

PULPITS AND PULPITEERS.

THERE has been a great deal said and written, of late, on the subject of preachers and preaching. The most of it has come from the laity; and it is a good source, for, as a class, those who sit in the pews are quite capable of imparting not only new, but valuable, information respecting the pulpit and the pulpiter. Almost everyone will admit that, with the marked change which has come over quite all of the different features of our social life, there has been a shifting of the pew and pulpit relations. Influences, visible enough, have told powerfully on the position which the pulpit heretofore enjoyed. It must be admitted that the minister no longer occupies the intellectual vantage ground he did a quarter of a century ago. A diffusion of education among the laity has divested the clergy of the great bulk of the former prestige, and the minister no longer enjoys an immunity from literary criticism. Again, we have a perfect flood of cheap, and, at the same time, valuable, literature entering and becoming a part of the home, and the freest discussion of the most sacred truths is carried on in periodicals of the highest character and widest circulation. But, for years, there has been an ever-widening intellectual difference between the minister and the pew holder. The laity are able now, as they were not in the past, not only to give a reason for the faith that is in them, but to require a reason for the faith that is taught them. Indeed, so immense has been the progress of scripture exegesis, as well as general knowledge, and so thorough has been the scrutiny of the Bible, that a silent revolution has been effected in the minds of the masses throughout the English-speaking world. Hence is it, that the same style of literal preaching, common enough twenty or twenty-five years ago, is no longer possible, unless both minister and congregation are quite behind the age. To put the matter squarely and honestly, the day has come when it is an earnest feeling of all christian people, that the moral sense, awakened by a closer, more human application of the gospel, is the interpreter of the scriptures. But, besides this diffusion of knowledge, which has given us moderns a new, and, undoubtedly, a better, understanding of the scriptures, both in their historical and religious sense, there has been a transition of thought, in relation to religion itself, going on in the minds of the people of every rank in the civilized world. If the pre-scientific times were the ages of faith, this of to-day is unquestionably the age of inquiry. All, young and old, are athirst for truth, and for that personal consciousness which carries conviction. What was true when spoken grandly by the prophets, and by the evangelists of old, is not less true to-day; but the people are asking that evidence of it be given with the assertion. People do not want the mere conventional statement, set forth in tawdry rhetoric. They demand that the pulpiter shall be qualified to go back of this conventional view of these religious subjects, to where he shall be able to find, for his hearers, the real spiritual meaning. In this day, creeds amount to very little. In their place, people want a common-sense, prac-