

CHAPTER II.

BAXTER'S MINISTRY.

If WHITEFIELD is properly called the prince of preachers, BAXTER deserves to be ranked as the prince of pastors. The Holy Spirit made him a model pastor, and in the ecclesiastical history of England, since the Reformation, no name can be mentioned as being his equal in the pastorship. To form an adequate conception of his pastoral character, it is necessary first to read his own ideal of a Christian minister in his "Gildas Salvianus, or Reformed Pastor," and then to see his working out of that ideal in the "Reliquiae Baxterianae," where he recounts his plans and methods of pastoral toil at Kidderminster.

Baxter commenced his ministry as a Conformist. His family, though inclined to Puritanism, were all Conformists, and so were all his connexions. The whole of his theological reading had been against Nonconformity. When he was about twenty years of age, he became acquainted with several able Nonconformist divines in Shropshire, and especially with the Rev. Walter Cradock, the apostle of Nonconformity in North Wales. In their society he found an atmosphere which was refreshing to everything devout, unearthly and holy, in his own mind. The fervid piety, the serious conversation, and the lofty devotion of these men raised them very highly in his esteem, and the prosecutions which they suffered kindled his indignation against the hierarchy that oppressed them: but neither the holy character of the Shropshire Puritans, nor the persecuting disposition of the prelates, produced in him any scruples about conforming. To be a minister, he must be episcopally ordained; to be ordained, he must subscribe the Articles and the Liturgy—and to subscribe consent and assent to them he had no hesitation, because, says he, "I had never once read the Book of Ordination." In 1638, he was ordained at Worcester by Bishop Thornborough. The first sermon he ever preached was in the Upper Church at Dudley, while he was head master of the grammar school there. He laboured in that town as a preacher for about a year, but without any pastoral relation to the people.

The next scene of his ministry was Bridgenorth, a town at that time full of public houses. He preached here for nearly two years to large congregations of ignorant and besotted people, with very few instances of success, and with many discouragements. It is still reported in Bridgenorth that when he preached his farewell sermon to the people, he remarked that their hearts were as hard as the sandstone rock on which their church is built. It was at Bridgenorth that he became a Nonconformist. When, in 1640, regal tyranny and prelatical madness imposed upon the clergy the notorious *Et Caetera* Oath;¹ binding all the ministers of truth and liberty never to change their opinions concerning bishops, deans, &c., its ridiculous and wicked pretensions were carefully examined by the Salopian Conformists assembled at Bridgenorth. After this discussion, Baxter resolved that he would not subscribe the oath, and that he would honestly and manfully investigate the claims of Pre-lacy. He read with diligence and candour the works of distinguished and learned Nonconformists, as well as those of able Episcopalians, and he came to the conclusion that Diocesan Episcopacy was of unscriptural origin,

opposed to the simplicity of primitive pastorship, and subversive of scriptural discipline and order in the church. The Et Caetera Oath produced many results favourable to the progress of Nonconformity, and among its et caetera consequences one was the Presbyterianism of Baxter.

On April 5, 1641, Baxter was appointed lecturer at Kidderminster. His removal to this town was brought about partly by the parliament, and partly by the people. The clergy, in every part of the country, were so ignorant and dissolute, that the parliament appointed a committee to enquire into the religious state of the country, and to hear the complaints and the petitions of the people against their ministers. The inhabitants of Kidderminster availed themselves of this arrangement, and presented a petition against the Rev. Mr Dance, their minister, who was a drunkard, and who preached only once a quarter. This petition resulted in the committee's invitation to Baxter to take the lectureship, which was seconded by an affectionate letter from the people of the town.

Kidderminster had many attractions for Baxter: the town was large, and afforded an adequate sphere for his commanding talents; the people were generally of a profligate character, for which his fervid and rousing preaching was well adapted; and, among the inhabitants, there were a few who were sighing for the abominations of the place, and who would cheerfully welcome and further the efforts of a holy minister to do good. He commenced his ministry among them by preaching for one Sunday on probation, and was then cordially chosen by the people as their lecturer. He spent here two years, which proved, in the arrangement of Providence, a kind of disciplinary novitiate to his remarkable labours there at a subsequent period. His first labours at Kidderminster were interrupted and blasted by the unhappy rupture between Charles I. and the Parliament. When the first rumours of a civil war were heard in the moans of an oppressed people, Baxter began to develop some of the mental characteristics which marked the subsequent history of his life; for he sided with neither party, but found fault with both. This was not from timidity; much less was it from compromise; but it was from his sincere desire to secure and promote peace on earth and good will among men. All the writings of Baxter demonstrate that he was a firm and thorough friend to the cause of the parliament; and that though he was loyal to the monarchy and the throne, he detested the consummate and heartless duplicity of Charles. All this the people of Kidderminster believed and knew; and, therefore, when the king's declaration was one day being proclaimed at the market-place, just while Baxter was passing by, the officer who read it exclaimed, "there goes a traitor." The rabble, who already hated him on account of his serious and faithful preaching, responded immediately and heartily, "Down with the roundheads"—and then directed their march in pursuit of him, with the resolution to take away his life. As the town of Kidderminster, and indeed nearly every town in Worcester-shire were openly for the king, Baxter was advised to quit the place and retire from the county altogether.

In the sketch of his life given in the preceding chapter, his retirement to Gloucester—his brief return to Kidderminster—his preaching at Alcester on the Sunday that the battle of Edgehill was fought—his first year at Coventry—his two months' sojourn at Shropshire at the siege of Wem—and his second year at Cov-

entry, have been recorded. In all these wanderings he was ever faithful to the work of the ministry, preaching whenever he could and wherever he might—sometimes in towns, and sometimes in villages and rural hamlets; now to soldiers in garrison, and anon to peasants in the highways and hedges. His village labours were carried on amidst many dangers, and especially at the hazard of apprehension and imprisonment. As an instance of the state of the times, and as a memorial of the interposition of Providence in his behalf, the following anecdote is introduced on the authority of the Congregational Magazine.’²

The report is, that during Baxter’s residence at Coventry, several of the Non-conformist ministers of that city united with him in preaching a lecture at a private house, on a neighbouring common. “The time of worship was generally a very early hour. Mr Baxter left Coventry in the evening, intending to preach the lecture the following morning. The night being dark, he lost his way; and, after wandering about a considerable time, he came to a gentleman’s house, where he asked for direction. The servant who came to the door informed his master that a person of very respectable appearance had lost his way. The gentleman, thinking it would be unsafe for such a person to be wandering on the common at so late an hour, requested the servant to invite him in. Mr Baxter readily accepted the kind proposal, and met with a very hospitable reception. His conversation was such as to give his host an exalted idea of his good sense, and his extensive information. The gentleman, wishing to know the quality of his guest, said, after supper, ‘as most persons have some employment or profession in life, I have no doubt, sir, that you have yours.’ Mr Baxter replied, with a smile, ‘Yes, sir, I am a man catcher.’ ‘man catcher,’ said the gentleman, ‘are you? I am very glad to hear you say so, for you are the very person I want. I am a Justice of the Peace in this district, and am commissioned to secure the person of Dick Baxter, who is expected to preach at a conventicle in this neighbourhood early to-morrow morning; you shall go with me, and, I doubt not, we shall easily apprehend the rogue.’ Mr Baxter very prudently consented to accompany him.

“Accordingly, the gentleman, on the following morning, took Mr Baxter in his carriage to the place where the meeting was to be held. When they arrived at the spot, they saw a considerable number of people hovering about; for seeing the carriage of the Justice, and suspecting his intentions, they were afraid to enter the house. The Justice, observing this, said to Mr Baxter—‘I am afraid that they have obtained some information of my design; Baxter has probably been apprised of it, and therefore will not fulfil his engagement; for you see the people will not go into the house. I think, if we extend our ride a little farther, our departure may encourage them to assemble, and on our return we may fulfil our commission.’ When they returned, they found their efforts useless, for the people still appeared unwilling to assemble.

“The magistrate, thinking he should be disappointed of the object he had in view, observed to his companion, that, as the people were very much disaffected to Government, he would be much obliged to him to address them on the subject of loyalty and good behaviour. Mr Baxter replied, that perhaps this would not be deemed sufficient; for, as a religious service was the object for which they were met together, they would not be satisfied with advice of that nature: but, if the

magistrate would begin with prayer, he would then endeavour to say something to them. The gentleman replied, putting his hand to his pocket, 'Indeed, sir, I have not got my prayer book with me, or I would readily comply with your proposal. However, I am persuaded that a person of your appearance and respectability would be able to pray with them as well as to talk to them. I beg, therefore, that you will be so good as to begin with prayer.' This being agreed to, they alighted from the carriage and entered the house, and the people, hesitating no longer, immediately followed them.

Mr Baxter then commenced the service, and prayed with that seriousness and fervour for which he was so eminent. The magistrate, standing by, was soon melted into tears. The good divine then preached in his accustomed lively and zealous manner. When he had concluded, he turned to the Justice and said, 'Sir, I am the very DICK BAXTER of whom you are in pursuit. I am entirely at your disposal.' The magistrate, however, had felt so much during the service, and saw things in so different a light, that he laid aside all his enmity to the Nonconformists, and ever afterwards became their sincere friend and advocate, and it is believed also a decided Christian."

Baxter commenced his ministry in Coventry on the condition that he should neither be obliged to take a commission in the army nor be appointed a chaplain to a regiment. His duties were to preach once a week to the soldiers, and once on the Sabbaths to the town's people. For his labours he took no remuneration but his diet. In this garrison he followed his studies, he says, "as quietly as in the time of peace." After the battle of Naseby, fought while he was at Coventry, his scruples to join the army gave way before what he heard and saw on visiting Cromwell's troops near Leicester. He found that the church in the army was a different thing from the church amid citizens and peasantry. He was astonished and grieved to hear civil and religious liberty openly, freely, and manfully discussed by the soldiers. "I heard," he says, "the plotting heads hot upon that which intimated their intention to subvert Church and State;" and these were Cromwell's chief favourites, and they were the soul of the army, though in number they were only as one to twenty. Several officers pressed him to join the army, and after consulting his ministerial friends in Coventry, and obtaining the reluctant consent of the city garrison to release him, he joined it as chaplain to Colonel Whalley's regiment. Among his friends in the garrison, he said expressly that he attached himself to the army for the purpose of doing his best against its sectarian tendencies. On hearing him, Colonel Purefoy said very magisterially, "Let me hear no more of that. If NOL CROMWELL should hear any soldier but speak such a word, he would cleave his crown."

On joining the army, he was introduced to Cromwell, who received him very coolly, and never afterwards conversed with him, nor was he ever allowed an opportunity to attend the meetings of the officers at head quarters. It is not unlikely that Colonel Purefoy had communicated Baxter's designs to Cromwell, and this was the reason of the coolness; but another fact might also be in the recollection of Cromwell which would induce him to treat the divine with some reserve. When Cromwell lay at Cambridge, he collected his first troop of Ironsides, which he and his officers tried to form into a church; that is, a troop of church members, a liter-

ally militant church, or fighting congregation. This troop invited Baxter, while at Coventry, to become its pastor. In reply, he not only declined their invitation, but rebuked them for their constitution, and for their designs. This peevish denial and ill-timed reproof are enough to account for the coolness with which he was received by the army.

His ministry in the army was an utter failure. He was too belligerent in polemic theology, and too much of a field-marshal in logic, to maintain successfully a ministry of peace among soldiers, and especially among the independent Ironsides. In his ministerial labours, he set himself to discover the ecclesiastical corruptions of the soldiers—disputed with the troops upon all points, political as well as religious—contended against all varieties of opinions among them, whether Antinomianism, Arminianism, or Quakerism and Anabaptism, but especially against Voluntaryism. In describing the army, he says, “The most frequent and vehement disputes were for liberty of conscience, as they called it; that is, that the civil magistrate had nothing to do to determine matters of religion by constraint or restraint.” With the leaders of these heroes of freedom, Baxter would dispute in the hearing of the rest, to try to make them the laughing-stock of the troops. The consequence was, that he was both bitterly scorned and cautiously avoided. It is due to these first and noble disciples of liberty of conscience to record, that the failure of his ministry among them was to be traced more to the controversial tendencies of his own mind than to the military habits of the soldiers. To this fact he gives himself a candid and an honest testimony. “Many of those honest soldiers who were tainted but with some doubts about liberty of conscience or independency, were men who would discourse of the points of sanctification and Christian experience very seriously.” As a proof of the manner in which he was treated and avoided in the army, he says—“All the two years that I was in the army, even my old bosom friend who had lived in my house, and been dearest to me, James Borry, then Captain, after Colonel and Major, the Lord of the Upper House, who had formerly invited me to Cromwell’s old troop, did never once invite me to the army at first, nor invite me to his quarters, nor ever once come to visit me, or ever saw me, save twice or thrice that we met by accident.”

After many marches and counter-marches with the army for two years, and after many attacks of disease, through which it is not necessary now to follow him, he settled at Kidderminster, much to the joy of his people, and much to the honour of his own immortal character.

Baxter’s settlement at Kidderminster was the greatest honour that God ever conferred on that picturesque town. His pastorship there will be had in everlasting remembrance, when the skill and the wealth produced by its peculiar manufactory will be forgotten for ever. As a model pastor, his character deserves to be known, studied, and imitated, yea, if possible, surpassed. To form a proper estimate of his pastoral labours, it is necessary to know the character of the inhabitants before he settled among them, the state of his health amid his numerous labours, the various plans of usefulness which he adopted, the amount of his success, and the peculiar advantages which he had for carrying on his operations.

The character of the inhabitants of Kidderminster, at the period of his settlement, was as degraded and as unpromising as an incompetent and profligate

clergy could make it. The vicar of the place did not understand even the substance of the catechism or creed. His preaching consisted in scraping together, once a quarter, "a few words which he so said over as to move pity in his auditors." Attached to the parish there was a chapel, which was supplied by an old curate as ignorant as his vicar. This curate got his living by celebrating unlawful marriages. "I knew not," says Baxter, "how to keep him from reading the prayers, for I judged it a sin to tolerate him in any sacred office." In one of the suburban districts, called the Rock, there were two chapels. The curate of one of these got his living by cutting faggots; and the other curate by making ropes, "their ability being answerable to their studies and employments." It is no wonder that under the ministry of such clergy the whole populace of the town had become a disorderly mass and an unruly rabble. The people were hostile to real religion under every name and form, whether conformist or nonconformist. They compelled Baxter to leave the town and the county to preserve his life, and they resolutely opposed two or three attempts which the congregation made to restore him. This fact in the history of Kidderminster, will supply a salutary lesson to some ministers in the present day, who, in contemplating some new sphere of labour proposed to them, speak of it as abounding with "up-hill work." If any pastor on earth had "up-hill work," Baxter had it. Baxter's discouragements, and Baxter's devotedness, should cancel such phrase from every minister's vocabulary, for in "destroying the works of the devil," he must expect difficulty, toil, and suffering.

Such was Kidderminster: and now see the man who is going to labour for Christ in it. In bodily health he seems a very Lazarus, and his painful diseases would have been by many a sufficient apology for doing nothing in pastoral efforts. He says, "in my labours at Kidderminster, after my return, I did all under languishing weakness, being seldom an hour free from pain. Many a time have I been brought very low, and received the sentence of death in myself, when my poor, honest, praying neighbours have met; and, upon their fasting and earnest prayers, I have been recovered." "Another time, I had a tumour rose on one of the tonsils in my throat, white and hard like a bone, above the hardness of any schyrrous tumour. I feared a cancer. This proved obstinate against all remedies, when, at the end of about a quarter of a year, I was checked in conscience that I had never publicly praised God particularly for any of the deliverances vouchsafed me." He was now writing the second part of the "Saint's Rest," and while he was penning the passage of gratitude to God for his mercies, "the tumour vanished," he says; "and no sign wherever it had been remained; nor did I know what went with it to this day." "Another time, being in danger of an oegilops, and (to be brief) at divers times, in divers weaknesses, pains, dangers, I have been delivered upon earnest prayers." "After abundance of distempers and languishings, I fell at last into a flux hepaticus, and after that into manifold dangers necessarily too long to be cited." He had very distressing headaches, and a stomach so disordered, that "a spoonful of wine would disturb him for a whole fortnight." His body was indeed a body of death, a vile body, sufficient to clog any soul, and to weigh down any common pastor. In addition to all the pains endured, let it be remembered what debilitating influence such a body would have upon the mind and upon the temper, indisposing the mind to work, and souring

the temper against all pastoral intercourse with his people.

Such was the man who regenerated Kidderminster. It is now to be seen what he did, and how he did it. It was remarked at the commencement of this Essay, that one purpose of its being written was to interest young ministers in the pastoral character of Baxter. To promote this purpose, it is thought desirable to place the elements of his extensive usefulness in an adjusted order, that they might be apprehended with the greatest possible distinctness. This is the reason why they are arranged under separate and distinct heads.

I. BAXTER'S PLANS OF USEFULNESS.

The methods which he adopted for the regeneration of Kidderminster are the following —

1. Before the wars he preached twice every Lord's day, and afterwards once a Sabbath.

2. On Monday and Tuesday in each week, his assistant and himself took fourteen families between them for catechising and conference: Baxter taking the town, and the assistant the parish. In these visits he heard them recite the words of the catechism, and then examined them in the meaning of it, and finally urged them to practise what they knew. He spent about an hour with each family, making seven hours a day.

3. He preached a lecture every Thursday morning; and after the lecture had "the company of several godly ministers, with whom he spent the afternoon in the truest recreation."

4. Every Thursday evening he had his neighbours to meet him at his own house. On these occasions one of them repeated the leading thoughts of the sermon that had been preached in the morning; and others proposed their difficulties, and cases of conscience. These meetings closed by one or more engaging in extempore prayer, and sometimes he himself prayed.

5. Once a week the young people met a few of the members more privately, when they spent three hours in prayer together; and, especially on Saturday night, they met at some of their houses to repeat the sermons of the last Lord's day, and to pray, and prepare themselves for the morrow.

6. Once in a few weeks, Baxter and his people held, on some occasion or other, a day of humiliation and prayer.

7. Every religious woman that was safely delivered in childbirth, if able, kept a day of open thanksgiving with some of her neighbours, praising God, singing psalms, and soberly feasting together.

8. On the first Wednesday in every month was held the monthly meeting for parish discipline.

9. Every first Thursday in the month was the Minister's meeting for discipline and disputation, and mutual conference, at which he was "almost constant moderator;" and for which he generally prepared a written determination.

This was indeed a week well filled up, and well spent. His only time for study was Monday, after spending seven hours in pastoral visit; Tuesday the same;

Wednesday entirely, except the first Wednesday in the month; and the whole of Friday and Saturday. When his manifold labours, his intense sufferings, his laborious preparations, are taken into consideration, his industry must appear stupendous, and his economy of time virtuously avaricious. In his visitation to any district of the town, he expected to see every family, and he was resolved to have an interview with them, if possible. As an instance of this resolution, the following anecdote is current in Shropshire. In some streets, he found some families so obdurate that they refused him admission, and the door was continued closed as long as he was known to be in the neighbourhood. In such cases, his practice was, on another day, to enter some friendly house which commanded a view of the door that had been closed against him, and thence watch to see if the door were open or on the jar; and whenever he saw the door partly open, he seized the opportunity, entered the house, and had religious conversation with the inmates.

II. BAXTER'S SUCCESS.

Having presented his plans and methods of labour, it is now pro-per to notice how they worked, and to record the amount of his success. In reference to his success, he says—"I have mentioned my sweet and acceptable employment, let me, to the praise of my gracious Lord, acquaint you with some of my success. And I will not suppress it, though I foreknow that the malignant will impute the mention of it to pride and ostentation; for it is the sacrifice of thanksgiving which I owe to my gracious God, which I will not deny him for fear of being censured as proud, lest I prove myself proud indeed."

1. His public preaching met with great acceptance. He was popular in the town, and even those that were so hostile to him before the wars, not only became tractable, but also attended his ministry.
2. The congregation increased, and became so numerous that five galleries were built in succession to accommodate the crowds that attended, though the church itself was large and commodious. Even at the private meetings the place was well attended.
3. No disorder was to be seen on the street on the Lord's day. He says—"You might hear an hundred families singing psalms, and repeating sermons, as you passed through the streets." "When I came thither first, there was about one family in a street that worshipped God, and called on his name; and when I came away, there were some streets where there was not past (i.e. more than) one family in the side of a street that did not so." This was the case even with the inns and public-houses of the town.
4. The number of his regular communicants averaged sixteen hundred; "of whom," he says, "there was not twelve that I had not good hopes of as to their sincerity."
5. When he began personal conference with each family, and catechised them, there were very few families in all the town that refused to come; and they consisted chiefly of beggars and paupers who lived in the out-

- skirts of the town. Scarcely a family left his presence “without some tears, or seemingly serious promises of a serious life.”
6. Some of the poor people became so versed in theological questions as “competently to understand the body of divinity,” and were able to judge in difficult controversies. “Some of them were so able in prayer, that very few ministers did match them in order and fulness, and apt expressions, and holy oratory, with fervency.” —“The temper of their minds, and the innocence of their lives, was much more laudable than their parts.”
 7. The lectures which he preached in his itinerant efforts at Worcester, Cleobury, Shiffnall, and especially Dudley, gave him great encouragement. At Dudley he says, “the poor nailers and labourers would not only crowd the church as full as ever I had seen in London, but would also hang on the windows and leads without.”
 8. His success among his ministerial brethren was as great as among private Christians. Their meetings were “never contentious, but always comfortable.” “We took,” he says, “great delight in the company of each other, so that I know that the remembrance of those days is pleasant both to them and me.”—“When I attempted to bring them all conjunctly to the work of catechizing and instructing every family by itself, I found a ready consent in most, and performance in many.”
 9. As Baxter became a model Pastor, the church at Kidderminster became a model Church to the surrounding congregations. “The zeal and knowledge of this poor people,” he says, “provoked many in other parts of the land. And though I have been absent from them now six years, and they have been assaulted with pulpit calumnies, and slanders, with threatenings and imprisonments, with enticing words and seducing reasonings, they yet stand fast, and keep to their integrity. Many of them are gone to God, and some are removed, and some are now in prison, and most still at home; but not one that I hear of are fallen off, or forsake their uprightness.”

It would be wrong to close this account of Baxter’s success without stating the devout feelings with which he recorded it. “I must here, to the praise of my dear Redeemer, set up this pillar of remembrance, even to his praise, who hath employed me so many years in so comfortable a work, with such encouraging success! O what am I, a worthless worm, not only wanting academical honours, but much of that furniture which is needful to so high a work, that God should thus abundantly encourage me, when the reverend instructors of my youth did labour fifty years together in one place, and could scarcely say that they had converted one or two of their parishes! And the greater was this mercy, because I was naturally of a discouraged spirit; so that if I had preached one year, and seen no fruit of it, I should hardly have forborne running away like Jonah, but should have thought God had not called me to that place.”

III.—BAXTER’S ADVANTAGES.

In surveying the wonderful success of Baxter, and in wishing to adopt his plans of usefulness, many young ministers would be glad to know what were the peculiar advantages of his position which contributed to the efficiency of his ministry. He himself has recorded thirty of these advantages, which will now be presented in his own arrangement, and, for distinctness' sake, in his own enumeration.

1. His going to a people who were not previously hardened by the Gospel.—“I came to a people that never had any awakening ministry before, but a few formal cold sermons of the curate. If they had been hardened under a powerful ministry, and been sermon proof, I should have expected less.” This language was occasioned by his bitter remembrance of Bridgenorth.

2. His affectionate and serious style of preaching.—“I was in the vigour of my spirits, and had naturally a familiar moving voice, which is a great matter with the common hearers; and doing all in bodily weakness as a dying man to dying men.” “It must be serious preaching which must make men serious in hearing and obeying it.”

3. The removal and disappearance of the profane rabble out of the town.—“Those who had risen in tumult against me at first, and who were the enemies of all godliness in the town, went, from the very hatred of the Puritans, to the wars, and perished in battle.”

4. Freedom of conscience and liberty of prophesying under the reign of Cromwell.—Baxter himself bears testimony that the success of the Parliament in the civil wars “removed many and great impediments to men's salvation.” Somewhere between the niches allotted for Charles the First and Charles the Second, in the New Houses of Parliament, where, as an insult to the civil and religious liberties of England, a statue was denied Cromwell, a tablet should be placed bearing in letters of gold the following testimony of Baxter:—“Though Cromwell gave liberty to all sects among us, and did not set up any party alone by force, yet this much, gave abundant advantage to the Gospel [viz.], removing the prejudices and the terrors that hindered it; especially considering that godliness had countenance, and reputation also, as well as liberty.” “For my part, I bless God who gave me, even under an usurper whom I opposed, such liberty and advantage to preach his Gospel with success, which I cannot have under a King to whom I have sworn and performed subjection and obedience; yea [liberty and advantage] which no age, since the Gospel came into this land, did before possess, as far as I can learn from history.”

5. The esteem and veneration in which he was personally held by all.—“It is almost certain that the gratefulness of the person doth ingratiate the message, and greatly prepares the people to receive the truth. Had they taken me to be ignorant, erroneous, scandalous, worldly, self-seeking, &c., I could have expected small success.”

6. The co-operation and zeal of his people.—These “thirsted for the salvation of their neighbours, and were, in private, my assistants; and being dispersed through the town, were ready, in almost all companies, to repress seducing words, and to justify godliness, to convince, reprove, and exhort men according to their needs; as also, to teach them how to pray.”

7. The consistent lives of the members of his church.—“The malicious people could not say, ‘Your professors here are as proud and covetous as any.’ The blameless lives of godly people did shame opposers.”

8. The absence of sectarian bigotry in the town.—“We had no private church, though we had private meetings. We had not pastor against pastor, nor church against church, nor sect against sect, nor Christian against Christian.”

10. The private meetings which he held with religious people.—These were meetings for religious conversation, and for the friendly discussion of some important point of doctrine. “Here I had an opportunity to know their case; for if any were touched and awakened in public, I should presently see him drop into our private meetings.”

11. The diligence and laboriousness of his ministerial assistants. These deserve honourable mention; they were successively Mr Richard Sergeant and Mr Humphrey Waldern. In speaking of Mr Sergeant, he says,—“No child ever seemed more humble. No interest of his own, either of estate or reputation, did ever seem to stop him in his duty. No labour did he ever refuse which I could put him to. When I put him to travel over the parish, which is nearly twenty miles about, from house to house, to catechize and instruct each family, he never grudged or seemed once unwilling. He preached at a chapel above two miles off one-half the day, and in the town the other, and never murmured;” “Mr Humphrey Waldern was very much like him.”

12. The countenance of the magistrates of the place. “A bailif and a justice were annually chosen in the corporation, who ordinarily were godly men, and always such as would be thought so; and were ready to use their authority to suppress sin and promote godliness.” This was in perfect keeping with Baxter’s views on the authority of the magistrate in religion; though it would be disputed by most Independents.

13. His generous liberality to the poor. The living was thought to be worth L.200 per annum, but only L.90, and sometimes only L.80 came to Baxter. His published works brought him in some-times L.60, and sometimes L.80 per annum. Some of the cleverest children he sent to the universities, “where, for L.8 a year, or L.10 at most, by the help of my friends there, I maintained them.” “Some of them are honest ministers, now cast out with their brethren.” “In giving what little I had, I did not inquire whether they were good or bad, if they asked relief: For the bad had souls and bodies that needed charity most. And this truth I will speak to the encouragement of the charitable, that what little money I have now by me, I got it almost all, I scarce know how, in that time when I gave most. And since I have had less opportunity of giving, I have had less increase.”

14. The free distribution and circulation of his practical writings among the inhabitants. Of all his smaller publications he presented a copy to each family among his people, “which came to about eight hundred.”

15. The facilities for reading afforded by the particular trade of the town. In those days hand-loom allowed the people “time enough to read, and to talk of holy things;” but the wheels and spindles of power looms are not so accommodating. “The town liveth upon the weaving of Kidderminster stuffs, and as they stand in their loom, they can set a book before them, or edify one another.” “And their

constant converse and traffic with London doth much promote civility and piety among tradesmen.”

16. His single life. “For I could the easilier take my people for my children; and being discharged from the most of family cares, keeping but one servant, had the greater vacancy and liberty for the labours of my calling.”

17. His practice of physic. He found that “they that cared not for their souls did love their lives, and care for their bodies.” “Sometimes I could see before me in the church a very consider-able part of the congregation, whose lives God had made me a means to save, or to recover their health. And doing it for nothing so obliged them, that they would readily hear me.”

18. The influence of his young converts upon their relations. In the town there were few irreligious families “but some of their own relations were converted. Many children did God work upon at fourteen, fifteen, or sixteen years of age; and this did marvellously reconcile the minds of the parents, and elder sort to godliness. They that would not hear me would hear their own children.” “We had some old persons of near eighty years of age who are, I hope, in heaven; and the conversion of their own children was the chief means to overcome their prejudice, and old customs and conceits.”

19. Afflictions in families. “Though sick-bed promises are usually soon forgotten; yet was it otherwise with many among us. And as soon as they were recovered, they first came to our private meetings, and so kept in a learning state, till further fruits of piety appeared.”

20. His bearing a public testimony against the iniquity of the times. Here he refers to Cromwell’s army marching against the Parliament—to the execution of Charles I.—to the invasion of Scotland, &c., and says, “Had I owned the guilt of others, it would have been my shame, and the hindrance of my work, and provoked God to have disowned me.” In his view, pulpit protests against iniquitous governments were not likely to injure ministerial usefulness.

21. The character of the ministers around him. “Their preaching was powerful and sober; their spirits peaceable and meek; disowning the treasons and iniquities of the times, as well as we. They were wholly addicted to the winning of souls: adhering to no faction, neither episcopal, presbyterian, or independent, as to parties, but desiring union, and loving that which is good in all. These, meeting weekly at our lecture (in Kidderminster), and monthly, at our disputation, constrained a reverence in the people to their worth and unity, and consequently furthered my work.”

22. The reproach and ridicule which intemperance brought upon itself. “There were two drunkards almost at the next doors to me, who, one by night, and the other by day, did constantly every week, if not twice or thrice a week, roar and rave in the street like stark madmen. These were so beastly and ridiculous that they made that sin, of which we were in most danger, the more abhorred.”

23. The character and the fate of apostates and backsliders in the neighbourhood. “They that fell off were such as, before, by their want of grounded understanding, humility, and mortification, gave us the greatest suspicion of their stability.” “As they fell from the faith, so they fell to drinking, gaming, furious passions, horribly abusing their wives, &c.—and so to a vicious life. So that they

stood up as pillars of God's justice to warn others."

24. The closeness of his appeals in his pastoral visits. In these visits he had "personal conference with every family apart, and catechising and instructing them. That which was spoken to them personally, awakened more attention, and was easier applied than public preaching, and seemed to do much more upon them."

25. The firm maintenance of Church discipline among the members of his congregation. His system of discipline was somewhat doubtful for a parish Presbyterian, but the advantages of it to his ministry were the following, as stated by himself. (1.) "We performed a plain command of Christ, and we took obedience to be better than sacrifice. (2.) We kept the church from irregular separations, &c. (3.) We helped to cure that dangerous disease among the people, of imagining that Christianity is but a matter of opinion and dead belief; and to convince them how much it consisteth in holiness, &c. (4.) We greatly suppressed the practice of sin, and caused people to walk more watchfully than else they would have done."

26. The wise adaptation of his ministry to the circumstances of his hearers. This he did, he says, "by ordering my doctrine to them in a suitableness to the main end, and yet so as might suit their dispositions and diseases. The thing which I daily opened to them, and, with the greatest importunity, laboured to imprint on their minds, was the great fundamental principles of Christianity contained in their baptismal covenant."—"Yet I did usually put in something in my sermon, which was above their own discovery, and which they had not known before; and this I did that they might be kept humble, and still perceive their ignorance, and be willing to be kept in a learning state."

27. The absence of wealthy men in his church. "My people were not rich."—"There were none of the tradesmen very rich, seeing their trade was poor, that would but find them food and raiment. The magistrates of the town were, few of them, worth L.40 per annum, and most not half so much. Three or four of the richest thriving masters of the trade got about L.500 or L.600 in twenty years, and it may be lose L.100 of it at once by an ill debtor. The generality of the master workmen lived but a little better than their journeymen, from hand to mouth."—"It is the poor that receive the glad tidings of the gospel, and that are usually rich in faith. As Mr George Herbert saith in his Church Militant—

'Gold and the gospel never did agree,
Religion always sides with poverty.'"

28. His abstaining from all money agitations with his people. He avoided "meddling with tithes and worldly business, whereby I had my whole time, except what sickness deprived me of, for my duty, and my mind more free from entanglements, than else it would have been. And also I escaped the offending of the people. And I found also that nature itself being conscious of the baseness of its earthly disposition, doth think basely of those whom it discerneth to be earthly."—As an instance of his indifference to money, he gives the following racy account of his domestic life, while a bachelor. "In my family, I had the help of my father, and mother-in-law, and the benefit of a godly, understanding,

faithful servant, an ancient woman, near sixty years old, who eased me of all care, and laid out all my money for house-keeping, so that I never had one hour's trouble about it, nor ever took one day's account of her for fourteen years together, as being certain of her fidelity, providence, and skill."

29. His continuing his ministry so long in one place. He was at Kidderminster "near two years before the war, and fourteen after."—"He that removeth oft from place to place may sow good seed in many places, but is not like to see much fruit in any, unless some other skilful hand shall follow him to water it. It was a great advantage to me to have all the religious people of the place of my own instructing and informing; and that I stayed to see them grown up to some confirmedness and maturity."

30. His itinerant labours in the surrounding towns and villages. Baxter and his brethren had a regular system of itinerancy for the county. In speaking of these country lectures, he says—"To divers of them I went as oft as I was able, and the neighbour ministers oftener than I."—"This business also we contrived to be universally and regularly managed; for, besides the lectures set up on week days fixedly in several places, we studied how to have it extended to every place in the county that had need. This lecture did a great deal of good; and we continued it voluntarily till the ministers were turned out, and all these works went down together."

This concise but well-defined outline of Baxter's labours and usefulness contains nothing singular in the advantages of his position,—nothing novel or extravagant in the machinery of his means. His plans were simple, and his advantages were almost common to every faithful pastor; but his success is extraordinary, and its influence is yet telling throughout England and the Protestant world. The efficiency of his plans is found in his own masculine mind, and manly piety, baptized with the Holy Ghost and with fire. His machinery was plain, but every wheel and pin in it was of the best gold; was all worked by a living and indefatigable heart, and that heart moved by the Holy Ghost. He mentions thirty advantages which contributed to his success: but one more might have been added to his enumeration, which perhaps his holy modesty prevented him from recording,—and that, the thirty-first, was his preaching talents. He was an effective preacher, as well as an efficient pastor. Under the heads 3 and 26 he makes allusions to his preaching, such as his "familiar moving voice," his "dealing in fundamentals," &c.; but they are mere allusions, which give us no full conception of Baxter in the pulpit. His works are the best index to his preaching, for he delivered from the pulpit the greater part of his practical publications; and he says, that, except when diseased or idle, he wrote out all his sermons, and read them as they were written. His printed sermons demonstrate that his discourses were distinguished for three great principles of effective preaching—simplicity of style, directness of purpose, and earnestness of manner.

Baxter's own immortal lines will explain the simplicity of his style in the pulpit

"I preached, as never sure to preach again,

And as a dying man to dying men.”

His language was sound, chaste, and vigorous Saxon, used without the Latin idioms of Owen, or the majestic negligence of Howe. He preached Christ crucified in a crucified style, without over diverting his hearers by extravagance, or offending them by coarseness. He never ranged over poetical fields to cull flowers for his sermons. All his flowers, and many of them are of the loveliest and freshest hues, grew out of his subject; and there he let them stand, because they were either medicinal, or nourishing, to his hearers, as well as beautiful to their sight. He preached as feeling that the truths of God were too great and too glorious in themselves to be covered up with the little trappings of human adornments. He would as soon have thought of hanging the rainbow with corals, as of dressing the cross of Christ with tinsel. His eloquence consisted in fit thoughts, and not in rounded sentences. Consummate and ready dialectician as he was, he very rarely or never introduced metaphysics into his sermons. Sometimes indeed, as has been recorded, he would say something profound or abstruse, just to convince his hearers that his plain preaching and his simple style were not to be traced either to a feeble intellect, or to superficial knowledge; still he was never a metaphysical essayist in the pulpit. He never preached a sermon to display his scholastic learning, or his powers of logic; but his aim was ever to win souls to Christ. If fine and elegant sermons are tolerable at all, it is in the press only, when they are to be read as discussions of a subject, and read either as an intellectual exercise or as a discipline of conscience. In the pulpit splendid sermons are splendid sins. They dazzle, and amuse, and astonish, like brilliant fire-works, but they throw daylight on no subject. They draw attention to the preacher, instead of to the gospel. The splendid preacher, like the Pyrotechnist, calculates on a dark night among his attendants; and amid the coruscations of the pulpit, his skill and his art are admired and applauded, but Christ is not glorified. If angels weep and devils mock, it is at the pulpit door of a splendid preacher.

His sermons are all distinguished for directness of purpose, and singleness of aim. He neither preached about his hearers nor at them, but to them. Even when recording his having preached at court in the days of the Commonwealth, he says that he “preached to Cromwell,” and not before him. Neither did he preach above or beside his audience; but they, like the hearers of our Lord, “perceived that he meant them.” It was the boast of the Benjamites that they could shoot their arrows at an object to the breadth of a hair; but it seems the pride of many pulpit-archers that they can shoot many degrees above their targets. In their pulpit parades their shafts are polished, but they pierce none. The plaudits of the archer are loud and long; but, after the whole quiver is exhausted, no groans of the wounded are heard, crying for relief and life. In the ministry, every honest preacher must aim at success; and he must never misinterpret the scripture narrative of a certain man who drew an arrow at a venture, to justify desultory sermons or aimless preaching. All Baxter's sermons have a given and intelligible aim, which stood distinctly and prominently before his eye, and that was the heart or the conscience. He aimed at producing impression, and producing while he was yet speaking; he, therefore, never sent his hearers home to

decide, but always insisted on “Now or never.”

In preaching, Baxter's heart burnt within him; and while he was speaking, a live coal from the altar fired his sermon with seraphic fervour. Into his pulpit he brought all the energies and sympathies of his entire nature. He had a large mind, an acute intellect, a melting heart, a holy soul, a kindling eye, and a “moving voice”—and he called on all that was within him to aid him in his preaching. Being deeply earnest himself, he wished his hearers to be deeply earnest. Himself being a burning light, he wished to flash the hallowed fire into the hearts of others. He seems never to have studied action or “the start theatric.” The only teacher that gave him lessons in action and attitude was feeling—real, genuine, holy feeling : and this taught him how to look, how to move, and how to speak. In preaching, as well as in every thing religious, he believed with Paul, that “ it is good to be always zealously affected ;” and, consequently, that earnest fervid preaching is truly apostolic. Would God that there had been in the church of Christ a real uninterrupted succession in the fervour of apostolic preaching, and that the mantle of apostolic Elijahs had been taken up by succeeding Elishas, and by men like Apollos, “an eloquent man, and mighty in the Scripture, who being fervent in spirit, spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord.” The modern mode of preaching is more like Joseph's coat of many colours, than like Elijah's mantle, which raised the dead—it has never descended from a chariot of fire, and it is so flimsy, that it gives neither heat nor warmth even to the preacher himself.

Hear Baxter's own heart-stirring thoughts on the best style of preaching.³ “How few ministers do preach with all their might? Or speak about everlasting joy or torment, in such a manner as to make men believe that they are in good sadness. It would make a man's heart *ache* to see a company of dead and drowsy sinners sit under a minister, and not have a word that is like to quicken or awaken them. To think with ourselves, *O if these sinners were but convinced and awakened, they might yet be converted and live.* And alas! we speak so drowsily or gently, that sleepy sinners cannot hear. The blow falls so light, that hard-hearted persons cannot feel it. Most ministers will not so much as put out their voice and stir up themselves to an earnest utterance. But if they do speak out loud and earnestly, how few do answer it with earnestness of matter? and then the voice doth but little good: the people will take it but for mere bawling, when the matter doth not correspond. It would grieve me to hear what excellent doctrines some ministers have in hand, and let it die in their hands, for want of close and lively application. What fit matter they have for convincing sinners, and how little they make of it; and what a deal of good it might do, if it were sent home; and yet they cannot or will not do it. Oh sirs! how plain, how close, and earnestly should we deliver a message of such a nature as ours is? When the everlasting life or death of men is concerned in it, methinks we are nowhere so wanting as in this seriousness. There is nothing more unsuitable to such a business than to be slight and dull. What! speak coldly for God! and for men's salvation! Can we believe that our people must be converted or condemned, and yet can we speak in a drowsy tone! In the name of God, brethren,

labour to awaken your hearts before you come; and when you are in the work, that you may be fit to awaken the hearts of sinners. Remember that they must be awakened or damned; and a sleepy preacher will hardly awake them.”

FOOTNOTES

1 One part of the oath ran thus—" Nor will I ever give my consent to alter the government of this church by archbishops, bishops, deans, and archdeacons, &c., as it stands now established, and ought to stand."

2 Congr. Mag. vol. iii.

3 Reformed Pastor, Chap. iv. Sect. 6.