

CONCERNING TITLES AND DEGREES

By Evangelist W. Edmund Smith

Carnal pride in men has ever led them to aspire to that which makes them more conspicuous than their fellows, therefore, money, position and titles, have been eagerly pursued both in Church and State.

We heard of a detachment of the Mexican army being captured by an American force. Among the hundred men taken captive, ten full-fledged generals were found and nearly all the rest were colonels.

In a certain State, when a man has accumulated or inherited a little wealth, or attained to some distinction in local or State politics, they dub him with the title 'Colonel', even though he may never have been inside a military uniform. And the man that starts a store on the corner, where he sells pills, powders, plasters, perfumery soda water—plus, is called "Doctor".

We have a great variety of doctors today—allopathic, homeopathic, electric chiropractic, doctors of divinity, of laws, of philosophy, education, music, etc. We have corn doctors, horse doctors, tooth doctors. Some of these degrees and titles are earned, some are purchased, and others are assumed by the individual or bestowed by an indiscriminating public. But certainly the person who writes several letters after his name is no ordinary person in the eyes of the uninitiated. I am frank to confess that when a boy in Canada, I really thought that A. B. after the name of a person made him a sort of super-individual, and D. D. not only meant superior piety but almost omniscience.

In the Church, where lowliness and humility are supposed to abound, degrees and titles make a sort of ecclesiastical aristocracy. There is the title "Reverend" which is assumed by most every one that feels led to preach. Then we have "Right Reverend", and as a climax "Very Right Reverend". Too often we find the "Right Reverend" burning incense to the god of his unclean appetite, while the "Very Right Reverend" often pours down lavish drink offerings to propitiate his god. Too often we find a collar in reverse, a stogie cigar, and a red nose, concomitants of this superior reverence. I found this especially true in England and Scotland.

We, holiness folks are supposed to be dead to all these trifling toys and hold them in contempt. We remember the condemnation of Jesus, pronounced against the proud Pharisees, who loved the greetings in the market places and were puffed up when called "Rabbi", "Rabbi". Jesus told them that it was no wonder they had no use for him when they "received honor one of another". Such pride made living faith in him impossible. And we contend that wherever pride rules in the heart, manifesting itself by outward array of ornamental dress, or ornamental titles, there will you find faith either dead or languishing.

The superficiality of American life is seen in our feverish desire for titles and degrees. To meet this demand various fake institutions have sprung up, prescribing very superficial courses and liberal fees, yet granting degrees from A. B. to L.L. D. In the theological seminary I attended, we had a student registered in the English course, who held the degrees of D. D. and L.L. D. from a Western college, for which he had been financial agent; but the college was then defunct. When this brother assisted a student pastor in evangelistic services, he had his degree attached to his name on the handbills. It was certainly impressive to the public to be informed that Rev. Lester B——n, D. D., L.L. D., was to hold forth

in that little church. I was once associated with a preacher, in a community, who was so ignorant that he could not read a chapter of Scripture correctly. I met him after some years of separation, and he informed me that he had in the meantime, earned his Ph. D., and had made such good marks the institution had thrown in the degree of D. D. Such things are laughable, but they are also pathetic. Sad to see a man who is called to preach the gospel, fall for things so cheap.

I had my own lesson in this matter. When I entered the ministry I had not half a high school course to my credit. After preaching two years, I entered college as a special student, and did about two and a half years of promiscuous work, in two years. I saw non-resident courses leading to Ph. B. and Ph. D., offered by a certain University. My ambition was aroused. I entered into correspondence with that institution; found that I could qualify for the courses and prepared to take the work, dreaming what it must be like to be a real Ph. D. But God began talking to me. He said, "My child what motive prompts you to do this thing? Will getting these cheap degrees make you more of a man of God? Will it not create and foster pride of heart that will ruin your real success in the ministry?" I replied, "Yes Lord, it will". I laid aside my ambition. After that, I finished the regular course prescribed by the Methodist Episcopal Church, for travelling preachers, and also took a three year's course in one of the foremost theological seminaries, from the standpoint of scholarship, where I majored in the Semitic languages and also in New Testament Greek, and had the honor of being chosen one of the class orators at Commencement, which honor was bestowed because of scholastic standing. Yet while I finished the entire Bachelor of Divinity course, except writing the thesis, I did not get a degree because I had not received the initial degree of A. B. That was a long time ago. From that day till this I have tried to have proper appreciation of intellectual development and culture. But above all I have esteemed the glory of God in my soul as of the highest importance. We honor those who finish the college curriculum and get their degrees provided they hold them subordinate to the higher knowledge that comes by a living faith in Jesus. But we have only pity and mild contempt, for those who flaunt cheap degrees and seem to love to be called "Doctor"! "Doctor"! even as the Pharisees loved to be called "Rabbi" "Rabbi!", in the market place.

With some holiness people intellectual pride seems quite prominent. We have known them to start a little educational institution, with a poorly qualified faculty, a meagre equipment in buildings and a very low curriculum, yet they called it a University, because they had added to the regular courses some instruction in music, diatetics, and elocution. Later wisdom has led to the less pretentious title of "college". We know men who have never finished a high school course, prominent in holiness work, who exploit Ph. Ds. and D. Ds. and would look really grieved if when addressing them by word or letter you call them "Brother" instead of "Doctor". We know a Brother, whose work was to pull teeth and fill them. We do not know whether or not he ever took a course in a reputable dental college, but when he gave up pulling teeth, and came to the work of pulling men out of the fire his title of "Doctor" was transferred with that of his vocation. Now he is "Doctor!" "Doctor!" It would be almost sacrilege to use his name without the title of "Doctor". He got that title pulling teeth, yet the public thinks him to be

a regular D. D. If two persons, one a corn doctor and the other a horse doctor, were to come into the ministry of that church, they would carry their titles with them. The public would not know that one got his title of "Doctor" by eradicating corns, and the other his, by curing heaves, glanders and epizootic. No difference now—both are doctors and the title goes.

We have come to the place where in assembly and conference, most any preacher who rises to speak, especially if he has a considerable church and ordinary ability, is recognized by the presiding officer as "Doctor". Well, I am called that too, when the undertaker wants to be especially gracious and the clothier wants to sell me a suit of clothes, or somebody else wants to sell me something, and thinks calling me "Doctor" will make me feel good.

But after all, it might be well if all preachers were dubbed D. D. One brother informed me that he is a Ph. D., and had earned his title. said he, "I am a Paper Hanger and Decorator". Some little uncultured, yet Spirit-filled preacher would honor a D. D., if it were to mean "Doubly Delivered," for he has "the blessing" and gets others in. To another D. D., might mean "Diligent Digger," for he is a real plodder all the time. To another we might interpret it as "Denatured Divinity" for he preaches a milk and water gospel. For another this degree might mean "Doubly Deluded", for he may think himself an intellectual heavyweight when he is a real lightweight. When applied to another it might mean "Dry as Dust", for the title has dried up his experience by giving birth to pride of heart. Add L.L. D. it would mean Lots and Lots Drier.

Of course, if every preacher had the title, the use of it would soon be abandoned. The only benefit of being called "Doctor" is that it gives you a superior touch; it identifies you with a sort of intellectual hierarchy. I remember reading the reports of two church officers both D. Ds sent on a foreign mission. In their letters back home, published in the church paper, they seemed to vie with each other in giving the title of Doctor in referring each to his brother. It was so common and so conspicuous that it gave one a pain. In contrast with this we have read of the intercourse of Mr. Wesley and Mr. Fletcher in their journies and journals. Both of these were of outstanding intellectual attainments and spiritual culture. There was nothing of "Doctor Wesley" and "Doctor Fletcher" in their conversation. We may be wrong, but we do contend, that the seeking after and the arraying and recognizing of these high sounding titles to the names of preachers, is of the same sort of pride as prompts a woman to put rings on her fingers, jewels around her neck and robe herself in costly and conspicuous apparel; it is only a manifestation of that pride of heart that exalts the human above the divine and desires more, the approval of men, than that of God.

It is true that the great leaders of the Church ever have been men of splendid intellectual equipment; but like Paul they poured contempt on all their early pride, and in the eyes of a proud Church became as fools for Christ's sake. They gained such eminence for self-sacrificing service that they needed no special titles to give them honor. Wesley said "Give me a hundred men who desire nothing but God, and fear nothing but sin, I care not that they be university graduates, or only ordinary intelligent men, and I will shake England". Wesley found those men. But when congregations increase in wealth, and improve the character of their church buildings, they naturally demand as pastors, men