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Character and Ministry.

IT has been said that the culture of character is the task of life. It begins with the cradle, and who shall say when and where it ends. In our Christian ministry there is the ever-present, and all-pervasive factor of character and personality. "Give diligence to present thyself . . . a workman that needeth not to be ashamed," wrote Paul to Timothy; for work and "workmen" are here indissolubly joined. As Dr. Ritson put it the other day, "the Christian ministry is the only profession in the world in which the Message and the Messenger are inseparable." There are vocations in which workmanship may be in almost inverse ratio to the character of the worker. Dissolute genius may be artistically creative. There is a workmanship which remains what it is, apart from the test of any ethical standard. But in the cure of souls, the character basis of personality is a determinant. The nexus here between the man and his ministry is a vital one. "If a man therefore purge himself . . . he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, meet for the Master's use prepared unto every good work."

We shall possibly all admit that some of the graver perils of ministry cluster about the temptation to neglect this more "intensive" culture of our vocation. "While thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone!" A minister is busy here and there, and some, almost imperceptible, loss is more or less apparent:—a withering of moral tone, a certain perishing of spiritual power: the "quality" of our ministry is strained: the level of our spiritual receptiveness becomes low, and we are aware of a certain powerlessness to communicate anything. It has been truly said that the secret of the preacher's power is in "the presence of the life of God in his own soul, and the ability to communicate that life to others." Sylvester Horne in one of his letters wrote: "The fruit of our work on others depends upon the fruit of God's work on us." The "increase" of our ministry has its rise in the heart and soul of the preacher himself. There is the testimony of a Master in Israel. Dr. Maclaren was wont to say:—"I have always found that my own comfort and efficiency in preaching have been in direct proportion to the frequency and depth of my daily communion with God. I know of no other way in which we can do our work, but in quiet fellowship with Him."

But while we readily admit the claim and value of the

spiritual culture of the "inner life," the problem for the minister is always, how, amid a plethora of calls and tasks, to give time and attention to such culture. Perhaps the first requirement is to settle in our own minds the positive value and supremacy of character for ministry, the utility, power, and real worth of personal influence. Personality—and I use the term in quite a non-psychological sense—as an instrument in ministry can be trained and cultivated, and has a range of influence all its own. Mr. Chesterton says in his biography of Browning that the poet believed that to "every man that lived upon this earth had been given a definite and peculiar confidence of God." We are more than persons. Each has a power hidden somewhere of "personality"—a potential genius of personality. According to the New Testament the best personality is made. In Christ persons became personalities. Our Lord did not look for men and women who were specially gifted and endowed. A person, an ordinary person, was enough. Whatever the talents or talent, each had the power of doubling. Dr. Burroughs, in a suggestive chapter in one of his books, reminds us that our poverty in moral and spiritual leadership is due to the paucity of personalities. We have the persons, and we need the personalities. We could meet the need if men and women would consent to be made by Jesus Christ. He quotes the saying of George Macdonald:—"If men would but believe that they are in process of creation, and consent to be made!"

We are apt to put the balance of emphasis on work, on something accomplished, something done, and leave the potent factor of personality in ministry to take care of itself. A facetious tramway conductor asked me some time ago how I would like to earn my living. There was at least a distorted conception in the laughing rebuke, that to be a minister was to be something more than a man with a job. Underneath the "soft impeachment" there was the recognition, of a sort, that my vocation was not exhausted in terms of toil. The Christian ministry is life at a certain level of life, at a certain level of character and personality. There is something other than work which is ministry, and great ministry, too. This is not to minimise in the least the necessity for stern and unbending labour. It was the fragrance of the alabaster cruse of ointment that filled the room, not its costliness. The costly box was but the medium of something else, something intangible and priceless. Some few of our sermons are remembered, *as sermons*. But there is a sense in which they may *all* be remembered, "a sense sublime of something far more deeply interfused," something that lives on, and is interwoven in the hearts and lives of the flock of God. Dr. Stalker, in his book, *The Preacher and His Models*, quotes the

estimate of a professor on the work of the minister. This professor was reputed the most severely scientific of the staff, and it was expected that he would indulge in a scathing rebuke of the weakness of ministers, or deliver a strong exhortation to study. Dr. Stalker says: "We listened to a conception of the ministry which had scarcely occurred to any of us before. The Professor declared that the great purpose for which a minister is settled in a Church, is not to cultivate scholarship, or to visit the people during the week, or even to preach to them on Sunday, but to live among them as a good man, whose mere presence is a demonstration which cannot be gainsaid, that there is a life possible on earth which is fed from no earthly source, and that the things spoken of in Church on Sundays are realities." A minister is apt to get caught in the very machinery which, with the best intention, he sets going to increase the scope of his ministry. A diary which is all engagements, and no blanks, may bring on Sunday impotence. Robert Hall, I believe, is credited with the saying that when the devil sees that a minister is likely to be useful in the Church, his way of disposing of him is to get on his back, and ride him to death with engagements.

There is a strong urge from without to-day to the culture and spiritual equipment of our own manhood. The moral victories of character are at a discount in an age where life moves with "the vibration of a cinematograph." We can all blame the "traffic"; but can we do anything to arrest it, to make it move more safely, with less danger to soul and body? If the streets are congested to-day, so are those roads and avenues that lead in to life. Mr. Filson Young has been telling us that "people are losing or have lost, the power of resting, and life is becoming less fertile of those fruits which a more placid generation so richly harvested." We can run, but we cannot rest—unless it be a brief stop for a further supply of petrol! Our triumphs in the realm of mechanical locomotion are far ahead of our command of the more intricate and delicate machinery of personality. We are conquering distance, an achievement which has its value, no doubt, if our sense of moral values be not lost. "Greater is he that ruleth his own spirit than he that taketh a city." And part of our Christian ministry to-day is to speak through disciplined and controlled personality and character, to reveal the harvests of the quiet eye, and to show that there is a type of life capable of using wisely the rich and complex civilization of our time.

The mysticism of another day may not be our sign-post for to-day. We may be justly doubtful about a virtue that has not been put into practice. Wherever our "secret place," it must open out on to the market place. "They shall go in and out and find pasture." We must shut to our own door, and keep it shut until

we can safely open it—so that we can hear “the bubbling of the springs that feed the world.” With the New Testament in our hands, and the Spirit of God as Guide, we can find “the green pastures and the still waters”—our own spiritual enrichment for our own peculiar ministry. It is somewhere “behind” and “within” that the real and abiding results of ministry are won. The weapons of our wonderful and varied warfare are spiritual.

ALLAN M. RITCHIE.

JOHN MILLER, of Hanley, in Dorset, was arrested on Sunday, 31 August, 1662, for teaching and preaching to thirty or forty people in the house of John Kingman at Britford, contrary to the King's proclamation. Both men refused to take the oaths of allegiance and supremacy. Their friends declared they believed Miller was a true minister. After eighteen weeks in prison, they petitioned for release, protesting loyalty, and pleading the Declaration of Breda. Miller is the man who died in 1694, Messenger of the General Baptists. In 1666 many similar cases came up at the Wilts. Quarter Sessions, also in 1671, when 2,000 people were said to have been at a conventicle in Brockerswood, North Bradley. In 1682 the jurymen of the hundred of Aldersbury refused to present a conventicle frequently held there. In 1689 twenty places were certified to Quarter Sessions for Protestant dissenting worship.

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ANNE COOPER of Alington was presented to Quarter Sessions in Wilts. for not coming to church. John Rede, (colonel, of Idmiston) wrote to the clerk of the peace to have her name struck out; she was a godly woman, delighting to hear the truth by whomsoever it was delivered in the fear of the Lord, and usually took all opportunities to hear such as were enabled by the Spirit of Truth to make known what they had received of the Lord.

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SAMUEL OATES, 29 June, 1646. This day I held against Oates the Anabaptist, morning and afternoon. Argument: that they had no ministry, and that particular Christians out of office had no power to send ministers out to preach. He confessed it, and held only to do what he did as a disciple; I showed him it was contrary to scripture. Our discourse was without passion. The man boldly continued in town till Wednesday, exercising all three days. *Diary of Ralph Josselin*, vicar of Earles Colne, Essex: Royal Historical Society, 1908.