

grave and serious in your general deportment. Never for a moment forget the object for which you are in the community where you labour. Remember you cannot lay aside your official character even in your hours of recreation. The teacher, the doctor, the judge may put off the manner which his business requires and throw himself into Society with the laudable intention of having a good time, but you are never off duty; you cannot distinguish between the minister and the *man*. Those who surround you will be judging of your earnestness, and of the importance which you attach to religion, by your conduct in your lightest moments. The general atmosphere which surrounds you will teach more powerfully than your public ministrations, and it may exert an influence in the opposite direction. The lips which are most giving to jesting or frivolous talk are not the best fitted to communicate religious instruction or to awaken holy resolves. I speak with some feeling on this point for I fear I have sinned in this particular, although I have continually striven to guard against it. Do not suppose that I mean to inculcate a gloomy and morose disposition or a stiff, formal, studied manner. Nothing is more disastrous to the influence of a religious teacher than this. I have great faith in a happy, buoyant, Christian cheerfulness in captivating the affections of men. But there must be always a deep moral earnestness at the back of it, a fervent desire to advance the internal interests of those with whom you converse and associate; and then while your manner is pleasant and affable—"each one will feel,

The silken scabbard holds a sword of steel."

Say to yourselves every day—"I am an ambassador from the King of Heaven to the rebellious inhabitants of earth, and I must be careful to-day not to endanger the interests of the court which I represent, either by word or look, or the most trivial action which I perform."

You must not think, gentlemen, that when you have conducted the required services on the Sabbath, the prayer meeting during the week, and have visited from house to house with general reading of the Scriptures and prayer that your work is done. One of the most important and difficult parts of it remain, I mean personal dealing with men, religious conversation with individuals about the relation which their souls occupy to the Divine Being. This is no easy matter, especially for a timid and reserved beginner. There is not only his own diffidence to be overcome, but also the consciousness (or at least the fear) that he is broaching a disagreeable subject, and that he will probably give offence instead of accomplishing good. It is easy enough to speak on religion and to make urgent appeals on behalf of vital christianity from the pulpit on the Sabbath day, when the people are assembled expecting to hear these topics discussed; but I have always found it exceedingly difficult to commence direct personal appeals to individuals when I have found them alone in the house or in the field. Yet I am convinced that an appeal properly made on such an occasion has ten times the force of one weakened by all the conventionalities of the pulpit.

There are some men who experience no embarrassment in entering upon such a course of conversation at a moment's notice, who can ask the most direct questions and administer the sharpest personal reproofs without preface or apology. These men have an overpowering sense of the native majesty and authority of truth, and of the dignity of their own office as its advocates and expounders. Such teachers who are troubled by no sense of delicacy, by no feeling of reserve in speaking of religious subjects are very frequently lauded by earnest Christians as the most faithful servants of God, and are held up as models which all religious workers would do well to imitate. Often the more sensitive and backward of their brethren desire a measure of their gifts. But I am convinced from a careful observation of facts that many ministers, evangelists, and catechists, who pursue this method are not so successful as we should

at first have supposed. They feel at all times impelled to declare the whole counsel of God whether men will hear or whether they will forbear. What is it to them that natural men will take offence at what they will call their impertinence? Have they not received a commission from Heaven itself to reprove, rebuke and exhort with all authority? They denounce the judgment of everlasting condemnation against all who will not listen to them, and complacently declare that they are clear of the blood of all men for they warned them and they would not hear.

I conceive it to be my duty this morning to tell you that I consider that these men have made a mistake. If the majesty and authority of truth were apparent to all men when it is simply stated to them this course would undoubtedly be the right one, but we all know that a bare presentation of the gospel is not sufficient to secure its acceptance. So far from this being the case we find that owing to the cloud of prejudice by which every natural man is enshrouded and the strong bias in favour of evil which springs from his perverted desires, the statement of the truth only awakens opposition in his soul. This opposition is greatly increased when the truth is presented in a dogmatic (and as he will say) impertinent manner. His mind ever on the outlook for an excuse for its position will find one in the meddling, offensive, self-conceited spirit of his would-be instructor and he will reply with perhaps a good deal of force and reason: "Who made thee a judge, and a spiritual adviser to me?" What shall we do then? Shall we refrain from urging upon men their duty because they will thus receive it? Nay, verily that would be the worst unfaithfulness on our part, but we must be very careful as to how we approach them. The offence of the cross is great enough now, let us not add to it by our own carelessness or arrogance.

When the greatest teacher of men that earth has ever seen or will see, called his first followers from their humble labours by the Sea of Galilee he gave them the promise that he would make them fishers of men. It has always seemed to me that this expression has a force and meaning not entirely dependent on the circumstances in which it was first uttered. He did not promise that he would make them Lords over men's consciences, or endow them with a power such as the most stubborn of human wills would be compelled to obey. He did not tell them that they were to have supreme authority to command, denounce, and threaten, and that men would only need to hear to understand and comply with their requests. No, they were to be simply *fishers* of men. A servant is sent to catch trout in a neighbouring stream. He rushes pell-mell down to the bank, and springs upon the pebbly strand with a noise and clatter sufficient to scare all the members of the funny tribe far from the shore. He swings his hook and line several times round his head and then lets it into the water with a splash such as increases the wild terror of the fish, and drives them further away. He wanders up and down the bank for hours vainly trying to get a bite and then returns home. But what is our surprise and indignation when we hear him saying to his Master with an air of confident assurance: "I have done all that thou did'st command, but I have not caught anything." You can see the application before I can frame it in words. Nothing requires more tact and skill, more originality of conception and patience of execution than this fishing of men. We must study the dispositions of those whom we wish to approach in the matter, and we must observe the mood they are in when we are about to do it. We must take advantage of seasons when their hearts have been softened by grief, or when their natural feeling of gratitude for mercies received wells up in their souls. If we make ourselves unnecessarily disagreeable we close the door of access against God's truth—we gain nothing and lose a great deal.

Some have a rare and happy faculty of being able to turn any conversation round into a profitable channel in a natur-