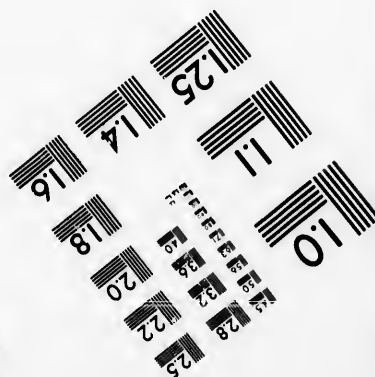
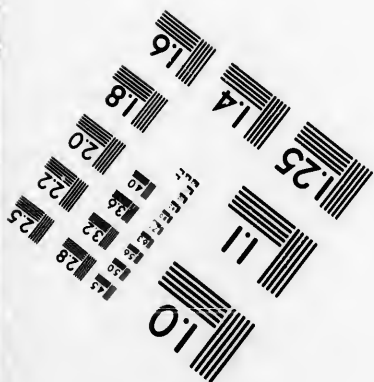
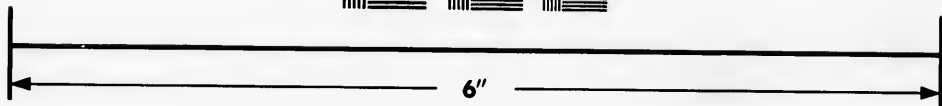
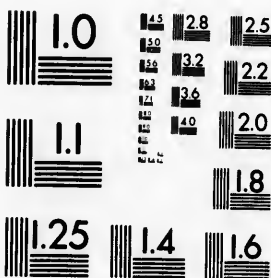


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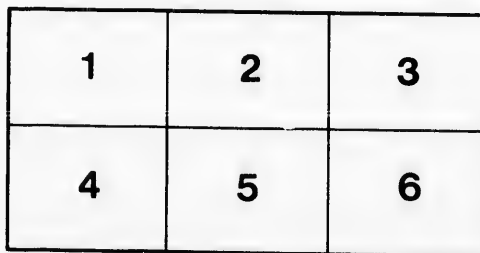
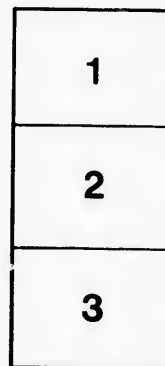
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THE
CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

ITS DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES.

A SERMON

PREACHED IN THE CATHEDRAL OF THE HOLY TRINITY,
QUEBEC,

AT THE OPENING OF THE DIOCESAN SYNOD,
JUNE 8TH, 1888,

BY THE
RIGHT REV. J. W. WILLIAMS, D.D.,
Lord Bishop of Quebec.

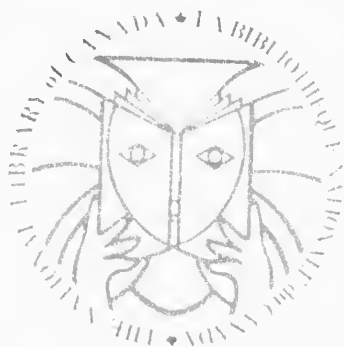
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2 Tim. IV. 5—"Make full proof of thy Ministry."

Circumstances have now for a long time prevented the delivery of my customary visitation charge. And I have thought it well, on this occasion of our Synod's assembling, to take advantage of the opportunity it affords for saying something to you, my brethren, concerning the common work in which we are all engaged.

Twenty-five years have now all but elapsed since, in the providence of God, and by your choice, I was called to be the Bishop of this Diocese. The thought may well make us pause. Twenty-five years, during which you, and I, my Revd. Brethren, have watched for souls, as they who must give an account of their stewardship. It is an awful thought. If it has happened that the Church, or any member thereof, has taken any hurt or hindrance by reason of our negligence, we know the greatness of the fault. It is a perilous office that we bear. And the review—the frequent review—of all our bearing and behaviour therein is indispensable, both for the due discharge of the office, and for the safety of our own souls. Each of us, when he received the Holy Ghost for the office of a Priest in the Church of God, gave his most solemn promise and pledge before God and the Church, that he would give his faithful diligence, always so to minister the Doctrine and Sacraments, and the discipline of Christ as the Lord hath commanded, and as this Church hath received the same. We promised to use both public and private monitions and exhortations as well to the sick as to the whole. We promised to be diligent in prayer, and in reading of the Holy Scriptures; to set forward peace and quietness; to make ourselves and our families wholesome examples to the flock of Christ. And it behoves us often, in our course, to take these our pledges,

which we so solemnly plighted on that solemn day, one by one, and, in the presence of God, searchingly, to try our life and ministry by them.

That we all do this from time to time, I suppose. But what I want to urge now is the necessity of doing it with regularity and method. And it seems to me, that it will be helpful, if I go briefly over what should, in our life and ministry, be the outcome of such self-examination. I shall not adhere, in what I have to say, to the precise order of the questions I have referred to. It will be more convenient to take the general subjects arising out of them, and to discuss these.

Now, the general subjects arising out of these questions put to the candidate for the Priesthood, which I have cited, fall naturally under the heads of, 1. Services in Church, 2. Pastoral Visitation, and 3. Personal Religion.

Let me say a word, then, about each of these.

1. And first of the Services. These will be (a) Daily Services. (b) Services on Sundays and Holydays.

Of Daily Service. Upon this point the rule of the Church is plain, and our vow was that we would administer the discipline of Christ—as this Church hath received the same.

Well, the discipline of Christ “as this Church hath received the same,” requires that “all Priests and Deacons are to say daily the Morning and Evening Prayers, either privately or openly, not being let by sickness or some other urgent cause;” and to say these in the Church publicly, if they be not reasonably hindered.

Now, what constitutes a reasonable hindrance, it must be left to each man’s conscience to say. But it is quite plain, that he is bound in conscience to say daily prayers in his Church when he can. And it is equally clear that, in default of the feasibility of daily prayers in the Church, each Priest and Deacon is in conscience bound to say the

morning and evening office in private, unless the thing be on any occasion impossible.

That is the clergyman's rule and duty; and that should be enough. But I cannot pass from the subject without adding a word as to the benefits of the practice.

That the daily service, where it can be had, is a help to religious life, no one, I suppose, will question. But the laity are not, as we are, under any solemnly given promise to use the daily service. And unless the Church is daily open for prayer, they are not likely to use the morning or evening office. And if we, who ought to have been in our Church to pray with them, are not there, the hurt and hindrance that comes to their spiritual life, by such loss of opportunity, comes by our negligence. And if, from whatever cause, there cannot well be in any particular parish a daily service in the Church, the daily use of the morning and evening offices is not only a duty enjoined, but an inestimable benefit to the clergyman himself.

And here I may say, that the remedy for the grievous fault of a dry, insipid, perfunctory use of the Church's prayers in public, is a deeply meditated use of them in private, the habituating of our minds, by the patient, thoughtful, devout, study of each separate prayer, to realize the full solemnity and import of its every word. And the more we make the forms of the Prayer-book the suggestive lines along which stretch, and from which radiate, at all points, our own peculiar prayers, personal thanksgivings, hopes, joys, fears, and aspirations, the more living, and spiritual a service will our saying of the same prayers be, when, with our brothers and sisters in Christ, we are met together for Common Prayer, and for our public reading of the Scriptures. This ought never to be a perfunctory performance. It ought always to be the reverent, intelligent, rendering of our previous interpretation, and meditation. After private study and prayer-

ful meditation alone, can we hope to imbue, first ourselves, and then our fellow-worshippers with the meaning, and spirit, and feeling, of the lessons which we read.

This way of studying and using the Prayer-book, and the Lectionary, will give us the answer of a good conscience when we question ourselves concerning that promise of ours to be diligent in prayer, and in reading of the Holy Scriptures.

Concerning the services of the Sunday, little surely need be said. That every clergyman holds on the Sunday as many services in his parish, or mission, as his physical strength allows, I take for certain. And that, in so doing, he duly emphasizes the great themes of the Church's year, I hope I may also assume.

One word, however, concerning the celebration of the Holy Communion, I should like to say.

The Order of our Prayer-book presumes, that in every parish, there will be a celebration of the Holy Communion every Sunday; and in some cases requires of Priests and Deacons that they communicate every Sunday, at the least. Now, without the laying down of any rigid rule, I would urge you, my brethren, to consider with yourselves, whether you are not bound to carry out the spirit and intention of the Prayer-book, by endeavouring, wherever the same is feasible, to partake yourselves, and to give your people the opportunity of partaking, every Sunday, either in Midday Service, or at an earlier hour, of the spiritually strengthening and refreshing food of the Body and Blood of Christ.

And every clergyman, who is charged with the cure of souls, ought to be careful to observe the Holy-days appointed by the Church. Let no scantiness of attendance deter you from this duty. Men may be so immersed in their worldly work, as to neglect these days, and even to despise them. But that is no reason why you should acqu-

iesce in their estimate, or join in their negligence. The visible organization of Christ's Church, of which you are an appointed officer, exists as a perpetual protest against the spirit of the world. And, whether the attendance be large or small, the regular, persistent observance of these days will be an influence effective for the education of the people amongst whom you live, in respect and reverence for "the things that are above." All the days appointed by the Church to be kept holy, we should observe. But on no account whatever, should the clergyman fail to be in his Church *on the morning* of Christmas Day, Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, and Ascension Day.

I now turn to the matter of pastoral visitation, and the close, personal contact with individual souls, involved in our ordination vow. There is so much that thrusts the collective prosperity, or collective failure of a parish into prominence, that a clergyman's thought is always liable to be drawn off from individual cases. If the Communicants are few in number, and infrequent in attendance; if the young are not careful about Confirmation, if the Sunday School dwindles, if the people value so little the ministrations of the Church, that they will give nothing for them, if the Church is empty, the facts at once come home to the Minister. And deficiencies, in some of these points, do present themselves so continually, that his time, thought, and energy are largely expended in remedying them. But the mischief is, that whilst he is remedying these, his enthusiasm is apt to expend itself. And when his toil is crowned with success, and his Churches are full, his Communicants increased, his Confirmation classes numerous, his schools well attended, a complacency, the natural attendant of success, comes over him; and he reposes in the belief that his work now at length is being done. It is only beginning. These are but the preliminaries, necessary, but still prelim-

inaries only. The work itself is the conversion of individual souls.

Oh! never cease, my brethren, never cease your labour, your care and diligence, until you have done all that lieth in you, according to your bounden duty, to bring all such as are, or shall be, committed to your charge, unto that agreement in the faith and knowledge of God; and to that ripeness and perfectness of age in Christ, that there be no place left among you, either for error in religion or for viciousness of life.

If I am asked how a clergyman is to bring himself so close to his people as to deal effectually with individual souls, I should say: Tell your people plainly, in your sermons, and in your conversations, that this is what you want to do. Ask them, entreat them to speak freely to you of their hopes, their fears, their doubts and distresses. And when they come to do so, make everything give way to their necessities. Let even important business go, rather than lose the opportunity of winning—of helping a soul—rather than freeze expanding sympathies by any indication of inconvenience or hurry. And I would say, too, endeavour to make your pastoral visits the means of spiritual edification.

There are difficulties here, perhaps; but very often we make them for ourselves. Very often, that spiritual character, which we shrink from impressing upon our visit, is just what those visited expect and desire. Begin, and a spiritual confidence will grow up, that will bring you and your parishioners close together soul to soul. And then it is, when souls touch, that the divine spark of converting grace passes between them.

And here we come to that other point upon which I proposed to speak—the state of our own personal religion. To kindle others, we must first burn ourselves. The preach-

ing and the teaching of a clever man, who has prepared himself by human means, and natural industry, may dazzle and delight, inform and instruct, but the breaking out into voice and utterance of a life that is "hid with God in Christ," converts and saves the soul. A life lived in secret communion with God is the mightiest instrument God is pleased to use for the salvation of souls. Instruction is not everything, and precepts touch but single points; exhortation by repetition loses its effect; and denunciation only irritates; but a holy life is never ineffectual—its influence is freshened and deepened by every renewal of contact; and it takes hold by a thousand points. An incident of which I have read somewhere will illustrate this.

A letter was once written to an old clergyman, whose ministry had been greatly blessed. "My people," said the writer, "are cold and heartless; tell me how I can effect a revival of religion in my parish."

The answer was brief—"My brother," he said, "revive thyself."

If, in prayer and devout meditation, our life be spent in the perpetual renewal of our own spirituality, we are in the very best way of preparation for doing the work of Evangelists—for making full proof of our ministry—for converting souls to God.

I have spoken of devout meditation. Of course we all meditate: we cannot help it. When our hearts are set upon some object, we think of it long and often. We vividly apprehend the thing itself, with all the surroundings of it, and all the details of the ways by which it is to be reached, and the obstacles to be encountered in the endeavour to reach it.

But by meditation as an act of devotion I mean the limitation of ^{his} exercise to the realization of communion between the soul and God. As in prayer we speak to God;

so in meditation God speaks to us. We stand face to face with God. The practice begets the habit. The habit begets the faculty. And he, who possesses the habit and the faculty of mental communion with God, has gone far in the art of holy living.

To attain the habit of devout meditation then, we should, with regularity and frequency, select some one of the great thoughts pertaining to salvation; and, having selected our subject, then, with intensesness of concentration, exclude all other thoughts, and with fixedness of contemplation, raise before the mind's eye a vivid picture of that which we think about. Then wait; wait in patience, with our gaze fixed always upon the picture so raised. And a still small voice will be heard—a voice that will tell the application of these things to the state of our own souls.

Wait yet, and the voice will crystallize into a precept of duty.

Wait yet again, and in your own heart will arise the answering echo of a resolution to do it.

Then, meditation has done its work. The notions and abstractions of religious doctrine have become real things. The power of religion is upon you. There will be a depth of spirituality in all you do that day. You have met the Lord, and your face will shine, as did that of Moses when he came down from the Mount.

“Retreats” and “quiet days” are much in use now among the clergy, for the reminding themselves of the consecration of their lives; and for the renewal of their minds in spirituality, and detachment from the world.

The value of such opportunities for the cultivation of a recollectedness of spirit, which may serve as an antidote to the secularizing distractions of business and routine, to which we are inevitably exposed, and which may prevent the constant iteration of sacred words, and sacred thoughts,

from hardening upon our souls an incrustation of indifference, or of inattention to the awful responsibilities of our calling, can hardly be overrated. And I rejoice to think, that such an opportunity will be afforded in the retreat to be conducted by the Provost of Trinity, at Bishop's College, in September next. In connexion with this, my only regret is, that I shall be unable to share its blessings. But I shall not forget, and though absent in body, I shall be present with you in the spirit.

Such opportunities indeed may not, in a community like ours, always be feasible or available. Still, I think that we might all do something for ourselves in any case.

On a former occasion I described, and I will repeat again, the practice of Dr. Hook :

When Vicar of Leeds—though he found more time than most men can find for literary labour—and though he was a man all his lifelong much in prayer—he was immersed, if ever a man was, in the multifarious occupations of parochial work. Always at work, but always accessible—living literally "*in ore vulgi*," he was, from ten in the morning till ten at night, at the beck and call of his parishioners. But, through the din of all this business, his spirit heard, too, the Master's call : "Come ye apart, and rest awhile" ;—heard and heeded. His plan was, to betake himself, where he could attend the daily service in the Church, but where he was not known ; and there to spend the day devoutly—alone with God.

I give this as an illustration to shew that something may be done, where there is a mind to do it ; not as a pattern to be followed. That might not be possible—or, if possible, not suitable. But something of the kind we might surely do. The great thing is to secure freedom from the interruption of ordinary calls and distractions.

Well, if no other means can be found, I think a clergy-

man may spend a day now and then, with great advantage to his soul's health—unknown to any—in his own Church, —with no interruption, and no fear of interruption, in protracted meditation and prayer.

By the use of these means, it seems to me, my Brethren, that we may do much to obviate the danger of spiritual deterioration, resulting from the distraction of petty cares and calls, and the benumbing familiarity with sacred things, to which we are inevitably and constantly exposed.

LAUS DEO.



