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I.—LITERARY.

CONDITIONS OF SUCCESS IN THE GOSPEL
MINISTRY.*

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PREACHING, which is the prime function of the ministry, has been aptly and tersely defined as "Truth through Personality."

The other departments of instruction in this institution have to do mainly with the truth—a fixed and unvarying element. This department, however, more especially in one of its branches, has to do with the ever-varying element of *personality*—the medium through which the truth is conveyed.

The burning question here is not, "What is truth?" but rather, "How can the truth be brought into saving contact with a perishing world?"

Whilst there are many and divergent views as to what constitutes that truth which is committed to the ministry, there are no less divergent views as to the nature and functions of the ministry; views, perhaps not so obtrusively heterodox, but none the less pernicious in their influence.

In view of the practical importance of the subject, and without apology for introducing to your attention so trite a theme, let us consider briefly and simply some, at least, of the conditions of success in the gospel ministry.

Where shall we find our model minister? the ideal pastor? What constitutes the highest excellence in this calling? One instinctively points to the great "Shepherd of the sheep," as being the archetypal "teacher sent from God," the very incar-

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nation of every conceivable qualification for this office. Another points to the great apostle to the Gentiles, as a more approachable model, being himself a sinner saved by grace. Another turns to the apostle of love, the warm and gentle-hearted John ; or to the practical, matter-of-fact James , or to the eloquent Apollos, mighty in the Scriptures ; or to the beloved Timothy, with his godly ancestry, his early piety, and his apostolic training. All of these are indeed grand models, worthy of imitation, and yet one sees at a glance that there are marked differences. We must separate the essential from the incidental. We must seek for those fundamental qualities which hold good for all time and for all individuals. We must translate the traits of the first century into those of the nineteenth, and recast Eastern customs into those of the West.

What are some, at least, of the principal qualities and characteristics which mark the true "man of God," the absence of which detract more or less from his efficiency, or even stamp him as an intruder ?

We mention some of these characteristics, not in the order of their importance precisely, but for convenience rather, under these heads :

I. *Physical.* The body is an integral part of man as truly as is the soul. Both shared alike in the fall and in the redemption. Christ died for our bodies not a whit less than for our souls, and ministered to the wants of one as assiduously as to the other. Undertaking the work of our redemption, he took to himself "a true body" as well as "a reasonable soul," and so became "bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh."

The body thus assumed played a most important part in the scheme of redemption ; for without it there could have been no sacrifice for sin on Calvary, nor any ministry of love. He needed a body ; yea, a sound and vigorous one ; and we have reason to believe that our Lord was a man of great bodily vigor, and not, as is often represented, an effeminate, ethereal being, ill-fitted for the conflicts of life.

How arduous were his labors, as for three years he bore the heat and burden of the day ! How tremendous the weight of responsibility resting upon him ; how incessant the toil ! Yet, while his disciples sought their much-needed repose in sleep, he spent the night in prayer. Once, and only once, do we find mention made of his being weary, and even then he was about his Father's business as he rested on Jacob's well. Had he

entered upon his life-work a pale-faced youth, emerging from his cloister; a poor dyspeptic, with nerves already shattered, his work would have been a miserable failure.

His immediate disciples too were brawny sons of toil; hale, hearty, inured to all manner of hardships. They, at least, were not laid aside by clergyman's sore throat, or nervous prostration; and doubtless, in choosing them, our Lord had respect to their sound and vigorous bodies, their capacity for work, and their ability to endure hardships.

Paul, indeed, may be regarded as an exception to this rule, but without sufficient reason. True, he was insignificant in appearance, and afflicted, as many suppose, with ophthalmia, but a man who could, through a long series of years, perform such herculean labors, and endure such hardships—a man in labors more abundant; in stripes above measure; in prisons more frequent; in deaths oft; five times receiving forty stripes save one; thrice beaten with rods; once stoned; thrice shipwrecked; a night and a day in the deep; in journeyings often; in perils of water, of robbers, by his own countrymen, by the heathen, in the city, in the wilderness, in the sea, among false brethren, in weariness and painfulness; in watchings often; in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness; and besides these things the care of all the churches (2 Cor. xi. 23-28)—and then die in a good old age, and only by the executioner's sword, was surely no weakling.

True, we read of the "oft infirmities" of Timothy, yet we also find that he was solemnly urged to apply a remedy therefor, and that injunction has been preserved in the inspired record for our warning and admonition.

It is freely conceded that prodigies have been performed both in church and state by men of frail bodies; but the proposition still holds good that a sound and vigorous body plays a most important part in the work of the ministry; and while some may succeed without it, multitudes will fail for lack of it.

The arduous labors which confront the minister, the ever-increasing burdens he is called to bear, imperatively demand the very highest type of bodily vigor. A minister with a long catalogue of diseases, a pale face, an ethereal look, and sepulchral tones, may strike the fancy of the sentimental dreamer, but if the work of the Lord is to be done efficiently we must be living and not dying men, except in a figurative sense.

So intimate is the connection between our physical and

spiritual natures, that the very gospel we preach receives its complexion from the condition of the body, and a dyspeptic gospel is often offered to those who are looking for the bread of life.

II. *Intellectual.* (1), A sound mind. The gospel is addressed primarily to the intellect, and through the intellect to the moral nature. It demands the exercise of the reason and judgment, and hence it cannot be apprehended by the idiot, nor be laid hold of by the mentally incompetent; much less can a disordered mind be the means of communicating it to others.

As a liquid takes the shape of the containing vessel, so the gospel inevitably bears the impress of the medium through which it is transmitted. It is therefore a matter of prime importance that the herald of the gospel should have the ability to apprehend it in all its fulness, and to proclaim it in all its integrity.

There is no room in this noble calling for cranks, nor for the riders of nobbies, nor for the weak minded; and he who is unfit for a responsible position in other callings is still more unfit for the responsible work of the ministry. This is no dumping-ground for poor unfortunates, and a call to the ministry is not usually made known by a failure in other departments of labor.

"We have this treasure in earthen vessels," indeed, but they are not cracked vessels, nor rejected ones. It is enough that they are *earthen*. God has, indeed, chosen to save the world by "the foolishness of preaching," but not by foolish preaching, nor yet the preaching of foolish men. If there is a calling in which common sense is requisite, it is this, and the lack of it can be offset only by the most incontestible evidence. Here is a work affording ample scope for all our God-given powers of mind, as well as of body, and none need fear that it will in anywise dwarf the most acute intellect. To this great work the church should consecrate its best talent, and far distant be the day when the gospel of the grace of God shall be entrusted to mediocres and weaklings!

(2), Thorough cultivation. An educated ministry has ever been the watchword of the Presbyterian Church, but with many it has degenerated into a mere "shibboleth," and the substance is sacrificed to the shadow. Hands are often raised in holy horror at the idea of licensing a man to preach, who,

while lacking a classical education, has had his wits sharpened by a manful share in the battle of life, while the college and seminary graduate, who has so effectually idled away his opportunities that he is unable to tell how many tenses there are in Hebrew, or is in doubt as to whether Abraham lived before or after the flood, receives the imprimatur of the church without the slightest hesitation. May the time soon come when our beloved church will sharply distinguish between an education and a prolonged and expensive attendance upon some institution of learning! But while the church demands, theoretically, at least, an educated ministry, many utterly fail to appreciate its importance. Profoundly impressed with the transcendent importance of spiritual qualifications, the intellectual are lost sight of and are depreciated, forgetful of the fact that the one is but the complement of the other. Others, again, are misled by the phenomenal success of some extraordinary cases of this kind, forgetful of the multitudes who ignominiously fail; nor is allowance made for the fact that there is an education which does not come through the use of books, though the process be a slow and painful one.

But there is another ground of objection far more serious: it is that scholarship is inimical to piety, and, to a certain extent, unfits one for the humbler duties of the ministry, and especially for work among the ignorant and lowly. It is held that an uneducated man can more readily adapt himself to this class, and can do far more efficient work than one more scholarly; that Latin, Greek, Philosophy, etc., are, so far from being a help, rather a hindrance in this work. If this be true, it is a matter of great moment, for the gospel must be preached to the poor; and for the church to be out of touch with this feature of the work is to be out of touch with her Lord, and failure is both inevitable and deserved.

It is undeniable that with many piety apparently wanes with the increase of learning, and that while there are many and glorious exceptions, yet educated men do shrink from contact with the ignorant and degraded, and seek more congenial fields of labor.

It is a well-known fact that heathen converts who are educated in Christian lands and then go back to labor among their benighted countrymen are, as a rule, failures, and either lapse into heathenism, or, overcome with disgust, do not lay hold with heartiness upon their perishing fellows.

How can one who has soared be content again to grovel?
How can he who has had converse with angels now talk with
men? How can he who has communed with sages—

“The great of old,
The dead, but sceptred sovran who still rule
Our spirits from from their urns”—

now talk of gardens, and chickens, and remedies for the croup?

Beyond all question, education does materially widen the gap between the man of God and the lowly to whom he ministers; but the remedy is not less education, but more grace to bridge the chasm.

When one is upon the same social and intellectual level with his people, it requires but little effort and but little grace to enter into all their feelings, hopes, and aspirations; but as he rises above them, it requires more effort, more grace, more self-denial, more crucifixion of the flesh. The increased efficiency arising from his education must be paid for by a corresponding sacrifice. As we crowd on more sail, there must be an increase of ballast in the hold, or shipwreck is inevitable. With each upward step there must be an increase of grace. The spiritual development must keep pace with the intellectual, otherwise education becomes a curse.

How wide the gap between our Lord and those to whom he ministered in the days of his flesh! Think of his views of truth, his sentiments, his tastes, as compared with those of the groveling, sordid, and sensuous throng with which he mingled! Think you that his efficiency as a teacher and herald of the gospel would have been greater had he known less, and had his tastes and sentiments been more in accord with theirs? Nay, verily, for thereby was he prepared for this very work, and by grace “condescending to men of low estate,” “the common people heard him gladly,” “wondering at the gracious words that fell from his lips.”

Was it a disadvantage to the great apostle to the Gentiles that he had been brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, and that he was master of the learning of his day? Would he have been more successful as he talked with the humble women by the river-side at Philippi, or preached Jesus to the half-civilized heathen of Lycaonia? Was he fitted only for preaching upon the Areopagus, or in the halls of the Cæsars? Let us read his own answer in those memorable words to his Corin-

thian converts: "For ye see your calling, brethren, . . . how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called; but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world, . . . and the weak things, . . . and base things, . . . and things which are despised, . . . yea, and things which are not."

We need an educated ministry, not only for literary centres, but for the slums and backwoods as well. Alas, that so many look upon a collegiate or seminary course as an initiatory rite merely, and not an actual or important preparation! Alas, that so many in the ministry virtually give up all study, because, forsooth, their lot has been cast among a plain and uneducated people!

(3), **Acquaintance with the Scriptures.** But while secular learning is not to be despised, a knowledge of the sacred oracles is still more indispensable. There is an intellectual acquaintance with the word of God which forms the groundwork and substratum of all spiritual knowledge. Let it never be forgotten that the heart can be reached only through the head; and the facts recorded in Scripture, its warnings and promises, its doctrines and precepts, must be in the head before the spiritual truths they convey can reach the soul.

This book is no charm, communicating its efficacy in some mysterious way, but must reach the soul by the open door of the understanding. It is a written communication, and must be construed in accordance with universal and well-recognized laws of language. The Holy Spirit is indeed the interpreter of the word, but he does not teach the facts of Scripture, nor the laws of grammar, nor yet the principles of interpretation; and he who neglects these thereby debars his gracious influences.

One of the most hopeful signs of the times is the revival of Bible study, and may the time soon come when the sacred word will be as familiar to the humblest as their Scriptures were to the Jews of old, and when it will be a disgrace for one to be a teacher of the word without an intellectual mastery of that which he teaches!

(4), **Loyalty to the truth.** There are many who receive without question the traditions of the elders, and who deprecate investigation as a heinous offence, allegiance being given to systems and received doctrines rather than to the truth itself. Above all things, the messenger of the "King of Truth"

is bound to "prove all things," and then "hold fast that which is good."

A fear of investigation ; a fear lest some cherished tenet be found untenable, only shows the absence of loyalty to the truth. Should we not unfeignedly rejoice when some fancied truth has been unmasked, for then has truth triumphed! If Calvinism be not true, then down with it! If plenary inspiration is a delusion, then away with it! If this Bible be not the word of God, then ruthlessly hurl it from its lofty pedestal! Yea, if Jesus be not the Christ, the Son of God, then proclaim it before high heaven!

Our Lord explicitly challenges investigation of himself and his claims. So far from demanding faith without evidence, he declares it to be our duty to reject him if he does not justify his claims, saying: "If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin."

Unfeigned loyalty to the truth is an indispensable requisite in everyone enlisted under the banner of the "King of Truth," and every herald of the cross should be able to say with another:

"Before thy mystic altar, Heavenly Truth,
I kneel in manhood, as I knelt in youth;
There let me kneel till this dull form decay,
And life's last shade is brightened by thy ray!"

III. *Spiritual.* (1), We place in the very forefront of spiritual qualifications a sound and saving conversion, the fruit of a divine quickening. Many, like Judas Iscariot, have been made instrumental in the salvation of others while they themselves were still strangers to God and heirs of perdition, yet for all this the proposition still holds good, that a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ is a prime requisite in his ambassadors. Without this one may indeed proclaim the truth, but he cannot be representative of Christ nor a witness for him. He cannot be a leader of the flock, not being in the way of life himself, nor can there be a genuine, Christ-like sympathy; and at best he is but a finger-board which shows the way but does not walk in it.

Let it not be supposed that this qualification is mentioned merely as a matter of form, for though standing in the foremost rank it is often lacking, perhaps as often as any other. Speaking of religious teachers, our Lord says: "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy

name, and in thy name have cast out devils, and in thy name done many wonderful works? and then will I profess unto them, I never knew you : depart from me ye that work iniquity." In other words, many accredited ministers of the gospel, after an apparently successful ministry, will be shut out of the kingdom for a lack which no one ever suspected.

The dangers which beset the ministry in this particular are not seen in their true light. Many decide this most momentous question of a call to the ministry while yet novices in the Christian life, and before their own conversion has been tested by time ; and in many cases a decision has been reached and publicly announced long before manhood. When once committed to such a course, how hard to retrace one's footsteps and confess that a mistake has been made ; and doubtless some are carried into the ministry by the *vis inertiae* of an early choice. When once inducted into the sacred office, invested, in the eyes of the multitude, with an official sanctity, and looked up to as a spiritual guide, how easy then to take the popular verdict as a true one ! How hard to open so painful a question and to deliver an unbiased judgment ! How easy to mistake an intellectual knowledge of the truth for a saving acquaintance with it ; and to mistake a zeal in matters pertaining to religion for religion itself. May it not be that the unsuspected secret of some, yea, of many, failures is *the lack of vital godliness* ? How lame and impotent and perfunctory such a ministry ! The blind leading the blind, and both falling into the ditch ! How dreadful to preach a glorious salvation to others and then miss it ourselves ! Well may we say with Paul : "But I keep under my body and bring it into subjection ; lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."

(2), Fervent Piety. One may be a true child of God, and yet only a babe in Christ, a poor, dwarfed weakling all his life. It is not enough that one is born of God, he must have attained to manly strength if he would discharge efficiently the duties of the ministry, for its burdens can be borne only by the sturdiest shoulders. "Fight ye not with small or great, save only with the king of Israel," was the command of the king of Syria to his captains ; and it is the leaders of the Lords hosts to-day who must bear the brunt of the battle, and woe to him who is not "strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus !" "Not a novice," says Paul, "lest being lifted up with pride

he fall into the condemnation of the devil."

The minister determines, to a large extent, the type of piety among those to whom he ministers. As a leader he sets the pace for those that follow, and his spiritual offspring will inevitably bear the impress of his own character; and hence the urgent need of a high type of piety.

This, then, is one of the great needs of the ministry: more spiritual life; more saltiness in the salt; more conformity to Christ. While we exert ourselves most strenuously to cultivate our intellectual natures, with tenfold more earnestness should we seek to cultivate our spiritual natures, for neither will grow without careful cultivation.

The secret of a successful ministry is pointed out in those words of our Lord, addressed more immediately to his disciples: "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in me. . . . He that abideth in me and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing." All the efficacy of the gospel is of God; and the closer the relation between the messenger and he who sends, the more efficacious the message.

What a thing of power the gospel is when proclaimed by those who have seen God face to face, when they come forth from the closet with face still aglow with the divine radiance, and bring a message directly from the King of kings! Oh, for a ministry that finds a throne of grace its tower of strength! an earnest ministry like that of Jesus or Paul, like that of a Payson or a McCheyne!

There is nothing so attractive to men as the utterance of the deep convictions of the soul; and the man who "believes, and therefore speaks," never lacks for hearers. "Never man spake like this man," said the officers sent to take Jesus; and one respect in which he differed from others was, that he declared, not the traditions of the elders, nor other vain speculations, but that which he knew as the very truth. He spoke with the authority born of deep conviction and assured knowledge, and not as the scribes.

When the man of God has "tasted the powers of the world to come"; when God, and heaven, and hell, and life and death are realities, and not vain abstractions; when they are as substantial entities as the things we come in daily contact with, and no longer idle dreams, then his message will both compel

attention and produce conviction. The believing man is always an earnest man, and a man of blood-earnestness is always a man of power. When the word of God in his heart becomes as a "burning fire shut up in his bones," and he becomes "weary with borbearing," or when he "can but speak the things he has seen and heard," then even a Herod will hear him gladly, and do many things while he fears him, and a Felix will tremble as he reasons of "righteousness, temperance, and a judgment to come."

(3), Ability to sympathize. Closeness of contact with God is most needful, but closeness of contact with man is equally essential. He who would lift his fallen brother must be able to grapple him as with hooks of steel. The bond of union must be one which no power in earth or hell can break, since the grappling power measures the saving power. It was no work of superogation when our Lord took upon him the nature of those he would save. He so linked himself with our fallen race that not even death itself could dissolve the bond, and even to-day a man sits at the right of the Father, a pledge of the eternal redemption of his people, for he says, "Because I live ye shall live also." In like manner it behooves the man of God to be in all respects one of the people, and the more completely he becomes identified with those about him the more able is he to bless and to save. Let it be the aim and ambition of the minister to bind himself with indissoluble bonds to those about him, avoiding most scrupulously anything that would tend to isolate him from them, and then, through the mighty power that comes from his contact with the throne above, let him lift them up. Especially let him learn to love, for there is no bond like unto this. Christ first loved us and then gave himself for us, and only as we love men can we bless them. Paul, catching his Master's spirit, declares his willingness to be accursed from Christ if thereby he could save his brethren. Let the minister first lay hold on God, or rather be laid hold of him, and then let him lay hold with a deathless grasp upon those about him, and success is assured.

It is said that in the House of Lords any exhibition of enthusiasm is considered a sign of weakness, but the minister who is not an enthusiast, whose soul is not stirred to its profoundest depths, who is not in the best sense of the term a fanatic, is unworthy of the name. He who has no passion for

souls, and who never, like his Master, wept over the perishing, and has never had bestowed upon him the "donum lachrymum," may well doubt the reality of his call to the ministry of the gospel of the Son of God.

(4), A divine call. That a certified call from God is a distinct source of strength does not admit of question. With all his deep piety and ardent patriotism, how could Moses have ventured upon that mission of deliverance had it not been for that preptory "Go!" of Jehovah? How could he have led Israel through the wilderness, but for that soul-inspiring, "Certainly I will be with thee"? How could Joshua have assumed the responsibility of invading Canaan, but for that most potent warrant: "Have not I commanded thee?" How quickly would Jeremiah have given up his hopeless ministry, but for that word of the Lord which was like "a fire in his bones"! It was an element of strength even in our Lords ministry, for again and again did he remind his hearers that he had not come of himself, but had been "sent." Had it not been for this same profound conviction on the part of the apostles, they would have been as chaff before the wind, but with the Risen One at their backs all the powers of earth and hell could not turn them aside.

There are, perhaps, times in the life of every minister when nothing short of the consciousness of a divine call can enable him to buffet successfully the waves of opposition and trial; and woe to him who in this dire extremity is lacking this sheet anchor! It causes the weakest to set his face like a flint, and and taking his stand where duty calls, to say with Luther; "Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise: God help me!"

We hear much of the decline of the pulpit and its loss of power, and beyond question, much of that which is called preaching is utterly futile, but whenever and wherever a God-sent messenger delivers a God-given message there is power—a power that can waken the dead, and shake Satan's kingdom to its very centre.

(5), Thorough Consecration. Jonah was indeed divinely commissioned, but his was an unwilling answer to the call of God, a reluctant service, the offspring of fear rather than of loyalty and love. There must be a hearty and whole-souled response to the divine call; a joyful surrender of all our powers to the Master's service.

Like Isaiah, we must cry: "Here am I; send me." Like the

Chief Shepherd himself, our watchword must be: "Lo, I come . . . to do thy will, O my God!" or like Paul, we must say: "For to me to live is Christ."

The crying need of the church is not more men, but *better* men—more consecrated men. Gideon's band of three hundred is preferable to an army of thirty-two thousand half-hearted and untrained men. Jonathan and his armor-bearer put to flight the Philistines, while Saul and his army were trembling in their tents. What cannot even one man do if so be that the Lord is with him! The Israelites said to David: "Thou art worth ten thousand of us"; and one man like Paul, with his natural powers developed, and indued with power from on high, is worth more than a whole host of inefficient men.

Brethren of the ministry, and those who are looking forward to it, let us seek to get a true conception of this glorious ministry. Let us ever set before us a high ideal of it, a scriptural ideal, and let us make it our daily effort to seek its realization in ourselves and others, that "when the Chief Shepherd shall appear we may receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away."

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