

## Pastor and People.

### A PRAYER.

I ask not wealth, but power to take  
And use the things I have aright,  
Not years, but wisdom that shall make  
My life a profit and delight.

I ask not that for me the plan  
Of good and ill be set aside,  
But that the common lot of man  
Be nobly borne and glorified.

I know I may not always keep  
My steps in places green and sweet,  
Nor find the pathway of the deep  
A path of safety to my feet.

But pray that when the tempter's breath  
Shall fiercely sweep my way about,  
I make not shipwreck of my faith  
In the unbottomed sea of doubt.

I do not ask for love below,  
That friends shall never be estranged;  
But for the power of loving, so  
My heart may keep His love unchanged.

For this I count, of all sweet things,  
The sweetest out of heaven above;  
And loving others surely brings  
The fullest recompense of love!

### ON PREACHERS AND PREACHING.

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#### NO XXIV THE MINISTER AS A BUILDER OF CHARACTER.

If one has been used to lead a soul to Christ, that is much, but there is more. Christian character is to build up. The believer is to be edified. As a child at its birth has no distinctive character among men, so a newly-born soul in the kingdom of God has as yet no distinctively Christian character. That needs to be formed. The germ of all is there, but the germ must grow; the foundation is there, but it must be built upon, the rudiments are there, but they must be developed. A very common mistake made just here is to suppose that conversion is the end of all, while it is only the beginning. A man believes, that is well. But he is commanded to add to his faith those graces that grow out of it, if it is a living faith. In other words, he is to take thought and care to build up a distinctly Christian character—one that shall mark him off from the common run of men and distinguish him as a man of God.

How shall that be done? By bringing the central force of the nature into play, that is, the will, in choosing and doing what Christ specifically enjoins. A man is a Christian just in so far as he obeys Christ. If he listens to Christ as his Master and delights to do His will, then there begins to form a character that may be designated as Christian. So will he follow Christ, and grow up into Him in all things, who is the Head. The choosing of a thing because Christ commands it, and the willing to do it for His sake, recognizes His lordship over the man and is a true Christian act. Among professing Christians there can be no doubt that very, very much is done simply because it jumps with our own notions, it chimes in with our ideas of what should be done, it suits us, rather than because it is the will of Christ. Were we to examine carefully our conduct we would be surprised and astonished out of measure because so much of our willing and acting has no reference whatever to the will of Christ. Now, it is the will of Christ acting on our will and ruling it that moulds and fashions our Christian character. We are the rude block of marble and He is the sculptor that, with the soul of genius and the skill of an artist, brings out with mallet and chisel the beautiful and almost living statue. In Grecian story we read that Pygmalion fell in love with his ivory statue after he had fashioned it—but Christ fashions us into His own image out of the rudest and most unsightly conditions because He loves us. And knowing that He loves us, what an inducement this is to yield our will to Him; that is, to love Him.

All the old churches and cathedrals were built upon foundations that were cruciform, intimating that whatever beauty there was above in the magnificently noble structure, with its upspringing gothic arches, its richly fretted and groined roof, its storied windows, its grand towers, its sculptured facade, all was founded upon and came out of the cross. And so it is to be in the Christian character; the cross is to give it symmetry, strength, proportion and beauty; the cross is to make it great and glorious and enduring. "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." This foundation ought to be distinctly apprehended. It ought to lie in the mind of the minister to-day as clearly defined, and as thoroughly understood, as it did in the mind of the great apostle. He should know what he is building on. If he does not get down to the live rock of true repentance, that turns away from sin with abhorrence, and heartily embraces Christ in his sacrificial character, he may be laying his building on the rotting rubbish of good resolutions that have been carted in there to fill up the empty space. Christ Jesus as the atonement for sin is the only safe foundation. "But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon." Christ has been truly and properly laid, and the building is to rise squarely upon Him.

The great work of the minister after the conversion of a man is to fashion him after Christ. That is a difficult task and requires much thought and more prayer and entire de-

pendence upon God. Who is sufficient for it? Who can carry it on apart from God? No one. In this, without Him we can do nothing. Yet this is part of ministerial duty, as Paul suggests as he writes to the Galatians: "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you," i.e., till ye take on the character of Christ, and are seen to be clearly His. The message that Robert M. McCheyne sent to a beloved brother is one to which all ministers need to give special heed. "Do not forget to carry on the work in hearts brought to the Saviour. I feel that this was one of my faults in the ministry. Nourish babes; comfort down-cast believers; counsel those perplexed; perfect that which is lacking in their faith. Prepare them for sore trials. I fear most Christians are quite unready for days of darkness."

What a mass of precious instructions Paul gives in his Epistles to Timothy and to Titus, in reference to this very thing of which the sum is: "Preach the Word, be instant in season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine." That includes much work that demands faith, and that calls for cross-bearing. It is easy to give kindly exhortations that do not turn a hair or ruffle a feather, but to rebuke them that sin, before all, that others also may fear (1 Tim. v. 20), to rebuke them sharply that they may be sound in the faith (Titus i. 13), to rebuke with all authority (Titus ii. 15), requires courage based on faith in God. Yet that has often to be done. Mischievous errors creep in that lead men into evil ways and habits, and to correct them, to eradicate them, requires no dallying, but decided and energetic action. The minister, like Phinehas (Num. xxv.), must put away the evil that has come in at whatever cost. He must be a brave man who declares the whole counsel of God, who checks and keeps down evil manifestations of the carnal nature and evokes and gives encouragement to the good that springs from the effectual working of grace in the heart. In the upbuilding of a godly character, like the upbuilding of a temple, all parts are not built at once. Now work is being done at a window to let in the light, again, at a pillar to give support, again, at a wall to give protection; again, at a door to afford entrance into the presence of God, and again, at the altar where God reveals Himself to the soul. But at some one point, at least, work is being done, either through the proclamation of duty or the exposition of privilege. The grand old Puritan preachers are models of this kind of minister. They dealt much with doctrine, and also much with practical experience. They were well balanced men. They might have hobbies, but their printed words do not perpetuate them. These press hard on the vital truths that the Christian needs for growth and development into the likeness of Christ. They preached courses of sermons, and what a sweep these take through the deep things of God! They gave the people solid divinity. And what men they reared! No doubt the times were favourable to the building up, through the ministry of the Word, of such characters. They were quiet times, open to, and provocative of, deep thought. And they had also their trials that put their learning to the proof. They heard men of extensive and intensive knowledge of the Scriptures, and they profited largely by them. They heard patiently, they thought deeply and they lived nobly. They knew the Gospel of grace, their position in grace, and their indebtedness to grace, and so were men full of self abasement. They walked humbly with God. Our trouble to-day lies here men are not humble enough, and the preaching of our time contributes much toward this. We have not enough of the cross of Christ in it. Not enough of doctrine! Ah, we seem to have in many quarters the marks of the last times (see 2 Tim. iii. 1-5). Now let us place clearly before us Paul's words, first, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, whereby the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world." "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified." Second, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good work." Take these steps. The cross, then doctrine—reproof, correction, and righteousness the fruit. Well-considered, this gives the lines along which the teaching that develops character is to run. Christian character to be built up by Christian truth—appropriated and acted on in every event of the life.

### THE CHRISTIAN'S GUIDE.

To follow Christ—that's the sum and substance of a Christian life.

Christ is the guide, true Christians are the guide-boards, the Bible is the guide-book—you can have the benefit of them all.

Our guide goes before us, anticipates our wants, helps us with our burdens, opens and explains the meaning of the guide-book.

What sort of a guide-board are you? Does anybody know from your life that you are following the Guide?

The nearer we are to our Guide, the more fully will His character be repeated in us.

Christ is not one of many guides. He is *the* Guide.

Our Guide is going to heaven. If you want to go there also, follow Him.

If any one asks why you go the way you do, point to your Guide, and say it is because He goes that way. There can be nothing better said of you than that you go the way your Master goes.

If you have been a wanderer—a stranger in a strange land—come to the One who can and is willing to guide you.

He is calling you now. Will you not hear His voice?

Don't imagine you can find your way as well alone. You need a guide. If you could have gotten along just as well alone, there would have been no Calvary.

It cannot be a very desirable place to which a man is going if he don't care what direction he takes. And if there is a guide who thoroughly knows the way, he is a simpleton who refuses his services.

Don't make the mistake of supposing that you can follow Him on Sunday and wander at your own sweet will the rest of the week.—Rev. Willis S. Hinman.

### THE DIVINE CALL.

The Divine call to the ministry of the Word is a truth clearly attested in revelation. It is made intense by an inward conscientiousness of the individual and by a celestial voice confirming His commission to preach the Gospel to every creature. It is generally supported by a corresponding decision of the Church through whom he is authorized to go forth on this errand of mercy. It is verified by the godly temper and heavenly fruits of his life, which convince all that he is divinely ordained to this great work. Henceforth the obligation becomes imperative; no solicitations of the flesh may break its force; no sense of weakness nullify it, no temptations of Satan undermine it! One grand conviction follows him through all the walks and lanes of his life.

St. Paul, moved by this inward conviction, declared "we faint not." Standing forth thus in Christ's stead, every minister for the Lord Jesus needs similar courage. The mere youthful enthusiasm will not answer; the formal laying on of hands will be insufficient; the choice of friends, or the acquired gifts of the individual, will not be sufficient to support his godly courage in his work throughout the vicissitudes of his career. Nothing less than an ever-present consciousness of a Divine commission will enable him to conquer throughout the toils and labours of such a life.

### THE FREE GIFT.

What encouragement there is to come for pardon to a throne of grace! What ever thy state may be, thou needst not hold off. Though thy sins be as scarlet, if thou come to Christ they shall be made "white as wool." The greatest of sinners are invited. Can any sin be so great as to overtop the value of Christ's blood? Oh! there is not so much vileness and wretchedness in the sinful heart of man as there is grace and goodness and virtue in Christ. There is no disease so bad that He can not cure. Let me be as bad as I can be, there is no reason out of the word of God why I should not come to Christ for salvation. He puts none back. His proclamation is, "Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come ye, buy wine and milk, without money and without price." "Who-soever will, let him come." What would'st thou have more. The invitation can not be plainer. If then thou art not saved, it is plain thou hast no wish for salvation, for if thou hast a will, thou hast a warrant. Say not, "I would come if I had so much humiliation and so much faith," for that were to make a bargain with Christ. If God were to say, "You must love Me, and I will pardon you, that were an exchange, not a free gift. Away with such a thought! Who-soever will, let him come"—Archbishop Usher.

### LIFE AND IMMORTALITY.

The teachings of the Bible concerning discipleship are almost invariably drawn from life. And it is a life not yet come to its full. The believer is the "child" of God. The pilgrim is "going on." The heaven is spreading still, and the mustard-seed yet waxing great. This gives to the invitations of the Gospel their peculiar charm. The soul of the believer stands tip-toe with hope and expectation of the things which must shortly come to pass. He is first of all things an idealist. He sees visions and dreams dreams. Life in its infinite meaning is still before him at death's gate. All the possible changes you can ring upon annihilation—call it nirvana or unconscious immortality, or what you will—fail to make an eternal sleep the object of desire. It is sweeter to be a peasant's child than a Pharaoh's mummy; it is sweeter to lie cradled in the rudest creche than buried in the thirty-ton porphyry sarcophagus of Napoleon under the swelling dome of Des Invalides. You cannot build a mausoleum so gorgeous that it will be as dear to the soul as the gates of dawn. What the soul craves is not only "life, but life more abundantly." Man had rather be an apple-tree fragrant with May blossoms than a petrified forest in Arizona, though every fibre be converted into jasper and chalcedony.—Interior.

### SUNSET THOUGHTS.

Sacrifice is the indispensable condition of success. We must renounce in order to prevail. He that seeks his life loses it; he that loses his life finds it. One must sow in tears if we would reap in joy. Master and scholar have the same experience—that suffering is required in order to fruitfulness and victory. It is the furnace that purifies and renders efficacious; the spices must be bruised to bring forth their fragrance. Happy they who recognize this law of the divine economy, and are content to suffer if only they may be made to bear much fruit.—William M. Taylor, D.D.