

SOMETHING NEW DESPERATE

AS I look back now it seems to me that almost from the beginning of my life as a minister I have felt that the clerical element of the church occupied a disproportionate place in it. I don't mean that their work was not just as important as any of them conceived it to be, or more so, or that they did more than they should, but that what is called for convenience the lay element had not the place to which it was entitled and did not do enough of the sort of work which could be done by it better than by the clerical element.

Until quite recently this feeling of dissatisfaction was vague. I felt that it would be better for the church and the world and for the lay members themselves if they could play a larger part in distinctively religious service, but most of the religious work they were asked to do was such as selected and trained ministers could do better than they. I remember how delighted we were when we could coax a successful business man or a prominent lawyer or medical man to give a religious address from the platform or even from the pulpit, even though it might not be, apart from the respected character of the speaker himself, a very striking address.

When in the last half century or so lay delegates began to be admitted to gatherings that had till then been strictly clerical in

their composition, most ministers, I think, welcomed their entrance, though, as far as my observation goes, very few of them could compare with ministers in debate.

I think I felt as I did because I was almost foreordained to be a Protestant. I was, so to speak, a Protestant from before my birth, in one respect at least, that I always felt that the domination of any one class in the church or anywhere else was not for the general good, nor for that of the class itself. Enlarging experience of life, however, and such study of history as I have been able to make have taught me that usually, perhaps always, where any class seems to enjoy an undue amount of prestige or authority it has originally earned it. The extraordinary authority with which the bishop is vested in the Roman Catholic Church was the natural outgrowth of the centuries of savage persecution and strenuous internal debate which the early church survived as far as human agencies were concerned, largely through the discipline and the inspiration of the bishops. They held the churches together. And through the still more trying centuries that followed when the old classic world was submerged under a muddy flood of barbarism it was the monkish missionaries and the bishops who were the chief Christianizing and civilizing agencies.

And when we look at Protestantism it is

plain to be seen that it is the ministers who have made it what it is, and partly through their preaching. This has been manifest in the great revivals that have come so much to do with the remarkable Protestantism in English-speaking countries during the last two centuries. All the movements that I have witnessed have been (again humanly speaking) the work of great preachers from Whitefield to Moody and Billy Sunday. All that seemed necessary to revitalize a town or small city was that two men should move on it, one gifted in speech, the other in song.

So that, all things considered, it is wonderful that the clerical portion of the church—bishops, priests or ministers—has been regarded as the divinely ordained agency for realizing God's purpose on the earth, that in comparison with them the lay members have seemed much less important.

Undoubtedly great things have been accomplished by this largely clerical effort. The church owes to these men set apart to great self-sacrifice, for spiritual work beyond all calculation. Christendom to-day, is largely, under God, their work. The question I, a minister, the son of a minister, brought up with a respect for ministers accentuated by

ing with her husband only when his freighter called at Tongay Island.

That made it all very simple. For some day, Skelly calculated, this chit of a Chinese wife would inherit Quong Kim's vast estate. In the meantime she was always here, safely anchored. "An ace in the hole," he was pleased to think of her. In all he had five of them in as many ports of the seas.

Each of them he saw only about once a year. But only this one remained young and pretty. Two were growing scrawny, two were growing fat. The recompense for fading attractions was that it made the subjects all the easier to wheedle money from, which was all that counted. There was a certain hazard of exposure, but Skelly was used to hazards. A sailor must brave many storms, in or out of harbor. The hazard gave a constant thrill even to Ace Skelly. To win by deception brought him a vicarious elation.

It was the same when he was able successfully to cheat at cards.

Hit By a Bold Idea

BUT now, as he played draw poker with his father-in-law on the island of Tongay, he was too canny to try cheating. So the luck ran even, while Lili perched primly on the arm of Skelly's chair. Skelly was thinking less of the game than of to-morrow morning's tide when he must up anchor for Shanghai. Already, from the standpoint of his San Francisco owners, he had dallied too long at this Malaysian isle.

"So pretty lady!" Lili exclaimed suddenly. "So plenty pretty!"

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