

Ministerial Problems, 1830.

THE following letter from the Rev. Isaac Mann, of Maze Pond, to the Rev. James Upton, of Blackfriars, written 110 years ago, surely reflects honour on both writer and recipient. The problems discussed are with us still, although one has been partly removed by the Sustentation and Superannuation Funds. Mann died the following year, and Upton within four years.

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46, Long Lane,
BERMONDSEY,
October 30th, 1830.

My dear Brother,

I have read the little book you put into my hands with great interest. Your flock, and your friends, will receive it as a useful *vade mecum*, and peruse it with profit when you are removed. The conduct of the Church over which you preside, in reference to your sons, is highly honourable to them, and, if possible, more so to yourself. Two or three things, relative to aged ministers, have painfully affected my own mind.

Many ministers of the Gospel do very tenaciously hold the possession of their pulpits, when they ought to resign them to others. In some cases, a man's perceptions fail most when turned inwardly upon himself. Christ is the object of his supreme regards, and has been his glory and joy for many, very many years. In the work of the ministry, the aged minister has found a thousand pleasures—and he is unwilling to quit his Master's service. All others perceive his incompetency, but here his sight is dim. In such a case, the friends of the good old man are filled with no little perplexity. He has outlived the friends of his youth—a new generation has sprung up, which only began to know him when falling into a state of dilapidation, and are but little prepared to appreciate their fathers' friend, of whom they see only the shadow. A painful desertion frequently follows; and he who conducted with great profit the edification, the worship of an overflowing congregation, lives to see the place where they assembled almost as dreary as a desert.

Some ministers, I fear, have had too great an anxiety to retain the emoluments arising from the discharge of pastoral duties, and have found them a temptation sufficiently powerful

to prevent their quitting the pulpit, when reduced to almost imbecility. Where such a corrupt principle has operated, the Christian ministry has been reproached, and the Church has been torn with division and strife.

In how many cases has an endowment on meeting-houses operated only to freeze and cause to perish the benevolence of the people, and to secure in the place an inefficient, and often unworthy minister. Our forefathers followed an unhallowed fashion which blasphemed the Christian liberality of succeeding ages. They endowed everything—churches, chapels, workhouses, hospitals—everything must be endowed. Church endowments have, in a thousand instances, been the prey of rapacity, the boon of indolence, and the curse of the Churches of Christ. Thrice happy will be the day, when men shall have hearts disposed to employ their surplus property, in effecting present good in the Church and in the world, and leave future exigencies to the liberality which Christianity, under the influence of its Divine Author, shall inspire.

But, alas! how many instances do we remember, in which the minister of the Gospel has himself been fully conscious of growing infirmities, and increasing incapacity for his work, and yet he could not retire. Through life he has had merely the means of present subsistence. A very small and a standing salary, with a constantly growing family, have most effectually prevented his providing for the claims of old age. If he retire, another must succeed him; his people cannot support two ministers; and to quit his pulpit would only be a preface to his being cast upon a parish. There can be no doubt, that this apprehension has deterred many an honourable minister from retiring, when he perceived that his strength for effective labour was exhausted. Happy will it be, if, in this day of growing benevolence, some year sufficient provision may be made to meet cases of such a truly distressing character.

Where ministers have thought it necessary to receive an assistant, an unhappy jealousy has been entertained of the growing popularity of that assistant. The venerable minister of Jesus Christ, forgets that his old friends are in heaven; that a younger generation cannot sympathize with him, as did the friends of his youth; and hence he becomes unhappy at an apparent neglect. Young ministers, in such situations, have need of great prudence and tenderness and affection. They may see in the conduct of a young congregation towards an aged minister, the very treatment they may expect, if ever placed in such circumstances. And whoever should for a moment seem to slight the venerable and enfeebled pastor, they will do well to manifest to him the most assiduous and Christian attentions.

You, my dear brother, are in a most enviable situation in these matters. You have passed your seventieth year, and yet your health is good, and your faculties are almost entirely unimpaired. You have led your flock onward in seeking an acceptable assistant, and they have treated you with a tenderness and delicacy above all praise. I do, yes, I must, regard your conduct in your old age, as reflecting high honour, both on yourself, your flock, and the cause of Christ.

But there are doubtless cases in which Churches have consulted with far less attention than was justly due, the taste, feelings, and judgment of their pastor, in the choice of an assistant. Your honoured deacons and fellow-members, here, however, act in concert, and with entire harmony. That harmony will, I trust, be for ever unbroken!

I have been led into this train of reflections by the small Volume before me. We have known and loved each other nearly twenty years, and I am truly thankful to see the evening of your life so calm and tranquil. I sympathize with you in your deep afflictions in one branch of your family. May God graciously support you, and deliver yours! In this way would I testify my unfeigned and unchanging esteem to my brethren in Church Street, and to their beloved pastor.

I am,

My dear brother,
very affectionately yours,
I. MANN.

REV. JAMES UPTON.

The City Temple, 1640-1940. The Tercentenary Commemoration History, by Albert Clare. (Independent Press, 5s. net.)

A great history worthily told. Much painstaking research has gone to the writing, and the early period at Anchor Lane and the Poultry, lives no less than modern days. We could dispense with many Victorian biographies for an adequate one of Joseph Parker (the same remark applies to Spurgeon), and we are glad that the author has devoted eight chapters to his remarkable personality. The present minister, in a preface, writes a lively defence of popular preaching—does he protest too much?

This book must be referred to by those who would write in the future of the Free Churches. How was it, with its nearly 300 pages and sixteen illustrations, produced for 5s.?