







**THE DEAD LINE IN THE MINISTRY.**

I stood talking this summer with a physician, a friend of mine; and I peculiarly referred to the fact that his hair was turning gray. He smiled serenely, and remarked, that he did not care how soon his head was white, as it added influence in the practice of his profession. This is very true. What is required in a physician is experience, and a long experience produces confidence among his patients. What is true of the physician is equally true of the lawyer. In legal counsel, the client instinctively searches for an adviser who has spent many years in his profession; and the older the lawyer, other things being equal, the safer does the client regard his counsel. Take also the case of the journalist. To the younger man is committed the gathering of the news; but to the man of age and experience is delegated the task of expressing the editorial opinion. There is no branch of human activity where so much is committed to the rashness of youth and inexperience as in the ministerial profession. As a consequence, congregations and communities are frequently at sword's points.

It is not intended, in this article, to argue against young men being brought into prominent positions in the Church, for young blood is most desirable. But we desire to point out the fact that it is an element of weakness and great unwisdom to set aside the ripest experience for the most inexperienced youthfulness. This is contrary to sound common sense. Of course, if mature age is unaccompanied by mature intellect, that is another question. Some of the older preachers have not kept pace with the advance of human thought. In behalf of such we are not speaking. But there are in the Eastern Conferences many men of rare studiousness who are ruled out of the ranks of acceptability simply because they are no longer young. It is true that this feeling against ministers of middle age is not so strong to-day as it was fifteen or twenty years ago; but it exists to a certain degree to-day, and ought to be discouraged. Evidently, it came into fashion in a thoughtless and giddy time. As all young men will at some time, if they live, become old men, it will be seen that we are not setting ourselves against young men as a class. We cordially welcome the best of them into the Conference. But it is folly of the most aggravated type to contend that when these excellent young men reach the age of fifty years, they are, by virtue of that very fact, rendered thenceforward incompetent to preach the Gospel. Many a good man's spirit has been broken by the heartless manner in which he has been set aside at the period when he was prepared for the greatest usefulness. It has been one of the greatest mistakes of the modern Protestant Church. Silly, flirting young ministers have been sent to responsible positions, and have broken the influence of the Church so effectually that years have not repaired the damage. It is too much to expect that a society will increase in power in the community when it is burdened with such a social caricature as a young preacher who devotes himself to a promiscuous courting of all the frivolous girls in the neighborhood. This is the sort of thing that has grieved the righteous souls of many church people. All young men are not like this; if they were, the future would be hopeless. But too many such cases come to our notice.

That some of the older men are discouraged, not to say disheartened, is not to be wondered at. They have spent their lives in honest and earnest toil for the good of the Church. To find themselves abandoned, ignored or forgotten is about as hard as the care of the father who has been deserted by his children and is left desolate at a time when most he needs their care. It is bad enough to be neglected in extreme old age; but there is also something unreasonable in practically communicating a man in the prime of his powers. It will be a happy thing when all Protestant Churches combine to wipe out forever this "dead line." Several of the most effective men have withdrawn from our Conference recently, in consequence of the implied reproach; and others are seriously thinking of taking the same step. The remedy is largely with the laity. If they demand this ruthless waste of ripened power, of course, it will still go on, and the callow and untrained neophyte will be in the ascendant. The Lyman are supreme. The appointing power is merely the agent of the Church. If the success of an ephemeral congregation is the dominant desire, extravagance and sensationalism will bring it; but if permanent usefulness is wanted, it must be sought through the legitimate channels of careful and earnest pastoral labor. If experience is worth anything, it ought to be worth the most in the most important profession in the world. If unskilful work is undesirable in the most ordinary trade surely it must be undesirable in the most important work which can engage human activity. In this whole matter we have another exhibition of the Savior's words, that "the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light." Ancient Church History shows us that the early Christians were not guilty of the folly that we have been condemning; but that an aged Christian minister increased in influence with his years.

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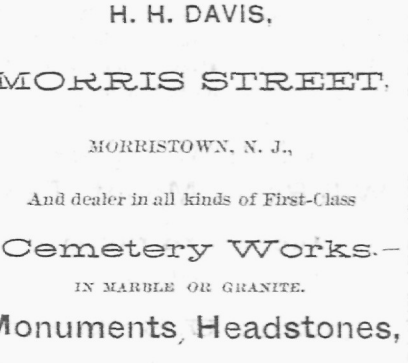
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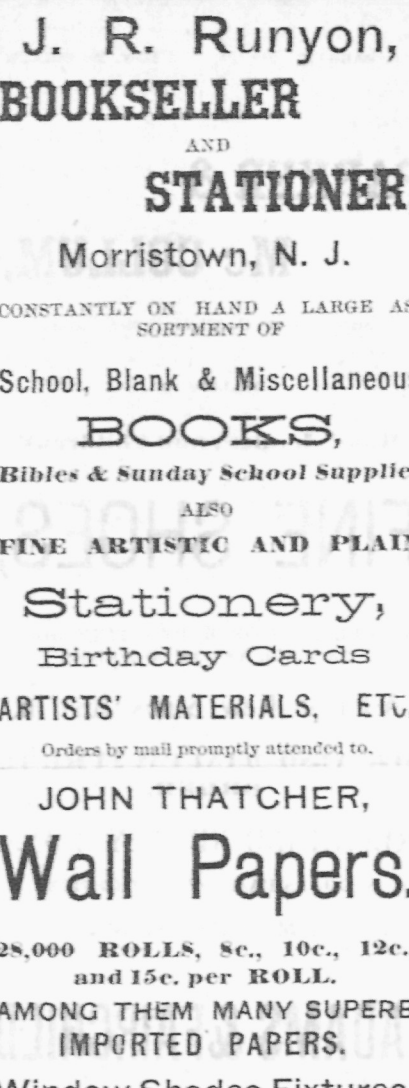
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