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ART. VI.—SPIRITUALITY IN MINISTERIAL WORK.

AN ADDRESS TO ORDINATION CANDIDATES.

“I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.”—1 *Cor.* ii. 2.

ONE of the dangers to which you are subject, my brothers, by entering on the work of your life as very young men, is of looking upon it as a profession. It is not in the worldly and ordinary sense of the world a profession at all. It is not to be regarded as a means of obtaining a livelihood; that is contrary to its very theory and essence. It is not to be regarded as an opportunity for self-advancement; all such thoughts you renounce on entering upon its duties. It is not a system of daily life in which you have certain fixed tasks to perform in a respectable manner; everything that you do has to be instinct with faith, and prayer, and vitality. You are called, not to an earthly profession, but to spiritual office in the Church of God. “My kingdom,” said our Lord, “is not of this world”; and “the kingdom of God is within you.” The sphere in which your work will lie is internal, moral, religious, spiritual; not mechanical or professional. The first and main object of the calling which you have obeyed is to deal with the souls of men.

I can imagine a young man who would make an admirable professional minister, and be much respected by the world, and yet might have never realized this real meaning of the Christian office. He might be of blameless conduct, faultlessly dressed, and of decorous habits and manners; he might intone his prayers in tune; he might read the lessons in the official tone; he might preach sermons which would be considered interesting by the people; he might daily visit the parishioners and talk to them in an agreeable and friendly way; he might read the prayers of the Visitation Office by the bedside of the dying; he might organize all kinds of charitable and social institutions and clubs, and devote the greater part of his time to them; and yet all the time he might be merely professional, and never have touched a single soul either in public or in private. It would be because, however painstaking and conscientious, he had never given himself up to the indwelling and animating presence of the Holy Spirit of God.

It is difficult for young men to become possessed by the sense of the overwhelming and supreme importance of the new obligation that has come upon them of speaking straight to the souls of men. First, they will have to do it in their visiting from house to house. My own experience was that it was a great help to make a rule never to pay a visit without read-

ing some verses of the Bible and following them by prayer. Depend upon it, even the most indifferent of the people will expect it; they will be surprised if you go away after talking about the weather and the children like anybody else.

I read only to-day the following passage—a description by a poor man of such an entirely unprofitable visit: “Sore sickness came upon me, and I was nigh unto death, and my soul woke within me and began to cry, like a child for its mother. Janet sent for the minister, and he was very kind, and he spoke about my sickness and my farm, and I said nothing. For I was hoping he would tell me what I was to do for my soul. But he began upon the sheep-market, and I knew he was also in the dark. After he left I turned my face to the wall and wept. Next morning was the Sabbath, and I said to Janet, ‘Wrap me in my plaid, and put me in a cart, and take me to Aberfeldy.’ ‘And what will you be doing at Aberfeldy? and you will die on the road.’ ‘There is,’ said I, ‘a man there who knows the way of the soul, and it is better to die with my face to the light.’”

In the more unoccupied parts of the United States, a man of God on his travels is seldom charged for staying at an inn. A young clergyman knowing this, stayed a night, and took leave without paying any attention to his account. “You have not settled,” said the landlord. “I am on my way to my clerical duties,” said the young man. “Ah, indeed,” said the landlord; “well, you came in last night, and you never said a word of peace to any of us; you had your supper, and it seemed to me that you never asked God’s blessing upon it; you never said ‘Let us have a word of prayer’ before you went to bed; you called for your light and gave very little time to your own prayers; when you came down this morning you gave us no reading or worship; you sat down to breakfast, and not a word of blessing again. No, you go on just like any other sinner; you come in like a sinner, you eat like a sinner, and now you are going off like a sinner; and like a sinner you shall pay.”

The young man’s conduct may have been owing to shyness and reserve; but shyness and reserve are altogether out of place in one who has undertaken to be an ambassador of Christ, a preacher of the Gospel, a faithful and self-devoted pastor of souls, a minister of the Word and Sacraments. A friend of mine, who is one of the most fruitful and earnest of the London clergy, went to his new parish a few years ago, which was largely inhabited by wealthy and influential people. He addressed a letter to every householder, and another to his wife, announcing that he had been commissioned to come and work among them, that he would be at their service and that

of their households whenever they wanted him; and that he would as soon as was possible follow up the letter by a visit. In each case of visiting, after the formal introduction was over, he went straight to the point, and inquired how they stood towards the things of God. In many instances he was met at first by the panoply of worldly astonishment and annoyance; but in most cases he broke it through, and often his courage and faithfulness were followed by genuine repentance and an earnest life in the Church. It is a very real help to a shepherd of souls to be able to address God when visiting or in meetings out of the abundance of his heart, as well as in the beautiful and familiar collects of the Prayer-Book.

In the same way, you must constantly pray that your public work in the congregation may be free from the curse of professionalism. You may sing or say the service twice every day throughout the year in the most approved style, and yet you may never utter a real word of prayer or move a single soul. Certainly you are not called upon to preach the prayers, but you will kindle no sympathy, you will warm no hard heart, unless it is felt through every corner of the building that you are yourself praying, and that the wishes of your heart go with the words you say. This is a special risk in places where the music is so perfect that it lulls the soul into a state of delightful drowsiness. We must always beware lest our services be to any of our people like the prayer-wheels in Japan. On the highroads every mountain, hill, and cliff is consecrated to some divinity; and at all these places travellers have to repeat prayers, sometimes several times over. As this would detain them too long, the Japanese have set up posts at these places, which have a cut in them at a certain height, and in the cut a flat round plate is placed, on which is engraved the prayer to the particular deity of the spot. The traveller obtains credit for the prayer in proportion to the number of times he turns it round.

Again, let your reading of the Word of God be real, not artificial. Often have I turned round when I have been trying to listen to a lesson and asked myself what it was all about, and been unable to reply. It has been read in a sing-song way as a professional charm, and has made absolutely no impression upon anybody. Forget yourself when you are reading. Ask God to show you what is the message which He intends His people to learn from that particular chapter. Throw yourself into the circumstances of him who wrote it, or of the persons and actions whom it describes. Believe that it is meant to teach something, and try to bring that teaching to the heart even of the most distant and ignorant worshipper.

And then your preaching. Let it be of spiritual things;

let it be of Christ and His redemption and grace ; let it be from heart to heart. Do not care how simple and unadorned the outward form is, if you only reach the heart. A hundred and five years ago Wesley was preaching on the text, "One thing is needful." When the congregation was retiring, a lady exclaimed with great surprise: "Is this the great Mr. Wesley, of whom we hear so much? Why, the poorest might have understood him!" And he to whom the complaint was made replied: "In this, madam, he displays his greatness: that while the poorest can understand him, the most learned are edified, and cannot be offended." Depend upon it, whatever the small proportion of critics and literary people on the surface of society say about preaching, the great mass of the people are as ready as ever to hear the sincere, unaffected, sympathetic, earnest, zealous proclamation of Christ's Gospel. Wesley preached daily for fifty years, generally two, sometimes three or four sermons. The amount is calculated at some 40,560. Whitfield preached constantly for thirty-four years, a much shorter time; his sermons were upwards of 18,000. Think what an effect these two men have left behind them! Few young men realize what an enormous privilege is put into their hands by having a congregation prepared to listen to what they say for some half hour every week throughout the year! What an opportunity for setting forth the things of the kingdom of heaven! What a responsibility if the occasion is wasted, scanty preparation given, no earnestness acquired through prayer and thought, and the realization of the presence of the Holy Spirit, and the hungry after all sent empty away! A learned man having to preach once before the Lord Mayor and Aldermen, chose a subject in which he thought he could display his powers. He was heard with admiration by the educated people, and was walking home from his dinner at the Mansion House with much self-satisfaction. A poor man following him, touched his arm, and asked if it was he who had been preaching. He said he was. "I came," he said, "in hopes of getting some good to my soul, but I came away greatly disappointed; I understood very little of what you said; you were quite above my comprehension." "Friend," said the clergyman, "if I did not preach you a sermon, you have preached one to me;" and he took care never again to be so foolish and faithless.

You have some of you read a book lately produced full of true pathos and spiritual insight. It describes in one place the disappointment of a religious peasant at misplaced erudition. There was no glory, because the minister, being still young, expounded a new theory of the atonement of German manufacture, and Donald's face was piteous to behold. It haunted the

minister for months, and brought to confusion a promising course of sermons on the contribution of Hegel to Christian thought.

Or, again, of a rhetorical young preacher, this was the comment of another village critic of experience: "A very nice speaker, and well pleased with himself. But I was thinking, when he was giving his images, there was a lad fishing in the brook before my house, and a very pretty lad he was. He had a rod and a string, and he threw his line beautifully. It is a great pity he had no hook, for it is a want, and you do not catch many fish without a hook."

There are, of course, multitudes of important and useful subjects which should be brought in subsidiary to the message of Christ's salvation; but that must be the foundation on which all other instruction and exhortation must be based, must be begun, continued, and ended. Either the Gospel is true, or it is not. Either we have the words of our Lord, or we have not. If we have not, then there is no use in saying any more about it. If we have, those words and that Gospel are paramount, and are our supreme guide and authority in everything, small and great alike.

Whether in your intercourse with your people, or in your ministry in the church, or in your sermons, you must always remember that you will be ineffectual if you are content with merely claiming allegiance, adherence, and attention by your office; in every exercise of your calling you have to justify your acceptance of it by your sincerity, your zeal, your affection, your sympathy, your humility, your devotedness, your loyalty. Like St. Paul, you have to persuade men, to commend yourselves to every man's conscience, to adapt yourselves to those amongst whom you serve. Every part of the Christian ministry you have to make living and fertile by grace and operation of the Holy Spirit within you. A mere official act or machinery by itself is barren and formal; it needs faith, prayer, and love to make it glow with Divine power. So will you find yourself growing in strength beyond your expectation. You will be rewarded for your humble trust in God by the fact that your words do not fall to the ground. You will have the privilege of bringing true comfort to many a troubled soul. Like St. Paul, you will often be in much weakness and tribulation. It is a hard and difficult life that you have before you. But if you can get rid of all thought of yourself, and give yourself wholly up to God, and speak and live in the love of the Lord Jesus Christ, your words and works will be the words and works of the Holy Spirit of God Himself.

WILLIAM SINCLAIR.