

The Call to the Ministry¹

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Any Christian has a right to disseminate the gospel who has the ability to do so; and more, he not only has the right, but it is his duty so to do as long as he lives. Rev. xxii. 17. The propagation of the gospel is left, not to a few, but to all the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ: according to the measure of grace entrusted to him by the Holy Spirit, each man is bound to minister in his day and generation, both to the church and among unbelievers. Indeed, this question goes beyond men, and even includes the whole of the other sex; whether believers are male or female, they are all bound, when enabled by divine grace, to exert themselves to the utmost to extend the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Our service, however, need not take the particular form of preaching--certainly, in some cases it must not, as for instance in the case of females, whose public teaching is expressly prohibited: 1 Tim. ii. 12; 1 Cor. xiv. 34. But yet if we have the ability to preach, we are bound to exercise it. I do not, however, in this lecture allude to occasional preaching, or any other form of ministry common to all the saints, but to the work and office of the bishopric, in which is included both teaching and bearing rule in the church, which requires the dedication of a man's entire life to spiritual work, and separation from every secular calling, 2 Tim. ii. 4; and entitles the man to cast himself for temporal supplies upon the church of God, since he gives up all his time, energies, and endeavours, for the good of those over whom he presides. 1 Cor. ix. 11; 1 Tim. v. 18. Such a man is addressed by Peter in the words, "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof." 1 Pet. v. 2. Now, all in a church cannot oversee, or rule--there must be some to be overseen and ruled; and we believe that the Holy Ghost appoints in the church of God some to act as overseers, while others are made willing to be watched over for their good. All are not called to labour in word and doctrine, or to be elders, or to exercise the office of a bishop; nor should all aspire to such works, since the gifts necessary are nowhere promised to all; but those should addict themselves to such important engagements who feel, like the apostle, that they have "received this ministry." 2 Cor. iv. 1. No man may intrude into the sheepfold as an under-shepherd; he must have an eye to the chief Shepherd, and wait his beck and command. Or ever a man stands forth as God's ambassador, he must wait for the call from above; and if he does not so, but rushes into

¹ This lecture is found in Spurgeon's *Lectures to my Students* (1881 Edition), pages 18-39.

the sacred office, the Lord will say of him and others like him, "I sent them not, neither commanded them; therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the Lord." Jer. xxiii. 32.

By reference to the Old Testament, you will find the messengers of God in the old dispensation claiming to hold commissions from Jehovah. Isaiah tells us that one of the seraphim touched his lips with a live coal from off the altar, and the voice of the Lord said, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Isa. vi. 8. Then said the prophet, "Here am I, send me." He ran not before he had been thus especially visited of the Lord and qualified for his mission. "How shall they preach, except they be sent?" were words as yet unuttered, but their solemn meaning was well understood. Jeremiah details his call in his first chapter: "Then the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb, I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations. Then said I, Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child. But the Lord said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord. Then the Lord put forth his hand, and touched my mouth; and the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth. See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, and to build, and to plant." Jer. 1.4-10. Varying in its outward form, but to the same purport, was the commission of Ezekiel; it runs thus in his own words: "And he said unto me, Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak unto thee. And the Spirit entered into me when he spake unto me, and set me upon my feet, that I heard him that spake unto me. And he said unto me, Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that hath rebelled against me: they and their fathers have transgressed against me, even unto this very day." Ezek. ii. 1-3. "Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, eat that thou findest; eat this roll, and go speak unto the house of Israel. So I opened my mouth, and he caused me to eat that roll. And he said unto me, Son of man, cause thy belly to eat, and fill thy bowels with this roll that I give thee. Then did I eat it; and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness. And he said unto me, Son of man, go, get thee unto the house of Israel, and speak with my words unto them." Ezek. iii. 1-4. Daniel's call to prophesy, although not recorded, is abundantly attested by the visions granted to him, and the exceeding, favour which he had with the Lord, both in his solitary meditations and public acts. It is

not needful to pass all the other prophets in review, for they all claimed to speak with "thus saith the Lord." In the present dispensation, the priesthood is common to all the saints; but to prophesy, or what is analogous thereto, namely, to be moved by the Holy Ghost to give oneself up wholly to the proclamation of the gospel, is, as a matter of fact, the gift and calling of only a comparatively small number; and surely these need to be as sure of the rightfulness of their position as were the prophets; and yet how can they justify their office, except by a similar call?

Nor need any imagine that such calls are a mere delusion, and that none are in this age separated for the peculiar work of teaching and overseeing, the church, for the very names given to ministers in the New Testament imply a previous call to their work. The apostle says, "Now then we are ambassadors for God;" but does not the very soul of the ambassadorial office lie in the appointment which is made by the monarch represented? An ambassador unsent would be a laughing-stock. Men who dare to avow themselves ambassadors for Christ, must feel most solemnly that the Lord has "committed" to them the word of reconciliation. 2 Cor. v. 18, 19. If it be said that this is restricted to the apostles, I answer that the epistle is written not in the name of Paul only, but of Timothy also, and hence includes other ministry besides apostleship. In the first epistle to the Corinthians we read, "Let a man so account of us (the *us* here meaning, Paul and Sosthenes, 1. Cor. i. 1), as of the ministers of Christ, and *stewards* of the mysteries of God." 1 Cor. iv. 1. Surely a steward must hold his office from the Master. He cannot be a steward merely because he chooses to be so, or is so regarded by others. If any of us should elect ourselves stewards to the Marquis of Westminster, and proceed to deal with his property, we should have our mistake very speedily pointed out to us in the most convincing manner. There must evidently be authority ere a man can legally become a bishop, "the steward of God." Titus i. 7.

The Apocalyptic title of *Angel* (Rev. ii. 1) means a messenger; and how shall men be Christ's heralds, unless by his election and ordination? If the reference of the word *Angel* to the minister be questioned, we should be glad to have it shown that it can relate to anyone else. To whom would the Spirit write in the church as its representative, but to some one in a position analogous to that of the presiding elder?

Titus was bidden to make full proof of his ministry--there was surely something to prove. Some are "vessels unto honour, sanctified and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work." 2 Tim. ii. 21. The Master is not to be denied the choice

of the vessels which he uses, he will still say of certain men as he did of Saul of Tarsus, "He is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles." Acts ix. 15. When our Lord ascended on high he gave gifts unto men, and it is noteworthy that these gifts were men set apart for various works: "He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers" (Eph. iv. 11); from which it is evident that certain individuals are, as the result of our Lord's ascension, bestowed upon the churches as pastors; they are given of God, and consequently not selfelevated to their position. Brethren, I trust you may be able one day to speak of the flock over whom "the Holy Ghost has made you overseers" (Acts xx. 28), and I pray that every one of you may be able to say with the apostle of the Gentiles, that your ministry is not of man, neither by man, but that you have received it of the Lord. Gal. i. 1. In you may that ancient promise be fulfilled, "I will give them pastors according to mine heart." Jer. iii. 15. "I will set up shepherds over them, which shall feed them." Jer .xxiii. 4. May the Lord himself fulfil in your several persons his own declaration: "I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night." May you take forth the precious from the vile, and so be as God's mouth. Jer. xv. 19. May the Lord make manifest by you the savour of the knowledge of Jesus in every place, and make you "unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish." 2 Cor. ii, 15. Having a priceless treasure in earthen vessels, may the excellency of the divine power rest upon you, and so may you both glorify God and clear yourselves from the blood of all men. As the Lord Jesus went up to the Mount and called to him whom he would, and then sent them forth to preach (Mark iii, 13), even so may he select you, call you upward to commune with himself, and send you forth as his elect servants to bless both the church and the world.

How may a young man know whether he is called or not? That is a weighty enquiry, and I desire to treat it most solemnly. O for divine guidance in so doing! That hundreds have missed their way, and stumbled against a pulpit is sorrowfully evident from the fruitless ministries and decaying churches which surround us. It is a fearful calamity to a man to miss his calling, and to the church upon whom he imposes himself, his mistake involves an affliction of the most grievous kind. It would be a curious and painful subject for reflection--the frequency with which men in the possession of reason mistake the end of their existence, and aim at objects which they were never intended to

pursue. The writer who penned the following lines must surely have had his eye upon many ill-occupied pulpits:

“Declare, ye sages, if ye find
'Mongst animals of every kind,
Of each condition, sort, and size,
From whales and elephants to flies,
A creature that mistakes his plan,
And errs so constantly as man!

Each kind pursues its proper good,
And seeks enjoyment, rest and food,
As nature points, and never errs
In what it chooses or prefers;
Man only blunders, though possessed
Of reason far above the rest.

Descend to instances and try:
An ox will not attempt to fly,
Or leave his pasture in the wood
With fishes to explore the flood.
Man only acts of every creature
In opposition to his nature”

When I think upon the all but infinite mischief which may result from a mistake as to our vocation for the Christian pastorate, I feel overwhelmed with fear lest any of us should be slack in examining our credentials; and I had rather that we stood too much in doubt, and examined too frequently, than that we should become cumberers of the ground. There are not lacking many exact methods by which a man may test his call to the ministry if he earnestly desires to do so. It is imperative upon him not to enter the ministry until he has made solemn quest and trial of himself as to this point. His own personal salvation being secure, he must investigate as to the further matter of his call to office; the first is vital to himself as a Christian, the second equally vital to him as a pastor.

As well be a professor without conversion, as a pastor without calling. In both cases there is a name and nothing more.

1. The first sign of the heavenly call is *an intense, all-absorbing desire for the work*. In order to a true call to the ministry there must be an irresistible, overwhelming craving and raging thirst for telling to others what God has done to our own souls; what if I call it a kind of *στοργή*, such as birds have for rearing their young when the season is come; when the mother-bird would sooner die than leave her nest. It was said of Alleine by one who knew him intimately, that "he was infinitely and insatiably greedy of the conversion of souls." When he might have had a fellowship at his university, he preferred a chaplaincy, because he was "inspired with an impatience to be occupied in direct ministerial work." "Do not enter the ministry *if you can help it*," was the deeply sage advice of a divine to one who sought his judgment. If any student in this room could be content to be a newspaper editor, or a grocer, or a farmer, or a doctor, or a lawyer, or a senator, or a king, in the name of heaven and earth let him go his way; he is not the man in whom dwells the Spirit of God in its fulness, for a man so filled with God would utterly weary of any pursuit but that for which his inmost soul pants. If on the other hand, you can say that for all the wealth of both the Indies you could not and dare not espouse any other calling so as to be put aside from preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, then, depend upon it, if other things be equally satisfactory, you have the signs of this apostleship. We must feel that woe is unto us if we preach not the gospel; the word of God must be unto us as fire in our bones, otherwise, if we undertake the ministry, we shall be unhappy in it, shall be unable to bear the self-denials incident to it, and shall be of little service to those among whom we minister. I speak of selfdenials, and well I may; for the true pastor's work is full of them, and without a love to his calling he will soon succumb, and either leave the drudgery, or move on in discontent, burdened with a monotony as tiresome as that of a blind horse in a mill.

"There is a comfort in the strength of love;
"Twill make a thing endurable which else
'Would break the heart."

Girt with that love, you will be undaunted; divested of that more than magic-belt of irresistible vocation, you will pine away in wretchedness.

This desire must be a *thoughtful* one. It should not be a sudden impulse unattended by anxious consideration. It should be the outgrowth of our heart in its best moments, the object of our reverent aspirations, the subject of our most fervent prayers. It must continue with us when tempting offers of wealth and comfort come into conflict with it, and remain as a calm, clear-headed resolve after everything has been estimated at its right figure, and the cost thoroughly counted. When living as a child at my

grandfather's in the country, I saw a company of huntsmen in their red coats riding through his fields after a fox. I was delighted! My little heart was excited; I was ready to follow the hounds over hedge and ditch. I have always felt a natural taste for that sort of business, and, as a child, when asked what I would be, I usually said I was going to be a huntsman. A fine profession, truly! Many young men have the same idea of being parsons as I had of being a huntsman--a mere childish notion that they would like the coat and the horn-blowing; the honour, the respect, the ease; and they are probably even fools enough to think, the riches of the ministry. (Ignorant beings they must be if they look for wealth in connection with the Baptist ministry.) The fascination of the preacher's office is very great to weak minds, and hence I earnestly caution all young men not to mistake whim for inspiration, and a childish preference for a call of the Holy Spirit.

Mark well, that the desire I have spoken of must be *thoroughly disinterested*. If a man can detect, after the most earnest self-examination, any other motive than the glory of God and the good of souls in his seeking the bishopric, he had better turn aside from it at once; for the Lord will abhor the bringing of buyers and sellers into his temple: the introduction of anything mercenary, even in the smallest degree, will be like the fly in the pot of ointment, and will spoil it all.

This desire should be one which *continues with us*, a passion which bears the test of trial, a longing from which it is quite impossible for us to escape, though we may have tried to do so; a desire, in fact, which grows more intense by the lapse of years, until it becomes a yearning, a pining, a famishing to proclaim the Word. This intense desire is so noble and beautiful a thing, that whenever I perceive it glowing in any young man's bosom, I am always slow to discourage him, even though I may have my doubts as to his abilities. It may be needful, for reasons to be given you further on, to repress the flame, but it should always be reluctantly and wisely done. I have such a profound respect for this "fire in the bones," that if I did not feel it myself, I must leave the ministry at once. If you do not feel the consecrated glow, I beseech you return to your homes and serve God in your proper spheres; but if assuredly the coals of juniper blaze within, do not stifle them, unless, indeed, other considerations of great moment should prove to you that the desire is not a fire of heavenly origin.

2. In the second place, combined with the earnest desire to become a pastor, there must be *aptness to teach and some measure of the other qualities needful for the office of a public instructor*. A man to prove his call must make a successful trial of these. I do not claim that the first time a man rises to speak he must preach as well as Robert Hall did in his later days. If he preaches no worse than that great man did at the first, he must not be condemned. You are aware that Robert Hall broke down altogether three times, and cried, "If this does not humble me, nothing will." Some of the noblest speakers were not in their early days the most fluent. Even Cicero at first suffered from a weak voice and a

difficulty of utterance. Still, a man must not consider that he is called to preach until he has proved that he can speak. God certainly has not created behemoth to fly and should leviathan have a strong desire to ascend with the lark, it would evidently be an unwise aspiration, since he is not furnished with wings. If a man be called to preach, he will be endowed with a degree of speaking ability, which he will cultivate and increase. If the gift of utterance be not there in a measure at the first, it is not likely that it will ever be developed.

I have heard of a gentleman who had a most intense desire to preach, and pressed his suit upon his minister, until after a multitude of rebuffs he obtained leave to preach a trial sermon. That opportunity was the end of his importunity, for upon announcing his text he found himself bereft of every idea but one, which he delivered feelingly, and then descended the rostrum. "My brethren," said he, "if any of you think it an easy thing to preach, I advise you to come up here and have all the conceit taken out of you." The trial of your powers will go far to reveal to you your deficiency, if you have not the needed ability. I know of nothing better. We must give ourselves a fair trial in this matter, or we cannot assuredly know whether God has called us or not; and during the probation we must often ask ourselves whether, upon the whole, we can hope to edify others with such discourses.

We must, however, do much more than put it to our own conscience and judgment, for we are poor judges. A certain class of brethren have a great facility for discovering that they have been very wonderfully and divinely helped in their declamations; I should envy them their glorious liberty and self-complacency if there were any ground for it; for alas! I very frequently have to bemoan and mourn over my non-success and shortcomings as a speaker. There is not much dependence to be placed upon our own opinion, but much may be learned from judicious, spiritual-minded persons. It is by no means a law which ought to bind all persons, but still it is a good old custom in many of our country churches for the young man who aspires to the ministry to preach before the church. It can hardly ever be a very pleasant ordeal for the youthful aspirant, and, in many cases, it will scarcely be a very edifying exercise for the people; but still it may prove a most salutary piece of discipline, and save the public exposure of rampant ignorance. The church book at Arnsby contains the following entry:

A short account of the Call of Robert Hall, Junior, to the work of the Ministry, by the Church at Arnsby, August 13th, 1780. "The said Robert Hall was born at Arnsby, May 2nd, 1764; and was, even from his childhood, not only serious, and given to secret prayer before he could speak plain, but was always wholly inclined to the work of the ministry. He began to compose hymns before he was quite seven years old, and therein discovered marks of piety, deep thought, and genius. Between eight and nine years he made several hymns, which were much admired by many, one of which was printed in the Gospel Magazine about that time. He wrote his thoughts on various religious subjects, and select

portions of Scripture. He was likewise possessed of an intense inclination for learning, and made such progress that the country master under whom he was could not instruct him any further. He was then sent to Northampton boarding school, under the care of the Rev. John Ryland, where he continued about a year and a-half, and made great progress in Latin and Greek. In October, 1778, he went to the Academy at Bristol, under the care of the Rev. Mr. Evans; and on August 13th, 1780, was sent out to the ministry by this church, being sixteen years and three months old, The manner in which the church obtained satisfaction with his abilities for the great work, was his speaking in his turn at conference meetings from various portions of Scripture; in which, and in prayer, he had borne a part for upwards of four years before; and having when at home, at their request, frequently preached on Lord's-day mornings, to their great satisfaction. They therefore earnestly and unanimously requested his being in a solemn manner set apart to public employ. Accordingly, on the day aforesaid, he was examined by his father before the church, respecting his inclination, motives, and end, in reference to the ministry, and was likewise desired to make a declaration of his religious sentiments. All which being done, to the entire satisfaction of the church, they therefore set him apart by lifting up their right hands, and by solemn prayer. His father then delivered a discourse to him from 2 Tim, ii. 1, 'Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.' Being thus sent forth, he preached in the afternoon from 2 Thess. i. 7, 8. 'May the Lord bless him, and grant him great success!'"

Considerable weight is to be given to the judgment of men and women who live near to God, and in most instances their verdict will not be a mistaken one. Yet this appeal is not final nor infallible, and is only to be estimated in proportion to the intelligence and piety of those consulted. I remember well how earnestly I was dissuaded from preaching by as godly a Christian matron as ever breathed; the value of her opinion I endeavoured to estimate with candour and patience-but it was outweighed by the judgment of persons of wider experience. Young men in doubt will do well to take with them their wisest friends when next they go out to the country chapel or village meeting-room and essay to deliver the Word. I have noted-and our venerable friend, Mr. Rogers, has observed the same--that you, gentlemen, students, as a body, in your judgment of one another, are seldom if ever wrong. There has hardly ever been an instance, take the whole house through, where the general opinion of the entire college concerning a brother has been erroneous. Men are not quite so unable to form an opinion of each other as they are sometimes supposed to be. Meeting as you do in class, in prayer-meeting, in conversation, and in various religious engagements, you gauge each other; and a wise man will be slow to set aside the verdict of the house.

I should not complete this point if I did not add, that mere ability to edify, and aptness to teach is not enough, there must be other talents to complete the pastoral character. Sound judgment and solid experience must instruct you; gentle manners and loving affections must sway you; firmness and courage must be manifest; and tenderness and sympathy must not be lacking. Gifts administrative in ruling well will be as requisite

² Biographical Recollections of the Rev, Robert Hall, A.M. By J. M. Morris, 1833.

as gifts instructive in teaching well. You must be fitted to lead, prepared to endure, and able to persevere. In grace, you should be head and shoulders above the rest of the people, able to be their father and counsellor. Read carefully the qualifications of a bishop, given in 1 Tim. iii. 2-7, and in Titus i. 6-9. If such gifts and graces be not in you and abound, it may be possible for you to succeed as an evangelist, but as a pastor you will be of no account.

3. In order further to prove a man's call, after a little exercise of his gifts, such as I have already spoken of, *he must see a measure of conversion-work going on under his efforts*, or he may conclude that he has made a mistake, and, therefore, may go back by the best way he can. It is not to be expected that upon the first or even twentieth effort in public we shall be apprized of success; and a man may even give himself a life trial of preaching if he feels called to do so, but it seems to me, that as a man to be set apart to the ministry, his commission is without seals until souls are won by his instrumentality to the knowledge of Jesus. As a worker, he is to work on whether he succeeds or no, but as a minister he cannot be sure of his vocation till results are apparent. How my heart leaped for joy when I heard tidings of my first convert! I could never be satisfied with a full congregation, and the kind expressions of friends; I longed to hear that hearts had been broken, that tears had been seen streaming from the eyes of penitents. How did I rejoice, as one that findeth great spoil, over one poor labourer's wife who confessed that she felt the guilt of sin, and had found the Saviour under my discourse on Sunday afternoon: I have the cottage in which she lived in my eye now; believe me, it always appears picturesque. I remember well her being received into the church, and her dying, and her going home to heaven. She was the first seal to my ministry, and, I can assure you, a very precious one indeed. No mother was ever more full of happiness at the sight of her first-born son. Then could I have sung the song of the Virgin Mary, for my soul did magnify the Lord for remembering my low estate, and giving me the great honour to do a work for which all generations should call me blessed, for so I counted the conversion of one soul. There must be some measure of conversion-work in your irregular labours before you call believe that preaching is to be your life-work. Remember the Lord's words by the prophet Jeremiah; they are very much to the point, and should alarm all fruitless preachers. "I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran; I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in my counsel, and had caused my people to hear my words, then they should have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings." Jer. xxiii. 21, 22. It is a marvel to me how men continue at ease in preaching year after year without conversions. Have they no bowels of compassion for others? no sense of responsibility upon themselves? Dare they, by a vain misrepresentation of divine sovereignty, cast the blame on their Master? Or is it their belief that Paul plants and Apollos waters, and that God gives no increase? Vain are their talents, their philosophy,

their rhetoric, and even their orthodoxy, without the signs following. How are they sent of God who bring no men to God? Prophets whose words are powerless, sowers whose seed all withers, fishers who take no fish, soldiers who give no wounds-are these God's men? Surely it were better to be a mud-raker, or a chimney-sweep, than to stand in the ministry as an utterly barren tree. The meanest occupation confers some benefit upon mankind, but the wretched man who occupies a pulpit and never glorifies his God by conversions is a blank, a blot, an eyesore, a mischief. He is not worth the salt he eats, much less his bread; and if he writes to newspapers to complain of the smallness of his salary, his conscience, if he has any, might well reply, "And what you have is undeserved." Times of drought there may be; ay, and years of leanness may consume the former years of usefulness, but still there will be fruit in the main, and fruit to the glory of God; and meanwhile the transient barrenness will fill the soul with unutterable anguish. Brethren, if the Lord gives you no zeal for souls, keep to the lapstone or the trowel, but avoid the pulpit as you value your heart's peace and your future salvation.

4. A step beyond all this is however needful in our enquiry. The will of the Lord concerning pastors is made known through the prayerful judgment of his church. It is needful as a proof of your vocation that *your preaching should be acceptable to the people of God*. God usually opens doors of utterance for those whom he calls to speak in his name. Impatience would push open or break down the door, but faith waits upon the Lord, and in due season her opportunity is awarded her. When the opportunity comes then comes our trial. Standing up to preach, our spirit will be judged of the assembly, and if it be condemned, or if, as a general rule, the church is not edified, the conclusion may not be disputed, that we are not sent of God. The signs and marks of a true bishop are laid down in the Word for the guidance of the church; and if in following such guidance the brethren see not in us the qualifications, and do not elect us to office, it is plain enough that however well we may evangelise, the office of the pastor is not for us. Churches are not all wise, neither do they all judge in the power of the Holy Ghost, but many of them judge after the flesh; yet I had sooner accept the opinion of a company of the Lord's people than my own upon so personal a subject as my own gifts and graces. At any rate, whether you value the verdict of the church or no, one thing is certain, that none of you can be pastors without the loving consent of the flock; and therefore this will be to you a practical indicator if not a correct one. If your call from the Lord be a real one you will not long be silent. As surely as the man wants his hour, so surely the hour wants its man; The church of God is always urgently in need of living ministers; to her a man is always more precious than the gold of Ophir. Formal officials do lack and suffer hunger, but the anointed of the Lord need never be without a charge, for there are quick ear's which will know them by their speech, and ready hearts to welcome them to their appointed place. Be fit for your work, and you will never be out of it. Do not run about inviting yourselves

to preach here and there; be more concerned about your ability than your opportunity, and more earnest about your walk with God than about either. The sheep will know the Godsent shepherd; the porter of the fold will open to you, and the flock will know your voice.

At the time of my first delivery of this lecture, I had not read John Newton's admirable letter to a friend on this subject; it so nearly tallies with my own thoughts, that at the risk of being thought to be a copyist, which I certainly am not in this instance, I will read you the letter:

“Your case reminds me of my own; my first desires towards the ministry were attended with great uncertainties and difficulties, and the perplexity of my own mind was heightened by the various and opposite judgments of my friends. The advice I have to offer is the result of painful experience and exercise, and for this reason, perhaps, may not be unacceptable to you. I pray our gracious Lord to make it useful.

“I was long distressed, as you are, about what was or was not a proper call to the ministry. It now seems to me an easy point to solve; but, perhaps, it will not be so to you, till the Lord shall make it clear to yourself in your own case. I have not room to say so much as I could. In brief, I think it principally includes three things:

“1. A warm and earnest desire to be employed in this service. I apprehend the man who is once moved by the Spirit of God to this work, will prefer it, if attainable, to thousands of gold and silver; so that, though he is at times intimidated by a sense of its importance and difficulty, compared with his own great insufficiency (for it is to be presumed a call of this sort, if indeed from God, will be accompanied with humility and self-abasement), yet he cannot give it up. I hold it a good rule to enquire in this point, whether the desire to preach is most fervent in our most lively and spiritual frames, and when we are most laid in the dust before the Lord? If so, it is a good sign. But if, as is sometimes the case, a person is very earnest to be a preacher to others, when he finds but little hungerings and thirstings after grace in his own soul, it is then to be feared his zeal springs rather from a selfish principle than from the Spirit of God.

“2. Besides this affectionate desire and readiness to preach, there must in due season appear some competent sufficiency as to gifts, knowledge, and utterance. Surely, if the Lord sends a man to teach others, he will furnish him with the means. I believe many have intended well in setting up for preachers, who yet went beyond or before their call in so doing. The main difference between a minister and a private Christian, seems to consist in those ministerial gifts, which are imparted to him, not for his own sake, but for the edification of others. But then I say these are to appear in due season; they are not to be expected instantaneously, but gradually, in the use of proper means. They are necessary for the discharge of the ministry, but not necessary as pre-requisites to warrant our desires after it. In your case, you are young, and have time before you; therefore, I think you need not as yet perplex yourself with enquiring if you have these gifts already. It is sufficient if your desire is fixed, and you are willing, in the way of prayer and diligence, to wait upon the Lord for them; as yet you need them not.³

³ We should hesitate to speak precisely in this manner. The gifts must be somewhat apparent before the desire should be encouraged. Still in the main we agree with Mr. Newton.

"3. That which finally evidences a proper call, is a correspondent opening in providence, by a gradual train of circumstances pointing out the means, the time, the place, of actually entering upon the work. And until this coincidence arrives, you must not expect to be always clear from hesitation in your own mind. The principal caution on this head is, not to be too hasty in catching at first appearances. If it be the Lord's will to bring you into his ministry, he has already appointed your place and service, and though you know it not at present, you shall at a proper time. If you had the talents of an angel, you could do no good with them till his hour is come, and till he leads you to the people whom he has determined to bless by your means. It is very difficult to restrain ourselves within the bounds of prudence here, when our zeal is warm: a sense of the love of Christ upon our hearts, and a tender compassion for poor sinners, is ready to prompt us to break out too soon; but he that believeth shall not make haste. I was about five years under this constraint; sometimes I thought I must preach, though it was in the streets. I listened to everything that seemed plausible, and to many things which were not so. But the Lord graciously, and as it were insensibly, hedged up my way with thorns; otherwise, if I had been left to my own spirit, I should have put it quite out of my power to have been brought into such a sphere of usefulness, as he in his good time has been pleased to lead me to. And I can now see clearly, that at the time I would first have gone out, though my intention was, I hope, good in the main, yet I overrated myself, and had not that spiritual judgment and experience which are requisite for so great a service."

Thus much may suffice, but the same subject will be before you if I detail a little of my experience in dealing with aspirants for the ministry. I have constantly to fulfil the duty which fell to the lot of Cromwell's Triers. I have to form an opinion as to the advisability of aiding certain men in their attempts to become pastors. This is a most responsible duty, and one which requires no ordinary care. Of course, I do not set myself up to judge whether a man shall enter the ministry or not, but my examination merely aims at answering the question whether this institution shall help him, or leave him to his own resources. Certain of our charitable neighbours accuse us of having "a parson manufactory" here, but the charge is not true at all. We never tried to make a minister, and should fail if we did; we receive none into the College but those who profess to be ministers already. It would be nearer the truth if they called me a parson killer, for a goodly number of beginners have received their quietus from me; and I have the fullest ease of conscience in reflecting upon what I have so done. It has always been a hard task for me to discourage a hopeful young brother who has applied for admission to the College. My heart has always leaned to the kindest side, but duty to the churches has compelled me to judge with severe discrimination. After hearing what the candidate has had to say, having read his testimonials and seen his replies to questions, when I have felt convinced that the Lord had not called him, I have been obliged to tell him so. Certain of the cases are types of all. Young brethren apply who earnestly desire to enter the ministry, but it is painfully apparent that their main motive is an ambitious desire to shine among men. These men are from a common point of view to be commended for aspiring, but then the pulpit is never to be the ladder by which ambition is to climb. Had such men entered the army they would never have been satisfied till they had reached the front

rank, for they are determined to push their way up—all very laudable and very proper so far; but they have embraced the idea that if they entered the ministry they would be greatly distinguished; they have felt the buddings of genius, and have regarded themselves as greater than ordinary persons, and, therefore, they have looked upon the ministry as a platform upon which to display their supposed abilities. Whenever this has been visible I have felt bound to leave the man "to gang his ain gate," as the Scotch say; believing that such spirits always come to nought if they enter the Lord's service. We find that we have nothing whereof to glory, and if we had, the very worst place in which to hang it out would be a pulpit; for there we are brought daily to feel our own insignificance and nothingness.

Men who since conversion have betrayed great feebleness of mind and are readily led to embrace strange doctrines, or to fall into evil company and gross sin, I never can find it in my heart to encourage to enter the ministry, let their professions be what they may. Let them, if truly penitent, keep in the rear ranks. Unstable as water they will not excel.

So, too, those who cannot endure hardness, but are of the kid-gloved order, I refer elsewhere. We want soldiers, not fops, earnest labourers, not genteel loiterers. Men who have done nothing up to their time of application to the college, are told to earn their spurs before they are publicly dubbed as knights. Fervent lovers of souls do not wait till they are trained, they serve their Lord at once.

Certain good men appeal to me who are distinguished by enormous vehemence and zeal, and a conspicuous absence of brains; brethren who would talk for ever and ever upon nothing—who would stamp and thump the Bible, and get nothing out of it all; earnest, awfully earnest, mountains in labour of the most painful kind; but nothing comes of it all, not even the *ridiculus mus*. There are zealots abroad who are not capable of conceiving or uttering five consecutive thoughts, whose capacity is most narrow and their conceit most broad, and these can hammer, and bawl, and rave, and tear, and rage, but the noise all arises from the hollowness of the drum. I conceive that these brethren will do quite as well without education as with it, and therefore I have usually declined their applications.

Another exceedingly large class of men seek the pulpit they know not why. They cannot teach and will not learn, and yet must fain be ministers. Like the man who slept on Parnassus, and ever after imagined himself a poet, they have had impudence enough once to thrust a sermon upon an audience, and now nothing will do but preaching. They are so hasty to leave off sewing garments, that they will make a rent in the church of which they are members to accomplish their design. The counter is distasteful, and a pulpit cushion is coveted; the scales and weights they are weary of, and must needs try their

hands at the balances of the sanctuary. Such men, like raging waves of the sea usually foam forth their own shame, and we are happy when we bid them adieu.

Physical infirmities raise a question about the call of some excellent men. I would not, like Eusthenes, judge men by their features, but their general physique is no small criterion. That narrow chest does not indicate a man formed for public speech. You may think it odd, but still I feel very well assured, that when a man has a contracted chest, with no distance between his shoulders, the all-wise Creator did not intend him habitually to preach. If he had meant him to speak he would have given him in some measure breadth of chest, sufficient to yield a reasonable amount of lung force. When the Lord means a creature to run, he gives it nimble legs, and if he means another creature to preach, he will give it suitable lungs. A brother who has to pause in the middle of a sentence and work his air-pump, should ask himself whether there is not some other occupation for which he is better adapted. A man who can scarcely get through a sentence without pain, can hardly be called to "Cry aloud and spare not." There may be exceptions, but is there not weight in the general rule? Brethren with defective mouths and imperfect articulation are not usually called to preach the gospel. The same applies to brethren with no palate, or an imperfect one.

Application was received some short time ago from a young man who had a sort of rotary action of his jaw of the most painful sort to the beholder. His pastor commended him as a very holy young man, who had been the means of bringing some to Christ, and he expressed the hope that I would receive him, but I could not see the propriety of it. I could not have looked at him while preaching without laughter if all the gold of Tarshish had been my reward, and in all probability nine out of ten of his hearers would have been more sensitive than myself. A man with a big tongue which filled up his mouth and caused indistinctness, another without teeth, another who stammered, another who could not pronounce all the alphabet, I have had the pain of declining on the ground that God had not given them those physical appliances, which are as the prayer-book would put it, "generally necessary."

One brother I have encountered – one did I say? I have met ten, twenty, a hundred brethren, who have pleaded that they were sure, quite sure that they were called to the ministry--they were quite certain of it, because they had failed in everything else. This is a sort of model story: "Sir, I was put into a lawyer's office, but I never could bear the confinement, and I could not feel at home in studying law; Providence clearly stopped up my road, for I lost my situation." "And what did you do then?" "Why sir, I was induced to open a grocer's shop." "And did you prosper?" "Well, I do not think, Sir, I was ever meant for trade, and the Lord seemed quite to shut my way up there, for I failed and was in great difficulties. Since then I have done a little in life-assurance agency, and tried to get up a school, besides selling tea; but my path is hedged up, and something within me

makes me feel that I ought to be a minister." My answer generally is, "Yes, I see; you have failed in everything else, and therefore you think the Lord has especially endowed you for his service; but I fear you have forgotten that the ministry needs the very best of men, and not those who cannot do anything else." A man who would succeed as a preacher would probably do right well either as a grocer, or a lawyer, or anything else. A really valuable minister would have excelled at anything. There is scarcely anything impossible to a man who can keep a congregation together for years, and be the means of edifying them for hundreds of consecutive Sabbaths; he must be possessed of some abilities, and be by no means a fool or ne'er-do-well. Jesus Christ deserves the best men to preach his cross, and not the emptyheaded and the shiftless.

One young gentleman with whose presence I was once honoured, has left on my mind the photograph of his exquisite self. That same face of his looked like the title-page to a whole volume of conceit and deceit. He sent word into my vestry one Sabbath morning that he must see me at once. His audacity admitted him; and when he was before me he said, "Sir, I want to enter your College, and should like to enter it at once." "Well, Sir," said I, "I fear we have no room for you at present, but your case shall be considered." "But mine is a very remarkable case, Sir; you have probably never received such an application as mine before." "Very good, we'll see about it; the secretary will give you one of the application papers, and you can see me on Monday." He came on the Monday bringing with him the questions, answered in a most extraordinary manner. As to books, he claimed to have read all ancient and modern literature, and after giving an immense list he added, "this is but a selection; I have read most extensively in all departments." As to his preaching, he could produce the highest testimonials, but hardly thought they would be needed, as a personal interview would convince me of his ability at once. His surprise was great when I said, "Sir, I am obliged to tell you that I cannot receive you." "Why not, Sir?" "I will tell you plainly. You are so dreadfully clever that I could not insult you by receiving you into our College, where we have none but rather ordinary men; the president, tutors, and students, are all men of moderate attainments, and you would have to condescend too much in coming among us." He looked at me very severely, and said with dignity, "Do you mean to say, that because I have an unusual genius, and have produced in myself a gigantic mind such as is rarely seen, I am refused admittance into your College?" "Yes," I replied, as calmly as I could, considering the overpowering awe which his genius inspired, "for that very reason." "Then, Sir, you ought to allow me a trial of my preaching abilities; select me any text you like, or suggest any subject you please, and here in this very room I will speak upon it, or preach upon it without deliberation, and you will be surprised." "No, thank you, I would rather not have the trouble of listening to you." "Trouble, Sir! I assure you it would be the greatest possible pleasure you could have." I said it might be, but I felt myself unworthy of the privilege, and so bade

him a long farewell. The gentleman was unknown to me at the time, but he has since figured in the police court as too clever by half.

We have occasionally had applications at which, perhaps, you would be amazed, from men who are evidently fluent enough, and who answer all our questions very well, except those upon their doctrinal views, to which repeatedly we have had this answer: "Mr. So-and-so is prepared to receive the doctrines of the College whatever they may be!" In all such cases we never deliberate a moment, the instantaneous negative is given. I mention it, because it illustrates our conviction that men are not called to the ministry who have no knowledge and no definite belief. When young fellows say that they have not made up their minds upon theology, they ought to go back to the Sunday-school until they have. For a man to come shuffling into a College, pretending that he holds his mind open to any form of truth, and that he is eminently receptive, but has not settled in his mind such things as whether God has an election of grace, or whether he loves his people to the end, seems to me to be a perfect monstrosity. "Not a novice," says the apostle; yet a man who has not made up his mind on such points as these, is confessedly and egregiously "a novice," and ought to be relegated to the catechism class till he has learned the first truths of the gospel.

After all, gentlemen, we shall have to prove our call by the practical proof of our ministry in after life, and it will be a lamentable thing for us to start in our course without due examination; for if so, we may have to leave it in disgrace. On the whole, experience is our surest test, and if God upholds us from year to year, and gives us his blessing, we need make no other trial of our vocation. Our moral and spiritual fitnesses will be tried by the labour of our ministry, and this is the most trustworthy of all tests. From some one or other I heard in conversation of a plan adopted by Matthew Wilks, for examining a young man who wanted to be a missionary; the drift, if not the detail of the test, commends itself to my judgment though not to my taste. The young man desired to go to India as a missionary in connection with the London Missionary Society. Mr. Wilks was appointed to consider his fitness for such a post. He wrote to the young man, and told him to call upon him at six o'clock the next morning. The brother lived many miles off, but he was at the house at six o'clock punctually. Mr. Wilks did not, however, enter the room till hours after. The brother waited wonderingly, but patiently. At last, Mr. Wilks arrived, and addressed the candidate thus, in his usual nasal tones, "Well, young man, so you want to be a missionary?" "Yes, Sir." "Do you love the Lord Jesus Christ?" "Yes, Sir, I hope I do." "And have you had any education?" "Yes, Sir, a little." "Well, now, we'll try you; can you spell 'cat'?" The young man looked confused, and hardly knew how to answer so preposterous a question. His mind evidently halted between indignation and submission, but in a moment he replied steadily, "C,a,t, cat." "Very good," said Mr. Wilks; "now, can you spell 'dog'?" Our young martyr hesitated, but Mr. Wilks said in his

coolest manner, "Oh, never mind; don't be bashful; you spelt the other word so well that I should think you will be able to spell this: high as the attainment is, it is not so elevated but what you might do it without blushing. "The youthful Job replied, "D,o,g, dog." "Well, that is right; I see you will do in your spelling, and now for your arithmetic; how many are twice two?" It is a wonder that Mr .Wilks did not receive "twice two" after the fashion of muscular Christianity, but the patient youth gave the right reply and was dismissed. Matthew Wilks at the committee meeting said, "I cordially recommend that young man; his testimonials and character I have duly examined, and besides that, I have given him a rare personal trial such as few could bear. I tried his self-denial, he was up in the morning early; I tried his temper, and I tried his humility; he can spell 'cat' and 'dog,' and can tell that 'twice two make four,' and he will do for a missionary exceedingly well." Now, what the old gentleman is thus said to have done with exceedingly bad taste, we may with much propriety do with ourselves. We must try whether we can endure brow-beating, weariness, slander, jeering, and hardship; and whether we can be made the off-scouring of all things, and be treated as nothing for Christ's sake. If we can endure all these, we have some of those points which indicate the possession of the rare qualities which should meet in a true servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. I gravely question whether some of us will find our vessels, when far out at sea, to be quite so seaworthy as we think them. O my brethren, make sure work of it while you are yet in this retreat; and diligently labour to fit yourselves for your high calling. You will have trials enough, and woe to you if you do not go forth armed from head to foot with armour of proof. You will have to run with horsemen, let not the footmen weary you while in your preliminary studies. The devil is abroad, and with him are many. Prove your own selves, and may the Lord prepare you for the crucible and the furnace which assuredly await you. Your tribulation may not in all respects be so severe as that of Paul and his companions, but you must be ready for a like ordeal. Let me read you his memorable words, and let me entreat you to pray, while you hear them, that the Holy Ghost may strengthen you for all that lies before you. "Giving no offence in anything, that the ministry be not blamed: but in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in affliction, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings; by pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the arm our of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things."