

Our Obligations to the Rising Ministry.

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BY REV. D. FREEMAN.

"But when He saw the multitudes He was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, the harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest." Mat. ix. 36-38.

Prayer for an increase of gospel labourers is needful, because the preaching of the Gospel is God's appointed means for saving men. The gospel as an instrumentality is fully equal to the end; but the number of those who preach it is as yet inadequate to meet the wants of the world. When Jesus said, "The harvest truly is plenteous but the labourers are few," He stated a fact which has ever been true of the whole world down to the present time.

If we could see, as the Saviour saw, the spiritual destitution which now prevails among men, we should be moved as He was with compassion towards them, and pray as He commanded for more labourers. Between correct information as to the spiritual condition of the world and the offering of this prayer there is a close connection. One reason why we feel so little concern for a lost world, that we know so little about its real state. Hence we enter the utility of every means for diffusing missionary information among the people, in order to kindle in them a missionary spirit. The existence of so many means of information as to the spiritual condition of the world, makes it unnecessary for me now to dwell on this part of my subject, except to present a few general facts:

It is said that our globe is peopled by Ten Hundred Millions of human beings: that only seventy millions of these are Protestants, and that only about one-third of these bear the gospel in anything like its purity. In other words, only about one person out of forty-three may hear the gospel in its purity.

Again, take another view from the statistics published in the Minutes of this Convention last year. We reported 277 Baptist churches, and 161 ordained ministers,—nearly two churches to one minister. Comparing the several Associations, we see that Nova Scotia Eastern (then including Prince Edward Island) reported the smallest proportion of ministers, having only 26 ministers to supply 60 churches. We notice especially that, during the past ten years, the increase of ministers in this Convention has not kept pace with the demand. In A. D. 1858, our minutes reported 194 churches and 129 ordained ministers. The increase since that year has been 73 churches, and only 32 ordained ministers. In ten years the increase of ministers has been considerably less than one-half the increase of churches.

These facts tell us that, at home, we have destitute churches and mission fields; that at home we have mourners in Zion uncomfited, and multitudes going down to hell unsaved. They tell us that with all our outward prosperity, we are declining in inward piety. They call us to humiliation before God—to earnest prayer and renewed effort for an increase of gospel laborers. It is a rule in the divine government that prayer involves effort to secure its answer. He who prays "Thy kingdom come," must do all he can to advance that kingdom, or else his prayer is an abomination before God. So he who prays for gospel laborers must do all he can to procure them. This brings us to the subject which I would now urge on your most careful attention: *Our obligations to the rising Ministry.* While urging this subject, may "the Spirit of Truth" be our guide.

Before stating our obligations to the rising ministry, let us first consider some of the grounds on which those obligations are based. We may thus anticipate objections, and prepare our minds to feel the force of those obligations. In doing this I would remark:

1st. That it is God's prerogative to call His ministers—to appoint His own ambassadors to men. This is assumed in the direction to pray to Him for laborers. But has the church no responsibility in the calling of ministers from her bosom? To answer this we ask, what constitutes a call to the ministry? Without refining over much on this point we reply, that, one evidence of a call to the ministry is a desire to preach on the part of him who is called. This desire we suppose is awakened in circumstances similar to those described in the text. He sees the wretchedness of men, he pities and resolves to "help" them. Should not the church inculcate such views, feelings and resolutions in her members? Another evidence of a call to preach is the actual sympathy of the church in this matter. Dr. Wayland says, the "evidences of a call to the ministry are our consciousness and the consciousness of our brethren."

But suppose a church to be in a state of spiritual torpor, incapable of sympathizing with those who feel for a lost world. In this case would not the gospel of Christ be hindered?

2nd. Again, it is God's prerogative to qualify His ministers for their great work. The qualifications of the true minister include sound conversion, genuine piety, and a love for souls. Is the church under no responsibility in these matters? But are these the only qualifications which a minister requires? In primitive times these were not sufficient. The Apostles enjoyed three years and forty days instruction under the greatest Teacher that ever appeared on earth. And even that was not enough for them.—Besides conversion, piety, "a passion for souls," and the personal instructions of Jesus, they received the miraculous endowments of the Spirit of God. And with all these qualifications they were not content without the prayers of the churches. But those miraculous gifts have ceased. Miracles have given place to means. Instead of the gift of tongues, strange languages must now be learned by the laborious process of study. Many arguments might be used in favor of ministerial education. Reason, common sense, observation and experience demand it. But the Word of God is all-sufficient and imperative. The minister of Christ should be not only desirous of teaching, and apt to teach, but "able to teach others also." We would not set up any fixed standard of literary attainment for ministers. This must vary according to circumstances. But we would urge upon the rising ministry, that the lowest standard that a young candidate now commencing should aim at, is to be able to read that book which he is to inculcate. The expositor should be able to maintain his exposition. The interpreter should, if possible, be able to translate the Bible. In short, God requires that his ministers should covet earnestly the best gifts. And He just as obviously requires his people to furnish them the facilities for so doing.

3rd. It is God's prerogative when he has called and qualified, to send forth his ministers. But one great agency which he employs in thrusting them forth is His church. We read in the 13th chapter of the Acts, that "There were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers: and as they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So they being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed." Here while Barnabas and Saul are stated to have been sent by the Holy Spirit, it is also said that they were sent by brethren in the church. To lost sinners the Spirit and the Bride say Come. To the heralds of the cross the Spirit and the Church say Go and carry the invitation to the lost. This is the starting point of missions. Carey said to his brethren, "I will go down into the well if you will hold the rope." He went down. The brawny arms of Andrew Fuller and his coadjutors held the rope. And what was the result? Two hundred millions of heathens are being lifted from the pit of degradation, and a new impetus was given to that work which will lift the world to God.

The thrusting forth of laborers into the gospel field, implies three distinct agencies, the candidate, the Church, and the Holy Spirit, who moves both. Here we see the relation from which our obligations to the rising ministry originates. But should the church fail in her duty, what would be the result? The natural effect would be what now exists, a lack of gospel ministers. But perhaps it may be objected that other causes may be assigned for this deficiency. This is admitted. There may be collateral reasons for this lack. Should labourers in the field not be sustained by their churches. Should their reputation be disregarded, their Scriptural teaching be rejected, or their legitimate authority be despised; or if, when their work is done, they be left to pine with want? God might withhold his servants from those indignities. There may be radical grounds for such deficiency. And while we glance at those probable causes, we become painfully impressed that these are only outward symptoms of a disease that is deeply seated in our hearts, a want of a due appreciation of the gospel itself.

Or again: God may have special reasons for withholding gospel ministers, out of our sight, known only to himself. If so, with these we have nothing to do. Secret things belong to God. It is ours to do our duty as far as God has revealed it. We see then that various points may be urged as reasons why God has not sent forth more labourers into the harvest. But they are more or less closely connected with our want of solicitude for the rising ministry. Let us try to remove it.

II. Having considered some of the grounds of our obligations to young ministers, we may now enquire more fully what those obligations are, and how they may be discharged.

I. Our first duty is to imbibe a fuller appreciation of the gospel. As a people, we have cause to value the gospel in common with all believers. We also should love the gospel for reasons peculiar to ourselves, as Baptists. To the gospel in its purity we owe our past success. To it we must be indebted for our ultimate and complete victory over error. When Prussia wished to consolidate the disjointed members of Germany into one body, what course did she adopt? She patronized the needle gun, honored its inventor, and trained her soldiers to its use; and on the field of Sedowa she enjoyed the satisfaction of seeing the Austrian bands dwindle before its deadly fire. We have a mightier work to do, a more glorious kingdom to consolidate. There is no hope of the complete union and legitimate communion of all

believers, except in the truth. This battle must be fought with the weapon of the truth. Even now the din of arms is sounding in our ears. We do well when we prize the weapon—the gospel—honor its founder, and train his soldiery for the great decisive struggle.

2. In order to increase the number of laborers in the gospel field, it is needful also to foster all the talents of the churches. The whole body of believers is one spiritual priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. In this respect there is no difference between clergy and laity. In the words of Leighton, "All believers are Christ's clergy." They may differ in circumstances as talents, opportunities, ordination; but as to laboring in the gospel field, none are exempt.

This scriptural rule carried out would create a host of what are sometimes termed "lay preachers." This order of preaching was sanctioned by the Saviour both before and after His death. When on earth, He sent out seventy-two and two. After His ascension, He caused His disciples to go "every where preaching the word." In the Apocalypse we see the all pervading genius of the christian dispensation symbolised by the angel flying "in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth." And one of the last notes of revelation left ringing in our ears is, "Let him that heareth say Come." This lay preaching continued for some time after the apostles' day. "The idea that the whole church constituted a spiritual priesthood, and that each believer was entitled to exhort, to teach, and to preach, continued for some time in the Church. We learn from Neander that it was not till about the middle of the third century that disputes began to arise on this point. Those disputes ceased not till the distinction between clergy and laity was established, the universal priesthood of the church was limited to a few, and those few became subservient to the Pope. Then followed the thousand years of darkness from the fourth to the fourteenth century. During those dark ages, lay preaching was confined to a single proscribed sect.—Orchard speaks of "itinerating Baptists," or, as they were termed by way of reproach, "wandering Anabaptists," in the eleventh century, in the valleys of Piedmont. They travelled through kingdoms, plying their trade and preaching the gospel as they went. He describes the cause of their success. "Each believer's gifts and talents were brought into requisition, and a multitude of adherents ensued." In the fourteenth century the Reformation began in England under Wickliffe. The Bible was translated and given to the people. Then arose the "poor priests" of Wickliffe, who preached the gospel in many parts of England, and who doubtless gave an impulse to the Reformation. This lay preaching has been generally discouraged by the Church of England; yet the sainted Baxter performed his great work at Kidderminster by employing his converts to go from house to house and address the people on the subject of their souls' salvation. Twenty years ago the followers of Wesley numbered twenty thousand lay preachers and class leaders who did not belong to the ordained ministry.

This lay agency is well suited to the free constitution of Baptist churches. Curtis, who made the progress of Baptist principles for the last half a century a special study, testifies, "Here lies the great strength of all true churches, not in the labors of the ministry alone, but of all the people." Dr. Wayland, while insisting on this with great force, adds that many would thus be led to give themselves wholly to the work, as in the case of the late Dr. Sharp, of fragrant memory.

Here is one potent remedy for the lack of ministers. Let our extensive churches supplement the labors of the pastor with lay preaching in all their numerous stations. Let our feeble isolated churches improve all their spiritual gifts, and they need not long remain, without some one to break to them the bread of life, or without being centres of radiating light to all around them.

3. When a church has called all her talents into requisition, she should watch with the utmost solicitude for those who show any indication of a divine call to preach the gospel. She should regard the discovery of these talents as one reason for improving all her gifts and graces. And with what joy should we hail the least sign of the existence of such a talent among her ranks. If the angels rejoice over one sinner that repenteth, surely they would also rejoice when one is converted who will call many others to repentance. Dr. Fish, in his "Primitive Piety Revised," says—"Time was when mothers knelt over their children in the cradle, and prayed that God would make them ministers; time was when churches sought out acceptable gifts and urged the possessors to this work. We may lament as much as we will, but until we have a spirit of consecration in our churches, such as shall make us all willing to be ministers—if that were Christ's will—and to have our sons and brothers ministers, and to count even hardness acceptable service, we shall still find the harvest plenteous and the laborers few." p. 76.

4. When a church has discovered that one of her members is called of God to preach the gospel then it becomes her duty to furnish him with every needed facility for preparing him to go forth to that work as soon and as fully equipped as possible.

Here numerous objections arise. But when they are tested, they fly before the light of truth as mists before the rising sun. It may be said, that as the young minister may occupy a lucrative position, he should be left to furnish the means of his own education. But a lucrative position is not his aim. His desire is to save souls. To do this he is willing to endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. Hence it is the duty of the church to aid him as

he goes forth to her work. Again, it may be urged that if a young man is called of God, no neglect or opposition should hinder him. The fact is granted, but the inference is denied. On seeing a young brother struggling with almost insuperable difficulties, we would not feel justified in standing coolly by without proffering assistance, so long as we adopt the christian motto, "Bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ." Furthermore, it may be urged that, as souls are perishing and time would be lost, the young minister should go forth at once, without further preparation, to his work. But we have seen that preparation is his imperative duty; it only remains to decide how far that preparation shall extend. When this is decided, as little time as possible should be employed in securing it. The mower gains time by staying in the morning to grind his scythe. So with the spiritual laborer; but let him have every facility for grinding it, so that his time may not be wasted. Another objection may be that as the work is of God, we ought not to interfere in this matter of increasing the number of His ministers. To this we reply in brief, that the glorious doctrine of God's sovereignty is not designed to paralyze the efforts of His people, but to prompt, to direct, and to encourage them in every good work. It is no detriment for us, while abounding in the work of the Lord, to know that God has purposed that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.

Looking at this subject in every possible point of view, we see that God's people are under solemn obligations in securing an increase of able ministers of the New Testament—of workmen that need not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. We are to pray for this, and to use every effort which that prayer involves. When this is done it is of great advantage, first to the beneficiary, then to the benefactor, and then to the church and the cause of God at large. One brother has a divine call to the ministry. When God calls this young disciple, He, at the same time, provides the means to enable him most effectively to respond to that call from on high. But the candidate, it may be, has not those means in his own possession. Where, then, are those means treasured up? Here is another brother, or a sister, whom God has not called to give themselves wholly to the ministry; but He has called them to support those who do. And how do we know this? It may be known from the fact that God has given them the ability to a greater or a less extent. As such an one looks on his worldly possessions, the thought strikes him, "Here is an opportunity of so using a portion of these perishable things that they may be the means of enriching the poor, of comforting the afflicted, and of saving the lost." He embraces the opportunity; he sympathises with that young disciple; he sets before him the greatness of his work, and encourages him to make full preparation for it; he aids him, if necessary, by material as well as moral support. And afterwards, he has no reason to regret that he did so; for, if his aid has been wisely administered, he sees that young man go forth and occupy some useful position in the great harvest field. Perhaps in heathen lands; or, it may be, in the field at home, he sees him laboring for immortal souls; and as he does so, he feels the joyful consciousness of having contributed somewhat to the success which he beholds. Instead of looking on his gold and silver, cankered, and destined some day to eat his flesh as it were fire, he now sees before him a consecrated man of God, gathering the wandering sheep and lambs into the fold of Christ. And his interest in that servant of Christ will be reciprocated; and many a joyful prayer will be offered up for him, such as that offered by St. Paul, "The Lord give mercy unto the household of Onesiphorus; for he hath often refreshed me, and he was not ashamed of my chain."

All this has been realized in actual experience. Could all the cases of this kind be ascertained, they would form an interesting chapter in the history of Christian benevolence. And on the other hand, could all the privations and sufferings of poor, yet gifted young men studying for the ministry be gathered, they would fill a volume with sorrows of the most touching kind. But these sorrows have been borne in secret. They have not been wailed abroad; yet they have doubtless "entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth," and the church has reaped the recompense. Many a light that might have shone brightly and long on Zion's walls has been prematurely extinguished by disease incurred in this fatal conflict with poverty while struggling for an education. Many an honored minister in the field to-day is painfully conscious that his education is limited, his usefulness curtailed, and his life shortened by the too severe discipline of want and neglect in the early part of his career. But these cases are becoming more rare. The church is awaking to her responsibility. Large provision is now made among Baptists in every part of the world to aid indigent young ministers during their preparatory studies. That column in our benevolent scheme entitled "Ministerial Education," shows that we have not entirely forgotten our duty. But the small amounts contributed to this object also show that our recognition of that duty is as yet but little more than nominal.

The early Baptist ministers in these provinces felt the importance of this subject. By their personal influence scores of young men were induced to give themselves to the work of the Lord. By the purity of their lives men were led to regard their work as one that angels might covet. By the highly evangelical character of their preaching the soil they cultivated was made prolific in gospel ministers. They opened up the Foreign Mission that their people might learn that the harvest field is co-extensive with the world. They founded Academies and a College, that they might enjoy the luxury of sending forth men fully equipped for their work. Thus the early fathers offered the prayer of the text.

So they labored, and it remains for us to enter cheerfully into their labors. But our circumstances have greatly changed. From every part of the world, from perishing heathens and toiling