

THE TROUBLES OF A PASTOR

BY ONE OF THEM.

There are quite a number of small matters in which, by the exercise of a proper thoughtfulness, the people may greatly aid their pastor. No small share of the time and strength of the minister of a large church is consumed in attention to petty details, of which he might be relieved if the people had a mind to relieve him. Not a little of his work is the direct result of their neglect and carelessness. Not a few of his failures in service might be avoided if they would co-operate with him, in ways which would involve little labor on their part.

It would be a simple matter, for example, to notify your minister when you change your residence, that he may make the needful correction on his calling list and know where to find you. A postal card, costing one cent, and which you could inscribe and direct in less than one minute, would convey to him this information. Yet, I have often spent hours in hunting up families or individuals who had changed their residence without giving me any notice whatever. Indeed, in my experience of twenty-five years as a pastor, I have found very few persons who were thoughtful enough to give the minister this information, even when their attention had been repeatedly called to the matter from the pulpit. When a minister travels all the way to Dan in search of a parishoner and finds that the parishoner, without mentioning the matter to him, has removed to Beersheba, it does not put him in a good humor; especially if, as is often the case, he was in Beersheba the day before, and might, if he had known it, have made this call by walking a square or two. I have frequently travelled from two to six miles to make a call that I might have made by travelling a few rods. And it would have been such a simple matter for these perambulating parishoners to have saved me all this trouble!

Very often church-members remove from the city to distant places without giving their pastor notice. Within the past three months I have devoted considerable time to searching for a missing family, and at last, six months after their departure, I learned that they were in Kansas. Not a few of the absentees on the roll of our churches have behaved in this way, and we are now wholly unable to trace them. This is not only a great annoyance and trouble to the pastor, it is a gross breach of their church covenant.

Families are sometimes in sore trouble, through sickness or other calamity, and the minister never finds it out. They do not give him notice, and he fails, from no fault of his own, to visit them in their time of need. It would have been easy for them to call him, and he would have answered their summons most gladly. Yet such persons sometimes cherish umbrage toward their pastor because he has not rendered them a service which they gave him no chance to render. The faithful pastor regrets every such failure. The people who are in trouble are the people whom he desires to see. And if, in the moment of their anxiety or their sorrow, they will reflect that their pastor is not omniscient, and will let him know that they would be glad to see him, they will do him a great favor.

Members of the church might aid the pastor greatly by taking pains to make the acquaintance of new-comers in the congregation, or in the neighborhood, who seem disposed to connect themselves with the church, and by furnishing the pastor with their names and places of residence. With all such strangers he desires to become acquainted, and it is often difficult for him to find out who they are, or to put himself in communication with them. Those who sit near them in church and offer them the courtesies of the sanctuary can easily make their acquaintance, and learn whether or not they would be pleased to receive a call from the pastor.

One of the most unsatisfactory and slovenly departments of the life of many of our churches is that which relates to absent members. In some of our churches the number of absentees is large, often amounting to an eighth or a tenth of the entire membership. Some of these are only temporarily absent; some of them have gone away without notifying the pastor of their departure, some have been absent for years. Over these absent members the church exercises little care. Many of them fall into neglectful and irreligious ways, and have no desire to renew their church relations. It seems highly important that some means of communication be established between the church and these absentees, and the work may well be undertaken by the members of the church. A careful list should be made

out, with the residences of those absent, so far as known; and this list should be taken in charge by the clerk, or by some member of the church who volunteers to perform this service. The list should be read at some well-attended social meeting, that those present may correct and complete it, if they happen to know the whereabouts of any of the absent ones. Then these names should be parceled out for correspondence among the members of the church present, giving to each correspondent but few names; and each one should write regularly, say once in six months, to those assigned to him, explaining to each that he writes in the name of the church, to convey its greetings to its absent communicant, to give him information of the work that is going on at home, and to inquire after his welfare. A friendly letter of this sort, expressing the interest of the church in these members now beyond its sight, and gently reminding them of their covenant relations, will prove very helpful to many of them. The fact that they are remembered and cared for in their absence will touch many of them deeply; and those that had grown remiss and wayward will often be called back to better ways by such a friendly word.

If the residence of any absent member is not known, it should be the duty of the person to whom the name is assigned to find it out. The pastor or other persons may furnish clues to the investigation, but the work of making the investigation should be left to the correspondent himself. All discoveries of this nature, and all changes of residence, should be reported by the correspondents to the clerk, or person who keeps the list of absentees, that this list may be as full and as accurate as possible. To those who expect to be permanently absent, the suggestion may properly be made, not by the correspondent, but by some official communication from the church, that it would be better for them, if it be convenient, to remove their relation to some church near them, with which they may engage in work and in worship.

This work of keeping the lines of communication open between the church and its absent members will be found, in most cases, pleasant and profitable. The answers that will come from many of them will be grateful and hearty, and some opportunity should be found of reading these responses, or such portions of them as may be properly read in public, at some social meeting of the church. By this care of the absentees, the pastor would have one of his anxieties removed, and one of the loose ends of the church administration neatly picked up and secured.

There are many other ways in which a vigilant church may assist its leader in carrying on his work. And they will find it greatly to their account to relieve him, so far as they can, of all kinds of unnecessary labor, that he may give himself more fully to the weightier studies and services of his calling.

HISTORIC TYPES.

Four leading styles of men figure in History—the athlete, the ascetic, the æsthetic and the academician. The athlete was an early, even a primeval type. He is the man of brawn more than brain, of herculean strength, but of brutish disposition. Such a man was Lamech. Esau was of this class, so was Jethu. When the type is simply athletic, it is contemptible, as in the case of Goliath the godless. But it is capable of valiant efforts for the right, when upon some sinewy Samson comes the special strengthening of God. The athlete is certainly of use in the development of the race. The muscle and the brawn and the healthy constitutions tell. There was a rugged strength and a simple sincerity to the old primeval savage which is sadly lacking in many modern social types. The athletic principle is valuable, although "advancing" civilization, which multiplies diseases as well as cures, might appear to make against it. Such a consideration, for example, as the alleged fact that as civilization progresses the range of the human eyesight is diminishing, might be quoted by some as only one evidence of the gradual deterioration of the physical type.

But while the athlete was possibly the first style of man, the ascetic quickly followed upon him, just about as soon as men began to cultivate religious instincts at all. The type was early quite common among the Hebrews, as well as among other ancient peoples. It was Pythagorean and Stoic in Greece and Nazareth and Essene in Judea. Daniel is a distinguished example of a man with this flesh-crucifying tendency, even while he mingled with the world