

the Christian ministry is, *to convert sinners, and to edify the body of Christ*. No faithful minister can possibly rest short of this. Applause, fame, popularity, honour, wealth; all these are vain. If souls are not won, if saints are not matured, our ministry itself is vain. The question, therefore, which each of us has to answer to his own conscience is, "Has it been the end of my ministry; has it been the desire of my heart, to save the lost and guide the saved? Is this my aim in *every sermon* I preach, in every visit I pay? Is it under the influence of this feeling that I continually live, and walk, and speak? Is it for this I pray, and toil, and fast, and weep? Is it for this I spend and am spent, counting it, next to the salvation of my own soul, my chiefest joy to be the instrument of saving others? Is it for this that I exist; and to accomplish this would I gladly die? Have I seen the pleasure of the Lord prospering in my hand? Have I seen souls converted under my ministry? Have God's people found refreshment from my lips, and gone upon their way rejoicing?—Or have I seen no fruit of my labors, and yet am I content to remain unblest? Am I satisfied to preach, and yet not know of one saving impression made, one sinner awakened? Can I go contentedly through the routine of ministerial labor, and never think of asking how God is prospering the work of my hands and the words of my lips?"

Nothing short of positive success can satisfy a true minister of Christ. His plans may proceed smoothly, and his external machinery may work steadily, but without actual fruit in the saving of souls, he counts all these as nothing. His feeling is, "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again, until Christ be formed in you." And it is this feeling which makes him successful!† The resolution, that in the strength and with the blessing of God, he will never rest without success will insure it. It is the man who has made up his mind to confront every difficulty, who has counted the cost, and, fixing his eye upon the prize, has determined

to fight his way to it; it is such a man that conquers!

The dull apathy of other days is gone. Satan has taken the field actively, and it is best to meet him front to front. Besides, men's consciences are really on edge. God seems extensively striving with them, as before the flood. A breath of the Divine Spirit has passed over the earth, and hence the momentous character of the time, as well as the necessity for improving it so long as it lasts. The "earnestness" which marks the age is not of man, but of God. It is the fruit of God's last dealing with man in love, ere He smites in wrath. To give the right direction to this earnestness is the great business of every one that would be a fellow-worker with God. It is taking so many wrong directions, such as scepticism, ritualism, rationalism, Romanism, &c., that we must make haste to put forth every effort to lead it aright. The one true goal or resting-place, where doubt and weariness, and the stings of a pricking conscience, and the longings of an unsatisfied soul would all be quieted, is *Christ Himself*. Not the Church, but Christ.—Not doctrine, but Christ. Not forms, but Christ. Not Ceremonies, but Christ; Christ the God-man, giving his life for ours; sealing the everlasting covenant and making peace for us through the blood of His cross; Christ the divine storehouse of all light and truth, "in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge;" Christ, the infinite vessel, filled with the Holy Spirit, the enlightener, the teacher, the quickener, the comforter, so that "out of His fulness we may receive, and grace for grace." This, this alone is the vexed soul's refuge, its rock to build on, its home to abide in, till the great tempter be bound, and every conflict ended in victory.

It is to give this direction to the varied currents of earnestness that we must strive. How these may multiply; what strange directions they may yet take; with what turbid torrents they may pour along the valleys of the earth, what ruin they may carry before them, and with what a hideous deluge they may yet overflow the world, dissolving and levelling everything divine and good, everything true and noble, who shall adventure to foretell?

Let us, then, meet this "earnestness,"

† "Ministers are seldom honoured with success, unless they are continually aiming at the conversion of sinners."—OWEN.