

Pastor and People.

SABBATH EVENING.

How calmly sinks the parting sun !
Yet twilight lingers still ;
And beautiful as dream of Heaven
It slumbers on the hill ;
Earth sleeps, with all her glorious things,
Beneath the Holy Spirit's wings,
And, rendering back the hues above,
Seems resting in a trance of love.

'Round yonder rocks the forest trees
In shadowy groups recline,
Like saints at evening bowed in prayer
Around their holy shrine.
And through their leaves the nightwinds blow
So calm and still, their music low
Seems the mysterious voice of prayer,
Soft echo'd on the evening air.

And yonder western throng of clouds,
Retiring from the sky,
So calmly move, so softly glow.
They seem to Fancy's eye
Bright creatures of a better sphere,
Come down at noon to worship here,
And, from their sacrifice of love,
Returning to their home above.

The blue isles of the golden sea,
The night-arch floating high,
The flowers that gaze upon the heavens,
The bright streams leaping by,
Are living with religion—deep,
On earth and sea its glories sleep,
And mingle with the starlight rays,
Like the soft light of parted days.

The spirit of the holy eve
Comes through the silent air
To Feeling's hidden spring, and wakes
A gush of music there !
And the far depths of ether beam,
So passing fair, we almost dream
That we can rise and wander through
Their open paths of trackless blue.

Each soul is fill'd with glorious dreams,
Each pulse is beating wild ;
And thought is soaring to the shrine
Of glory undefiled !
And holy aspirations start,
Like blessed angels, from the heart,
And bind—for earth's dark ties are riven—
Our spirits to the gates of Heaven.

—George D. Prentice.

ON PREACHERS AND PREACHING.

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NO. XX.—VISITATION OF THE SICK.

The visitation of the sick is one of the most difficult of the minister's duties, but it is his golden opportunity. It calls for the exercise of many graces, such as wisdom, tenderness, sympathy, prayerfulness, fidelity—in a word, thorough integrity of ministerial character ; but it brings, in answer to all this, a manifold reward. It cannot be done efficiently offhand. There must be preparation made for it. Careful preparation of mind, and above all of heart and spirit. If there is needed study and forethought to speak to those who are in good health, able to listen, and follow an argument, or accompany one in the discussion of a theme, how much more is this needed for those who are in circumstances less advantageous, and in conditions of body less favourable. It must necessarily call for serious consideration of what shall be at the same time seasonable and appropriate and profitable. The spiritual benefit of the sick one must be sought. An effort therefore should be made to find out the state of mind, the attitude of spirit towards truth and God, and the measure of concern about spiritual things that obtain.

A good physician will administer no medicine till he has made a thorough examination of the case with which he has to deal, and so should it be with the spiritual physician. To speak at random in such a case as this, is folly. Wisdom must guide every step that is taken. In many instances, if not in most, we may presume that the conditions will be favourable : that the conscience will be awake, the mind thoughtful, the heart softened, and the natural opposition to the truth gone. That there will be a readiness to receive spiritual counsel and comfort. Whatever there may be of this, should be skillfully used, and used without delay. Hence, the approach of the minister to a sick bed should be that of a friend. One desirous of doing all the good that can be done. The door of the heart may be opened to welcome all the truth that may be presented to it, but, if it is not, it shall be needful to knock, not in a way to excite alarm, but rather in a way to call forth confidence, that it may be opened. It is of great moment that a teachable spirit should be secured in the sick one. Very often an obstinate, rebellious, or indifferent frame of mind will exist, in the presence of which it is difficult to speak. How great need there is then of ejaculatory prayer, "Lord, help," "Lord, prepare the way," "Lord, give me a suitable message," while seated by the bedside.

Here is a wide field for ministerial service. It may be best to point out whence affliction comes (Job v. 6, Matt. x. 30), the object it has in view (1 Peter i. 7, Heb. xii. 5-11), the duties that arise under it (Job x. 4, Heb. ii. 1, Job xiii. 15) and the ends it seeks to accomplish (Isaiah xxvii. 9, 2 Chron. xxxiii. 12, Eccles. i, Psalm l. 15, Zech. xiii. 9, Psalm lv. 6-8).

Above all Christ must be presented as the way to God, the truth of God, the life of God. In the fulness of His mediatorial character He should be held up before the eyes of the sick one. As the Friend born for adversity, the Friend who sticketh closer than a brother, the Friend above all others. The gracious, all merciful Saviour. The One all need, and need evermore to meet all wants.

Great care must be taken to deal thoroughly and honestly with every sick one. What a confession is made in "Orton's Letters to Dissenting Ministers": "Many of my people have died, with whom my conscience has afterwards accused me of not dealing so plainly as I should." Is not this a confession that alas ! too many might make ? There is wanting a real earnest view of the gravity of the case as a matter of eternal life or eternal death. A sick bed is no place for compliments, even though they are plentiful there : it is no place for flattery, even though that be not wanting. There, the light of eternity should come in, and dispel all temporizing and deceitfully tranquilizing moods. Rev. Richard Cecil gives a very instructive illustration of the faithful discharge of this duty : "Sometimes we have a very painful part to act with sincere men, who have been carried too much into the world. I was called in to visit such a man. 'I find no comfort,' he said, 'God veils His face from me. Everything around me is dark and uncertain.' I did not dare to act the flatterer. I said, 'let us look faithfully into the state of things. I should have been surprised if you had not felt thus. I believe you to be sincere. Your state of feelings evinces your sincerity. Had I found you exulting in God, I should have concluded you were either deceived or a deceiver ; for, while God acts in His usual order, how could you expect to feel otherwise on the approach of death, than you do feel ? You have driven hard after the world. Your spirit has been absorbed in its cares. Your sentiment, your conversation have been in the spirit of the world. And have you any reason to expect the response of conscience, and the clear evidence which await the man who has walked and lived in the closest friendship with God ! You know that what I say is true.' His wife interrupted me, by assuring me that he had been an excellent man. 'Silence !' said the dying penitent, 'it is all true !' One of our Canadian ministers recently told me of a young woman who was dangerously ill and whom he visited. She professed faith in Christ, but he seriously doubted the sincerity of her profession. As a comment on that insincerity she was surrounded by giddy and frivolous worldlings. Feeling deeply within himself that she was not converted, he armed himself with the most pungent passages for bringing about the sense of sin. These he used faithfully. For a time there was no change, but e'er long the truth did its work, and she confessed that she was not really saved and enquired the way, and found peace in Christ. Then her frivolous companions retired : the atmosphere became too bracing for them. They could not endure it. A great lesson lies here, namely, that we should judge of the profession that is made. It is too often a mere parrot-like utterance. It is not understood. It is therefore far from being heart deep. The work of conviction has not been done, far less conversion. There is need to begin at the beginning, and go on to the end.

Dr. Chalmers tells of a man who sent for him in prospect of death. "A man of profligate and profane habits, who resented my calling him an unworthy sinner, and who spoke in loud and confident strains of his faith in Christ, and that it would save him. Then," says the Doctor, "I represented to him the necessity of being born again, of being humbled under a sense of his sins, of repenting and turning from them." Again and again Dr. Chalmers visited this man, who was "buoying himself up in Antinomian security," and, so far as the narrative goes, no change came to him. But the minister of God had faithfully done his duty, so that he was clear from the blood of the man. Here the minister must act as in view of eternity and the judgment seat ! Dr. Doddridge gives this direction as to dealing with the sick : "Gather something from their own mouths—on which you may ground a plain and awakening address. Send their relations, if you conveniently can, out of the room ; then ask the person seriously if he hath anything particular to say to you with regard to the state of his soul. Enquire what his hopes are, and especially on what foundation they are built. When you have asked him a few questions on these heads leave him room to talk ; perhaps he may freely and fully tell you his state. If he does not, ask him such questions as these : Has sin ever been your grief and your burthen ? What have you done to get rid of it ? In what view has Christ appeared to you ? What are your thoughts of covenant grace ? Have you kept up secret prayer ? Have you felt the power of Scripture upon your heart ? Have you been concerned to give your thoughts and affections to God as well as your external actions ? Have you felt a struggle with the temptations of Satan and the corruptions of your own heart ? Have you enquired after the remedies of the distempers of your own mind ? And so far as you have understood them, have you endeavoured to use them ?" etc. Again he says : "If you find that there is anyone sin prevalent in their character, rest your charge upon that." He gives a body of additional directions from which we cull these : "There is great danger in authoritative absolution." "Take care that your prayers are not too long." "Take care how you call them the servants of God."

Prayer with and for the sick is always in place. Sometimes the sick one may be unconscious to all around, and it may be thought prayer would not be beneficial, but who can

tell ? At any rate God hears. A minister, on one occasion, had visited a man upon his death-bed who was delirious, and, returning home, met Dr. Chalmers. "Well, said Dr. C., 'did you pray with him ?' "No, he was delirious, but I prayed with the family." "Ah you did wrong, sir ! Who knows but that some old strain of thought might have been stirred up by the tones of a familiar voice ? You did very wrong, sir !" There is instruction in that.

When should the minister visit the sick ? As soon as he knows. He cannot do it sooner. The quaint Dr. Thomas Fuller says : "To sick folks the faithful minister comes sometimes before he is sent for ; as counting his vocation a sufficient calling. None of his flock shall want the extreme unction of prayer and counsel."

There is a good point that Dr. Cuyler makes when he says : "There are many cases of extreme and critical illness, when the presence of even the most loving pastor may be an unwise intrusion. An excellent lady who had been twice apparently at the brink of death said to me : 'Never enter the room of a person extremely low, unless the person urgently requests you, or unless a spiritual necessity compels it. You have no idea how the sight of a new face agitates the sufferer, or how you may unconsciously or unintentionally rob that sufferer of some of the little life that is fluttering in that feeble frame.' I was grateful to the good woman for her advice ; and have often acted upon it accordingly, when the family would have unwisely importuned me to do what would have been of more harm than benefit."

In doing this duty faithfully the minister will reap the richest results. He may be instrumental in leading many precious souls to Christ, and he himself will be fitted for the declaration of the truth on a higher key ; with a clearer insight of its meaning and a fuller experience of its power. This "walking the hospital" teaches much that we cannot get anywhere else. One word from "Gerard's Pastoral Care" in closing : "In everything a minister says to a sick person, he ought to keep three things steadily in view, the influence which it may have on the person if dying the influence it may have on him if he recover—and the influence it may have on persons in health who are about him."

WHAT TO KEEP LISTS OF.

Keep a list of your friends ; and let God be the first in the list, however long it may be.

Keep a list of your enemies ; and put down the "old man" and the "old serpent" first, and pray for all the rest.

Keep a list of your sins ; and let the sin of unbelief be set down as the first and worst of all.

Keep a list of your mercies ; and let pardon and life stand at the head.

Keep a list of your sorrows ; and let sorrow for sin be first.

Keep a list of your joys ; and let the joy unspeakable and full of glory be the first.

Keep a list of the gifts you get ; and let Christ, who is the Unspeakable Gift, be the first.

Keep a list of your hopes ; and let the hope of glory be foremost.

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES.

"'They testify of Me,' saith Jesus. Is not that word enough ? What so sweetly, so powerfully engaging to the soul, as somewhat of our dear Saviour is to be learned from every page ? The more we are acquainted with His precious person, His amazing love, His wonderful humanity, His astonishing sufferings, His finished work on earth, so much the more will He be endeared to our hearts. We will prize the word that testifies of Him, and the Spirit that glorifies Him : we shall think of Him, love Him, live upon Him, live to Him, long to be with Him from day to day. So we shall beguile all our troubles and trials below ; our hearts will be simple and happy, our conversation and conduct will be more like the meek Lamb of God. Thus shall we grow as Pharaoh's kine, fat fleshed and well-favoured, while we feed in God's meadow."

NOT THE RIGHT METHOD.

There are some people who give up and lose all their courage and faith the moment any trouble comes. They cannot endure trial. Sorrow utterly crushes them. They think they cannot go on again. There have been lives broken down by affliction which have never risen again out of the dust. There have been mothers, happy and faithful before, who have lost one child out of their home, and have never cared for life again, letting their hope grow dreary and desolate, and their other children go uncared for, as they sat with folded hands in the abandonment of their uncomfited grief. There have been men with bright hopes who have suffered one defeat or loss and have never risen out of the dust. But God's word teaches that we should never faint under any trial. God chastens us, not to crush us, but for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. To faint, therefore, under chastening is disloyal to God. We should accept the affliction with reverence, and turn the whole energy of our life into the channels of obedience and service.

WHAT is more annoying than going about constantly hawking and spitting ? This is the result of catarrh, and Nasal Daim will cure any case when faithfully used.