

## Happy Hours in a Pastor's Life.

BY THEODORE E. CULVER, D. D.

Every lot in human life has its inevitable trials, and the life of a minister of the Gospel of Christ has some trials peculiar to his sacred office. But if he is faithful to his high calling, he has some peculiar joys. Let me indicate some of the happy hours in his life journey, which warm and cheer his heart; they are foretastes of his heavenly rewards; for our God is not only a liberal rewarder, but he often pays in advance.

THE JOY OF SERMON MAKING.

We will go, for example, into a pastor's study on a Tuesday morning, after he has had his needed rest on Monday. He sits down to prepare his sermon; and first of all he seeks for light from the source of all light, for a few minutes of honest prayer is worth more than hours of study. He alights upon a text, or rather some text lays hold upon him and will not let him off. He begins to explore it. He looks at it in all its surroundings; comparing Scripture with Scripture. The deeper he goes into the passage of divinely-inspired truth, the richer, and sweeter and more profitable of all manner of instructions it becomes; and he rejoiceth "as one that findeth great spoil." No discovery thrills more than the discovery of a new truth. With his mind all aglow, he sets down one thought after another as fast as he can note them, whether he writes out his discourse in full or only prepares a comprehensive "brief." These are golden moments to him. Sir Walter Scott tells us that the faded eye of his "Last Minstrel" kindled "with all a poet's ecstasy." The preacher of all God's glorious messages to men feels also an ecstasy when he has grasped and put into a fitting form the heavenly message which may—with the Divine blessing—be a savor of life unto life to some souls on the following Sabbath. God pity the minister to whom sermon preparation has become a drudgery! The people are to be pitied who have to listen to such wearisome task-work.

THE JOY OF PREACHING.

If the delving into the inexhaustible gold mine of the Holy Scripture brings such delight, there may be a still higher delight in presenting this precious ore to an assemblage of immortal souls. A preacher who does not love to preach ought to demit his office; his Master has discharged him. Sooner offer to eat a brother minister's dish of strawberries for him than to offer to preach for him if he has a sermon newly coined and burning in his heart which he is longing to deliver to his flock. To be in good physical trim, and not have your "head in a bag," is one essential to enjoyable work in the pulpit; therefore let no minister exhaust his energies by late work on a Saturday night.

After a refreshing night's rest, and with a message from God's word in his heart that he feels as sure of as he does of the existence of a sun in the heavens, a true ambassador of Christ will rejoice to enter the pulpit. He sees the light of eternity flashing in the faces of his audience. And when, in firm reliance on the aid of the Holy Spirit, he opens his lips before that assemblage, when his fervid heart pours forth a torrent of argument made red-hot by holy emotion, when every word is illustrated by the eloquence of an eager eye and vigorous right arm, when warning and entreaty and persuasion are all combined, and when the preacher becomes the beaming and burning impersonation of God's glorious truth, then preaching becomes a joy that an arch-angel might covet. This is no mere fiction of imagination. Such supreme delights are not confined to Whitefields and Gutbries and Spurgeons and Simpsons and the masters of pulpit eloquence; they are within the reach of the humblest minister who will saturate his mind with God's truth, make himself God's mouthpiece, and let the Almighty God speak through him. Many men in these days organize "steel trusts" and "oil trusts," but there is no monopoly in gospel truth, and no exclusive limitations in the honors and the joys of proclaiming that gospel of salvation to immortal beings. Joyful preaching may cause joy in heaven over repentant sinners; and the pulpit will never lose power while re-enforced by the "power from on high."

THE JOY OF PASTORIAL CALLS.

Preaching the gospel is spiritual gunnery; and every minister must find out whether his shots strike, and where they strike. This he must ascertain by going among his people in faithful pastoral visitation. Personal intercourse may prove whether his heavenly messages are producing spiritual results. Fishing for compliments is too contemptible to deserve rebuke; but it does gladden a pastor's heart to be told "Your sermon has helped me mightily," or "Your discourse last Sunday cleared up a difficult passage for me," or "I was led by your appeal to decide for Christ." This is better pay than any salary in gold or greenbacks. Perhaps while you are in your study there is a knock at the door and some one enters who is awakened, and comes for direction. You counsel immediate surrender to Christ, and pray with this anxious inquirer, who decides on the spot, and goes away rejoicing. A happy hour is this, and your study becomes a Bethel with descending angels.

An important part of every pastor's work is with the troubled, the sick and the bereaved. Bruised hearts are to be bound up and a helping word spoken to the weak, and the weary and woe begone. These ministrations of mercy cost no little effort and strain on the nerves, but they

bring rich rewards. Among all my immense correspondence the letters that I cherish most are those written by hearts grateful for guidance through dark places and consolation in dark hours. Such tributes of thankfulness are embalmed as in lavender and never lose their fragrance.

I have spoken of the many happy hours which a faithful pastor may enjoy in exploring God's wonderful Word in holding up Christ before His Sabbath auditors, and in winning the gratitude of those whom He has befriended in season's of trouble and bereavement. The crowning mercy however, to any pastor is an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and the crowning joy is the ingathering of converted souls. As I look back over a ministry of almost fifty-six years, the seasons that are marked in my life record with a "Hallelujah!" have been the season of revival. Nearly all of these have come without special discourses to Christians, and all of them have been unpredicted. One of the most presumptuous and misleading of blunders is to go about predicting an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. In my own pastoral experience these seasons of peculiar spiritual blessing come under the ordinary ministrations, and the first token of them has been the awakening of a few impenitent persons.

THE JOY OF SOUL WINNING.

I recall now a most remarkable revival that occurred during the earlier period of my ministry in that beloved Brooklyn church which I served for thirty years. I had begun the Week of Prayer, and on one of the coldest January evenings that I ever knew. In spite of the thermometer below zero, the prayer-room was crowded and the first thrill of the evening was when a prominent man "rose for prayer"; before the week was over, other well known men were on their feet as seekers for salvation. I immediately appointed special services, and opened inquiry-meetings; nothing wakes up heavy eyed Christians like the sight of inquirers going into such meetings. For four months that glorious work of grace went forward; we sometimes held as many as ten services of various kinds during a single week. The communion Sabbaths, when the aisles of the church were crowded with converts confessing Christ, when Jubilee days were anthems of thanksgiving rolled up to heaven. The word "rapture" is not too strong a word to describe the emotions of both pastor and people during those months of spiritual harvesting.

Such happy hours are within the possibilities of the faithful, fearless pastor who is bent on winning souls to Christ. Looking at his converts in Thessalonica, Paul exclaimed, "Ye are my glory and joy." John Bunyan wrote, "I have counted as if I had goodly buildings and lordships in the places where my spiritual children were born."

And the seraphic Samuel Rutherford of Scotland cried out to his people, "Your heaven would be two heavens to me, and the salvation of everyone of you as two salvations to me!" Brother ministers, be of good cheer. Study God's Book, preach, pray, work, from house to house and from heart to heart, rally your staff-officers, call for volunteers, lay strong hold on God; and there may be joys in store for you; "full measure, pressed down and running over," that your hearts shall not be large enough to hold. Sel.

## Life-Building.

BY REV. A. C. DIXON, D. D.

The old adage, "Every man is the architect of his own fortune," is misleading. The architect is the man who plans the building, the builder erects it. We to a large extent are the builders of our own fortunes, but we pity the man who is the architect of his life. We should receive our plan from God. He knows what we are best fitted for, and for each one of us I believe he has a divine plan. By the study of ourselves, his book, and his providences, we may learn that plan. In Christ Jesus we see his ideal. His attributes are God's specifications in the plan of character building and the Architect is with us. "I am with you," God said to his people, "therefore be ye strong." He will guide us in the erection of every part of the building, and his presence is an inspiration.

A most important part of every building is the foundation, "and other foundation hath no man laid than that is laid, which is Christ Jesus." Christ may be the foundation of the home, the business, the church, the nation, the character, the life and the destiny. The home that is built upon his gentleness, patience and love will not fall to pieces. The business that is built upon his truthfulness, integrity and faithfulness will never bring dishonor. The church that is built upon his consecration, and spiritually will also glorify him. The nation that is built upon his righteousness and philanthropy is certain to prosper. The character that is built upon his holiness can never be shaken. In a word, the life and the destiny built upon his attributes will stand a monument forever to God's glory.

Building means work. "Be strong saith the Lord, and work," was the message of Haggai to the people. Every one was to take a hand. Some went to the forests and cut the timber and hewed it into shape; others used the trowel, while others mixed the mortar. "To every one his work." It is easier to criticize than it is to perform, and critics who stand up and make comments are not so much builders as destroyers. Did you say when you returned

home that the prayer meeting was dull? Whose fault was it? You were there, why did you not make it interesting? You blame others, forgetting that it was your work. Your church is not as social as you think it ought to be. Who is to blame? Why don't you take the lead in hand-shaking and paying attention to strangers? Remove that obstacle with your own hands.

I have read of an eastern king who determined to test the character of his people by placing a huge stone in the road, and watching at a convenient distance what the people did. The first man that came along was a farmer, whose wagon struck the stone, and he went on, denouncing the community for its laziness in leaving such an obstruction in the road. The next man who came was a soldier, with his head in the air, singing a lively song. His foot struck the stone and he fell in the dust. His song ceased and he went on grumbling against the shiftlessness of the people. For three weeks that stone remained in the road, and nearly every one that passed blamed the community for their laziness and carelessness. At length the king appointed a day and called the community together. He told them that he had placed the stone in the road and had watched developments. He went and with his own hand overturned the stone, and underneath it was a box of gold and jewels, intended for the one who would stop and remove the obstacle. The legend has in it a lesson for us all. There are jewels of blessing in store for those who cease grumbling and take hold of the difficulties in the way. One hour's work is worth more to the kingdom of God than a year's fault-finding.

Let us not forget the element of time. The temple was not erected in a day. Great buildings do not spring up like mushrooms in a night. Deep foundations must be laid, and the work may continue for a long time. To neglect to build is really to tear down, for the pick-axe of time is always digging away at every building. Benjamin Franklin impressed this fact upon a man who came into his store to buy a book. "How much is this book worth?" the man asked of the clerk. "One dollar," was the reply. "I would like to see Mr. Franklin himself," continued the customer. Mr. Franklin was invited from his office down to the store. "I want to know of you how much this book is worth?" "One dollar and a quarter," replied Mr. Franklin. "Why," said the man, "the clerk has just told me the price was one dollar." "Yes," answered Mr. Franklin, "but you have taken twenty-five cents worth of my time." "How much did you say it is worth?" continued the man. "One dollar and a half," answered Franklin, and he would not take a cent less. The man left the store impressed with the fact as never before that time is valuable. May we never forget it while we think of the work of building which we have on hand. Indeed, money cannot pay for time lost. Every day and every hour should add something to the building of character and destiny.

And let us not be discouraged by the limitations which come into our lives. Now and then a part of a wall may have to be torn down and another part straightened. Let not our clumsy work fill us with despair. It was the blunder of a servant girl which led to the discovery of a secret which enriched the Staffordshire Pottery Manufacture in England. She was left to watch a boiling pot over a hot fire, and by her carelessness the pot was upset, and it was found that its contents made a beautiful cheap glazing for iron. The company thus learned the secret which brought a fortune to their purses, and if we will learn by our mistakes, we will be in the long run enriched by them.

A boy who had to leave school because of a fall which had crippled him for life. He lay four weeks helpless upon his bed, and began to feel that his life was ruined, but by the suggestion of his friends he turned his hand to sketching for which he had a talent, and the result was that he reached a high position as an artist, and made a splendid support for himself and his mother. But for that misfortune this talent may have lain dormant. So the limitations of life may develop in us resources of strength of which we did not know. Trust in God, and do for him; the result in time of eternity will be for His glory. I like that line of Mrs. Browning: it graphed my heart when I first read it: "I assure while I expire." We may rise while we fall, until by and by, when the body shall fall into the grave, the spirit shall rise to be with God. The externals of life are largely the scaffolding around the building of character and destiny; death simply knocks down the scaffolding and leaves the building not made with hands eternal in the heavens.

"We are building in sorrow or joy,  
A temple the world may not see,  
Which time cannot mar nor destroy,  
We build for eternity.

"Ev'ry tho't that we've ever had,  
Its own little place has filled,  
Ev'ry deed we have done, good or bad,  
Is a stone in the temple we build,

"Ev'ry word that so lightly falls,  
Giving some heart joy or pain,  
Will shine in our temple walls,  
Or over its beauty stain.

"Are you building for God alone,  
Are you building in faith and love,  
A temple the Father will own,  
In the city of light above?"

—W. Recorder.