

For a Continuous Ministry.

BY PASTOR J. WEBB.

I am inclined to think that it is quite possible for the churches to enjoy a continuous ministry. I shall endeavor to work out my plan for bringing about that very desirable state of things in the following imaginary conversation:

"Good morning deacon Up-to-date. It is a long time since I had the pleasure of shaking hands with you."

"Good morning deacon Old-school. I am right glad to see you and to welcome you to our city. You will dine with me of course?"

"Thank you, nothing could please me better. Will you kindly direct me to the church where the Reverend Doctor Big-gun preaches?"

"Certainly. If you will follow this road you cannot possibly miss it; it is the only stone building in the city."

"Well, brother Old-school, now that we have a little time for a chat, tell me what you think of the learned doctor."

"I can assure you, brother Up-to-date, that it was a rich feast. His language is poetry—his manner is captivating—in fact, he is what I should call a model preacher."

"Then you were highly entertained?"

"Why, yes, I could have listened to him for five hours. Where did you go this morning?"

"To my own church."

"Who have you for a pastor now?"

"We have no pastor at present."

"Then who was the preacher?"

"We did not have a preacher."

"Did not have a preacher! How in the world did you put in the time? When our pastor is away on a vacation, or sick, we stay at home."

"We put in the time fairly well. We had a season of prayer, witnessed for Christ and comforted one another with the beautiful words of the gospel—sang some good old hymns—and, best of all, a middle-aged man stood up and asked to be prayed for. He said, as the tears ran down his face, that he never thought that there could be any religion to speak of if the minister was not there. But now he knew that there was something real in religion. Christ was there, and he wanted Jesus to be his Saviour."

"This must have been a great surprise to you. I have never seen a revival without a minister being in it. I am a firm believer in revivals—we would all die without them."

"This is not exactly a revival, that is, as the word is generally understood, it is a continual feast. It is true that we are without a pastor, but we are not without the gospel, and I am thankful to say that we have a 'continuous ministry'—the ministry of the saints."

"I am astonished! Is not this something new?"

"No, not with us. We have been going along in this way for several years. There was a time when we suffered a good deal when we were without a pastor, and I am sorry to say that in those days we were often without pastoral care. You see, we expected so much from the pastor that it was impossible for him to fill the bill. We never, for one moment, thought that we had any responsibilities resting upon us. We blamed him for everything that went wrong in the church, and, poor man, we soon grew tired of him and he as quickly grew weary of us. The strangest thing about it, however, was this, we thanked God when the minister was removed, and he thanked God for being removed."

Then there was another big trouble, which, I am sorry to say, most of our churches suffer from more or less, it is the 'subscription paper' trouble. The brethren would sign a subscription paper for the support of the minister. This was for one year and for 'one year' only. This important fact was clearly understood by the whole community; the minister understood it with fear and trembling; for he had been duly and solemnly informed in the presence of all the brethren at the church meeting. And further, that there should be no misunderstanding in regard to the matter, the clerk emphasized it in the minutes of the church book.

At the close of the year there was always a good deal of criticizing to be done. "Are we going to hire the minister for another year?" was the almost universal question of the day. At last the great day would arrive, and it would arrive with all the usual accompaniments of bitter feelings and naughty words, and the result was: 'fifty dollars less on the subscription list than was signed last year.' The result of this meeting would come as a thunderbolt in the home of the pastor. I always noticed that after this the faces of the pastor and his wife were a worried and sad look. After a few months it was the old story—the parsonage was vacant—there was no minister, and the brethren would wonder why professors would backslide and why sinners were not converted. I must say, however, that all the ministers were good men, and there was no reason why they should have been sent away as they were.

Many and many a time have I asked with other laymen, 'Why can't we have a continuous ministry?'

"I am really growing impatient, brother Up-to-date, to hear the whole story, for the history of your church, so far, is the exact history of ours."

"I am glad, brother Old-school, that you are interested in my story. I am going to relate now how the change came about. It happened thus:

'One fine day as I was sitting in my home, and feeling pretty blue on account of the sad state of things in our church, sister Grey, one of the brightest members, came to make a friendly call. After she had been talking with my wife for about fifteen minutes on things in general, she turned rather abruptly toward me, and with a very pleasant smile on her countenance, handed me a crisp ten-dollar bill.'

"What is this for? I asked."

"For the minister's salary," she replied.

"For the minister's salary! Why, we haven't any minister!" I exclaimed, somewhat alarmed.

"Of course, I know that," she replied, "but we are going to have one soon for I have been praying to the Lord to send us one—and I know that he will if we pray with our money as well as with our hearts."

"I have been thinking," she continued, "how much better it would be if you went round with the subscription paper right now, and asked the people to sign for the support of the gospel. Tell them that the Lord is going to send us a minister. Then, when they have all signed, give out that there will be a special prayer meeting for the purpose of asking the Lord to send us a pastor. For," said she, "How can we consistently ask the Lord to do his part if we are not doing ours?"

"Sister Grey," I replied, "I will do all that you speak of and more too if I can. You have solved the whole problem. I have been troubled about the sad state of the church for years. I can see through it all now. We have been trying to run our church business along the devil's track, and it is a wonder to me how God could bless us at all!"

"There is another thing," said sister Grey, "which troubles me. We have been in the habit of going to church when we knew that there would be preaching but when we knew that there would be no preaching we would stay at home or go out visiting, and the church would be shut up. I have been feeling very sad about this state of things—Why, deacon, we are Sabbath breakers! It is all wrong! We have been setting an awful example before the world. Tell the people that the church will for the future, be opened on Sundays just the same as it is when there is regular preaching. I will get the choir to have some hymns ready and we who profess to be followers of Jesus will read and pray and witness for Christ."

"We knelt right down where we were and asked the Lord to forgive us and help us to do as he would have us do, and be what he would have us be. From that time, brother Old-school, we have had a 'continuous ministry' in our church."

"I am still more interested in your story, brother Up-to-date, and, if it is not troubling you too much, I will thank you to tell me how you get along in regard to the hiring of a minister."

"That is, I can assure you, an easy matter now. You see—we have the salary difficulty settled—and God supplies us with ministers."

"But do you not have the usual excitement and hard feelings to contend with at the church meetings, when the brethren are called upon to choose a pastor from the long list of candidates?"

"We have found out by bitter experience that the 'candidating system' is another of the devil's tracks. The sooner the churches stop running their gospel trains along this line the better it will be for them."

"Then how do you manage in the selecting of a pastor?"

"We have an understanding between the brethren. There are certain rules laid down by us to guide us in these matters. We call them 'our common sense rules.'"

"Will you kindly tell me what rules you have to guide you in such important matters?"

"With pleasure. They are as follows:

1. We do not allow a candidate to preach without being first invited. This rule often saves a split in the church.

2. A candidate is invited only after due consideration, and with the consent of the church or by the pulpit committee.

3. We settle with one candidate before we consider another.

4. We pay an invited candidate at the same rate per Sunday as we would if he were our pastor—adding his travelling expenses.

5. After having heard our candidate preach, we call a church meeting, and, after much prayer, we talk the matter over, and finally take a vote by ballot. It is understood that a two-third vote, if there are no serious objections from the majority, is as good as a unanimous vote. Then the church clerk informs the candidate immediately as to the result of the meeting.

6. We aim to treat a minister, when he becomes our pastor, as the servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. We also make up our minds to help him—and, a minister with a

working church behind him you know is almost sure to be a success."

"But do you not have trouble with one or two persons who are bound to have their way, even if they have to rough-ride over the heads and rights of all the rest?"

"No. We have our rules which, if imperfect, can be improved upon, and since we have learned to go to church for the purpose of worshipping God, and since we pay our money for the support of the gospel, the blessing of the Lord rests upon us, and the church has grown spiritually, numerically and financially."

"But don't you find it a difficult matter to get a good minister?"

"That depends upon what you call good. I think, in fact I know that there are lots of good ministers; we have one coming next week. He has been used by God in other places and I am inclined to believe that God has a work for him here. If God speaks to us through him, and if we feel, after hearing him, that we want to get nearer to Jesus, and to live better Christian lives, and to be more useful in the kingdom of Christ—that is the man for us!"

"I thank you with all my heart brother; your story has done me good. We have been making blunders ever since we have been a church. When we look for a minister, we want one that will paralyze the Methodists and Presbyterians and fill the town with wonderment. We pass by all the home ministers, without even a thought, for we think that they are all too common, and send away to Chicago or some other far-off city for some great meteor, or a comet with a long blazing tail. And then we herald his coming with a great flourishing of trumpets, and a long article in the newspapers giving his pedigree from the time that he crawled out of his cradle to the time of his arrival in our town; and, of course, everybody turns out to see and hear this wonderful prodigy; and then—well, you know the rest. He is not a Spurgeon, or a Talnage, or a Phillip Brooks, or even a Moody; and—but I can see through it all now.—We do not go to church to worship God, and we do not give 'as unto the Lord,' and,—well, I am going home now, and I promise you that from this time forth I am going to try for a 'continuous ministry in our church.'"

Better Than its Name.

It is a pity that Miss Saunders did not hit upon as happy a designation for her latest book as for "Beautiful Joe." "Tilda Jane: An Orphan in Search of a Home" is too tame (begging the author's pardon) for the spirited piece of writing it stands for. It is true that Tilda Jane, the small heroine, is undeniably homely, and that her life, her circumstances, and the adventures that befall her are of the homeliest order; but when homeliness is made so captivating as here, it deserves to be known and remembered by a more taking title.

"Tilda Jane," though presumably written for youthful readers, possesses the double charm of all "really and truly" children's books: it has the absorbing narrative which especially delights the young, and the subtle humor and other fine qualities of style which only grown-ups can properly relish. The book is full of clever touches—like that of Tilda's selection of "bad" Hank Dillion as the most likely person to give her a "lift" to Australia;—like the episode of her being stricken with temporary dumbness as the result of other people's loquacity;—like her shrinking from Mrs. Tracy's caress, because it was "too homey" for a "real orphan." "Oh! I want a home!" she cries. "I want some one to talk to me as if I had blue eyes and curly hair. I want a little rocking-chair and a fire. I don't want to mind bells and run with the orphans, but it ain't the will of Providence. I've got to give up." There are also a few bits of Nature description which are admirably fitted to the theme, and which show the author's keen appreciation of the connection between things animate and inanimate.

But, as might be expected, one of the strongest points in the book is its sympathetic handling of the two or three dumb "understudies." If Tilda Jane comes near to being a really unique creation, it is largely so because of her passionate love of "animiles." During that lonely night walk through the forest, when she puts the dog Gippie down to "stretch his legs a mite," she says, "Keep in my tracks, an' I'll not let anything hurt you. If a bear comes he'll eat me first." (The italics are mine). Could anything be more exquisitely done? And again how delicate is the introduction of Poacher, the deer-hound, to Tilda. "At the mention of his name, Poacher rose and walked politely toward the little girl. He looked at her and she looked at him; then he took a step nearer and laid his muzzle on her shoulder. With exquisite subtlety he comprehended all that she wished to say in relation to herself, and all that she felt in relation to the dog race in general. She laid her cheek against his velvet ear, then her arm stole round his neck. The dog stood in courteous silence, but at last, feeling embarrassed under her attention, he looked somewhat foolishly at his master, and appealingly licked Tilda Jane's cheek. As quick to understand him as he was to understand her, she released him, whereupon he lay down beside her and put his handsome head on her lap."

Miss Saunders has already charmed her thousands and tens of thousands with the vivid interest and humane feeling of "Beautiful Joe." If now she is inclined to follow her subject deeper, she may yet do for the domestic animals what Kipling and Seton-Thompson have done for the wild denizens of plain and forest—not imitating these, however, but developing her own distinctly original power of interpreting the subtle relation which exists between human beings and the creatures they have made their dependents. BLANCHE BISHOP.