. It is my soul you are sending these men to save. I have the same right to speak out plain words that passengers on vessels have to call on pilot boards for pilots who know the channels through

which they are licensed to guide the little bit of life men pass on this earth.

I drove into a lovely village in the north country one Saturday evening last fall. The Sunday morning found me in an Episcopal church. I went to worship God with the people. Young men may be safely trusted with the service, which is the chief purpose of the Sunday morning assemblage. But now when a robed boy began to preach to his little congregation of country folk, he opened with this statement, in almost these words: "A few weeks ago I told you that after much study I had come to the conclusion, from the teaching of our Lord and of the apostles, that the choice for eternity which is laid before you and before all the human race, is salvation by the atonement of Christ or annihilation. I feel, however, that I ought to tell you that others have thought and taught differently." And the rest of the sermon was a brief statement of the views of some people that there is a future state of punishment for the wicked, with a restatement of the preacher's profound study and his conviction, from his personal investigation, that the Church was wrong and his belief in the annihilation of the wicked was right. Another sermon which I heard in a Congregational church, within the next two weeks, was based on something the preacher had read in one of the now many books made up by ignorant men, professing to give philological and archæological information, but full of errors. The most extraordinary misstatements were made of history, of ancient customs, of the testimony of hieroglyphic inscriptions in Egypt and cuneiform tablets from Assyria. The *mélange*, which the preacher had accepted as truth, from the flimsy book he had read on Saturday, and now retailed to a group of listeners, was shocking. These are not exceptional illustration. Such sermons I hear constantly, and this in country parishes where a former generation heard sermons from men who, whatever their abilities, knew that in theology, as in all other sciences, the true teacher is very humble and preaches only the unchanging faith of the Church. Those men never preached themselves; and if they sought to extend in any way or to explain the words of Holy Writ, bowed their souls reverently to the authoritative teachings of the Church, and the great minds in the Church, before they ventured to tell the people, whom they loved, what might be for their eternal weal or woe.

New England congregations in the country are made up of people of no small intelligence. It is saying little to say that no-

where in the world is a more able, more discriminating set of men and women. They have not always the education which enables them to judge of the truth or falsehood of what is told them, but they have logical minds, understand argument, and know what is false in sequence or weak in illustration. They are fully up to, and sometimes far above, the calibre of the men who preach to them.

Evening meetings are generally better attended than morning services. After the meeting it always happens that a few men who have been at church, and a few who have not, meet in the bar-room of the inn. The bar-room, under Prohibition law, no longer has a bar. It is called the office; and it is not supposed to be noticed that every five minutes two or three men rise, as by some secret impulse, which communicates itself to the landlord, who also rises, and all pass solemnly through a door, returning in three minutes with moist lips to resume the discussion of the sermon. It would make the ears of many a clergyman tingle to hear the sharp and thoroughly appreciative criticism of his sermon on such occasions by the country sinners, as I have frequently heard it, and the clear exposure of his failures.

It goes without saying that such preaching to such people has chief effect in reducing church attendance. It is not strange that intelligent men and women, untaught in the duty of assembling for worship, have little desire to go Sunday after Sunday to listen to that which is neither amusing nor instructive. This preaching tends to disrespect for religion, disregard for the Church. It is especially injurious to the young, who grow up without reverence for the faith of the fathers. It is a well-known fact that a vast deal of the literature of the day,—abundant in cheap form throughout the country,—and no little of the teachings of common schools and high schools, are more than tinctured with the crudities of modern speculative science. The young and the old read. They do not need argument and reason to remove the influence of this sort of literature, for they are not affected by it as a matter of reason. They yield their minds to it because they find broad assertion, which is always influential, and they have no respected teachers to answer assertion with the all-powerful *ipse dixit* of God. The clergyman is too often only a man hired to preach to them, and they are tired of hearing his sermons which are his own speculations, whose errors they are able, at least now and then, to recognize and expose to one another. Nor do they always find the clergyman inclined to help them against unbelief. Many young and some mature men in the pulpit are so

fond of their own speculations and of preaching their own notions about religious things, that they are unsettling instead of grounding firmly the faith of their young hearers. In churches of various "orthodox" denominations I have heard,—once for three successive Sundays in places far apart,—sermons in which there was no distinctive feature of Christianity. In short, while on the one hand the traveller is forced to lament the fact that the people in large sections of the country have ceased to be regular church-goers, he is much of the time compelled to admit that they might as well be anywhere as hearing error from desks which give it a show of authority.

Let no reader imagine that in what has been written I have intended to characterize the entire Church and clergy in New England, of any or all denominations. Numerous as have been the churches visited in my spring and autumn journeys, they are but few among the thousands which are scattered on the hills and in the valleys of the New England States. Among the clergy of New England there are great numbers of devout, earnest, able men, whose work is for the Master all the week and who teach on Sunday the faith of the saints. They are men of power in their parishes and in the communities which surround them. There are ministers' wives who are sisters of that charity which sanctifies human life. There are young men, imbued with that humility which becomes the young man, entering on the most responsible work committed to human hands and minds and hearts. If any such read what I have written, his own deep sense of the grandeur of his work and the weakness of and the stoutest man for it, his submission to the voice of the Church, and the authority of its fathers and elders, his firmness in the faith taught him and delivered to him to be delivered to those who are committed to his keeping, these all will save him from supposing that I speak of him. Nor is what I have written to be regarded as necessarily applying to churches in New England alone. It happens that my wanderings in my carriage have been for years chiefly among the grand and beautiful scenery of Vermont and New Hampshire. Doubtless those who travel in other parts of our country will find similar facts.

It will not do to meet these facts with tables of statistics. No amount of statistical tables of church membership would be of as much practical value as a look into an old church, once filled, now almost empty, and a glance at the fallen roof of the long horse-sheds behind it.