



ECCLESIASTICAL POLITICS

IN THE

Methodist Episcopal Church.

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A

SYMPOSIUM.

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## INTRODUCTION.

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**W**ITH a view to eliciting representative opinions from different sections of the Methodist Episcopal Church upon an admitted and growing evil, the following circular letter was sent out from the office of ZION'S HERALD, Boston, Mass., and the accompanying articles, received in reply, were published in the columns of that valuable weekly. In response to a general demand for more permanent publication, the articles have been gathered together in their present form, with the editorial comments of Dr. Parkhurst preceding each. The following is a copy of the letter named above:

MY DEAR DOCTOR: We wish to treat the subject of "Ecclesiastical Politics" in our columns. Our sole purpose is to conserve the interests of the denomination and to protect its good name.

We have decided on the following plan—to lay before our readers as the foundation for editorial

comment the convictions of several of the leading representatives of the church. To this end, we have divided our Methodism into six districts—the Pacific Slope, the Western, the Middle, New York, New England and Southern Districts.

We would be glad to have you write for the—— district, under no other restraint than that of conscience, and inspired by your love for the church.

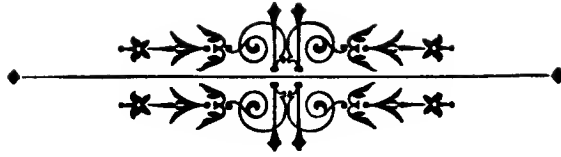
You might answer, in the main, the following inquiries: Is there good reason for the application of the phrase, “ecclesiastical politics,” to our denomination? How is it manifested? How may the tendency be overcome?

In order that each writer may be relieved from undesirable notoriety, criticism or misapprehension, his name will be withheld from the public. Each man will also write without knowledge of what the other has written, and no one of the articles will be published until all are received.

Hoping for a favorable reply, we remain for a Methodism “above reproach,”

Yours faithfully,

CHARLES PARKHURST.



## CHAPTER I.

### ECCLESIASTICAL POLITICS.

#### **Editorial Comment.**

On the first page we publish the first of the series of articles on this topic. There, also, will be found the request which evoked these utterances from the representatives of our church. A further word in frank explanation is here added. It is anxiously desired that our position be rightly understood. The exposure of shameful practices in our ecclesiastical life is made only from a feeling of stern necessity that something must be undertaken within the church to correct this harmful tendency. In the editor's extensive travels over our land to become personally acquainted with our aggressive Methodism, it was discovered that this one painful characteristic of our church-life filled loyal Metho-

dists with chagrin and foreboding. In many instances personal appeal was made that ZION'S HERALD seek to correct this wrong. It was appreciatively declared that the genius and history of this paper especially qualified it to "speak out" upon this great and growing evil. To serve the church, in its hour of distress, therefore, is our sole purpose.

Our readers are assured that the men who write are the elect servants of the church, and are prompted only by the desire to inaugurate a reform in this matter. Their names are withheld at our suggestion for the present, that the attention of the denomination may be concentrated upon the condition revealed rather than upon the persons who expose the situation. ZION'S HERALD assumes the responsibility for what each writer says.

We bespeak for our readers a prayerful and earnest co-operation in this crusade. We plead with our Methodist press to lead in a united endeavor to check this growing and scandalous practice. ZION'S HERALD will be content to play a most humble part if only the work of thorough reform be set in

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motion. We are anxious solely for the honor, good name and usefulness of the denomination. That our laity are feeling most keenly upon this subject is already evinced by the fact that we are in receipt of numerous letters, since our announcement of this series of articles, according us hearty approval and cheer in our purpose. God save our beloved Methodism from further exhibitions of such unholy aspirations and methods!





## From the Pacific Slope.

**A** TOPIC not clearly defined is apt to be cloudily discussed. What, then, are we to mean by ecclesiastical politics? The word “politics” had a reputable birth and honorable family connections. It meant “that branch of ethics which has for its subject the proper mode of governing a State, so as to secure its prosperity, peace and safety, and to attain, as perfectly as possible, the ends of civil society.” But, like the prodigal son, it fell into evil company and took on an odious sense. “Politics” became a synonym for artifice and craft. “Politician” came to describe a man whose zeal for partisan victories and personal emoluments towered high above authentic honor and manly conscience. Thus Shakespeare in *King Lear*:—

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“Get the glass eyes  
And, like a scurvy politician,  
Seem to see the things thou dost not.”

A politician, in the popular judgment, is a wire-worker, a man of plots and schemes in which “truth in the inward parts” is not called into council and even-handed justice lies like Lazarus at the gate, ragged, unhonored, and unfed. He is a time-server for personal and partisan ends. He is sinister, evasive, fawning.

“Off goes his bonnet to an oyster-wench,”

and he barter sycophancy for your vote.

What, then, are we to understand by ecclesiastical politics but schemes, finesse, combinations, bargains, in the interests of men or parties? To give to the term its etymological, undegenerate sense, were to command instant approval and remove the question from the domain of debate. If you please, then, we will understand by the phrase, electioneering, biased and not scrupulously truthful representations of men and measures, *ex-parte* statements, insinu-

ations, keen watching for opportunities which may be adroitly used to the disadvantage of the other party, and, in a word, all such sinister usages as consult factional triumph more than fraternal justice, the eye of God, and the day of judgment.

### “Is there Good Reason

for the application of the phrase, Ecclesiastical Politics, to anything prevalent in our denomination?”

Rare and promptly rebuked obtrusions of an evil should not be made the basis of a general charge; and the accusations of defeated aspirants may wisely be taken with generous abatements. Yet it were a slovenly counterfeit of charity which should be dim-sighted to “the first approach of sin” in church procedures. *Obsta principiis* is a maxim both ancient and wise. The very tip of the camel’s nose thrust in at the tent-door should encounter a sturdy blow; for the church and her ministry must be above suspicion.

I am not conscious of unhonored aspirations or mortifying defeats, and my opportunities for

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observing have been reasonably extensive. As a matter of observation, which was meant to be candid, I must regretfully answer the question in the affirmative. There is good reason for believing that political expedients have to a hurtful measure crept into the church which we delight to honor.

There is a natural—too natural—ambition that rarely tries to expound those Scriptures which command us in honor to prefer one another, and, for ourselves, to seek the honor that comes from God only. Such passages are obscure, and our “higher criticism” tacitly rejects them as inconsistent with reason. Since we all came out of the world, it is less surprising than deplorable if we have brought some of its taints and stains with us. That we have done so, is capable of proof; but it occurs to me that the argument may be shortened by taking up the second query submitted to me:—

**“How is it Manifested?”**

For, obviously, if it is manifested, it is there. *Ex nihilo nihil fit.* The reader may take “reason”

or "politics" for antecedent of "it" and reach the same goal.

Attend an Annual Conference during the session preceding an approaching General Conference, and keep your eyes and ears open. While the central current sweeps grandly on, you will notice little eddies and swirls of button-holing, whispering, knowing nods, confidential communications, manifold electioneering, with now and then a covert or open and unblushing request for support, enough to convince you that either the Lord's unselfish work has assumed novel phases, or personal ambition has entered the field to run and be glorified. It is a naked and unlovely fact that arts too low for Christians, and such as politicians possessed of a shred of manhood could hardly stoop to, are sometimes employed in the heat of a canvass. There are men in every Conference grandly incapable of such degrading mendicancy; but enough of the other sort figure in the scene to stigmatize the whole in the estimation of a multitude of not too-friendly lookers-on.

The introduction of lay representation—what-

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ever merits may be claimed for the measure—has intensified the wretched politicism which all true men must deprecate. One would think it quite enough that they should have their candidatures, coteries, heart-burnings, among themselves; but there have been cases in which laymen and laywomen have interfered actively and offensively in the election of ministerial candidates.

The General Conference is the great law-making body—at once the legislature and the supreme court of the church. Here, if anywhere, we have a right to look for gravity, sincerity, and sound speech that cannot be condemned. Nor do our anticipations prove at fault. Here are learning, labor, love. Here are the fearless, the faithful, the fervent. Here are the wisest of advisers, the ablest of debaters, the truest of Christians, the noblest of men. Here are the heroic, the humble, the self-forgetting, whose breath is purity, whose spirit is power. But (alas! that a few dead flies should damage so goodly a pot of ointment) here, even here, are sciolism, evasion, conceit. Here are the worst of advisers, the weakest

of debaters (*vox et proeterea nihil*), the shabbiest of Christians, the ignoblest of men. Here are the fanciful, the faithless, the formal. Here are the heady, the office-hunting, the self-adoring, whose breath is poisonous, and their spirit perverse. That their numbers are not relatively great is gladly conceded; but their influence is harmful far beyond their numerical strength. A jewel in a swine's snout is a malplacement which shocks the sense of fitness. How, then, about a swine's snout in a heap of jewels? One might be endured, and two not prove fatal; but a dozen or so would dim the lustre of the biggest and brightest heap of gems that ever laughed in the face of the sun.

Within the gift of the General Conference are many honorable and responsible offices. This fact appeals to the cupidity of some and the vanity of others. To those who will stoop to such arts, here is room for intrigue and political chicanery. If all who aspire to them were fit for these high offices, their names might be shaken in a bag and drawn out at a venture. But if, as in Origen's time, those

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are to be held as least worthy who are most aspiring, the plots and sinister combinations of the few greatly complicate and embarrass the functions of honorable representation, and should be met with a withering rebuke.

I ought for a moment to point to another province of churchly action where the disease of ecclesiastical politics threatens to become epidemic. I refer to the growing practice of making pastoral appointments in advance of Conference. Official boards and presiding elders usurp an authority for which Methodism gives no warrant—which, indeed, contravenes the vital principle of the system, and reduces the admirable plan of our fathers to a bastard Congregationalism, discreditable alike to both denominations, and fraught with cancerous wrong. If presiding elders are not capable of ascertaining the needs of the charges and the rights and interests of pastors without confining themselves to the whim of a beggarly half-dozen in the last quarterly conference, away with them, and fill their



places with men of capacity and courage. And if the cabinet is inadequate to the work assigned it, let the incumbents be displaced, or the degenerate system be restored to its original status, or the dishonored name exchanged for one better suited to the spurious thing which time-servers appear intent on parading before the world as authentic Methodism.

**“How May the Tendency be Overcome?”**

is the third and last question on which my very humble opinion is sought.

Ask me how to extirpate human depravity by resolution, reverse the inverted position of Uranus by vote, inject a modicum of sense beneath the skull of the average self-styled Christian scientist, or disburden higher criticism of the abysmal nonsense which clings to it like a barnacle and threatens to make it a festering, critical abortion, and I may be bold enough to answer you with guesses. But this query appalls my confidence. I can do no more than suggest, in naked outline, a few repressive

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measures which may be adopted with some hope of effect:—

1. Cast the itch of office-seeking and partisanship out of your own hearts. Stand so near to God that the glory of His favor will shine utterly away the shadowy phantoms which captivate the unsundered fancy.

2. Seek no office for ourselves or our relatives. Cherish at the heart's very centre the conviction that no office under the stars is worth enough to be bought by the sacrifice of the self-respect lost in asking for it. That which does not come to us freely, is dross.

3. Exalt your estimate of Christian manhood, and *believe* that

“Unless above himself he can  
Erect himself, how poor a thing is man!”

The sentiment that

“The man is mean whom staves and strings can raise,”  
should be as real and as present as our names.

4. Enter into no cliques and coteries.

5. Vote no man into an office for which he makes himself a candidate. It was a wise thought in the early church that office is unsafely entrusted to those who eagerly seek it. In the church of the Crucified the office should seek the man.

6. Suffer no lay-committee to represent a charge at Conference, unless its members — agreeably to Bishop Fitzgerald's admirable test—habitually attend the prayer and class meetings, take the church papers, and throw the weight of their influence on the spiritual side of churchly life.

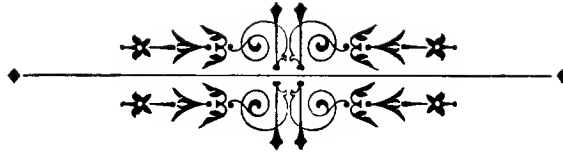
7. To every man who fawns about you and asks your vote, apply a fraternal caustic which will keep you in kindly remembrance. Do it Christianly and heartily for his good. And may the Head of the church bless your effort to counterwork the ecclesiastical politics which infect its spiritual health, break the shield of its strength, and blunt the edge of the sword of its excellency!

8. Let every delegate be too much a man to be carried in any man's pocket, bought, sold, swapped off, herded, or halter-led by any man or for any man.

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9. Let every man cast his ballot for officers, “unangered and unawed,” uncaucused, unbiased, silently, prayerfully, in the fear of God, and leave the counted ballots to express the judgment of the Conference without the insolence of patronizing advice and the infamy of partisan electioneering.





## CHAPTER II.

### UTTERLY SUBVERSIVE.

#### Editorial Comment.

The articles in our columns on “Ecclesiastical Politics,” written by the most able and reputable men in the church, reveal a condition of things which not only scandalizes the denomination, but is utterly subversive of the spirit of Christianity. Our Methodism marks a special revival of apostolic Christianity. The history of the work of Wesley and his co-laborers reads like the chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. It was because of this fact that the great Chalmers characterized Methodism as “Christianity in earnest.” Our denomination has, therefore, joyfully believed that it was commissioned afresh by the Son of God to bring this world to allegiance to Him. Everything, therefore, was to

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be subordinated to this divine mission. The mind and purpose of Christ, the self-denial and abnegation of our Lord, were to be incarnated in our ministry. Renunciation of self—indeed, the promised extinction of self—is the invariable requisition for admission into our pulpits. By the sacred declaration of intent through the most solemn and public vows, our ministers are inducted into a fellowship of Christian service in which they are to think of nothing, know nothing, and labor for nothing but to do the will of God in the salvation of mankind. In view of these inspiring facts, how odious and humiliating become the practices which the writers of these articles describe! It is thus recognized that such modern self-seeking in the church is thoroughly un-Christian, utterly subversive of the principles upon which our ministry is constituted, and destructive of that spiritual and aggressive life which is our only birthright.

Let the great majority of Methodists, who are still loyal to the true purpose of the church, so assert themselves in disapprobation of this spirit of

self-seeking, that the minority who now trouble our Israel shall be driven into silent contempt and neglect. Let it be enough to condemn any man that he presumes to let it be known that he desires to attain to any position in the gift of the church.



## From the Western District.

**N**O ecclesiastical system furnishes more favorable conditions for “politics” than the Methodist Episcopal. The connectional polity of our church, with the multiplicity of offices necessitated by our very connectionalism, gives room for temptations to personal ambition. There is such a thing in our system as “official position”—something practically unknown to Presbyterianism and Congregationalism, and to the Baptist denomination. In either of these denominations a minister of the Gospel cannot expect to rise higher than the pulpit and pastorate. But it is coming to be quite the talk that our Methodist ministry consider the pastorate as of minor importance—only a stepping-stone to a semi-secular agency, or to a secretaryship, or an



editorship, or the episcopacy. It is also said that Methodist ministers who have once been elevated (?) to official position, consider it an affliction and humiliation to be sent back and down to the ranks of the pastorate. The Methodist Episcopal polity is a wheel within a wheel, but there is a crank and an assistant crank to every wheel, and an applicant, nay, a score of applicants, for every crank. Ecclesiastical politics manifests itself in the itch for office. Nothing is more pitiable than a minister of the Gospel poisoned with ambition for official position. Perhaps he is more worthy our commiseration than our censor who is found standing at the quadrennial corner in the shabbiness of his increasing ministerial inefficiency, holding out the battered hat of a long candidacy for the pittance of "Anything, please, just so it be an office." It is alarmingly remarkable how many of these beggars-for-office every Annual Conference can pour forth upon the long-suffering world. It is almost laughable to see with what pious convictions, deep, after-prayer convictions, some ministers are drawn away from the

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pastorate to the higher opportunity and wider field of official position! And the piety of their convictions is excelled only by the persistency of their self-supported candidacy.

It would seem that the sacred and responsible office of the episcopacy might be above the aim and grasp of personal ambition, but, alas! it is even intimated that ministers have been known to seek the office before the office had ever dreamed of seeking them. While it is acknowledged that such ministers are unworthy the office, may there not be danger that sooner or later just this brood of moral pigmies will begin to rattle around in the episcopal office if ecclesiastical politics continues to develop in Methodism?

The Annual Conference preceding the General Conference is coming to be

### **A Wire-Pulling Campaign**

in ecclesiastical politics. Electioneering paralyzes business; preachers are at it; college presidents and professors are at it; editors and secretaries are at it;

presiding elders can hardly escape the contagion. And, with the marked exception of the candidates for General Conference, the brethren seem to lose their spiritual tone. If it were not for the extraordinary piety and prayerfulness of the candidates, the religious life of the Conference would be utterly demoralized. It has been known to take a Conference four years to recover from this demoralization caused by the envyings and strife of ambitious ecclesiastical politicians.

There are Methodists who make bold to intimate that the presiding eldership has been made a nucleus of a very lively and potent form of ecclesiastical politics. To be out-and-out, who doubts that the large proportion of presiding elders in the General Conference is due to "politics?" Who doubts that, as a rule, the presiding elder is elected a delegate through the power of his position rather than through the power of his personality? It is most noticeable that when the presiding elders step back into the ranks of the pastorate, they are seldom thought of as the most intellectually and spiritually representative men

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of the Conference. Complaints are heard against the favoritism of certain presiding elders who appoint their men and man their appointments with an eye to the reciprocity feature of ecclesiastical politics. It is said that presiding elders have been known to "remember" their "political" friends, and to "pay back" their political opponents. Whether justly or not, hints have been expressed that two presiding elders have, on occasion, found it profitable to pool their issues, and for each to "deliver" his district to the other, and for both thereby to enjoy the honors of election.

It is notorious that certain Conferences are divided up into striving factions, each faction having a chronic, weather-beaten, peripatetic candidate for General Conference as a leader. Doubtless Conferences in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Illinois, Nebraska, Indiana and Ohio, as well as in New York and Massachusetts, have suffered experiences along this line. In some of our Conferences the spiritual life of the church and the fraternal harmony of the ministry have been almost destroyed by the unyield-

ing, domineering ambition of ecclesiastical politicians who believe in the policy of "rule or ruin."

How may we successfully answer the intelligent layman who charges that too large a ratio of General Conference delegates is composed of successful ecclesiastical politicians who owe their position to what the vulgar call "wire-pulling?" There may be an alarming significance in the fact that in a delegation of five or six ministers only one is a pastor, while the great majority are presiding elders and office-holders. When agents, secretaries, editors, presidents and professors of colleges, and all the presiding elders, are scrambling for a place in General Conference and are using their official position to further their personal ambitions, there seems to be no chance for the man who is doing the great work of a successful preacher and pastor. Our soul-winners, our preachers of revival power and saintliness, are rarely honored with an election to General Conference. As a rule, with exceptions, the ecclesiastical politicians snatch all those honors and are accorded the front seats in the official synagogue.

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It is not to be understood that pastors are all above the ambition for office. It would not be difficult to find pastors who are willing to go to General Conference, or assume the responsibilities of an agency, or secretaryship, or even of the episcopacy. Indeed, some Conferences have been greatly wearied by office-hunting pastors. What nuisances these men are in a Conference! How irrepressible! What insufferable bores they are; what parliamentary wind-bags; what Sir Oracle egotists; what incessant lung! But this is all harmless in comparison with

### The "Bossism" of Certain Men

who act as if they own the Conference and carry its votes in their pockets. Fortunate is that Conference which has but one "boss!" There is trouble when more appear, and the Conference is split up into factions. We know of Conferences where a minister must choose sides the moment he enters, and must be known as a "Smith man," or a "Jones man," or a "Brown man." The Bishop must make his appointments so that Smith and Smith's men, or

Brown and Brown's men, are not favored or neglected beyond the rival faction. And thus the "politics" of the Conference largely fixes the appointments.

These are some of the manifestations of that curse to the church known as ecclesiastical politics.

It may be objected that such expressions as "Conference bosses," "ecclesiastical politicians," "ministerial wire-pullers," etc., are too harsh to be applied to ministers of the Gospel. I wish there were harder and more contemptuous terms to be used. Of all the politicians that infest the land, ecclesiastical politicians are the most unscrupulous and dangerous, the most hypocritical, unfair, and demoralizing in methods. Ecclesiastical politics is the greatest evil our Methodist Episcopal system has to fear. It is no disparagement of a church polity to affirm that its success and permanent efficiency depend upon the wisdom, piety, unselfishness, and consecration of its ministry, and that an ambitious, self-seeking ministry will wreck and ruin it. This must be said of our great system. It will be mighty for righteousness with a holy, self-crucified ministry;

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it will perish with a place-seeking ministry corrupted by ecclesiastical politics.

To say that the tendency to "politics" is to be overcome by a greater devotion to the spiritual mission of the church, would be to utter a truism, yet how many of these difficult problems may and must be settled by

### **A More Thorough Consecration to Christ!**

How shall we overcome the tendency of the ministry to worldliness, and secularity, and ambition? Answer that question, and in it you will find an answer to the question, "How shall we overcome the tendency to ecclesiastical politics?"

Again, overcome the tendency to multiply official positions. Reduce by one-half, if not by two-thirds, the number of delegates to General Conference. Three men can represent Michigan, or Illinois, or Rock River, or New York, or Philadelphia, or New England Conference, as well as six.

Reduce the number of secretaryships and con-



solidate the benevolences. Give the agencies and editorships to laymen.

Diminish rather than increase the appointment-fixing power of the presiding elders.

Increase the legislative power of the laity.

Liberate the official press from the domination of ecclesiastical politicians, and let it be more emphatically the organ, not of the ecclesiastical officeholders, but the organ of the people.

Limit eligibility to General Conference to once in eight years, or to only twice in succession.

Preserve the two-thirds rule in election of bishops.

Vote against the chronic candidate and the ecclesiastical politician.

Don't elect more bishops than are needed simply to provide for candidates.

Locate the Conference "boss." Elect spiritual, soul-winning, high-toned, intelligent pastors to make up the majority of the General Conference.

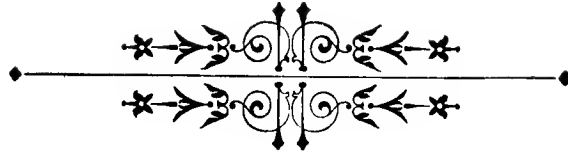
Let bishops, people, pastors and press exalt the pastorate above every official position.

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Don't permit it to be taken for granted that one official position is necessarily but a stepping-stone to another, nor that it is an affliction and a humiliation to step out of any office in the church up into the active pastorate.

A little more religion all around would help. More power and less machinery. Less self and more Christ.





## CHAPTER III.

### APPREHEND AND APPLY.

#### Editorial Comment.

It is often necessary to give line upon line, and precept upon precept, that one's purpose be not misunderstood. For this reason the circular letter which called forth the articles on "Ecclesiastical Politics" is kept before our readers. It was also stated editorially that the only purpose of ZION'S HERALD was to arouse a public sentiment *within the church* that should prevent the continuance of such practices in the future.

As was expected, the minority, who alone are guilty in these premises, endeavor to parry the force of these articles with the charge that ZION'S HERALD is endeavoring to scandalize the denomination. To such accusation most emphatic denial is made. Will

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our readers please again critically examine the circular letter—the only request and instruction sent to these writers? Conscience and love of the church solely were to control their pens. ZION'S HERALD would have been intensely gratified if every man could have declared that the current rumors and reports were false. The revelations are made by the purest, ablest, and best-beloved representatives in the church. These men are as jealous of the honor of the denomination as any persons within its fold. To complain of the effort to correct these glaring evils, is to imitate the faithless Hebrews who condemned the prophets for their words of rebuke and warning. Will our readers, then, fully apprehend the situation?

How shall such disclosures be treated?

Our church has only to address itself, with its large and overwhelming majority of innocent and heroic ministers and laymen, to the application of the remedy needed. The denomination can surely cure these evils within its own household. These practices are probably no worse than would have

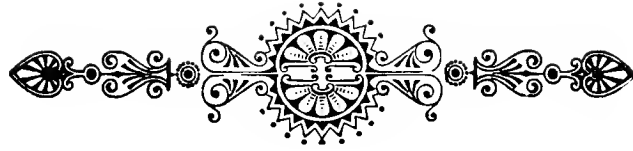
crept into any ecclesiastical body having so large a membership and so many elective offices at its bestowal. That the men elected are held in such high repute by the church and the general public, is evidence of the honorable position which the denomination holds in the thought and affection of Christendom.

Self-seeking is clearly the fungus-growth. Excision is the only remedy. Let it be applied in all our borders. There is no pharisaism in moving for this reform. The drastic remedy may be as much needed in our own circle as anywhere. It should best begin there. To build over against one's own household is as good and effective tactics as when Nehemiah gave the order. Let him who has been culpable be so no more. Let all Conference slates, old or new, be broken. Discard all "claims" for promotion. Jesus Christ forbade Gentile ambitions and expectations, saying distinctly: "But so it shall not be among you." There is no such thing in the Christian system as a "claim." It is purely a fiction and a pretense. It would be well if many

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noble and neglected men could normally gravitate to recognition.

In this week's issue a man long held in highest and loving esteem by the church speaks his own frank word. It is gratifying that it is a conservative and apologetic utterance. Next week we shall hear from the New York District. It will be a characteristic and forceful message from one who has earned the right to speak for his church.



## From the Middle District.

IT is plain enough that ecclesiastical politics must be like any other politics in source and motive. A church which has elective officers will have more or less politics employed to “select the right men” to fill the places. It is, in fact, an incident of all democratic organization. There are political elements in the election of a pope, because a pope is chosen by votes. The case is the same for any other elective ecclesiastical office in any church. The politics may be good or bad in any instance; but there are always *tendencies* prevailing and fixing the character of the politics. Bad politics and good politics tend alike to self-perpetuation. This is true in public life and in church life. No sudden changes are likely to happen; good or bad tendencies grow

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from small beginnings. These general suggestions make it easier to approach

### Our Methodist Politics.

We elect our highest officers by a double election. Bishops are chosen in General Conference by delegates who are chosen in Annual Conferences. Most of us know that the elections of delegates may be politically affected by the friends of candidates for the episcopacy, and also that there is a very active canvass for the votes of delegates in the General Conferences. Bishops have been chosen without any but the most rudimentary political canvass, and that feeble imitation of politics has been confined to conversations among delegates a day or two before the election in the General Conference. We have probably outlived this simplicity. The appointing power of the bishops makes their selection in General Conference a matter of deep and vital concernment to ministers and to churches. Lay and clerical delegates agree that the episcopal elections are the most important matter committed to their charge. A good ecclesiastical politician recently said to the



writer that the next General Conference would be unimportant "because no bishops will be chosen."

Apart from this highest function of the General Conference, the election of delegates in the Annual Conferences has its special and peculiar provocations to ecclesiastical politics. In some cases Conferences are actively canvassed all the time, the whole interim of General Conferences being improved to secure the choice of particular delegates. In rare cases (and the writer has personal knowledge of more than one) the selection of presiding elders and the fixing of many other appointments turn upon the politics concerned in selecting the next delegation to the General Conference. Of course the bishop presiding is not a party to these manipulations, nor is it suggested that the appointments are ever "unfit to be made." We are now so rich in men of gifts that "bad" appointments need not be the result of politics. The influences which arrange the episcopal choices are always obscure and often very delicate and adroit. Wherever political management is highly developed, the presiding elders

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have a large influence to be used or counteracted by industrious politicians. The writer knows two Conferences in which the strength of parties is measured by experts in this way: “ ‘A’ has four elders and ‘B’ has only three.” There is no intention herein to accuse the brethren. The situation spoken of exists in General Conferences. Its morals and religion are not necessarily bad *on both sides*, though probably unsanctified (more or less) on one side.

This brings up the question of

### Conference Leaders.

Every Conference has its leading men—and these men are leaders, often in a political sense. The leader aspires to influence and to the honors of the Conference. To gain these things, he helps his brethren in various ways. He “speaks a good word” for them to the bishop at a critical moment. If the “good word” is followed by a satisfactory appointment, the leader may claim the credit; if it is otherwise followed, he may plead that he did all he could for his friend and client. If this leader is to maintain his place at the front, or to get to the

front, he must usually have strong friends in the eldership and must keep his rivals out of this office. It happens that a Conference comes to have rival leaders, and that many of their brethren are made uncomfortable through their neutral situation. The better appointments are wanted for the partisans in the two camps, and the neutrals are left to take what is left unless the bishop penetrates the secrets of the leaders and discomfits their organized ranks. A Conference split into two parties on a personal issue may well become a good Conference to transfer from. The selections of presiding elders may give rise to a battle royal, depriving the bishop of sleep and keeping up a fever of excitement throughout the session of the Conference. There are cases in which lay influences are employed to secure the episcopal decision for the favorites of one leader; and there is a more or less authentic tale that once upon a time two leaders arrayed cohorts of laymen face to face on the field of controversy.

A Conference leader who leads must have the appearance of great influence with the bishop, with

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leading laymen in the churches, and with the presiding elders. He is practically the attorney of his followers in these three courts, and gains the decisive part of his votes by such service, or through the belief that he can render it. (Let it be said just here that these statements apply only to rare cases.) In one case, a critic of a Conference leader affirmed that this leader could sit in his study and dictate half the appointments by influencing official boards. It is certainly true that the critic believed what he said; probably the leader could influence only a few appointments.

It should be remembered that the gravest element of danger in the politics concerning leaders is that it is wholly personal. The rival leaders do not differ on any question of church policy. The only thing at issue is, "Who shall be greatest?" Such a condition of politics in public life is

### **The Most Dangerous Possible.**

So long as principles are held up as at least the pretended stakes, there is an honorable ground for

contention. But a leader who must virtually say, "I am better than my rival," is in a perilous position himself, and he puts the public in a more perilous position. For himself, his little self, no truly good man can make much of a fight over an election. The minister who does it will certainly fall from grace more or less plainly. And so it happens that the typical Conference leader is seldom or never conspicuous for piety, and is generally marked by a certain coarseness, indelicacy and egotism. It is very rare that he is a leader because he is the best man—he is often a thorough demagogue, flattering follies, encouraging if not originating falsehoods to injure a rival, and suggesting a doubt whether he has any right to be in the ministry, to say nothing of leading the ministers of a Conference.

These statements do not describe the general condition of ecclesiastical politics, but rather certain phases of the Conference life; and it is noteworthy that when the leaders rise to office or depart for the other world, a simpler and more fitting style of politics takes the place of the florid and coarse kind

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herein described. This coarse type begins and ends with a personal career in a Conference. The removal of the one aspiring man restores the peaceful order of things which it displaced for a limited period. While, therefore, the occasion for some kind of politics always exists in our democratic church organization, the occasion for bad politics comes seldom, and never stays very long in the same Conference. The badness of the politics is mostly the badness of a few men; if they handle a majority, it is because the majority are deceived or have good reasons for their preferences. No doubt an ambitious leader may have ways of gaining his ends which are rather suspected than known, and an honest Methodist minister will give his leader the benefit of the doubt.

The writer believes that he has stated

### **The Most Extreme Cases**

of Methodist politics, omitting all rhetorical coloring. Hard things are said by defeated men who hardly believe these things on their knees before God; and often a harsh critic is only a disappointed competitor,

made bitter by adversity. If the view here taken is correct, bad elements in church politics are transient in their reign and in their effects. The writer knows Conferences where personal battles have raged around Conference elections for a decade or more, but in which no appearance of personal politics can now be identified. In short, our bad politics arise from personal ambitions which, as a rule, do not clothe themselves with demagogic dress in the person of a Christian minister. Our ministers, as a rule, are neither free from a desire to rise nor consumed by a passion for honors or to rule the church. The general wholesomeness of their spirit makes the task of the ecclesiastical politician difficult.

Many, if not most, of our church leaders are such without any effort on their own part to command attention and influence. They are gifted, and so win the respect of their brethren in the ministry and of the people who attend on their ministry. Conspicuous examples of this kind of leadership were Bishops Simpson and Kingsley, both sons of the middle region in which this is written. No one

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ever thought of either as a Conference boss, and after they became known, the only question about either was what good work he should be set to do for the whole church. The middle region has produced other leaders of this type. The other sorts of leaders have had brief reigns and passed into obscurity. The church, like other large institutions, needs men who interest themselves in the general welfare, who are not content simply to do well the tasks assigned them from year to year, but watch and work for the general prosperity, study the law and economy of the church, aid in its growth by wise counsels, and fit themselves to bear the larger responsibilities. In the presence of a man of this type, bad politics keeps to narrow ways and but feebly affects general feeling and Conference action.

If our piety were a thing of history, the church might easily become a scene of partisan strife and perish in its immorality. But our ministry is constantly replenished with men professing personal piety. This profession is made on the threshold of the Conference, and this piety is the only reason



for crossing that threshold. To an ambitious and self-seeking man our ministry presents no attractions. To the rare exception, the high motives of his brethren present an obstacle which is rarely overcome, and only for short periods.

It may be profitably considered, too, that the influence which laymen exercise upon appointments and elections

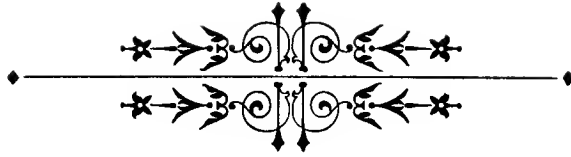
### **Tends to Repress Demagogical Politics.**

The layman is not always wholly sanctified, but he very rarely allows himself to behave in the church as he would in a party caucus—he reverences too much the sacred character of the church and the high calling of her ministry. Nor is it of record that an official board ever selected its pastor from political considerations—they simply seek for “the best man for their work.” It is also true that while the election of bishops is an occasion and cause of politics, the powers of the episcopacy and its independence arrest and defeat bad politics in nearly all cases. Leaders who actually made the appointments, and

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who could agree among themselves, might easily make spoil of our Zion. Here, too, unregenerate politics find a strong barrier to success. In short, it is only by general backsliding, or by a demagogic reorganization of the church, that ecclesiastical politics can become a great and general peril to Methodism. If every place in the church, from the poorest pastorate to the episcopacy, were to be re-assigned by votes whenever the proper Conference assembled, then bad politics would gain an immense advantage. Under the present polity so many other influences oppose with effect the ecclesiastical politician, that he never gains any success except by concealing his true character.





## CHAPTER IV.

### A BIOGRAPHY WITH OPINIONS.

#### Editorial Comment.

Dr. Crooks, in his biography of Bishop Simpson, in which a really great life is fittingly portrayed, says of his election to the episcopacy: “In an autobiographic sketch, without date, which he appears to have dictated to some one, he states more in detail the circumstances of his election, and modestly mentions his refusal to as much as try, by word or act, to influence votes—*an example to be commended in these days of ecclesiastical office-seeking.*” (The italics are ours, the opinion is Dr. Crooks’ ) Bishop Simpson’s statement is then quoted, which is: “I had never solicited in any manner a vote as a delegate to the General Conference, or for any office connected with it.” And

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then Dr. Crooks adds another opinion: "He had reached the episcopate with clean hands and spotless fame. Contrary to the practice of our times, he was an active and speaking member of the Conference that elected him. He did not consider himself to be doomed to silence because he was a possible or probable candidate for high place." That is strong language to go into a biography that is to enter our homes and to be read by our Methodist people. We were not aware, however, that Dr. Crooks had become in any degree wanting in his love for the church or in his loyalty to it.

Aye, this revered man speaks thus frankly only because his love for the church constrains him. The modest and distrustful attitude of Simpson in connection with the great office to which he was elected, reminds us of Hedding protesting with such sincerity as broke forth into passionate sobs that he was unworthy the episcopate; and the genial Baker walking the streets of Boston arm in arm with his dearest friend—that noble man, Dr. L. D. Barrows—after his election, and declaring with painful and

devout earnestness that he was so illy qualified for the position that he could never consent to be consecrated.

That is the kind of littleness which makes the possessor really great.

## AN AMUSING SIDE.

### Editorial Comment.

The most serious subjects have their amusing side. This fact is illustrated in the treatment which the articles on "Ecclesiastical Politics" are receiving from some of our most thoughtful readers. The guesses at identity are most laughable. One reader is sure that certain unmistakable peculiarities of style reveal one author. Another reader is confident that the writer of one of the series was a defeated aspirant in the last General Conference. A distinguished jurist is accredited as the author of the contribution in last week's issue. Suffice it to say, that every attempted identification is wrong and every characterization is wide of the mark. The reader who writes of "Out West" as of some un-

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known critic would be amazed to look into the face of the man. There will be some surprises all around if, as some of these authors request, their identity be revealed. Our readers are again assured that these are not disappointed men who thus write, but that they now possess, in a marked degree, the confidence and love of the church. Their only purpose is to awaken the denomination to resolute and successful purpose in this urgent reform. In this issue the New York District speaks its own frank and forceful word. New England will next be heard.



## From the New York District.

**W**HAT is to be done to save the church from the ecclesiastical politician? That question does not contemplate the man who is devising the improvement of the polity and its adaptation to the age; but the place-seeker who makes all measures and men as far as possible serve his preferment. To deny that there is such a *genus homo*, is to go squarely into the face of the facts.

At recent General Conferences attention has been called to this character. The warning was met in each instance by an instant and general denial. That men who preach a gospel of self-denial and of "preferring one another in honor" should be guilty of plotting for their personal advancement, as pro-

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fane politicians do, was too startling and shocking to be believed or admitted. But the disclaimer did not quiet the heart of the church. The fear and distrust remained. Delegates returning were compelled to admit in home circles certain significant facts, and were dumb before the inferences drawn. Every year the evidence increases and multiplies that our great church is threatened by the politician seeking his own. We know of no well-informed minister, except the man who seeks to cover his tracks by denial, who does not at times express his anxiety upon the matter.

A thing so commonly talked and universally admitted in private, and so vehemently and indignantly denied in public, would justly subject us to the charge of Jesuitism were it not that the explanation is to be found in the fact that the public statements outran the actual belief of the church and presented the evil in proportions too great for acceptance. It was a shock. It was hoped that the evil was not so great as it sounded. For when told out loud it sounded very bad.



The charge was so bad that even the place-seeker himself was startled, and said, "It cannot be!" He thought how monstrous it was for a man who preached on Sunday, "Seek first the kingdom of God," to be scheming all the week to turn that kingdom to the account of personal ambition and gain and make of it merchandise, and he was compelled by what little of the Master's spirit was left in him to say, "Is it I?"

It is

### **An Awkward and Unpleasant Admission**

for gospel ministers to be compelled to make, and we can appreciate the spirit of the protest at the General Conferences. But the evil is only fostered and nurtured by such blindness—a blindness that will not see. None too soon now can the peril be met. And at any personal cost should it be withstood, for it works with mighty force and soon will have passed beyond control. "But it is a delicate subject to handle." Such have been the answers of men whose ability and positions render it fitting that

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they voice the alarm of the church and warn, "Hands off!"

To say that men have in recent years candidated for the office of bishop, and allowed the politician's methods to be used to promote their election, might seem to reflect upon the present incumbents of that office. Were that true, cannot the people be trusted to discriminate? Do they not know the men of that office of the past and present to whom such suspicions cannot attach? And if it should chance that there ever came to the position an incumbent through such means, or generally suspected of such methods, ought he not to be made singularly and uncomfortably conspicuous, that he may keenly feel that his presence is odious?

With such a jealous eye should our episcopacy be guarded, and so fearlessly should all methods to secure the place upon the part of any man be rebuked, that no man will dare enter the sacred precinct until he is called. A politician ought to feel as out of place and lonesome in our episcopal office as did the man at the feast without a wedding gar-

ment on. The men who are there by the voice of the church have nothing to fear, and will thank the church for keeping upon all approaches to the office a white light. It is due to them that ascension to that great station be made impossible to unworthy men by any means, and to worthy men by unworthy means.

There is, also, the fear upon the part of some prudent souls that one may be charged with ulterior purposes himself if he speak upon this subject. Such accusations will come only from the politician who is foiled, that he may divert the attention of the church from his own conduct, and pursue his mole-like methods unmolested. Men who wait for their motives to be commended by the enemies of their cause are not made of the stuff to win battles or lead in great reforms. It is enough that one be conscious of his own integrity and the justice of his cause.

It would not be strange if some who appreciate the force of the evil are kept from resisting it by what they feel to be the just politic consideration

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that their usefulness may be imperiled. They know the power and persistency of a politician—how he assumes the angel-of-light character while using the tongue of a Titus Oates in the dark. They know that a demagogue is skillful in the “martyr’s pose,” and will adroitly claim himself to have been wronged, “though he himself the wrong has done,” and leave his just accusers accused of persecution. They cannot hope to cope with him. They are afraid of being destroyed by him. But, remember, a certain man got into awful trouble once because he had no better excuse than “I was afraid.”

The peril

### **Involves the Very Existence of the Church**

as a spiritual force in the land; and its resistance and removal is worth the price of any position or caste. It becomes a question of extending our glorious mission, or of constructing a piece of ecclesiasticism for purposes of preferment. Hale, in his “Fall of the Stuarts,” says of Spain at the close of the 17th century: “Every adventurous spirit had been

enthralled by the desire of becoming rich. Its race of statesmen and warriors died out." That is what office-seeking in the church means to the power and spiritual aggressiveness of our grand Methodism. *The great men die out.* It means that our young men are not to emphasize spiritual works and the salvation of men, but they are to find a worthy goal in some General Conference office. Success will be measured by the rapidity of their advancement to a secretaryship or editor's chair, or to the episcopacy. They are to hear their talents discussed with reference to such possibilities. Purity, spirituality, power to persuade men to be saved, are all to be sacrificed to place-hunting. Our great ship is to stick fast on the ways instead of launching into the open sea, giving her clean white wings to the breeze for glorious heavenward voyage.

The principles upon which preferments are both sought and made among us are often grotesque, and place weak men in line for promotion. Precedents are urged. Positions already occupied are made the occasion and argument for pushing men forward for

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the suffrages of their brethren, who, weighed in the balances alone, would be found sadly wanting. Men are taken up upon tickets because they have positions that command a following, or by social qualities group about themselves numerous friends whose influence and votes may be hoped for. Such men, who by the weight of their own ability would never gravitate to these high offices and responsibilities, are forced upon the church by "combines" of friends. And thus counsels of men of worth, of great intellect and full knowledge, are lost to the church.

It is notorious that often in recent years the attempt has been made to put the colored men into the scales in a heap to decide by balance of power the light-weight office-seeker's fortunes. Some men set up *claims*, and those who hope to profit by their promotion urge these claims for them; when the fact is plain enough that no man has any claim upon the church that was not liquidated the day he was converted through her instrumentality. We can claim nothing; we owe everything. There is no position

that belongs to any man until he can fill it to greater advantage to the church than any other man—all things considered. And the church is to tell *him* of that fact. He is not to tell the church. No man should dare to think of himself or set his friends to work for himself for a position of so great trust. He will have responsibility enough when, recognized by common consent, the great denomination sends for him. It is far better to wait and grow big enough to be seen and felt and called than to be thrust upon an unwilling church with immature or ill-adapted or inadequate powers.

### **Premature Greatness is a Calamity**

to any man. Some very able men fill their friends with distrust and anxious inquiry as to their fitness for promotion by their restless spirit. Zaccheus no need to have climbed into that sycamore tree. The Master was going to his house that day any way.

Oh, for that time to come, when the places of men in the church shall be determined by their fitness and the demands of the church! As that other

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law of gravitation makes the orbits and magnitudes of the stars, so may the gravitation of worth and ability assign men to their spheres here, uninfluenced by zealous friend, unhindered by scheming demagogue.

The causes of this growing evil are:—

1. Human nature unsanctified, such as Christ had to rebuke at the beginning, when there was a strife among them over who should be accounted greatest. Human nature is the same in all ages, just as darkness and dirt are the same.

2. The growth of the church in lucrative and honorable positions tends to imperil her character and work: (1) By attracting unworthy men to the ministry. This has been so in all ages; (2) By exciting ambition in the hearts of good men to seek prominence and emolument, instead of the true mission of sacrifice and usefulness, by exalting officialism above the pastorate.

The remedy? It is suggested and answered by the causes of the evil. Nobody can cope with human nature but God. The church must be kept spiritual;



and its spirituality must be ethical, of the type that "in honor prefers one another." Mere gush and camp-meeting enthusiasm will not do it. It must be so bright and clean and Christ-like as to shame the place-seekers.

Cut down officialism. Make it less a fetich. In some way get rid of the long line of lieutenants and dependents that stand waiting for the advancement of those ahead of them, that they may drop into the vacated places—the places which, with the strongest self-motive, they help to make vacant by political work, and upon which they place a claim by political service.

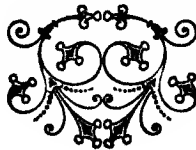
### **The Difficult and Hopeless Part**

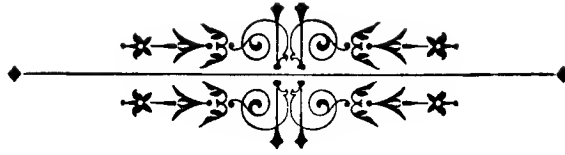
of this whole problem is that the "sub" waits to be the chief, the assistant to be the principal, the secretary and editor to be the bishops. The "heeler and claquer" of the General Conference expects his reward, and generally gets it.

The piercing eye of the great church should be turned upon this whole miserable business and the

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brand of her condemnation and wrath be burned deep into it by the fire of that relentless eye. It should disqualify a man for office in the church of God, to seek after that office.





## CHAPTER V.

### THE ECLIPSE OF THE EGO.

#### Editorial Comment.

There is no fact that so clearly and unmistakably reveals the nearness of the individual soul to God, as the eclipse of the *ego*. John, the beloved disciple, most happily illustrates this truth. In writing his Gospel, when describing scenes in which he had most active and honorable part, he cannot mention his own name, much less parade his personality. There is nothing more significant and beautiful in the New Testament than the eclipse of the *ego* by the tested servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. The real Christ-man cannot be an egotist. Such an exhibition is impossible in the soul where Christ lives and reigns. He, therefore, who would press himself into prominence in the church, is wholly

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unlike those who have lived nearest their divine Lord. This fact should bear its forceful lesson and solemn warning to the few who have come to trouble the peace and tarnish the good name of our Methodism by the irrepressible exaltation of the *ego*.

The series of contributions which are now being published in our columns, so unmistakably photograph the self-seeker that the declaration is made on every side: "Thou art the man." The New England District, this week, speaks its characteristically clear, courageous and judicious word. The Southern District, in our next, will conclude these prophetic utterances. The impression made by these articles is remarkable. The sentiment of protest and revolt which has been awakened against such un-Christian practices is so deep and intense, that it will not be effaced. Let the *ego*, then, be fully eclipsed. May the whole church arise to the victorious acclaim:—

"Higher than the highest heavens,  
Deeper than the deepest sea,  
Lord, Thy love at last has conquered,  
None of self, and all of Thee."



## From the New England District.

**L**IKE poor Tray in the fable, men devoted to politics have, from exceptionable association and service, earned a bad name. Especially is this true of ecclesiastical politics—a phrase used almost exclusively in a bad sense.

In the civil domain, the term has a double meaning, a good as well as a bad signification. Politics treats of the science of government, or the practical regulation of the affairs of the state or nation, as well as the manipulation of parties, the control of factions, the advancement of candidates, and the contrivances and trickeries by which the interests of individuals, or cliques and rings, are promoted. The first is the work of the statesman, who aims at the national well-being by open and honorable means; the second that

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of the partisan, who has a personal or party aim, setting, if need be, the interests of the one or few against those of the State. The office of the statesman is beneficial; that of the partisan pernicious, insomuch that the very term has an odious suggestiveness.

In the ecclesiastical domain, on the other hand, the term is usually employed to describe the work of the party manager, the manœuvres of individuals, or knots of men, to compass selfish ends, or to elevate members of their coterie to desirable offices. For this reason the term as well as the thing is offensive to the best class of Christian people. From persons addicted to such practices they shrink as from those without a high sense of what is unselfish and honorable. In adopting political methods they feel that the man of God descends from his high place to the platform of the self-seeker, preferring his own interests to those of the cause or of his associates, and willing often to secure them by methods anything but open and commendable. To the Christian minister the gift of the politician is a fatal endowment.

Whatever he may gain thereby in position or place is more than offset by inevitable losses. The gain of temporary advantage is made by the sacrifice of the sense of manliness and the reputation for what is noblest and best in character and conduct. Men are persuaded that the church politician is first cousin to the trickster who flourishes by cunning contrivances and dark methods rather than by generous wisdom. No church can afford to place such men at the head of the column. If the Methodist Church would maintain her reputation for purity and honor, she must relegate them to the rear. Cunning must not come into the lead, nor chicane be allowed to dispose of the proprieties.

To the insidious approaches of the ecclesiastical partisan, the Methodist Church, from her make-up and history, is peculiarly exposed. Of the leading sects it is the youngest. As a revival church, into which great tides of impulsive life have been borne, it is susceptible to new combinations. The reform struggles in which the church has been engaged from the first have afforded unusual opportunities for the

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combinations of this evil genius. To this may be added the advantage accruing by the large number of young men who have been entering the Methodist ministry, so that against this evil and danger it behoves the church to be on her guard.

The reign of the ecclesiastical politicians in the Conferences is

### **Deleterious in the Extreme.**

Its effect is to tone down the standard of morals and to destroy the nice sense of propriety and honor. It puts to a disadvantage and perpetrates a wrong upon a class of noble men, usually the ornaments of their Conferences, who scorn the use of these partisan tricks and combinations. They can afford to be unrecognized by the ring-masters; they cannot afford to part with their honor as gentlemen and brethren. Its tendency is to place third-rate men in the highest positions in the church. First-rate men would not enter the combinations, and, if admitted, could not be used by the bosses; and they are driven to use baser material to effect their purposes. A few men have



sufficient hold on their Conferences to ensure their election in spite of the ring; but in quite too many instances able men are shelved and mere ciphers put forward. How surprising that some men reach the General Conference, that better ones are left at home! Once in the General Conference, they are the mere tools of the bosses, often more concerned in arranging the electoral card than in promoting good legislation. Often the men they elect are as great a surprise to the public as those they leave out. Can the Methodist Church, in the closing decade of the nineteenth century, afford to place at the head, to shape her policy and guide her administration, inferior representatives? The best men for the best places should be her invariable motto. To select others is a wrong to the cause.

Not a few of the methods of these tacticians surprise us by their exhibitions of cheek, assurance and insensibility to the proprieties of associate life. What can you say of secret combinations to secure the election of one or more of the circle to office? What of securing the pledges of preachers before-

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hand to vote their ticket? What think you of an aspirant to high General Conference honors who should visit the ministers at their homes before Conference and endeavor to secure their pledges to vote for him as a delegate? What of the independence of preachers who gave the pledge and redeemed it in his election? How would it look to secure pledges not to vote for certain men, by circulars to other particular men? What of a Conference ring which should undertake to fill every influential office and pulpit with its members? What of a ring-master, with the episcopal bee in his bonnet, who should travel from his place in a distant Conference to be at every special gathering through a quadrennium? Worst of all, these methods go to the General Conference in the shape of lobbies and combinations against which, more than once, an outcry has been raised on the General Conference floor. These are very unseemly things to happen in connection with elections to high place in the church.

The cure of these evils, though extremely desirable and indispensable to the honor of the

church, is not easy. The tricks of the trade are in the make-up of some men. And then the spoils are tempting. But they ought not to succeed; and that they may not,

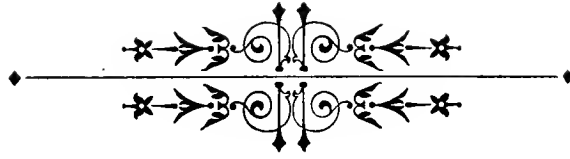
### **Exposure is a First Duty.**

They are methods which flourish only in the dark. To turn an electric light on them is to discomfit the actors; for they are doing what they feel would not bear exposure, what they themselves are ashamed to tell. But, if they persist, it must be told abroad, if for no other reason, to excite in the actors a sense of shame. The discussion of the matter may tend to awaken in the rank and file a higher sense of propriety and duty. The hope of a cure is in the elevation of public sentiment to the point where such practices would not be tolerated. Rings and their manipulators should be given a wide berth. To know that a man is the candidate of a clique, which has been at work for him through the year, and has a wide "combine" in his favor, should be a sufficient reason for his rejection by candid men. So long as

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you tolerate such cabals, you will replace your best men by those of very inferior quality. Allow no man to presume that he can manipulate your vote. Stand on your honor and use your ballot for the cause and justice, rather than for a friend, or for the ends of the ring-master.





## CHAPTER VI.

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# THE VERDICT.

### Editorial Comment.

That the ecclesiastical politician has large place in our denomination, and that he is the most harmful and dangerous factor in the church, is unmistakably shown by the series of contributions on the subject which have appeared in our columns. The revelations made are a sufficient justification of this journal in its earnest purpose for reform. The way in which the subject has been so forcibly brought to the attention of the denomination, is now seen to have been particularly fitting and wise. Elect men in our own large household, selected with special care as beloved and trusted servants of the church, were asked to testify "whether or not these things were so." They were requested to speak to the church

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with entire freedom. No restraint was imposed, but, with their well-known devotion to the denomination, they were to conscientiously declare their message. They have been heard. Like Jeremiah and Isaiah to the Jewish church, like Paul to the Corinthian and the Galatian churches, these men have poured out their souls in anxious utterance. Their words read like the message in the Apocalypse to the seven churches: "He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

Recapitulation is demanded. From all sections of our church come emphatic and condemning words.

*From the Pacific Slope District :*

"There is good reason for believing that political expedients have to a hurtful measure crept into the church which we delight to honor. It is a naked and unlovely fact that arts too low for Christians, and such as politicians possessed of a shred of manhood could hardly stoop to, are sometimes employed in the heat of a canvass."

*From the Western District :*

"Ecclesiastical politics is the greatest evil our Methodist Episcopal system has to fear. It is no

disparagement of a church polity to affirm that its success and permanent efficiency depend upon the wisdom, piety, unselfishness, and consecration of its ministry, and that an ambitious, self-seeking ministry will wreck and ruin it. This must be said of our great system. It will be mighty for righteousness with a holy, self-crucified ministry; it will perish with a place-seeking ministry corrupted by ecclesiastical politics.”

*From the Middle District :*

“Apart from this highest function of the General Conference, the election of delegates in the Annual Conferences has its special and peculiar provocations to ecclesiastical politics. In some cases Conferences are actively canvassed all the time, the whole interim of General Conferences being improved to secure the choice of particular delegates.”

*From the New York District :*

“What is to be done to save the church from the ecclesiastical politician? That question does not contemplate the man who is devising the improvement of the polity and its adaptation to the age; but the place-seeker who makes all measures and men as far as possible serve his preferment. To deny that there is such a *genus homo*, is to go squarely into the face of the facts.”

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*From the New England District:*

“What can you say of secret combinations to secure the election of one or more of the circle to office? What of securing the pledges of preachers beforehand to vote their ticket? What think you of an aspirant to high General Conference honors who should visit the ministers at their homes before Conference and endeavor to secure their pledges to vote for him as a delegate? What of a ring-master, with the episcopal bee in his bonnet, who should travel from his place in a distant Conference to be at every special gathering through a quadrennium?”

*From the Southern District:*

“Loyal and disinterested friends of both the white and colored work have felt, however, that the political methods strongly suspected to be in vogue in certain parts of our work have become a burden too heavy to be borne.”

The entire message in this issue from the Southern District will be read with deepened humiliation. In that land where our denomination is brought into closest competition, where new foundations are being laid, where ecclesiastical methods should be above reproach, there the church politician has best plied his most shameful arts.



Against such un-Christian and damaging practices ZION'S HERALD cannot be silent. From the first it was set for the defense of the church from foes within not less than from foes without. God has called our Methodism to such an exalted and world-wide mission that it must not thus be shorn of its spiritual birthright and power. It would be much more congenial to prophesy smooth things—to declare what an eager constituency, rightfully proud of their church, desire only to read. But to do this in the face of such testimony as these revered witnesses give, would make us recreant to the holiest obligation. Our vision of duty in this crusade becomes clearer and more positive. No individual is more pained than the writer at such disclosures. But as the honorable deponent from the New England District so strongly affirmed, exposure is the first and inevitable movement towards correction. "Speaking the truth," therefore, "in love," with prayerful effort to utter only what is discreet and needful; discarding all personal references while honoring sincere and variant opinions; with no "futures in

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view" except to conserve the interests of the entire church, we shall prosecute this reform until an aroused constituency shall no longer give place to ecclesiastical politics.



## From the Southern District.

**I**N the application of the term “ecclesiastical politics” to the church, we understand it to be used not in the highest sense—that is, as the science of church management or government—but rather to refer to the bringing in of the methods of the political party—the caucus, schemes for party advantage, artful plans to secure the success of men or measures, that are characteristic of the politics of to-day.

The application of the term “ecclesiastical politics” to our church as a denomination would be misleading. When, however, the term is applied to certain men in the church, as indicating the trend of their thought and action in their ecclesiastical

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relations, it hits at a fact that exists, it covers an evil that should be corrected. While these individuals, by their influence and aggressiveness in church business, may in a sense stand as representatives of their Conferences in the councils of the church, they are not the Conferences, nor do they necessarily represent the character and spirit of the rank and file who compose those ecclesiastical bodies.

### **The Self-seeking Spirit**

is at the basis of what men call "ecclesiastical politics." As a church we are probably about as free from self-seeking as other denominations. The vast body of our ministry goes forth to charges each year, literally not knowing whither they go, and with no stipulation as to salaries which can be enforced. Our church, however, because of its connectional character, presents a special danger in the large number of official positions that must be filled from the body of the ministry. Ambition that leads to self-seeking of official position or special honors, in the Methodist Episcopal Church, finds

outlet in other churches in a striving for chief pulpits and other high places.

The manifestation of this spirit takes various forms. In fact, it may exist, and not appear outwardly. It is possible for men to get into a "political" attitude of mind with reference to their position and work in the church. This influences action, directs motives, molds work. This spirit leads them to pursue their work with a view to securing influence over men for the sake of personal gain or promotion. Having ulterior ends in view, this even influences friendship and associations.

There is an impression, quite general in extent, that the term "ecclesiastical politics" is specially applicable to the Southern field of our church work, of which I am asked to write. The multiplication of Conferences, and the rapid rise of the same from missions into independent Conferences, opened a new field for leadership. The agitation as to division into white and colored Conferences gave opportunity for astute managers of men and measures to come to the front. As these changes came into the General

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Conference for action, it gave leaders in these Southern Conferences special prominence and power because they stood as representatives of a number of delegates solidified on special issues of sectional and general importance. Thus the delegates from the colored Conferences to the General Conference, because of special interests vital to them, and, it may be, because of color and section inclined to hold together, came to constitute a rather distinct body. Because of their relation to certain questions affecting their status in the church, they came generally to stand together for action.

In the earlier years many of these delegates were quite ignorant as to church interests and men and measures. As a voter in the State, so also in the Church, the colored man offered opportunity to self-constituted leaders, ambitious for power and promotion. Thus the prejudices of the Negroes in the church have been appealed to. Their obligation to candidates in view of certain sentiments or services in their behalf have been urged. Worse than this, the ambition of colored leaders has been stimulated.

The General Conference season has proved the golden opportunity to the delegate who had some building enterprise on hand, to pass about his subscription book. From a scanning of some of these lists one would judge that the candidate who significantly replied: "Wait till all elections are over, then come to me," constituted the exception rather than the rule. Shame on the man who will use the ignorance or play upon the weakness of any man or class of men to further any plan or interest, however desirable to be gained he may deem the end to be! Let the appeal go forth to the manhood and Christian integrity of the men who constitute our General Conference, to so direct the elections and every other interest of the church as to lift these weaker brethren out of such influences and surroundings into an atmosphere unclouded by selfishness and radiant with the very presence and spirit of Christ. If the representatives of our colored work would hold the esteem and confidence of the church, they must stand independently as men, and follow the example of some of their number who spurn the inducements

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of those who would use them as tools. Let them be inspired by a broad love for the church, and not be swayed by selfish ends or the prejudices of race. To this end, let the Conferences choose the strongest, broadest, most consecrated men of the race for the service of the church in official relations. The writer rejoices in the knowledge that there is a growing manliness and independence among the colored representatives. With experience has come knowledge; with knowledge, independence of thought and action; and the church need not fear to trust the men who, out of our schools, with broader outlook and loftier purposes, are coming to the front to represent a people among whom our church has a mission of immeasurable importance.

The existence of so large a number of small white Conferences also coming into prominence, as above indicated, holding in the general councils of the church a representation and power out of all proportion to their membership, has come to give the church no small concern. The fact that a number of such Southern Conferences are counted on to



stand solidly together for action in the General Conference, gives a "political" cast to their action. The fact that it is a matter of general report that a leader, assuming to represent these Conferences, spoke to more than one man of the forty or more votes that he had at his command to cast solidly in the interests of his sectional body, has, to say the least, a flavor of "ecclesiastical politics." Though largely dependent for their very existence—and some Conferences entirely so—on funds from the general missionary treasury, the men set forth as leaders are often most aggressive. They appear to unite and cast their solid strength for candidates who are supposed to represent their special interests. If this be true, as is reported, it is a menace to the church. Broad-hearted, unselfish, philanthropic laymen will not pour their thousands into the treasury of the church year by year to support these Conferences, and then see their representatives come forth, and, by combination, oppose the best interests of the general church for narrow ends of their own section.

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Whether these charges as to "ecclesiastical politics" in these Conferences be true or not, it may bring matters to a head to simply state these things that have become the subjects of discussion and deep concern among disinterested men of the church. Certain it is that some of the common results of "political" methods seem to appear in one or more of these Southern Conferences. In at least one there has been for years arrayed party against party. Crimination and recrimination are common. Grave charges are freely made as to oblique methods on the part of managers and leaders in Conference and educational work. Consecrated and aspiring young men have left for other fields of labor, though sorely needed in the home field. It is openly charged that men transferred to strategic points and able to do successful work, have literally been driven from the field by the hostility and jealousy of self-constituted leaders in the very Conferences that they came to serve.

It should be understood that while the writer has presented this evil as it shows its head in one

section of the church, he has largely confined his observations to these Conferences, knowing that the subject would be treated also by representatives of other parts of the church. Our Southern work has had much with which to contend, and should receive fair treatment. Loyal and disinterested friends of both the white and colored work have felt, however, that the "political" methods, strongly suspected to be in vogue in certain parts of our work, have become

### **A Burden Too Heavy to be Borne.**

Yet how powerless would be any man or combination in a Conference, or set of Conferences, if there were not men representing other parts of the church who stood ready to join in an alliance with them for the accomplishment of their plans. Let all such men in every Conference be remanded to the rear!

And may the young men of the church who, in every Southern Conference, are coming into the work, unite with the unseeking and devoted rank and file, to stand firmly for righteousness as represented in men who rise far above even the suspicion of

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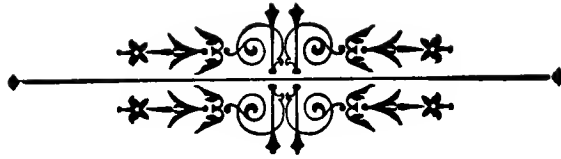
methods not thoroughly open and straightforward. Then shall this work in all its phases regain the confidence and co-operation of all friends of an aggressive missionary Methodism.

The root of "political" methods (in the church) is self-seeking, selfishness—seeking for supposed *rights*, demanding what the church *owes them*, rather than being inspired by supreme love to Christ and to the church, and asking, "How can I serve the church?"

As to the animus of this unholy spirit in the church, and the way in which this tendency may be overcome, allow me, in conclusion, to simply quote these significant words, slightly altered, from the Journal of Amiel: "The notion of right inflates the individual, fills him with thoughts of self and of what others owe him, while it ignores the other side of the question, and extinguishes his capacity for devoting himself to a common cause. To such men and leaders the church tends to become a shop, with self-interest for a principle; or rather, an arena, in which every combatant fights for his own hand only. In

either case self is the motive power . In the church his task should be to do good while suppressing his own merits by a voluntary act of humility.”





## THE END THEREOF.

### Editorial Comment.

It was at a session of an Annual Conference. The ballots had been cast for the election of delegates to the General Conference, and the votes had been counted. One teller reported to the presiding bishop that twelve tissue ballots had been discovered in his collection, all bearing the name of one candidate; and that he was confident that they were cast by the man whose name was written upon them. The bishop suggested that another vote be taken, without stating fully the reason, and directed the teller who knew the suspected man to receive his vote last. Twelve more such ballots were found, bearing the name of the man in question, and clearly the last dropped into the box! That candidate for General Conference had a majority of thirty-six votes.

He was by far the most able, brilliant and popular man in his Conference.

Said our informant—the bishop who held the Conference—“That was the most tragic scene I ever saw. If the young man had waited his time, and dismissed the thought of the honors of the church in doing its work, he would most likely have received at an early day the compliment he had come so eagerly and then so wickedly to covet.” The bishop further said: “That is an illustration of the result of such harmful self-seeking in the church. I have never seen a repetition of consequences so painful, but I have observed hundreds of cases where men have damaged themselves and humiliated the denomination. Go on in your work of reform! Nothing is so much needed in the church. Do not falter nor desist. Good men everywhere will sustain you.”

Within two hours after his election, he had been tried for illegal voting and expelled from the Conference and the ministry.

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At the next session of that Conference the case came up for a rehearing and a new trial, on the ground that the previous session had acted hastily and upon impulse. A faithful, searching and most exciting trial ensued. The hour came for the delivery of the verdict. Every available place in the church edifice was packed with anxious listeners. And when it was announced that the finding of the previous year was sustained, which adjudged the young man guilty of illegal voting, and the sentence of expulsion was affirmed, the beautiful wife of the guilty man leaped from her seat with a convulsive shriek and from that hour became a hopeless maniac.







## ◦ ◦ ◦ Critical Notices. ◦ ◦ ◦

The *Boston Traveller* thus frankly expresses its opinion:

“There has been a disposition on the part of some to criticise the good taste of publishing the series of articles which has appeared for the last six weeks in ZION’S HERALD upon ‘Ecclesiastical Politics’; but the real friends of the church will agree that the time has come when silence on the part of the press of the great Methodist Episcopal denomination would be almost a crime. The articles have been written in each case by men whose character is unquestioned and whose motives cannot be impugned, and they cover the state of affairs throughout the whole Methodist field. Exposure of such methods has come none too soon. It may, it will be, a preliminary to correction.”

“The Editor of ZION’S HERALD did a valuable service for the church in calling forth and publishing the series of articles on ‘Ecclesiastical Politics’ which are appearing from week to week in that paper. They are attracting wide attention. The articles are written with ability and in good spirit. They come from men of large experience and wide observation. They give expression to plain blunt truths which cannot be gainsaid. The Editor’s thought was to correct a patent evil. This cannot be done without agitation. It would be well if the entire symposium were published in pamphlet form and scattered broadcast.”—*Buffalo Christian Advocate*.

“ZION’S HERALD is publishing a remarkable series of articles on ‘Ecclesiastical Politics’ from representative men of each section of the church. All young people, especially young preachers, should read them.”—*Inland Christian Advocate*.

## CRITICAL NOTICES.

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“If it shall lead its ministers to exalt the pastorate above every other position, to lay greater emphasis on the opportunities for service in every office, to set the stamp of unworthiness on all self-seeking ambition and wire pulling and trading for ecclesiastical honors, it will infuse new devotion and power into this grand denomination, and aid it to a future more illustrious than its noble past.”—*The Congregationalist*.

“The second thing to say is that Dr. Parkhurst has done all Christian denominations a service. The peculiar polity of his own sect no doubt makes the temptation to engage in ‘ecclesiastical politics’ greater in that than in some others; but the evil is universal. Possibly it is even more offensive in some religious bodies whose organization is simpler. There being in the latter not so many offices and not so much machinery, the struggle to hold office and to control the machine is even more desperate and less scrupulous. If the secret history of some of the contests which have, for the past three or four years, been chiefly attracting public notice ever comes to be published, it will appear that much which has masqueraded as orthodox zeal has been simply ‘ecclesiastical politics.’”—*Boston Daily Advertiser*.

“Our laymen need to watch themselves in this regard. Lay delegation has been working well, and promises much for the church. But if lay delegation shall result in the introduction of the methods of the caucus and the convention into our conferences, it will be a blighting curse to the church, no matter what help there may be in it in any other direction.”—*Holston Methodist*.

Dr. Moore, of the *Western Christian Advocate*, puts the emphasis where it belongs, in saying :

“All are agreed, save the guilty ones themselves, that ecclesiastical office-seeking, with its attendant worldly methods, is particularly reprehensible; and that every lover of the church ought to aid in creating an overwhelming sentiment against it.”

## CRITICAL NOTICES.

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From a prominent Methodist minister's study in far-away Milwaukee, Wis., comes this voluntary and significant word :

“For years there has been nothing published in our church papers, more timely and necessary than the articles that have lately appeared in ZION'S HERALD, on ‘Ecclesiastical Politics.’ The evils therein pointed out are very grave and dangerous, as well as very patent; but editors elected by our General Conference seem unconscious of their existence. Your beautiful recognition of Mark Trafton's services to the church has already been noticed by our official organs, but the articles on ‘Ecclesiastical Politics’—ten thousand times more important—have been passed by with ominous silence. ZION'S HERALD, by its vigorous protest against wrong in our own church, is the most thoroughly loyal paper in Methodism.”

The *Itinerant*, a bright paper published at Sioux City, Iowa, after making favorable and grateful comment upon the series of articles on “Ecclesiastical Politics,” says pungently :

“What is the remedy? Squelch the office-seeker! Let the man who has the official bee buzzing in his bonnet be elected to stay at home and find consolation in his buzzing. Refuse to become a party to combines and cliques. Examine the heart as closely and as carefully over the casting of our influence for a brother as we do on the question of our personal relation to God. Have no sympathy with the *quid pro quo* arrangement; if we are approached for a vote with the intimation that we will not be the loser, or we will be cared for by-and-by, let that be enough in itself to turn us against the proposition. Any scheme or any man not strong enough to stand on their personal merits are unworthy of our support.”

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