

Some Thoughts Suggested by the Home-call of Mr. John Ritchie.

BY W. J. M'CLURE.

IN the home-call of John Ritchie, another of "The Old Guard" has gone. A long and faithful ministry has closed, and he has entered into rest, waiting in the presence of his Lord, waiting up there, while we wait down here for that day of days, when our Lord shall come to catch us up to be forever with and like Him. May his home-going deepen the desire in us who remain, to end well, to cleave to the Lord and His Word in these days when it is so easy to drift away from that which has reproach connected with it, and to seek a path more congenial to our flesh.

Since hearing of the departure of our brother, thoughts have been revived in my mind, which for some time have been struggling for expression. During about fifty-four years connection with assemblies gathered to the name of the Lord Jesus, I have observed a considerable change in both meetings and preachers. With regard to the latter, the change is not wholly their fault, indeed, in a great measure, it may not be theirs at all. I am not quite old enough to know much personally of the earliest preachers of the movement, but it has been my pleasure to sit under the ministry of their immediate successors, H. Groves, H. Dyer, etc. Fifty years has not erased from my mind their messages; they come back with a freshness that makes one wonder if it can be so long ago.

After these dear men, came another crop, if I may so put it, and amongst these we think of D. Ross, D. Munro, James Campbell, W. McLean, J. R. Caldwell and our dear brother Ritchie. Not all gifted alike, but all rare gifts to the church. To these men personally we are greatly indebted for teaching which helped and established us in the truth of God. Some of them, as for instance D. Ross and James Campbell had much to do in shaping our life, and personal acquaintance and correspondence with our brother, who has just gone, did much to strengthen and encourage in seeking to hold on our way, in "the midst of the paths of judgment."

Of the class to which these men belonged, very, very few now remain, and the going of each one leaves us weaker and poorer. And the saddest part of it is, they are not being replaced by men of the same spiritual power and energy. We gladly own that there are many dear men, who seek to follow in the footsteps of that generation of preachers, of whom John Ritchie was one, men devoted to the Lord and His Word, and who have no desire to escape the reproach that is inseparable from carrying out the Word of the Lord in these days of easy indifference to it.

But what gives us much concern, is the coming crop of preachers. Again and again, it has presented itself to us like this. What is to become of the testimony of assemblies, if we are not to have men of spiritual power and energy to stand in the gap and make up the hedge. We dread to contemplate what assemblies will be like in Twenty or Thirty years, should the Lord not come before then.

One thing we judge, all must admit, who have eyes to see, and that is that each successive generation of preachers is weaker than the preceding one. Is the Lord thus letting the glory depart? Shall things be at a low, or lowest ebb when He comes?

Who that remembers, can help comparing the dear men we have just mentioned, with so many, more recent preachers. Those dear men had such a grip on God that they could push on into new fields and plant assemblies. The usual thing now is making a round of the assemblies, and rarely ever touching a new place. Hundreds of towns and cities are passed by, in which there are no meetings, and the place which has a meeting, with local brethren capable of preaching the gospel, gets all their time. Those dear men of days gone by, kept themselves in form by getting a bag of tracts, and scattering them from door to door. The sight is not uncommon now, of preachers carrying a bag of golf clubs, or a tennis racket, and the plea is, the need for more physical exercise.

To go into the gospel meetings conducted by some of the newer preachers, one would think that it was some sectarian mission into which we had come, the methods and ways are so identical with that of the sects. Now if the rule holds which we have observed, *deterioration*, then what shall we expect of the generation which will succeed the present? We confess we do not care to think of it. We gained some inspiration from the lives of the men we have named; their example has helped us and given us the desire to end well. Thus, Paul's example was followed by Timothy (see 2 Tim. 3. 10. R.V.) They committed to us the testimony in scriptural simplicity; shall we do the same to those who *come after us*? (See 2 Tim. 2. 2).

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