

MEMOIRS
OF
THE LIFE AND WRITINGS
OF
THOMAS CHALMERS, D.D. LL.D.

BY HIS SON-IN-LAW,

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VOL. II.

EDINBURGH: THOMAS CONSTABLE AND CO.
LONDON: HAMILTON, ADAMS, AND CO.

MDCCLII.

APPENDIX F.—P. 121.

“ My first advice to you, Gentlemen, on entering the important and honourable office with which you have now been invested, is to feel the full impression of its sacredness. I am well aware that there is not a professing Christian who does not forfeit all title to the name and character of a Christian if he do not honestly and with all the energies of his soul aspire at being not merely almost but altogether a disciple of the Lord Jesus. It is the duty of the obscurest individual in our parish or in our congregation to be as heavenly in his desires, and as peculiar in the whole style of his behaviour, and as upright in his transactions, and as circumspect in his walk, and as devoted in heart and in service to the God of his redemption, as the minister who labours amongst them in word and in doctrine, or as the elders who assist him in the administration of ordinances, or as the most conspicuous among the office-bearers of that Church with which he is connected. But remember, my friends, that the very circumstance of being conspicuous forms a double call upon your attention to certain prescribed duties of the New Testament. It is this which gives so peculiar an importance to your example. It is this which by making your light seen before men renders it a more powerful instrument for the glorifying of God ; and it is this, too, which stamps a tenfold malignity upon your misconduct. And under the impression of this I cannot forbear urging upon you to be careful lest your good should be evil spoken of, to be in all things an example to the flock over which God hath appointed you the overseers, to remember that your conduct has now a more decided bearing upon others than it had formerly, and that as it is your duty to look not to your own things but to the things of others also, so it is your most solemn and imperious obligation to take heed and give no just offence in anything, that the religion of which you have now become the declared and the visible functionaries be not blamed.

“ I know not how a greater outrage can be practised on Christianity—I know not how a deadlier wound can be given to its reputation and its interest in the world—I know not how a sorer infliction can be devised on a part of greater tenderness, than for a man to usurp a place of authority and of lofty standing in the Church of our Redeemer, and then to exhibit such a life, and to maintain such a lukewarm indifference, and to hold out such a conformity with the world as to all the levities and all the secularities which abound in it, and, above all, so to deform the path of his own personal history by what is profane and profligate and unseemly, that

the report of his misdoings shall spread itself over the neighbourhood, and into whatever company it may enter, it shall scandalize the friends of Jesus, and become matter of triumph and of bitter derision to his enemies.

“ But I hope better things of you, and things which accompany salvation, though I thus speak. I rejoice in your admission amongst our number. I feel a weight of personal gratitude upon my own heart for the kind and friendly acquiescence with which you have favoured me ; and though I call it a weight, it is such a weight as causes no oppression and no painfulness along with it—a weight which I count it honourable to bear, and of which I can say with truth that I feel a pride and a pleasure in carrying it about with me.

“ I have only two leading remarks to offer on the duties of that situation which you are now entering. They both relate to your intercourse with the people of the parish, and may be divided into the spiritual, which in my estimation form the primitive and the essential duties of the eldership, and into the temporal, which form the superinduced duties, and which have rather been accumulated upon the office by the custom and practice of the day—duties which, though essential in themselves, were originally devolved upon another set of office-bearers.

“ As to the first set of duties, the first thing which occurs to me to say about them is to do nothing of constraint. I am well aware how widely the practice of our generation has diverged from the practice of our ancestors—how, within the limits of our Establishment, the lay office-bearers of the Church are fast renouncing the whole work of ministering from house to house in prayer and in exhortation and in the dispensation of spiritual comfort and advice among the sick or the disconsolate or the dying. On this subject I urge nothing upon you. I am aware that a reformation in this department can only be brought about by an influence of a more gentle and moral, and withal more effectual kind than that of authority ; and I shall therefore only say that I know of almost nothing which would give me greater satisfaction than to see a connexion of this kind established between my elders and the population of those districts which are respectively assigned to them—that I know of nothing which would tell more effectually in the way of humanizing our families, than if so pure an intercourse were going on as an intercourse of piety between our men of reputable station on the one hand, and our men of labour and of poverty on the other,—I know of nothing which would serve more powerfully to bring and to harmonize into one firm system of social order the various classes of our community ; I know not a finer exhibition, on the one hand, than the man of wealth acting the man of piety, and throw-

ing the goodly adornment of Christian benevolence over the splendour of those civil distinctions which give a weight and a lustre to his name in society ; I know not a more wholesome influence, on the other, than that which such a man must carry around him when he enters the habitations of the peasantry, and dignifies by his visits the people who occupy them, and talks with them as the heirs of one hope and of one immortality, and cheers by the united power of religion and of sympathy the very humblest of misfortune's generation, and convinces them of a real and longing affection after their best interests, and leaves them with the impression that here at least is one man who is our friend, that here at least is one proof that we are not altogether destitute of consideration amongst our fellows, that here at least is one quarter on which our confidence may rest—ay, and amidst all the insignificance in which we lie buried from the observation of society, we are sure at least of one who, in the most exalted sense of the term, is ever ready to befriend us, and to look after us, and to care for us.

“ Rest assured, Gentlemen, that you have an ample field for such exercise—a field so extensive, that if left to the solitary management of one individual, is left in a great measure neglected—a field greatly beyond the time and strength of your minister—a field which he is not able to cultivate to the full by his own personal exertions, and which he would therefore like to devolve upon others in the way of deputation ; and here it occurs to me to say, that such is my confidence in your judgment, that if delicacy or inexperience should for a time restrain you from entering upon your respective districts in the capacity of spiritual labourers, what is to hinder you from availing yourselves of deputation ?—what is to hinder you from calling into action the piety and the Christian intelligence of your neighbours ?—what is to hinder you from providing, in the person of others, for the homes of those who are under you the comforts and the warnings of religion ? I know that a good deal is done in this way by the piety of private Christians. It may not be official piety, but still if it is piety, I am sure that a right and salutary influence will spread itself among the streets of our city by the free and active circulation of it.

“ I now come to the second set of duties—those which relate to the business of ministering temporal accommodation to the needy population of our parish. Though I think it were better that these should be devolved on another set of men entirely, I am yet far from denying the importance of them, and till those men be provided, I would press them on your most earnest and practical and affectionate attention. Next to the object of Christianizing our people, I know not another to which we can more use-

fully and more laudably direct our ambition, Gentlemen, than that of diminishing the amount of wretchedness that is among them, than that of alleviating their actual and of anticipating their eventual poverty, than that of combining the great object of an effectual relief with the other great object of sustaining the spirit and the industry of our people—in one word, I should like if we could exhibit the spectacle of a well-served and a well-satisfied parish, and at the same time could conduct our affairs so discreetly and so economically, and mix up our administration of the public funds with so many wise and well-directed exertions of private charity, that we outstripped all the parishes around us in the superior cheapness as well as in the superior efficacy of our management.

“ I call upon you therefore, Gentlemen, to make a conscience of your attendance upon the needs and the demands of your respective populations—not to shun and superficialize the matter, but to give to it strength and earnestness and persevering inquiry—to lay your account with its being a burden, and to summon up a stock of patience and of hardihood for the bearing of it ; not to enter upon your offices as if they were so many sinecures, but to feel that certain duties are annexed to them, and that for the right and attentive performance of these duties a weight of responsibility is now lying upon you. Sure I am that with the manageable extent of walk which will be assigned to each of you, you will at length come to feel that to be an enjoyment which you may perhaps for some time feel to be an oppression—that custom will soon reconcile you to your new employments—and that the more you methodize and attend to it now, the more speedily will you reduce it to a smooth and pleasing and easily practicable concern.

“ I shall just venture on three distinct observations relative to this department of your services :—

“ My first is, that the poor will feel themselves greatly soothed and conciliated by your ready attention, by your friendly counsel, by your acts of advice and assistance as to the conduct of their little affairs, by the mere civility and courteousness which mark your transactions with them, and that these will positively go further to gladden their hearts and to endear your person to them than all the money you may find it necessary to award for the support of their indigent families.

“ My second remark is counterpart to my former one. It will be said, that by this unrestricted facility of manner you will lay yourselves open to the inroads of the worthless and the undeserving. In answer to this, I ask if there be not room enough in a man’s character for the wisdom of the serpent along with the gentleness of the dove ? That we may ward off the unde-

serving poor, is it necessary to put on a stern and repulsive front against all the poor who offer themselves to our observation? The way, I apprehend, is to put forth patience and attention, and to be in the ready attitude of prepared and immediate service for all cases and for all applications in the first instance; to conduct every examination with temper and kindness,—and surely it is possible to do this and at the same time to conduct it with vigilance. Exercise will soon sharpen your discrimination in these matters, and when you have got at a thoroughly ascertained state of the claim which has been advanced, and you find that it is not a valid one, then put forth your firmness, then make a display of calm and settled determination, then show your people that you have judgment as well as feeling, and that you know how to combine the habit of justice to the public by not squandering their money on unsuitable objects, with the habit of sympathy for genuine distress, and of ready attention to the merits of every application.

“ On the strength of this second advice, Gentlemen, you will check, on the one hand, all unseasonable applications, and, on the other, you will still preserve all that homage of attachment which your kindness to real sufferers, and your candour and courteousness to all, are fitted to secure to you. Your people will not like you the worse that they see you acting in a sound, judicious, and experimental way with them. They know how to appreciate good sense as well as we, and they admire it, and they actually have a liking for it. They are scandalized when they see kindness lavished on the unworthy. Though they like attention and sympathy, they have a greater esteem for them when they see them conjoined with the wisdom of judgment and a good understanding; and in proportion as you evince yourselves to have the faculty of rejecting those claims which are groundless, in that very proportion will a real sufferer esteem that act of preference by which you have had the discernment to single out his claim, and the benevolence most soothingly and most sympathizingly and most amply to provide for it.

“ I have just one remark more to submit to you. I know not a more interesting case that can be submitted to you in this way than when an applicant proposes for the first time to draw relief from a public charity. This he is often compelled to do from some temporary distress that hangs over his family; and if the emergency could be got over without a public and a degrading exposure of him who labours under it, there would both be a most substantial saving of the public fund and a most soothing act of kindness rendered to the person who is applying to you. I am very far from urging anything upon you. I merely throw this out as a hint and a suggestion. If by your own influence or that of your friends work could be provided for a man in such circumstances, or some private and delicate mode

of relief be devised for him, then I know not in what other way you could more effectually establish yourselves as the most valuable servants of the public and as the best and kindest friends of your own immediate population. All will depend on the earnestness and the sense of duty which you bring to your offices along with you ; and while I feel nothing but confidence, and conceive nothing but the most favourable anticipations on this subject, I beg leave to conclude with expressing once more my sincere and hearty acknowledgments for the readiness with which you have stepped forward to assist and to relieve us."

APPENDIX G.—P. 128.

"I feel myself in the line of a most direct and pertinent application when I carry forward the general principles which I have now stated in your hearing to the much agitated question of Sabbath-schools. The object of these institutions is to make the young wise unto salvation through the medium of the word of God, and for this purpose to exercise their attention and their memory, and their understanding, and their every faculty which belongs to them, on the sacred volume of inspiration. You will at least allow that during the whole work of such an institution the right seed and the appropriate soil for the reception of it are brought in contact with each other, and the only thing wanted to complete the human part of the arrangement is a qualified agent for the purpose of depositing this seed. Now there is one class of objectors to this system who must find it quite impossible to allege in opposition to it the difficulty of finding such agents. They conceive, and they honestly conceive, it to be hurtful on the principle of its withdrawing the young from the moral and religious guardianship of their parents. Such an objection as this supposes the great mass of parents to be qualified for the Christian education of their families, and I most readily admit this to be the case in as far as the qualification of mere talent is concerned. Parents, generally speaking, labour under no natural disqualification for the effective training up of their offspring in the nurture and admonition of the Lord,—and why? Just because, agreeably to all I have stated on this subject, every one of them may if he will have access to the Bible—every one of them may if he will have access to the Mediator, through whom the things of God may, through the medium of the Bible, be revealed to the understanding—every one of them may if he will have the benefit of the teaching of the Holy Ghost, and through prayer for wisdom as he stands in need of it, may obtain a plentiful supply