

MINISTERIAL DISAPPOINTMENT.¹

WE must premise that the sovereignty of our God is never to be forgotten; that "He worketh all things after the counsel of His own will"; that "there is a set time to favour Zion." Yet, nevertheless, there may be reasons for lack of success for which we may be ourselves responsible. Some of these I prefer to state in the form of questions.

1. Is it perfunctoriness that hinders? Are we content with mere routine? Have we relapsed into a cold, stiff formality, in church and out of it? Do we give our people any cause to say, "Our clergyman is merely going his round, and performing the requirements of his office"?

2. Is it prayer restrained and hurried over? Do we "wrestle with God" for ourselves, our family, and our flock? Without the Divine aid our work will be fruitless; without the Holy Spirit, no life and power; without His constant, realized presence we shall faint and fall by the way. Therefore we must pray much and often, and very specially for direction, consolation, realizing, appropriating faith, full confidence in His Covenant promises.

3. Is our preaching what it should be in matter and manner? Are we preaching "Jesus Christ and Him crucified"? Do we delight to dwell on the precious blood, and the power of the Holy Spirit alone to apply it to the heart? Are we discriminating, pointed, practical, exegetical, interesting, experimental, sympathetic? Are we illustrative and often parabolic in our discourses, not dealing in far-fetched comparisons, but in self-evident allusions? Do we declare what we know, and "testify that we have seen"? Do we steer between staleness and novelty? We must set out old truths in new lights. Do we keep back from fear of man anything we ought to express? Do we seek our messages from God Himself, or out of our own minds and fancies?

4. Is our pastoral visitation regular, prompt, kindly, affectionate, friendly as well as ministerial, indicative of knowledge of, and interest in, each lamb and sheep of our fold? "He calleth His sheep by name, and leadeth them out."

5. Are we consistent in our life and walk, and maintaining this as much as may be in our families? The world is very observant, all eyes are upon us, and these often undiscriminating. Close walk with God will give us a power, a secret influence, which nothing else will impart. Scholarship

¹ A paper read at a recent clerical meeting on "Ministerial Disappointment: What may be some of its Reasons and its Remedies?"

may teach, oratory delight, ingeniousness amuse, familiarity make popular, but a holy life will convince, attract, induce to imitation, instrumentally save.

II. I pass now to some remedies.

1. I begin with special prayer for each of our flock. Bishop Hamilton kept a map of his diocese before him, and went round it mentally, praying for each parish in turn. Canon Atherton when at Bedminster used to "pray his people out," as he called it, going on praying till each street and each household came to his ministrations. We should not think it sufficient as parents to pray for our children generally; we daily name them each before God; and are not our parishes but our larger families?

2. As it regards instruction, I have found diversity desirable. Sermons in courses, textual sermons, subject sermons, season sermons, none should be without special point. No one should go away saying, "All very true and good, but where was the point? Why that text or sermon to-day?" We may preach over people's heads, but sometimes there may be little to get into their heads or hearts at all!

3. Close self-examination. A clergyman once experienced a particular temptation which he had never known before. He conquered it by the Holy Spirit's grace. Shortly afterwards one of his people came to him, telling him of a precisely similar assault, and wishing to consult him about it. He replied, "If you had come to me a week ago I should have had but little to say, but recently I have personally passed through the same strange experience, which I had not done before, and now I can advise you."

4. Strife with Satan and his angels. These have a great deal to do with ourselves and our people, far more than we think; but we must remember "Dothan," and not be discouraged or dismayed. "More are with us than with them." His angels and the "Angel of the Covenant" Himself are on our side, and we are of the conquering tribe "Gad. A troop shall overcome Him, but He shall overcome at the last."

5. Realization that this is the dispensation of the Spirit—that we must go to Him specially to teach us, and open out to us His Holy Word, and tell us what to do and say, and unlock minds and hearts around us. This would seem to be, alas! a sadly forgotten truth. Our Evangelical forbears dwelt much on the work of the Holy Spirit.

Reverend and dear brethren, I have written all this with a full knowledge that I have penned, after all, little but mere truisms which may have frequently occurred to most of you. If they have, you will see that your thoughts have my own fraternal sympathy. If I have appeared presumptuous or

dictatorial, I crave your indulgence. How gladly would I receive instruction from the youngest amongst you! If bodily infirmity hinders my joining your assembly to-day, no clogs of the flesh can fetter the wings of the spirit. Still can I "joy and behold your order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ." Still can I carry you unseen to the mercy-seat, that large blessing may descend. I part from you with a similitude which the locality in which you are now gathered has suggested. Now Mendip has caught the rain-cloud and detained it on its course, and the genial shower is falling to fertilize the hill pasture and enrich the plain. May such be the outpouring of the Spirit on you all and each, now the shadow has left the mountain, and even the "corrie" and the "combe" are sharing the sunshine from on high. Be such our blest experience! And when all terrestrial surroundings have departed, alike both as objects and as parables, may the blessed realities "within the veil" stand forth revealed in all their glory, and draw from our wondering lips the Queen of Sheba's exclamation, "Behold, the half was not told me!"

MIRACLES.

CHRIST'S wondrous miracles were signs indeed
 Of wondrous power, yet every miracle
 Of His had moral purpose, and was wrought
 To show this moral purpose, and perchance
 Thus is it that no longer we possess
 The power to do such deeds. Had you or I
 Such gifts, we still should heal unceasingly,
 Nor judge of the effects were cures but made.
 Where then would be God's discipline of pain?
 Where His just government of all His world?
 Where then would be His discipline of sorrow?

MACKENZIE BELL.
