

Miscellaneous.

DR. HUMPHREY'S FAREWELL SERMON.

It is cause of regret, says the North-Western Christian Advocate, to all the evangelical churches and pastors of this city, that Rev. Z. M. Humphrey, D. D., pastor of the First Presbyterian church, has felt that duty calls him to Philadelphia.

We trust that in his new home nearer the ocean, his accomplished, Christian wife will find renewed and confirmed health, and that in his new field of labor his "bow may abide in strength, and his hands be made strong from the mighty God of Jacob."

On Sabbath, March 1st, Dr. Humphrey preached his farewell sermon. The large church edifice was crowded. The people were sad. The sermon was of touching appropriateness. The text was Acts xxi. 14: "And when he would not be persuaded we ceased, saying, the will of the Lord be done."

Who builded wiser than they knew? We give some extracts from the sermon, as reported in the Republican, premising that the sub-heads are ours:

REMOVALS NOT ALL EVIL.

"Still another thought is, that the separation which seems to be final is not perfect. St. Paul left a part of himself wherever he wrought for Christ. He left not only the truth he proclaimed, but also himself; for that truth always bore the stamp of his own individuality. Michael Angelo is not lost to Rome, although he died long ago. He still remains there in the wonderful architecture of St. Peter's, and in the still more wonderful frescoes with which the interiors of his architecture were adorned. We cannot build up any structure of thought without leaving on it the traces of the thinker. St. Peter's, built by Leonardo da Vinci, would have been characteristically different from that which Michael Angelo built, though the same stones should have been laid in its walls. The truths we hold may be identical with those which others in distant places hold; and we hold them as they were communicated to us by men who shaped them in their own minds before they were communicated. In the same manner personal influences abide after he who exercised them is gone. We feel not only their pressure, but also that of the character of him from whom they come. Every personal influence is like the stroke of a die on a coin. It leaves a fixed image; it may be Cæsar, it may be Xerxes. Most men's lives are divided into chapters, and in each chapter we have not only a record of what they did at certain periods and in certain places, but also what they were. In any one period of a man's life, you have the whole of him at that period. He is identified with the interests which his life affects. His roots go out into the soil where for the time he is planted. He draws strength from his surroundings, and he yields fruit where he abides. So far as he has personal character and force, just so far does he affect society. Transplant him, and some of his roots will remain, perhaps to send up new shoots when he is taken away. The seeds he has matured, good or bad, may still grow. One bad man in a community may be like a thistle, which curses broad acres. One good man may be like an oak, from whose acorns a whole forest may spring."

CHANGES INEVITABLE.

"In the present constitution of society, it is unavoidable that pastoral administrations shall be comparatively brief. Time was when the settlement of a pastor was considered as forming a life-long relation. The young pastor expected to mature and grow gray in one parish, and to be laid at last where the shadow of his own church-spire should sweep over his grave with each revolving day. He expected to marry the children whom he baptized in his earlier ministry, and in his later days to baptize and perhaps marry their children in turn. And there was something indescribably beautiful in the long pastorates which were passed under such a system. But those were the days of even and tranquil movement, before our population had become restless and migratory as now; before the currents of popular thought had become so swift and changeable; before the requirements made upon the ministry were so exacting, so wearing upon nerve and brain. A congregation will not now be satisfied with the quieter, though perhaps more instructive preaching which flowed so evenly from the lips of our fathers. By railway and steamship we are carried hither and thither to all parts of our country, if not to all parts of the civilized world. We learn to compare the utterances of the pulpit with which we are most familiar, with those which are occupied by the most distinguished men. Every pastor feels that he is brought into a sort of competition with, not those only of his own town or city, but also those of the whole land. Telegraphs and newspapers excite and quicken us all. We want the throb and thrill in the sanctuary to which we are accustomed in the avenue of trade. Popular intelligence is increased, and it is more difficult to satisfy the requirements of people than it was when the week brought but its single dull newspaper, and the book-shelf held but its score of books. The change is, in some respects, unfortunate. The foundations of religious knowledge are laid, perhaps, less securely. Most readers know far less than they suppose. They acquire much without mastering anything. There is little room now for that significant old proverb, 'Beware of the man of one book.' But the result of this speedy running up of the structures of knowledge, however insecure the foundation, is an increased demand for that work in the pulpit which most readily wears out the vital forces. If the preacher does not or cannot satisfy his people, it is better that he should leave them. Even if he succeeds in this without physical prostration, it still remains that he does not long preach to the same people. His congregation fluctuates like a quicksand. A few abide like the rock in the centre of the quicksand, while the greater portion come and go with the movements of the social tide."

NO SERIOUS DAMAGE.

"We are not, therefore, to regard the actual close of a pastor's ministrations in a particular church, as being so much of a disaster, as if society were more permanent—not so much as if from the necessities of the day such changes were not to be expected. What renders it natural that a pastor should be detached from his position, renders it the easier to supply his place."

CHANGE BENEFICIAL.

"After all that I have said, it may seem unfortunate that a pastorate closed when neither pastor nor people wish it should be terminated. But in view of these considerations, it is easy to believe that what neither party desires may be for the promotion of a common cause. In the great future of Chicago other pastors may lead on this church through successive stages of growth and prosperity, more effectively than I could have ever led it, while, perhaps, my remaining life may not be useless in another field. Let us be as hopeful and trustful as we have been submissive, in yielding to a manifest necessity."

ABOUT CANDIDATES.

A Methodist editor could hardly write what follows without being liable to a charge of misunderstanding the facts in the case. We suspect the Doctor's warning may be appropriate to some of our congregations.

"In respect of obtaining the services of another pastor, allow me this word of counsel—that you act through those to whom this special duty is committed. Also, that you receive no one into the pulpit as a candidate. There are very many who would be glad to preach here as candidates. Possibly you may know of individuals whom you would be glad to introduce to the congregation in this capacity. But with the appearance of every candidate, you will be thrown into a critical mood, and there is a possibility of division over every candidate presented. Let me assure you that the name of the pastor who will best satisfy you is not to be found on any one possible list of candidates. He is either now occupying a field from which his people will regret to spare him, or his position is such for other reasons that he will not consent to appear before you as a candidate. You can never decide upon the merit of a preacher by hearing one or two discourses. His stroke may be twelve or it may be only one. You can always learn more of a minister through those who have long known him, than by a personal inspection of him, when both he and you feel that he is on exhibition. When Dr. Bethune, now of sacred memory, left the parish to which he had so long and successfully ministered in Philadelphia, he wrote to his people in the strongest terms upon this point. 'Believe me,' said he, 'it is a very poor way to judge of a preacher's qualifications on hearing once or twice in the pulpit. It is far better to choose one whom you have never seen, if he has the high esteem of his brethren as a faithful and able minister of the New Testament.' 'Let me say, also, that it is unfortunate for a church to be publicly known as in pursuit of this or that distinguished man. Whatever may be the movements of those who have the duty of inquiry in charge, they should be quietly made. No reporter should be allowed in any way to learn their secret. And when at last a call is definitely given no public announcement should be made of it until the purpose to accept it has been signified. 'No child of this generation' would be willing to have his attempts at important negotiations trumpeted to the world, especially if such attempts should, one after the other, prove failures. Why should not the 'children of light' be equally wise? Besides, the selection of a pastor is not a mere matter of business. The leadings of God's providence are to be sought. It is time enough to announce those leadings when you know what they are. Very likely they will not conduct you to this or that prominent man, whose name may first occur to you. I believe that in this I have spoken the sentiment which is already entertained by the most of you, and which, on reflection, you will all approve."

GOOD ADVICE.

"I have already expressed, in more ways than one, the hope that my departure will be no signal for dispersions among you. Abide by the ship. St. Paul gave that counsel when his vessel went to pieces. Abide by the ship, for it never rode more hopefully on the wave. Not a sail is split; not a spar is strained. Abide by the ship, for it needs you; and if you go you may have cause to regret it. If any of you now think that you must leave it, wait until a new pastor is obtained, and then decide."

LAST WORDS.

All Methodist clergymen know the feeling

with which the Doctor pronounced these last words, so tender, so touching, so many. A reference is made in them to Rev. E. A. Pearce, a devoted young minister of this city, who has recently died in the far South, whither he went in search of health:

"In leaving this sanctuary, I leave what is and always will be to me, one of the pleasantest spots on earth. I do not go as one goes from some dingy workshop, in which he has long been a foreman. Were I thus to go, I should still leave this place with regret, for the mechanic becomes attached to his machinery, and has pleasant associations with the dusty windows through which he has been accustomed to look, and the blackened rafters which have held up the roof above him. I leave this sanctuary as one leaves a delightful home, and this congregation as one leaves a beloved household. I can never go so far that I shall not be able to review old scenes, and place myself by fancy among them again in one instant. Many a day I shall be in spirit in this pulpit again—in body, too, sometimes, let us hope. Many a day your familiar faces will be clear to the inward vision. Familiar voices shall float about me on the wave of sacred song. I shall hear touching interludes from the organ, plaintive or jubilant strains of voluntaries. And then the scene will change. I shall be pleading with you once more in the name of Jesus, or I shall seem to stand beside the communion table, a wide circle of recent converts around me, binding themselves by solemn covenant to God and to the Church, while beyond stand the covenanting people, like a cloud of witnesses. And as that vision fades, another will appear. The communion table will hold but the baptismal basin. The circle around me will be one of Christian parents holding their long-robbed babes, and one of the little ones will be in my arms, the water on its brow, and the formula of baptism on my lips. Again, and there will be the fragrance of flowers all about me. The circle will be that of a bridal party, kneeling in prayer amid the hushed assembly. Again, and behold the temple is filled with children, singing hosannas as of old. Or, in the chapel I shall be once more in the Sunday School, or in the prayer-meeting. Or in the study, I shall be seated at the familiar desk, or standing at the library with hand upon some favorite volume. Or, through the doors of your homes I shall pass without so much as a shadow to tell you I am there."

"Watch for me if you believe the spirit's presence is to be detected. Watch for me after the tidings of your special joys or sorrows have gone abroad. Watch for me as I come with a smile of congratulation or a tear of sympathy. Watch for me when on a visit to some new made grave. You have promised to see that the turf is green above those little graves I call my own. Shall I not also be looked for and felt, though not seen, beside those graves which are especially dear to you?"

Ab, brethren of the churches, do you know that much of the sadness of change would be removed, could we feel assured that the people we have served in the Lord would "see that the turf is green above the graves we call our own." You can often trace the pathway of the itinerant by the graves of his loved ones! They are the waymarks of his pilgrimage! His eye often fills with tears, as in some distant field he thinks of those graves and fears they are forgotten! The itinerant has no family burial place. The mother and the child sleep far from each other, and too often, each in a neglected grave.

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