

THE YOUNG PREACHER

Theo. E. Meyers

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THE following chapters have already appeared in the "Golden Rule," and are now published in a more permanent form, at the request of many readers of that journal.

T. L. C.

TO
MY YOUNG BRETHREN WHO ARE CALLED OF GOD
TO PREACH
"JESUS CHRIST AND HIM CRUCIFIED"
THIS LITTLE VOLUME
IS AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED.

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CHAPTER I.
WHY SHOULD YOU BE A MINISTER?

I.

WHY SHOULD YOU BE A MINISTER?

IN this series of articles addressed to young preachers I shall draw chiefly from my own personal experience and observations during the last forty-six years. Superlatively happy years have they been to me; for I have often said that no monarch's throne and no presidential chair is so exalted as a pulpit in which a living preacher presents a living Christ to dying souls. Every minister who reads these columns, and is worthy of his high calling, will doubtless echo the same sentiment. But a vast number of young Christians among our readers are raising the question, Ought I to enter the ministry? Let me say a few

frank words to those who are debating with themselves this vitally important question.

That the demand in our country for effective ministers is far in excess of the present supply is very evident. Our population increases more rapidly than the supply of preachers; and of those who have entered the ministry, a considerable proportion have evidently mistaken their calling. No mistake can be more lamentable than this; sometimes it is made from a false estimate of one's self, and sometimes from the urgent persuasions of indiscreet friends. But if there are some in the sacred ministry who ought not to be there, I feel quite sure that there are many more outside of the ministry who ought to be there. The legal, medical, editorial, engineering, and some other professions, are overcrowded. The only occupation in America that is not overdone is the occupa-

tion of serving Jesus Christ and saving souls. I do not undervalue the consecrated labor of laymen; I do not affirm that a Christian cannot serve his Master effectively in any other sphere than that of the ministry; but I do affirm that the ambition for worldly gains and worldly honors is drawing some of the church's best blood into their greedy outlets. All this is undeniably true; yet, whenever a young man comes to me for advice in regard to entering the ministry, I generally put him through a course of pretty close questions.

In the first place, my good brother, have you any natural gift of speech? The chief business of a preacher is to speak; and if, from either physical or mental deficiency, you have no ability to address an audience, then you will be as useless as a bell without any clapper. Great orators are few, and it is not necessary that you should be one; mere flu-

ency of utterance with nothing to utter will make you only a "tinkling cymbal"; and yet a certain degree of fluent speech is indispensable if you ever expect to command any auditors. Test yourself in the Christian Endeavor meetings or elsewhere, and find out whether you can say a good thing in such a way as to make people listen to you. If, after several fair and honest trials, you completely fail, then you may conclude that God did not make you for a preacher. Serve him in some other way; but do not let a pious intention deceive you into a profession for which you are not fitted.

Second, have you the physical health to endure the strain that the duties of the ministry will lay upon you? Some preachers, like Richard Baxter, Robert Hall, and Dr. Payson, of Portland, have wrought a glorious work in spite of the bodily infirmities that overtook them; but it is not safe for any young man to

undertake the ministry if he is an invalid, or even likely to become one. Next to a heart full of love to Christ, and a clear brain, you will need good lungs and good legs; the first, in order to preach; and the other, in order to go about among your flock. If you are too frail to endure the strain of study and public speaking, if your nerves are rickety and your stomach hopelessly dyspeptic, then you will enter upon your work heavily handicapped. At a later time I will offer some hints to ministers on the preservation of health; but do not start out with no health to preserve.

Third, have you the mental furniture to equip you for the ministry of the gospel? Genius is not essential, unless it be "a genius of godliness." Pulpit geniuses are rare; and, if God intended to save the world by them, he would have created more of them. Some of the most thoroughly useful, effective, and blessed min-

isters I know of have been, or are, men of very moderate intellectual powers. No two pastors in New York led more of their congregations to Jesus Christ than did the late Dr. B. and Dr. N.; yet neither of them ever uttered a brilliant thing. They both had eminent piety, warm, loving hearts, and an abundance of good common sense. This last quality is indispensable. If you have not learning, you can by hard study acquire it; if you have not a strong constitution, you may by wise regimen strengthen it; if you have not money to pay for your education, you may earn it; but if you have not good common sense, then (as a quaint old preacher said) "may God pity you, for you cannot get that anywhere."

Fourth, are you fervently and honestly praying for heavenly direction and carefully watching the leadings of Providence? When God calls a man to the ministry, he is apt to let the man know it. I be-

lieve in answers to honest prayer, and I believe in the leadings of the Holy Spirit; and if you believe in them also, and will keep your eyes open and heart humble and docile, you will be likely to get some clear indications as to your duty. During the first eighteen months after I graduated from college—months mostly spent in teaching—I was balancing between the law and the ministry. Many of my relatives urged me to become a lawyer, as my father and grandfather had been; but my godly mother had dedicated me to the ministry from infancy, and her counsels all leaned toward the pulpit. One winter afternoon I rode off five miles to a prayer-meeting in a neighboring village. It was held in the parlor of a private house. I arose and spoke for ten minutes; and, when the meeting was over, a person said to me, "Your talk did me good." On my way home the thought flashed into my mind, "If ten minutes'

talk to-day helped one soul, why not preach all the time?" That one thought decided me on the spot. Our lives turn on small pivots; and, if you will let God lead you, the path will open before your footsteps.

Finally, let me say that no young man ought to enter the ministry unless he feels an intense and invincible longing for the work,—a desire so strong that he will gladly submit to any hardships and privations in order to carry out his holy purpose. When Dr. John Todd, the author of the "Student's Manual," set out for his education for the ministry, he walked all the way to college, and slept on the ground out-of-doors for lack of money to pay for his lodgings. If you do not feel in your very bones, "Woe is me if I cannot preach the gospel!" then let it alone. God is not calling you to a work that an archangel might covet. You will need all your zeal, all your

faith, and all your staying power, to carry you through; for the life of a faithful, courageous, and consecrated minister is not a swing in a hammock. It is the happiest life on earth, if you enter upon it with a pure, unselfish motive, and pursue it, not for your own glory, but for the glory of your Master. Go to that all-wise and loving Master, my young brother, and ask him the question that Saul of Tarsus asked, "Lord, what wilt *thou* have me to do?" Whatever he saith unto your conscience, do it.

CHAPTER II.
PASTORAL WORK—HOW TO DO IT.

II.

PASTORAL WORK—HOW TO DO IT.

THE work of every minister is twofold; it is partly in the pulpit and partly out of the pulpit. The first is the work of the preacher; the second is that of the pastor. The two ought to be inseparable; what the providence of God and good common sense have joined together, let no man venture to put asunder. You will be in your pulpit only four or five hours in each week; what you are to be and to do during those infinitely important hours will be the theme of my plain, loving counsels to you in a future article. But your labors outside of your pulpit will occupy more or less of your time during every day of the week; they

embrace the whole sphere of your pastoral intercourse with your flock,—your dealings with the awakened, with the sick and the afflicted, with the bereaved and the troubled; your organization of Christian work in your parish, and your executive oversight of all the manifold activities of the church. Your great business is to win souls to Jesus Christ, and to build them up in godly living; and all this cannot be accomplished by two sermons a week, even if they were the best that Paul himself could deliver. In fact, the largest part of Paul's recorded work was quite other than public preaching. As for our blessed Lord, he has left us one extended discourse and a few shorter ones; but oh, how many narratives we have of his personal visits, personal conversations, and labors of love with the sick, the sinning, and the suffering! He was the Shepherd who knew every sheep.

Determine, then, from the very start, that you will be a thorough pastor. Only a few men can be great preachers, but every minister who has a good heart and good sense can be a good pastor. Devote the forenoon of every day, except Monday, to your study, and do not allow anybody to intrude upon you, unless he or she comes there on the Master's business. My custom was to pin on my study-door a card, "Very Busy;" this had the wholesome effect of shutting out mere formal calls, and of shortening the calls of those who had some important errand. Having given your forenoon to your studies, give your afternoons to pastoral visitation. The physical exercise alone will be a benefit, and the spiritual benefits will be tenfold more. Secure a complete record of the "whereabouts" of your congregation. Request from the pulpit that prompt information be given you of any change of residence, and also of any case

of sickness or trouble of any kind. Encourage your people to send you word when there is any case of religious interest in their families or any matter of importance to discuss with you. In short, treat your flock exactly as if they were your own family. Be perfectly at home in their homes.

You should manage to visit every family at least once in each year, and as much oftener as circumstances may require. If you are wise enough not to have any "loafing" places, you can easily get through the largest congregation that you are likely ever to have. Spurgeon had an assistant pastor for his immense flock; but he made it a rule to visit the sick or the dying in as many cases as possible. He once remarked to a friend, "I have been to-day to visit two of my church-members who are near eternity, and both are as happy as if they were going to a wedding. Oh, it makes me preach like

a lion when I see how my people can die.”

It has always been my custom to take a particular neighborhood, and to call on every parishioner in that street or district; but I have seldom found it wise to send word in advance to any family that I would visit them on a certain day or hour. For I might be prevented from coming, and thus subject them to disappointment or annoyance. Run the risk as to finding them at home; and, if they are all absent, then leave your card, and try again at another time. If you come in upon your people unawares, as you commonly will, it will depend upon yourself to secure a cordial welcome. If you come in with a hearty salutation, and ask them to allow you to sit down with them wherever they are, regardless of dress or ceremony, you will soon be perfectly at home with them. No one should be so welcome as a loving pastor. Do not

squander your call in idle trivialities or gossip. Encourage them to talk with you about the affairs of your church, about the Sabbath services and the truths preached, and the influence that your message is having upon them. In this way you may discover whether your shots are striking, for the gunnery that hits no one is not worth the powder. Fishing for compliments is beneath you; but it does cheer a pastor's heart to be told, "Your sermon last Sunday brought me a great blessing;" "It helped me all the week;" or, better still, "Your sermon brought me to decide for Christ." In a careful and delicate way seek to draw out your people in regard to their spiritual condition; if you find that any of the family is anxious about his or her soul, or has any peculiar spiritual trouble, then manage to have a private and unreserved conversation with that person. Be careful how you ever violate the confidence reposed in you. A

family physician and a faithful pastor often have to know some things that they do not like to know, but they should not let any one else know them.

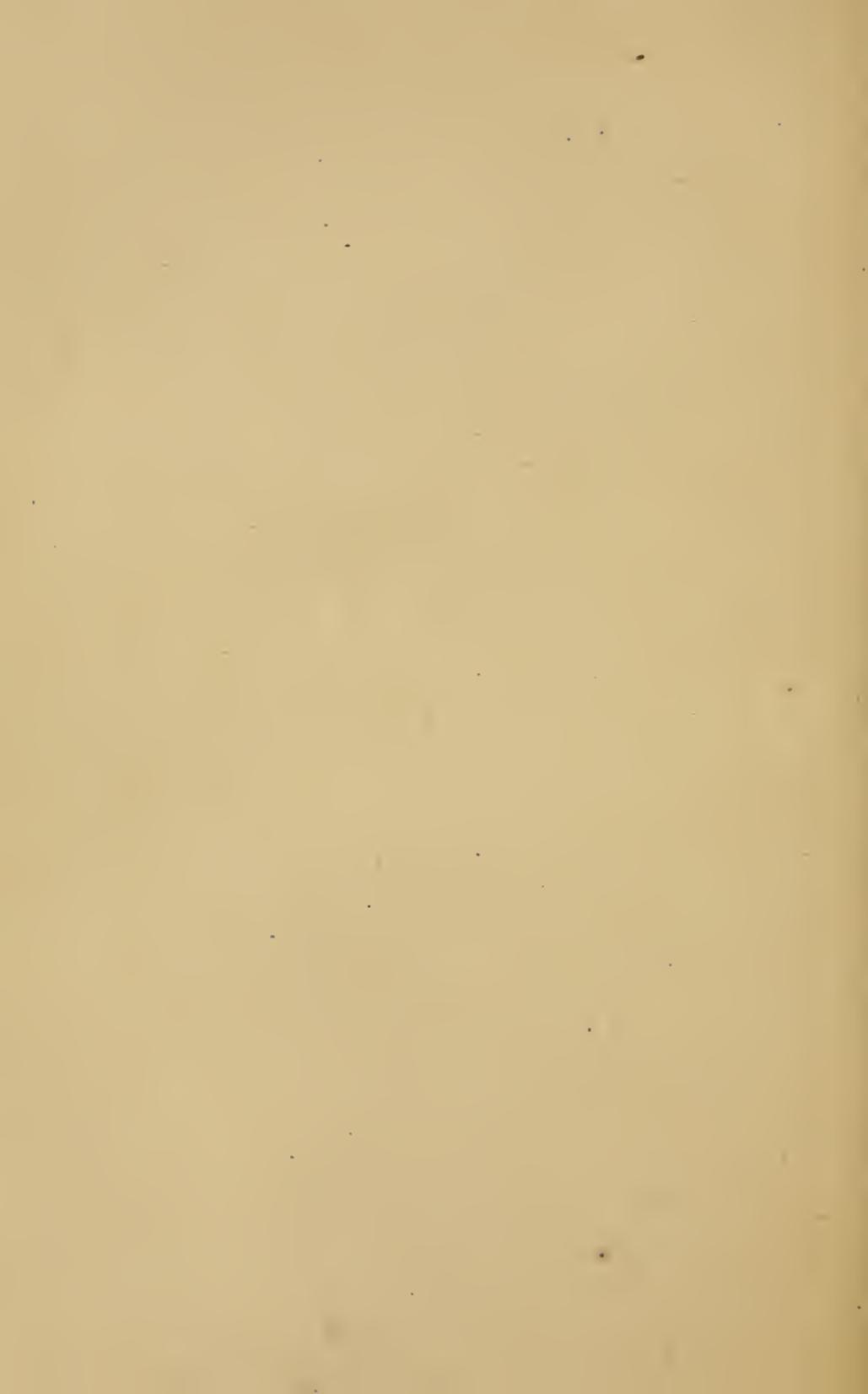
This intimate, personal intercourse with your flock will enable you to bring the undecided to a decision for Christ. It will also enable you to clear up difficulties and to solve doubts, gently to rebuke the delinquent, and to encourage the diffident and desponding. A close, hearty, personal talk will often accomplish more than a hundred sermons. As a school of practical theology there is nothing like dealing with a human soul in its various needs or conflicts and temptations. The first revival that I ever had (in my little church at Burlington, N. J.) was worth more to me than the same length of time spent in the theological seminary. Next to God's Word, the most important thing for you to understand is the human heart. Out of the knowledge that you gain in your

intimate intercourse with your people you will often make some of your best practical discourses. My people have given me almost as many sermons as I have given to them. A living person is worth a dozen dead books to instruct you.

“A house-going minister makes a church-going people.” He wins hearts. If you make yourself at home in everybody’s home, if you are hearty in your manner,—especially with the children,—if you come often to visit them in their sickness and in their sorrow, if you deal with them frankly and lovingly, you will gradually weave a cord around their hearts that is not easily broken. They will forgive a poor sermon, and stand a plain sermon without flinching. It is your business to be popular, not to gratify vanity, but to make your heavenly message winsome. You represent Christ. Study to win everybody. Take an interest in everybody. Never slight the

smallest child, or poorest or most obscure human creature in your parish. Never knuckle to the rich; never neglect the poor. The most effective ministers, who build up the most solid churches, are the good pastors. If many a minister would take part of the time that he now spends in polishing his sermons (and often polishing all the edge off), and would devote it to going among his flock, he would have a bigger congregation and vastly more conversions to Christ. All this pastoral work will consume time, and will often put a sharp strain on your nerves. No matter; it will pay in the end. Nothing costs too much that will save a soul. The shepherd who is above the watching and the tending and the nursing of his flock will soon have no flock to watch.

CHAPTER III.
GROWING SERMONS.



III.

GROWING SERMONS.

A GREAT many sermons are made, and very bunglingly made, too; but the best sermons grow. The seed, or root, of them is lodged in the preacher's mind, and often by the direct agency of the Holy Spirit. It should always be a passage from God's inspired and infallible Word. Your divine commission is to "preach the Word," and whatever topic or subject should be revolving in your mind, yet the sermon on that topic should have a root in the Bible. The men who draw from God's inexhaustible reservoir of truth are commonly the men who hold out; for human brains often run dry, but the Bible never does. Spurgeon was al-

ways a closely textual preacher, and that was one great secret of his perennial power. The brilliant Theodore Parker, of Boston, sometimes took his text from Shakespeare; he concocted therefrom bright essays, but they did not contain gospel enough to save a mouse.

It has always been my custom to keep a little memorandum-book in which I noted down any Bible passage that seemed especially adapted to the pulpit, and so I always had by me a supply to draw from when I sat down to work on my sermon on Tuesday morning; for I seldom left the choice of my theme any later than that day in the week. Be on the lookout for themes all the time and everywhere. As I happened to meet a man one day, and mentioned to him the fact that a criminal was to be hanged on that day, he replied, "Yes, poor creature, the wages of sin is death." That old, familiar passage so impressed me at the

moment that I went home and began a discourse on it immediately. It is a happy thing for you when some out-of-the-way passage that is seldom preached from opens itself to you in a fresh and striking way; for then you can present to your people something that they had probably never heard before, and the very novelty of the text excites curiosity and enchains attention. Sensational preachers often hit upon odd texts, and handle them grotesquely; as when one of this tribe preached on the words, "Let her drive!" and another one founded a discourse against the practice of immersion on the words, "Beware of divers." While clowns in the pulpit perpetrate such follies, there is still a legitimate argument in favor of novel texts, when handled wisely and devoutly; for such presentations of sacred truth give your hearers a new idea of the inexhaustible wealth and wide applications of God's Word.

When you have selected your passage from the Bible, let your sermon grow legitimately out of it. The connection between every good sermon and its text is just as vital as the connection between an apple-tree and its roots. Sometimes a lazy minister endeavors to palm off an old sermon for a new one by changing the text; but this artifice should soon expose itself, for the change would be like the decapitation of a man, fatal to life. The text ought to spring up as the root of your discourse, and send its trunk towering aloft as the central idea of that discourse. All the arguments, instructions, and exhortations are but as the boughs branching off from this central truth, giving breadth, vigor, and spiritual beauty to the whole organic production. The unity of your sermon—yes, and the spiritual power of it, also—will commonly depend upon its adherence to the great divine truth contained in the inspired

text. Remember that your text is God's part of your sermon; and from that should sprout out manifold vital and vigorous thoughts, like the fruit-laden limbs of a Bartlett pear-tree. Be careful that you do not tie on the trunk a lot of dead sticks that have no organic connection with the trunk, and only disfigure its comeliness. The more thoroughly you get your text into your very soul, the more you will get it into your sermon. Very often you may introduce the results of your own personal experience into your preaching; and, if you live close to God, he will be pouring his Spirit into your heart; and these experiences will be among the most richly profitable portions of your pulpit instructions. If you water your text with prayer, it will assuredly grow into a goodly tree, and "the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon."

As to what may be called the mechanical process of sermonizing, you must fol-

low your own instincts. There has been, and probably will ever be, an endless discussion about the comparative merits of written and of extemporaneous preaching. No rule is the best rule. Find out by practice which method you can use to the best advantage, and then pursue it. No man ever fails who understands his forte, and no man succeeds who does not. Some ministers cannot extemporize effectively, if they try ever so hard; there are others who, like Gladstone, can think best when they are on their legs, and are inspired by an audience. Probably the two greatest British preachers of this century were Chalmers and Spurgeon. Chalmers wrote every line of his magnificent discourses, and delivered them with such tremendous vehemence that he made the rafters roar. Spurgeon was a prince of extemporaneous orators. When I once asked him whether he ever wrote any of his sermons, or even any portion of them,

his reply was, "I had rather be hung." His method was to fill up the cask all through the week by diligent study of God's Word and of all nutritious books; and then, when Saturday evening came, he selected his particular text, and on Sunday morning he just turned the spigot, and out flowed the pure, sweet gospel in an abundant stream. No man could preach after that fashion who was not a close student of books and of human nature, and who had not a great gift of ready, fluent speech. Young brother, if you find that your sermons are running out, or furnish only a thin, scanty stream, fill up your cask.

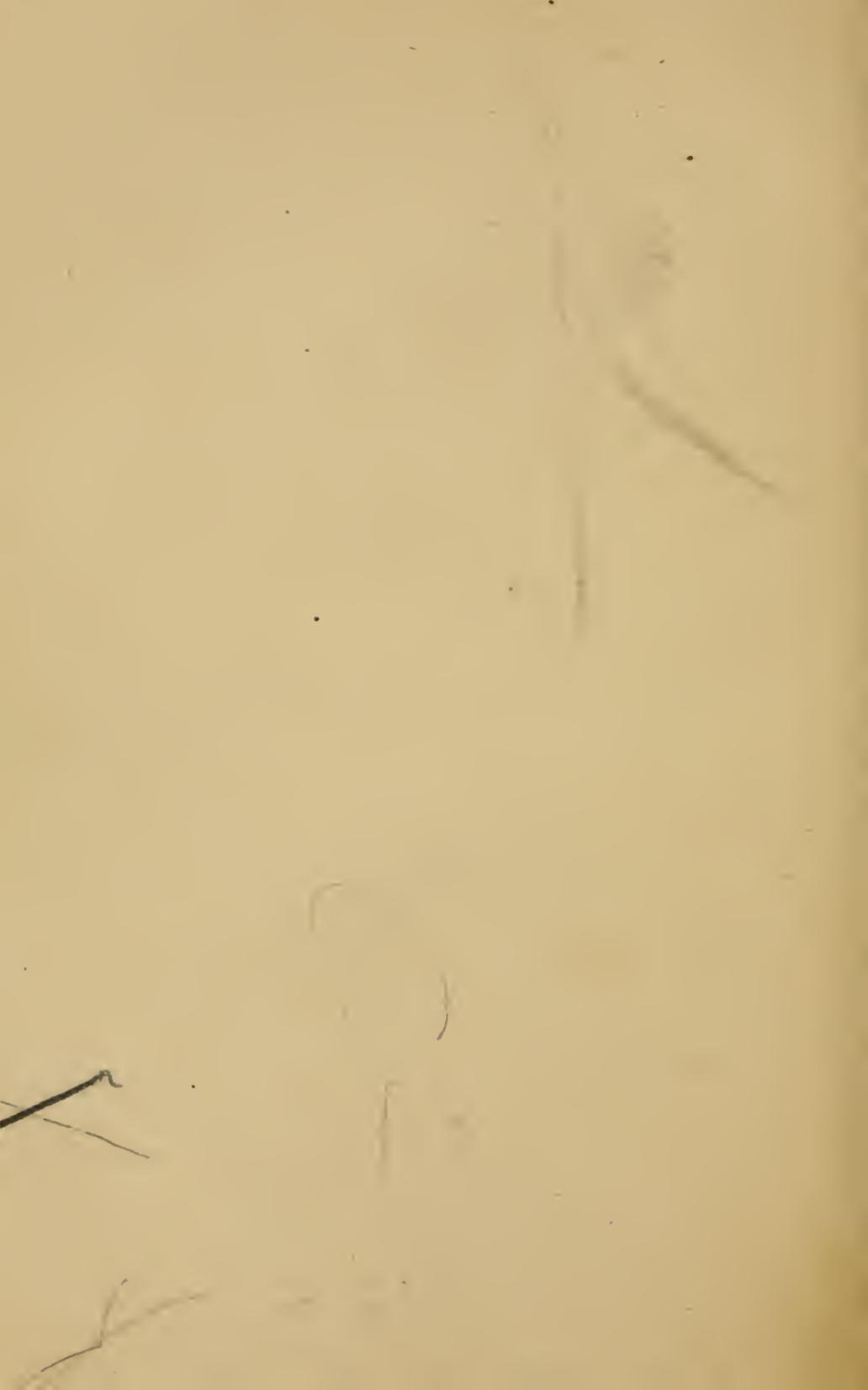
The great danger of extemporaneous preaching is that it may lead you into disconnected rambling, or mere effusive gush. Therefore you ought to form your style, at the outset, by careful and systematic writing. When Spurgeon was a youth, he wrote most of his sermons.

Dr. Richard S. Storrs is by all odds the most elegant and affluent extemporaneous orator in America; but for twenty years he carefully wrote all his discourses. Henry Ward Beecher was in the habit of writing about half of the sermon; and then, turning away from his notes, he interjected the thoughts that came to him in the heat of the moment, and presently returned to his manuscript. This has been my own method of sermonizing, until about fifteen years ago, when I adopted the plan of preparing a short brief and tucking it into a Bagster's Bible. Dr. John Hall writes carefully, and leaves his manuscripts at home. So does Dr. Alexander McLaren, of Manchester, who is to-day the most splendid sermonizer in Great Britain. The eloquent Guthrie of Scotland committed his discourses to memory, and delivered them in a torrent of godly emotion.

Without citing any further cases, let

me exhort you to study your sermons most thoroughly, conscientiously, and prayerfully, whether you commit them to paper or not. The most slipshod and abominable of all methods is that of extemporaneous thinking, or attempting to shake a sermon out of an empty sleeve. It is this style of offhand pulpit chatter that has brought extemporaneous preaching into discredit. If you are careful to plant a text in your mind, water it with prayer, and let it grow all the week, and branch out into fruitful boughs of practical spiritual truth, you will never be ashamed to look at your people from your pulpit, or to look at yourself when you go home from church.

CHAPTER IV.
MORE ABOUT SERMON-GROWING.



IV.

MORE ABOUT SERMON-GROWING.

AS every orchard contains a variety of fruit-trees, so you should aim at variety in the growth of your discourses. Some preachers run into an excess of doctrinal sermons; others, into the controversial; and others, into the hortatory. Dr. Charles Hodge used to select his texts from the epistles, and he preached theology—and very sound theology, too; Dr. Talmage is apt to find his texts in the narrative portions of the Old Testament, and his sermons are vivid pictures. The Bible is a miracle of variety; every note of the gamut is struck in its pages, and every chord in the human heart is made to vibrate by its truths.

The backbone of your work in the pulpit ought to be doctrinal. Jesus Christ dealt in doctrine; in the third chapter of John, during the course of a single conversation with Nicodemus, he discussed human guilt, the atonement, regeneration, the Trinity, divine love in redemption, the need of faith, and the promise of heaven. These great central truths are all packed into one short, simple, solemn talk. Paul is the great master of divine theology; his Epistle to the Romans was well pronounced by Coleridge to be the profoundest book in existence. And oh, how his mighty soul kindles and burns with holy emotion! My young brother, if you are ever dry or ever dull, do not let it be when you are handling these great central truths. Preach doctrine with passion. Make your arguments red-hot with heavenly fire. A man who cannot get into a holy glow over such themes as the atonement, the

new birth, the glories of redemption, the resurrection, and the judgment to come, can never be a great preacher or hold thoughtful minds under the spell of his power. Finney, the king of modern evangelists, bombarded the consciences of sinners with a tremendous broadside of doctrine; the most acute lawyers and judges were attracted by his logical discourses, and many of them were converted. Yet he could be very rich and tender in dealing with the desponding and the troubled. He used to say that the Bible fared very badly; some Christians gave away all of its precious promises, and sinners threw away all of its threatenings; and so there was not much left of it. In our day Rev. B. Fay Mills exhibits many of the traits of Finney, and his close, pungent, doctrinal preaching to the conscience is the chief element of his power. Solid instruction ought to come before the most persuasive appeals; in other words, you

must tell your hearers what to believe and what to do before you urge them to do it. Merely hortatory sermons seldom amount to much.

Your main reliance must be upon the great central, doctrinal truths of God's Word; these you should preach with all the fresh and vivid illustrations, and all the fervor, that you can command. But the Bible is very rich in history and biography. This is one of the internal evidences of its divine origin; being written for human instruction and guidance, it contains every variety of human character. What a marvelous portrait-gallery is that which begins with Adam, and is followed by such a procession of patriarchs, soldiers, statesmen, singers, prophets, rulers, apostles, mingled with humble maidens, servants, and little children! Some of these characters—such as Enoch, Gaius, Dorcas, Demas, and Tertius—are painted in a single sentence. Out of all

this immense gallery you can select subjects for scores, yes, for hundreds, of sermons. I have always found that biographical discourses were not only interesting to almost every class of auditors, but could often be made the most practical and profitable. Robertson of Brighton has a sermon on Eli, and Dr. Guthrie one on Demas, and Dr. McLaren one on Judas (the text being "See thou to that"), which are superb specimens of portraiture, that present pungent truth to every man's conscience. Rev. John McNeill, who is often styled "the Scottish Spurgeon," deals very largely with biographical incidents; and his sermons on the sacrifice of Abraham and the expulsion of Hagar are brilliant specimens of word-painting, and at the same time of acute analysis of character and presentation of some central truths of the gospel. When presenting Scripture incidents, be careful to adhere to the inspired narrative, and not to

overlay it with any "modern improvements." Even one of the greatest evangelists of the day, who is a grand practical expounder of Scripture, was tempted to make the servants of Naaman say to him, "Suppose the prophet had told you to take cod-liver oil three times a day for ten years, wouldn't you have done it?"

There is a third kind of sermons, which our forefathers used to call experimental, because they deal mostly with the inner life and the spiritual experience of God's people. The seeds of this sort of discourses are found in great abundance in the Psalms and in John's Gospel. Bunyan's immortal *Pilgrim* is the unrivaled masterpiece in the line of Christian experience; after him come Jeremy Taylor's "Holy Living and Dying," Rutherford's "Letters," and President Edwards on the "Religious Affections"; of all living preachers along this line, none excels Rev. F. B. Meyer, of London, who has

attended the Northfield conferences for two summers. This is a sort of preaching that requires close, prayerful study of the Word and of the workings of the Holy Spirit on your own heart. The deeper the soil of godliness in your own soul, the richer will be the crop of experimental sermons sprouting out of it. If you are a faithful pastor, studying the experiences of your own people, you will gather no little material from them also. Preach, my dear brother, to the heart. The head is of but half as much consequence. Your pulpit is not a professor's chair, nor your audience a class of university students. They are a company of immortal creatures, who come to your church every Sunday from the toils, the temptations, the trials, the joys, and the sorrows of the week. They want to be fed, and not with whipped syllabub or confectionery. Most of them will need a lift; bruised hearts will need to be bound

up; feeble knees to be strengthened; a word in season must be spoken to the weak, the weary, and the woebegone. Tonic sermons are always in order; the stronger, the better. Many of our people are like eight-day clocks; they get terribly run down during the week, and require to be wound up again on Sunday. Try to steep your sermons in God's Word and in prayer, so that when you preach them they will infuse iron into the blood.

Of course you will use all the illustrations you can get hold of; but be careful that they illustrate something. When lugged into a sermon merely for the sake of ornament, they are as absurdly out of place as a bouquet would be if tied fast to a plough-handle. The divine Teacher set us the example of making vital truths intelligible by illustrations when he spake so often in parables. All congregations relish incidents, when they are pat for the purpose. Do not be afraid of an anec-

dote, if it is serious enough for God's house, and helps to drive the truth into the hearts of your auditors. During my early ministry I delivered a discourse to young men, at Saratoga, and closed it with a solemn story of a man who died of remorse at the exposure of his crime. The late Hon. John McLean, a judge of the United States Supreme Court, was in the congregation; and the next day I called to pay my respects to him. He said to me, "My young brother, I was much interested in that story you told last evening; it clinched the sermon. Our ministers at C—— used to introduce illustrative anecdotes; but it seems to have gone out of fashion, and I am sorry for it." I replied to him, "Well, I am glad to have a decision of the Supreme Court of the United States in favor of telling an anecdote or personal incident in the pulpit." There is one principle that covers all cases; it is this: What-

ever makes the gospel of Jesus Christ more clear to the understanding, and more effective in awakening sinners, in converting souls, in edifying believers, and in promoting holiness, is never out of place in your pulpit. When you are preaching for souls, use any and every weapon of truth within your reach.

CHAPTER V.
THE DELIVERY OF SERMONS.

V.

THE DELIVERY OF SERMONS.

THE preaching of the gospel is spiritual gunnery; and many a well-loaded cartridge has failed to reach its mark from the lack of powder to propel it. A good sermon committed to paper, or carefully prepared in your mind, is merely a preliminary process; when you get into your pulpit, you must preach. And preaching is not paper-reading, nor is it mere frothy gush. It is the faithful presentation of God's inspired truth to immortal souls; and that truth must be addressed not only to the reason, but to the conscience and to the affections. Your aim must be to arrest the attention of your auditors,—to arouse those who

are indifferent, to warn the careless, to rebuke the faithless professor, as well as to comfort the sorrowing, strengthen the weak, and edify believers. As the ambassador of the living God, you must demand and command a hearing, cost what it may. An advocate strikes for the jury; and if he does not gain the verdict, his effort is a failure. You must strike for souls; and if you do not succeed (with the sought help of the Holy Spirit) in moving your hearers one inch toward a better life, then your preaching is a failure. Results are what you are after, and they will never be secured if you address your auditors in a cold, or careless, or formal and perfunctory manner.

The delivery of your sermons, my young brother, is half the battle. Why load your gun, unless you can send your charge to the mark? Many an ordinary discourse has produced an extraordinary effect by an intensely earnest delivery.

It is equally true that many an excellent discourse has failed to produce any impression on account of the dull and monotonous manner of the speaker. If you do not warm yourself up, you may be sure that you will never warm up your congregation. I once asked Albert Barnes, "Who is the greatest preacher you have ever heard?" Mr. Barnes, who was himself a very calm, clear-headed thinker, replied, "I cannot answer your question exactly; but I can tell you what was the grandest specimen of preaching I ever heard; it was by Edward N. Kirk, before my congregation during the height of a revival. It produced a tremendous effect." Dr. Kirk was not a profound scholar or thinker; but he was a born orator, with a superb voice and graceful manner and persuasive tone, and his whole soul was red-hot with a holy love of Jesus and of dying souls. About the time that I had this talk with Mr. Barnes

I was in Boston, and at a public meeting there I heard a very able production read in a lifeless manner before a listless audience. As I was coming out, a gentleman said to me, "If Edward N. Kirk had had hold of that address, he would have thrilled everybody in the house." Certainly, my old friend Kirk had a remarkable gift of saying even a common thing with most uncommon power.

You may call this "magnetism" if you choose, or by any other name; but I would define it as the fire in your own soul that not only kindles your tongue, but also kindles the hearts before you. Paul must have had this when he ceased not to warn the Ephesians, night and day, with tears. It has been the characteristic of nearly all the most effective preachers. Dr. Chalmers had it; McCheyne had it; Dr. Guthrie had it to such a degree that a Highland drover standing in the packed auditory spoke out audibly, "And did ye

iver hear the like o' that?" The sermons of Frederick W. Robertson, of Brighton, are models of vigorous thought and clear-cut expression; yet they owed much of their power at the time to their being delivered "with a fiery glow." In my own humble experience I have seen my congregation much moved by a certain discourse, and spiritual results have followed it. At another time and place the same sermon has produced no impression, and I feel quite confident that the difference was more with me than with my hearers. Physical condition may have something to do with a minister's power in delivery; but the chief element in the eloquence that awakens and converts souls is the unction of the Holy Spirit. Your best power, my brother, is power from the Holy Ghost. You may have that if you empty yourself of pride and vainglory and foolish fear of man, and then seek the inpouring of the divine

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Spirit in his fullness. Do not be discouraged if your voice is weak, or is harsh and unmusical; do not trouble yourself too much about the gracefulness of your gestures. Dr. Alexander Duff's eloquence swept his audience like a hurricane, but such outlandish contortions of gestures as his, I never witnessed elsewhere. Physical defects may often be overcome by resolute training, as Bishop Phillips Brooks overcame them; and, if you fall into uncouth and disagreeable habits of intonation or gesticulation, get some good friend to score you out of them. You never will become an effective preacher if you are unwilling to accept the sharpest criticisms kindly; and faithful are the wounds of a wife, if she sometimes cuts your self-conceit to the quick, or prunes off your bad habits without mercy.

During my three years in Princeton Theological Seminary I made it a rule to go out as often as possible and address

little meetings in the neighboring school-houses, and found this a very beneficial method of gaining practice. A young preacher must get accustomed to the sound of his own voice; if he is naturally timid and bashful, he must learn to face an audience. He must first learn to speak at all; afterward he may learn to speak well. "I spoke every evening but one during my first session of Parliament," said Charles James Fox, "and I am only sorry that I did not speak on that evening also." It was by such constant practicing on the patience of his auditors that Fox became one of the most splendid masters of parliamentary debate. It is a happy thing for a young minister to begin his ministry in a small congregation. He has more time for study; he has a better chance to become intimately acquainted with individual characters, and also a smaller audience to face. The first congregation that I was called to

serve contained about forty families; three or four of these were wealthy and cultured, and the rest were plain mechanics, with a few gardeners and coachmen. I aimed my sermons at the comprehension of the gardeners and the coachmen at the rear of the house, leaving my cultured parishioners to gather what they could from the sermon on its way. One of these rich folks was a very distinguished lawyer. After I had delivered a very earnest sermon on "the worth of the soul" I went home and said to myself, "Lawyer C—— must have thought that was a camp-meeting exhortation." He met me during the week, and to my astonishment he said to me, "Young man, I thank you for that sermon last Sunday; it had the two best qualities of preaching — simplicity and earnestness. If I had a student in my office who was not more in earnest to win his first ten-dollar suit before a justice of the peace

than some ministers seem to be in trying to save souls, I would kick such a student out of my office."

That lawyer's remark did me more good than any month's study in the seminary. It taught me that the cultured relish plain, simple truth as much as do the ignorant, and that downright earnestness to save souls "hides a multitude of sins" in us raw young preachers. If you want to be a natural and forceful speaker, do not trammel yourself too much with the canons of elocution. Load your piece with God's truth, take good aim, and then fire away. The less you think about yourself while in the pulpit, the better. Leave your own self-consciousness and your own reputation down under the pulpit stairs. Look at your auditors as immortal beings bound to the judgment-seat of Christ, and remember that you are to meet them there, and to render your account for discharging your duty to them.

Then seek the power from on high, and preach for souls! Preach as if the light of eternity flashed into your face. The more soul you put into your preaching, the more souls you will bring to Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER VI.
HEALTH AND HABITS.

VI.

HEALTH AND HABITS.

MANY people have the very foolish impression that the life of a minister is a very easy one. But the pastor of a large parish, who devotes himself conscientiously to his work, needs a strong mind in a strong body. Every student for the ministry should use abundant physical exercise during his preparatory training, so that when he enters upon his labors he may be able to "endure hardness as a good soldier," and not be a candidate for the hospital. It is rarely a wise thing to have a first settlement in a great city. A small parish in the rural regions is the best place in which to begin. There the young man will

have undisturbed opportunity for studying God's Word, and human nature, too; he will have the bracing influence of country air, and of long walks or rides to visit his flock. Almost all the greatest ministers of both Britain and America have served their apprenticeship in humble parishes, while those who rush precipitately into ambitious settlements commonly break down. The clock that is not content to strike one will never strike twelve.

Bodily health, my young brother, is more easily kept than regained; and Dr. Prevention is the best physician that you can employ. I am not very strong physically, but I have taken good care of a good constitution, so that, during an active ministry of forty-seven years, I have never spent an entire Sabbath in bed. On three or four occasions I have suffered from ailments that kept me from church, but did not put me on my back.

The best parts of me have always been my lungs and my legs; they are really the most important parts, for the one does the preaching, and the other does the pastoral visiting. As to the voice, I have avoided too many warm wrappings about the throat, have applied plenty of cold water and friction, and have never been addicted to troches and other like trumpery. Nor is it a good practice to drink cold water very often while speaking.

Take a total-abstinence pledge, at the very start, to refrain from all sorts of alcoholic stimulants and all sorts of indigestible food. A minister sometimes calls in as an ally what proves to be a deadly enemy. Long years ago, the eloquent Dr. K—— fell into sad inebriation from having used port-wine to enable him, as he honestly said, “to preach with more power.” He repented in dust and ashes, and spent the closing years of his

godly life as an entire abstainer. One of the most zealous ministers of this city probably shortened his life by a lamentable slavery to strong coffee and tobacco. Both coffee and tea are harmless luxuries to most of us when used in moderation. Famous old Dr. Emmons, who died at ninety-five, used to drink his coffee "one half milk, and the other half sugar"; but when I saw the British prime minister, Lord Beaconsfield, trembling like an aspen leaf, I was not surprised that his wife said, "My husband likes his coffee as black as ink and as hot as Tophet." God's prohibitory law against the use of exciting stimulants appears in that they are all armed with a whip of scorpions.

My chief panacea has always been sound, healthful sleep. This is the great secret of Mr. Gladstone's longevity and marvelous power at the age of eighty-three. He once told me that he managed to lock all his cares, and parliamentary

debates, and perplexities of public office, outside of his bedchamber door. The men who live the longest, and do the most effective work, are commonly good sleepers. If they cannot secure enough sleep at night, they make it up by a short nap in the middle of the day. When a man who has so much strain on his brain and his nervous sensibilities as a pastor has, goes to his pillow, he should school himself to the habit of dismissing all thoughts about outside matters. If this costs him some difficulty, he should pray for divine help to do it. As for anodynes to quiet down the nervous excitements of preaching, or of revival meetings, I have found nothing so wholesome as a good bowl of bread and milk. Dr. Lyman Beecher used to accomplish the same result by shoveling a pile of gravel to and fro in his cellar, and sometimes by dancing to the music of his own violin.

Too many ministers toil at their ser-

mons until ten or eleven o'clock, and then retire, with throbbing nerves, to their sleepless beds. This is suicide. The man that invented "midnight oil" deserves a purgatory of everlasting nightmare. My own rule is never to touch a sermon by lamplight. One hour in the morning is worth two or three at night. Get into your study every morning—except Monday—as early as you can, and then to your books and your pen. If your mind is dull and inactive, do not attempt to force it into the preparation of a sermon that will probably put your congregation to sleep. Throw down your pen; take up a book, or try a short nap or a short walk. But when your mind is especially clear and alert, then bolt your study-door against all intruders, and make the very most of such precious golden hours. More than once I have had a whole sermon burst on me at a single sitting, and I did not stay my pen until every nimble

thought was captured and securely fastened to paper. "Redeeming the time" literally signifies "buying up opportunities"; and when these favored moments for coining thought are vouchsafed to you, let no thief break in and steal the mintage.

Do not be surprised that I exhort you so earnestly to the care of your bodily health and to the formation of good mental habits. They are both of vital importance for your usefulness. Your health affects the spiritual health of your flock. If you are sleepless during the week, you will become enervated and irritable, and will put your congregation to sleep by your dull sermons. If you do not digest your food, you will be very likely to torment them with indigestible preachments. As soon as your study becomes so excessive as to fag you out, then shut up your books, or drop your pen, and be off at something else. It is the work

that we attempt when we are tired that hurts us; yes, and hurts those that are obliged to listen to us.

Sometimes you will be tempted to repeat a former discourse, from lack of time to prepare a new one. If you do this, see to it that the discourse is improved on its second delivery. Cut out its weak points; strengthen it with fresh thought; and, if it was originally delivered on a stormy Sabbath, it will be well to give it a larger audience under better auspices. Do not be afraid to repeat a thoroughly good thing. Many folks have short memories. A poor, lean, juiceless sermon ought never to be preached once; but a rich, nutritious discourse, which God has already blessed, may be made still more forcible on a second or third delivery. Dr. Edward Dorr Griffin delivered his great sermon on "The Worth of the Soul" ninety times; he never wearied of it, nor did those who had

heard it more than once. Fewer sermons and richer ones should be the aim of those that really edify Christ's people and win souls to the Saviour. There is an increasing fashion of advertising the topics of discourse in the newspapers. It is a bad fashion, and none of the great preachers, such as Guthrie, McLaren, Liddon, Newman Hall and Spurgeon, have practiced it abroad; and very few of our best preachers practice it in our country. There are more objections to this custom than I have time and space to specify. The best topic is that which will save the most souls; the best advertisement is the love of your people and the blessing of God upon your ministry.

CHAPTER VII.

WINNING SOULS.

VII.

WINNING SOULS.

SOME one asked Dr. Lyman Beecher, in his old age, "What is the greatest of all things?" The sturdy veteran replied, "It is not theology; it is not controversy; it is saving souls." He had been the king of the American pulpit; but, as he looked back over his noble career, he felt that the greatest good that he had accomplished was in leading guilty and polluted souls to their only Saviour. David Brainerd, one of the most celebrated of our missionaries, while he was laboring among the poor, benighted Indians on the banks of the Delaware, once said, "I care not where I live, or what hardships I go through, so that I can but

gain souls to Christ. While I am asleep, I dream of these things; as soon as I awake, the first thing I think of is this great work. All my desire is the conversion of sinners, and all my hope is in God." Our blessed Master came into our sin-cursed world to seek and to save the lost. To convert men to Jesus Christ by the aid of the Holy Spirit was the master-purpose of Paul and his fellow-apostles. The great Reformation, under the lead of Luther and Calvin and Knox, was far more than a protestation against Popish errors; it was a direct bringing of benighted souls to the cross for salvation. Whitefield and the Wesleys made this their chief business. The most successful preacher of modern times was Spurgeon; and he once asked me the question, "How far do your ablest American ministers aim mainly at the conversion of souls?"

The question that my beloved British brother asked me I would propound to

every young preacher that reads these lines. No minister is likely to succeed in anything that he undertakes with only half a heart; he can never do what he does not even attempt to do. If your whole heart is not bent on the glorious work of converting sinners, by the help of God, you will never accomplish it. You may produce much valuable and elevating thought; you may argue ingeniously against current skepticism; you may unfold sound principles of morality; you may say many eloquent things about "developing humanity," and in behalf of benevolent reform; but if you stop short of leading immortal souls to Jesus Christ, then your ministry will be, at the most vital point, a failure. Nor is it a vague idea about "reaching the masses," or saving people in the general, that must inspire you. Men are saved or lost individually. The Bible declares that "he which converteth a sinner from the error

of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall cover a multitude of sins." A single soul was a sufficient audience for the Son of God at the well of Sychar and in the inquiry-room of Nicodemus.

1. Aim then, my brother, to make your preaching direct, pointed, individualizing. Let every unconverted person in the house be made to feel, "That means me." Not every sermon is to be addressed to the impenitent, by any means; but when you are presenting Christ, present him as each man's Saviour; and when you discuss the guilt and danger of sin, bring it home to each individual sinner: "Thou art the man," sent Nathan's parable into David's heart like an arrow. Do not be afraid of any sinner in the house; and pray God to help you love every sinner before you so fervently that you will tell him plainly that if he does not repent and accept Christ, he will be lost forever. Do not be afraid of the word "hell" any

more than of the word "heaven." Oh! it is sheer cruelty to conceal from your hearers that the wages of sin is death. If you are faithless and cowardly, the blood of souls will be found in your skirts. Preach, therefore, plainly, lovingly, and pungently the guilt of sin and the doom of sin, and pray that every impenitent soul before you may be convicted by the Holy Spirit. Aim to reveal to every sinner his or her own personal guilt before God, for nobody is likely to flee to the Lord Jesus Christ until he or she feels the need of him. Deep convictions of sin generally produce deep conversions; shallow convictions produce shallow Christians. Put in the plowshare of divine truth, and then bear down on the beam; if it reaches to the roots of sin, and tears them up, all the better. When you have made a sinner see himself, then try to make him see his Saviour. Then point him to the all-sufficient Redeemer, whose

atonement blood cleanseth from all sin. That is the way in which Peter preached at the time of Pentecost, when three thousand souls were convicted and converted in a single day. When you are preaching repentance to the sinner, you cannot deal too faithfully and pungently; when you are offering salvation to the sinner through Jesus, you cannot be too winsome and loving in your beseechings.

2. Only a part of your work in soul-winning is likely to be done in your pulpit. The most important part will be done when you are brought face to face with an awakened person. Be on the lookout for such persons constantly. During your pastoral visits you will encounter those that are inquirers, and you should rejoice to converse with them immediately. By the way, when I discovered several such cases during my calls in one afternoon (in 1856) I hailed this fact as a token of the Holy Spirit's pres-

ence; and I summoned my church-officers, and appointed special services every evening, which services resulted in a large number of conversions. Always be on the watch for the presence of the Holy Spirit. Listen for the first drops of heavenly blessings; then gird yourself for the happy work. In dealing with an awakened soul, your prime duty is to coöperate with the Holy Spirit, and therefore you must pray fervently for his guidance. Endeavor to ascertain just what it is that is in the way of the inquirer, and what it is that keeps him from surrendering to Christ. If it be some bad habit or evil practice, then that evil practice must be abandoned. If it be some sin, cherished in the heart, then he must yield, even if it be like plucking out a right eye or cutting off a right hand. In most cases the chief hindrance lies in a wicked, stubborn heart. It has always been my aim to convince awak-

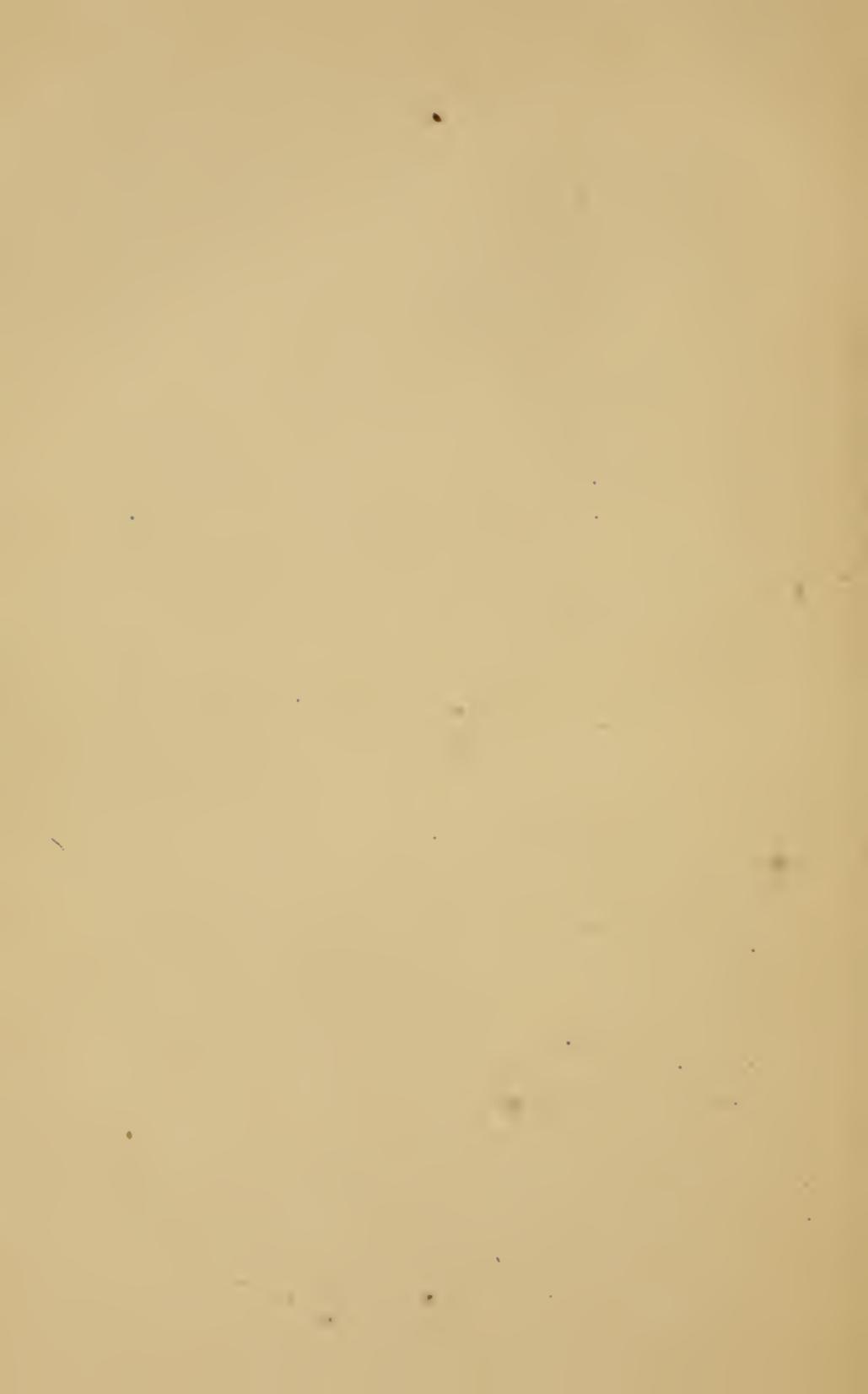
ened persons that, unless they were willing to give their hearts to Jesus and to "do the will" of Jesus, there was no hope for them. We must shut the inquiring soul up to Christ. The experiences of inquirers may differ as much as their countenances; but in two vital particulars all cases are to be treated alike. Every sinner must cut loose from his sins, and must cleave to the Lord Jesus. Saving faith is vastly more than an opinion or a feeling; it is an act of the soul. It is the act of joining our weakness to Christ's strength, our ignorance to his knowledge, our guiltiness to his atoning love, our wills to his will, ourselves to him. No one is soundly converted, and no one should join the church, until he has joined himself to Jesus Christ. This is the one infallible test. It is not enough to "feel happy"; it is not enough to say, "I am trying to be a Christian"; no soul is safe until it has surrendered uncondi-

tionally to Christ, and has been "born anew" by the Holy Spirit. Do not "count noses" too hastily, and do not be so ambitious to swell the numbers of your church that you will rush the unconverted or the half-converted into it. It will be your folly, and may be their ruin.

3. In addition to your conversations with such awakened persons as you may encounter in their homes, or such as may call on you for conversation, it will often be wise to appoint inquiry-meetings. Do this when you discover a need for such meetings, and not as a mere empty form. Some zealous ministers insist that such a meeting should be appointed after every preaching-service; but suppose there are no inquirers to meet; then the very word becomes a solemn farce or failure. When there are inquiring souls, and they are gathered for instruction and guidance, then be exceedingly careful as to whom you allow to go in with you. Surely you

would not call in the first person that happened to go by your door to treat one of your family that was dangerously sick. Be equally careful not to allow rash and inexperienced persons, or pious "cranks," to meddle with immortal souls that are settling the stupendous question of their own salvation. If you require help, invite only the men and women possessing both grace and good common sense. Converse with each inquirer as closely as possible, and as concisely. Bring each to the point at once. Have God's Word in your hand as well as in your memory, and be ready to use the right passages for the right case. With the infallible Word to give you light, call upon the Holy Spirit to apply his almighty power and loving work to the souls before you. Encourage the inquirers to pray themselves. Try to keep every eye fixed on Christ; urge immediate surrender to Christ. Do not be-

grudge the time or labor required to help a halting or perplexed soul. Hand-picked apples keep the longest. Individual labor with each inquirer is indispensable. The happiest hours you will spend in this world, my young brother, will be those that you spend in leading sinners to the Saviour. "He that is wise winneth souls." To you, if you are thus wise, will belong the crown that shineth as the stars.



CHAPTER VIII.

HOW TO HAVE A WORKING CHURCH.



VIII.

HOW TO HAVE A WORKING CHURCH.

YOUR success will depend, under God, not only upon your own devotion and diligence, but also upon the thorough coöperation of your people. You are not only a shepherd of souls, but the commander of a regiment in Christ's sacramental host. It is not every godly minister that has the gift of executive ability. Henry Ward Beecher, with all his splendid genius and eloquence, had but small executive faculty. Mr. Spurgeon, on the other hand, was so masterly an organizer that if he had taken to politics he might have been a great parliamentary leader, or perhaps the prime-minister of the realm. Dr. James W. Alexander once

said to me, "There is no pastor in New York whom I envy more than Dr. Asa D. Smith [afterward the president of Dartmouth College], for he has the knack of keeping all his people at work."

It is indeed a peculiar "knack" of many ministers; and, if you do not possess it naturally, you must do your utmost to acquire it in as large a degree as possible. Common sense and godly zeal are indispensable to every minister; if you do not possess these, God has never called you to the ministry. If you do possess them, then apply them to the task of developing and guiding the spiritual activities of your flock. Be an untiring worker yourself. A lazy pastor makes a lazy church. Emphasize from your pulpit, again and again, the duty and the joy of labor for Christ, and exhort every member of your church to find his or her place of usefulness—the place for which God created him and the Holy Spirit converted him.

Too large a proportion, in nearly all our churches, count for very little except upon the muster-roll; and, when that roll is called for duty, they seldom answer "Here." A large portion of the power in the church, therefore, becomes latent; the stream is diverted upon the water-wheels of wordliness, or else runs to waste entirely. One reason is that young converts are not trained into Christian activity from the start. Another is that when new members unite with the church they are not set to work; and so they drift away into idleness, and become "dead-heads" in the church.

Of course you will organize a society of Christian Endeavor in your congregation, if there be none already in existence. No church in these days is complete without a thorough organization of its young people for spiritual labor and spiritual growth. As a training-school for young converts it is as indispensable to the

church as the Sunday-school; it molds the youth into a household, and into a homelike relation with the church; it supplies a social necessity, and keeps the sons and daughters of Christ's family out of the clutches of the devil. The danger with all associations of young people is that the social element may crowd out the spiritual element, and so cause a Christian organization to degenerate into a semi-convivial club, bent on amusements. There is a place for innocent, healthful entertainments, such as musical concerts, readings, sociables, instructive exhibitions, etc.; but as soon as the "daughter of Herodias" gets into the association, and your young people try to make a frolic of their religion, then use your veto summarily. No society of Christian Endeavor and no association of young Christians is likely to lose its interest or to languish, so long as the hearts of the members are full of Christ, and their

hands are full of doing good. But, when Satan "side-tracks" them into mere mirth and merriment, they soon go over the embankment, and end in a smash-up. There is always enough of innocent recreation and wholesome happiness to be found on Christ's side of the dividing line, without going over to the world's side; nor can we ever convert the world to Christ by conforming to its follies, its fashions, or its frolics.

In every society of Christian Endeavor there ought to be a temperance committee. The decanter and the dramshop are chronic curses in every community, which your pulpit and your church have no right to ignore. The title to membership in a temperance society should be the pledged practice of entire abstinence from all intoxicating beverages; the constitution and by-laws should be brief; the public meetings should be free to everybody, and a collection should be

taken up to meet current expenses. I found such an organization in my church to be a source of manifold blessings to our own members and to the surrounding community.

Your prayer-meetings will be the spiritual thermometer of your church. A prayer-meeting below freezing-point indicates a cold church; it is both a cause and an effect of serious spiritual declension. When a revival comes, it commonly begins right there. Whatever else you neglect, never neglect your prayer-meetings, and never allow anything else to crowd them out. Always attend them yourself, but never take charge of them so long as any church-officer or gifted member can be found to conduct them. If you lead them, there is a danger that you will be tempted to monopolize them. A certain eminent minister complained that his people did not take part in the devotional gatherings, and the reason was that he absorbed most

of the time by his own addresses. The main purpose of a prayer-meeting is not a sermonette by the pastor; it is the development of the church-members in their spiritual life, the worship of God in fervent prayers, songs of praise, and the stirring up of one another's hearts in experimental talks and warm exhortations. The more like a family gathering it is, the better. Have your church-officers conduct it, in alphabetical order. It is a good practice to select some Bible passage or practical topic beforehand, and to have that announced from the pulpit on the previous Sabbath. Exhort the leader to come well prepared, and then leave the helm in his hands. If the meeting drags, be ready to give a timely lift; and you will seldom allow the service to close without some words of earnest exhortation or of prayer. Unless you are wonderfully fortunate, you may be troubled by some officious and indiscreet brethren

that persist in flying like moths into the candle. It is your duty to deal with such offenders lovingly and kindly. If they are genuine Christians, they will thank you for setting them right, and so will the rest of your people. If they are only noisy, or self-conceited self-seekers, then they ought to be abated as nuisances.

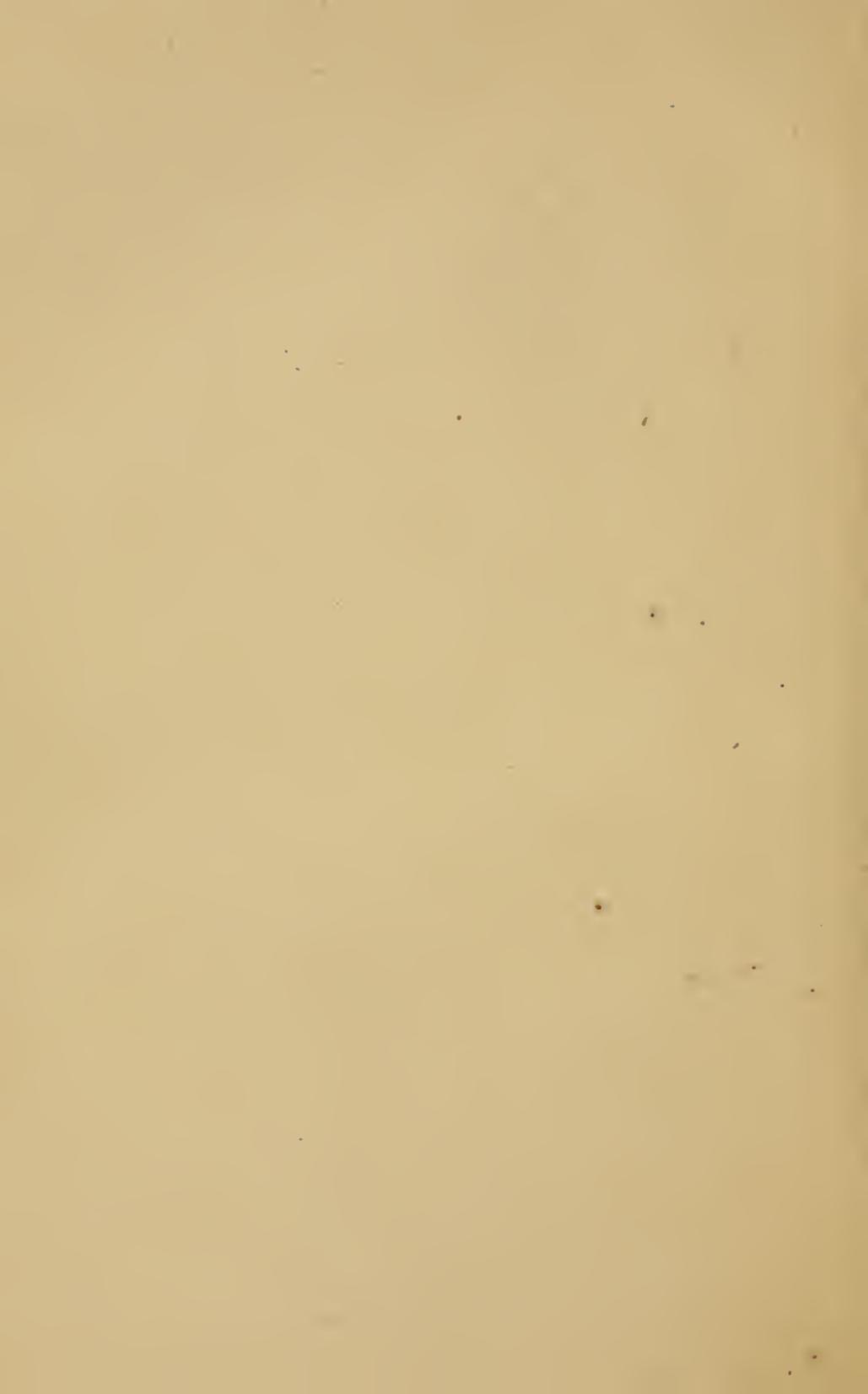
In dealing with the varieties of people in your charge, and in developing their activities, you will need to use a holy tact. Study the characters of your members. Put to the front the wisest, and gently repress the blunderers. Some good people will do good service if they are only consulted; to such it will be wise to say, "Brother A, don't you think it would be well for *us* to do this or that?" The brother will then imagine that he is having his own way, when he is really going your way. There is a vast deal of human nature in the godliest men and women in our flocks. Never wound a true disciple of Christ; never discourage any one that

longs and tries to be useful; and never do anybody's work so long as he or she can be got to do it. You will have enough work of your own.

Finally, let me exhort you to drive every wheel in your machinery to its utmost; but do not have more wheels than power. Enlarge your work as fast and as far as you have men and money to propel it. Keep clear of hobbies and all sorts of sensational devices. Feed your flock with strong, solid, gospel food, if you want them to be strong for work, and then arouse their enthusiasm by your own example and by leading them to seek the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Come to them on Sunday with Christ on your lips, and go among them all the week with Christ in your heart and life. The only power that can drive any church is the Power from on high; and that church which is mighty in prayer will always be mighty in work. Heaven's holy activities will be its sweetest rest.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MAN BEHIND THE MESSAGE.



IX.

THE MAN BEHIND THE MESSAGE.

THE ambassador of the United States to a foreign court is both accorded certain honors and exposed to critical observation, because he represents the great republic. Remember always, my young brother, that you are the ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ, the bearer of the gospel message from the court of heaven; therefore be very watchful of the man that bears the message. Look well after the man that walks in your shoes. People have a right to expect more than ordinary piety in a minister, because he is a representative of Jesus Christ, and has promised to be an "example to the flock." You have no right

to be a minister if you are not willing to be closely watched and keenly scrutinized; you ought to have taken account of this when you voluntarily assumed so high and holy an office. Do not shirk the "fierce light" that may be expected to beat upon your pulpit and your pastorate, and, above all, on your own personality. A torch-bearer must not expect to be hidden; the light that he carries will reveal to others what manner of man he is.

The great object of preaching the gospel is to form godly character, and therefore the preacher himself should strive to exhibit a character of the highest possible type. We whose business it is to set forth Christianity must not forget that people look at us when outside of our pulpits, to discover what we mean when in our pulpits. If your conduct before the community contradicts your utterances of God's truth on God's day, then

your tongue, if it had the charm of Chrysostom's, would be but a tinkling cymbal. A parishioner once remarked, "My pastor's discourses are not brilliant, but his daily life is a sermon all the week." Paul stood behind all his inspired utterances; the "living epistle" was as eloquent and convincing as any words he ever sent to Corinth, or ever pronounced on the hill of Mars. A large part of the power of the best ministers lies in their own personality. Phillips Brooks was generally accounted the foremost American clergyman of these days; his discourses were fresh, chaste, vigorous, often brilliant; and, being constructed largely out of his own spiritual experience, were adapted to the experiences of his hearers; but the magnificent manhood of Phillips Brooks towered above his grandest discourses. It was equally true of Spurgeon, the most popular preacher of modern times. Behind all his thousands of fervid gospel

messages stood Spurgeon, the fearless, faithful, genial, warm-hearted man of God, whom Protestants and Roman Catholics, Jews and Quakers, alike revered and loved. They did this, too, in spite of all the sharp points of his Calvinistic doctrines. He never trimmed his sails to catch popular favor, and the world liked him all the better for that. Time-servers are always despised. If you want to catch and to keep the popular ear, have the courage of your convictions. Never be afraid of your own congregation, or of any one else but God. Yet plain, fearless speaking should never degenerate into the bluster of a bully, or the exasperations of a common scold. Richard Cecil, of London, once said that too many ministers go to the opposite extreme. "They are all milk and mildness. They touch all sin with so much tenderness! and if the patient shrinks, they will touch no more. The gospel is some-

times preached in this way till all the people agree with the preacher; he gives no offense, and he does no good."

If compromising God's truth in the pulpit is mischievous, so is compromising in your practice during the week. I have a pretty strong conviction that the reaction that has set in during these later years is not a wholesome one. Ministers in former times may have gone to an extreme in punctiliousness of clerical dress and in austerity of manners. Now the danger is in the opposite direction; and too many ministers try to be like everybody else, both in their costume and their customs. For fear of being thought puritanical they become frivolous. In order to win favor with the world they fall too much into the ways of the world, forgetting that when they try to conform their Christianity to the world they will never be able to conform the world to Christianity. The standard is being lowered,

both in doctrine and in practice. The dividing line between the church and the world is becoming more indistinct; as to some things, it is almost obliterated. For example, a larger proportion of church-members attend the theater than attended forty years ago, not because the morals of the average stage have been elevated, but because the moral standard of too many professing Christians has been lowered. Set your face like a flint against all impure and unwholesome amusements. There are certainly enough pure and innocent recreations to be found without resorting to the gilded nastiness of the average playhouse, or the sensualities of the ballroom. Never go where your Master would not go. Never be found where any one, especially one of your own church, will be likely to say, "I did not expect to see you here." Keep on Christ's side of the dividing line; and, where you

are in doubt, give Christ and conscience the casting vote. There are several things that are not sinful *per se*, but which it would be improper for a Christian minister to do. God's Word may not pronounce it a sin to touch a glass of wine; nevertheless, under the sanction of Paul's precept to practice self-denial for the sake of others, you ought to let the wine-glass severely alone. Secret drinking is dangerous to yourself; public drinking is dangerous to other people. Entire abstinence is the only safe course. There may be no direct prohibition in the Bible of certain games of chance; yet a minister should never be seen with a pack of cards in his hands. "Keep thyself pure;" "let no man despise thee." Never indulge in any practices that will require you to make explanations or apologies. Be rigidly careful in your pecuniary transactions; and, however small your salary may be, let me exhort you to bear

any privation sooner than incur the terrible bondage of debt. This has eaten like a cancer into more than one minister's health and happiness. Sterling honesty, scrupulous truthfulness, rigid self-denial, cheerful sobriety (that is not afraid to laugh when laughter is in order), generous treatment of all your brethren, and sympathy with the sorrowing, the sobbing, and the suffering around you—all these virtues will tell upon your influence, and will give a prodigious power to your ministry.

If in your case the man is to be at all like his divine message, then you must keep your heart with all diligence; for your outward life before the world will be measured by your inward life with the Lord Jesus Christ. The water in a public fountain never rises one inch higher than its birthplace upon the mountain-side. The greater your piety, the greater your power. Genius, scholarship, elo-

quence, are no substitutes for whole-souled love of Christ and holiness of life. If you do not love your Master intensely, you will soon get weary of your work; if you do not love your people unselfishly and devotedly, they will soon get weary of you. The deeper you root down into Christ's heart and your people's hearts, the larger and the longer will be your pastorate.

That prince of modern evangelists, Charles G. Finney, used to have seasons when he felt shorn of his spiritual strength. Then he shut himself up with God, went down on his knees, and, emptying himself of all self-seekings and self-reliance, he fervently prayed to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Then he went to his pulpit like a giant. The last hour that I spent with my beloved friend Spurgeon was spent at family worship. After I had concluded my prayer, he chimed in with a most wonderfully sim-

ple, fervent, artless converse with God; it was like the reverent talk of a child with the best of fathers. After I heard that marvelous prayer I said to myself, "Now I know the secret hiding-place of Spurgeon's power." My brother, if you cannot pray, you cannot preach.

With these few frank and fatherly counsels I bid you Godspeed in your work—a work so glorious that an archangel might covet it, and yet it is intrusted to "earthen vessels." Preach the Word. Feed the flock. Win souls. An ordinary man may become extraordinary when the Spirit of the Almighty Son of God dwelleth in him. Carry the sacred fire in your bones, as old John Bunyan did when he warned his hearers to flee from the wrath to come, and to set their faces toward the Celestial City. Keep eternity in view. Let the light of the "great white throne" fall on your page when you study, and

on your pulpit when you preach. You are a watchman who must give account for souls in the great day of judgment. There is no higher throne for any saint in heaven, and no more radiant crown, than is reserved for the faithful, fearless, unselfish, holy-hearted minister of the Lord Jesus Christ. He shall reign with his Lord and King; he shall shine as the stars for ever and ever.

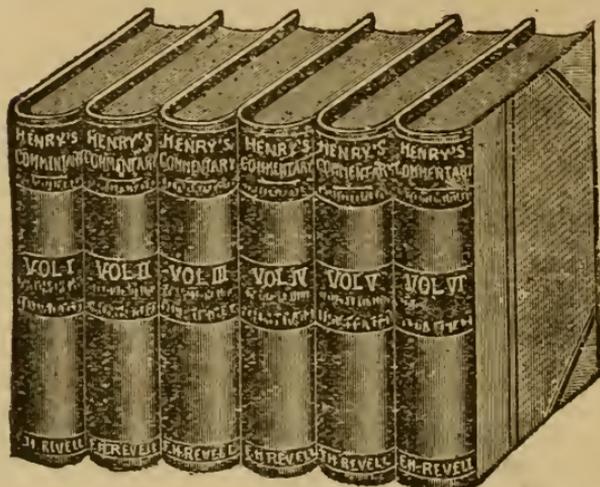
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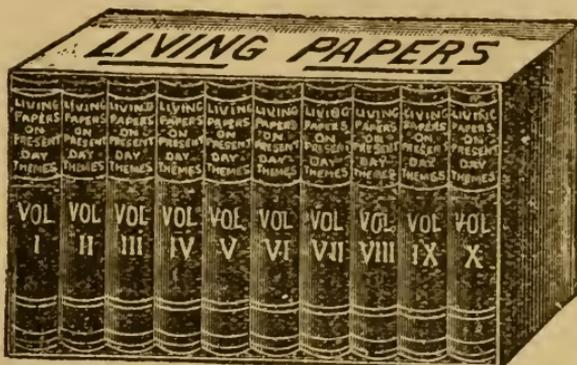
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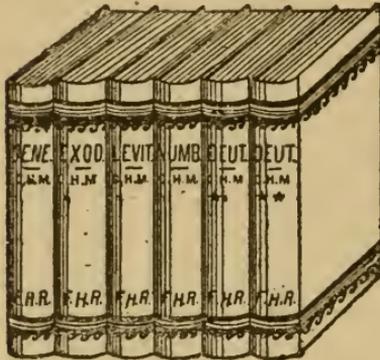
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