



Calvinist, Up-To-Date

II. Robert Skinner, Clergyman.

Returning to Princeton to study in the seminary, the seat of Calvinism in America, was like coming back home after a journey in foreign lands. Bob Skinner's business experience had broadened his outlook, given him a sense of proportion, an understanding mind. At last, he was on his way to becoming a Christian minister in truth, because he had learned that ministers are more desired for their human qualities than for their knowledge of homeletics. He was young and eager and, when graduated in the Class of '34, splendidly equipped for his life's work.

Robert Skinner is one of a number of able and energetic young clergymen who are rejuvenating the Christian church by extending the character and scope of its influence. "The church," he says, "must cease to emphasize denominationalism and devote itself to an interpretation of the Christian answer to life's problems—a right relation between God and man, and consequently between man and man. Matters which effect the health, cleanliness, freedom, opportunities for advancement and growth are of immediate concern to the church".

Before coming to Westfield he was pastor of Presbyterian churches in Georgetown, Washington, D. C., and Pottsville, Pa., and he worked through religious and civic organizations to deepen the spiritual life of these communities in practical ways. Expressive of his successful ministry in Pottsville were the words of a Jew, a local merchant, when he heard that the young parson was leaving town: "I never knew any man in this place who will be missed more than Mr. Skinner."

The local church is his most important charge, not alone because of its size but because of its strategic position in the heart of a metropolitan area. The church has an individual membership of 2250. It is the largest in the Elizabeth Presbytery, and second only in the state to the Presbyterian Church, Newark, of which Dr. Lester Clees is pastor. It is growing rapidly and opportunities and obligations are multiplying. The church and parish house must be enlarged, a new organ installed, and, perhaps, that incongruous minister's dwelling, known as the manse, given a proper setting in some remotely Victorian neighborhood. Meanwhile,

the social and religious activities of the church must keep pace with its physical expansion. Here is compelling need for wise direction. It is a young man's job.

"The church recognizes a crying need for change," he says. "The world of the spiritual giants of the past is not our world. The church must interpret the light of God to men and women whose pattern of thinking and speaking and acting has so radically changed that many of the old interpretations leave them unimpressed."

These are the views of a modern clergyman, born and reared in a Calvinistic environment, a Calvinist by temperament and training, who speaks with the conviction of one who believes sincerely in the tenets of his faith. Yet, this is not the point of view of John Calvin or of his literally-minded followers. This is not the church of Geneva, though it is clothed in its outward forms. Here is no commanding voice, no compulsion, no apostasy. Here only is the appeal to the mind and heart. "To be persuaded!"—that is the way, the only way, to spiritual freedom. No rule, nor mandate can bring peace and order to the world. "When people in their hearts set a standard different from that demanded of them, you have the stage set for rebellion," he concludes. "A man's behavior will be determined ultimately by what he is."

Here is the voice of experience, of history. In the theology of this comprehending Christian minister is the realism of the new and the faith and spirit of the old order. Here are combined the attributes which gave cogency and vitality to the cause of freedom, and moral leadership, political independence and constitutional government to the thirteen United States of America. They are as indispensable today as they were in the formative years of this republic. Then, a fiery patriot, Rev. John Witherspoon, president of Princeton, signer of the Declaration of Independence, member of the Provincial Congress, declared in the halls of Old Nassau that a nation without freedom was a nation without God. Now, when freedom has become the shibboleth of demagogues, we have forward-looking, humanitarian young clergymen, such as Rev. Robert Skinner, to remind us that a world without God, in this atomic age, would be no world at all.