

CHAPTER VII

GETTING TO WORK AND COALESCING

INTIMATELY connected, yet widely different, are theory and practice. The theory we spin out in thought, speech and books; the practice we find amid the vital forces, the living issues and interests of actual life. Right here it is that our previous instructions sometimes appear almost useless, our notions visionary, and our plans futile. For success in any calling or profession, more is to be learned than can be learned prior to entering upon it.

Of no profession, perhaps, is this more true than of the ministerial. Against the usual preparatory course through ten years of study, in academy, college and seminary, not a word is to be said: it is by no means useless. In many respects, and in most cases, it is essential; but it alone can never qualify one for the ministerial work. This is never found to be precisely what it seems in books. It includes many an experience and emergency for which the previous training has given no real preparation; while much of the so-called preparation that has been made, however cherished and relied upon, will be found like the armor of Saul on the youthful David, and can only be put aside as cumbersome and useless.

Often the young minister finds himself coming awkwardly into his calling, because he seeks to carry into it the full panoply of the schools, or of favorite theological giants, instead of going to his work simply in the name of the Lord. The process of getting to work so as to work successfully, in which every one has so much to learn that has not been taught him by books and teachers, is always more or less a process of disappointments and failures. A modification of previous views and plans becomes necessary. There are frequent calls for self-adjustments and adaptations, to meet unthought-of exigencies; so that the man often, in the course of a few years, comes out far different in many respects from what he had proposed. So it proved in the case of the classmates, who, in a few short days, were taken from the quiet scenes of student life at Andover, and set down—one here, and another there—as home missionaries in Iowa.

One, from the representations then frequent respecting the moral wants of the West, had pictured to himself a country destitute of preachers, and a people, with the recollections of Christian homes fresh in their memories, all eager to hear the gospel. He had fancied, that, when once among them, the simple announcement that he came as a minister would be enough immediately to draw about him those famishing for the bread of life. "Oh, what a joy," thought he, "to be a home missionary!"

Imagine the change in his views as he found, in the place to which he was assigned, the great majority of the people not only just as indifferent as elsewhere, but, owing to the sharp, worldly features of a stirring Western town,⁸ even more so. The few that had any interest at all in religious things were cut up into cliques and denominations of all sorts, some of which he had never heard of before; and, to meet their wants, there was a minister or preacher of some kind at every corner of the streets, making it, as the Sabbath came, not only difficult to find a place or an hour in which to preach, but more difficult still to secure any thing like a stated congregation from Sabbath to Sabbath. Here was actual experience as against the theory of home-missionary life.

In his mind, another one of this untried Band had planned on this wise: "I am going to Iowa; and, when I get there, I am going to have my study and library. Then I am going to write two sermons a week; and, when the Sabbath comes, I am going to preach them, and the people, if they want the gospel, must come to hear." Well, he came to Iowa to find his home, for the time being, in the house of kind Christian people, in which the one room must answer all the needs of the family, with those of the new minister superadded. The familiar quilt of those days partitioned off one corner for his bedroom and study; and his study-chair was a saddle. As for written sermons,

⁸ Mount Pleasant.

they were, of course, few; and if any one was compelled to go about in search of the people, instead of being sought by them, it was William Salter.

A third, Alden B. Robbins, fancied that he would have three or four preaching-places far enough apart to enable him to preach on the same subjects in each place. So he was calculating on time and opportunity to work up extempore sermons of great power on important subjects. He found himself, and for years has stood, where, with some of the same hearers from Sabbath to Sabbath, the constant demand was for two written sermons to be prepared each week, and, at the same time, cut off from the usual relief of ministerial exchange and of annual vacations.

Twenty-five years ago (1843), Nauvoo, the city of the Mormons, was in its glory. Dr. Lyman Beecher had sounded, through the East, alarms of Catholicism in the West. These two opposing forces, it was supposed, would at once confront any Christian laborer going West, and meet him at every turn. So McGavin's "Protestantism," a huge work, was procured and studied, the Mormon Bible perused, and in other directions special preparations made to meet them, for must not the workman go forth prepared for his work?

In fact, however, the most of our young missionaries for years never saw a Mormon; and, as for Catholicism, this was by no means the only hostile *ism* in the land. They found a people starting homes, in-

stitutions, usages, laws, customs, in a new territory; gathered from all parts of the country and the world; coming together with differing tastes, prejudices, ideas and plans; and representing all shades of belief and disbelief. Every phase of error, that any age or country had ever seen, was here cropping out. They soon found that they were where, if their lives were to be of use, if they were not to be swallowed up by the forces around them, they must be positive and earnest. They must set forth the best platform under God they could, and, as earnest men, set about building thereon. What that platform was to be, and what the work to be done upon it, was not so much of a question as how to do it; what to unlearn, and what to learn; how to be adapted to circumstances; when to take on new methods and ways, and when to cling to the old; and how, especially, to mingle among the people, not only as among but of them, so as, by identity of feeling and interest, to gain their confidence and affection, and so an open ear, and by God's grace, an open heart.

After the ordination and dispersion came this process of getting to work, each in his own field, and coalescing,—this process, we will not say, of turning from the Eastern to the Western man, but rather of growing from the Eastern into the Western, in which somewhat of over-niceties and the restraints of etiquette and form are laid aside.

“How do you like the new minister?” was asked

of a resident in a county where Brother Ebenezer Alden was thus getting to work. “Oh, we all believe in him,” was the reply; showing how Eastern habits and culture were no barrier, as they sometimes are, to access to the hearts of the hardy pioneers. In this process of getting to work, in the course of a year or two things were fully settled.

First, what, ecclesiastically, the platform of the missionaries was to be. This in the case of each was Congregational. With a number, when they came to the Territory, the matter of church polity was an open question. Decided instructions in the Seminary had not been given. There had been no conference respecting it, one with the other, by which any conclusion or agreement had been reached as to whether they should be Congregationalists or Presbyterians. The feeling was, that, very likely, some would be one, and some the other. Nor, after they came, were any pains taken by the Congregational brethren on the ground to influence them in this matter. But in the providence of God, by the fitness of things soon perceived, with one consent they thought best to build upon what, with a single exception, had been the foundation of their fathers. In after years they thanked God that it was so.⁹

Secondly, they had in affection, feelings, interests and aims, coalesced with the brethren who preceded them. These were few; not so many by half as those

⁹ Note 5.

who reenforced them. Coming in such comparative numbers as classmates in the same seminary, as did the Iowa Band, and at so early a period in the history of the state, it would not have been strange, if, in the minds of the brethren already here, there had been the suggestion at least, if not the fear, that the newcomers would be clannish in their feeling, banded together, and standing apart from others; not only disposed to set aside those who were here before, but dictatorial and assuming over those who should come after them. If any such suggestion or fear there was, one year was sufficient to dispel it.¹⁰

With open hands and warm hearts were they received; and the common interests and experiences of home-missionary life soon bound all together as one. As they coalesced with those who had preceded them, so have others coming later, till the Iowa ministry of the Congregational churches has become a band indeed; and though that part of it known as the Iowa Band has thus far been made prominent in this home-missionary record, and, in the circumstances, may properly, perhaps, occasionally be so made in what follows, yet be it understood, that, as to work accomplished and results reached, honor is due, under God, not to them alone, but to all who have labored with them,—to those who have come in at a later period as well as to those who were here before them.

¹⁰ Note No. 6.

CHAPTER VIII

A DIARY¹¹

STILL further to illustrate, and as affording, to some extent, a little more of an inside view of this process of getting to work, we give in this chapter a brief diary. It contains the observations of one, who, in that first year, was called to visit the most of his brother ministers at their homes. The tour begins upon the banks of the Des Moines at Keosauqua.

July 16, 1844. — Here are Brother Lane and wife in their little home with two rooms. They have a chair or two now, and a table; but they say they set up housekeeping without either, using, instead, old boxes. They have a church of a few members, a village of promise, and the people are kind. On the whole, they are in good spirits and hopeful. The church is organized as Presbyterian; but its members are not all of that way of thinking. Brother Lane is coming to be very decided that Congregationalism is the true Bible way; is really quite conscientious about it. A majority are with him in opinion. How things will turn out, I can't tell.

July 18. — At Mount Pleasant to-night. Found

¹¹ Note 7.

Brother Ephraim Adams well. He has a study at a tavern, and "boards round," like a schoolmaster. No church organized, or next to none. He groans over sects and divisions, and hopes somehow to get some of them together. Says he sometimes thinks there are more ministers West than East. One can do nothing in this place till he takes his stand, and goes to work. It is not so much destitution as it is indisposition, selfishness and self-seeking of the human heart here as everywhere.

July 19. — Came up to Brighton. This is a farming settlement, a number of intelligent, pious families. Brother Burnham is the minister here; used to know him in college. He has a house: it is unpainted, no carpets in it, a poor fence around it, wood pile near, and pigs loose. Does n't look much like a New England parsonage. I wonder if this is n't the way for a minister to do, — to get a home, and grow up with the people. Farmers are the basis of everything; and he has a good field.

Monday, July 22. — This (Iowa City) is the state capital, the great city of Iowa, of which everybody has heard, of four hundred inhabitants. It has a pleasant location, however, and plenty of room. Went into the state library; while looking about, met an old gentleman, who proved to be Governor Lucas, the ex-governor of the territory. He was affable, and interested to show me about the city; took me down half a mile or so to see some mineral springs. I felt a

little awkward to have such attention paid me by so old a man. Spent the Sabbath here with the Rev. W. W. Woods, M.D., of the New School Presbyterian church, and preached for him. There is an Old School church here also, but no Congregational. Neither of the churches having any meeting-house, they hold meetings in the State House,—one in the Representatives', the other in Senators' Hall. These two halls are opposite each other; so that, as the doors were open while the people were collecting, when we took our seats in the desk we could look across through the opposite hall and see the Old School minister in his desk at the other end of the building. "Now," whispered the doctor, "now the watchmen see eye to eye." Did n't think 't was just the place for such a pun, — so sadly false, too! Long time, I fear, it will be before the Old School friends will see eye to eye with the New School brethren, or us either; for they look upon us with suspicion, say we are unsound, and won't even exchange with us. Oh, what a pity that all these little places should be so cut up! Glad we have n't any church here.

July 23. — This day's ride on my faithful pony, for I've forgotten to say that I now own one — price forty-five dollars — has brought me to Tipton, county-seat of Cedar County. Here found Brother Alden. He has a study, a little ground room right on the street, in a "lean-to" of a store, over which lives the family. Horses stand around, these

hot days, kicking the flies; and when he is out the pigs run in, unless he is careful to shut the door. Poor place, I should think, for writing sermons. Partition so thin that all the store talk, especially when the doors are open, is plainly heard.

It being Tuesday evening, we of course wished to remember the Tuesday evening prayer-meeting, but wanted a more private place for it: so went out in search of one. Came to a two-story log building used for a jail, which happened to be empty, with the doors open. Went up by an outside stairway to the upper room, and there, with the moon sailing over the prairies, had our meeting; prayed for each other, for the brethren, for Iowa, for home. Not exactly like the old Andover meetings in the library, but something like them. Coming down again to the ground, Brother Alden looked up in his queer way: "There," said he, "I guess that's the first time that old building ever had a prayer in it." Just as cheerful and funny as ever; but he is doing a good work here, and getting hold of the hearts of everybody. Indeed, he is becoming quite a bishop of the county. "The first time there was ever a prayer in it!" I wonder in how many places and ways we shall do the first things for Christ in this new country!

July 24. — Am here in DeWitt, a little place with a few buildings on a big prairie. But how I got here, which way I traveled, I can't tell. I only know that in the morning I gave myself up to the pilotage of the

mail-carrier. Soon after starting, he turned his horse off the road into the prairie, and I followed. Since then my head has been in a kind of a whirl, the points of the compass lost; and I can only think of prairie-grass, bottom-lands, sloughs, a river forded, a cabin or two by the way, and little groves here and there, all jumbled up together. But I am here! Looking at the map, I reason myself into the belief that I have really traveled from Tipton to DeWitt. Here is where Brother Emerson lives, a man whom I have long wished to see. It was his account, in "The Home Missionary," of the manner in which a gang of horse-thieves was broken up at Bellvue, that turned my attention to Iowa. Somehow I then felt that there was work to be done in such a country, and that I would like to labor near such a man; and here I am at his home. He is a whole-souled, earnest brother, and takes you right in. No danger, I guess, that we and those who were on the ground before us will not feel as one.

One good thing about this trip is to get acquainted with the older brethren, to see the different fields, to know what the land is. Brother Emerson says he located here because it was so central. If this is a center, there is no trouble in finding a similar one on any of these big prairies.

July 26. — Came up to-day to Maquoketa, where I expected to find Brother Salter. Learning that he was absent, having gone north, came on up through

Andrew, a little stumpy town in the woods, to this place, Cottonville, the home of Deacon Cotton. So I am the guest, to-night, of one of the direct descendants of old John Cotton of Puritan memory, in this far-off Iowa; and a nice old man he is. Before leaving the East, an old Christian lady, a mother in Israel, learning I was going to Iowa, came, saying that she had a son-in-law in Iowa for whom she felt greatly concerned, and gave me his address, with the injunction, if I ever went near him, to go and see him, and do him all the good I could. I took the address, never expecting really to go near him, but find that to-day I have passed right by his door. Sorry I had not kept it more in my mind. This impresses me more than ever with one feature of the mission work; it is, to do here, among the scattered people, what the Eastern fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, are contributing, longing and praying to have done. I must be more careful.

Deacon Cotton says Brother Salter has taken a trip up into Wisconsin, about Potosi; that he is inclined to think he will not stay in this field long. Hope he won't leave Iowa: I'll find him if I can.

July 27. — Am up now as far as Dubuque. Here is where really the first white man crossed the river to dwell. He had a grant from government to trade in this mining region with the Indians. The place takes his name; and the whole region is honeycombed with the miners' diggings. Great fortunes have been

made; but many a splendid prospect fails. So it is in all things else. Some say that if all the labor expended in digging for lead had been expended upon the surface of the ground, about six inches deep, the people generally would be better off. However this may be, a "right smart town" of a few hundred people is here. Brother Holbrook preaches here, and has, I am told, great influence. He is away now at the East to get funds towards repairing the church. It needs it; for it is a stone building with bare, unplastered walls inside. Yet it is the only house of worship built expressly for this object that we have in the Territory. By urgent solicitation of the brethren, am to spend the Sabbath here.

July 31. — Up, up, still farther north, here at Jacksonville (now Garnavillo), the county-seat of Clayton County. I have now traversed northward, on my horseback trip, about two hundred and fifty miles. Since leaving Dubuque I have been so tossed about that I could not use my diary: so I must write up a little.

Started on Monday morning in search of Brother Salter. Came up to Potosi Landing. There crossing the river, soon got on his track, and after inquiring for him from house to house, found him at last, doing good mission work among the people. It was truly a surprise-meeting. Glad to learn that he was true to Iowa, and was to return soon to his field. Stayed with him that night in a neat log cabin of some young mar-

ried people, who said they were from Maine. Might have known they were from Yankee-land, if they had n't told us, by the morning-glories around the door and the general air of things in and around the cabin. There will be a good house there some time, and a Christian home, too, I trust.

Next day, about noon, crossed back again into this best part of the world, on the fiatboat ferry at Cassville Landing, at the mouth of the Turkey River. That afternoon had quite a time. I was on the south side of the river, and the first ford was ten miles up stream, the track leading for the most part through a hilly forest. From recent rains, the river was much swollen, making, by backwater, every stream putting into it impassable at the mouth: so my work that afternoon was principally heading those streams. It was in one of these, as I urged my horse down a steep bank into deeper water than I supposed, that I was thrown full length, when saddle-bags, sermons and papers went floating. Fortunately I gathered them all up, and came on. Reached the ferry near night, where the ferryman swam my horse for me, and took me over in a canoe. I was then twelve miles from this place, and started on with quickened speed. Just as it was getting dark, as I was querying whether or no I could keep the road, my horse turned into a by-path, and shot around a clump of bushes with a will. Thinking he must have some intent in this, I gave him the rein. In about five minutes he took me

up to a fence and a light. There I stopped for the night.

It was the cabin of an old sea-captain, Captain Reed. His wife, for years a praying Christian woman, in poor health, and somewhat deaf, was once a member of Father Kent's church in Galena, Illinois, but now is living away alone, as a sheep in the wilderness. On learning I was a minister, she was greatly rejoiced. We talked; she told me much of her history and experience; we read the Bible; we prayed. I stopped that night in the house of the Lord. In the morning she thanked me over and over for the good she received; but I felt, and feel now, that she did me far more good than I did her. Experience, with the chastenings of the Lord, confers that which seminaries and colleges can never give. We come out here to preach; but there are those who preach to us more effectively than we to them.

That day I came to this place. Here are Brother Hill and wife. The settlement is on a beautiful prairie ridge, and there are many fine families here. Brother Hill and wife are boarding at present, and have before them a fine field. He enters it with his usual staid, steady tread; but she throws herself into it with the enthusiasm of her whole soul. Long may they live to labor here! The next place north, they say, is Sodom, and then the Indians: so I guess I'll turn back.

From this point, our tourist, on his return, retraces

pretty much the path by which he came; so that we find in his diary nothing of new interest until he comes down to Davenport, on the Mississippi. Here we quote as follows:—

Aug. 10.— Came down to this place to-day, from DeWitt. Of all the rivers in the territory, and I believe now I have seen them all, I think the Wapsipicon is the worst. Such ugly bottom-lands, and, indeed, such sloughs as I have had all day long! A hard ride: but I find here a beautiful place, the most beautiful natural location on the Mississippi, some say; and I know of none that excels it. There are here about five hundred people. I have heard the place spoken of as a good location for a college. I see nothing to the contrary. There is certainly beauty of scenery. Probably it will not be much of a point for business; and a literary institution with such surroundings would attract a class of people congenial to itself. Here I am the guest of a new acquaintance, Brother Hitchcock, who preaches here. I believe, though, he is to leave before long to go to Moline, Illinois, a new village just starting on the other side of the river, three miles above Rock Island. I am to spend the Sabbath here, and shall be glad of the rest. I am getting about enough of travel. As to clothes, between the excessive rains, hot sun and horseback wear, they are beginning to look pretty rusty.

Monday Morning, Aug. 12, 1844.— Preached yesterday in the forenoon for the Congregationalists in a little building put up for a dwelling-house, and now used for a schoolhouse, situated on what is known as Ditch Street: twelve hearers. They are building, however, a neat little church, about twenty-eight by thirty-eight, on which I see that Brother H. works daily. Wonder if this is the way, when it comes to church-building, that the minister has to turn in as head carpenter to “boss the job!” In the afternoon yesterday, by invitation, preached for the Baptists. In the course of the sermon was a little vexed as I noticed two ladies smiling at some holes in my coat-sleeve, revealed by my gesturing. Drew down my arms, and their faces, too, by preaching straight at them. Perhaps, on this account, I preached with more point and earnestness than usual; for after meeting an Old School Presbyterian said he would give five dollars if I would stop and preach a year in the place. Felt it quite a compliment, considering the source.

Aug. 13.— At Bloomington.¹² The greatest effort at town building this. From four to six hundred people here are pitched into gullies, and tossed about on the hills. But here I have a hearty welcome by Brother Robbins and wife. They are getting ahead of all the rest by a little new-comer to their household. Mrs. Robbins laughs at the bachelor brethren, and

¹² Now Muscatine.

pretends to have such a care of them. Materials here for a good church; and, if the place ever is anything, no doubt there will be a good one.

Aug. 16. — At Burlington. Have been here before quite frequently. Nothing specially new now. Brother Hutchinson is working away quite hopefully, though his health is not very firm. Nothing new, I say? — yes, there is one thing new, in the shape of an utterance of one Rev. Mr. White, a Cumberland Presbyterian minister, in a piece published in the paper, to which Brother Hutchinson called my attention. It is so modest, I must put it down as so much history: —

“Observation has taught me that many honest persons have heard Iowa misrepresented. So far from being a land of heathens, it is becoming densely populated by people of intelligence, from not only different parts of the United States, but of the Eastern and Western Continents. The people are able to support their ministers; and it is an insult offered to their intelligence to have men stationed in their largest towns and villages, who receive from one to four hundred dollars per annum to instruct the brethren. Iowa is an unhealthy climate for theological dwarfs. Ministers are needed who have clear heads, warm hearts; whose sentences breathe, and whose words burn.”

O Brother W.! you, then, must be one of the kind needed; for your sentences breathe, and your words

burn. We have heard of similar utterances made by unbelievers, especially by one of the leading judges¹³ of the territory when we came into it; but little did we expect that gospel ministers would join in the cry. The judge, however, apologized, as he found one of our number¹⁴ coming to be his next-door neighbor. Wonder if *you* ever will!

Aug. 17. — At Denmark. This is a kind of a home for us all; and I thought I would come over here to rest a little before going back to my field. I have certainly taken quite a tour, and am glad of it. I have seen the brethren, seen their homes, know the country, and trust I shall work the more heartily.¹⁵

¹³ Judge Joseph Williams of Bloomington (now Muscatine); a good Methodist, not an unbeliever.

¹⁴ Bro. Robbins.

¹⁵ Note 8.