

## PASTOR AND PEOPLE.

### PREACHING.

[The following ordination charge, by the Rev. James Stalker, M.A., appeared in a recent number of the "Family Treasury," and contains so much valuable matter that we gladly reproduce it in these columns. —CANADA PRESBYTERIAN.]

I should like to connect what I have to say with a text of Scripture, which you may remember as a motto for this occasion. Take, then, that pastoral exhortation to a young minister in 1 Timothy iv. 16. "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee."

There are three subjects recommended in this text to one in your position,—first, yourself; second, your doctrine; and third, those that hear you.

#### I. TAKE HEED UNTO THYSELF.

Perhaps there is no profession which so thoroughly as ours tests and reveals what is in a man—the stature of his manhood, the mass and quality of his character, the poverty or richness of his mind, the coldness or warmth of his spirituality. These all come out in our work, and become known to our congregation and the community in which we labour.

When a man comes into a neighbourhood, as you are doing now, he is to a large extent an unknown quantity; and it is very touching to observe the exaggeration with which we are generally looked on at first, people attaching to us a sort of indefinite largeness. But it is marvellous how soon the measure of a man is taken, how he finds his level in the community, and people know whether he is a large or a petty man, whether he is a thinker or not, whether he is a deeply religious man or not. The glamour of romance passes off, and everything is seen in the light of common day.

The sooner this takes place the better. A true man does not need to fear it. He is what he is, and nothing else. He cannot by taking thought add one cubit to his stature. Any exaggeration of his image in the minds of others does not in reality make him one inch bigger than he is.

It seems to me to lie at the very root of a right ministerial life to be possessed with this idea, to get quit of everything like pretence and untruthfulness, to wish for no success to which one is not entitled, and to look upon elevation into any position one is unfit for as a pure calamity.

The man's self—the very thing he is, standing with his bare feet on the bare earth—that is the great concern. That is the self to which you are to take heed—what you really are, what you are growing to, what you may yet become.

All our work is determined by this, the spirit and power of our preaching, the quality of the influence we exert, and the tenor of our walk and conversation. We can no more rise above ourselves than water can rise above its own level. We may, indeed, often fail to do ourselves justice, and sometimes may do ourselves more than justice. But that is only for a moment; the total impression made by ourselves is an unmistakable thing. What is in us must come out, and nothing else. All we say and do is merely the expression of what we are.

Evidently, therefore, there can be nothing so important as carefully to watch over our inner life, and see that it be large, sweet, and spiritual, and that it be growing.

Yet the temptations to neglect and overlook this and turn our attention in other directions are terribly strong. The ministerial life is a very outside life; it is lived in the glare of publicity; it is always pouring out. We are continually preaching, addressing meetings, giving private counsel, attending public gatherings, going from home, frequenting church courts, receiving calls, and occupied with details of every kind. We live in a time when all men are busy, and ministers are the busiest of men. From Monday morning till Sunday night the bustle goes on continually.

Our life is in danger of becoming all outside. We are called upon to express ourselves before conviction has time to ripen. Our spirits get too hot and unsettled to allow the dew to fall on them. We are compelled to speak what is merely the recollection of convictions which we had some time ago, and to use past feeling over again. Many a day you will feel this; you will long with your whole heart to escape

away somewhere into obscurity, and be able to keep your mouth quite shut for weeks. You will know the meaning of that great text for ministers, "The talk of the lips tendeth only to penury,"—that is, it shallows the spirit within.

That is what we have to fight against. The people we live among and the hundred details of our calling will steal away our inner life altogether, if they can. And then, what is our outer life worth? It is worth nothing. If the inner life get thin and shallow, the outer life must become a perfunctory discharge of duties. Our preaching will be empty, and our conversation and intercourse unspiritual, unenriching, and flavourless. We may please our people for a time by doing all they desire and being at everybody's call; but they will turn round on us in disappointment and anger in the day when by long living merely the outer life we have become empty, shallow, and unprofitable.

Take heed to thyself! If we grow strong and large inwardly, our people will reap the fruit of it in due time: our preaching will have sap and power and unction in it, and our intercourse will have the breath of another world about it.

We must find time for reading, study, meditation, and prayer. We should at least insist on having a large forenoon, up, say, to two o'clock every day, clear of interruptions. Oh, these hours of quietness are our real life! It is these that make the ministerial life a grand life. When we are shut in alone, and the spirit having been silenced and collected by prayer, the mind gets slowly down into the heart of a text, like a bee in a flower, it is like heaven upon earth; it is as if the soul were bathing itself in morning dews; the dust and fret are washed off, and the noises recede into the distance; peace comes; we move aloft in another world, the world of ideas and realities; the mind mounts joyfully from one height of truth to another; it sees the common world far beneath, yet clearly, in its true meaning, and size, and relations to other worlds. And then one comes down on Sabbath to speak to the people, calm, strong, and clear, like Moses from the mount, and with a true divine message.

In so doing, my dear brother, thou shalt save thyself. Lose your inner life and you lose yourself, sure enough; for that is yourself. You will often have to tell your people that salvation is not the one act of conversion, nor the one act of passing through the gate of heaven at last; but the renewal, the sanctification, the growth into large and symmetrical stature of the whole character. Tell yourself that often too. We take it for granted that you are a regenerated man, or we would not have ordained you to be a minister of the gospel to-day. But it is possible for a man to be regenerate and to be a minister, and yet to remain very worldly, shallow, undeveloped, and un sanctified. We who are your brethren in the ministry could tell sad histories in illustration of that out of our inner life. We could tell you how in keeping the vineyards of others we have often neglected our own; and how now, at the end of years of ministerial activity and incessant toil, we turn round and look with dismay at our shallow characters, our unenriched minds, and our lack of spirituality and Christlikeness. O! brother, take heed to thyself—save thyself!

#### II. TAKE HEED TO THE DOCTRINE.

A very little experience of preaching will convince you that in relation to the truth which you have to minister week by week to your people, you will have to sustain a double character—that of an interpreter of Scripture and that of a prophet.

Let me first say something of the former. With whatever high-flown notions a man may begin his ministry, yet if he is to stay for years in a place, and keep up a fresh kind of preaching, and build up a congregation, preaching such discourses as Scotchmen like to hear, he will find that he must heartily accept the role of an interpreter of Scripture, and lean on the Bible as his great support.

This is your work; the Book is put into your hands to-day that you may unfold its contents to your people, conveying them into their minds by all possible avenues, and applying them to all parts of their daily life.

It is a grand task. I cannot help congratulating you on being ordained to the ministry to-day, for this, above everything, that the Bible is henceforth to be continually in your hands, that the study of it is to be the work of your life; that you are to be continually sinking and bathing your mind in its truths; and that

you are to have the pleasure of bringing forth what you have discovered in it to feed the minds of men. The ministerial profession is to be envied more for this than anything else. I promise you that if you be true to it, this Book will become dearer to you every day; it will enrich every part of your nature; you will become more and more convinced that it is the Word of God, and contains the only remedy for the woes of man.

But, oh, be true to it! The Bible will be what I have said to you only if you go deep into it. If you keep to the surface, you will weary of it. There are some ministers who begin their ministry with a certain quantity of religious doctrine in their mind, and what they do all their life afterwards is to pick out texts and make them into vessels to hold so much of it. The vessels are of different shapes and sizes, but they are all filled with the same thing; and, oh, it is poor stuff, however orthodox and evangelical it may seem.

To become a dearly-loved friend and an endless source of intellectual and spiritual delight, the Bible must be thoroughly studied. We must not pour our ideas into it, but apply our minds to it, and faithfully receive the impressions which it makes on them. One learns thus to trust the Bible as an inexhaustible resource, and lean back upon it with all one's might. It is only such preaching, enriching itself out of the wealth of the Bible, and getting from it freshness, variety, and power, that can build up a congregation, and satisfy the minds of really living Christians.

The intellectual demand on the pulpit is rapidly rising. I should like to draw your earnest attention to a revolution which is silently taking place in Scotland, but is receiving from very few the notice which it deserves. I refer to the changes that are being made by the new system of national education. No one can have travelled much for several years past through this part of the island without his attention being attracted by the new and imposing school buildings rising in almost every parish. These are the index of a revolution; for inside, in their management and in the efficiency of the education, there has also been an immense change. I venture to say that nothing which has taken place in Scotland this century—and I am remembering both the Reform Bill and the Disruption—will be found to have been of more importance. There will be a far more educated Scotland to preach to in a short time, which will demand of the ministry a high intellectual standard. It is a just demand. Our people should go away from the church feeling that they have received new and interesting information, that their intellects have been illuminated by fresh and great ideas, and that to hear their minister regularly is a liberal education.

Nothing will meet this demand except thorough study of Scripture by minds equipped with all the technical helps, as well as enriched by the constant reading of the best literature, both on our own and kindred subjects. One of our hymns says that the Bible "gives a light to every age; it gives, but borrows none." Nothing could be more untrue. The Bible borrows light from every age and from every department of human knowledge. Whatever especially makes us acquainted with the mysterious depths of human nature is deserving of our attention. The Bible and human nature call to each other like deep unto deep. Every addition to our knowledge of man will be a new key to open the secrets of the Word; and the deeper you go in your preaching into the mysteries of the Word, the more subtle and powerful will be the springs you touch in the minds and hearts of your hearers.

But preparation of this sort for the pulpit is not easy. It requires time, self-conquest, and hard work. Perhaps the greatest ministerial temptation is idleness in study—not in going about and doing something, but in finding and rightly using precious hours in one's library, avoiding reverie and light or desultory reading, and sticking hard and fast to the Sabbath work. I, for one, must confess that I have had and still have a terrible battle to fight for this. No men have their time so much at their own disposal as we. I often wish we had regular office-hours, like business men; but even that would not remedy the evil, for every man shut up alone in a study is not studying. Nothing can remedy it but faithfulness to duty and love of work.

You will find it necessary to be hard at it from Tuesday morning to Saturday night. If you lecture, as I trust you will—for it brings one, far more than