

Our Contributors.

HAPPY HOURS IN A PASTOR'S LIFE.

BY THE REV. THEODORE L. CUYLER, 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 sources 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 lies 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 instruction 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 fitting form the heaven-sent 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 Scriptures 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 buring 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 Guthries 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 mouth-piece, and let the Almighty God speak through him. Many men in these days organize "steel trusts" and "oil trusts," but here 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 reinforced by the "power from on high."

THE JOY OF PASTORAL 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 directions. 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 the woe-begone. These ministrations of mercy cost no little effort and strain on the nerves, but they bring rich rewards. Among all 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 en-

joy 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 seasons 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 seasons 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 have 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 30 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 being 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 these 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 every one 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.

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