

The Minister at College.

IT is a fact, sad and yet not widely known, that many a young man who enters college with commendable motives, high hopes, and every promise of usefulness, once he is launched upon the work of the ministry as pastor, finds himself sadly lacking in something which he feels to be most important, but which he cannot exactly define—in a word, he feels uncomfortable. He discovers that he has now to gather up many things dropped by the way. Some regard a college course as a sort of impediment thrown by "old fogies" across their pathway to usefulness and renown. Hence they hasten through it—cram it, abbreviate it—with all possible diligence. Others lay out all their strength upon securing high attainments and honours as scholars—become book-worms—to the neglect of other qualifications for the practical work of pastors. Let both take heed lest in their haste, the one to "get through," the other to "stand high," they lose sight of their ministerial character and destiny. May not this account in some degree for the lack of comfort and success of which the young minister sometimes complains? Perhaps the trouble may be traced to an earlier date than his connection with the "listless congregation" or his entrance upon a difficult mission field, viz., to a college course characterized more by vivaciousness than spirituality, more by fondness for metaphysical subtleties than by deep exercise of heart. A college course is a preparation for the work of the ministry in many important respects other than the acquiring of knowledge and the training of the intellectual powers. It may be said with safety that no man knows its full value until he has been for a time in the active work of the ministry. Every theological student knows what it is to return to college at the close of a summer's work in the mission field, hungering for knowledge. Every preacher knows what a treat it is to hear a sermon from another. Little wonder is it, therefore, that a minister who has preached to one congregation for hundreds of consecutive Sabbaths should often wish that he had better employed his time while at college. Much, therefore, of our future happiness and usefulness depends upon the way we conduct ourselves while at college. It is said that every vibration of the air caused by sound affects the whole atmosphere of the globe; that the ripples made by casting a stone into the sea move onward and outward to its remotest shores. Thus is it with the conduct of men. The results of human action strike out indefinitely into the eternity of the future. The deeds of youth travel on to meet the aged man bending over the grave. Of none can this be said with greater truth than of the student. It has been noticed that the impressions which students form regarding one another are retained throughout life; nothing can remove them, nothing can change them.

In order that our seven years of college life may be

to any extent profitable as a preparation for the ministry, we should endeavour, first of all, to make sure of our *call* to the ministry. Every true minister should, in some degree, share the sentiment of Paul: "Necessity is laid upon me, yea, woe is unto me if I preach not the Gospel." He who can adopt this as his conviction in the matter is happy indeed, and need not doubt of future usefulness. But what *is* a call to the ministry? In general it may be said that *every* man is called to that vocation in which he can be most useful. This general principle may be assumed as indisputable. Hence the question with *every man* is, or should be, not merely "Is this or that occupation lucrative, honourable, legitimate?" but "In what vocation or business can I be of most service in glorifying God and in furthering the great enterprise of saving men?" This principle applies to all callings, and ought to govern every man in the choice of his life-work, whether agriculture, law, medicine or theology. This principle, if universally adopted, would "divide" labour happily and profitably for all. It follows from this that if a man is convinced, by some experience, by the counsel of wise brethren, by the possession of the necessary endowments of body, intellect and heart, that in the ministry he can be more useful than in any other calling or business whatever, the ministry is his sphere. But however we may define a call to the ministry—for opinions differ on the point—this much is certain, and should be remembered and acted upon, that much, very much of our usefulness and comfort *in* the work will depend upon the degree of certainty with which we feel that we are called.

Again while students (in the technical sense of the term) we should ever remember that we are *now* ministers of the Gospel, and should labour to sustain that character. We are ministers from the moment of our *call*, not merely from the date of our graduation or ordination. To call a Theological College a "parson factory," as some thoughtless people do, is a vile travesty, and betrays ignorance as well as malice. The church does *not* make ministers, the Head of the church alone can do that. No ecclesiastical body, no church court, no board of examiners, no college can *make* a minister. Even the Apostles themselves, "in solemn council assembled," never made a minister, never claimed to have done so. Great and honourable and responsible as is the work committed to the church, this is a work reserved as the prerogative of the Most High. He makes ministers. He calls them. He qualifies them in any respect in which they cannot qualify themselves. He appoints them. All that the church *can* do, or was ever designed to do in the matter, is to *recognize* the men already called by God, to encourage them and to assist them in fitting themselves for their work. It follows, therefore, that a man may be, *in esse*, a minister of the Gospel—and he who is truly called of God is such—before he ever enters a college at all.

Now it is evident that much depends—much of usefulness, much of comfort—upon a man's *sustaining* this