

Original Contributions.

The Rich Man in the Congregation.

BY MATHIAS.

It was deep winter in the city. The short dreary day was drawing to a close, and the murky gloom was beginning to overspread the sky, and cast sombre shadows upon the western hills, when the pastor sat down to read his afternoon mail.

A familiar hand writing caught his eye, and breaking the seal he was soon following the quaint penmanship of dear old Deacon P., of the little village of M—, several hundred miles toward the tropics. The pastor's eye was immediately caught with an array of figures, in a business like way, down the page, and he was not long in discovering that the deacon was spreading out to his gaze an old debt that the church had contracted, and in favor of the said pastor. After a show of figures and a few statements regarding them, the deacon wrote: "The above is to show you that I am interested somewhat in having you get what we owe you, and have made a commencement. I agitate the question in this way: When anything is said about getting some one to preach for us, I tell them we must pay you first. I tell them that we do not deserve a preacher until you are paid; hence I will continue to agitate the question. Hoping you will pardon me for not writing sooner, I am your brother."

To this the pastor replied: "many thanks, my dear brother, for your kindness regarding my back salary. I believe you are right in your decisions; not that I in the least, desire that there shall be no preaching at M—, but because the motives that should actuate churches, should be firm business principles. I assure you that something is wrong—I may never be able to give the real cause—but it is not the sentiment that demands true Christian business in the church. If the brethren hold or control money in any way, and do not use it for the Lord's work, they will not, cannot prosper in the Lord's cause. That congregation which gives liberally, not for display, but that the word may be preached and taught, shall be blessed in its deed.

Prove to me that in no sense is a congregation under obligations to take of their money to preach the

word, and with many others, whom I know to be God fearing praying men, give up preaching. Why? Simply because it is not demanded of us. 'But' says the objector, 'some one must preach; yes, but who? Jesus said: "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel." Is there yet a necessity of preaching the Gospel? Yes—then one man as much as another is commanded to preach, and surely that man whose life has been shielded from forty to sixty years, by religion; who has been put in the way of competence and often fortune, by this same shield, has as much right to preach the Gospel as the poor young man, whose father died without leaving him a dollar. "But the rich man has not the talent for preaching." No, but he has talent and ability, certainly. The young man had no talent for preaching till he acquired it. He could have acquired a talent for business just as well as preaching—why not do it? I am no more compelled to preach from the pulpit than fifty of my companions who have chosen other work. But I choose preaching; why? Because I have faith in God, faith in my brethren. Faith in God makes me say, I will do his will, and he will give me eternal reward. Faith in my brethren: "Even so did the Lord ordain that they who preach the Gospel should live by the Gospel." Why? that "we should bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ." "But how much shall we pay?" How has the Lord prospered your community? How many of your family, your brethren in Christ, are in the poor-house? How many are really in want? How many have, to give? Count your property rolls; you are worth as a community of brethren, fifty thousand, five hundred thousand. One man is rich. "But," he says, "I did not get my money by any aid of the church." Sir, you either got your money honestly or dishonestly. If you got it honestly, you *was* aided by the Christian influence upon society. If you got it dishonestly, it is not yours, and must be repaid. The men may not live who can tell by what device it was made, but God can tell. The money must reach a channel of usefulness, in converting men to God, or the rich man will be condemned for his covetousness, or there is nothing in Inspiration that is true. We can take our choice of these positions, I suppose, but few of us are willing

to decide against the plain statements of Christ.

Suppose the rich man should take this view: I love my brethren; I also trust them. I believe that "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God." I believe that could the world hear the truth, many would be turned from darkness to light. I believe there are preachers living who, because they trust the brethren, choose to develop their talents for preaching. I would like to send one such a young man out to preach, thereby filling some part of the great commission, "Go preach the Gospel." But how much shall I pay him? That depends on where he goes. Let me see; what does society, the society in which I live, demand? He can live here for so much, in the rural district he can live much more cheaply. The preacher desires to lay up a small amount no doubt. At his age I was not making much, but I directed my talents toward making money; I put myself in the way of income. He needs an income—let it be small or great—over his actual needs. I will give him a living and a small salary. As he is not a money maker, and I am, I will put his income on the basis of his talent and ability, and when his engagement with me shall end, I will invest his income or aid him in making it turn to his account; by that means I can increase it for him, and leave him at liberty to increase his capital, viz: the ability to preach the word. Now I am ready to send out a man, and therefore I will advertise." Very soon in the religious journals appears the following advertisement: Wanted.—A young man, with or without a wife, a true hearted man, to preach the Gospel. He must have assured the brethren by whom he is known, that he has sufficient education, and the consecration necessary for this work; no other need apply.

I will agree to pay his expenses and he shall be my GOSPEL AGENT. I do not promise to meet his *cigar* and *tobacco* bills, nor any really unnecessary expenses. In order that I may intelligently know the funds necessary, I shall require of him for six months, an itemized account of his expenses, which I will pass upon as his wants demand. It shall be understood that necessary expenses only include his board; washing, lodging and traveling expenses, or his actual expenses in house-keeping, books, clothes, furn-

iture etc., shall be considered income. Above the expenses, I agree to pay him a small salary and allow this salary to be invested as he deems most expedient for him with the promise that this investment shall in no wise interfere with his studies as a minister. Upon his past he shall agree to work, for a specified time, say one year, the territory assigned him. He shall agree to preach the word; be instant in all the duties that devolve upon a minister of God's word; further, he must have his membership with some congregation, be amenable to the authority of the church, for his conduct. In further consideration of this salary which shall be herein after agreed upon, he shall, according to apostolic example, take each Lord's day, the regular contribution in his field or fields of labor and remit to my address, the same in monthly installments by draft or money order, with certified check for full amount from the church treasurer, or from one appointed by the congregation his respective field."

Now Bro. P., do you believe any such advertisement would be answered? I do; and ten years hence should rich men work upon this principle, our schools would be turning out hundreds of young men, willing and capable of becoming Gospel Agents recommended by the churches and college faculties.

"But," methinks I hear you say, "do you intend to convey the idea that the rich man who might do this, shall make merchandise of the Gospel?" I convey no idea whatever. I take it for granted that the rich man is acting in good faith with himself and the brotherhood at large. I take it for granted that he sends out his Gospel Agent, but does not cease his work at home. I take him simply as an honest, God fearing man, who will take this way to preach the Gospel in destitute places, knowing full well that where regularly employed pastors can be sustained, is no field for his Gospel Agent, and that the money from destitute fields will not pay the expense, but will be only to encourage liberality in the children of God."

Thus the pastor builded in his mind, this untried plan of sounding out the word, till he was seized with a desire to try the merits of his project. He accordingly at the first opportunity, wrote the "rich man" a letter containing an outline of what he had written the deacon,