

multitude of rebuffs he obtained leave to preach a trial sermon. That opportunity was the end of his importunity, for upon announcing his text he found himself bereft of every idea but one, which he delivered feelingly, and then descended the rostrum. "My brethren," said he, "if any of you think it an easy thing to preach, I advise you to come up here and have all the conceit taken out of you." The trial of your powers will go far to reveal to you your deficiency, if you have not the needed ability. I know of nothing better. We must give ourselves a fair trial in this matter, or we cannot assuredly know whether God has called us or not; and during the probation we must often ask ourselves whether, upon the whole, we can hope to edify others with such discourses.

We must, however, do much more than put it to our own conscience and judgment, for we are poor judges. A certain class of brethren have a great facility for discovering that they have been very wonderfully and divinely helped in their declamations; I should envy them their glorious liberty and self-complacency if there were any ground for it; for alas! I very frequently have to bemoan and mourn over my non-success and shortcomings as a speaker. There is not much dependence to be placed upon our own opinion, but much may be learned from judicious, spiritual-minded persons. It is by no means a law which ought to bind all persons, but still it is a good old custom in many of our country churches for the young man who aspires to the ministry to preach before the church. It can hardly ever be a very pleasant ordeal for the youthful aspirant, and, in many cases, it will scarcely be a very edifying exercise for the people; but still it may prove a most salutary piece of discipline, and save the public exposure of rampant ignorance. The church book at Arnsby contains the following entry:—

A short account of the Call of Robert Hall, Junior, to the work of the Ministry, by the Church at Arnsby, August 13th, 1780.

"The said Robert Hall was born at Arnsby, May 2nd, 1764; and was, even from his childhood, not only serious, and given to secret prayer before he could speak plain, but was always wholly inclined to the work of the ministry. He began to compose hymns before he was quite seven years old, and therein discovered marks of piety, deep thought, and genius. Between eight and nine years he made several hymns, which were much admired by many, one of which was printed in the Gospel Magazine about that time. He wrote his thoughts on various religious subjects, and select portions of Scripture. He was likewise possessed of an intense inclination for learning, and made such progress that the country master under whom he was could not instruct him any further.

He was then sent to Northampton boarding school, under the care of the Rev. John Ryland, where he continued about a year and a-half, and made great progress in Latin and Greek. In October, 1778, he went to the Academy at Bristol, under the care of the Rev. Mr. Evans; and on August 13th, 1780, was sent out to the ministry by this church, being sixteen years and three months old.) The manner in which the church obtained satisfaction with his abilities for the great work, was his speaking in his turn at conference meetings from various portions of Scripture; in which, and in prayer, he had borne a part for upwards of four years before; and having when at home, at their request, frequently preached on Lord's-day mornings, to their great satisfaction. They therefore earnestly and unanimously requested his being in a solemn manner set apart to public employ. Accordingly, on the day aforesaid, he was examined by his father before the church, respecting his inclination, motives, and end, in reference to the ministry, and was likewise desired to make a declaration of his religious sentiments. All which being done, to the entire satisfaction of the church, they therefore set him apart by lifting up their right hands, and by solemn prayer. His father then delivered a discourse to him from 2 Tim. ii. 1, 'Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.' Being thus sent forth, he preached in the afternoon from 2 Thess. i. 7, 8. 'May the Lord bless him, and grant him great success!'"*

Considerable weight is to be given to the judgment of men and women who live near to God, and in most instances their verdict will not be a mistaken one. Yet this appeal is not final nor infallible, and is only to be estimated in proportion to the intelligence and piety of those consulted. I remember well how earnestly I was dissuaded from preaching by as godly a Christian matron as ever breathed; the value of her opinion I endeavoured to estimate with candour and patience—but it was outweighed by the judgment of persons of wider experience. Young men in doubt will do well to take with them their wisest friends when next they go out to the country chapel or village meeting-room and essay to deliver the Word. I have noted—and our venerable friend, Mr. Rogers, has observed the same—that you, gentlemen, students, as a body, in your judgment of one another, are seldom if ever wrong. There has hardly ever been an instance, take the whole house through, where the general opinion of the entire college concerning a brother has been erroneous. Men are not quite so unable to form an opinion of each other as they are sometimes supposed to be. Meeting as you do in class, in prayer-meeting, in conversation, and in various religious engagements, you gauge each other; and a wise man will be slow to set aside the verdict of the house.

* Biographical Recollections of the Rev. Robert Hall, A.M. By J. M. Morris, 1833.