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A

SERMON,

DELIVERED AT WOOLCOT (CON.) SEPT. 21, 1814,

AT THE

Installation

OF THE

REV. JOHN KEYES,

TO

THE PASTORAL CARE OF THE CHURCH IN THAT PLACE.

==
BY LYMAN BEECHER,

PASTOR OF A CHURCH OF CHRIST IN LITCHFIELD.
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SERMON.

ISAIAH lxi. 4.

And they shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations.

THE text predicts the civil and religious order, which should succeed the restoration of the tribes from Babylon. During that long exile, many fields lay untilled, and many cities without inhabitant, their walls broken down. The temple and the synagogues of the nation lay, also, in ruins. But "they shall build," saith the prophet, "the old wastes." The fields shall be tilled—the cities inhabited—the temple rebuilt—and the worship of God restored.

The prediction has unquestionably a reference also to the latter day, and announces that great spiritual change, which awaits the nations, made desolate by sin. In all lands the wastes shall be builded—the wastes of paganism—the wastes of mahometanism—the wastes of popery—the wastes of atheism and heresy.

The accomplishment of this universal restoration, will include the raising up of decayed churches, as well as the planting of new ones, and will be accomplished, doubtless, by the charities and benevolent exertions of those religious communities, which are blessed with the institutions of the gospel.

The waste places of Connecticut, and the duty of building them, will be the subject of consideration in this discourse. That there are desolations in this State, will not be questioned by any, minutely acquainted with our circumstances. Not a few societies have ceased to hear those doctrines of the gospel, by the instrumentality of which, the Spirit of God awakens, converts, and sanctifies men. A number of churches have become feeble, and by hard struggling prolong, from year to year, the enjoyment of divine institutions. While some have, long since, fallen and are lying, now, in utter desolation.

The building of these wastes will include the propagation of the truth, the communication of strength to the feeble, and the restoration of fallen societies to the order of the gospel.

In the illustration of the subject it is proposed to consider

I. The causes of these desolations.

II. The means of restoring them.

III. The motives to immediate exertion for that purpose.

The immediate causes are, evidently, the difference of religious sentiment and worship, which prevails, connected with a criminal indifference to the institutions of the gospel.

There is not, in the state, a town or parish, unable to support the gospel constantly, and with ease, provided all the families in the limits of each, were of one heart, and of one way to serve the Lord. But the property, in many societies, is divided between three or four different denominations, beside a part, which the love of money, and indifference to the gospel withdraw, wholly, from the support of divine institutions. The consequence is, the decline, and, in some cases, the entire subversion of that religious order which our fathers established.

But, by what causes has this change been accomplished, in the religious opinions and habits of the people? The fathers of Connecticut came here on purpose to establish, and perpetuate that religious order which is, still, the prevailing order in the State. They were united in their views of doctrine and discipline; were strongly attached to the religious order they had established; and, with singular wisdom, provided for its perpetuity. Believing godliness to be profitable to the life that now is, and ignorance and irreligion to be crimes against the State, they required every society, by law, to support the gospel, and every family to contribute its proportion and attend steadily upon its ministrations.

In the formation of a new settlement of not more than twenty families, a minister, a meeting-house, and a school-house, were deemed as indispensable as their own dwellings.

Thus organized, for more than a century Zion was a city compactly builded, and friends and foes might, with different emotions, "go round about her, and tell her towers, and mark her bulwarks, and consider her palaces." By what causes, then, have these changes been accomplished? The most efficacious are, doubtless, remote, have operated silently and slowly, and produced their results at periods so distant as almost to elude observation.

In bringing them into view, no unkind feelings are in-

dulged by the speaker, towards christians of other denominations, and nothing disrespectful or injurious is intended. The importance of the subject demands the proposed investigation, which it will be his endeavour to conduct with the verity of the historian, and the fidelity of the surgeon, who wounds only to heal.

A remote cause of our present wastes, is to be found in a very great declension of vital piety in the churches, which took place many years ago. For more than one hundred years, the pastors and churches of Connecticut were strictly evangelical; but at length, different views concerning doctrine began to prevail. This was occasioned by an alarming suspension, for many years, of the special influence of the Spirit, and by the expedients of human wisdom to replenish the churches without the agency of God. One effect of this decline was, the introduction, into the ministry, of men, who probably had never experienced the power of divine grace on their hearts, and who, of course, would be prepared by native feeling to oppose the doctrines of the gospel. From such, nothing better could be expected than a cold, formal, unfaithful, unproductive ministry, and a gradual approximation to another gospel. Those precious doctrines, which are the power of God to salvation, were, of course, first omitted, and at length openly opposed. The consequence was, that "the love of many waxed cold, and the ways of Zion mourned, because few came to her solemn feasts."

Alarmed at the declining numbers of the church, and the corresponding increase of the unbaptised, our fathers, with pious intent, doubtless, but with a most unwarrantable distrust of God, and dependence on human wisdom, introduced what has since been denominated the *half-way covenant*.

According to the provisions of this anomaly in religion, persons of a regular deportment, though destitute of piety, might be considered as, in some sense, church members, and offer their children in baptism, without coming to the sacramental supper; an ordinance, for which, religion was still deemed indispensable. The practical effect was, that owing the covenant, as it was called, became a common, thoughtless ceremony, and baptism was extended to all, who had either sufficient regard to fashion, or to self-righteous doings, to ask it for themselves, or for their children. As to the promises of educating children in the fear of the Lord, and

submitting to the discipline of the church, on the one hand, or of watchful care on the other, they were alike disregarded, both by those who exacted, and by those who made them.

Others, alarmed by the same declension of numbers, in the visible church, and leaning equally to their own understanding to provide a remedy, discovered, as they imagined, that grace is not necessary to the participation of either ordinance, that there is but one covenant, the condition of which might be *moral sincerity*, and that the sacrament of the supper, like the preaching of the gospel, might be numbered among the means of grace for the conversion of the soul. With these views, the doors of the church were thrown open and all the congregation, who *could* be, were persuaded to come in.

These innovations in discipline, though resisted by many churches, and not introduced without considerable agitation, became, at length, in some shape, almost universal throughout New England. The consequences were, what might be expected where sinners are countenanced in drawing near to God with their mouth, while their heart is removed far from him, and their fear towards him is taught by the precepts of men. They were the annihilation of church discipline, and the prevalence of self-righteous Arminian feelings and opinions, mingled with the disjointed remains of evangelical doctrine. Without an absolute rejection of the doctrines of grace, the preaching, and the feeling, and the practice, to a great extent, were, "*do and live.*" Good works, and the use of means, occupied the foreground, while the Holy Spirit waited, at humble distance, to accomplish the little which remained to be done, as the reward, or promised consequence, of antecedent well doing. So alarming had this declension of vital piety become, in the days of Cotton Mather, as to occasion the memorable prediction, that in forty years, should it progress as it had begun, convulsions would ensue, in which, churches would be gathered out of churches;—a prediction, afterwards, signally verified. For in the year 1740, it pleased the God of our fathers, to visit the churches of New England by the special agency of the Holy Spirit. But this joyful event, which commenced the restoration of evangelical doctrine and discipline, and planted the seeds of those revivals, which still prevail, was,

through the weakness of some and the wickedness of many, made the occasion of evils, which are felt to this day.—I allude to the opposition, which was made to this work of God, by the unconverted, the formal and the timid; the prejudices it excited against a learned ministry, and the standing order, the intemperate zeal it enkindled, the separations it occasioned, which rent many churches, and laid the foundation for that diversity of religious opinion and worship, which has so unhappily, enfeebled some churches and brought others to desolation.

Until these separations, which a proper zeal and prudence, on the part of pastors, and churches, might have easily prevented, the ancient external order of the churches remained with but little variation, or prejudice against it. The inhabitants of the same town or parish were of one denomination, and worshipped together in the sanctuary, which their fathers had built. But now, driven from their ordinary course by a repulsion so violent, the separatist became, for a season, the subject of an enthusiasm, which defied restraint and despised order. In these new societies, awoke that spirit of proselitism, which has outlived them, and those deeprooted prejudices against a learned ministry, and those revilings of a hireling priesthood, and the standing order, and those complaints of persecution, which have not wholly ceased to this day. Built up, however, by the zeal of an emergency, and destined to ultimate decay, they were still prevented by a strong aversion, from coalescing with the regular churches, and of course, laid the foundation, and furnished the materials to build up the several denominations, which now prevail in the State.

A beginning having once been made, a small society of whatever name, being once established, various causes would naturally contribute to perpetuate and enlarge it. All, who were fond of novelty and given to change, could now make experiment how it would seem to worship God in some new way; and every one, who, by any means, became dissatisfied with his minister, or the deacon, or the church, or any member of the society, could take a speedy revenge, by going to another denomination. The covetous, constrained by law to pay against their wills, for the support of the gospel, soon learned to plead a tender conscience, to save their money, and joined themselves to the

denomination, which could help them on to heaven, at the least expense.

As another cause of debility and desolation, may be noted the defections occasioned by the restoration of evangelical doctrine and discipline. The revivals of 1740 were the commencement of a reformation, which has brought us back, with few exceptions, to the doctrines and discipline of our fathers. A change so great, however, and so contrary to human depravity, fortified by custom, was not to be accomplished without resistance. Accustomed to the immunities of church membership, and pleased with this self-righteous, dilatory method of preparation for heaven, the unconverted were alarmed at the demands of immediate repentance, and offended at the distinction, both doctrinal and practical, which now began to be made between the righteous and the wicked. It was not till after nearly half a century of controversy, in the progress of which, many churches were shaken, and many societies enfeebled, that the point became established, that a credible profession of religion is indispensable to church membership; and that the seals of the covenant are to be applied to none but to the members of the visible church and their children.

Another cause of desolation, more limited in its operation, but not less disastrous in its effects, where it has operated, has been, the timid policy of forbearing to preach plainly those doctrines which offend, and of shrinking from a vigilant, efficient discipline in the church, lest these things should interrupt the peace, and endanger the stability of the congregation. It has been called prudence; but experience has shown it to be a prudence, which, in the beginning, surrenders, at discretion, to the enemy, to keep him quiet; which substitutes policy for duty, and relies on temporising expedients, instead of the protection and blessing of God, in the fearless performance of duty. The uniform effect has been, weak hands, and a faint heart, to the minister; the loss of personal usefulness, the suspension of divine influence, the decline of vital piety, immorality and error in the church, and impiety and licentiousness without; until, at the death or dismissal of the pastor, the church has become almost extinct, and the congregation is conducted to the verge of ruin.

A later cause of decline and desolation, has been the insidious influence of infidel philosophy. The mystery of

iniquity had, in Europe, been operating for a long time. The unclean spirits had commenced their mission to the kings of the earth, to gather them together to the battle of the great day of God Almighty. But when that mighty convulsion took place, which a second time burst open the bottomless pit, and spread darkness and dismay over Europe, every gale brought to our shores contagion and death. Thousands, at once, breathed the tainted air and felt, at once, the fever kindle in the brain. A paroxysm of moral madness ensued, and terrific innovation. In the phrensy of perverted vision every foe appeared a friend, and every friend a foe. No maxims were deemed too wise to be abandoned, none too horrid to be adopted. No foundations too deep laid to be torn up, and no superstructure too venerable to be torn down, that another might be built, such as, in Europe, they were rearing with bones and blood. As the institutions of Connecticut, however, were built upon a rock, and were defended by thousands not yet bereft of common sense and moral principle, a few experiments evinced that such foundations could be shaken, only by the slow progress of undermining. It remained, therefore, to extend the atmospheric mania till it should subtract from their defence, and add to the host of assailants, a number sufficient to accomplish the work. With great feigned reverence, therefore, were the Bible and catechetical instruction exiled from the school. The polluted page of infidelity, every where, met the eye, while its sneers and blasphemies assailed the ear. The specious argument of leaving children, unbiassed, to choose their own religion at a riper age, gave leisure for depravity to mature its alienating prejudices, and for lies to extend their influence, and for vicious habits to establish their unresisted dominion. The result was, a brood of infidels, and heretics, and profligates, a generation prepared to be carried about, as they have been, by every wind of doctrine, and to assail, as they have done, our most sacred institutions.

But the time, at length, arrived, when all the preceding causes were enlisted as auxiliaries, merely, and invested with double potency, by political violence and alienation.

The origin and progress of these collisions of party, need not be traced, nor is it the object of this discourse to weigh the contending parties in the scales of justice, to ascertain their relative guilt, and measure out a retribution—

a work which belongs to God and the judgment of the great day. But the effects of this unhappy controversy have been such, upon this once peaceful State, that the combatants, on both sides, have occasion to sit down and weep together over the desolations which the conflict has occasioned. For it has been keen and dreadful, and, like the varying conflict of battle, has marred and trodden down, whatever has stood within the range of its commotion. On every field over which it swept, abiding traces are left of its desolating career. Families divided, neighbours and friends imbittered, ministers and people alienated, churches divided, and the numbers of seceding denominations multiplied, with all those bitter feelings which contention, and stripes, and wounds are calculated to inspire. At the present moment there is, scarcely, an ecclesiastical society in the State, which has not experienced a diminution of its numbers; or a seceding denomination, which has not been established or augmented by these political contentions, as a cause without which, such things had never been. To the preceding causes must be added, if we speak the whole truth, the direct enterprise of religious denominations, to augment their numbers.

Feeling as all minorities ever have felt, and impatient to exchange the inconveniences of weakness, for the advantages unavoidably attached to numbers, and confident, as all denominations are, of being exactly right, a deceitful heart might easily mistake the combined impulse of proselyting zeal, and restless ambition, for unmingled zeal for the Lord of hosts, and might verily think that many things ought to be done to pull down the *standing order*; which things, also, as the circumstances of the times have favoured, have been done.

The operation of all these causes has been greatly facilitated, by the change made in the law for the support of the gospel, to accommodate it to the changes in religious opinion which had gradually taken place in the State. It was the fundamental maxim of the civil fathers of this State, that the preaching of the gospel was, in a civil point of view, a great blessing to the community, for the support of which, all, being equal partakers of its civil benefits, should equally contribute according to their several ability. This law, while the inhabitants of the State were all of one way, was entirely efficacious, and secured

to the people of the State, at least, four times the amount of religious instruction which has ever been known to be the result of merely voluntary associations for the support of the gospel.*

* It has been said that the gospel will support itself, and that civil laws have nothing to do with the support of the gospel. If it be meant that the gospel will exist in the world, though we should neglect to support it in Connecticut, it is true; but if the meaning be that God will continue to us a faithful ministry, and bestow his blessing upon it, though we should withhold the means for its competent support, it is not true. The certain continuance of the gospel in the world, no more ensures its continuance where the proper means are neglected, than the certain continuance of seed time and harvest in the world, prove that the people of Connecticut may neglect to plough and sow and still expect an abundant harvest.

And with respect to the manner in which religious instruction shall be provided, no plan has ever yet been adopted so effectual as legislative provisions, which shut out individual discretion, and require every man to pay for the support of the gospel according to his property. The experiment has been fairly made, on our right hand and on our left, of what may be expected from voluntary associations and contributions for the support of divine institutions; and the result is, that at least four times more religious instruction is secured by legal provision, than has ever been provided to any considerable extent by voluntary discretion. Even in this State, since the evasion of the law has become practicable and common, the amount of religious instruction provided by themselves by that portion of our population, who have reserved to their own discretion what they will give, has dwindled in nearly the same proportion. One Sabbath in three, is probably about the medium amount of religious instruction, which they think fit to provide for themselves or their families; or, to use their own language, which the gospel 'provides for itself.' This too is falling off in the face of a general, contrary example, and in spite of antecedent education and habit. What then is to be expected from the next generation, and what is to be the destiny of this State and its institutions, should an increasing portion of our population grow up in such comparative ignorance? If any portion of the instruction, which God has provided for men, is important, the whole is proportionably more important. If one Sabbath in three is important, each of the other two is equally important; if a total loss of Sabbaths would be a calamity, the loss of two out of three is a calamity of equal relative amount; if two Sabbaths' instruction lost is of no consequence, the one Sabbath enjoyed is of no consequence, and the Sabbath itself is good for nothing. So far as religious instruction on the Sabbath is the cause of religious knowledge and of moral habits, nothing can be anticipated but the increase of ignorance, and irreligion, and immorality, in proportion to the decline of the means of instruction and restraint. Nor is this all, the families, who have worship to attend only one Sabbath in three, will not attend that Sabbath as punctually as those will attend steadily, who have weekly instruction. Two Sabbaths of indolence and vagrancy of thought and conduct will more than dissipate the instruction, and efface the impression of the third.—No community and no family can hold their own, against the current of depravity and the power of temptation, by one Sabbath in three.

If these views are correct, it is deplorable to witness with what thoughtlessness and disregard of consequences, men will cut themselves off and cut off their families, and, by consequence, successive generations of posterity, from at least two thirds the amount of that religious instruction and restraint which God has provided to bless them in time, and to qualify them for heaven. All this would be to be lamented if the remaining portion of instruction was as good matter and manner as the whole, which they have abandoned. But how little is thought of truth and its importance in the feverish haste of revenge or the narrowness of avaricious savings. Oh! 'tis enough to make angels weep, to see whole families of precious, immortal children, unconscious of their doom, cut off at once by this rash act of a father from the hearing of the truth, to famish by hearing nothing, or be poisoned by hearing error. Oh! how will such rash deeds appear in the day of judgment, when the wretched father, undone by his folly, shall find himself surrounded by his ruined family, undone by his anger, or destroyed

But the multiplication of other denominations demanded, at length, a modification which should permit every man to worship God according to the dictates of his conscience, and compel him to pay only for the support of the gospel in his own way. The practical effect has been, to liberate all conscientious dissenters from supporting a worship they did not approve, which the law intended; and to liberate a much greater number, without conscience, from paying for the support of the gospel any where, and progressively to diminish the amount of religious instruction, and moral influence in the State; a thing which the law did not intend. While it accommodates the conscientious feelings of ten, it accomodates the angry, revengeful, avaricious, and irreligious feelings of fifty; and threatens by a silent, constant operation, to undermine the deep-laid foundations of our civil and religious order.

The vital principle of our system, that every man shall pay according to his property, somewhere, for the support of religious instruction, as a public civil benefit, and for the preservation of morals, and good order, in the state, is gone. Every man, who chooses to do it, withdraws, now, by a little management, his whole tax from the support of the gospel; and the result is lamentably manifest in the multiplication of feeble societies and waste places.

It has taught also the malicious and the irreligious the art of breaking down societies, and multiplying, by design, our desolations. It is only to collect the firebrands in each society, or to kindle up a flame which shall make them, and the society, which was as the garden of Eden before the flame, becomes a desolate wilderness behind it.

The last cause which I shall mention is the remedy which has, too often, been applied, to rescue declining congregations and raise waste places. The usual result has been, the settlement of a minister, upon an incompetent salary, with the expectation that he will support himself, in part, by his own exertions. The result has usually been, what might have been anticipated, the habit of worldly care and exertion, which necessity began, becomes

by his parsimony! How must their agony torture him, and their cries harrow up his soul! What imprecations from a long line of descendants, ruined by his folly, will assail his ears—And what anguish wring his heart while he goes away with them into everlasting punishment, where their worm dieth not and their fire is not quenched!

sometimes, a confirmed habit of worldliness, to which the ministry becomes entirely a secondary consideration. Gain is substituted for godliness, and preaching the gospel becomes a convenient auxiliary in the system of accumulating money. The man has become a thriving farmer, an able school-master, a sagacious speculator, but has long since ceased to be a faithful minister of Jesus Christ.

His thoughts, his heart, his time, are devoted to secular pursuits, while, with his lips only, he deals out one day in seven, cold commendations of that religion, whose interests he betrays. But the more common effect is, that his ministry embarrasses his worldly enterprise, and his worldly enterprise his ministry so much, that both become comparatively unfruitful. He cannot pursue his worldly business to the best advantage, because he is a minister, and he cannot pursue the work of the ministry to advantage, because he is a farmer; the combined result is, a bare support, with a double tax of care, few books, and no leisure to read them, little time for study and that of little value, from the impossibility of putting in requisition, at a moment's warning, the resources of a mind vexed with ceaseless care, and long since, a stranger to habits of study. He laments his situation, longs to devote himself to his work, hopes for better days, while every year brings new conviction, that they will never come. In this unequal struggle his days of improvement pass away, his mind undisciplined, his heart cold and formal, his sermons unpopular abroad, and irksome at home.—He neglects to visit his people, for he has no time; he neglects district and meetings for prayer; and the main spring being removed, all the movements which are the life of religion, stop. In proportion, also, as he does less for his people, he loves them less, and their affection for him declines in the same degree;—and now sectarians, with flaming zeal, break in upon his charge, and preach and pray and visit, and do just those things to alienate his charge, which ought to have been done to attach them to himself, and to one another. Alarmed at this furious onset, he hurls from the pulpit, unavailing invectives against the foe, and makes some feeble exertions, to prevent, by action, a defection, which hard names will only extend. But it is all too late; the kind attention, by which he might once have bound his people to himself forever, has been exhibited by a stranger, who has stolen away

their hearts, by an irretrievable delusion. And now his little salary presses hard upon the diminished number of his people, is poorly paid, and operates as a constant temptation to increased defection. Alarmed at their danger, his people complain that he does not visit them, and take pains to hold the congregation together; and he, in return, complains that they have not enabled him to do it, by providing for him a competent support, or even by the punctual payment of the pittance stipulated. Complaint begets complaint, and crimination begets crimination, until at length the crisis arrives;—his people, weakened by defections, can no longer raise his little salary; and he, by the most strenuous exertions, cannot do without it. Of course a council is called, and the pastoral relation is dissolved. The pastor, with a large family, in the decline of life goes an exile to the wilderness, or settles in some other declining church, to repeat the same experiment, and, unless death prevent, to witness the same result.

The Society, which by a trifling additional effort, might have commanded the whole time of their pastor, and become yearly stronger, have by their injudicious parsimony, frittered away their strength and brought themselves to desolation—have dug their own grave, and lie down in it to awake no more. One half the time of a minister, who devotes his whole time to his appropriate work, would be more efficacious to build up a declining society, than all the scraps of time, which any man compelled to support himself in part, can possibly rescue from the toils and cares of worldly avocations. The success of a minister depends much, under God, upon the state of his mind and his heart—a mind disciplined by study, and a heart warmed by action in his blessed work: a state of mind and heart which cannot be preserved amid the distractions of cares, and the din of business, and which cannot be commanded for immediate use, the moment he sits down in his study, or steps from the world into his pulpit.

It would be far better, that two feeble societies should unite in the competent support of one man, where it can be done, commanding between them, the whole time, and all the talents of their pastor, than to prolong in both a ministry, without its appropriate duties and blessings, until both are brought to desolation.*

* Why should the ministry be denominated a sedentary profession? It cannot be.

We are to consider

II. The means by which the wastes, in this State, may be built.

And here, suffer me to suggest, as a measure of great utility, not to the desolate merely, but to all the churches, the occasional itineration of the stated pastors, within the limits of each association, and by exchanges into other associations, and in different parts of the State. A ministry, entirely migratory, though it possess some advantages, is defective, and so also is a ministry wholly stationary. A system which should retain all the benefits of stability, and avail itself of the peculiar advantages of itineracy, would approach, it is believed, nearest to perfection. But such a system, might, with the utmost ease, be established in this State. Partial experiments have been made already, and always with singularly happy effects. A religious enterprise of this kind, breaks in upon the lethargy which is apt to invade the mind, too long conversant with the same place, objects, and duties. It creates a more minute, and yet extended knowledge, of the state of the churches, and a stronger interest in their welfare; while it awakens to new zeal and enterprise, among their own people, both those who itinerate, and those who are cheered by their coming.*

For the especial benefit of destitute, feeble congregations, a concert might be formed, by ministers in the vicinity, which should extend to them a course of parochial visits,

from the example of Jesus Christ, and it cannot be because there are not important active duties belonging to the profession enough to occupy, at least, one half the time. If a minister be disposed to do it and his people will permit, as too commonly they will, he may lead a very inactive life. But if he understands his duty and is not deficient in love to his Saviour and the souls of his people, like his Master he will often scarcely find time to eat and will as frequently lie down wearied with bodily exertion as with study.

* Itinerations of the above description, have been repeatedly practised in both the associations of Litchfield county, and in every instance have been attended by the happiest effects. The revivals which prevailed in this county from the year 1798 to 1800, and those which have for more than three years past prevailed in our churches, were, in many instances, begun, and in all, happily promoted by the blessing of God upon such itinerations. In the state of New Jersey also, two seasons of extensive revivals, were begun by the blessing of God upon a similar system of special enterprise. Two ministers have in all cases been united in the same tour: and latterly the churches have had previous notice of the commencement and continuance of the tour, and have devoted a portion of time each evening, between the hours of seven and eight, to a concert of *secret prayer* to God for his blessing upon the enterprise, and not unfrequently, while they have been yet speaking, the answer has been granted. In all cases the churches have been refreshed and animated by such visits, and a more extensive attention produced, than would have been commanded by ordinary lectures.

once or twice a year; to which might be added, a stated lecture upheld by concert, once a month, and, in many cases, every week. Four ministers, by spending each one week in a vacant congregation, might catechise all the schools, and visit all the families, at least once a year; and by preaching only three lectures each might convene the people twelve times a year, to be instructed and cheered, by the preaching of the gospel. How great would be the amount of instruction thus communicated, and of religious and moral influence thus exerted? What confidence would it inspire in the pastors of the churches? What affection would it create, what gratitude awaken, what opportunities to advise, and what influence would it give to ministers, to preserve and build up decayed congregations? How benign, especially, upon the rising generation would be such gratuitous pastoral attentions? How much impiety, and immorality, may be thus prevented? What new views communicated—what new desires awakened—what new hopes excited—what new habits formed? To these instructions of the week, might be added stated supplies for some time, on the Sabbath, by the consent of surrounding churches. Is there a church in the state blessed with a stated ministry, which would not rejoice to impart the bread of two Sabbaths, to a destitute sister church? Or a minister, who would not travel, once or twice a year, ten or twenty miles to supply, in this manner, a vacancy? This measure alone, would sensibly cheer the wastes of Zion, without the least pecuniary sacrifice, or any sacrifice, which would not more than repay itself, in the good done, and the satisfaction experienced in doing it.

Another means of restoration may be found in the appointment of evangelists, whose whole time shall be devoted to the preaching of the gospel within the limits of feeble and destitute congregations. Their access to these wastes, and their continuance in them, may be regulated by their own discretion; but unquestionably, the time of several evangelists might be as profitably employed, in this State, as in any region to which missionaries are sent. How much might they do to cheer the pious, to encourage the desponding, to remove misconceptions, to eradicate prejudices, to promote revivals, and the reformation of morals, and thus to prepare the way for the established order of the gospel!

The impulse thus given might suffice, in many cases, to produce a speedy, spontaneous resurrection; for of many a sister church, we trust it may be said, "she is not dead but sleepeth."

To the labours of evangelists must be added in some cases, probably, a permanent, stated supply, until the work of restoration be consummated. It is a long, continued action of inauspicious causes, that has occasioned desolations in certain cases, and nothing but a stated, counter-acting, salutary influence can build them up.

As to the means of supporting evangelists, and stated supplies, a portion of the expense and probably an increasing portion annually would be borne, cheerfully, by the people, who are blessed with their ministrations. For another item:—let each association in the state open a treasury for the purpose, and each church in the association cast into it one sacramental contribution a year, enlarged as it would readily be for that purpose, and the amount would employ constantly several evangelists, to cheer the wastes, and cause the heart of the desolate to sing. This single measure would, ultimately, though slowly, raise up the foundations of many generations. It would command, however, but a small portion of the resources which would readily be furnished, and would defer needlessly a consummation so devoutly to be wished. A general society might, therefore, be formed for the special purpose of building up the wastes of the State, or, should it be judged most expedient, the missionary society of the state might be authorised to hold monies, and the several congregations to make contributions, annually, for that purpose. The manner may be a subject of deliberation at the proper time, but that funds can be raised to help the desolate, that our ruins can be built, and must be built, does not admit a doubt. Should no calamity defer the enterprise, in a few years, every waste may be built, and the funds raised for this purpose be consecrated to the benevolent work of building the wastes of other states, and other lands. To the preceding means may properly be added, for the purpose of preservation, as well as restoration, the special enterprise of ministers, in the performance of pastoral duties.

This will include the particular regard of each pastor,

to the wastes within his own limits. Many causes conspire to interrupt the attention of distant villages, and neighbourhoods, to the public worship of God, and to introduce a relaxation of religious and moral order. To counteract these effects of local circumstances, occasional visits and the preaching of lectures are indispensable. Such attention is an act of justice to the distant districts of a congregation, who pay equally for the support of the gospel, and cannot, without some such attention, be made equally partakers of its blessings. It conciliates affection also and binds the extremities of a congregation to the sanctuary of their fathers, by stronger ligaments than can otherwise be found. It is a means of preservation too, which if not employed by ourselves to unite, will infallibly be employed by others, to alienate and divide. Great benefits have been found to accrue also, from weekly lectures in different districts of the congregation. They contribute very much to keep alive the attention of the people to the subject of religion, afford to the pastor opportunity of becoming more intimately acquainted with his flock, as well as of approaching their consciences in a more plain and yet forcible manner. Such assemblages of districts promote also kind affections among themselves, accommodate the aged and the feeble, and call up the attention of many, to the subject of religion, and allure to the sanctuary of God many, who otherwise had slept away the day of grace.*

We may not in this place omit to add pastoral visits to the best of ministerial duties for the preservation of the church.

There is no congregation where they may not, with prudence, be introduced, and usually, with the most ardent approbation of the people. In their progress, the pastor enters every family of his charge, the rich and the poor alike, to pray with them, catechise the children, inquire after the spiritual welfare of all, and to communicate such advice, exhortation, or reproof, as the circumstances of

* The revival in the congregation of Litchfield, now of two years' continuance, has been chiefly promoted, by the blessing of God, upon such lectures. It has been found most useful, when a lecture is established in any district, to attend it steadily, every week, for three or four months, instead of making appointments in rotation in different parts of the congregation. In one case, the impression has in every instance gradually increased until a revival ensued; while in the other, temporary impressions have seemed to be lost, in the long interval which ensued before the return of another Lecture.

each family shall demand, and his own discretion dictate. Unquestionably, such visits may be ranked among the most efficacious labours of a minister for the salvation of his people. They increase greatly his affection for them, and their affection for him. They make him acquainted with the children of his charge, and furnish a minuteness of information not otherwise to be obtained, and without which he could not be qualified to give to every one, his portion in due season. They will occupy indeed, considerable time, but by furnishing a press of interesting subjects and increased facilities of composition, they will redeem as much time as they occupy. Any man will be able to preach better, on the Sabbath, after visiting his people two days in the week, than he would be, had his whole time been devoted to study. He will then have an object while he writes and when he speaks, and will write and speak with an animation, which nothing but a deep interest in his subject can inspire.

To parochial visits, it will be proper to add an efficient system for the instruction of children and young people, in the doctrines and duties of religion.

It would seem proper, where the season will permit, that the children of the congregation (who ought all of them, as far as possible, to attend public worship) be catechised by a committee of the church, in the interval of public worship; and that stated catechetical examinations of all the children of the congregation, be attended by the pastor and a committee of the church, at least semiannually, and if practicable, quarterly.*

It is also unspeakably important, that a system of religious instruction be provided, to succeed the shorter catechism, adapted to the age and altered feelings of young people. In most cases the whole system of religious instruction, by the church and by parent, also, ceases with the period of childhood.

A species of false shame renders young people reluctant to repeat the catechism, deemed, perhaps, a badge of childhood; and no alternative being provided they stay at home, forget what they have learned, and efface by the dissipating influence of levity, the serious impressions of early life.

* In some churches these examinations are attended once in two months, on the day of each preparatory lecture.

For a long period, they escape from pastoral influence. Some become irreligious and dissolute, and never return : and none return until the Spirit of God revives the tender feelings of childhood, and brings into the fold, his wandering lambs,

A system of instruction is needed, therefore, suited to the age and altered circumstances of youth, which shall prevent their breaking the bands of Christ and keep them, unceasingly, within the reach of exhortation and pastoral influence. The period, when their education has ordinarily ceased, is precisely the period when it is most needed. When its influence for their conversion would be most hopeful and their emancipation from its restraint the most perilous.*

We have only to add to the list of means for the restoration of decayed churches and congregations, a concert of prayer among the churches, for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon these desolations, and the revival of religion. It is by revivals only that the waste places, in this State, can be effectually built up, and all the preceding means are to be employed with a direct reference to a revival of religion. But no means will avail without the special power of God to render them effectual. The Lord God Almighty must build the old wastes among us, by a high hand, and an outstretched arm ; but for all this, will he be inquired of by the churches to do it for them. But where the preceding course of exertion is adopted, and followed by the united supplications of the churches for the blessing of God, with exultation we may announce, "The time to favour Zion has come, for thy servants take pleasure in her stones and favour the dust thereof. †

* This continued attention of young people to religious instruction, and this salutary access of their pastor to them, has been successfully accomplished, in some instances, by youthful libraries and moral schools, sometimes by stated lectures for the exposition of the catechism, and recently, perhaps in the highest degree, by means of the Biblical catechism of Mr. Wilbur and the associations of young people which it has occasioned for the purpose of gaining an acquaintance with the Bible.

† In the month of October, 1813, the south consociation of Litchfield county, were called to dismiss the Rev. Abraham Fowler from his pastoral relation to the church of Christ in Milton. At that time the society, from various causes, was reduced, perhaps, to thirty families; and the church, long rent by divisions, was almost annihilated. Both the church and society, appeared to give up entirely the idea of ever attempting again to support the gospel. The prospect of extinction to a sister church, was deeply afflicting to the consociation, and a secret engagement was

III. The motives to immediate exertion for the purpose of building the old wastes, in the State, now claim our attention.

1. It is the duty of the churches in this State, to help decayed sister churches to arise.

The particular churches of this State are not organized for their own edification, exclusively, but for mutual assistance in distress; and for co-operation in building up the Redeemer's kingdom. The gospel recognises no independent churches. All are the subjects of one kingdom, to whose prosperity they are mutually devoted. All are citizens of one city, assailed by a common enemy, and associated for the common defence. All are members of the same family, bound together by a common interest and by common ties of blood. All are members of one body, united in a common head, from which all the body, by joints and bands, having nourishment ministered and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.

There is a fellowship of churches, which Jesus Christ has constituted, and relative duties, which he has enjoined. These duties are, sympathy in joy and sorrow, counsel, admonition, and pecuniary aid, as circumstances may require. It is not a matter of discretion, then, whether the churches of Connecticut shall help feeble sister churches. They are bound to do it. In becoming churches, they have assumed a relation to each other, the duties of which, are as plain and as indispensable, as the duties of husband and wife, or parent and child. According to our ability, we that are strong are bound to help the feeble. Is it our duty to minister to the hungry the bread that perisheth; and can we be at liberty to withhold the bread of life? Are we bound to do good unto all men as we have opportunity; and may we yet overlook the household of faith? Are the members of the same church bound to

formed, to procure them immediately a supply, to be supported by a contribution among the churches, and to unite our fervent supplications to God, for the outpouring of his Holy Spirit upon that afflicted and desolate people. The supply was accordingly obtained, and went to his work, attended by the supplications of the surrounding churches. The result was, an immediate revival of religion, in the progress of which, about forty persons became, apparently, the subjects of reconciliation to God, including in the number, almost all the young people belonging to the society. The church has been united, enlarged, and cheered: and has never, since its first establishment, been in a more happy state, in a religious point of view, than at the present time.

look, not every man on his own things, but every man, also, on the things of others; and may churches contract themselves within their own selfish circumference, regarding with a cold heart and an unhelping hand, the necessities of other churches? Can there be no love to God in the individual professor, who hath this world's goods, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion against a needy brother? And can churches practise towards churches the same hardhearted parsimony and be guiltless? Or must we draw the alarming inference, that the love of God dwelleth not in churches, if they disregard the afflictions of destitute churches and withhold the necessary aid? Is it our duty to send the gospel to the destitute in the new settlements in other States, and to the heathen in other lands; and can we be at liberty to witness, as idle spectators, the extinction of sister churches, and the return of heathenism at home?

The primitive churches understood the relative duties of churches as we have explained them. The whole primitive church was one great association for charitable purposes, and exerted, for centuries, and in the midst of persecution, a boundless enterprise to propagate the gospel. They gave, not to support preachers only, but to support preachers and hearers also, whom persecution had made desolate. The same sympathy and efficacious charity distinguished the churches of the reformation! And when our fathers came to this land, they, being many members, were yet one body. A strong sympathy made them partakers of each other's joys and sorrows. "Then might be seen, magistrates and ministers together in way of advice. Ministers and ministers cleaving together in way of communion. Churches and churches together in way of consultation by greater and less synods. Magistrates, and ministers, and their people together uniting hands and hearts in the common cause, breathing a public spirit and conspiring with holy zeal and vigor to advance the kingdom of Christ. O the uniting glory then manifest! Grace ruling and ordering both rulers and people under the glorious banners of true gospel holy love. Then were colonies united, and courts united, magistrates united, and ministers united, churches united, and plantations united."*

* Church's Fast Sermon, page 14.

The consociation of the churches of this State in the year 1708, is an express recognition of the relation which churches bear to each other, according to the gospel, and a voluntary, implied engagement to fulfil towards each other all righteousness. Nor have the feelings or the duties of this relation utterly ceased, but they are feeble and limited in their practical influence. Sister churches have been overrun with error—divided, broken down, and even annihilated, and nothing but good advice and good wishes has been interposed. Instead of a general lamentation, that a light in Israel should be put out, it is not known, to many churches in the State, that such calamities have come upon us. But they have come.—There are grievous desolations in this State: societies might be named, where the church is extinct and the house of God in ruins: The blasts of winter rave through it, the flocks of summer find a shelter in it. The Sabbath is a holiday. The authority of revelation has ceased with many, and, by others, is employed to sanction doctrines, not less destructive than atheism. Preachers are patronised, whose object it is to keep the audience laughing by ridiculing the ministers, and the doctrines of the gospel. A revival of religion would be regarded with as virulent enmity, as Jews or Pagans regarded christianity. There are, in this State, districts as far from heaven, and, without help, as hopeless of heaven, as the Pagans of Hindostan or China. Will the churches sleep over such ruins? Can nothing be done to repair these desolations of many generations?

2. Unless these desolations are built they will become more desolate.

The heart of man is desperately wicked, and freed from the restraints of religious instruction, will go on indefinitely from bad to worse. Where the restraints of religion cease to operate, the restraint of law will also be speedily unknown, for the plain reason that, in such communities, there will be none to execute the laws. The result will be intemperance, profane swearing, gambling, idleness, poverty, hatred, variance, strife, disease and woe.

Were these temporal calamities the chief miseries of such desolations, their claim upon our christian sympathy would not be small. But these are only the beginnings of sorrow. The bondage of corruption, commencing here,

will extend through eternity. The career of iniquity, here begun, will hold on its unobstructed course and never end. There is no bottom to the pit in which these wastes have begun to sink; no limit to the woes which are before them, and little hope that they will ever escape. The aged die with the measure of their iniquity full, and children are born to fill up the measure of their fathers, until wrath, to the uttermost, come upon them. No revivals approach to burst the bands of wickedness and proclaim liberty to the captive. No day of hope dawns, no ray of light breaks in. There is no rain, neither any dew upon them from heaven, and no breath of the Lord visits the bones, which are dry, very dry. Brethren, is there no help? Among all the churches in this State, dwelling at ease, is there no eye to pity, no arm to save?

3. If these waste places are not built they will exert a powerful influence to create other wastes and extend the scene of desolation.

The inhabitants of neighbouring towns exert no inconsiderable influence upon each other. The good encourage the good, and the bad countenance and strengthen the bad. By means of intercourse, their opinions, views, and feelings are interchanged, the moral atmosphere of each is breathed by the other, to an extent, which will sensibly affect the moral system of both. Beside, each waste, like Babel, will send out yearly, its host of emigrants, of many tongues;—strangers to the fear of the Lord, and furious in their opposition to our civil and religious order, and prepared to exert, always, a pernicious, and sometimes, as circumstances favour, a fatal influence upon the town or society in which they reside.

From these wastes also sally forth the infidel, seeking whom he may devour;—the universalist, to quiet profligates in sin, and multiply their number;—the political empiric, to augment his party;—and the sectarian of every name, to proselyte, until a broad circumference around shall become as divided, and weak, and dissolute, as Babel itself. Evil communications corrupt good manners. Their word eateth as doth a canker. A conflagration on the borders of a city is not more to be dreaded, than a society, bereft of the gospel, emancipated from the fear of the Lord, and self-destroyed, is to be feared by neighbouring societies.

Facts, lamentable facts, may be found in this State, to justify these apprehensions. There are, this moment, in this State, waste places, which exert precisely the kind of influence, which we have ascribed to them.

4. If the wastes among us are not built, they will undermine, ultimately, the civil and religious order of the State.

Our past unity and strength, in a civil point of view, has been owing to the very extended, and happy coincidence of religious views and feelings in the State. Destroy this coincidence, and you disseminate the causes of jealousy and alienation, and multiply the difficulties of legislation. It was the conflict of religious competition that brought Charles to the block, and broke down, for a time, the strong government of England. And let the wastes, in this State, multiply till one third of the freemen shall care for no religion, a third attach themselves to various, seceding denominations, and a remnant, only, walk in the old way, and the unity of our councils and the vigor of our government would be gone. The business of legislation would become a scene of intrigue and competition of religious and political ambition, of temporising compromise, and bargain and sale. Each party would soon have its ambitious leaders, who would kindle the fire to warm themselves by, and cry persecution to seat themselves in high places. Each party would be kept organised by demagogues for political use, and the fire of the State would go up to heaven, as the smoke of a great furnace, and all our blessings would perish in the flames. But to such a state of things the multiplication of waste places will inevitably bring us. They are not warts, merely to mar the beauty of the face, but cancers corroding the heart's blood, and fastening their fibres upon the vitals. The religious and civil order of this State, commenced their existence together, and together they will live or expire. One was made for the other, or rather one was made *by* the other. Without the religious order of the State to form the conscience and establish the fear of the Lord, our civil institutions, which have stood almost two centuries, could not have endured a year. Let the ancient churches in this State, one after another, be broken down,

and the doctrines, which have purified and cheered them, cease to be heard, and soon, Connecticut will be Connecticut no more. Like Esau we may seek, carefully, with tears, what our folly has abandoned, but no repentance will retrieve our ruin. Our laws, habits, and manners, are the result of our religion; all other causes combined, have not had so much influence; remove this master spring, and every movement will stop. Bid the soul depart, and that moment, will the body die. But who would risk the tremendous experiment? Have our religious institutions been so barren of good to us, that we may lightly trifle them away in search of better? Or is experimenting in religion so harmless a thing, that if the right form does not come out of the fire, we can restore the molten mass to its former uses? No, let the prevailing religious order of the State be once broken down, and it is gone forever. What injustice would this be to the dead? It is not two hundred years since the forest waved in our towns, and the war whoop was echoed from the heavens? To these abodes of desolation our fathers came to plant these churches, which now survive them, and to transmit those doctrines, which now enlighten them, and to establish, unfettered by European usage, those institutions which might bless their posterity till the second coming of our Lord: and God was with them.—They accomplished their work and went to heaven; leaving to their posterity, only the labour of preserving, what they had bequeathed. And now shall we listen to the syren tongue of charity, inviting us to substitute another order, and another gospel? And shall the cry of bigotry prevent our contending earnestly for their preservation? Shall the miner steadily pursue his work, and foundations fail, and desolations multiply, and no alarm be sounded? And no counteracting efforts be made? How could we answer it to God should we do so? How could we look our fathers in the face should we meet them in heaven?

5. The time past is more than sufficient to have neglected our duty and slept over our dangers. For twenty years, a combination of inauspicious influence has been exerted, without cessation, upon the religious order of the State, with very little systematic influence in the way of self-pre-

servation. We have trusted to our laws, to our habits, to the good sense of the people; and in common times these might have sufficed. But on common times we have not fallen, and to meet the change, common exertions are not sufficient. • Other religious denominations have not been inattentive to the preservation, and the increase of their churches, while we, unadmonished by circumstances, have kept on in the beaten track. Indeed, we have, for so long a time, borne patiently every assault, that to assail *us* is deemed a right, and resistance, on our part, even in self-defence, is deemed persecution. With the loving speech of charity, and toleration, the onset is made upon us; but if we open our lips, if we lift a finger, if we do not retreat, and abandon to strangers, the heritage of our fathers if we do not even help them to destroy us, the heavens are rent with the cry of bigotry and persecution. Is it not time, then, to awake to our duty, that, by a vigorous enterprise, we may retrieve what is past, and stop the progress of decline? The causes which have laid us waste, are, many of them, in operation still, and without a special counter-acting influence, will not be confined to their present limits. Other churches will become feeble, and the feeble desolate. Ambition, covetousness, irreligion, revenge, and false zeal, by their continual droppings, will wear away, by peacemeal, our firm foundations. The children of alienated families are multiplying, and their education, or want of it, are operating alike to change the character of the State. Their opinions, their property, their example, and their suffrage will have its influence in every town, and upon all our public concerns, changing, silently, and to a fatal extent, the civil, the moral, and the religious character of the State.

A few words in the application of this discourse may properly be addressed to the pastor elect.

My Brother,

From this discourse you perceive your duty to this people, and to the church of God. To you, though an earthen vessel, is committed that treasure, which is able to enrich them forever. Upon your fidelity, under God, will depend their eternal destiny. To become faithful, you must study. Neither talents nor piety will supersede the

necessity of application. The mind must be disciplined or it will lose its vigor ; it must receive, or it cannot communicate. Sermons must be studied, or they will be common-place, pointless compositions. Unstudied, written sermons, are as much more intolerable than unpremeditated, extemporary effusions, as methodical dullness is more irksome than immethodical zeal—for as to matter both will hang in even scales. But study is not all ; you must act. You must take care of the wastes in your own limits. You must be instant in season and out of season, to preach the gospel to your people. Calling together, from week to week, the different districts of your charge to speak to them the words of eternal life. To you is committed the care of the lambs of this flock. Your discretion, and enterprise, and influence, will be the spring of that whole system of religious education, which, under God, must determine their character for time and eternity. You are to catechise them and to stimulate the church, and every family in your charge, to the work of religious education. It becomes you to acquire, as you easily may do, an all-pervading influence among your people, under which, they shall assume a character and stability, such as they ought to possess. That prudence, in a minister, which would avoid difficulties by doing nothing, is pernicious. It is your duty to be active, and prudent too. It is not enough that your charge grows no worse. Without special hindrances, you must be sadly deficient, if they do not grow better. But to gain this all-pervading influence, you must love your people, and secure to yourself a reciprocal attachment. And to do this you must be faithful to them. You must know your flock, attend religious meetings, pray by the bed of the sick, visit mourners, and go from house to house to teach them and to do them good.

Such, brother, is the work in which you are about to engage. Do you shrink from such toil—such exclusive consecration to your work ? Have you much collateral business of your own ? A literary field to cultivate for fame ? A vineyard of your own to till, and flocks to tend, for filthy lucre's sake ? Now then is the time to stop, for it is better not to vow than to vow and not perform. If private christians cannot serve God and mammon, much less

can faithful ministers of the Lord Jesus. But if your heart's desire is, to give yourself wholly to the Lord, and to know nothing among your people, save Jesus Christ and him crucified; and if still, at times, the cankering thought arise, what shall I eat, and what shall I drink, and wherewithal shall I be clothed, then, brother, have faith in God. Behold the fowls of the air, for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Trust then in the Lord and do good, and verily thou shalt be fed. For it is not merely a duty enjoined upon others, that they, which preach the gospel shall live of the gospel, but a promise also given to his ministers, which Jesus will not fail to verify. Be faithful, then, to God and to your people. Give them your time, your talents, and your prayers. Let them know, from experience, the blessings of a faithful ministry; and God, I doubt not, will both incline and enable them to take care of you.

You perceive, also, from what has been said, your duty to the church of God generally. No minister liveth for his own charge exclusively. An extended field lies open before him, to be cultivated by the joint labours of pastors and churches. To you, with others, will appertain a friendly care of vacant churches and waste places. To you it belongs, as a guardian of the church, to attend steadily the several ecclesiastical meetings of the church, that you may know her interest, and afford your counsel and cooperation for the general good. Indolence, or indifference, or worldly business, which produces a neglect of ecclesiastical meetings and of enterprise in the business of the church, will limit your influence to do good, diminish your zeal to do good, and subtract essentially from your stimulus to pastoral fidelity among your own people. Nor is your eye, or heart, or hand to be confined to the narrow limits of an association. The State, the Nation, the World demand your prayers, and charities, and enterprise. Do you sink under such a weight? It is enough to crush an angel. But through Christ, strengthening you, you can do it all.

The church and congregation in this place will now permit a brief application of what has been said to themselves.

We have heard, friends and brethren, with great satisfaction, of your high estimation of gospel privileges, and of your very laudable exertions to avert from yourselves and your children the multiplied evils of becoming a waste place. Upon principles of policy you have acted wisely. Upon principles of the strictest economy you have acted a saving part;—for had you fallen, the tax of your vices had been more than four times the expense of supporting the gospel. The tax of intemperance, of litigation, and of sickness induced by the excesses which prevail where the gospel does not restrain men, would grind you to the dust. There is that withholdeth more than is meet, and it tendeth to poverty; and in no case is this proverb more strikingly verified, than in those parsimonious calculations, by which societies curtail to themselves the privileges of the gospel.

You perceive, brethren, from the sketch given in this discourse, what your pastor is called to do; and you cannot but perceive that your best good demands that all of it should be done, and that, to do the whole, will occupy every moment of his time. If, in reality, you were unable to support him, so that he might devote to your service his whole time, in that case, could no help be derived from other churches, after the example of Paul, it might be his duty, by his own hands, to minister to his necessities. But if the same wisdom guide you, which hitherto has seemed to prevail, you will see to it that the necessity be *real* and not imaginary; the result of a natural and not a moral inability; created by the providence of God and not by that covetousness, which is idolatry. As much as in you lieth, you will see to it that no avocations of necessity divert him from those labours, which your best good demands.

It is a sad mistake, too often countenanced by ministers themselves, that small congregations are unable to support the gospel: when the fact is, that no congregation is able to do without the gospel: for the tax of desolation is four times as expensive as the tax, which is requisite to support the institutions of religion. This is no fiction. Go to those societies, which have judged themselves unable to support the gospel;—go to parents, and demand the items squandered by their prodigal children, beside breaking their

hearts by their undutiful conduct. Go to the tavern on the Sabbath day and on week days ;—attend the arbitrations, the courts, the trainings, the horse-racings, and the midnight revels ;—witness the decayed houses, fences, and tillage ;—the falling school-house, and tattered children of barbarous manners, and then return to your own little paradise, and decide, whether you will exile the gospel, as too expensive to be supported. If you are too poor to support the gospel, you are, demonstrably, too poor to do without it. If the one would severely press you, the other would grind you to powder. A few families may fatten in waste places, but it will be upon the vices of the rest. The greater portion will be poor, and ignorant, and vicious. Do you demand how a poor people can support the gospel? Let them first appreciate the privilege according to its importance, and then let the father, and the mother, and the son, and the daughter, and the servant, lay, weekly, a light tax upon their pride, and another upon appetite, needlessly gratified, and add to these savings another item, acquired by some special effort for the purpose ; and another, as God shall have prospered their lawful industry, and the result of the whole would be an abundant supply.* Any ten families of ordinary property, could better afford to support the gospel, than to do without it. When societies calculate what they can afford to give for the support of the gospel, they go upon the supposition, that what they do give is so much subtracted, annually, from the whole amount of their income ; a supposition, which is utterly erroneous ; for, in fact, as it respects the diminution of property, they give nothing. The gospel is not a debtor to those who support it, but they are debtors to the gospel. It does not subtract from the property of a society, but adds to it, more than it takes away. It is God himself who hath said, Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the first fruits of all thy increase, so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy

* The expense of ardent spirits consumed in the poorest societies, to the great injury of health and morals, would furnish annually an ample support for the gospel. If this were not enough, how many superfluities in dress might be forborne. And what if each member of the society should consecrate one hour a week to some lucrative employment, the avails of which should be appropriated to support the gospel. Would not these combined earnings go far to pay for preaching on the Sabbath?

presses shall burst out with new wine. This duty of supporting the worship of God has not ceased with the Jewish dispensation, nor has this promise been repealed, and the whole providence of God, to this day, has been a practical confirmation of his faithfulness in its fulfilment. The Jews often distrusted this assurance, and robbed God to save their property, but they were always reduced by the experiment. They sowed much and brought in little, and when it was gathered, God did blow upon it. The dew of heaven was stayed, and the earth did not yield her increase. Ye are cursed with a curse, for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground, neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time, in the field, saith the Lord of hosts, and all nations shall call you blessed, for ye shall be a delightsome land saith the Lord of hosts.*

The same rule of administration is regarded still. The curse of heaven still fastens upon communities that despise the gospel, and neglect its support. Their decline in outward prosperity, is notorious; and their restoration is no less manifest, when, convinced of their folly, they make a competent provision for the public worship of God. Nor is the fact mysterious, or miraculous, since the life of man, his health, his wisdom to plan, and strength to execute, the life and vigor of his flocks, and herds, every stalk of grain and every blade of grass, are in the hand of God. In ten thousand ways he can add to, or subtract from, your income. A fit of sickness, a broken bone, a profligate child, a vexatious lawsuit, a dearth or a flood, a murrain among your cattle, or a blast on your field, may cut off, at once, all your sacriligious savings. While his blessing can, in as many ways, make you rich, and add no sorrow with it. You may give, therefore, with an unsparing hand, as exigencies demand, for the support of the

* Malachi iii, 9, 10, 11, 12.

gospel, and it shall be given unto you again good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over. Your cruise of oil shall not fail, and your barrel of meal shall not waste.

My beloved brethren in the ministry,

Permit me to address to you also, a word of exhortation on this interesting occasion. If the views we have taken in this discourse are correct, have we not occasion to blush and to tremble at our past deficiencies? But what shall we do? Weary of our Master's work, or disheartened by past delinquency—shall we stop, and in despondency resign our commission and abandon our work? Or shall we this day renew our ordination vows, and go home to our people, resolving, in the strength of the Redeemer, to do better for the time to come? Which of us could bear to leave our work as it is, and go to judgment with the account of his stewardship? How many superfluous things have we done, wasting our precious time? How many important duties have we neglected, putting in jeopardy the souls of our people? How often might we have spoken to edification when we have held our peace? How many pastoral visits might we have made which we have not? How many district lectures might we have preached, which have not been heard? How many precious prayer meetings attended, which, through our negligence, have had no existence, and how feeble in our societies, the whole amount of our moral influence, compared with what it might have been, had we done our duty with all our might? What shall we say, brethren? Shall we seek to lighten the tax of guilt by denying the extent of our duty? It is at our peril that we do it. The glory of God, the prosperity of the Redeemer's kingdom, the welfare of souls, the terrors of the Lord, the love of Jesus, and our own solemn vows, all demand at our hands, more than has been suggested in this discourse. Twice have we given ourselves to the Lord—once when he delivered us from the horrid pit, and again when he counted us faithful, putting us into the ministry. The vows of God are upon us, and we cannot go back. We must do our duty; wo be to us if we do not preach the gospel, and fulfil its appropriate duties. Be-

side, we live in a peculiar day. Exertions, which once might suffice to avert desolation, are not sufficient now. The law which operated once, to prevent the dissolution of congregations, can be evaded, and is evaded, by every man whose impiety, or covetousness, or resentment, prompts him to do it. Personal attachment to the minister, is now the strongest bond of union, and to hold together by this bond, a society of fallen men, demands no ordinary vigilance and fidelity. Our predecessors might do less than their duty, and the primary impulse, unresisted, would cause things to move on in the right way. But now, the resistance is increased, and the impelling forces diminished, and nothing but an impulse, carefully and constantly applied, will keep things in their proper course.

The necessity of study is not diminished, but the necessity of action has greatly increased. Action is now the order of the day; for beside the peculiar exigencies of our own people, and the churches in this State, such a field of labour is opening before us, as the world never saw. Jesus is coming quickly to take possession of the earth, and is now putting in requisition the hearts, the thoughts, the time, and strength, of all his ministers; and which of us will not rejoice that it is so, and give him all?

AMEN.

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