

preacher cannot, it will hardly be disputed, do his most effective work as a stranger. The most efficient Pastor, other things being equal, is he who is the most intimately acquainted with his flock. The relations of Pastor are of a confidential and sacred character, and men and women will not give their confidence to a stranger. The Methodist Pastor comes suddenly, and comes a stranger; it is known that at the furthest he can stay but three years, and congregations naturally shrink from forming warm attachments which must be broken every three years. The minister is, therefore, chiefly valued for his sermons, and his personal influence counts for comparatively little. Thus it is that Methodists do not build up strong, influential churches in the great centres of population as rival denominations do. The same reason which prevents the Methodist minister from being known intimately by his congregation also operates to his disadvantage in the community. He has not time enough to build up a reputation for himself. He cannot become identified with the interests of the people. He virtually loses his citizenship.

In rural districts these disadvantages are somewhat lessened by the fact that the acquaintance of Pastor and people is greatly facilitated by a less conventional and more accessible society. Thus it is that Methodism has twice the success in the country that it has in cities. But the centres of population are also the centres of influence, wealth, and intelligence, and if Methodism is ambitious to occupy the first place in the nation, it must have more regard to its churches in the cities. Another of the disadvantages of the itinerancy is that the limit of the pastoral term comes frequently in the midst of a revival, an interruption in which is likely to cut it short. Or a financial project upon which depends the continuance of the church is suddenly arrested, while being successfully carried forward, by change of Pastors, and, perhaps, utterly overthrown. The itinerancy has not a particle of elasticity, and the successful revivalist or financier must certainly go elsewhere when the legal limit is reached, no matter if an additional month would suffice to save the church from financial ruin or to gather the fruits of the revival.

Among the plans which are proposed by way of modification is one known as the Brooklyn plan, which asks simply that the Bishop be granted power to make appointments year by year of the same minister to the same churches. The length of the pastoral term could, under this rule, be gauged according to the wishes and needs of the churches and the desires of the Pastors. This would give the benefits of the settled Pastorate, while retaining the obvious advantage of the itinerancy in making necessary changes easily and quietly.

Very many, perhaps a large majority, of the ministers of the Church are opposed to this and other proposed modifications. The itinerancy, they say, is the distinctive feature of Methodism, the cause of its wonderful success, and the keystone, so to speak, of its structure. The Brooklyn plan would destroy the itinerancy, and with the itinerancy destroyed, Methodism would be swallowed up by Congregationalism. Perhaps there might be a worse destiny, but the danger of such an event does not appear to be a very threatening one. It is difficult to see how the continuance of some scores of Pastors for an indefinite period in the same churches could bring about such a catastrophe, as the great body of the clergy would continue to revolve as regularly, doubtless, as they do now, and the system would not be injured because some would become fixed stars.

THE METHODIST ITINERANCY.

No more important question will be considered by the Methodist General Conference, which meets in Cincinnati in May, than that of modifying the itinerancy. The Methodist system of distributing Pastors is unique. It was not a product of thought, but of an emergency in the early history of Methodism, and was adopted as a part of the Methodist polity, and has been rigidly adhered to because in practice it was found to work successfully. As a theory, the itinerancy, in its connection with episcopacy, is an organized tyranny, and is destitute of any rational basis. The discretion of one man, the Bishop, is all that interposes to prevent the system from assuming the characteristics of a game of chance. Here are one hundred ministers and one hundred appointments. The ministers represent all grades of intellect and culture. Some are men of education and high intelligence, and endowed with special gifts; some are ignorant, dull, and inefficient. The churches also vary as greatly in character. By the operation of the system of settled pastorates, these churches and ministers would become associated in accordance with the law of fitness, the churches and the Pastors acting both as judges of that fitness and as contracting parties. But according to the itinerant theory, every Methodist minister is the possible Pastor of any church in the denomination. The poorest preacher of the hundred may, therefore, be appointed Pastor of the best church in the hundred, and the best preacher be sent to the poorest church. The Bishop has the unquestioned power to make such appointments, and to make them without the knowledge of church or Pastor. The practice now generally followed, at least east of the Alleghanies and in cities, of leading churches selecting their Pastors before Conference, leaving it only to the Bishop to sanction the engagement, is an innovation. As the system used to be carried out, the preacher was in utter ignorance as to where he would be sent until the appointments were read at the close of the Conference, and this is still true in some of the Conferences. The matter of secrecy is not now regarded as an essential element of the itinerancy, but the time-limit is as rigidly adhered to as it was fifty years ago.

Against the arbitrary rule which prescribes that no minister shall serve any one church longer than three years in six, a considerable opposition is being developed in all parts of the Church. Probably there are not half a dozen ministers in the Methodist Episcopal Church who would vote to do away with the itinerancy. The most vigorous opponents of the three-years rule recognize the advantages which the itinerancy possesses over the Congregational system, and seek only for such modifications of it as would remove some of its most obvious disadvantages. They believe that it can be amended so as to become the best system of pastoral appointment ever devised. The point at which the itinerancy seems to fail is in pastoral service. The