

The Christian Visitor.

“Hold” fast the form of sound words.”—2 Timothy, 1. 13.

SAINT JOHN, N. B., THURSDAY, DECEMBER 17, 1863.

LAY PREACHING.

The truth on this important subject has of late years made wonderful progress: common errors, once universally and tenaciously held, have been boldly attacked and refuted both by theory and practice; and among intelligent students of Scripture, and thoughtful unbiassed working Christians, the question of the lawfulness and propriety of lay preaching is virtually set at rest. But error on the point still obscures many minds. There are still some who consider it unscriptural and worse than useless; others who consent to it as a thing that “can be cured,” and “must be endured,” and who look upon it as that which must be made the best of, since it would neither be easy nor desirable, on the whole, to put a stop to it, seeing they cannot ignore its blessed effects. There are others again, who, while they sanction and encourage lay preaching, do so on insufficient and even untenable grounds. No evangelist, for instance, who understands his position, could consent to substitute, his rights as an Englishman for his responsibilities as a Christian in this matter, or pretend to accept from men permission to obey God! Clear proof of the scripturalness of the thing, and exposition of its true basis, have often been rendered; but they have to be continually renewed, to enlighten the un instructed, to confirm the wavering, and to increase the sense of responsibility, inadequately felt by most, to do what in them lies as labourers in the gospel field.

It was a very common error, and it is by no means exploded yet, to suppose that all ministry, in the church and to the world, should be confined to a particular class, set apart for its performance. Like other errors, this was in great measure a distorted and misspelled truth. Scripture and experience both taught the necessity and benefit of a class of “pastors and teachers” devoted to the work of the ministry. This divine institution was recognized and felt to be needful for the well-being of the church, and very conducive to the conversion of sinners, but it was wrongly regarded as all that was needful, especially for this latter object. As well might we conclude, because an educated class of physicians is needful to the full development of the healing art, that therefore no private individual should ever exert his skill in applying a remedy, or use judgment in prescribing a well-known cure! “Pastors and teachers,” a special class devoted to a special object, are indeed needed; but oh, how much is needed besides! Evangelists, gospel preachers, city missionaries, Bible-women, labourers, male and female, young and old; labourers of all classes, adapted to all spheres; labourers in the vineyard of Christ, labourers together with God; labourers not a few, but many, for the vast harvest-field, are imperatively needed; as many as can be procured, all the help that can be got, for the work is overwhelming, the need unutterable!

The world is perishing; Christ has died; sinners may be saved by faith in Him; the glad tidings have been sent; the time is short; the end of all things is at hand; who shall carry and proclaim the good news, the gospel message? Who? Every Christian man, woman, and child on earth, having tongues to speak and opportunities for speaking of Jesus! To what extent shall they go? To the very utmost limit of their abilities and opportunities, without trespassing on prior claims or transgressing any ordinance of God or man, unless such are antagonistic to God's. And this they may do without, in the least interfering with a class of work, or a sphere of responsibility, to which some only are called. All Christians, not some merely, are to be “lights in the world, holding forth the Word of life,” “reproving the unfaithful works of darkness,” “telling what great things Jesus has done for them, and has had compassion on them;” and who shall dare to say, as regards any individual, that this testimony is to be only an *acted* and not a *spoken* one?

This general ministry of the whole church, due to the world, does not obliterate a special ministry of some, called and gifted as evangelists, even as to gospel preaching; much less does it touch upon the work of pastors and teachers in the church, which is altogether different. Certain individuals are called to more prominent, continued, and engrossing efforts than others; they are bound to “do the work of an evangelist,” perhaps exclusively, and to “make full proof” of their ministry. Grace and wisdom will be tested in the appropriateness of the sphere selected by any labourer; the Lord's blessing resting on his efforts, and “confirming the word with signs following” is the way of conversions, may generally be taken as guidance in the matter. Occasional and comparatively obscure efforts may often lead as a stepping-stone to more constant and public ones; for God mostly trains his servants in private before He calls them into public; and I may add, that an evangelist, as time passes, and knowledge increases, and experience deepens, may not infrequently become well qualified for the work of guiding and teaching the church also, though the latter office is by no means a mere development of the first, but requires special gifts, qualifications, and call.

When rightly understood and kept each in their place, the operations of evangelists, and those of pastors and teachers, would never clash, but beautifully harmonize. They should recognize themselves and each other, not as self-appointed workers, seeking each his own, but as members of his own choosing; but as ambassadors for Christ, seeking a common object, their Master's glory, by means differing indeed, but equally of His appointment and equally essential to the successful prosecution of His work. This sense of being fellow-labourers would at once unite them heart and hand, to their mutual strength and comfort, and to their greatly increased efficiency. Its absence weakens and impales both in their work, but the pastor suffers from it more than the evangelist.

It is strange that any should doubt or deny these things! God has always given a practical answer to such doubts, and rebuked such opposition by raising up and honouring, among and among such evangelistic labour outside the sphere of settled, pastoral work; and He is doing so still. Facts patent to all observers prove it, and endorse such ministry as of divine appointment, and Scripture abundantly does the same. The well-known passages in the eleventh of Acts afford ample precedent, authority, and encouragement for this so-called “lay-preaching.” “Then they who were scattered abroad, upon the persecution which arose about Stephen, travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but the Jews only. And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they were come to Antioch, spoke unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus, and the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned unto the Lord.”

Who were these preachers of the gospel? They who were scattered abroad by the persecution, the same followed Stephen's martyrdom; all the church which were at Jerusalem, except the Apostles (Acts viii. 1.) This settles the question as to the lawfulness of “lay” preaching. The mass, if not the whole of these who “went everywhere preaching the word,” were unofficial persons, or, in modern language, “laymen.”

How were they sent? These persons had neither ordination, recognition, nor even, as far as we know, permission from the Apostles; their efforts were spontaneous and independent, and arose out of circumstances. However advisable or expedient, therefore, recognition may now in certain cases be, it is not indispensable in any case, and not even wanted in ordinary evangelizing. The only needed prerequisites for this work are those which these early Christians all possessed: conversion, a godly life, and ability to speak in some degree—or other, suitably to some sphere, public or private. These, and circumstances which placed before them open doors, where all they needed, and all that any disciple of Christ can ever need, to authorize his laboring as an evangelist or gospel preacher.

Where did they go? “Throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria (chap. viii. 1), as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch” (chap. xii. 19) anywhere, everywhere, that need existed and circumstances led. To “the regions beyond” those that had already heard the joyful sound, to those who sat “in darkness and in the shadow of death,” wherever they found them. They were not yet aware that it was the purpose of God to grant “repentance unto life” to the Gentiles also, so for a time they confined themselves mostly to the Jews. “To us there is no limit.”

Salvation, O salvation, The joyful sound proclaim, Till each remotest nation, Has heard Messiah's name.”

“The regions beyond” those already evangelized still call with urgent voice, alike to the localized and itinerant gospel preacher. Who can say he has worked every corner of the field he occupies, and that further labour on his part is superfluous? Ah, no! we have but to lift our eyes to the fields, white as they are unto harvest, to perceive the need of a thousand sickles being thrust in, and alas, the labourers are all too few.

What did they do? “They preached the Word”—preached the Lord Jesus; and doubtless, in the first love of young converts, they all did so, with simplicity, realization, and power; though probably with different degrees of learning and eloquence, and with different measures of publicity and acceptance among the people, according to their different degrees of physical and mental ability, and the grace bestowed upon them. They did not attempt studied elaborate sermons, or dilate upon abstract truths; they just delivered God's gracious message, “preached the Word,” and testified of a personal living Saviour—“preached the Lord Jesus.”

And what were the results? “The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great multitude believed and turned to the Lord.” The divine right of their mission was attested by the divine blessing which rested on it. Conversions were the result, and a great number of them; the word accomplished that whereto it was sent, and the Lord Jesus, being lifted up, drew many unto Him. Let no preacher who realizes similar results now, doubt that “the hand of the Lord” is with Him too, even though every man's hand should be against him! and let no gospel preacher who does not realize similar results be satisfied with thinking himself rightly ordained and regularly appointed to his work. This will not suffice! The right thing must be preached, and that in the right way, and then it little matters who preaches it. The gospel itself is “the power of God to salvation to every one that believeth.”

It is hardly needful to add that this evangelistic work was followed by the more advanced teaching of such men as Barnabas and Saul, and resulted in the formation of “Christian” churches (Acts xi. 22-26; xiii. 1; xiv. 26). The development and form of these lie beyond the range of the present subject; and whatever difficulties and differences of judgment these questions involve, the one here discussed seems perfectly simple. All who know and love the gospel are bound to proclaim it, and should do so in the most effective way they legitimately can.

H. GRANTON GUNNESS.

Belfast, October 17, 1863.

From the Morning Star.

FRES. FAIRFIELD'S LETTERS—No. 4.

Some of the London ministers—Baptist W. Noel—his family connection—compared with G. H. Spurgeon—his papers in private—of the heroes of Iokerman—Puncheon—Binney—Bellevue—the Anti-Slavery orator, Geo. Thompson—his language in England—American excitement in London.

Allusion was made in my last to Hon. and Rev. Baptist W. Noel, with a partial promise to say something more of him in my next. Mr. Noel has long been endeared to the Christian people of America by his self-sacrificing and conscientious adherence to the truth against many temptations. His title of Honourable comes of his belonging to one of the families of the nobility. His oldest brother is Lord Gainsborough. As a preacher in the established church, he had gained such reputation that he was one of the twelve chaplains to the Queen at the time of his becoming a dissenter. His personal character, his talents, his family connections, and influence, would undoubtedly have elevated him to some bishopric before now, had he remained in the establishment. Yet when he became convinced that duty and truth led him elsewhere, he “conferred not with flesh and blood,” but “obedient to the heavenly vision,” renounced his prospects and his preferences, and attached himself to the Baptists. Such a conscientious following of religious convictions is a higher mark of nobility than he could have won, had he been himself the eldest son of his father's house.

Mr. Noel is not a fanatic; he is not a man to seek notoriety by an eccentric course. He is acknowledged by all to be a devoted Christian—gentlemanly, courteous, but unpretentious; all unconscious from anything you can perceive of having done anything to deserve special commendation. In Spurgeon you detect, without looking for it, more or less egotism—it stands out even in his preaching. He does not regard, and therefore he does not let his hearers forget, that he has the largest church, the largest congregation, and the largest number of conversions of any minister in England. Mr. Noel is so entirely self-forgetful that, though I watched him closely while preaching upon a subject that might easily have admitted something of the sort, I could detect nothing in word or manner that would remind you of any sacrifice which he had made for truth's sake, though I could not myself avoid thinking of them.

He preaches in an unpretending house, to a congregation of about five hundred persons. In the evening there was not quite so many as that. His manner of preaching is impressive, but not forcible. He talked—preaching extempore, with out notes of any kind—the evening I heard him talking calmly, wisely, plainly, affectionately,

with little variation of tone, and yet without a disagreeable monotony. You have the strong conviction, in hearing him, that you are listening to a man who believes every word that he says; who preaches not himself, but Christ; and who is prepared always to meet at the judgment-day those to whom he preaches. He has no artifice—nothing could be further from him than any tricks. He evidently does not feel called upon to make any special pleading on behalf of his Master. If his cause is not to be sustained by simple truth and a Christian spirit, then it must fail.

The impression which you receive from the pulpit is confirmed and intensified when you meet him in private. In leaving the English church, at he was compelled to do by the strongest convictions of duty and the constraining love of Christ, it must have been to one of so warm a nature as his, and enjoying the domestic relations of life so thoroughly, at least some little trial that he left his wife behind. She is still in the English church, but so large-hearted is his catholicity of feeling that his wife is loved none the less for her difference of opinion. So I imagine it must be; and such is the impression which every boy seems to have.

Mrs. Noel is at present in Switzerland—inviting me to dine with him last week, he alluded to his wife's absence, but added that he should insist upon my coming again, when his wife would be as glad to see me as himself. The dinner, therefore, was at the house of Lady Trowbridge, a near neighbour, and intimate friend of Mr. Noel. Lady T. is the widow of the late Sir Thos. Trowbridge, an admiral in the English navy. Her son—now Sir Thomas—is the hero of a remarkable incident in the battle of Inkerman. He commanded a battery. It occupied a very important position, and was doing efficient service. The Russians determined upon carrying it, and made a desperate assault for that purpose. Early in the engagement a ball struck the commander, taking off one of his feet and a part of the other. There was no other officer at hand to take his place. So he ordered his men to put him in position with his feet elevated to prevent fatal hemorrhage, and in that position he gave his orders without apparent weakness, held his battery, drove back the enemy, and gained the day. The fight, the necessary surgical operations were performed under chloroform; he then ate his supper and wrote a letter to his mother the same evening. Her Majesty did not fail to deal generously with the young Sir Thomas. With the half of one foot remaining, he can still act as paymaster, and receive a very handsome income.

His mother was the hostess on Tuesday—Mr. Noel and your correspondent the guests. On Saturday came another pressing invitation from the good lady to dine with her again. The invitation, coming through Mr. Noel, was too cordial to be declined. These four hours (for you will remember that two hours are spent at the dinner table—talking being the main thing, but eating is not to be entirely lost sight of, when your plate is changed six times) have given me a good opportunity of acquaintance with a genuine man; simple, honest, undisguised; giving you to feel as entirely at home as you could possibly desire. The talks were chiefly of American affairs; and you know how thoroughly Mr. Noel sympathizes with the North. He is just now carrying a book through the press in which he is to vindicate, undoubtedly in a most able manner, the position of the North in this war. Indeed, he is as the roughly American as the most loyal among us could desire—apologizing even for our blunders, and slowness, and stupidity, and defects.

His unaffected piety, also, shines out most sweetly in these private hours. Lady T. and her family, too, are devoted and earnest Christians; and between the American war and the great revival of 1857, the minutes passed quickly away—with an earnest requisition upon me again when I should return to the continent; a requisition which I shall not be reluctant to comply with, especially for the purpose of making the acquaintance of Mrs. Noel, who is said to belong not only to the nobility of England, but to that higher nobility of a true womanhood.

Mr. Noel's elocution is good every where, in public or in private, with one exception, which it might seem almost hypercritical to speak of in the midst of so many pleasing qualities of voice—naturalness, clearness, roundness, melody—and that exception is the strange omission of the sound of g in the words ending in *ing*. During the first fifteen minutes of his sermon it quite attracted my attention to hear such expressions as these: “Not knowin' what the Lord was intendin'.” “Paul was preachin',” &c. but the subject matter of the discourse, as well as the genuine simplicity and manifest piety of the preacher, soon led me to forget even this.

In person, Mr. Noel is more American than English—taller and less robust than the English generally; about five feet, ten or eleven inches. I should judge, and a little inclining to stoop. Put him on Spurgeon's platform, and I imagine he would appear to very good advantage before an audience; but no good looking man can do himself justice in such a pulpit as he occupies. A box four feet square, three and a half feet deep, and perched up so high that there is at least eight feet between him and the floor.

The singing in his congregation is conducted by a man who occupies an elevated stand just in front of the pulpit; who read the hymns, verse by verse, as the congregation sang them. In Spurgeon's Tabernacle a man stood on a platform below the preacher, large enough for twenty or thirty persons, and led the singing, as Spurgeon himself read either one or two verses at a time. I heard Puncheon one evening at the Victoria Terrace Chapel. There the preacher read a verse at a time, and all sang, but an organ aided in the execution.

I alluded briefly in my last to the sermon of Mr. Puncheon. It was on a Thursday evening in a church of a brother minister. The congregation numbered eight hundred, perhaps, which comfortably filled without crowding the house. It was an impressive and powerful sermon. The preacher is apparently quite absorbed in his subject; forgets himself; has great command of language, and an affluence of rich thoughts and glowing imagery. His reading of scripture was impressive. Mr. Noel's was plain, serious, but when a man reads fifty-two verses, as he did, without a word of illustration, it is apt to seem a little tedious to a majority of the congregation. Spurgeon's Scripture Readings are most admirable, and were indeed the prime excellence of his whole Sabbath exercises.

I have heard two other of London's leading ministers—Rev. Thomas Binney of the Congregationalists, and Rev. Mr. Bellevue of the Establishment.

Mr. Binney is a whole-hearted, large-headed Christian man; a little peculiar; strong, but keeping back his strength generally, taking part labor very much at his ease, and yet interesting an intelligent congregation of five hundred persons. I was standing at the door of a certain

edifice in King William street about ten o'clock last Sabbath morning as the door-keeper threw open the gates, and was about to speak to him, when he stepped quickly to a carriage that had just arrived, and let out a large, portly, good-looking man, followed by a pleasant-looking woman. The woman passed into a side gate. The man lingered, looked at me, and in a moment said: “Step this way; I think I know where you came from—America.” “Yes, sir. Everybody knows me here; I was intending to hear Rev. Mr. Binney this morning, and was waiting to inquire if this was his chapel.” “Yes, it is. My name is Binney. Walk in; you are a minister, are you not?” “I have preached some.” “Well, I thought you looked like a brother; come in.” “I will do so with pleasure; for I had wanted to take you by the hand some time, but didn't think of intruding till after sermon. We were soon in the study. Mrs. Binney was there, and I was in a few minutes conducted to the pastor's pew as if I had been an old friend of the family. And in truth I had been; but how did he know it?”

The exercises and sermon were a little peculiar: 1. Singing; 2. Prayer; 3. Reading scripture; 4. Singing; 5. Reading scripture again; 6. Singing; 7. Prayer, closing with apostolic benediction, after which the preacher left the pulpit (I began to think, as it was communion day, that no preaching was expected); 8. Singing, led by the clerk, during which the preacher returned from his study to the pulpit; 9. Sermon; 10. Singing; 11. Prayer, with benediction. Three-fourths of an hour were consumed before preaching. A good extempore sermon, in colloquial style, occupied the next hour; five minutes more, and we were dismissed. What the preacher left the pulpit for, I didn't ascertain. He made no change of robe, after the Episcopal fashion; but as the benediction before sermon is according to “church” style, maybe the other was a relic of the same. Possibly the suggestion of a friend at hand is the true explanation—that somewhat exhausted by the first three-quarters of an hour, which in the Episcopal church is performed by a clerk, the preacher was wont to renew his strength by a little wine or brandy and water. Mr. Binney is one of the men who laugh at teetotalism, and drinks every day something stronger than tea or coffee. So the suggestion, perhaps, does him no injustice, as he is now getting to be an old man—sixty, I should think. And how imperfect is human nature! Baptist Anti-Slavery away from a state church, but takes ale at dinner. A brother of his adheres to the establishment, but is a strict and stern teetotaler for conscience sake! Room enough in such a world as this for total forbearance and for large Christian charity.

Mr. Bellevue preaches to a crowded house—a thousand persons, or more. He has been a professional Shakespearean reader—at the theatre and elsewhere. His sermon was written. I have heard in all eight sermons in England. All the rest without a scrap of manuscript; his without a word of anything else. It was well written, sound in doctrine, high-toned in sentiment, and well read; with this important exception—that he led me to feel that he did not really believe and appreciate his own preaching. Certainly he must enter more thoroughly into the spirit of Shakespeare, or he could never have distinguished himself as a reader. In his church, however, I was more strongly reminded of home in one respect than in any other, which I have visited in England. The singing was performed by a few artistic singers, who sang for the admiration of the congregation, and spent most of their time in attending to something else than the services of the evening. Who that seeks the spiritual improvement of soul or daughter, would ever choose to make them members of a choir?

While I write of these distinguished preachers of London, it is to be remembered that there are not a few others of equal eminence whom I have not heard, but shall endeavor to hear at a future time. I have just received an invitation to take tea with Dean French at Westminster Abbey tomorrow evening; but having made arrangements to go to the continent to-day, I am compelled to decline. Should such an invitation be repeated upon my return to London, I shall be very sorry not to be in the way of accepting it; for there are few men in England with whom I should more gladly form an acquaintance. His writings on philology have given him great eminence in America, as well as in England.

Giving you this sketch of London preachers reminds me that I spent a very pleasant evening last week in listening to the distinguished Anti-Slavery orator, George Thompson, upon American affairs. Mr. Thompson, it is said, has not the full measure of power which he once possessed. But if he was ever superior to his present self, I can easily understand that so good a judge as Lord Brougham should very deliberately and considerately pronounce him the ablest orator he had ever heard.

His speech was admirable; clear, logical, happy, powerful. Words came at his bidding; rather, they seem to come without being bid; only that they never come amiss. Mellifluous as Wendell Phillips, but less colloquial; not so witty, but more oratorical; he, on the whole, reminded me of him more than any other speaker I have ever heard. With a serene majesty of eloquence and truth, bold in sentiment, but very courteous in manner; his periods full, round and completely finished; he is little short of one's best idea of an orator. With great partiality to Phillips, I should pronounce Thompson the more eloquent of the two.

And his familiarity with American history, the American Constitution and the details of this American war, were very refreshing. I found him, in a long talk of an hour and a half, going astray but twice, and then in matters of secondary importance, and perhaps also merely the result of a little haste in the moment of speaking.

The meeting was an enthusiastic one, and the thoroughly American view which he presented, together with his sharp and hard hits at Lord Russell, Messrs. Gladstone and Roebuck, were applauded most vociferously from first to last. It was a rare speech, of course; and that means that it was logically and fearlessly consistent with the fundamental principles of human rights and human society. A verbatim report of it ought to find its way into the American papers. The chief manager of the *Morning Star*—you have fortunately so occasion to be ashamed of your English namesake—presided, and introduced Mr. Thompson by a happy allusion to his former eminent career as a champion of human freedom, and now again, after twenty years of retirement, coming forward to hail the bright dawn of a day which he had scarce expected to see in his lifetime. But I must close.

Just now a little earthquake has “shooked the sensibilities” of some of the good people of the north of England, and to that London is concerned, all is quiet. Only American stars talked of here as the all-seeing eye. Known was an American; I have heard of his name, even in the city.

“THOU FOOL”

A man of intelligence, and of a very skeptical turn of mind, had had many conversations with his clergyman, and was always stumbling at the doctrine of the resurrection, as a veraton and plague to his reason. He stumbled at that stumbling-block, being disobedient. His clerical friend did not succeed in reducing the swelling of his skepticism, which proceeded not so much from particular difficulties and incredibilities in the mystery before him, as from a proud, self-relying dependence, not upon God, but upon his own reason.

At length for a long time they were separated. The clergyman did not insist the skeptic for years.