

...THE...

Union Seminary Magazine

VOL. XIX

FEBRUARY—MARCH, 1908

No. 3

THE VIRGIN BIRTH OF OUR LORD

BY REV. WALTER L. LINGLE, D. D.

There was recently an organized movement to put the Christmas story and the Christmas songs out of the public schools of New York City. Our whole country became interested and even excited. There is another movement which may well cause us deeper concern, though it is being carried on so quietly that we scarcely notice it. It is a movement to put the Christmas story out of the Bible itself. The whole trend of modern, radical criticism is to deny the Virgin Birth of our Lord, and practically all of the incidents which go to make up the beautiful story of his birth. One quotation will suffice to show to what lengths some of these critical scholars go. It is from Soltau's "Birth of Jesus Christ." "An evangelical Christian, that is to say a Christian holding fast in his religious convictions to the gospel of the Apostles and the Apostolic school, is no longer able to believe in the supernatural origin of Jesus. * * * Whoever makes the further demand that an evangelical Christian shall believe in the words, 'Conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary' wittingly constitutes himself sharer in a sin against the Holy Spirit of the true gospel as transmitted to us by the Apostles and their school in the Apostolic Age."

Nor is this denial of the Virgin Birth confined to the critical schools of Germany. It is creeping into the modern pulpit. The City Temple in London is one of the great pulpits of the world, and in the days of Dr. Joseph Parker the pure gospel was preached there in great power. Dr. R. J. Campbell, a minister of wonderful gifts and of wonderful personal mag-

THE SUPPLY OF MINISTERS

BY REV. HENRY H. SWEETS.

The most widespread discussion of any that has to do with the Church of God to-day is concerning the supply of candidates for the ministry. Even the secular papers have taken up the theme, and, sometimes with scant sympathy, are giving the views of men of the world on the situation.

No question is of more practical importance for those who are seeking the prosperity of the kingdom of God than the recruiting the ranks of the ministry. In the economy of God a large and important place is given to the preachers, the pastor, the bishop.

But while the Church is growing in wealth and numbers and influence, there is a confessed lack of men seeking the work of the gospel ministry. This condition has existed not in any particular denomination, section or continent exclusively. It has been discovered in almost every Protestant Church throughout our land, and in Europe as well as America. In many Churches the most serious decline began between the years 1894 and 1896. In many cases an actual decrease in the number of candidates was found, in almost all a relative decrease.

In Germany the decrease is almost twenty per cent., while in Scotland it is almost one-half.

"The fifty-eight leading theological seminaries of this country," says Dr. William R. Taylor, "have 700 less students than they had twelve years ago, although the membership of the Churches has increased by hundreds of thousands, and the population of the country by millions."

The decline appears to be greater in the East. Out of 1,200 men graduated in 1904 from Harvard, Yale, Columbia and Princeton, only 28 were preparing to enter the ministry. Yale's total number of graduates from 1850 to 1895 doubled, but in the same period the number of her graduates to enter the ministry decreased more than 60 per cent. Even at Princeton there were only 40 candidates out of 1,286 graduates in

recent years. About one-tenth of all the students at Princeton Seminary this year are from the Southern Church.

In the Congregational Church there has been a decrease of 30 per cent. in the number in eleven years. From all eight of their theological seminaries they graduated only 99 men last year. They have 1,140 vacant pulpits.

In the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, between the years 1895 and 1905, the membership increased nearly 200,000, while the candidates decreased from 1477 to 799. In 1897 there was one candidate for every 640 members of this Church. In 1907 there was one candidate for every 1,228 members. In this decade the Church increased from 961,000 to 1,341,000 members, and the entire country increased from 76,000,000 inhabitants to about 85,000,000. In a recent letter from Dr. Cochrane, Secretary of Education, he says, "The decrease has stopped, but the Church is still 424 candidates short of normal supply; i. e., one to every 800. Out of 10,789 churches there are 2,291 vacant pulpits."

In the Presbyterian Church in the United States the decline began in 1894. Between that year and 1904 the membership increased nearly 36,000, while the candidates decreased from 445 to 323. In 1897 there was one candidate for every 599 members. In 1907 we have one candidate for every 783 members. In this period our Church increased from 217,075 to 262,390 members. The decline stopped in 1901, when we had the smallest number (286) since 1888. In 1894 we had 445 candidates, one in each 447 of our membership. In 1901 we had 286, one in every 797. In 1907 there were 335, one to each 783. The death rate among our ministers from 1894 to 1907 was 30 per year, while an average of eleven were retired each year on account of sickness or old age.

These figures are taken from the reports adopted by the Presbyteries to the General Assembly last May. From the reports made to the Synods last fall we learn that the increase this year has been more marked. There were 359 candidates in the various Synods at that time. Several have been received since, and many others have already asked to be admitted under the care of the Presbyteries this spring.

Still there is a great need. Our present pastors must have successors. Right at this time we have 1,050 vacant churches. Some of these are small—often six or eight should be grouped together—but there is need for 200 men for fields—most of them hard fields, but able, with the aid of Home Mission Committees, to give a meagre support.

Possibly never before in the history of our Church were the fields more inviting or more promising of immediate results. A wave of great prosperity has swept over the South. Her cotton fields and mills, her mineral resources and development, her oil reservoirs and refineries, her sugar plantations and rice fields, her ever extending railroads and rapidly developing seaports are attracting the attention of the world.

Thousands of men and women and boys and girls are coming within her borders; many of them, at our very doors, "having no hope, and without God in the world." President Roosevelt rightly said, "If we do not take care of the immigrant, if we do not try to uplift him, then as sure as fate our own children will pay the penalty."

Six or eight millions of the negro race are among us. They are asking of their leaders bread, and for bread are oft receiving stones. The Master is saying to us, "Give ye them to eat."

The whole wide world is open to the gospel. By the agreement of various missionary agencies our Church is now responsible for 25,000,000 souls in the heathen world. They are standing out in the night of darkness and hopeless despair. They cry, "Come over and help us!" "How can they hear without a preacher?"

"The work the centuries might have done,
Must crowd the hour of setting sun."

The General Assembly has called for four times as many missionaries for the foreign field as are now laboring there.

The Cause.—Articles have been written, addresses made, sermons preached, conferences held to discuss this decline, but the cause remains a question yet. The reasons assigned are very many and very varied. Possibly there are many forces in the life and work of to-day that have played a part.

There seemed to be a scarcity of efficient men for the world's work during the period of decline. In some States it has been impossible to get enough teachers for the public schools. A loud call was made for men to fill the many places in Panama, Cuba, Porto Rico and the Philippines. The activity of the recruiting officers of the Army and Navy was never surpassed. Illuminated and gorgeous posters and hand-painted bill-boards were used to attract the attention of the youth of the land. Moving picture exhibitions were given free in the large cities, setting forth the glories to be achieved by service on our great vessels of war. Throughout the business and industrial world there has been a lack of efficient men.

The ministry, above all professions, demands well-trained men. The class from which recruits come is by no means large. Less than one-half of one per cent. of all the young men of our country ever have the privilege of a college training. But in the professions where broad education should also be required there has been a remarkable increase. In the past 30 years students in dentistry in this country have increased 1,424 per cent.; in law, 450 per cent.; in pharmacy, 436 per cent.; in medicine, 206 per cent., while there has been in this period an increase of only 41 per cent. in the number of candidates.

In the long, weary search there are three reasons for this decline that have been discovered by not a few.

The first is in the home. A well-ordered Christian home is the best recruiting ground for the ministry. But in many homes social and business engagements have largely crowded out family worship. The tastes cultivated are unfavorable to the choice of the ministry. The standards there set up often make the little things of life seem infinitely big and the great things of time intensely small. Unlike the parents in former days when the sons were dedicated to God for this great work and trained through life for it, many parents to-day, dominated by the secular spirit, overlooking the honors and privileges of God's Ministry of Reconciliation, do not want their sons to endure the hardships they think are incident to the life of him who lives not for himself but for others.

The second is in the Church. Too often has she forgotten the solemn charge of her Master. In the early days of the Church in America the ministers gave much thought and labor to the selection and training of those who should take up the work after them. Colleges were founded "for the training of ministers." Young men were often picked out for this service and taken into the minister's home. Many of our ministers have failed to present to the young men in their congregations the claims of God upon their lives. One of the most successful pastors recently said: "I feel that I failed most signally in my ministry in not picking out young men and encouraging them to enter the ministry." Especially has our Church neglected the small town and country churches. These are to-day furnishing more than four times as many men for the ministry as the city churches, besides sending hundreds of elders and deacons and active workers into the cities. In spite of the fact that the Presbyterian Church to-day is not a Church of the country, many more than one-half of all our candidates are the sons of farmers. If the Church is to fulfil her mission in the world she must have a sufficient number of men of training and power to lead in the work at home and abroad. Well may she be deeply concerned in every phase of this theme.

The third cause of this decline is in the boys and young men. Many of them seem to have forgotten that as Christian men they have surrendered themselves to Christ, that they are his servants. No more are they at liberty to choose their own ways; they are to do the Master's bidding. Men of the world may hear the call of pleasure, of self-ease, of earthly gain. It is theirs to find out the Master's plan and daily seek to fulfil it. Weigh well the words of Robert Speer: "If Jesus is not Lord of *all*, he is not Lord at *all*."

The Remedies.—There is but one remedy. It was given by Jesus Christ long centuries ago. It is written of him that "when he saw the multitudes he was moved with compassion on them because they fainted and were scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd." Turning to his disciples, he said, "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that he will send forth laborers

into his harvest." As soon as the Church obeys this command the need will surely be met. Pray for them. Pray believingly for them. Pray intelligently for the laborers in the harvest.

This remedy is being applied to-day, we believe, as possibly never before in the history of our Church. Prayer is the fruit of recognized need. Who to-day does not know of this need of Zion? "Prayer is the soul's sincere desire." Where is there a minister, an officer, a member of our Church who is not anxious to see large reinforcements to the ranks of those who are assisting to overtake the destitutions at home and abroad.

Several years ago our Committee began to send to young men the best tracts on the Call to the Ministry. In the past three years pastors, parents and teachers have sent names of hundreds and thousands of young men to whom they desire this literature sent. To-day we have a list of several thousand boys and young men for whom this request has been made, and concerning whom the prayer is constantly ascending that they may be guided to this great and happy work if it be the will of the great King. Last year the claims of the ministry were presented to the students of all our institutions and of almost every State Institution in the South.

An increasing number of our pastors are saying, "I am not really obeying this command of the Master, unless I present the claims of the gospel ministry upon the hearts and lives of the boys and young men under my care." And some have said, "I can not urge other parents to dedicate their sons to this work unless I give my boy to it." During the past year we have sent out literature to more than one hundred pastors who asked for information in the preparation of sermons on this theme. And considerably more than one-tenth of all the candidates of our Church are the sons of ministers.

We believe there is also much real prayer now in the homes. Many times there have been the saying of prayers, but no praying. Often fathers and mothers have repeated that petition, "Thy kingdom come," and have used every endeavor to turn the lives of their own children into paths of worldly pleasure and profit. No parents have really obeyed this command of

the Lord until they have dedicated their own sons to God for this holy office if God be pleased to call them.

If there were more Hannahs there would be more Samuels to do God's will. Mothers, fathers in Israel, hear the pleading voice of your Lord and Master, as, with his heart filled with compassion on the fainting multitudes, he commands you to pray to the Lord of the harvest that he will thrust forth laborers into his harvest. Remember the vow you made when the little boy was dedicated to God by baptism. Do not forget that you are to train that precious life in the fear of God and for holy and heavenly and eternal ends. Magnify the office and work of the ambassador of God. Around the fireside dwell not so much upon the success of the captains of finance and the achievements of earthly warriors as upon the great heroes of the cross, who have made themselves poor for the sake of Christ and have not counted their own lives dear that they might serve him.