

PERSONAL HOLINESS IN THE MINISTRY.*

The Right Rev. preacher in the first place dwells upon the peculiar obstructions to the personal holiness of the Christian Minister: and amongst these, he first states that—

1. Their familiarity with sacred things is calculated in some degree to sear their minds to holy impressions. Their thoughts, and tongues, and pens, are increasingly employed on this topic, enforcing duties, defending doctrines, arguing principles, applying and explaining the precepts and ordinances of Christianity. This is their constant occupation, their daily work. They enter into the interior of the sacred temple—its holy of holies,—and become familiarized with all its recesses. Hence, they are in danger of losing, in some degree, the susceptibility of religious impression, liable to become hackneyed in spiritual feeling, to glide into formalism or coldness, or what is even worse, into a fictitious kind of ardour, assumed for the occasion, and having no real foundation in the heart.

Amid his exertions to promote the salvation of others, he is tempted to forget his own personal religious improvement. His zeal for others absorbs his zeal for himself, and while pressing the solemn obligations of Christianity upon his flock, he may possibly become heedless to his own personal advancement in holiness and grace. This is in fact one of the perils of the ministry; and that deceitful heart which characterizes them like others, often sinks them imperceptibly, by this agency, into the hazardous abyss of spiritual sloth, or fictitious ardour and zeal,—feeding them with the delusion, that because as instructors, they are daily handling the word of truth and mingling in thought, conversation, and teaching with all the virtues and precepts of the Gospel, they must, therefore, of necessity, be growing in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ: when, in fact, the flesh which is weak has overcome the spirit which is willing, and they have sunk, like the sleeping apostles at Gethsemane, into the embraces of apathy and indevotion.

2. In the apt and expressive language of Christ he is declared to be "a city that is set on an hill, which cannot be hid." In all parts of his profession both as a Christian and a pastor, which lie open to human view, he is an object of especial scrutiny.—A thousand eyes watch his course with eager readiness to employ a thousand tongues to magnify and disseminate his defects and lapses.

But this inspection extends only to what may be called the visible parts of his religious character; and powerful as is its influence to restrain the outward conduct, it yet does not, and cannot, reach to that inner department of personal religion, which centres in duties, devotions, views, and feelings, which can be known only to the individual and to God.

Now, the very fact that in the external and visible traits of his Christian character he is subject to the ever watchful scrutiny, while it enhances his vigilance in these respects, is of itself a temptation to be less careful and less zealous in the unobserved and private exercises of his religion. Braced up even to decision before men, he is in danger of relaxing so far in private. Satan triumphs over him in secret. Spiritual lassitude follows often in the train of public energy. Many a servant of the altar, high in public estimation for his sanctity, devotion and zeal is mourned in secret over the consciousness of personal deficiencies, slackened energies, and prostrate illness, and would dread to submit the actual state of his heart to the same earthly inspection that catches his visible character and conduct. He shudders to the sad conviction that amidst all his labours of study, and zeal to be a successful, well esteemed, popular minister, he has almost forgotten to be a Christian. Alas, his heart has been growing cold, his affections have become stupified, secret prayer, meditation, communion with God, inward vigilance, spirit of faith and devotion, have all been more or less neglected, and there have sprung up as the miserable fruits of his neglect, tares in abundance, spiritual sloth, a proud and vain temper, a worldly spirit, and an unholy mind.

From a Sermon, by William Heathcote De Lancey, D. Bishop of the Diocese of Western New-York.

This obstruction is not a little strengthened by the very character of the times in which we live—It is an age of boisterous religion,—of impetuous and ill governed excitements,—of lofty enterprises to promote the cause of Christ, which exact from the clergy an unusual degree of notoriety, and subject them to especial public scrutiny. The quiet, unobtrusive graces of the ministerial character, humility, spiritual mindedness, a devotional temper, deep and thoughtful study, are little estimated in comparison with fervid zeal, energetic action, and fluent boldness. The pastoral model of this age is not the Prophet of Patmos, John, the divine, but the impetuous and fiery Apostle of the circumcision. The tone of the public mind countenancing so much more the energetic, than the mild and gentle, in the character of the Christian minister, is an additional temptation to him to seek to excel in the public rather than in the private virtues of Christianity, and thus throws an additional obstruction in the path of personal holiness.

3. A still further obstruction in this path is the intellectual occupation of the pastor. He is, he ought to be, a student for his whole life. His own mental improvement, his vows of office, the exigencies of his flock, and the exactions of his Master all demand with the utmost urgency, that his mind be not neglected, but that, on the contrary, he give himself to the diligent prosecution of professional studies.—Permanent usefulness cannot be expected without this mental application. Extraordinary talents, or preeminent genius may occasionally shoot across the religious world, with such originality and brilliancy, as possibly to justify neglect of regular and laborious study; but for the great mass of mind such study is equally essential and obligatory. There is a danger, however, to our spiritual interests even in this obvious duty. Study is more or less a mere intellectual occupation. It does not necessarily involve the exercise of the heart. It may be a mere frozen region where the sun of true devotion never penetrates to melt its ice, or start its moral vegetation. Every theologian is not a man of earnest piety, or devotional habits or inclinations. No small portion of theological investigation is but little connected with practical piety. A clergyman may make himself an acute critic, a powerful champion of the truth of Christianity, a fluent and able expositor of its doctrines, while he neglects the cultivation of the humble and holy graces of religion. And the danger to which every student lies exposed is that of disjointed growth in knowledge from growth in grace.—He becomes absorbed in the great theories of religion, and forgets its practice. His mind expands, but his heart contracts. In the process he loses his sensibility to holy impressions, and through the agency of Satan, is sometimes pushed onward to the ruinous delusion, that the improvement of his mind compensates for the neglect of his heart, that knowledge is an ample substitute for piety. His family and flock soon feel the influence of this fatal misconception, in the neglect of their spiritual and eternal welfare beyond the elaborate and often ill-timed and ill-applied discussions of the pulpit. Now this evil is no argument against a studious or learned ministry as hasty ignorance might conclude, any more than the frequent abuses of piety to superstition and fanaticism would be an argument against a pious and godly ministry.

The difficulty now under view is not perhaps so great as others, for the age is one of activity, not of study. But still, bound as we are to be diligent and studious, it is well to reflect upon the danger which lurks among books and libraries, and to stand armed and guarded against sacrificing the heart to the intellect, against dissevering grace from knowledge—against presenting ourselves to the Church, as icebergs, brilliantly reflecting the rays of the sun, but still encircled with an atmosphere of frost, and composed of particles which chill men to the very heart.

In enforcing the grounds of encouragement to the Minister of Christ, the Bishop observes—

4. If to animate him in the work of personal holiness, the apostle did not hesitate, to fix his eyes on the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus, we need not fear that we are violating the letter or the spirit of the Gospel by lifting our own desponding and timid eyes to the same heart stir-

ring prospect. It is a mysticism which has done little for the advance of manly piety amongst us, that forbids us to look above for motives, and which would encamp our vision to the single ground of what Christ has effected in the way of pardon by his atonement, without looking to what Christ has purchased for us hereafter by his mysterious sacrifice, and now holds up to excite and animate us in his service. The cheering influence of his promises wars not with the efficacy of his cross. Why is not the Christian Pastor to string his harp with the melodies of Heaven as well as raise to his lips the trumpet of denunciation whose dismal notes are taken from the weeping and wailing of Hell? Is the disciple of Christ to be stirred to zeal, solely by the terrific images of an undying worm, and an unquenchable flame, and a vengeance-taking God, the direful issues of apotacy and impenitence, and never to be prompted to exertion by the glorious visions which the Gospel opens to his astounded eye, the rivers of pleasure and the tree of life, the golden streets, the House not made with hands eternal in the Heavens, the new Jerusalem coming down from heaven resplendent with the light and glory of the lamb? Oh, well would it be for us, ministers and people, if our thoughts were oftener, in hours of seclusion, communing with that God who seeth in secret—lifted up to scenes which his gracious promises unfold, penetrating the Heavens, and transporting us, as it were, to the very presence of the lamb enthroned in glory at the right hand of God. I plead for no vain attempt to detail, or to depict what God has not revealed as to the nature and constituents of future bliss. This is a sea already strewn with the fragments of a thousand shipwrecks. But I do urge that Christian ministers and Christian people should follow the example of St. Paul, and look oftener to the glorious prize which an Almighty Saviour has purchased for them, and hung out to animate them in the Christian race. Seasons enough are there, both in the religious and the ministerial life, when we need the animation, which such contemplations inspire—times when perplexities distract, and opposition sinks the heart, when efforts, and prayers, and study, and zeal, and fidelity seem utterly ineffectual in opening a way for our instructions into the hardened and sun-blinded hearts of men, and when in regard to ourselves the divine threatening against Israel appears to be verified upon us, when the Heavens over are as brass, and the earth under us is as iron, without dews from above, or vegetation from beneath, then, and on all occasions, when tempted to despond, or relax, or falter, let our eyes be turned in faith to the glorious scenes above where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God—to the crown of glory that fadeth not away, to the great recompense of reward, the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. It is a view that will serve to steady our faltering steps in the path of godliness, to infuse vigor into our efforts, to lift us above the toys and trammels of the earth, and to dispose us to run with patience the race that is set before, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is now set down on the right hand of the Majesty on high. For her may we all come, through the infinite merits of our Lord.

For the Colonial Churchman.

The names of the ten Antediluvian patriarchs taken in succession, express the two grand truths contained in scripture, viz:—the natural misery of man, and his restoration by the death of Jesus Christ.

Adam. Seth. Enos. Cainan. Mahalaleel.
man made a wretch lamenting, the brightness of God
Jared. Enoch. Methuselah. Samerch. Noah.
descending instructed: his death sent to the afflicted, consolation.

The names literally translated form the foregoing sentence.

The tenses timed.—"Prosens est imperfectum; perfectum et plusquam perfectum futurum est."

GROTIUS.