

Ministerial Qualifications.

BY REV. GEO. R. WHITE.

"I sent them with commandment unto Iddo, . . . that they should bring us ministers for the house of our God. And by the good hand of our God upon us, they sent us a man of understanding."—Ezra 8: 17, 18.

The preacher of the gospel occupies somewhat of a unique position at the opening of the new century. Some there are who question the utility of such a personage, if not his right to be. There are grounds for all shades of opinions respecting the preachers of this age. But every true minister of Jesus Christ should not only prove his right to be, but to be an acknowledged necessity of his day. If such is not the case there must be something radically wrong with the preacher. Occasionally a bad man finds his way into the ministry, but no age or denomination of Christians has a monopoly of such men. There is a sense in which we all live in glass houses, and it is dangerous to throw stones. Every age and denomination of Christians have had their times of humiliation in this regard. There was a Judas among the twelve, and there are said to be spots on the sun. So we need not be over-surprised if now and again a wolf in sheep's clothing appears among the chosen flock. But too great care cannot be exercised in regard to the men we set apart to the gospel ministry, and equal care should be taken on the part of churches in calling ministers to fill their pulpits. That a good degree of care exists among us is evidenced by the history of the denomination.

When Ezra wanted a minister for the temple at Jerusalem, after prayer for guidance, he said: "By the good hand of our God upon us they sent us a man of understanding." This passage suggests our theme: "Ministerial Qualification." Among the qualifications of a good minister of Jesus Christ we name—

I. First, Piety. Yes, the minister of Jesus must be pious. Do you ask me what I mean by the word pious or piety? I opened the dictionary and found this meaning: "A controlling reverence toward God indicated by a loving conformity to his will; a sense of dependence on the Supreme Being, producing habitual reverence and a disposition to know and obey the law of God." To this we would add piety in a truly Scriptural sense is a deep and abiding love to God and man, planted in the heart by the Holy Spirit. A pious man is one on whom God has laid his sanctifying hands, and in whom is manifest the spirit of Christ. "If any man have not the spirit of Christ he is none of his." Piety, therefore, must be basal in a good minister of Jesus Christ. Without piety all other qualities are as nothing and worse than nothing, for they only add to the wicked deception. Austen Phelps has said, "A pious rather than a profound pulpit is the need of the hour."

There is a cold declamation which is often called eloquence, that touches no heart and influences no life for good, because there is neither heart or life in it. "If I speak with the tongue of men and angels, but have not love, I am become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love I am nothing." It has been well said, "that it makes a great difference in the force of a sentence to know who is behind it." The character of the preacher will give force and power, or destroy the effect of the most polished and eloquent sermon. "What you are," says Emerson, "sounds so loud I can't hear what you say."

From such apostles, O ye mitred heads,
Preserve the church! and lay not careless hands
On skulls that cannot teach, and will not learn."

There is nothing that can take the place of piety in the preacher. When Dr. Read of London, England, visited America he had a strong desire to see Dr. Payson's church. The deacon led him reverently up the aisle and pointing at the pulpit said: "There is where Mr. Payson prayed." "I thought," said Dr. Read, "whatever might have been his power as a preacher he was greater in prayer. I was now sure of it." The same was true of Mr. Spurgeon. We speak of his preaching qualities, but those who heard him pray always spoke of him as a man mighty in prayer. How few ask concerning the minister—has he power in prayer, can he reach the ear of God, and move the hearts of men? But almost always, "how did you like his sermon?" Ah, my brethren, we want praying men in our pulpits. Men who can lay hold on God with one hand and lost souls with the other and bring them face to face. Can your minister do this! then he is a good minister? There is not the amount of communication over the mighty Atlantic cable of prayer there should be. The new century is in need not only of men mighty in the Scriptures but mighty with God in prayer. We need Apollos, but, O God, send us more Elijahs, who can shut and open heaven with prayer. The world is languishing for the bread of life, and only men of prayer can unlock the granaries of the skies and feed the famishing millions. We need ministers who can draw from heaven as well as earth. "Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth." But this

gift, my brother, is a personal matter between God and your own soul, and you will not receive it by the laying on of hands to-night, not, at least, by virtue of such a human act. But piety and Holy Ghost power you will need, or your preaching will die as the mist dies upon the mountain top, before the rising sun, while souls all about you will go down to death and hell.

II. The second qualification of a good minister of Jesus Christ we would mention is Common Sense. Common sense, like common honesty, commands the highest value in the ministry. Dr. Hodge used to say that "common sense is the sort of sense without which all other sense is nonsense." We do not plead for the colossal, the extravagant, the superior judgment of the great wits, but plain common sense. Your minister may be as pious as Job and consecrated as Paul, but if he lack common sense he will be a failure in the ministry. Examples are not wanting of good pious men who have failed for lack of good judgment. You can never feel safe with a pastor who lacks in this regard. You cannot have the confidence of the old Scotchman who, on being catechised for sleeping in church, said: "Ah, pastor, I can trust you." But there is always a sense of insecurity in a man who lacks judgment. The gospel of Christ is a common-sense commodity, and the man who preaches it must have judgment. Some years ago there was a lady who kept a private boarding house in the city of St. John, who promised a suit of broadcloth to the preacher who would tell her what was the next quality to piety in a minister. Some said education, others good manners, others good looks. But one day there came in a minister from the country, he replied "common sense." He took the broadcloth. If a minister lack training he can secure it, but if he lack common sense, God have mercy on him—even Wolfville cannot supply that lack. No amount of piety can atone for such a want. You could hardly find a perfect minister in this house tonight, and there are some excellent ones here. Mr. Spurgeon has put this bit of homely wisdom in the mouth of John Ploughman: "I never knew a good horse that did not have some odd habit or other, and I never knew a minister worth his salt, who had not some crotchet or oddity. Now these are bits of cheese that cavaliers nibble at. Dear me, if all God's creatures were judged in this way, we would ring the dove's neck for being too tame, shoot the robins for eating spiders, and kill the hens for not giving milk. When a man wants to beat a dog he can find a stick, and at any rate any fool may have something to say against the best minister in England." But dear friends, the lack of common sense is such a lack, as cannot be passed in silence.

III. Education is the third ministerial qualification we will mention: You remember that concise statement: "If God does not need our learning, much less does he need our ignorance." Yes, the minister must be educated, and the more the better. Get it where and how he may, in college or out of college, only get it. This age calls for an educated ministry, and has a right to demand it! A college course is not synonymous with an education. But if some men are stupid in spite of a college course, how tremendous that stupidity without it. Ezra said, "by the good hand of our God upon us they sent us a man of understanding." The opportunities are such that there is no excuse for a young man entering the ministry without a good degree of preparation. Even piety and common sense will not give the 20th century a successful ministry. There are responsible or irresponsible pulpit committees, who look for piety alone. But Ezra, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, thanked God for the "man understanding." A "call" from God in this day includes an education. A lot of brains in the skull of a young man, with a school-house and college in sight, is a special call from God to educate himself for life's work. Seed time and harvest are calls from God to the farmer to sow and reap, or he shall buy in winter. So when you see these qualifications, piety, common sense, and education, with a consuming passion for souls, then you have a man "called of God," as was Moses, Isaiah, John the Baptist and Paul. The mind must be trained to the noblest use of all its powers for God and man. And no young man has done his best, for his Saviour and the world, who has not availed himself of the possibilities of his day and generation. And training is needed not only that he may be able to instruct men in the great thoughts of God, but to meet the sophistries of the age, and guard with a jealous eye "the faith once for all delivered unto the saints." If preparation is needed for worldly callings, how much more for the heavenly? Jesus put his disciples into upwards of three years of training before he sent them out to preach. The inspired Paul exhorts Timothy: "Give heed to reading, to exhortation, to teaching." "Neglect not the gift that is in thee." "Be diligent in these things"—Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed rightly dividing the word of truth." The minister's mind is not like the widow's cruse of oil, he must be putting into it, or it will run dry. We do not mean that he is to be a dealer in second-hand clothes. But he must "read, mark and inwardly digest," theology, science, poetry, history, biography, illustrations, and keep mind and heart open to the passing things of God and nature, or his church will soon hint that a change of pastorate might be advantageous to him, seeing he is a young man. A most doubtful compliment indeed. But a "rehash," or even "hash" is not the most palatable bill of fare.

But here I must make a practical application of what I have already said. The brother whom we are to set apart to the work of the gospel ministry at this time, possesses to a good degree the qualifications of a good

minister of Jesus Christ. And in addition to those already mentioned, piety, common sense, and education, our brother has a good wife, the very next best qualification to those already mentioned for a minister. To this I am sure those of you who have been sometime on the road will testify. And now with these qualities of head, and heart, and home, followed by the divine blessing, success must attend the work of such a man; and the work of the Lord must and will prosper in his hands.

And now having spoken on the qualifications of a good minister of Jesus Christ, will you allow a few minutes to emphasize briefly the work of the good minister: It is the work of revealing and declaring God to men. It is a glorious work. And in order to do this work successfully there is no need of resorting to sensational method, so called. We rule out the methods of the Mitred Mountebank who

"Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven
As make the angels weep."

The gospel itself is sufficiently sensational. Its truths are tremendous in their import, and lay hold on the innermost depths of the soul. If the gospel is dull and the hearer listless, it is because the preacher has never felt its power in his own soul. When the clergyman asked David Garrick, "why is it that you draw the multitudes, while I preach to empty pews?" The actor replied, "because I set forth fiction as if it were truth, while you preach the truth as if it were fiction." When the satirist Summerfield was dying, he said, "Oh, if I could return to my pulpit but for one hour, how I could preach, for I have looked into eternity."

What the preacher needs is a vision of God, and the angelic messenger to touch his lips with the live coal from off Isaiah's altar, that he may see the invisible and hear the inaudible.

There are two words which may somewhat define the work of the minister, namely, "Theology and Anthropology," or the science of God and man. Between these two lie his mission. Man must know God and himself to be saved. (1) Theology, or the science of God. The preacher must reveal God to men. But, "who is sufficient for these things?" Sir John Franklin says, "that when trying to persuade a tribe of Esquimaux of the Divine Presence, and interest in men, the Chief answered him, 'there may be a God, but he surely knows nothing about us. Behold our poverty, our rude homes, our tattered garments. Behold you icy crags. There may be such a Being, as you mention, but if so he is surely afar off.' The old Chief's idea of God is not peculiar to the poor Esquimaux. There are men and women in our congregations, whose conception of the divine immanence is not very far removed from that of the poor savage. It is the task of the preacher to so reveal God that these shall not only see but obey Him. It is a glorious work to help a man to find God. For such a task the minister needs not only Isaiah's vision, but Moses's burning bush and the voice from heaven saying: "Come now, and I will send thee."

(2) Anthropology, or the science of man. We do not know ourselves or our neighbor. We are not only strangers to each other, but very ignorant of God. It is not the whole duty of the preacher to unfold the knowledge of God in a general manner from the pulpit. He must preach righteousness in the great congregation; but sometimes he must speak to the individual. So the call came to Nathan, "go show David his sin." The King had committed a dreadful offence. He had murdered Uriah and taken Bathsheba to wife. Conscious guilt had clouded his soul for many days. God seemed afar off. He had resolved to bear it alone, and to try to atone for his guilt in his own soul. He was unfitted for service. Three words blazed forth wherever he went. Did he look upon the starry sky where he was wont to trace the handiwork and behold the glory of God, the trio was there. Did he seek the holy temple for worship, prayer cooled upon his lips, the spirit of worship forsook him. Wherever he looked he saw three words only, "Murder," "Adultery," "Avarice."

Into the presence of the King came Nathan the Court preacher. After the usual salutation, he informed the King that he had a little matter to lay before him for judgment. Then with a master stroke of delicacy the preacher cast his message into the form of a parable: "A poor man had a little ewe lamb. It was dear as a daughter, ate of his food and drank of his cup. His rich neighbor had many flocks and herds, but when his hospitality was needed, he spared to take of his own possession and seized upon the ewe lamb." Enough! Enough! cries the justly indignant King. "As the Lord liveth the man that hath done this thing shall surely die." Now prophet of God, speak! "Thou art the man." Stripped of ermine and purple the King stood condemned; and, as with a sword in his bones, David prostrates himself before God. "Hear him pray: 'Have mercy upon me, O God, according to the multitude of thy tender mercies. blot out my transgression. For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against thee and thee only have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight.' Thus must the true minister of Christ lay bare the transgressions of the people, and bring the guilty face to face with his sin. It is not an easy task. For to preach the truth this way, is to touch men at the very core of their being. Thus the Gospel is the power of God unto the salvation, or condemnation of men. For this story of sin and redemption is everlasting true. "And there is no difference, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." Could the preacher of to-day utter parables as did Nathan and Christ, he would save both himself and them that hear him. Is it any wonder that Paul said: "Brethren pray for us." If the inspired apostle felt his weakness to declare the divine message. If he stood in awe lest his tone of voice might unworthily represent his Lord, and felt his inability to modulate his voice and manner sufficiently to give the loving invitations of Jesus, how shall our poor uninspired tongues speak his praise, and tenderly invite sinners to the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world? So would we cry from the very depths of our souls, "Brethren pray for us," that utterance may be given unto us, that our lips may be touched with a live coal from off the altar of God; "pray for us," that we may speak the message of God clearly and boldly as we ought to speak. Oh for an unction from the Holy one, for after all spiritual things are only spiritually discerned. "But, we have this treasure in earthen vessel, that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us."