

Messenger and Visitor

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S. MCC. BLACK EDITOR.
A. H. CHIPMAN BUSINESS MANAGER.
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Pastoral Visiting.

This is a necessity. No strong church can be built up without it. While it is true that the pulpit is the preacher's throne, it is also true that the homes visited give him a place in the hearts of his people that he cannot get otherwise. To preach well he must visit well. Newspaper and magazine reading may make his preaching fresh and crisp, but after all it is the man whose spirit is saturated with Bible lore, that grips his people and makes a lengthened pastorate possible. For a minister to succeed he must not only be in his study and known to be there, he must also be among his people. He must keep in touch with the lives of his members. Each one must be made to feel that his pastor is his friend, and that he has a personal interest in him. A shepherd must know his sheep one by one. If his flock is too large for this, then it is too large for him.

There are many ways in which this can be done. There are no royal roads or easy ways of working. To some, pastoral visiting is a gift, an accomplishment. It is a pleasure and a delight. To others it is difficult and not at all to the liking. Some other features of pastoral work or life would be much more attractive. That may be, but whether delightful or otherwise it ought never to be neglected. A pastor should set himself to its performance just as resolutely as he sets himself to the task of his pulpit preparation. It ought never to be perfunctorily done. If it is, its effectiveness is lost. Love must lie at the root of this service as of all service. Given a heart overflowing with love for his people, ready to serve them in any and every possible way, and you have all that is needed to make a good pastor. To assume an interest that is not felt, is hypocrisy. And no hypocrite should undertake to shepherd the flock of God.

It takes time to do pastoral work. It does. That is true of all you do. And it is true of all that is worth doing. Where can you employ your time to better advantage? Ought you not to try to become acquainted with the people of your charge? To do them good must you not know them, their wants, temptations, trials, difficulties, everything in fact that is peculiar to their daily lives? How can you know them unless your life touches theirs at every point. No, no, brother minister, get close to the heart of your people in their homes, if you want to reach them from the pulpit and do them the greatest good. This surely is your aim. A grip of the hand, a cheering word, a loving interest in the daily task, a kind enquiry of a fellow workman may be all that you can do, but do it, and keep on doing it, and you will get such a hold of your people as will fill you with glad surprise when you and they meet. Suppose you do spend some time in this vital work, it is not lost time by any means. To spend and be spent in your God-given employ is that to which it is taken for granted you have given yourselves. Spend therefore and be spent. It is not at all necessary that you should read the latest novel nor the newest thing in Biblical criticism, but it is important that you should reach the ear of your people in such a way as to lead them to Jesus Christ, and help them to be a power for good in the community where you and they live. Brother minister do not neglect this work of pastoral visiting. The people never needed it more than they do today, especially in our growing towns and villages.

A Living Church.

In a recent address upon this subject in Scotland Dr. McLaren, among other things, said: "You remember there is a very striking and instructive

illustration of this in the Acts of the Apostles, where Barnabas was sent down to undertake to see into the strange new thing that was going on then in Antioch, and which the people up in Jerusalem were by no means sure about. They had been lifted out of the mire of heathendom, but the smell was still clinging to them, the fetters were still on their arms, their souls were scarred, if not stained, by the vices of heathendom, and their knowledge was of a most elementary character. What did Barnabas say to them? I'll tell you what some people would have said, "Oh, this is dreadful, this is terrible! We must at once set to work and lick them into proper ecclesiastical shape, and have ordained priests and sacraments duly administered." And some would have said, "Dear! dear! this will never do. We must draw up some brief manual of Christian doctrine and instruct them in the articles of the faith."

Well, Barnabas did not say the one thing or the other. He exhorted them all that "with purpose of heart they should cleave to the Lord," and if they did that, then the manual of doctrine would come all in due time; and all the ecclesiastical arrangements would duly evolve themselves. And if they did not do that, they might have three surplices instead of one, and a dozen sacraments instead of seven, and thirty-nine hundred articles, and a longer as well as a shorter catechism, but it would all have been of no use. The secret of a living church is "cleave to the Lord." Did you ever see a limpet sticking to a rock? That is the metaphor that is suggested by the strong words, that Barnabas uses. Formulas of doctrine are good and useful in their place. Forms and ceremonies may be all right for some minds. But neither can take the place of a living Christ, loved, served, honored and obeyed. And what is true of the unit is true of the mass.

Receiving Members.

There is ground for fear that some of our churches are receiving numbers into their fellowship of unconverted persons. There is a strong temptation, to both pastor and people, to add to the numbers more than to the graces of the churches, to make a fair show in the flesh by the addition of members and a fair show with figures in statistical reports, as if a church could prosper by an increase of members without an increase of spiritual life. Membership in a Christian church is one of the most unfortunate positions in the world for an unconverted person to occupy. Supposing himself all right, comparing himself with others, he will neither make an effort himself, nor welcome any from others, to improve his condition.

In order that the kingdom of God may grow and advance, make way against the forces of evil that oppose, there must be men of deep conviction and undoubted piety, who are engaged in the conflict. The piety must be of the sturdy type, not of the jelly fish variety. If the churches as a whole occupy no higher moral ground than decent unsanctified society about them, they will be impotent to draw men to the Cross or to lift the world up to God. Churches that are nominally founded on Christ, the Chief Cornerstone, and presumably built of living stones, while really the spiritual edifice is honey-combed with dead, decaying material, are utterly useless in the great conflict that is now on between truth and error. Our members should be rooted and grounded in the truth. They should know whom they believe and why they believe. They should have a clear conception of what the church of Jesus Christ stands for, and why they have enlisted in the service of the Great Captain.

Hidden Forces.

In every church there is a dormant power, like steam in water, electricity in the atmosphere, and heat in the buried coal. Is there any way to bring it out? For a church to be actively and growingly aggressive, it must be brought out, and herein lies the wisdom and skill of the pastor. He sees the hidden forces and studies how best to marshal and develop them for service. What a force would the vast membership of the church of Christ become if the hidden and unemployed power of personal faith were made available.

It must not be supposed that it is sufficient for the Christian to confess in one single act his

allegiance to Christ in order to secure growth and strength. There must be a steady cultivation of the graces of the spirit if he is to become strong in the Lord.

On any dark and tempestuous night one may see the sky aglow and a shaft of flame rising from the top of a lofty chimney. No wind puts it out, no rain extinguishes it. It shines brighter in the storm, because the clouds reflect its gleam. Far down beneath, in the great unseen furnaces, is a power which makes hard steel flow like water. The Christian who lets his light shine, and confesses Christ in his character, kindles a flame which no opposition nor ridicule can quench. Such a man has within him a living fire which has melted his heart. The epistle to the Hebrews indicates exactly the source of that strength which made martyrs triumph over torture and death. "They endured as seeing Him who is invisible."

Power for Service.

Thomas Edison is one of the most widely known men of today. He has revolutionized the whole world by his marvellous inventions. Mr. Edison has not discovered a new force, but has learned by close study and dogged tenacity how to appropriate electricity by invention. God has given to this wonderful man knowledge and understanding, which has given him the control of a vast physical realm. Edison making eighteen hundred experiments before he discovered the proper substance for the incandescent light and six thousand experiments before he solved the problem of preparing the products of the great iron mills for the blast furnace, is a most striking example of a man seeking to come into touch with nature's great force. Mr. Edison believes in the power of electricity. The world laughed at him for wasting time on the experiments of transferring the product of the iron mills to the blast furnace. He showed his faith by putting into the experiment one million dollars. He succeeded. God honored the man who believed in the marvellous power of electricity.

Power belongs unto God. Our strength of service is of the Lord. The most striking illustration of this great fact is Zechariah's vision of the candlestick, the olive trees, the bowl, and the two golden pipes. The word of the Lord which came to Zerubabel is for us, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit saith the Lord of hosts." To enter into the fulness of the life of faith and trust is a great privilege. It is also a great duty. There are few Edisons in the world. There are also few men in such loving touch with Jesus Christ as to be mightily used by Him in the upbuilding of His kingdom here on earth.

"Come Holy Spirit, Heavenly Dove;
With all Thy quickening power;
Come shed abroad a Saviour's love,
And that shall kindle ours."

Baptisms Throughout the World— 1898-'99.

"Dr. John Clifford says: 'There is no better antidote for denominational pessimism than an occasional half-hour with the 'Year Book.' Statistics may be said to be the account book of the denomination for ascertaining its affairs.'

The figures announced in the "American Baptist Year Book" for 1899 are of an encouraging nature. Let us examine them: The world has a grand total of 50,143 Baptist churches, 33,553 ordained ministers, 4,910,456 members. The baptisms for the past year numbered 242,646—hard on a quarter of a million of souls brought to Christ in one year by the instrumentality of Baptists. The baptisms throughout the world average 7 1/2 per each ordained minister.

Profit may be derived by dissecting these gross figures, and get to see what each country has been doing as its share in the hard work. The United States claims the first place. Of the 242,646 baptisms in the world, the exceedingly large number of 203,296 are credited to the United States of America. In round numbers, five in every six baptisms in the world take place in the land of Roger Williams."

The above is good reading. It is not necessary for Baptists to be continually calling attention to their growth and development. It is a good thing, however, for our young people and those multitudes that come to us every year from other denominations, to know that their lot is cast among a people whom God has signally honored. The Baptists of the world are a vigorous, growing, aggressive body of Christians. There are none more so. We have no reason to be ashamed of our lineage. Believing as we do and what we do the future of the Baptists, especially in America, is bright with promise.