

CHAPTER XVIII

LOSS AND GAIN

HOW often, when for duty's sake, for the sake of Christian service to be rendered, we enter upon some path, expecting and consenting to the loss of many things, we find, that, of all others, that was the very path to be chosen for real gain! "He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it." Solomon chose wisdom, and God gave him both wisdom and riches. Twenty-five years ago, every one thought it a great sacrifice for a minister to go West: no one would go except at the stern call of duty. As between an Eastern and a Western settlement, the advantages then seemed to be entirely with the former. Well is it remembered how a rhetorical production by one whose face was turned westward, under the title of "Inducements to go West," was then received by us at the Seminary. It was with a sort of smile, as much as to say, "Well, it is a happy faculty to look at the bright side of things; and, if one is going, he may as well make the best of it." Little was it then thought that what appeared fancy was but half the sober truth! Let it not be supposed that a Western life has been, or is, all gain and no loss; but, looking over the past.

let us strike a balance in this regard, and see where it stands.

Twenty-five years ago, one of the first things thought of by one contemplating the Western work was health. It was supposed that he must have the fever and ague, probably a bilious fever; and, at any rate, must go through a process of acclimation, the issue of which must determine whether he could stay in the country or not. We smile now at the way we used to think of this. Some of us, indeed, have had the fever and ague, and some have not. There have been some deaths; and from some families children have been taken, one after the other, till the record has become a sad, sad one. But so, doubtless, it would have been elsewhere. Taking the Band for a sample, it surely cannot be said, that, in the matter of health, there has been loss: we should say, probably gain. It is doubtful whether the same number of their classmates who chose an Eastern settlement have been more highly favored than they. In the case of no one is it certain that his health was injured by coming West; while in others it has been improved, and life, doubtless, has been prolonged. One of them at least, perhaps more, can say, that, for more than a quarter of a century, he has never lost a single appointment from ill health, nor more than a dozen from any cause.

Next to the matter of health, it is natural to consider that of support and home comforts. This, per-

haps, does not at first enter much into the calculations of those proposing to labor in the ministry at the East or West; but it comes up sooner or later, and may be properly considered. Four hundred dollars a year, twenty-five years ago, was about the highest limit of missionary salary. That sum now seems small indeed. It did then. But with beef and pork at two or three cents a pound, corn twelve and a half cents a bushel, and other products of a fertile soil in proportion, it is easy to see that a little money would go a great way. True, clothing, furniture, books, etc., were higher than at the East, and expenses in this direction had to be curtailed. Missionary families, like all other families in a new country, had to dispense with a great many things considered indispensable in an Eastern home. But they managed to get along somehow. Gifts came in sometimes from the people. Missionary boxes met many an exigency. Occasionally, some books or other remembrances came from Eastern friends.

As living expenses have increased, missionary grants have grown larger. Sometimes the home missionary, driven to buy a little place, because too poor to rent one, or wishing to get a little foothold for a home, has found himself, by the rise of prices in a thrifty village, actually gaining in property. Meantime, the churches have, many of them, become able to give more ample support. Taking it all in all, as a matter of fact, it is presumed that those longest in the field have no cause of complaint. Perhaps, in the

end they are just as well off, and, on the whole, have been as comfortably provided for, so far as the real necessities of life are concerned, as if they had been in Eastern settlements. They have had to dispense with many things, at times, that they might have had elsewhere: and, perhaps, were their wives called upon to testify at this point, they might say at once that the advantage was with the Eastern settlement; not because they are quicker to complain than their husbands, but because, as before stated, the privations of a new country fall most heavily within their peculiar province. Still, claiming a little advantage for the West on the score of health, we are willing to let that and this balance.

Next, let us look at mental development. A man's surroundings will, of course, have an influence upon his mental habits and intellectual culture. The time was, when the advantages in this respect seemed nearly all with the Eastern field. As to many things they were. "Early introduction," says a distinguished writer,⁴⁸ "to active labor in an extended field, partaking of a missionary and itinerant character, may, amidst much usefulness, spoil a man for life in all that regards progress of erudition, and productiveness of the reasoning powers." True, in the old and narrow field there may be the more quiet study, more help from books and literary intercourse, more time to elaborate and polish. There may be, moreover, among the

⁴⁸ Horace Bushnell,

hearers a more rigid demand for this sort of excellence in sermonizing, creating in the preacher an ambition to produce it. But, possibly, right here in the strong point of many a preacher is his very weakness. His hearers demand, and his life is worn out in supplying, what, while admired, fails to bless. But we are to compare, not criticize.

The Western man, on the frontier work, as was that of all Iowa once, suffers right here some loss. Here are felt some of his greatest privations, and some of his greatest self-denials are practised. His trial is not that he has to wear a seedy coat, as good perhaps as his brother Christians about him wear; nor that, in his travels of a wet season, he occasionally gets "sloughed," or has to swim the stream. This is just what his neighbors do, and is nothing in a new country. But, if he takes a paper, he reads of books which he can never see. He thinks of ministers' meetings, and the culture of literary fellowship among his brother ministers, which he can never enjoy. Exchanges, even, are out of the question. His duties call him much abroad out of his study, if he has one; and when in it, he groans in spirit, sometimes, that it is so poorly furnished with the needful helps. But this Western field has its advantages, too, even in the matter of intellectual development. The impression twenty years ago is not quite right,—that, if a man goes to a Western missionary field, he must once for all abandon all thoughts of mental culture and growth.

Men are to be studied, as well as books; and the contact of mind with mind is a vigorous mental stimulus. Place now a young minister in some new Western settlement, where, in his line, nothing yet is established, nothing even started; where everybody and everything about him is on the quick, earnest move; where are commingled from all quarters every shade of prejudice, opinion and belief; and where all, with the trammels off, are free to speak out just what they think, and he must have some earnest mental work. Every inch he gains here he must get by a sort of conquest. Aside from the constant readiness which he must have for hand-to-hand conflicts in his neighborly calls, the right arm of power in his public preaching must be the plain Bible truth, aimed straight at the mark, with an earnestness that means something. His hearers, if he gets hearers at all, must be drawn together and held together, not by the force of family or social relations, not by the beauty of the sanctuary where they meet, nor by the excellence of the singing; but, in the absence of all these, it may be, by the presence of one among them, positive and strong, whose preaching and whose life are calculated to produce the blessed fruits of the gospel. In all the demands of a growing country, he must be a practical man. If he makes for himself a place, holds it, and builds upon it, he will and must be an intellectually growing man. We do not say that Western men are more completely developed intel-

lectually than Eastern, but that their position is not, on the whole, unfavorable in this respect. Thrown upon their own resources, and standing at the head of growing influences, which they are called upon to gather, to hold and to guide, they themselves are compelled to grow in mental strength, energy, breadth of views and high Christian aims. There are advantages here, which, for all the purposes of earnest Christian work in the world, we must claim as items of especial gain.

The absence in a new country of established customs, usages and precedents, has been alluded to as one of the disadvantages of a Western field. The young man who takes an Eastern church has the way prepared before him. In many respects, he has only to keep things as they are, with tried men as advisers, and staid Christians to help. To start anew in a new country is to start without any such aids. But even this has its advantages. Besides helping to draw out of the minister all there is in him, it is often of use, both to him and his little church, to be free from the trammels of previous customs and habits. Churches get into bad ways, as well as into good ones. Much as we revere the memory of our Puritan Fathers, all wisdom was doubtless not with them. We do not suppose that New England churches and institutions are such perfect models that there can be no improvement upon them; neither do we think that every change, proposed or actual, is an advance. But on

this Western field, if anywhere, with the Word of God for our guide, and freedom to adapt ourselves to actual wants and circumstances, we should improve even upon the excellences of the past. In some respects, as already indicated, there ought to be among us, better churches, better colleges, and better methods of doing things, than in older regions. In our peculiar freedom to adopt new expedients and plans, therefore, we claim one advantage. If we do not use it for improvement, it is because we lack wisdom or grace, or both, to make the most of our opportunity.

"But there is, of course, a loss," it will be said, "as to the privileges of refined society, in going West." To this we say, "In your refined society, so called, there is much that is artificial, formal and sometimes hollow. We have learned that there is such a thing as being civilized and refined almost to death. Experience has proved it to be a real luxury at times to get out of the conventionalities of artificial life, into the frank atmosphere of true 'log-cabin hospitality.'" The free-and-easy ways of new-country socialities we heartily put down as on the side of gain, rather than of loss. Indeed, those of us who have been here longest almost sigh for things as they used to be twenty years ago; when all were more upon a level, when every house was open and every latch-string out. No one need fear loss in this direction.

Some ministers, even, may like to be in the neighborhood of newspapers, where names somehow creep

out in public print; and near anniversaries, and platforms, and speeches to be heard,—and made. There is in this a pleasure, and a kind of privilege. The only gain we have to suggest here is that involved in laboring away from all such influences in the main, away from all appeals to pride and ambition, in a kind of obscurity and isolation, where the true motives of the ministerial work have a better chance to operate, and where, as they are felt, and they alone, purer and richer rewards of ministerial labor are realized.

There is one more point to be considered, in respect to which all will doubtless concede that the Western field has the decided advantage. It is the privilege of helping to make things; of growing up with them, and seeing the fruit of one's labors. "I would rather," said an old settler,—"I would rather help build a log schoolhouse, and see things grow, than live in a country that is all made." Notwithstanding the hardships of a new country, there is little doubt that the generation that makes a country enjoys it better than one that takes it after it is made. The pioneer minister shares in all this work of construction. It may be in many respects a hard work. He begins low down, but at every upward step he has a peculiar joy. He sees a little flock gathered almost as "a flock in the wilderness." He joyfully shares their first communion season. The earthen plate and glass tumbler are in due time exchanged for a real communion service. He sees, in different directions,

gospel institutions and influences beginning to take shape around him. At length a meeting-house is built. This is for him a great day. He sees how that new house of worship helps to make for him nearly a new congregation, a new Sabbath-school, and of himself almost a new minister. Most of all does he rejoice, when, in connection with this new sanctuary, as is often the case, the Spirit of the Lord comes down, and the spiritual keeps progress with the material. Men who gave of their money for the material temple are often the first to be brought as lively stones into the spiritual building.

So he goes on, with fresh joy at every step. Home missionary churches become self-sustaining, and their pastors find themselves in a developed country, with the fruits of their labors about them. The frontier fields of a quarter of a century ago are now in the heart of the country; and those who entered them with the feeling that they were going so far away as scarcely ever to be heard from, find that they were striking for the very centers of position and power. This, however, was by the direction of God's wisdom, not theirs. In all this there is great gain. He who labors from year to year with an Eastern church, that, by dint of hard work, simply holds its own, is doing a good work. He who in faithfulness stands by a waning church, whose young people are all leaving, renders a noble and self-sacrificing service. In each case there is faith and heroism; but, if God will, it is

pleasanter to see results accomplished, to feel the throb of enterprise and progress around us, and to see new forces fast accumulating, through which the little we do shall tell for good in the ages to come. In this is our special gain.

Some may dislike, possibly, the first relations in which, so far as our denomination is concerned, the process just alluded to in this Western country is generally begun—the relations of a home missionary in connection with a little home missionary church or some new place yet churchless. But is there not something good, yea, noble, even in this? When one thinks of the prayers offered for home missionaries, is it not good to be one of them? When one thinks of the Christian donors who give so freely for home missions at the West, is it not good to be an almoner of their bounties? When one thinks of what it is to plant and foster a Christian church in a new country, he may well rejoice in the work, and gladly accept the relations in which so many are coworkers with him. Bringing his little church, by the blessing of God, up to self-support, he may well feel that his work, though humble, is yet a great and good one. He who, on mission ground, has done it once, twice or thrice, is an honored servant in the kingdom of Christ. Surveying thus the past, we claim no honor, no greatness, but bless God for opening before us a field in relation to which, as we balance the loss and the gain as compared with fields that might have been found

nearer our Eastern homes, we are constrained to say, No loss: especially gain!⁴⁴

Were youth renewed with our past experience, we are quite sure, if allowed of God, we would strike for some new field, only careful that it were small enough for us at the first, and then to grow.

⁴⁴ The experience and observation of after years emphasize the truth of this chapter also.