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An Intercepted Letter

From the Reverend John Hopkins to his True Son in the Faith, the Reverend Timothy Goring, A. B., A. M., Ph. D.

My dear Timothy: You must not apologize again "for the liberty you take" in writing me freely and fully of what you are doing or trying to do in your ministry to the Fifty-second St. Church. It is a pleasure to receive your letters and hardly less a pleasure to answer them for you will not misunderstand my language, it is not always precise and formal. You will even fear with me if I exercise the privilege of age and address you in admonition and reproof. Since I have no longer a pulpit of my own, I must now and then, like Brother Paul in his imprisonment, unburden my mind by means of an epistle.

I kept my seventy-first birthday last Sunday. The weather was stormy and I spent the day indoors, in my easy chair, like the self-indulgent "Sabbath sinners" whom I have so many times, and to so little purpose, publicly rebuked. But so strong upon me are the habits of well nigh half a century that I could not be quite contented until I had preached to myself a sermon. While the church bell was ringing I took for a text, the eight verse of the One Hundred and Twenty-first Psalm: "The Lord shall keep thy going out and thy coming in, from this time forth and forever more." The sermon was edifying and consoling to its single hearer, as I have always prayed that my discourses might prove, whether preached to many or few. But when the attentive congregation was dismissed, the suspicion that there was still a truth proper to the day which had escaped the preacher prompted me to take down my Tennyson from the shelf and read "Ulysses". You need not concern yourself about the "Ulysses" now, Timothy, but when you have got well into the fifties, take my word for it that you will find it a tonic and heartening.

I have come back, as you know, to seek a home for my old age in the retired little community which was the scene of my first pastorate. My daughters protested against a retreat which they called an exile. But what better could I do, now that my children are married, and my wife dead? I must contrive somehow to live my own life still, assert my modest independence, indulge if possible without offense my harmless whimsies. My heart turned, I hardly knew why, to Brantford. Its aspect is little changed, and after a half century it wears to me still a homely and familiar air. The view of the village from Booth's Hill is as serene and winning as when I saw it first from the lumbering stage coach which brought me to preach my trial sermon to a congregation too easily pleased; the post office has not been moved, nor the drug store, and I shall know where to look for the pink blossoms of the trailing arbutus if the April sunshine tempts me to walk into the woods to-morrow. The question of bed and board was soon and satisfactorily settled. John Winkle and his wife are members of the church which I once served, and recall cheerfully the days when they sat on the benches of the infant class room and listened, not without disdain, I suspect, to the young pastor's efforts to talk down to their shrewd, inquiring intellect. In their well-ordered home, set back from the village street a little among the trees, Mrs. Winkle has offered me a bedroom and a sitting room. The rooms could not be cleaner; they lie open to the sunlight; the food is good, the doorways will be shady in June, and I may drive the old horse when I will. What better could I do? What more could I ask? I am in my own quiet nook, with books and leisure, and a little balance in the bank at the end of each month, and such a life as one who has passed seventy may well thank God for. I have no longer a pulpit, but I shall get wonted even to that heavy loss, and please God, I need not be idle. A ministry of some sort I am sure awaits me. "Old age hath yet its honor and its toils."

But enough of my own affairs, Timothy. Let me turn to yours, I am greatly interested in two or three matters touched upon in your letter,

particularly in what you say of the reception the new "Society for Religious Education" is meeting with among the brethren whose boasting it is that they stand fast in the old ways, contending earnestly for the international lessons, once for all delivered to the saints. I would like to say something about that. But it can wait. I must deliver myself first on another topic. Be prepared now for plain speech.

To be frank, Timothy, your letter gave me a bad half-hour, for it shows only too plainly that you have given in your allegiance to a doctrine of ministerial efficiency and success which with all my heart I repudiate. Your idea, if your own words do not deceive me, are not my ideals, and the rewards you appear to seek I have never coveted. Not that I dissent in to from what you say. I am not prepared to deny that "facts are facts," though all facts are not equally important. To be sure, "this is the twentieth century, and not the seventeenth." To be sure, also, "methods of church work have changed." Dear me, yes! How true all this is! Where do not the "new methods" prevail? Here, in our little village church, they flourish and flaunt themselves. If thirteen-year-old Jenny Martin is put to bed by her too solicitous mother at five o'clock on Sunday afternoon with a strip of red flannel around her throat, the chairman of the look-out committee calls on Tuesday evening to ask why Jenny was not present at the junior endeavor meeting and makes a note of Jenny's excuse for his report of "cases investigated." Another committee is at this moment going up and down the village street with a "pledge book" in which you asked to put your name to a promise that you will read five chapters of the Bible each week day and five on Sundays. I wrote down my name somewhat reluctantly, I confess, for, though I am willing enough to read my Bible regularly, I do not like pledges. But neither do I wish in my old age and in a community where I would fain be respected to be reckoned among the outcasts and the scoffers. I had no choice, you see. Necessity was laid upon me. We were disposed to take some things for granted in my day. Culpatily so, perhaps, I am not prepared to defend the easy-going, inefficient, slack old times, nor to regret new methods because they are new. It must needs be that new methods will come

(To be concluded in our next issue.)

The Successful Minister.

By Rev. Theodore L. Cuyler, D. D.

The highest aim and ambition of every true minister of Jesus Christ is to achieve spiritual success. For this he prays and for this he labors; and for the lack of this neither fame nor popular favor, nor large salary can be any compensation. He is not blind to the fact that in his success two factors must be reckoned with—the human and divine. The planting of the wisest Paul and the watering of the most eloquent Apollos will avail nothing unless God gives the increase. Not by human might or power, but by the agency of the Holy Spirit, can success be secured. The minister may pray ever so fervently for the blessing of the Divine Spirit, but he cannot dictate and demand that blessing. Yet there are certain things that the ambassador of Jesus Christ must be and must do if his ministry is to bear spiritual fruits. For doing his duty he is responsible; for spiritual results he rolls the responsibility over upon the Master he serves. He works, but he does not worry.

1. The first essential to success is that a minister should not only love his work, but love that Divine Master and Owner whose blood-redempted servant he is. Paul clove to the root and in the core of the matter when he said, "The love of Christ constraineth us." Not only his love for us, but ours for him. The curse of a vast deal of preaching and teaching is that self is—in some shape—at the bottom of it, and Christ is not there at all. "Whose I am and whom I serve..." The more entirely a minister can fulfil

this vital and indispensable condition the stronger he will be, the happier he will be, yes, and the holier he will be also. Just as sure as the heart-thermometer shows a lowering of the Christ-love, just so surely will the sermons and the prayers feel the chilling effect; and a cold pulpit sends its frost through the whole congregation. On the other hand, when a minister brings Jesus Christ with him into the pulpit, then there is a "tonic of fire" there which will burn its way into the hearts and consciences of the auditors. Genius, scholarship, rhetoric, are but "tinkling cymbals," in comparison with this indwelling, ever-mastering grace of personal love for a personal Savior. If such men as Brainerd, McClintock, Sumnerfield, Spurgeon or Moody were sitting by my side, they would say "Amen" to every word I have just written. "More love to Thee, oh, Christ," is the prayer that should be often on every minister's lips.

2. As the spiritually successful minister is a man whose highest inspiration is a supreme love for Christ, so it is his foremost aim to induce his hearers to give their hearts to Jesus. He knows no other way to save a life but to save the heart that animates and controls that life; and the only way to save that heart is to enthronate Jesus Christ there. Winning people to trust, to obey, to follow Christ—that is his "high calling." There is a constant temptation with ministers to ignore this, or to substitute something else for it. One minister who lives much in the atmosphere of books is tempted to preach chiefly to the intellect, and gives much valuable instruction. Another is deeply interested in sociology, and aims to reform social wrongs, to promote humanitarian enterprises and Christian citizenship. The gospel of Jesus Christ goes infinitely deeper than mental instruction or social reforms, excellent philanthropies of various kinds. It aims to change human hearts and put Jesus Christ there. His message was "Come unto me." "Follow me," and no minister ought to feel that his work is successful unless (by the Holy Spirit's aid) he can win people to the service of Christ. His vital purpose is to form character—to make bad people good and good people better; this means heart work; this means regeneration; this means salvation for this world and another. My brother, do you fail right there? Then there must be something wrong in your aims or your methods, or your spirit; for the Christian ministry that yields no fruit of Christian lives is about equivalent to a medical practice that heals no sick folk, or a legal practice that gives no verdicts. To search honestly for the cause of failure is often the first step to success.

3. The minister who intensely loves his Master, and with singleness of heart labors for the salvation of his fellow men works at an immense advantage. He is not obliged to manufacture his weapons, or invent his arguments, or construct his own motive power. "Preach my Word" is His divine commission; "Lo! I am with you always" is His promise of divine support. My observation has been that those ministers who have had the most spiritual success (for this is the point I am discussing) have been men who had an implicit faith in the supernatural inspiration and the divine authority of their Bible, and who have kept at the front the great central themes of revelation. They have wasted no time or breath in defending God's Book, which they hold to be self-evidencing; they have planted themselves on the adamant of God's unshakable truth and preached with the light of eternity flashing in the faces of their auditors. They have never frittered away their sermons on secondary topics, or blinked human depravity, or concealed hell, or belauded the Atonement, or dwarfed God's infinite love, or Christ's infinite claims, or the indispensable need of the Holy Spirit at every step. They have aimed to make sin horrible, and Christ lovable, and a life of fruitful service the only life worth living. Such preaching the promise-keeping God has stamped with success and will do it while the world stands. Try it and see.