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## The Christian Minister's Portrait.

BY THE REV. SELWYN BLACKETT.

IN the house of the Interpreter "Christian saw a picture of a very grave person hang up against the wall, and this was the fashion of it : it had eyes lifted up to heaven, the best of books in its hand, the law of truth was written upon its lips, the world was behind its back. It stood as if it pleaded with men, and a crown of gold did hang over its head" ("Pilgrim's Progress.") In this brief paragraph John Bunyan gives us a thumb-nail sketch of the Christian minister.

*Eyes lifted up to Heaven.*—In the Gospels we read twice of the Lord Jesus lifting up His eyes to heaven : when He stood at the grave of Lazarus, and when He offered up the High Priestly prayer recorded in John xvii. In raising the dead, and in intercession for the living He lifted up His eyes to heaven. The work of the Christian minister is to raise the dead : to convert from the death of sin to the life of righteousness, and from whence cometh his help to do this impossible task but from above ? "I will lift up mine eyes," for "my help cometh from the Lord" (Ps. cxxi. 1, 2). The work of conversion is the work of the Holy Spirit only, but ministers are the instruments which He uses. The prophet comes from God to the people. He will deliver his message in but feeble fashion unless he realizes that he is "a man sent from God." The very first question which the Bishop asks in the Ordering of Deacons is this : "Do you trust that you are inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon you this Office and ministrati6n, to serve God for the promoting of His glory, and the edifying of His people?" The minister is sent by God to bring men to God, and the means of doing this is the delivery of a message from God to men. Both the authority and the ability to do this come from God, therefore must he lift up his eyes to heaven. Both preacher and people must recognize the Divine source of the authority and ability, and the preacher can find no better way of impressing this upon the people than by being deeply

impressed with it himself. The authority was given to the minister once for all at his ordination, but the ability is received continuously, in such measure as the need of it is felt and acknowledged. Moses is a remarkable instance of this realization. When he receives the authority, "Come now, I will send thee" (Exod. iii. 10), he asks, "What shall I say unto them?" To this question God replies, "I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say." The people realized the source of Moses' authority and ability as being in God when they said, "Go thou near, and hear all that the Lord our God shall say: and speak thou unto us all that the Lord our God shall speak unto thee: and we will hear it, and do it" (Deut. v. 27). God acknowledged that the message must come from Himself: "But as for thee, stand thou here by Me, and I will speak unto thee all . . . which thou shalt teach them" (Deut. v. 31): therefore God will not fail to give the message if the minister will lift up his eyes to heaven for it. One of the most frequent causes of an ineffective ministry is the failure to realize this. There are men who lift up their eyes to their bookshelves when they are going to prepare a sermon, who seldom or slightly lift up their eyes to heaven. We preachers need to receive our sermons more directly from God Himself. "The word of the Lord came unto me," said the prophets of old, and under the dispensation of the Holy Spirit we have even more right than they to expect to receive a message direct from heaven.

"They brought to Jesus one that was deaf and had an impediment in his speech" (Mark vii. 32). He was not dumb, but his speech was unintelligible. Notice the method of our Lord's working: first He took him aside from the multitude privately and concentrated his attention upon Himself; then he unsealed the deaf ears, and afterwards loosed his tongue so that he spake plainly. The minister of Christ must go aside from the multitude, and in solitude lift up his eyes to heaven: Christ will unstop the deaf ears and speak into them: then shall the minister speak so plainly that men will take knowledge of him, that he has been with Jesus.

But it is not for his message only that the minister must lift up his eyes to heaven. His Master and Example in the ministry spent much time in praying for the people who listened to His preaching. The long nights of prayer of which we read were surely employed in intercession. Perhaps there would be more power in the pulpit if there were more prayer for the people in the pews. Though sermons should not be preached *at* people, they must be preached *to* people, and the people need to be prepared as well as the sermons. Some clergymen go into the Church and lock themselves in alone there, whilst they go from pew to pew, and kneeling down where their hearers will be on Sunday offer up earnest intercessions for those who are accustomed to worship there. An atmosphere of prayer is thus created into which the people enter on Sunday, and are unconsciously prepared to listen.

In the house of the Interpreter we learn that prayer for a message and for the people is one of the features of the Christian minister's portrait.

*The Best of Books in its Hand.*—The preaching for the times is Bible preaching. The most up-to-date preacher is he who draws his inspiration and his subjects from the Bible, for that is the freshest book in the world. But what is Bible preaching? The announcing of chapter and verse for every quotation in a sermon, followed by a rustling in the pews, whilst people search nervously for Ezra in the New Testament, and confound Chronicles with Corinthians, defeats its own purpose; it does not lead to a knowledge of what is in the Bible. A Bible reading is one thing, a sermon is another. There is an appalling amount of ignorance of the Bible amongst ordinary congregations, especially of the well-to-do classes. If one half of the hortatory sermons now preached were exchanged for sermons of instruction, the power and interest of the pulpit would be enormously increased. A sermon on the list of the books of the Bible, showing their classification into Historical, Poetical, and Prophetical for the Old Testament, and into Historical and Epistolary, first to Churches and then to in-

dividuals, for the New Testament would be a revelation to some people who regard the Bible as a jumble of writing without any plan. Four or five expository sermons on a Gospel or Epistle on consecutive Sundays would lead to a systematic knowledge of the Scriptures. Ordinary church-goers have an acquaintance with a great number of scraps of Scripture, but do not know enough to arrange these scraps into any defined order. The mistake of some expository courses is their length and minuteness extending over months, and attempting to force a spiritual lesson out of every verse.

There is no book in the world so interesting as the Bible. The following incident is related in the life of the late Rev. C. H. Spurgeon: "A little boy was taken by his father to hear Mr. Spurgeon. The little fellow had heard it said that Mr. Spurgeon was the greatest preacher in the world. On being seated in the great Tabernacle for the first time he was all interest; and when the preacher began the service he leaned forward with open mouth and listened through the entire time with most intense earnestness, scarcely moving his eye from the speaker. When the service was over, and they got into the street, his father said, "Willie, what do you think of that man?" He stood still, and looked up into his face and said, "Papa, is that the greatest preacher in the world?" "Yes, I think he is." "Well then," said the boy, with a glow of enthusiasm in his face, "I know how to be the greatest preacher in the world: just pick out a nice chapter in the Bible, and tell just what is in it, so that everybody can understand you, and nothing more."

The clergy need to study the Bible more. Is it heresy to say that the habit of reading the daily lessons according to the Calendar is not the best way of reading the Bible? It sometimes leads to an insidious feeling that the appointed chapters having been read the Bible has been studied: but Bible reading is one thing, Bible study is another. If for five years we made a daily practice of steadily reading with a good commentary, lexicon, pen, and interleaved Bible, we should have learned more of it than in twenty years of reading the daily lessons.

Devotional reading, again, is distinct from Bible study, and the clergy need to be specially on their guard against reading the Bible professionally. The devotional reading of the Bible for our own spiritual life must be kept quite apart from sermon preparation and the reading of the lessons in church. In preparing sermons we are looking at the Bible with a definite view towards finding instruction for others: in reading the lessons in church we are thinking of the elocution. We need to keep a distinct time for reading the Bible as a message from God to our own souls. It is a wise practice not to read in our private devotions any passage upon which we are intending to preach. Dr. Phillips Brooks once pointed out that *witness* and *message* are the two words that sum up the preacher: he has a message from God to the people, but he is not a mere messenger; he must be able out of his own experience to be a witness to the truth of the message.

*The Law of Truth was written upon its Lips.*—The Word of God in his hand, the truth of God on his lips. His conversation is not merely true, but is also in accordance with God's Word. The Quakers thought that a Christian man's conversation must be expressed in Biblical language; that the use of *thou* and *thee* should be a distinguishing badge, like the Quaker dress, to mark out the Christian from the worldling. Some clergymen of the present day run to the opposite extreme, and affect a slangy style of conversation and a disregard of clerical costume under the mistaken idea that thereby they render themselves more agreeable and acceptable to men of the world. This is a great mistake. The man of the world wants the parson to look like a parson and talk like a parson; he may not love parsons, but he has generally a high ideal in his mind of what a parson ought to be. Just as the severest critics of Christian conduct are those who do not profess themselves to be Christians, so the keenest observers and critics of clerical life and conversation are the laity. The minister of Jesus Christ is never off duty. He may not be always consciously officiating, nor preaching, nor teaching, but he is doing all these all the time,

because his dress, his manners, and his conversation are always exercising an influence. He is being watched by others, more particularly when he is not watching himself. Men like the parson to be cheerful, but not the buffoon of the party : they like to see him take part in a concert, but not as a singer of comic songs and amatory ballads.

The clergyman's words, even in ordinary social conversation, should ring true. Social phrases which too frequently sacrifice truth to politeness ; conversation threaded with texts as a rosary with beads ; the parochial smile and the evangelical handshake—all these are blemishes on that absolute sincerity which should always be a distinguishing feature of the Christian minister's portrait. But sincerity does not imply brusqueness of manner, nor curtness of speech which some have cultivated as a protest against insincerity. Here the remedy is worse than the disease.

But probably John Bunyan meant more in this description of the Christian minister than that what he says is true and can be depended on. "The law of truth" probably means the Gospel, and is said to be "on his lips," to show that he is always ready, both in season and out of season, to deliver his Master's message. The very earnestness of men leads them, according to their special temperament, into opposite extremes. The enthusiastic, impulsive man wants to buttonhole the passing stranger in the streets and parks, and startle him out of his careless indifference by the abrupt question, "Are you saved?" There are cases, perhaps, in which this method has been blessed by God, but most people so addressed would probably reply, "Mind your own business," and that, not from any opposition to religion, but rather from a deep feeling that religion is too sacred to be treated on the level of a flaring advertisement which inquires whether you have used So-and-so's soap!

On the other hand, the clergyman should not be backward to use opportunities of personal dealings with souls when they are manifestly given him. If the Spirit should say, "Go near and join thyself to this chariot," he should be quick to run, like

Philip, and open up a religious conversation with the stranger. A prison chaplain told me that he could find very few clergymen willing to take his place during his annual summer holiday. Many were ready and willing to conduct the services in the prison chapel, but they shrank from the duty of private religious conversation in the prisoner's cell. It is an easy matter to deal with a congregation : it is very difficult to deal wisely with the individual soul. Nothing but a close and habitual walk with God can give the physician of souls that sensitive touch on the spiritual pulse which will enable him both to diagnose the disease and prescribe the remedy : to know when to speak and when to be silent.

*The World was behind its Back.*—This expresses unworldliness, or, as it has been happily expressed, other-worldliness. We are to be *in* the world, but not *of* the world. Our standard of judgment, our politics, our ambitions, our amusements, our dress, are to be tinged with the ideas of another world. And, on the other hand, whilst not being *of* the world we are to be *in* the world. The monastic idea is not the Christian idea. "I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world." The monk retires from the world as if he thought that God had made a mistake in putting him into the world. The monastic life has not produced many saints ; and though it was called the religious life *par excellence*, it failed to cultivate that essential part of the Christian character, which consists in living for others. The monk was so intent upon the salvation of his own soul that he gave little thought to the saving of others. The problem to be solved is how to fill our place in God's world without being swallowed up by that world which is enmity against God. The minister of Jesus Christ is the man of the soul and of eternity, living amongst those who forget both soul and eternity. How shall he remind them? Shall he take the place of the slave and whisper in the ear of Philip in the day of his triumph, "Thou art mortal"? Shall he carry round the skeleton at the feast? It is by what he is, rather than by what he says, that a clergyman will exert a spiritual influence. If a man is conscious of the presence of God, those with whom he



is talking will feel it. Moses' face shone from converse with God, and the people saw and were awed by it. Peter and John were unlearned men, but their Sadducee judges took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus, and in consequence they felt a certain dread of these fishermen. They were conscious that God was somewhere in the background. They were conscious of this because Peter and John were conscious of it. Just as the words of God are spoken to the world through the lips of Christians, and especially of the ordained ministers, so the presence of God is felt by the world through that presence in Christians. An indwelling Christ makes an outspoken Christian. It should be the aim of the Christian minister to take Christ with him wherever he goes, whether it be to a service in church or a dinner-party; to the bedside of the sick or to the clothing club. Ejaculatory prayer and thanksgiving; the momentary pause for prayer for guidance before answering his letters or receiving his callers; the intercessory prayer as he walks about the parish and passes the homes of those whose sins and sorrows and joys he knows; the quiet talk with Jesus as he walks along the country road to visit a distant hamlet—all these enable him to maintain that consciousness of God which puts the world into its proper place. It is not necessary for him to read his Prayer-Book in the train, but he can pray in the train. The world is always with us. The zealous, active clergyman does not wish it to be otherwise, for it is in the world and to the world that his ministry lies; but it is not the natural element of the Christian. The diver walks and works in the sea; it is not his natural element, so he must be careful to maintain unbroken communication with the upper air. The Christian minister depends upon a steady flow of grace from on high to enable him to do his work in the world. Grace cannot be stored up; it evaporates; it works only so long as it is fresh. Sunday's grace will not last throughout the week; the morning's prayer will not carry the minister on throughout the day; he must be continually praying, or else the world will have a numbing effect upon him. So also will the round of services unless he be watchful. The frequent

repetition of the same prayers in public, the rapid change from one service to another, from a marriage to a funeral where the parties are strangers to the clergyman, will make it difficult for him to maintain a sense of reality about it all. The freshness and sympathy that are so vitally important in the performance of these parochial duties can be preserved only by constant intercourse with the Lord Jesus.

The middle-aged clergyman is sometimes more likely to be hindered by the world than the freshly-ordained curate. Besides the distractions of settling his sons and daughters in life and the social functions into which he cannot avoid being drawn, there is also the snare of ambition. In reading the biography of an eminent and gifted Bishop, I was painfully struck by the insatiable desire for promotion which was exhibited in his private correspondence. There was an unashamed nakedness in writing to influential friends, begging their good offices to obtain him this living or that deanery. Restless eagerness for promotion is a hindrance to the spiritual life and influence of a Christian minister.

*It pleaded with Men.*—Is it not true that much of the preaching of the present day is deficient in this element of sacred oratory? Of course, to have an influence over thoughtful, educated men and women, the sermon must be instructive and up-to-date, and instinct with the preacher's own spiritual experience; but if it lacks affectionate appeal and personal exhortation it lacks much. Too many sermons are delivered in the hearing of the congregations rather than preached to them. "We pray you . . . be ye reconciled to God"; "We persuade men"; "We beseech you." Such was the yearning that St. Paul had for the salvation of his hearers; such pleading is sometimes heard in a mission, but surely it need not be reserved to such a special effort. Many sermons, again, are preached with a half apology for being preached at all. The preacher rattles through a colourless discourse that can neither please nor displease anyone; nobody pays much attention to it; nobody expects anything to come of it, certainly not the preacher;

and, of course, nothing does come of it, except the semi-contemptuous approbation of the fashionable church lounge. "Oh yes, ye know: I like So-and-so: never exceeds his ten minutes, don't ye know." The newspapers sometimes discuss "the decay of preaching." Preaching will never decay unless the preacher himself decays. So long as he feels intensely the love and fear of God, the value of a soul and the solemnity of life, he will preach intensely and men will listen intently. The preaching that the age requires is the preaching that expects results. If the preacher believes in his message his hearers also will believe in it. The recent revival in Wales and elsewhere has not depended on oratory; it is the people's response to the preacher's appeal; there has been but little eloquence, but there has been much affectionate pleading. The appeal to the unconverted ought to be heard from Church of England pulpits as well as from the Salvation Army at the street corner.

*A Crown of Gold did hang over its Head.*—Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi, one of the most admirable women of Roman history, devoted her life, after the death of her husband, to the education and instruction of her sons. When one of her female friends asked to see her jewels, Cornelia exhibited her sons as being the only jewels she possessed or cared to have. After her death a statue was erected to her memory, inscribed, "Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi." Various crowns are promised to the Christian—the crown of righteousness, the crown of life, the crown of glory—but that which St. Paul valued most was the crown which he was to have as the reward of his labours as a Christian minister; the only jewels he cared to have were his spiritual children, his dearly beloved and longed for, his joy and crown, as he terms the Philippians (iv. 1). "What is our hope, or joy, or crown of glorying? Are not even ye, before our Lord Jesus at His coming? For ye are our glory and our joy" (1 Thess. ii. 19).

