

DR. DANA'S  
HALF-CENTURY SERMON,

DELIVERED

NOVEMBER 19, 1844.

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# DISCOURSE

DELIVERED IN THE

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN NEWBURYPORT,

ON TUESDAY, NOV. 19, 1844,

IT BEING THE

FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE AUTHOR'S ORDINATION.

BY DANIEL DANA, D. D.

PASTOR OF THE SECOND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.



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NEWBURYPORT, Nov. 23, 1844.

The Rev. DANIEL DANA, D. D.

Dear Sir,— With the full concurrence, as we believe, of the First Presbyterian Church and Society, to whose service in the gospel, the energies of your youth were devoted, we present you our sincere thanks for the very appropriate and excellent discourse delivered at our place of worship, on the semi-centennial anniversary of your ordination.— Believing that its usefulness may be still further extended, we would also respectfully request a copy for publication.

J. F. STEARNS, Pastor of the Church.

THOMAS M. CLARK, } Committee of the Session.  
PAUL SIMPSON, }

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To the Reverend Pastor, and the Session of the First Presbyterian Church.

MY DEAR BRETHREN,— As your cordial invitation to preach a semi-centennial sermon in your house of worship, left me no choice, so your present request, though dictated, probably, by a too partial judgment, is equally decisive with me. I therefore submit the discourse, with all its imperfections, to your disposal.

Whether it shall, or shall not be found worthy of the public attention, it will at least signify to the beloved people of my *former* and my *present* charge, what were the first, the last, and the dearest wishes of their affectionate pastor, in their behalf.

Believe me, my dear brethren, very sincerely yours,

DANIEL DANA.

NEWBURYPORT, Nov. 25, 1844.

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## DISCOURSE.

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FOR NOW WE LIVE, IF YE STAND FAST IN THE LORD. — 1 Thess. iii. 8.

IT is with no ordinary emotions, that I appear in this desk to-day. Fifty years since, standing on this spot, I received in sacred charge, and with a trembling heart, a beloved people. Little did I then think that my unworthy life would be prolonged to its present date, or that aught but death could terminate that endearing connection. Twenty-four years since, the event, so unanticipated and so painful, took place. I gave you my parting, and, as I supposed, my final benediction. Little did I imagine that the scene would ever be renewed, or that anything analogous would ever arise. But your affectionate invitation, coming to my heart with all the force of a command, brings me again before you this day.

A multitude of thoughts and feelings excited by the occasion, must be suppressed; for they are absolutely unutterable. It shall be my humble aim to employ the present hour, deeply interesting as it is to myself, and to most of my hearers, in a manner which may be profitable to all.

Suffer me, then, in opening my heart to those beloved friends to whom, in *former* and more *recent* time, I have preached the gospel — for both classes are now before me —

suffer me to appropriate the address of the Apostle in the text. For, pre-eminent as he was, in every natural, acquired and supernatural gift, he only speaks *here* the language of every sincere minister, though of the humblest talents and station. All such can truly say to those whom they have served in the gospel: *Now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord.*

You see, then, my friends, what constitutes *the crowning joy and felicity of ministers*. It is *the pious steadfastness of their Christian hearers*.

Let us meditate awhile on this momentous truth, and open our minds and hearts to its influence.

What is implied in the pious steadfastness of Christians, or, to use the Apostolic phrase, in their *standing fast in the Lord*, it is not difficult to ascertain.

Doubtless, a first and fundamental point is *an enlightened and cordial attachment to gospel truth*. Christianity, in common with every other science, has certain great and leading principles which are vital to the system. If these principles are understood, the system is understood. If they are embraced, the system is embraced. If they are overlooked, or denied, or rejected, the same is true of the system itself.

Farther; what is holiness, what is genuine virtue, but conformity to truth? The Saviour prays for his disciples, that they may be *sanctified by the truth*. The Apostle Peter declares of Christians, that they have *purified their souls in obeying the truth*. No human heart was ever yet purified by error. Nor can truth itself purify the heart, any farther than it is received, loved and obeyed.

If Christians, then, would *stand fast in the Lord*, they must have *a deep-felt experience of the power* of divine truth. This is the *all in all* of living, practical piety. It is this which puts the wide difference, not only between the believer and the unbeliever, but between the real Christian and the

mere formalist. Who has not observed that the Scriptures of God evermore lay the greatest possible stress on *faith*, as the grand source of moral excellence, and the unfailing determiner of human character. This, to many, appears wonderful. And were faith that cold, heartless thing which it is often conceived to be, it would be more than wonderful. It would be inexplicable. But the truth is wholly the reverse. Faith, genuine faith, is the *grand artery* of the spiritual system. It is a living, powerful, active principle, laying hold of the truths of God's Word, and writing them on the inmost heart. It gives them a real existence in the mind. It transfuses them, so to speak, through all the faculties and sensibilities of the soul.

In connection with this, let it be remembered that these Scriptural truths are not mere cold abstractions, nor barren generalities. In themselves, they are of immense magnitude and moment. To immortal beings they are interesting in the highest possible degree. In proportion as their influence is felt, they transform and modify the whole character. This is a point so interesting as to merit a moment's illustration.

The Scriptures portray the condition of the human family as a condition of awful depravity and guilt. Every human being is alienated from God, offensive to his purity, and obnoxious to his endless wrath, with all its insupportable consequences. And who sees not that these truths, believed and felt, must have a mighty influence on the mind; banishing its sloth, its security, its worldliness; giving the death-blow to its pride, and prostrating its delusive hopes in the dust?

But our sinful, self-ruined race is not abandoned by its God. His own Son has left his heaven; has on earth shed atoning blood, that he might raise us up from the very gates of hell, to that heaven from which he descended. And what mysteries of love and grace are here; fitted to penetrate every human heart to its centre, and to awaken the liveliest



sensibilities of gratitude, of love, and of everlasting devotion.

But these sensibilities are unknown; a dying Saviour's love leaves the heart still cold and hard, till another miracle of mercy is wrought. The Almighty Spirit descends; opens the blinded sinner's eyes; bursts asunder the strong bars of unbelief and sin, and binds him, by everlasting cords of grateful love, to his God and Redeemer. He is now a *saved* sinner; and he is saved by a grace which is purely and strictly *sovereign*. For he resisted all its tender advances; and would have resisted to the last, but for the overcoming mercy of Heaven.

Here, then, are the great and stupendous truths which occupy the Scriptures, and which occupy the believer's heart. The utterly depraved and helpless condition of man — the interpositions of a Divine, atoning Saviour, and of an Almighty, renewing Spirit — salvation from deserved and endless ruin — salvation by pure and sovereign grace. These are the truths which break the slumber of the human intellect, and which, wherever admitted, go down to the inmost depths of the soul. And we repeat it, they mould the character. They become powerful principles of action; and *permanent*, as well as powerful. Securing a lodgment in the *heart*, they can never be lost. We do not wonder that those with whom these truths are mere speculations, and who never felt their humbling, purifying, exalting influence, can easily resign them. They must have been unwelcome guests, and, of course, readily parted with. But to the experienced Christian, they are dear; too dear to be resigned. Others may doubt, but his faith is too firm to be shaken. Others may vacillate, but he *stands fast in the Lord*.

For a religion, however, of *mere experience*, we do not contend. The religion which does not sanctify and govern the life, must, with all its pretensions, be hollow and false.

What is a *change of heart*, if it does not meliorate the habitual temper, and whole demeanor? What is *repentance*, if it does not embitter every form of sin, and bind to universal holiness? What is faith, what is gospel *hope*, if they do not shed a purifying, sublimating influence over all the life. Why are Christians styled the *sons of God*, unless they are *blameless and harmless, shining as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life*, declaring, by the resistless eloquence of example what is that religion which comes from heaven, and what are its sublime and unparalleled excellencies?

*Standing fast in the Lord*, I remark with emphasis, implies *decision* of character. It is readily conceded that all the great doctrines of the gospel stand opposed to the pride and corruption of the heart. Many of these doctrines are so sublime and mysterious that they elude an entire comprehension. But what then?—The heart, once effectually humbled, can admit the most mortifying truths. It can even cherish, with peculiar tenacity and delight, the truths which humble it more and more, and at which it once felt only disgust. As to the *mysteries* of religion, the enlightened mind receives them on the simple authority of God. And what higher authority can it ask? Thus fortified may it not feel itself secure? May it not courageously resist all opposition? Yes; the consistent Christian is a man of decision. He has entered an infallible school, and has an unwavering confidence in his Teacher. He perceives an intrinsic and unparalleled beauty in the lessons inculcated. In addition, he daily feels their sanctifying power on his heart. He finds that the very truths which once offended his pride, are the most powerful auxiliaries to all holiness, and all virtue. Surely such a man is not to be robbed of his faith by the arts of sophistry, nor seduced by the fascinations of error, nor turned aside by the shiftings of every fashionable gale.

A similar decision marks his whole plan and course of conduct. Here he is governed, not by the laws of earth, but of heaven; not by the maxims of a heartless morality, or of a mere formal piety, but by the unerring, unbending principles of the Word of God. Its great and unrepealed law, *Be not conformed to this world*, he conscientiously reduces to practice. Not that he affects needless singularities, or an uncommanded strictness. He willingly complies with the established usages of society, when innocent and salutary; and this, that he may oppose them with the better grace and effect, when they cross the path of his duty. Withersoever that path leads, he resolutely follows; nor can seductions or dangers, enemies or friends, turn him aside.

*Standing fast in the Lord*, as it implies a firm adherence to gospel truth, involves, too, *a courage and zeal in its defence*. "Contending earnestly for the faith, once delivered to the saints," was viewed by an Apostle, not as an indication of bigotry, but as an essential part of Christian duty. So it is esteemed, wherever Christianity is found in a healthful and vigorous state. So it is regarded by every enlightened good man. He knows that from the *purity* of gospel truth, is mainly derived its power and efficiency. He knows that they are the *distinctive doctrines* of revelation, which furnish the chief support and aliment of vital and practical piety. This he has learned from consciousness, from experience, from observation, from the history of the church, and from the Bible. He therefore holds fast these precious doctrines. To resign them, would seem a species of soul-destroying folly. Not to defend them against the assaults of enemies, would be treachery to the Saviour, and gross unfaithfulness to the vital interests of his church.

In fine; *to stand fast in the Lord*, is to *persevere* in the profession and practice of gospel religion, to the very end. The religion of thousands has but too accurately resembled

the prophet's gourd. It has *come up in a night, and perished in a night*. How many, who have commenced a course of apparent piety, and under promising auspices, have soon faltered, and declined to open ungodliness and sin. How many, who have shone for years, with even an unnatural brilliancy, have closed their career in disastrous darkness. Instances like these, while they grieve the thoughtful, and gladden the wicked, do but quicken and confirm the genuine, determined Christian. They send him to his own heart, to his Bible, to his closet, to his Saviour. Self-suspicious, watchful and prayerful, he holds on his way. He even gathers courage and strength from every casual defeat. He feels it better to die than to yield. He perseveres to the end; and obtains final victory and triumph over every foe.

You perceive, then, beloved hearers, what it is to *stand fast in the Lord*. This lovely character belongs to those who, from conviction of gospel truth, and vivid experience of its purifying power, are inspired with an unwavering decision in the cause of God and holiness; a decision, which, pervading their whole system of views, and feelings, and conduct, summons all their faculties to the defence of this sacred cause, and will not suffer them to abandon the conflict to their latest hour.

I have intimated that to see Christians thus *standing fast in the Lord*, is the cherished wish, and the crowning felicity of ministers. The reasons of this you will naturally anticipate.

You cannot but see that Christians of this character are *a precious recompense of a minister's cares and toils*. To labor in a glorious cause; to serve the best of Masters, is indeed a sublime privilege. But to *labor in vain, to spend our strength for naught*, is often sickening to the heart. In proportion to our love to our Master, and to the souls committed to our care, we shall be pained and grieved to see

spiritual langor and death prevailing around us. And when the scene is changed ; when *life* invades the regions of *death* ; when the gospel standard gathers around it throngs of immortal beings ; how delightful to the faithful minister is the spectacle. Yet even here, trembling is mingled with his joy. He knows how little proportioned, often, is the fruit to the blossoms. Perhaps he soon witnesses numbers who apparently commenced the Christian course with ardor, falling back into the ranks of sin. Others, without so plain an abandonment, are yet but too equivocal in their course, and give him alternate grounds of hope and fear. A third class evidently *stand fast in the Lord*. They are rooted in the faith, and hope, and love of the gospel. They grow in grace. They bear much precious fruit. These, these are eminently the minister's joy and crown ; the rich reward of his solitudes, his prayers and exertions. They comfort his heart ; they strengthen his hands ; they lighten his labors ; they soothe his sorrows. He proceeds with new alacrity and vigor amid the toils and discouragements of his office.

Let it not be thought strange, if I remark, that Christians of this stamp contribute much to *increase a minister's piety*. To some it may appear that animated and vigorous piety is almost a necessary incident of the ministerial office. It is a sad mistake. Alas ! our own experience often attests the reverse. We often feel most imperfectly the force of those truths, counsels, warnings and consolations which it is our duty to address to others. Our very preaching and prayers and exhortations, unless they go from warm hearts (and whose heart is always warm ?) are but too likely to generate in ourselves a spiritual insensibility. The solemnity and tenderness we often feel in the pulpit, and in the chambers of the sick and dying, may prove instruments of self-deception. The good opinion of our fellow-Christians, their well-meant commendations of our services, their sympathy in our trials,

and ours in theirs, may often tend to the same dangerous point. Few, few indeed, more imperiously need aids to their piety, and helps against spiritual decline, and the religion of mere form, than ministers. This assistance they must seek mainly from God, and his blessed Word. Among human instrumentalities, none are more efficient than solid, established, advanced Christians. If it is a minister's duty to *teach* his people, it is both his duty and privilege to *learn* of the best part of them. Our cold hearts often need to be warmed by the fire which Heaven has enkindled in some of the obscurest of our charge. Their humility puts our pride to the blush. Their spiritual attainments, their faith, their love, their self-denial, their zeal, summon us to imitation. Their consolations amid poverty, neglect, pain, sickness, death, make us feel more deeply the worth of that gospel we preach, and engage us to preach it with more feeling, simplicity and energy.

And whither shall a minister look for the most active and energetic *auxiliaries* in carrying out the great designs of his work? Who will faithfully co-operate with him in advancing the Saviour's cause, in opposing the progress of error and ungodliness, in reclaiming sinners from ruin, and elevating the piety of the church? Should he seek such aid of the superficial, unstable class of professors, he will go in quest of disappointment. But to Christians of deep, decided and eminent piety, he will not look in vain. Their example will add force to all his pious efforts. The sermons he delivers on the Sabbath, they will preach over anew, each day of the week, with the attractive and commanding eloquence of a holy life. In their pious deportment, in their heavenly spirit, the world will see what religion is; how real, how lovely, how divine. With what advantage does that minister declare the everlasting truths of the gospel, who can point to numbers around him as proofs that they are not mere speculations, but of

mighty efficacy to subdue the corruptions of the heart, and inspire the noblest virtues. Who can doubt that, were these instances greatly multiplied, the effect would be most salutary? Skepticism would retire abashed; the tongue of infidelity would be silenced; the religion of Christ would rise from its depressions, would reach an elevation hitherto unknown, and receive homage from all but the most perverse and abandoned.

There is another view in which eminent and exemplary Christians give comfort to a minister's heart. He perceives in them an assurance that the Spirit of God has not withdrawn. Surely this gracious Spirit is "the Giver of every good gift;" the Author and Bestower of all that is spiritually excellent in man. When, therefore, Christians, however small their number, shine in the beauty of holiness, and stand fast in the doctrines and precepts of their Saviour, **THE SPIRIT OF GOD** is among them. And although his influence may be sadly suspended, as it regards the many, it is powerfully and richly bestowed on the favored few. Here is consolation for the almost discouraged minister. He looks around him, and beholds *iniquity abounding*, and *the love of many waxing cold*; Zion in tears, and her enemies in triumph; and his heart is ready to sink within him. But let him not despond. The Heavenly Dove still hovers over the scene. The Holy Spirit still lingers with a favored, precious remnant. He will not, he cannot forsake them. Their prayers detain him. And who can tell but through the efficacy of these prayers, the windows of heaven may be opened, and an abundant, overwhelming blessing be poured down?

But the faithful minister's cares are not confined to the present age. He looks forward with deep solicitude to ages to come. Soon he will sleep in dust. Soon all around him will sleep in dust. And when the present generation of

Christians shall have retired from the stage, who shall come forward to occupy their place? Shall religion still survive? Shall the cause of God be vigorously supported? Shall his truths and ordinances be maintained in unimpaired purity and power? Or shall religion lie down in the graves of those who now occupy the stage? Shall Christian worship, and Christian ordinances, and Christian piety take their flight? Or, the living reality being gone, shall nothing remain, but empty forms, and lifeless observances? Shall error, and delusion, and fanaticism, and infidelity, and vice, and crime overspread the region where the Spirit of God once dwelt, and the religion of his gospel diffused its heavenly influence? — The answer to these thrilling questions must be found in the character of professing Christians of the present day. If they retain but a slender hold of the vital truths of the gospel; if they feel little, perhaps almost nothing, of their sanctifying power; if indecision, and vacillation, and heartlessness mark their character; if, instead of opposing a dignified resistance to the spirit and manners of the world, they suffer themselves to be swept away by its fashions, its practices, its follies, its vices — what a legacy do they leave to posterity. How surely, as night follows day, will the coming generations reap the sad and fatal harvest of their delinquency. But if living Christians are faithful; if they *stand fast in the Lord*; if they hold dearer than life the doctrines of his Word; if their tempers and their lives exhibit the sanctifying power of truth; if their heavenly example is a constant rebuke to the heartless morality, or the avowed impiety of an evil world — they will prove lights and blessings, not only to the present age, but to future ages. They will transmit to their children, and to their children's children, the fair, the invaluable inheritance of piety. And this beautiful land, in which our Pilgrim Fathers sought the pure and free worship of their God and Saviour, shall, to the latest period, be bright with heavenly light, and rich in all that adorns and blesses a people.



And where is the minister's hope for the conversion and salvation of the world? Surely, if he is a minister indeed; if his office and his heart are not at variance; this is the object of his dearest desires, of his daily exertions, and nightly prayers. And the world *will* be converted. Eternal truth has declared it. Almighty power will accomplish it. The reign of idolatry and sin, of superstition and blood, in our wretched globe, shall cease; and earth shall join with heaven in the pure worship of God and the Lamb. But by whose instrumentality shall this mighty revolution be effected? Who are the chosen, the honored delegates of Heaven, who shall be thus the blessings of earth, and benefactors of their species? They are Christians; Christians not in mere name, but reality; truth-loving, whole-souled, energetic Christians. Professors who have lost their first love, and perhaps their first faith, will have no heart for it. Professors who are immersed in the world, will have no time for it. Professors who feel little of the gospel's power and preciousness, will scarcely be at the trouble of sending that gospel abroad. Professors who have turned away from the truth, to a philosophical or fashionable religion, will not, probably, send to the heathen a better religion than their own. Even the missionaries who go from a community overspread with error, and with worldliness, will probably convey spiritual *death*, rather than life, to the unevangelized nations which they visit.

The minister, then, who wishes well to the heathen world, must wish to see the *Christian* world *more* Christian than it ever yet has been. He must wish to see the whole church receiving, as it were, a new baptism. He must wish to see all Christian professors clinging to their Saviour's cross; holding his heavenly doctrines dearer than their heart's blood, and *counting all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ*. They will then want no persuasions to feel, and pray, and act, and contribute for a dying world.

They will pour out their treasures like water, for its salvation. Gold, in their view, will be dross, compared with the pleasure of spreading the triumphs of their Saviour's love through a dying world. And they will send out a *pure* gospel. They will not mock the hunger of the perishing heathen with husks. They will send them bread; the bread of heaven; bread which has sustained their own spiritual life; bread which whosoever eats, shall live for ever.

Suffer me to add one reason more, why the faithful minister delights in the pious steadfastness of his hearers. It inspires the soul-thrilling hope of *meeting them in heaven*. But on this subject, I feel myself almost as unable, as I am unworthy, to speak. Listen, then, to one who could say with a grace, to his beloved converts: "What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye, in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy." — When ministers reflect on the dignity, importance and responsibilities of their office, on the one hand, and on their own unworthiness and numberless defects on the other, they often find it hard to believe that they can be accepted at last. To be welcomed to the Saviour with smiles; to hear his voice of condescending love and approbation, appears a blessedness quite overwhelming. Yet in those moments when to this blessedness they raise an eye of trembling hope, their joy would be incomplete, might they not expect to share it with their beloved hearers. Adored be the grace of Heaven, this joy *may* be anticipated; and *will*, by every pious minister, and every pious hearer, be realized. And if such delights attend their communion below; if, in mingling hearts amid the prayers, and praises, and instructions of the earthly sanctuary, there is such pure and sublime enjoyment, what will be the unknown bliss of the heavenly temple? There, no sin will mar, no anxious fear intrude, no sorrow vex the spirit. There, no heart will be cold, no tongue be silent, no

discordant note be heard, amid myriads and millions of happy worshippers. — But here, language fails, and even imagination is baffled. Beloved friends; let us believe that these visions of bliss are not splendid fictions, but solid realities. And believing this, let us pray, O let us pray, that none of us all, ministers or hearers, may be found at last debarred, and self-debarred, from that holy and blest assembly.

In the selection of my theme, and in its discussion, it has been my great object to inculcate on Christian professors, a decided, ardent and vigorous piety; a piety which, built on gospel principles, shall, like the gospel itself, resist every assault, and inflexibly preserve its own heavenly character, amid all the mutations of time and fashion, of error and of sin. To the other imperious and affecting considerations which recommend a piety of this stamp, permit me to add a few thoughts derived from the aspects of the present time.

It would be absurd to deny that this is an age of great and invaluable improvements. The human mind, having received apparently a new impulse, has plunged deep in the profundities of science; has even explored new territories; and has levied on science the most wonderful contributions to the progress of art. Theories unquestioned in former ages, have been examined and exploded, and new and improved theories built on their ruins. Thousands contend for a similar process in religion. But this is a superficial thought. Religion is not the offspring of human invention, nor the subject of human improvement. She is the daughter of the skies; and her heavenly beauties are only darkened and disfigured, when an arrogant philosophy assumes to mend them. Like her divine Author, she is *the same, yesterday, to-day, and for ever*. Beware, Christians, lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.

We are annoyed with a system of self-styled *rationalism*, which is in fact a compound of gross and palpable *irrationalities*. Its authors, by the very force of their talents and learning, have reached a degree of absurdity which puts common ignorance and error to the blush. Denying the Inspiration of Scripture, they blot out all its essential and distinguishing doctrines, substituting in their place their own dreams and delusions. The effects of the system, wherever it has obtained predominance in Europe, are precisely such as might have been anticipated. It has nearly obliterated the Sabbath; it has emptied the Christian temple, and spread impiety, licentiousness and vice among all ranks. Ages, centuries to come will scarcely suffice to counteract the poison it has diffused, and repair the ruin it has accomplished.

And yet thousands, in this land of the pious pilgrims, are yielding themselves to the same fatal delusions. Nor can it be sufficiently regretted that thousands of our well-informed and respectable citizens, while they shudder at these extravagancies of error and impiety, stand fearfully exposed to similar aberrations. Wherever the proper and plenary inspiration of the Bible is denied, or doubted, there an avenue is opened for the admission of every species of religious delusion. The mistake is in itself simple, and often unalarming. But the consequences following on it are disastrous and endless. Even among those who admit the inspiration of Scripture, discrepancies in religious views are sadly multiplied. But how vastly must the evil be increased, where the Heavenly Oracle is distrusted, and its responses command no implicit assent. Are not men, in such circumstances, thrown back on the mere light of nature; or more properly, on the darkness, the endless wanderings, and destructive delusions of heathenism itself?

Still other dangers, dangers in some respects more threatening, beset the American churches at the present day. A

style of preaching has obtained, which openly opposes almost none of the great doctrines of the gospel; which indeed seems to pay homage to them, by adopting much the same terms in which these doctrines have formerly been delivered; and yet, by a kind of under-current, the proper force and meaning of these terms are swept entirely away. It would be deplorable indeed, if in this way, a revolution should be insensibly introduced into our theology, and our churches should be led to adopt a new kind of religion, without even suspecting it. The *design* may be to improve religion, to strip it of its old-fashioned garb, to adorn it with some new accomplishments which shall commend it to the philosophic and the fashionable. The *effect* must be to emasculate its vigor; to deprive it of its power to nourish and console the hearts of Christians, and to awaken the consciences of the unconverted.

Never, surely, was there a period when the friends of truth were more imperiously summoned to its defence. Nor was there ever a period in which unestablished minds had more powerful reasons to bring themselves with deep solicitude to the inquiry: *What is truth?*

As there may probably be some of this last description in the present assembly, I would affectionately present to their consideration a single thought.

Ascertain, my friends, if you can (and the thing is not difficult) what are the doctrines which, in every age, both the friends and the enemies of the Bible have united to find on its pages: the one class viewing them with intense delight; and the other, with a disgust which has repelled them from the Bible itself. Ascertain, too, what are the doctrines which, while they have nourished the piety and soothed the sorrows of the good man, have filled the wicked with terror, and, at the same time, guided the awakened conscience, the disquieted soul, to peace. Ascertain these points, and you have an answer to the question, *What is truth?*

If it can never be enough lamented, that the doctrines of God's word should be opposed, corrupted and trampled down, there is another fact in our religious community scarcely less lamentable, and but for its undeniable frequency, almost surpassing belief. I refer to the case of those numbers who regularly hear, and professedly believe the truth; yet with perfect apathy and unconcern. In thousands of congregations, those doctrines and warnings are uttered in the name of the eternal God, which should thrill every conscience, and overwhelm the unconverted mind with terror. And who is moved? Who puts the question, What are these things to me? What is the state of my undying soul? Where am I to spend my eternity?

If a careless world can slumber over these dread realities, can *Christians* slumber? Should they not rouse? Should not their heart and flesh tremble for the woes that await the wicked? Should they not entreat them in the bowels of Christian compassion, to escape while they may? Are not Christians in this place loudly called, at this period of awful slumber, to lift the warning voice — to try, if possible, some new and unusual efforts to save their dying fellow-creatures? If they feel, with agonizing conviction, that their best efforts are powerless, should they not send up united, soul-breathed supplications to heaven for the interposition of the Holy Spirit of God — that Spirit that can revolutionize our whole religious state — that Spirit that can breathe life into immortal, but perishing souls?

Indulged as I have been, beloved hearers, to accomplish half a century of ministerial service, chiefly in this place; and called, this day, to utter some of my last words, I may be expected, perhaps, to take, at least, a momentary review of the past.

I was first invited to officiate in this congregation in the

spring of 1794. Here I found a church which had been gathered about a half-century previous, and this, with a professed view to cultivate great purity in the truths and ordinances of God. Heaven had signally smiled on the design; and under the successive ministrations of two distinguished pastors, the church and congregation had attained an unusually flourishing state. Recently, indeed, their numbers had been somewhat diminished by a secession, which, being not small from the first, speedily increased to a large and respectable Society. My ordination proceeded with a degree of harmony, but not to universal satisfaction; and the worthy members who dissented, retired the following year, and formed the church and congregation to which I have had the honor to minister for the last eighteen years. My own flock, however, still remained large, and furnished ample employment for all my powers of body and mind. To me, my labors, though arduous, were delightful; and to the honor of my heavenly Master, I would acknowledge, that they were not wholly unblest. Without any signal revival of religion, the church received gradual, but not inconsiderable accessions; and these accessions were rather increased in the closing years of my connection. When invited to a new and distant scene of action,\* I felt it a duty to submit the question of compliance to the judgment and advice of others. When, in obedience to that judgment and advice, I forced myself away from a people most tenderly beloved, the scene was heart-rending. And such was my prostration of bodily, as well as mental power, that, for a time, the hope of future action and usefulness almost deserted me. That my *heart* was not separated, my friends are well aware; nor has it been a small delight, since my return to this place, occasionally to revisit their pulpit, and to mingle my sympathies in the scenes of

\* The presidency of Dartmouth College.

their sickness and sorrow. It has likewise been a source of heart-felt satisfaction, that, with each of the highly esteemed ministers who have succeeded me, I have maintained a sincere and unbroken friendship. I have rejoiced in their prosperity, and have been gratified in lending, as occasion has presented, my feeble aid in lightening some portion of their labors.

I am deeply sensible, too, to the privilege of ministering to the Christian society, now under my care. Their smaller numbers have seemed well to comport with my own increased years and infirmities. The minister who duly estimates the exigencies of his people, and the responsibilities of his office, can never want employment. In my last connection, I have found friends firm and faithful; friends who have aided me by their efforts, and prayed blessings down upon my feeble labors. And here, too, adored be the goodness and the grace of God, I can speak of the spiritual children he has given me. In the season of quickened attention with which this place was blest about thirteen years since, a number not small was gathered into my church. Nor before that favored period, nor since, have my efforts among my present charge seemed to be wholly unrewarded.

But the remembrance of these things is like "the memory of joys that are past." These seem too much like tales of other times. And I deeply sympathize with my beloved ministerial brethren in the thought, that we can scarcely glance at visitations of divine mercy in seasons past, and not be pained with a melancholy contrast in the dearth and dereliction of the present.

Among the privileges allotted me in this place, I ought to mention the solid friendship which I have enjoyed with some of its best inhabitants, without regard to Society limits. Their conversation has often been instructive to me, their kindness animating, their sympathy consoling. Indeed, from



every description of citizens, I have received all the attention and respect I could desire, and far more than I have deserved. So multiplied are the tokens of regard and affection which have thronged around me of late, that my heart must be composed of strange materials, if its liveliest sensibilities have not been awakened.

With the ministers of the place generally, I have lived in an interchange of kind offices which has been rarely interrupted; while from those with whom circumstances have particularly connected me, I have derived much aid and support in the discharge of my ministerial functions.

I feel myself impelled to offer a very few remarks on the religious and moral character, past and present, of our beloved town.

Newburyport, when my acquaintance with it commenced, occupied a commanding position among its sister towns of New England. For its piety, its orthodoxy, its regard to the Sabbath and religious institutions, and, I may add, for the general purity and sobriety of its citizens, it was viewed by thousands, near and remote, as a model. It would be, I fear, but to echo the apprehensions of the best among us, to state, that from this lofty position, there has been, long since, an evident and sad descent. I know that through our country, degeneracy has been awfully extensive, and would gladly believe that our own degeneracy has but kept pace with the times. But what says the Sabbath? Where is the silence, the seriousness, the almost universal attendance on the house of God, and the marked devotion there, which once signaled this sacred day? And where the Sabbath is neglected and profaned, it follows of course, that family devotion and family government will decline; children will be ungoverned, and youth unrestrained; the fear of God will vanish, and eternity be forgotten; while vice and licentiousness, in their various and nameless forms, will walk abroad in the community, unabashed and

unchecked. I honestly fear, my beloved hearers, that these mournful symptoms are but too visible in our moral condition. Every attentive mind perceives them. Every pious heart bleeds over them.

And are there no symptoms of degeneracy in what may be termed the religious portion of our favored town? Have Christians at large those discriminating views of gospel truth; have they that vivid experience of its power, that stability in its maintenance, and zeal in its defence, which usually accompany a healthful and flourishing state of religion? Is the line of demarcation between the religious and the irreligious, clear and broad; or is it so indistinct as, in many cases, to be scarcely discernible? Are professors conscientiously and courageously opposing the tide of fashion and worldliness, of error and of sin; or do they too often consent to be borne away by the overwhelming current?

Yet as I would not wish to darken the picture by gloomy exaggeration, so neither would I detain you on a single side of it. And blessed be God! there is a more favorable side. There are numbers, among us, even yet, and those numbers are not small, who fear God, and keep his commandments; who hallow his Sabbaths, and reverence his sanctuary; who govern their houses, and govern their hearts; who oppose to the aboundings of sin, a dignified and consistent Christian example; who habitually consecrate time, talents, influence, substance, prayers, to the cause of reformation, to the salvation of their country, and the salvation of the world. I will confess that amid all the discouragements which have attended my ministry of late years, one thought has preserved me from absolute despondency. I assuredly know that there are scattered throughout our town, a goodly number, habitually awake to the interests of Zion, and unweariedly pleading that cause at the throne of heaven. I believe that their prayers enter the ear of the Almighty, and will return, soon or

late, in blessings on themselves, in blessings on the town, in blessings on the church and world.

Standing in this place to-day, I am forcibly reminded of the rapid flight of time, and the ravages of death. Of the large society to which, as a minister, I was first united, and which then occupied this house, not more than nine or ten males, then in adult years, survive to the present time. I find myself therefore addressing, not my original friends and parishioners, but their children, their grand-children, and others who have come into their places. Of the members who were active in organizing the church and congregation with which I am now connected, not an individual survives. Thousands, then, lately composing these two societies (for thousands they literally were) have been summoned to their final Judge, and to the retributions of eternity. And long before a similar period shall have passed away, where will be a vast majority of this numerous assembly? They will be summoned to the same glorious Judge, and the same eternal retributions.

But I am unwilling to trespass farther on the patience of my respected audience. Let me only add a few closing words to the members of those two beloved societies to which so great a portion of my ministerial life and labors has been devoted.

And let me call you, my dear friends, to unite with me in gratefully adoring the mercy of God, that he should be pleased to intrust me with the ministry of the gospel, and permit me to execute it during the unusual period of fifty years. To preach the unsearchable riches of my Saviour, I have truly preferred to the very highest of earthly honors. To be continued in the Gospel vineyard, when most of my fellow laborers, and nearly all my contemporaries are gone, is a great and distinguishing mercy.

If any good has resulted from my ministry ; if the cause of Christ and his truth has, in any degree, been served ; if, in my unworthy hands, the gospel has instrumentally saved immortal souls from ruin, or quickened and comforted the children of God ; ascribe, I entreat you, all the glory, now and for ever, to the riches of sovereign and almighty grace.

Let me entreat you, likewise, to join your prayers with mine, that the defects and sins of my life and ministry (ah, they are great and numberless) may be graciously pardoned ; and that through the precious blood shed for the *priesthood*, as well as for the congregation, my very imperfect and stained services may find acceptance, and myself be permitted to appear with comfort before my final Judge. *The Lord grant that we all may find mercy of the Lord in that day !*

My remaining counsel, and my parting benediction, you will receive as breathed from Apostolic lips ; nor will you doubt that my inmost heart accords.

“ My brethren, dearly beloved and longed-for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved.” — “ Ye, therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away by the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.” — “ Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace ; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.”

“ Now unto Him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy ; to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever.

AMEN.

*The following Hymns were sung at the delivery of the Sermon. By the request of the Committee, at whose invitation it is published, they are inserted here.*

H Y M N.

BY HON. GEORGE LUNT.

OUR fathers' God! we bless thy name,  
Whose promise stands in words of light,  
That still, from age to age the same,  
Thine own are precious in thy sight.

Our days, like bubbles down the stream,  
Dissolving float and melt away,  
And life we call a fleeting dream,  
As worldly hopes and thoughts decay.

But when a servant of thy house  
The nobler work of life has done,  
And round his venerated brows  
The crown appears already won;

'Tis then our souls adore the Lord  
For every bright example given,  
To bind us closer to his word,  
And fix our wandering hearts on heaven.

And thus, to-day, within thy courts,  
 Thy people's grateful songs ascend,  
 That Israel's mighty God supports,  
 Nor leaves his chosen to the end.

And spared, through long descending days,  
 Be this, thine ancient servant blest,  
 To guide our souls to seek thy grace  
 And find with him the promised rest.

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H Y M N .

BY MISS H. F. GOULD.

LoRD, thy countless gifts possessing,  
 While for them we render praise,  
 For a great, a signal blessing,  
 New, peculiar notes we raise.  
 Unto Thee, with spirits fervent,  
 Would we lift, in grateful song,  
 Him, our friend, thy faithful servant;  
 Thine so early! ours so long!

Since his life's warm morning glory  
 Lit the dewy flower of youth,  
 Till his locks are thin and hoary,  
 He hath taught thine holy truth.  
 To our fathers he was given  
 Fifty years ago to-day;  
 Still he labors here for heaven;  
 But our fathers — where are they?

He hath seen our loved ones languish,  
 By their dying pillows kneeled,  
 Cheered their souls, and soothed our anguish  
 When their lips in death were sealed.  
 When the spirit passed its portal,  
 Where the clay is left behind,  
 For its night, the sleeping mortal  
 He in hope to earth consigned.

He hath, from the world's broad highways,  
 Soldiers for the cross enrolled —  
 From its pois'nous dells and byways,  
 Gathered lambs for Jesus' fold.  
 He hath guarded, called, and fed them;  
 Faithful Pastor of thy flock!  
 He hath kept the path, and led them  
 In thy shadow, Living Rock!

Babes, that of the sprinkled waters,  
 Took from Him the sacred sign,  
 Trained to Zion, sons and daughters,  
 In his crown as stars will shine.  
 Drawn by him to life's pure fountain,  
 Where the deathless lily grows,  
 They have trod the spicy mountain  
 Bright with Sharon's thornless rose.

As to grass the dews of Hermon,  
 Like the shower on Syria's palm,  
 Oft from him hath come the sermon,  
 Precept clear, and counsel calm —  
 Till the soul, revived and nourished,  
 Reared its head, and looked above;  
 And to bless the lab'rer, flourished,  
 Spreading wide its arms of love.

Yet, O Lord, he doth not falter,  
In thy service, or thy ways!  
Grant him still, to light thine altar,  
Strength refreshed, and lengthened days.  
Still thy jewels may he gather;  
And be glory all divine,  
Honor, praise, Eternal Father,  
Son and Holy Spirit, thine!

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