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## PASTORAL VISITATION.

AT Rawdon College in 1880 when, as a boy still in my teens, I sought admission there, I heard Hugh Stowell Brown give the annual address to the students. The subject was Pastoral Visitation. He spoke for an hour. Two things made an impression on my youthful mind. One was that one of the great men of his generation, and a preacher of no common power, should choose such a subject for his address, the other, that he said that he had already walked more than forty thousand miles in Liverpool streets in fulfilment of that side of pastoral duty.

I sometimes wonder what are the thoughts and feelings with which the students of to-day face this aspect of their work. I will confess that to me it was so forbidding as to inspire thoughts of revolt and feelings of trepidation not far from panic. What should I say? What in the world could I talk about? Students in those far off Victorian days were sometimes shy and even timid. They did not shoot out of college like rockets with tails of dazzling degrees flashing behind them. But they had embryonic principals, known as presidents, who told them that they could not be pastors in any true measure unless they were diligent in this part of their work, and some of us were unsophisticated enough to believe that they knew what they were talking about, and to make up our minds to do and die.

In my case the providence that shapes our beginnings as well as our ends, ordained that I should start far in the North,

where ministers announced from the pulpit each Sunday the names of the streets or districts in which they would visit during the week. It was a Presbyterian habit, but it seemed to me susceptible of Baptist uses. So, being adept at plagiarism, I used it in my own pulpit, and in every one of the too numerous pastorates of a chequered ministerial career, very few Sundays went by without an announcement that two and sometimes three afternoons a week would be devoted to this work.

The work itself is a discipline of immense value to the man who undertakes it. For one thing it keeps his nose to the grindstone, a most desirable regimen for one who has no office hours, and who, since he often has more to do than he can accomplish, is apt to slip into the habit of doing less than he ought. Moreover, if he is one of those who have some aptitude for popular speech it saves him from yielding to the temptation that assails him, and now more than ever, to imagine that he is making full proof of his ministry and serving his people by spending a couple of afternoons and evenings per week in serving other churches, incidentally adding to his own income by doing so. I speak from personal experience, and a very humbling experience it was, when I say that it is possible for us ministers to grow as keen on money making as any business man, and to yield to impatience, and even to neglect of our own job, when invitations to what we persuade ourselves is enlarged usefulness clash with the regular and faithful performance of pastoral duty. If a man who knew and loved me were to say that my times of widest service to others were those of least usefulness to my own people I dare not contradict him. I cannot resist the impression that we should not suffer much if we had fewer extensive and many more intensive ministries than we possess. Scratching the soil never produces rich crops. Underfed sheep do not provide the best mutton or the finest wool in the spiritual realm any more than they do in the animal.

The first round of visitation, undertaken in fear and trembling, probably proves unexpectedly easy and delightful. The welcome given in almost every home is unaffectedly warm. Curiosity may be an element of it, and hope, pathetic hope, assuredly is. It is in their homes our people find us out, and discover whether we are the sort of man who can minister the help for which they secretly long. Before the round is com-

pleted dread has died a natural death; if a minister wants to learn how kind most people are and what a warm welcome they carry in their hearts for him let him visit them in their own homes.

But he must do so as their minister. What has been recently described, not very happily, as "pious loafing, often called visiting" is, of course, worse than useless. I question whether much of it exists. The man who takes this side of pastoral service seriously soon discovers its perils, but they are perils rather of impiety than of its opposite. For instance there is the problem of conversation. Our Lord has something serious to say about *argon* words—*argon* is the term He uses—and the minister is neither prig nor fool if the dread of being confronted with them at last haunts him as he sets out on a round of visits among his people. The old Scottish diet of visitation would, I suppose, be regarded in most quarters as a plague to-day. Our peril lies at the opposite extreme—just to go to a house and talk about anything that turns up. Obviously that wastes the time both of visitor and visited. We go to our people's homes to minister to them in a more intimate and personal fashion than is possible in the pulpit. That is our high calling. It is also one of our most arduous and exacting tasks.

To begin with it demands of us that we give some thought and study to its adequate performance. A man has no more right to enter the homes of his people without due preparation than he has to enter his pulpit unprepared. Aimless talk about everything in general and nothing in particular is unworthy of both occasions. A visit as well as a sermon should have a definite aim.

This means preparation of the mind. Our people not only get to know us with some intimacy through our visiting, we also get to know them, and, if the work is done with regularity and system, we have not been long at it before we possess a sort of aerial photograph of our afternoon's excursion. The circumstances and characteristics of each home are clear in the mind's eye. In general, most of the people with whom we have to deal conform, of course with a host of minor differences, to the type that looks at men and things and life through the wrong end of the telescope. They see big things little, and

little things big. By no means always through any fault of theirs. So the minister's task is one of enlargement and uplifting and enrichment. It is not so much new ideas that they need as new eyes, or, at least, a new way of looking at familiar things, and a truer valuation of things that ought to be worth a great deal to them, and have come to be worth very little. How to render them this service each man must learn for himself. One plan I found of use was to have several subjects in mind that could be introduced into the conversation, sometimes deliberately, sometimes incidentally with no appearance of intention and not infrequently none of them used, since worthwhile topics sprang to speech without recourse to any in my mind. But they were there as a reserve that could be called upon as opportunity and necessity arose. The need of them diminished as intimacy and affection grew, and conversation found its channels in problems and in confidences stored up in anticipation of the visit to be paid. Of course the pulpit has its part to play in this good work, and often what was said there came up in the closer fellowship. But it is in the personal contact and the to and fro of face to face talk of a pastoral visit that most of it must be done, and can be done best.

This, however, is not all. The man himself must be prepared for visiting. There must be spiritual as well as mental equipment. It is not too much to say that some of the most searching and enriching experiences of a minister's life spring straight from his engagement in this work. If he takes it up as it should be undertaken he will not go far in it without knowing something of agony and more of searching of spirit over it. He will come to know what it is to leave a home humbled and abased, because he knows in his heart that he has missed an opportunity, which, had he been a better man, more like his Lord, he would have seized. It is in such valleys of humiliation and defeat that the Chief Shepherd comes to His servant's help, and teaches him some of His own secrets. For me there are two Scriptures which are inseparably associated with this experience. One is a word spoken by the glorious Christ to a minister of His: "These things saith He that openeth and no man shutteth, and shutteth and no man openeth." The other is the scene beside the well where the Christ, Who sat there tired and thirsty, asked for a drink of water, and in the woman's wonder at the request saw a door swing open through which He led her to deliverance from a

life of shame. Our business is not to worry about the opening or the shutting of the doors that lead into the unseen world. That is His business, and He will see to it. My part and yours is to live so close to Him that when the door swings open we may have the eyes to see the opening, and the courage to enter it. Dullness of soul may save a man from worrying about such matters, and so does vital fellowship with Him Who is the pattern pastoral visitor. In His realised fellowship our visit may suddenly become a great occasion. And there is always time between the ring of the bell and the opening of the door to get into touch with Him, Who makes His will known to those who want to know it.

Little more than the merest mention must suffice for several valuable aspects of this work, e.g. its relation to the conduct of public worship. I will only say that the man who knows his Bible and his people with any intimacy will never lack subjects for sermons, and something helpful and practical to say in them; while for the exacting task of prayer in the sanctuary he will gather an insight into human needs, and a depth and tenderness of intercession that can be gained nowhere else.

Only a momentary glance can be given to another side of it, viz. its range. The parochial idea of the Church of England is one that lays its grip on every really pastoral mind. I wonder how many of us ask why the geography of our place of worship is what it is. When we do we cannot believe, even if in the first instance it was selected to serve a Baptist group, that that exhausts its mission. The programme of visitation already mentioned may appear fairly large, but it only covers a fraction of the ground. One quite essential addition to it is the homes of our Sunday scholars, and, if we have them, Guides and Scouts. But that is not all. We have a responsibility for our neighbourhood. From what the Archbishop of Canterbury said not long ago Anglican clergy are forsaking parochial visitation for organisations and conferences. How well the cap fits us it is not mine to ask. But I speak that which I know, and testify that which I have done when I say that house to house visitation in a man's own neighbourhood, if steadily pursued, is by no means unfruitful of result. I cannot conceal the conviction that, if every Baptist minister in the country set to work in that way in his own vicinity and kept it up steadily for three years, there would be fewer empty pews in our churches, the

slump in our statistics would be arrested, and lives now groping in the dark would be led into the light of the Lord, and the blessedness of Christian fellowship, and the stir of God for which we pray would be felt in the land. "Conferences," said the Archbishop, "have their value, but beneath them there must be a patient, steadfast, pastoral care, a love of souls."

This brings me to a word I want especially to speak. Our work is, above all, a cure of souls. We can only touch the fringe of that service in the pulpit, or in the groups associated in the Church. For cures are personal work, and every cure calls for personal interest, personal knowledge, and personal sympathy. Consider the situation. In pulpit, meetings, class, we deal with people in a group, and in an environment which, though familiar, is not the most familiar and most loved. In their homes we meet them where they are at *home*, at ease, on their own ground, however narrow and however lowly it may be. Often we meet them there alone, or just mother and child. If we continue visiting, as we should, into the evening, we have the family, or husband and wife, or, if mother is busy, father by himself. All golden opportunities. Intimacy, freedom, the best sort of sharing, are in the very air. If we are called to task for something that was ill said, or something left undone that we should have done, God gives us one of the biggest opportunities for showing His spirit Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again, and, by His help, of changing grumbler into lover, and critic into friend.

A visit is a precious opportunity for personal evangelism. The man who supposes that his evangelistic mission is fulfilled when his sermon is ended is no true evangelist. General appeals, however personal, need following up, and the aisles of our churches, and the homes of our people are given us by God for doing so.

Nor is this all. The man who loves his people, and longs to serve them to his uttermost, and proves it by seeking them in their homes, and by his demeanour whenever he gets there, wins a responsive love that is amazing. Sacred confidences are reposed in him. Secrets of struggling souls are whispered in his ear. Cares and sorrows, fears and failures, tragic battle-fields, the whole range of human experience is unfolded before him. He comes to understand why the Confessional persists, and what is divine in it. There he is, face to face with a con-

gregation of one, a human soul in distress, a crying and yet silent need, and he is called of God and man to meet it. In a recent letter from a ministerial friend he told me of a wonderful sense of the presence of the risen Christ that came on him and on his people one Easter Day. That is a sense that comes upon a faithful pastor as he seeks to minister the grace of God to a troubled member of his flock. There is a personal need, and, if he be in touch, as he should be, with the Christ of Sychar's well, a touch of the same insight and the same loving power to deal with a sore need is given. He knows there is another in that room, in Whose light he sees light, and of Whose love he receives a share that he may use it in the saving of a soul from death and the covering of a multitude of sins. Is it any wonder that he goes home, not weary but refreshed, knowing a little of what his Lord knew, when He said, I have meat to eat that ye know not of?

Such experiences are not vouchsafed at every visit, or in every round of visits. The great thing is to have the hope and purpose of them in our hearts. If so, even incidents that seem untoward contribute to its fulfilment. I remember sitting in one of those skeleton chairs that had a strip of carpet for its back and another for its seat, sipping a cup of tea, when suddenly the chair gave way, and I lay drenched amid the ruins. Two boys were in the room, and I can see their look of consternation change to glee, as they beheld their parson roaring with laughter at his own discomfiture. That laughter helped to win those boys for Christ. One of them told me so, and I baptised them both a few months afterwards.

I sometimes hear men say, "I will do sick visiting, but I see no reason why I should waste my time in visiting all and sundry." My answer to that point of view is this; that the number of people in our congregations suffering from bodily ailments is a mere fraction of the number of the spiritually sick, and, if it is the pastor's job to do the lesser work, it is infinitely more important not to neglect the bigger, the more urgent, and the far harder task.

In "A Parson's Job" Archdeacon Hunter, Anglican son of a Congregational minister, says: "The number of young clergy who think that people ought to come to them instead of their visiting the homes of the people, is become distressingly large." I wondered as I read it whether the writer was casting a side-

long glance at what are known as clinics, carried on often in vestries by parsons who practise psycho-analysis, and sometimes, I am credibly informed, charge fees like a Harley Street consultant. Whether the Archdeacon did so or not, this may be said, and said with emphasis, psycho-analysis can never be the substitute for pastoral duty, and the consultant physician is not the true counterpart of the minister of a Christian church. If there is any analogy between the doctor's calling and ours, it is found in the local practitioner who goes to his patients' homes and seeks to heal them there. A minister who loves his people, and regards his pastoral office as his high calling in Christ, unconsciously grows adept at something not far removed from psycho-analysis. But he calls it by a simpler and more human name. It is love and sympathy and the insight they inspire. It is not he who does the probing; it is they who do the revealing, because they love him, and know that he loves them, and will regard their confidences as a sacred trust. They are not cases in his diary. It is not professional interest that regards a human soul as a subject for dissection such as is applied to bodies in a surgical school, but a shepherdly heart and a longing to lead them into the fullness of the blessing of Christ; and his labour is not in vain in the Lord.

It is laborious! Of course it is. It takes time! Of course, and a great deal of it; but it is well spent time, and has a rich reward. It means the sacrifice of personal preference, and of hours that might be spent in more congenial, but not such profitable, study. For there are books worth reading besides those upon our study shelves. "The proper study of mankind is man." "Your face, my child, is as a book where man may read strange matters." Next to knowing our Lord we ministers should know the folk He has entrusted to our charge. As I recall glimpses of Him in homes of old, and think of unrecorded talks at Bethany, of salvation brought to a home at Jericho to which He invited Himself to supper, and of many more, where fevers of the soul were soothed, and sin-stained lives were cleansed, and others who had fallen by the way were lifted up, I have a sort of assurance, born of gratitude and praise to Him that, if ever it has been mine to set my foot in the print of His steps, it has been when, in His name, and with some longing in my heart caught from His own, I have gone into my people's homes, and sought to serve Him there.

JAMES MURSELL.



CHRIST'S SAVING MESSAGE :  
 OBSTACLES TO ITS ACCEPTANCE.

(Continued)

A GREATER difficulty than that which confronts man when he is brought face to face with the vastness of the universe, is that which he experiences when he faces the universe, which in its continual procession of cause and effect seems to leave no room for man's, or indeed, God's freedom. In such a universe many feel the futility of prayer and the impossibility of miracle. Here undoubtedly we touch upon a difficulty and an obstacle to the experience of Christ's saving power, which is felt not only by many laymen, but by ministers as well, and the latter are as likely, perhaps more likely, to be adversely affected by the scientific outlook than the laymen, because it is their special business to keep abreast of knowledge that vitally affects the religious situation. And if in ministers there are intellectual obstacles to the acceptance and experience of Christ's saving truth, there is less likelihood of that truth reaching the minds and hearts of those to whom we preach. If we really believe that intellectual honesty rules out the value of prayer and makes miracle an absurdity, then these two will pass out of our religious life, and our religious life will in reality be at an end, for prayer is the very basis of all true religion, and miracle means that God is not a prisoner in His own world, for if He is, His succour is a figment of our imagination. Is belief in the efficacy of prayer and in miracle inconsistent with intellectual honesty?

There is a very great anxiety on the part of thoughtful religious people to be on good terms with science, so to speak, and to fear its conclusions. Yet it should ever be remembered that science deals with the phenomenal world, and not with what is behind it and is its ground: science can never speak with authority concerning the nature of ultimate reality. Strictly speaking it is concerned with what is: it cannot trace the ultimate origin of events, nor can it dogmatise in regard to what is possible, or shall we say what is not possible. Again religion has no right to dogmatise on the phenomenal world: that is the province of science. Religion is concerned with the supernatural world, and no valid conclusions of science can affect what religion, keeping strictly to its own sphere, reveals. It cannot be too often stated that spiritual things are spiritually discerned, yet we must not speak thus to cover up our own

ignorance or to support statements the evidence of which is to be looked for in the realm of scientific facts. The conflict between science and religion has arisen because religious people have pronounced judgments on matters concerning which science alone is able to judge, and scientists have pronounced judgments on matters concerning which religion is the sole judge.

The intellectual difficulties in regard to prayer and miracle, into which we cannot enter in detail, arise from the suspicion that science has made it clear that we live in a world of law where every event is conditioned by what went before it, and then there is no room at all for the Divine initiative. Scientific determinism makes prayer appear childish and miracle impossible.

If Nature is a closed system such as scientific determinism maintains, then that is an end of religion, of any belief in a personal God, and in prayer or miracle. But isn't scientific determinism refuted once for all when no man has ever lived by that faith? If our consciousness of freedom is an illusion, why trouble about anything? If we are deluded concerning the deep faith on the basis of which we act every day that we are free beings, a faith without which life would be utterly impossible, is there anything that we can trust? In our personal life we are conscious of freedom to do things that without our volition would remain undone, yet we do not imagine that this freedom makes it impossible for us to believe in the orderliness of Nature. Let me quote from Dr. H. H. Farmer's\* latest book, to which I owe much as far the first part of this paper is concerned:—

“It may be well to point out that in our everyday life we are quite familiar with the idea of a volitional initiation of events which without that volition would not happen; yet it never enters our heads to suppose that the work of science is thereby stultified and thrown into confusion. If I pick up a stone and throw it, it seems self-evident to me at the moment of the act, that had I not done so the stone would have remained where it was; and it seems equally self-evident that a scientist could do much in examining from his angle what has taken place—the relation of the speed and weight of the stone to the path it describes, etc.—and in predicting what will take place if I again interfere and throw other stones, provided that the general environment, so far as it concerns the stones and their flight, remains constant. Man's

\*“The World and God,” by H. H. Farmer (Nisbet, 10s. 6d.).

whole life is built up on this awareness that he is related to a system which is permanent enough to be resolved into regularities, and plastic enough to leave at least some room for his own will to shape it to his own ends." (Pp. 146/7.)

We see a man in distress and we go to his help at his call. *There* is prayer in action, and *there* is the needed succour given. We have not interfered with Nature's laws, yet the prayer has been answered and the needed help given. Can we believe that God is less free than we are, in the universe that He Himself has created, to succour those who call upon Him? True it is that in the case of our human help we can trace the origin of the succour, and the various steps that led up to the point when help was given; but in the case of God we cannot trace what happens when God wills to succour one of His creatures: all we can see is that help is given and that without interfering with Nature's laws or the orderliness of the world. God's will can initiate movements just as our wills can; but the fact that we cannot trace the process that follows that willing which results in succour being given, makes it always possible for anyone to say that there was no direct movement on the part of God but only a chapter of coincidences. Answers to prayer and miracles can never be proved scientifically—that is we can never demonstrate that God by direct volition has come to the succour of His creatures—they are known only to the religious soul who has trusted in God and found Him coming to him with succouring aid.

Our faith, derived from Christ Himself, is that God is our Father, able and willing to help us and that He answers our prayers, and no belief in a personal God is possible unless that faith is ours. Religious folk, who have prayed to God in faith and expected answers have been assured that their faith has been justified, even although it was incapable of scientific proof, yet there was the inner witness to the faithfulness of God and to His love and care for His children. Yet the truest souls have always realised that they must leave to God's infinite wisdom whether to give or withhold, and that all true prayer has as its basis reconciliation to God's will.

Another intellectual difficulty that causes grave concern to many religious folk is the assertion made by some to-day that religious experience itself is an illusion, that what the religious man experiences has no foundation in reality. Our belief in God, we are told, is due to a desire for a Protector and so we

project our desire on to the universe and posit a God to satisfy it. Our belief that we are in contact with a reality beyond ourselves is due to self-suggestion or self-hypnotism. Here again we must maintain that psychology deals only with the phenomena of mind: it has no right to express itself on that which lies behind the phenomena which it is considering. It cannot and has no right to dogmatise on the nature of ultimate reality, and while it may prove that the so-called religious experiences of some are due to phantasies (as indeed they are) it cannot prove that all religious experience is of the same kind; and if, as some have declared, religion has come about by man's desire to deal adequately with his world, and that religion has therefore proved useful and essential, it is difficult to see why a falsehood should be better able to help us in the struggle against difficulties than the truth.

An endeavour to clear away intellectual difficulties from the minds of those who come to us for spiritual help is a task worth while, and the sympathy created by that effort, and the help we are able to give, does make it easier for Christ's saving message to reach the hearts of men, for if men feel that intellectual honesty makes it impossible for them to receive Christ's message, than we can do nothing until we can make them see that intellectual honesty and that message are not contradictory.

It may be that some of you are thinking that we are creating these intellectual difficulties for men, and that they are never met with; but some meet them, and they come from thoughtful people who are most worth winning for Christ because of the service they can render when once they are His. And, even if we do not often meet with those who raise these intellectual difficulties, we ought to be able to deal with them, so as to be able to give a reason for the faith that is in us.

Yet we must ever realise that religion has its roots not in the intellect but in the spirit, that it is due to the impact of the spiritual world upon our spirits; and the faith that that impact creates is as reliable, indeed more reliable than the impact of the phenomenal world upon our senses. We walk by faith, not by sight; but that does not mean by something less reliable than sight, but by the conviction of the reality of things unseen, and if we cannot prove our faith to the satisfaction of science, we have no need to abandon it—it is of the very nature of faith that it cannot be so proved—for it is justified in our experience, and we know whom we have believed.

II. But however necessary it is to endeavour to face the intellectual difficulties that are obstacles to the receiving of Christ's saving message, so that the inhibitions to the exercise of faith may be removed, these are not the most important obstacles that we have to face: more important, and more difficult to deal with, are the moral obstacles to faith.

We all know that however much electric power may be passing through a wire, we are perfectly safe in holding that live wire in our hand, provided we have a rubber glove on, or stand on a rubber mat or on some other insulating material. There might be enough power passing through the wire to drive a train, but we should not receive any of it because we were insulated. The saving power of Christ is everywhere about us; but so many, most, do not receive it because they insulate themselves so that it cannot reach them, and the insulation is insincerity.

Jesus considered this insincerity the greatest sin of which men could be guilty. Sins of the flesh, grievous as they are, were not those most condemned by Jesus. Hypocrisy, or insincerity, was the most terrible, because it veiled God's truth from men, and made it impossible for them to receive His saving power. It is that insincerity with which we have to deal if the saving message of Christ is to reach the hearts of men.

And first we must deal with it in ourselves, for we as ministers are not free from it, and until we have dealt faithfully with ourselves in the presence of Christ, we cannot deal faithfully with others. Until we have seen the beam in our own eye and cast it out, we shall not be able to see the mote in our brother's eye and pull it out. No one of us who has submitted to any searching examination can have failed to see that the main obstacle to our receiving Christ's saving power is our own insincerity.

There are two kinds of insincerity with which I want to deal, conscious and unconscious, both of which are obstacles to the receiving of Christ's saving power.

There is conscious insincerity in us all: we see the right and are disobedient to it; God speaks to us and we ignore Him because we find it convenient to do so. We see, for example, what we ought to say to people, and we are afraid to offend them for some selfish reason. We think more of our ministerial respectability than of doing God's will. We esteem the treasures

of Egypt greater riches than the reproach of Christ. Often we are more concerned with the outward success of the Church than with loyalty to God. I do not say they are always incompatible—God forbid—but sometimes at least they are. I heard one of our very prominent Baptist ministers say some time ago that he was turned out of his church because he was loyal to his convictions. We know that during the war, the Pacifist minister wasn't wanted in the churches. (I am not now pronouncing a judgment on what should be the Christian attitude to war). But when so much is at stake how often we are consciously insincere. Yet only as we overcome this conscious insincerity can we experience Christ's saving power to the full. Our outward success or the lack of it is nothing if we are loyal to Christ as far as we know how to be.

And if we meet with conscious insincerity in ourselves, we shall meet with it in others, and only in so far as we have conquered it in ourselves by the grace of God shall we be in a position to help others to conquer it. We cannot lead others to victory, if in the secret places of the spirit we are continually defeated ourselves. We must somehow or other get people to face themselves, and face their insincerities and deal with them if Christ's saving message is to come to them with power. We almost seem to be in a vicious circle: we cannot be sincere until Christ's saving message reaches us; and Christ's saving message cannot reach us until we are sincere; but no one is so blinded to truth that he is utterly and completely insincere; and the will to sincerity is the only essential to its achievement. The pure in heart shall see God, and purity in this sense is a willingness to face ourselves as we are in the presence of Christ, i.e. an utter sincerity. The Oxford Group Movement, whatever its weaknesses, has at least tried to bring a larger sincerity into the lives of men, and with that sincerity there has been discovered by many the saving power of Christ, a sense of liberation and freedom never before experienced.

Yet, when we have dealt with our conscious insincerities we have not completed our task; for we are still left with our unconscious insincerities. No one who has endeavoured to bring his unconscious life into the light of his conscious criticism can doubt that "the heart is deceitful above all things." It is because we are open to so many self-deceptions that so often Christ's saving truth cannot reach us, for we ward it off by some insulating insincerity.

Have we any right to speak of unconscious insincerities? If they are unconscious are they insincerities? This we may say, that many insincerities that are not now discernible by us are the result of past conscious insincerities; and there are other unconscious insincerities which are not of this kind but are determined by factors in our training and our environment for which we are not responsible, but they nevertheless powerfully influence our conscious life and make it impossible for us to see things as they really are and ourselves as we are in the sight of God.

Jesus seems constantly to try to bring men to face their unconscious insincerities. The man who asked Him whether few should be saved was told: "Strive to enter in at the straight gate." He was concerned with an interesting question when he ought to have been concerned with moral effort. Another was apparently very concerned that he should get justice from his brother. He said to Jesus: "Bid my brother that he divide the inheritance with me." But Jesus saw that it wasn't justice that he was concerned about, but that his heart was covetous. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees because they were very concerned about matters of very little importance and were ignoring the big things; straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel; and we shall find plenty of people doing that to-day.

The reasons for doing things or for not doing things are not always what they seem to be. Our motives may be entirely hidden from us, and we may think we are acting from perfectly pure motives when we are being determined by very selfish ones. Why is it, for example, that so little is accomplished by argument in Parliament, in the pulpit, or in private conversation? It is because unconscious insincerities obscure moral vision. The arguments may be very clever, they may be very logical, they may be true, but they fail to convince because unconscious insincerity wards off the truth of them from the soul.

Many a man will bring forward arguments why he cannot believe in Christ: they may be arguments full of intellectual subtlety and logically consistent. Even if you are able to deal quite frankly and powerfully with the intellectual difficulties, he will find some further intellectual argument to justify his position, and you may argue until both of you are tired, but without result. Argument is just a smoke-screen to hide the truth from his own soul and save him from facing it. The insincerity may be quite unconscious, but it is that that is

insulating his soul from the saving truth of Christ. A young man went to a psychologist and declared his atheism; he brought forth the most brilliant arguments to justify his unbelief; but the psycho-analyst discovered a moral root to his unbelief, the hidden insincerity that he was seeking to justify by argument. There is perhaps more than meets the eye in the words concerning the lawyer who asked what he should do to inherit eternal life: "But he willing to justify himself" said unto Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?" Did Jesus seek to unmask the hidden insincerity that was making the lawyer ask but another question, by his parable of the Good Samaritan, and compel him in effect to answer the question that would leave no further room for his insincerity?

How many people go to church from wrong motives? They think they are going because they want to worship God; but in reality they are going from motives of custom, respectability or fear. How many people's lives, outwardly respectable, are motived by conventionality, from desire to conform to accepted standards, from motives of fear and the desire to be well thought of by those around, and not by a vision of the truth and a love for it? How many do Christian work from

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## THE MINISTER'S RESPONSIBILITY FOR SUNDAY SCHOOL WORK

The Sunday School is the most promising part of the Church Organisation, and Ministers as well as Teachers and Officers should do everything possible to make their work for the children effective.

One of the best ways of doing this is to read "The New Chronicle of Christian Education," the only weekly journal devoted to Sunday School work. It is indispensable to the progressive worker. Send a list of the names and addresses of your staff to the Editor at 57 & 59, Ludgate Hill, London, E.C.4, and free specimen copies will be sent to each of them.

### THE NEW CHRONICLE OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Edited by SYDNEY C. LUCKER



hidden motives of pride and self-assertion, not because they have any real desire to serve God and extend His kingdom?

These hidden insincerities make it impossible for the saving power of Christ to get through to the hearts of men: they insulate the soul. I can imagine some of you thinking, yes, but to try to deal with these hidden insincerities is to give way to morbid introspection. Yet it is only morbid if we believe we can't be cured of them and continually dwell on them; but it is not morbid to ask God to let us see just where we are failing and the reason for our failure, and to help us to put things right. To face them ourselves in the presence of God, or to get help from anyone who can the better help us to understand our hidden motives is surely the right thing to do.

Then when we have faced our own hidden insincerities, we shall be the better able to deal with those of others. We shall be able to discern in ever so many ways that men and women are acting from wrong motives of which they are not conscious, but we can bring home to their hearts these hidden insincerities in our sermons, and sometimes in our private talks with them. Wherever we find real sincerity people will not object to be told of their unconscious insincerities, so long as they know that our desire is to help them, and that we really care for them. Yet such a revelation of their hidden insincerities is of no use unless they themselves see them, for it is only as we see things for ourselves that Christ's saving power is able to reach us and bring that inward freedom that is our right as children of God. Your vision will never bring emancipation to another: the vision must be his as well as yours.

This kind of work is very slow that we often want quicker results, and use all kinds of means to get them; but it is the only work that really lasts. It is the truth alone that can make us free; and we can't have emancipation in any other way.

ALEX. SMALL,

(Boreham Wood).

### JESUS, THE SUPREME TEACHER.

THE subject is too manifold in its aspects, too wide in its sweep, to allow of anything but a very inadequate and cursory survey. It is not only the teaching, but the Teacher also, that we have to consider; not only the many and far-flung branches, but the subtle ramifications of that underground system through which the vitality of the subject is drawn.

True teaching consists not only of matter but of method. It comprises personality as well as precept, expression as well as exposition. "Never man spake like this man" has probably more to do with the way He said things than with what He said. Note the leper who came to Him after the Sermon on the Mount. He does not say, "Lord, if you could you would make me clean," but the reverse, "If thou wilt thou *canst*"; He had seen more in Jesus than His words convey. He had discerned power beyond precept; he had recognised an effective personality behind the preaching.

What is the use of talking about the recovery of the Synoptic Jesus? Who shall ever reproduce for us the Jesus of history? Who represent Him to us? Who shall cast the first stone at Epstein? Our conceptions of Him are probably all equally imperfect and faulty. That is why the Reformers taught that we need the Holy Spirit's aid when we read the Bible in order to obtain even a glimmering of appreciative understanding.

Jesus does not merely bring us a word from God: He *is* the Word. Unlike all other teachers, who seek to direct the attention of their pupils away from themselves to the subject, He does the reverse. "*I am the truth, the light, the door.*" Christianity is not a string of abstract and almost platitudinous sentiments—The Fatherhood of God, the Brotherhood of man, social solidarity, ideals to which to hitch our wagons. We may clutch Christ's garment, and merely find it empty in our hands. The Gospel is no disembodied ethic; no mere collection of Christian terms and phrases. It is the Babe of Bethlehem's manger, the Man of Calvary's cross, the Christ who has left the Syrian stars to look down upon an empty tomb.

What built the early Church? Not the Synoptic Gospels, nor the Sermon on the Mount; they were not yet recorded nor circulated. Peter at Pentecost preached Jesus from the Psalms, Philip from Isaiah. The earliest Christian literature, the Epistles, affords us no opportunity to reconstruct the life and teaching of Jesus. The Apostles' Creed refers only to His cradle and His cross; "Born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate." Apparently, with naught but the three-fold weapon of the Incarnation, the Crucifixion and the Resurrection in its hands the Primitive Church went forth to conquer the world, and the might of God was in its arm.

To the attentive student it should be plain that the Synoptic Jesus had no message for, and no mission to, any but

the Jewish race. To His itinerant preachers He said, "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not, but go ye rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Salvation came to the house of Zacchæus because he was "a son of Abraham," and healing to the woman on the Sabbath because she was "a daughter of Abraham." To the Syro-Phœnician He said, "I am not come but to the lost sheep of the House of Israel." The Jews, well aware of this exclusiveness, based their plea for the Roman Centurion on the ground "he loveth *our nation*, and hath built us a synagogue." Study the journeys of Jesus, and see how studiously He avoided the great city of Tiberias, and other alienised communities in Palestine.

Consider carefully His great statement, "I have a baptism to be baptised with, and how am I straitened (limited, restricted, hindered) until it be accomplished!" He was straining to the cross all through that earthly ministry. How He was straitened! He could raise Lazarus from his tomb, but He could not raise him by the power of His resurrection. (No wonder He wept!) He could tell how a prodigal could have his soiled garments replaced; He could not tell the people how the sin-stained soul could stand before a God Whose eyes are too pure to behold iniquity!

But when Calvary is crossed, His bonds are loosed. He becomes the Imperative Christ rapidly organising His world-wide campaign: "Go, tell my disciples . . . . Hold me not . . . . Feed my sheep . . . . Tarry for power . . . . Ye are witnesses to the uttermost parts . . . . Go ye into all the world." Command crowds on command. Order presses on the heels of order, for the field is set, and the tireless legions are already on the march.

Why this exuberant interest in the Synoptic Jesus? Why this eager desire to return to the other side of the cross? Do we despise the consummating testimony of the Holy Ghost? We love those ever-blessed Gospel records, but they tell only of the way He went, not of the end He sought. If the life and teaching of Jesus in the days of His flesh were the all-important features of the Gospel He should have remained with us longer than those brief three years. And what is more, His teaching would have been more systematic and designed. For observe, setting aside for the moment the Sermon on the Mount, how little of it is intentional and spontaneous, how much incidental,

episodic and casual. Those great utterances of His on the relation of Church and state, divorce, forgiveness of sins, and others, were answers to questions casually addressed to Him by the way. Upon what threads their existence hangs!

Consider the origin of the Parable of the Good Samaritan. The lawyer had answered rightly, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and mind and soul and strength, and thy neighbour as thyself." But wishing further enlightenment he asked—not "And who is God, this God whom I must love with all my heart and mind and soul and strength?" (What a parable we might then have had!) He probably thought he knew all that was necessary about that but—"Who is my neighbour?" And Jesus told him in this most beautiful story, but there is not a word about God in it. He received what he asked for, no more.

But, at least, there is the Sermon on the Mount. Let us accept it as a sustained discourse. How are we to regard these unqualified demands? What of their relevancy and practicable application to ordinary life? "Oh, divine impossibilities," cries Professor Whitehead, our greatest present-day philosopher. And Brunner comments, "The man who regards them as impossibilities is probably nearer the truth than he who would incorporate them in a code of human morality." But what then? Are we to water down the absolute into the relative, and judge these unqualified commands by the wavering standard of expediency? Not so! For we are here listening to One who can say no less, though it be all beyond our human reach. For this is God's mind, His viewpoint, His requirement of us, His unlowered standard, and not merely ideals after which we are to laboriously and vainly strive. This is what God is, and not what we ought to be. Can we ever, in this life, be perfect as He is perfect? Was it not the same with the Jewish law, hopelessly unattainable, because of the weakness of the flesh? Shall I attain this radiant rivalry with Him? I, who am fallen in the night!

Consider, lastly, the eschatological teaching of Jesus; the battleground of all the Titans of Gospel exposition, the aspect of the subject which dominates all others. For Jesus never sees anything except in the light of the Last Things. To lose sight of that fact is to miss our way hopelessly. Dean Inge in his latest book, "The Gate of Life," has dismissed, fully and finally, those discourses of Jesus on the Second Coming, because it did

not occur during the life-time of the first Christian generation. Let us hope that patience and further reflection may yet lead him to revise that decision. For if Relativity teaches us anything it is the phantasmal nature of time. Not interval but relation of events alone is real. "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years." The eternal and the temporal lines cross only in one point, and all Divine revelation must be compressed within it. That is why, in the teaching of Jesus, the soon and the late, the near and the distant, the here and the there meet together, and time and space are but human categories which are to perish with the using. The Sermon on the Mount is the trumpet-call which summonses us to the Last Judgment; eternal life is that by which we call Jesus, Lord; the cross is the place where all the generations gather, and where earth and time and death have lost their sting.

JAMES F. TAVINER,  
(Spurgeon's College).

#### THE MINISTER'S BOOKSHELF.

WE give the first place to a small, but useful, book, by one of our own most esteemed members, J. R. Edwards, of Brixton. It is called *Tell Everybody*, and is published by the Kingsgate Press at 2s. 6d. Jack Edwards has the best collection of stories about children and for children of any man in the Baptist Ministry, and it is cause for regret that he has not published some of these long ere this. But better late than never. In this volume he reveals the art of the story teller at its best and his twenty-two chapters provide material for more than twenty-two children's talks. I have tried most of his stories on my own children both at home and in the church, and they are unanimous in their verdict: "First Class." I hope further volumes will follow in quick succession.

More than thirty years ago, Dr. Newman Smyth, of *Christian Ethics* fame, wrote a book entitled, *Through Science to Faith*. Since that day much water has flowed under the bridge, and many changes have taken place in the realms both of science and of theology. Dr. Smyth's distinguished son, Dr. Nathan A. Smyth, has carried on the "tradition" created by his father and has just published *Through Science to God* (MacMillan's, 10s. 6d.). He shows how the revolutionary changes of the present century in the various depart-

ments of human investigation show us the way into the spiritual realm. His thesis is that through the proper understanding and use "of the present basic working hypothesis of science, we may be able to cease struggling with remote abstractions and apprehend an immediately real and partly knowable God." This thesis he develops with scholarship, imagination and force, and has produced a book for which every thinking minister will be grateful.

*Scientific Progress* is the title of a very interesting book containing the Halley Stewart Lectures for 1935 (Allen and Unwin, 7s. 6d.). There are six chapters, dealing with the various sciences, each one written by an outstanding authority. Sir James Jeans writes on "Man and the Universe," Sir William Bragg on "The Progress of Physical Science," Prof. J. B. S. Haldane on "Human Genetics and Human Ideals," and Prof. Julian Huxley on "Science and its Relation to Human Needs." There are two other chapters, one dealing with electricity and the other with medical science, their writers being respectively Prof. E. V. Appleton and Prof. E. Mellanby. These six names are amongst the greatest in English scientific circles and are a sufficient guarantee of the high quality of the book. The volume, of course, is not theological, but it is nevertheless not to be neglected by those who, despite their prime interest in theology, require and want to know something of the great world in which God's glory shines forth.

Dr. A. Herbert Gray has now quite a number of books to his credit, but he has not yet (if he ever does) over-written himself. His latest book is *The One Way of Peace* (Hodder and Stoughton, 2s. 6d.), and is a most interesting survey of the present situation as it impinges upon our faith and conduct as Christians. He speaks of himself as "an older man" who tries to see the problems of the present hour from the standpoint of the younger generation, and his wise and sage counsel, together with his quiet intensity of Christian conviction, makes what he says well worth reading and pondering. He is, of course, an unshamed pacifist, but even those who cannot share his views on this burning question will rejoice in his sane approach to the present world-situation.

A book which every Christian should study is *The Power of Non-Violence*, by Richard B. Gregg (George Routledge, 5s.). It is a most remarkable volume, and is the outcome of much

research on the part of the writer. Mr. Gregg's theme is that non-violence (passive-resistance) is a practical proposition, despite the scepticism and ridicule with which it is generally met. He calls it "moral jiu-jitsu" and shows by reference to the methods of Gandhi and to the testimony of biologists, psychologists, philosophers and sociologists, that absolute pacifism is a workable attitude in the life both of men and nations, and that its widespread adoption would mean the salvation of the world. It is a book that gives one furious to think, and should be neglected by no Baptist Minister.

*Jack, Jill, and God* is the title of a most unusual book addressed to the present generation which, so the author shows, is almost entirely out of touch with religion. The author is R. A. Edwards and the book is published by Methuen at 5s. Mr. Edwards approaches the problems of religious belief in a most original way, and discusses such important topics as belief in God, the present position with regard to the Bible, the meaning of the Church, the nature of sex, the significance of Calvary, and so on. It is the kind of book to put into the hands of our thoughtful young people, and to discuss sympathetically with them.

Spain is very much in our thoughts and prayers at the present time, and we are all wondering how things will turn out in that unhappy country. Because of this *In Darkest Spain* will be of interest to many, especially as it tells in a most fascinating manner first-hand of the adventures of the author, Rev. Alexander Stewart, a Baptist minister. It is published by Marshall, Morgan and Scott at 3s. 6d.

Another of our members to give us a book is Rev. P. N. Bushill, B.A. It is called *The Best Story Book in the World* (Kingsgate Press, 1s. 6d.) and is quite off the beaten track. Its aim is to make Bible reading attractive to children, and it is likely to achieve that aim in those children into whose hands it is placed. But ministers will also find it suggestive in their preparation of "the children's portion."

One of the sacred memories of my life (if I may dare to refer to it) is seeing John Clifford lying dead in Dr. Shakespeare's room at the Church House. Only an hour or so before he had been translated in the Council Chamber, and a genuine

feeling of awe pervaded even the offices of the Baptist Union. What must it be to have known John Clifford intimately, and to be able to write inspiringly about him! That is the high privilege of Mr. Henry J. Cowell, Sub-Editor of the "Baptist Times." He has just issued (Kingsgate Press, 6d.) a fine little brochure entitled, *John Clifford as I knew Him*, in connection with the centenary celebrations of the great Baptist preacher's birth. It is an entrancing little booklet and shows—within its compass—Mr. Cowell's well-known skill as a delineator of character and teller of stories. It is not surprising that a second edition has been called for so soon after the first. It ought to be scattered throughout our churches, especially amongst our young people.

Though not sent for review, I should like to recommend the following, from first-hand knowledge. They are of different types, and do not all make a like appeal to everyone; but every one of them is well worth reading:—

(a) *What is the Faith?* by Principal Nathaniel Micklem, D.D. (Hodder and Stoughton, 3s. 6d.)—an attempt to set forth the essence of Christianity in terms of intelligent orthodoxy.

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(b) *Christian Morality*, by Dr. Hensley Henson, the Bishop of Durham (Clarendon Press, 12s. 6d.)—the Gifford Lectures for 1935-36, and of outstanding value to the Christian thinker.

(c) *Rebel Religion*, by Rev. B. C. Plowright, B.A., B.D., (Allenson's, 5s.)—a stimulating and thought-provoking effort to set forth the Christian reply to the challenge of Communism and Fascism.

(d) *The Great Galilean Returns*, by Dr. Henry Kendall Booth (Charles Scribner's Sons, 6s.)—a refreshing representation of the Social Message of Jesus.

(e) *Pentecost*, by J. I. Brice (Hodder and Stoughton, 3s. 6d.), and *He is Able*, by W. E. Sangster (Hodder and Stoughton, 5s.)—two books of the devotional type, but dealing with matters of supreme religious import. JOHN PITTS.

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