

MINISTERIAL FIRMNESS.

A

SERMON

PREACHED AT THE INSTALLATION

OF THE

REV. JOHN M. C. BARTLEY,

As Pastor of the Congregational Church and Society, in Hampstead, N. H.

OCTOBER 12, 1836.

BY DANIEL DANA, D. D.

Pastor of a Church in Newburyport, Mass.

NEWBURYPORT:

PRESS OF HIRAM TOZER.

1836.

HAMPSTEAD, Oct. 20, 1836.

DEAR SIR,—Having heard, with great satisfaction, and we hope, with profit, the sermon delivered by you, at the Installation of Rev. Mr. Bartley, and knowing, that it would be highly gratifying to the members of this society generally, and others, to have the privilege of perusing it, we would most respectfully request a copy of it for the press.

With great respect, we are your obedient servants,

H. C. COGSWELL, }
ISAAC SMITH, } COMMITTEE
JAMES DURGIN, } OF THE
JONATHAN KENT, } CONG'L. SOCIETY.
RALF BRICKETT, }

REV. DANIEL DANA, D. D.

GENTLEMEN,

Your candid reception of the discourse claims and receives my grateful acknowledgments. As your request for its publication has the concurrence of my ministerial brethren, I readily yield it for that purpose.

With great regard, and with ardent wishes for your spiritual prosperity,
I am, Gentlemen,

Sincerely yours,

DANIEL DANA.

The Committee of the Congregational Society, Hampstead.

SERMON.

ACTS 20 : 24.

BUT NONE OF THESE THINGS MOVE ME ; NEITHER COUNT I MY LIFE DEAR TO MYSELF, SO THAT I MIGHT FINISH MY COURSE WITH JOY, AND THE MINISTRY WHICH I HAVE RECEIVED OF THE LORD JESUS, TO TESTIFY THE GOSPEL OF THE GRACE OF GOD.

Thus spoke the great Apostle of the gentiles ; that bright and eminent model of every thing which constitutes a good minister of the gospel. Nor would it be easy to find, in the sacred volume itself, a finer specimen of genuine eloquence—eloquence at once simple, pathetic, and sublime—the eloquence of the *heart*.

Addressing himself, for the last time, to the elders of the church at Ephesus, and having adverted to the unwearied and faithful labors of his three years' ministry among them, he glances, for a moment, at his future destination. "And now, behold, I go, bound in the Spirit, unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there ; save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. "But"—adds this Christian Hero—"none of these things move me ; neither count I my life dear to myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God."

If the passage is rich in eloquence, it is rich in *instruction* too ; instruction precisely and perfectly adapted to the great occasion on which we are assembled this day.

It lets us know, in the *first* place, that the *gospel* is a system of *heavenly grace*. It is *the gospel of the grace of God*. It exhibits, indeed, the *whole* character of Jehovah to the highest advantage. It displays all his attributes in their brightest lustre, and their most consummate harmony. But amidst all, *grace* is transcendently conspicuous ; grace pure, rich, free, sovereign, eternal. Yes ; ages before man sinned, or even

existed, the plan of his salvation occupied the counsels of heaven. Mercy self-moved, self-originated, foresaw his ruin, and devised the means of his recovery. It had been much, if, in answer to the cries of a rebel race, prostrate in dust, divine favor had been shown. But no such cries ascended to heaven. And when the scheme of human salvation was formed, it was well known in heaven, that no such cries would ever be heard. The grace that saves a lost world, is grace unsought, un supplicated, undesired, not less than undeserved. The case is substantially the same, in the salvation of individuals. God *seeks* men by the dispensations of his providence, by the instructions of his word, and by the kindly monitions of his Spirit; or never would one of our sinful, self-degraded race think of seeking his Maker. And how astonishing is that mercy which rouses the slumbering conscience, and melts the hard heart; which brings the thoughtless to think, and the prayerless to pray; which reclaims the long lost wanderer into the path of holiness and peace; which bestows pardon, life, immortal glory, endless felicity, on such as deserve eternal perdition and woe. Still more astonishing is the *channel* through which all these blessings come—the mediation, the sufferings, the blood, of God's eternal, incarnate Son. In every view, then, the gospel of our salvation is a system of heavenly grace. The passage instructs us,

SECONDLY, that this gospel is to be delivered in the form of a *testimony*. To *testify* the gospel of the grace of God, as it was the object of the great Apostle, is likewise the first and principal duty of every minister. It is the business of a witness, not to utter the suggestions of his own reason, or fancy; but to state facts; to declare what he has seen and known. So it is the duty of the gospel minister to declare, not what human philosophy has discovered; not what his own genius, or learning, or imagination has furnished; but what he finds in the Bible; what the Holy Ghost has dictated; what the God of truth has uttered. Speaking thus, he may speak with decision and authority. Speaking thus, he may claim attention and belief. The faith which is yielded to preaching of this stamp, is at once *safe*, and *saving*; for it is faith, not in man, but in God. And farther; it belongs to a witness to declare,

not only *the truth, but the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.* Let the minister see that he *shun not to declare all the counsel of God.* Gospel truths may be mysterious, or humbling, or alarming; but they must not be suppressed. They may involve demands which to the ambition, or the pride, or the worldliness, or the self indulgence of hearers, may seem intolerable. Still they must be declared in all their length and breadth. Let the preacher beware, too, how he mingles with the holy and heaven-descended doctrines of the gospel, the subtilities of human reasoning, or the boasted discoveries of philosophy. What is complete admits no addition. What is perfect, no improvement. Whatever of *human* arrogates a place among the truths of God, must of course be false and delusive. "Every word of God," says the wise man, "is pure. Add thou not to his words, lest He reprove thee, and thou be found a liar."

A THIRD instruction furnished by our text, is, that *ministers of the gospel receive their office from the Lord Jesus.* This the Apostle asserts with reference to himself. And doubtless with reference to himself, the assertion is emphatically true. But it is not exclusively so. The true ministers of every age may without arrogance appropriate, in a qualified sense, the same assertion. They receive their holy office from the Lord Jesus. By him the order itself was instituted. And it is one of the most affecting instances of his love and pity for our degenerate world. Knowing the deplorable insensibility of men to their own eternal concerns; their awful forgetfulness of God, of death, of judgment, he has furnished them with monitors on these great and neglected themes—monitors once, like themselves, far from God; but now reconciled to God, and anxious to persuade their fellow sinners to be reconciled to him too. They are to be received, then, as Ambassadors of Christ. Nor may they themselves forget that he has invested them with this sacred office. The thought should inspire them, not with pride and self-exaltation, surely, but with the deepest humility, and the tenderest solicitude. How unworthy, are they of such an honor. How insufficient, in themselves, to meet the solemn duties and responsibilities connected with it. How indescribable must be their guilt and shame,

if, through any neglect or unfaithfulness of theirs, their Master's cause should sustain injury, or the souls he has committed to their care, be lost.

Still, the thought that they are ministers of Christ; called, commissioned, qualified, sent, by the divine Savior, is a thought full of animation and delight. What an honor, to serve such a Master. What a luxury, to labor, and even to suffer, in his cause. What an inspiration in the thought of his promised, unfailing presence; his observing and approving eye. What a relief, to lean upon his arm, to rely upon his strength, and to cast every burden at his feet. What a source of hope, to reflect that all human hearts are in his hand, and that his almighty blessing can succeed the feeblest efforts of his ministers. What a rich recompense, what an overwhelming delight, in the anticipation of a final approval from his lips, and a crown of glory from his beloved hand. We learn, then,

In the fourth place, what is the grand, all-absorbing *object* and *aim* of every true minister of the gospel. It is, *that he may close his life and his ministry with joy*. Such was the Apostle's exalted aspiration. "I count not my life dear to myself," says he, "so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus." How this favorite wish was accomplished, he himself informs us, when, standing on the verge of eternity, and anticipating a martyr's death, he exclaims, with holy rapture; "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day." Favored, happy man! Where is the brightest throne to which human ambition ever aspired, worthy of a momentary comparison with such glory and felicity as this? Still, let it never be forgotten, mere *personal* honor and happiness are not the chief and ultimate end of the true-hearted minister. No. All his interest is absorbed and lost in the interest of his divine Master. All his honor is merged in the glory of his God. To such a cause, he is willing to devote life. In such a cause, he is willing to meet death. In such a

cause, he esteems both life and death a *cheap* sacrifice. Where the true minister places his happiness, his heaven, David Brainerd has emphatically told us. "I do not go to heaven," says he, "to be advanced, but to give honor to God.—My heaven is to please God, to glorify him, and give all to him."

"That is the heaven I long for. That is my religion, and that is my happiness."

"If God may be glorified, I am made for eternity."

Such, I repeat it, is the aim of every true minister. His joy, in life, is to be devoted to his divine Master. And he desires to have no other joy in death, than the humble consciousness of such devotion, and the humble anticipation of his Master's approving smile.

The instructions which I have hitherto drawn from the text, might easily have been expanded into a sermon. Indeed, a volume would be scarcely sufficient to do them justice. There is, however, presented in the passage, one additional suggestion, upon which I propose to expatiate somewhat more at large. I refer to that *firmness and inflexibility of mind and purpose*, which should mark the character of the gospel minister. "None of these things move me," says the holy Apostle—that is to say, no bonds, no afflictions, no perils, not death itself. This was noble; for it was said in the prospect, not only of unparalleled labors and sufferings for the gospel's sake, but of a violent and ignominious death.

But nearly eighteen hundred years have rolled away; and the infant church, which cruelty and persecution would gladly have suffocated in its cradle, has attained the vigor and maturity of manhood. The rights of conscience are generally understood and acknowledged. In our own country, at least, both christians and ministers enjoy the protection of free constitutions of government, and equitable laws. Persecution for conscience' sake—*literal* persecution—is rarely known. Let us be thankful for the inestimable blessing. But let us not be too confident that it will always be ours. In the spirit of modern infidelity, there is a recklessness, and a rancor, which, without a miracle, might convert to violence and blood. Christianity may yet have a struggle to maintain with the powers of the world, as well as with the powers of darkness. And in

this case, its ministers may expect to occupy the forefront of the battle.

But apart from dangers of this kind (which may heaven avert from our country) is there nothing in the *existing* state of things, which demands of the ministers of the gospel, an unusual degree of firmness? Nothing calculated to put all their fortitude, and all their independence to the trial? Are there not, at this moment, bearing upon them, influences plainly hostile to the faithful and efficient discharge of their duties, and requiring little less than a martyr's spirit, to resist? That the age in which we live, is marked with very peculiar characteristics, none will deny. The human mind itself seems to exhibit new phases, and new attitudes. The ardor and energy which were, perhaps, first awakened by the advance of liberty, and by revolutions in government, have communicated themselves to every subject of human thought, and human interest. Discoveries and improvements in almost every branch of science, have multiplied beyond parallel. Correspondent improvements have taken place in the various arts. Every advancing year has brought with it a new contribution, not only to the comforts and conveniences of life, but to its embellishments and luxuries. In these improvements, our countrymen have taken their full share. Our recent origin as a nation, our boundless resources, our rapid advancement, our civil freedom, our facilities of education, have all favored the energy and the development of the general mind—and I may add, its restlessness, and desire of change. For it cannot be denied, that the spirit of revolution, the ambition of improvement, has at length fastened on religion itself. The doctrines of the Reformation; doctrines dear to our pious fathers, and to the pious of every age; the doctrines which unsophisticated minds have generally found on the very surface of the Bible, have been subjected to a modifying, reforming process. This has resulted in a religious system claiming to be more philosophical and scholar-like, than that which has been generally received; more congenial to reflecting minds; and more accommodated to the spirit and improvements of an enlightened age.

We would not deny to the advocates of this system, the

praise of sincerity. Probably it is their real aim to divest Christianity of what is repulsive, and to furnish a religion unobjectionable to philosophic, and even to common minds. But we contend that it is due to the Bible, to receive all its declarations in their natural, unforced sense; and that the philosophy which quarrels with such a simple construction of inspired truth, must of course be delusive and false. We anticipate no good, but much evil, from waving, or even modifying those gospel truths which offend the pride, or the boasted reason of man. Every concession of this kind is but a precursor to new and endless demands. We instinctively shrink from a system which denies, omits, or softens down those doctrines which distinguish the gospel from every other system of religion; and which, in every age, have been the grand instruments of Heaven, in humbling, purifying, comforting and saving the souls of men. We are not willing that our religion, by a labored attempt to improve its countenance and aspect, should be deprived of its heart and soul. In fine, we dissent entirely from the *great principle* which these fancied improvements assume. We deny that Christianity, like sciences of human origin, makes a gradual advance to perfection. Christian truth, like its Author, is *the same, yesterday, to-day, and forever*. It came perfect from the lips of its divine Teacher, and from the pens of its heaven-inspired apostles: Its earliest students understood it best. The moment of its corruption was the precise moment when philosophy interposed its gratuitous and officious aid, to improve its doctrines, and soften down its imagined asperities. Still, pretensions of this kind are imposing and popular. In every age of the church, they have found their multitudes of votaries, and of victims. And they are peculiarly calculated to captivate and delude, in an age like the present, when every thing that comes in the guise of novelty, of improvement, of philosophy, has a kind of irresistible charm; when, too, the form and drapery of Christianity command general respect; and nothing, even to the fashionable world, is disgusting, but its real spirit, its unadorned simplicity, its holy, humbling, unaccommodating principles and doctrines.

Here, then, is one great test of a minister's firmness and

independence. Can he seize with a strong grasp, can he hold with a persevering tenacity, can he preach with invincible courage, the simple doctrines of the gospel? Can he, amidst the conflicting opinions of men, adhere to the pure, unerring word of God? Can he, turning his back upon a thousand glittering novelties, walk in the plain, good old path in which patriarchs, prophets, and apostles have gone before him? Can he, under the simple banner of the cross, courageously resist, not only the open assaults of infidelity, but the secret, undermining influence of a specious, misguided philosophy? While stigmatized as falling below the spirit of the time, and behind the improvements of the age, can he still resolve to *know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified*, and to *contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints*? *

If the *matter* of preaching is transcendently important, there is no small importance attached to its *manner*. If, as ministers of Christ, we are indispensably bound to preach the truth, and the whole truth, we are not less bound to preach it in its native simplicity, its force, its dignity, its majesty. We should exhibit it, not only unpolluted by human mixtures, and undisguised by metaphysical subtilities, but unsullied by meretricious ornaments, and undepraved by degrading associations.

There is a *style*, which is level to every understanding; above no one, and below no one; lucid and transparent; and, like the crystal of a watch, attracting the attention, not to itself, but to what is underneath. This is the style which the preacher should seek and cultivate. A style which attracts attention to itself, and excites the admiration of a multitude of injudicious hearers, is almost certainly faulty; and the very style which a minister should avoid.

And there is a mode of composition which tells us that the preacher is filled with his subject; too much absorbed in great things, to have attention for little things; intent, not on the applause of his hearers, but their benefit; *serious in a serious cause*, and anxious to make others serious too. Such was the manner of Baxter, and Howe, and Flavel, and a host of other British preachers, whose memory ages have not effaced, but

* See Note A.

embalmed; whose writings are most prized by those who know them best; and when once perused, will be sure to be perused again and again. The same may be said of no small number of American ministers, who have long since departed from earth, but who still survive in their writings; writings full of gospel truth, and of plain, powerful appeals to the understanding, the conscience and the heart; writings which did such abundant execution in their day, and which ought never to be forgotten, or neglected.

But we have fallen on other times, and other modes of religious instruction. And it is worthy of a serious inquiry, whether what we fondly think we have gained in accuracy and refinement, we have not lost in solid power and usefulness; whether many of our modern sermons are not fitted rather for show than use; rather for display than execution; rather to amuse a mind at ease, than to answer the inquiries of the anxious, or to harrow up the feelings of the insensible.

Who that reflects seriously, can but be startled at the fact, that a great portion of the reading of the present day, is confined to works of imagination. Fictitious writings, which once constituted the amusement of youth, now constitute the *business*, not only of the young, but of *children grown gray*. Thus it is easily seen, that if our community are far too much disposed to serious thought on the realities of eternity, the evil has found a sure and effectual antidote. One consequence of this state of things, a consequence perfectly natural, is an eager and extensive demand for *sermons* of the same imaginative character; sermons which please the fancy, which gratify the love of novelty, the love of amusement, the love of excitement, the love of every thing, in short, but of truth and piety. It is painful to think that this demand has been but too well met; and that we have too many sermons about as amusing as novels, and about as much calculated to pain the conscience with a sense of guilt, and warm the heart with the love of God.

Do not many sermons of the present day treat their hearers absolutely too much like children, by dealing almost continually in *illustration*? They contain a *few* truths, and those, often not of the most interesting kind; for great, fundamental, vital truths, like the rays of the sun, are sufficiently seen by their

own light. But what is wanting in solid, sober instruction, is amply supplied by labored illustrations. The consequence often is, and very naturally, that the illustrations are remembered, while the truths themselves, thus gilded, not to say, stifled and concealed, are overlooked, neglected, or forgotten.

There is a *cloudy, misty* way of preaching, borrowed from the German school, or from some of its humble pupils, which promises much, and performs but little. Words apparently select, and sufficiently elegant, are not wanting; but the thoughts are too feeble and ill defined to make their way through the darkness. What is unintelligible, appears to some, profound. The superficial admire, perhaps; while those who attend the sanctuary in search of gospel instruction, grieve while they stay, and retire bitterly disappointed.

There begins to prevail, in some parts of our country, a style of preaching—it is painful to call it vulgar; and yet it cannot be denied that it makes a near approach to vulgarity. It affects to treat the most sacred themes, and the most awful truths of religion with perfect familiarity. Those exhibitions of divine majesty and wrath which have appalled and shaken the souls of the holiest of men, it can approach with unhal- lowed boldness. That ETERNAL NAME which fills all heaven with reverence, and all hell with terror, it can pronounce with irreverent lightness. It can even expatiate on the torments of the world of despair, and on the danger of those who hang over it, without either awe or compassion. In the meantime, it speaks of religion itself in terms the most superficial and de- lusive. The great and pervading *change* which it involves, it fritters down to a simple *resolution*; while addressing itself to the mere selfishness of human nature, to its hopes and its fears, it builds this resolution on a foundation of sand.

I am compelled by a kind of necessity, to notice another abuse of the sacred desk. The time is remembered by most who hear me, when every thing which indicated or excited levity of mind; every thing in the shape of jest or merriment, was, by general consent, banished from the sanctuary. What was ludicrous, was deemed profane. But times have chang- ed; and sentiments and tastes have changed with them. In the opinion of many, our religious anniversaries have scarcely

received their proper seasoning, till some shrewd jest has relaxed the muscles of the audience. Not only so; the pulpit (will it be believed?) the pulpit is employed by some who bear the name of Christian preachers, as a place from which to retail merry stories, and favorite jokes. Thus immortal beings are led to trifle with their Maker, while in his immediate presence; to trifle with heaven, and with hell. Thus they lose, not to say, murder, the precious moments which will stamp their eternity. Thus numbers resort to the house of God, as they attend the ball-room, or the theatre, for *amusement*; and return disappointed, if the favorite gratification happens to be denied.*

I have thus glanced at some of the novelties in preaching, some of the strange perversions of the pulpit, to which our times have given birth. I have done it from an imperious sense of duty, and with undissembled, inexpressible pain—a pain, I frankly confess, not unmingled, in some instances, with indignation. I will not insult the understandings of my hearers by inquiring whether, by these changes in the style of preaching, the pulpit has gained any thing; whether religion has gained any thing; whether sabbaths have become more solemn, sermons more impressive, hearers more serious, and churches replenished with greater numbers of solid and devoted Christians? Nor may I pause to inquire whether, if the cause of religion is, at the present time, unusually depressed; if Christians are more languid, and the impenitent more bold, than ordinary; if, in short, error, infidelity, atheism itself, with the most appalling forms of licentiousness and vice and crime threaten to overwhelm the land, and to sweep away every thing precious and sacred from our country—the cause, the *cause* of these enormous evils is not to be traced, in part, to the sanctuary, and even to the pulpit? I am arrested, at present, by the fact, that the abuses mentioned exist, prevail, and too probably increase; and by another fact, more wonderful still, that some of the most prominent and alarming of these abuses have received, hitherto, but little rebuke.

Yes; it is evident and undeniable; a false, a perverted, and most pernicious taste respecting preaching, prevails, and is

apparently still extending, in our country. Hearers of the gospel, in multitudes, are, at length, absolutely disgusted with the solemn and dignified exhibition of its doctrines; with the simple, unadorned, faithful, serious, pungent declaration of its truths. It is, they think, a worn-out and hopeless experiment. "Give us," they loudly and imperiously demand, SOMETHING "NEW; something more attractive, more amusing, more exciting, more consonant to the improvements in science and "philosophy, and to the taste and spirit of an enlightened age." What is most of all astonishing and humbling is, that some real Christians, instead of breasting the torrent, seem to be absolutely carried away with it, and to give their influence to a cause which, in proportion to its prevalence, must banish real Christianity from our country, and the world.

And now, who does not see that the Christian minister who would be faithful, has a part to act, which demands all his fortitude, all his courage, all his immovability of resolution? He is bound to adhere, not only to the truths of the gospel, but to the gospel method of defending and inculcating those truths. He must come to the Scriptures to learn, not only *what* to preach, but *how* to preach. He will gladly accept, indeed, whatever aid in defending and elucidating the Scriptures, may be derived from ancient learning, and modern science; from history and philosophy and polite literature; from observation and experience. But he will beware of depraving the pure and sublime religion of Jesus by any human mixtures; by the subtilties of metaphysics, by sickly sentimentalities, or by affected refinements of style. Still less will he consent to degrade it by irreverent familiarities, or wretched attempts at wit and humor. And though in this resistance to the taste and the demands of a corrupt age, he may encounter a torrent of fashion, and of obloquy; though he may meet the opposition of some, the scorn of others, and the affected pity of a third class; though friends and enemies may unite their efforts to turn him from his path—*none of these things will move him.* Anxious only for the smile of his Savior, and fearing nothing but his frown, and leaning on his almighty arm, he will boldly stand his ground. Strong in conscious integrity, he will dare obey his conscience, and his God, and calmly leave it to time,

to truth, and to the judgment of the great day, to vindicate his course.

Ministers of the present day are frequently perplexed in regard to some of the *measures recently adopted for the promotion of religion*. I have now more immediate reference to those *protracted meetings* to which many have looked, as the principal, if not the only means of religious revivals. It needs not be doubted that the plan of these meetings originated in a sincere and ardent desire to promote the salvation of sinners, and the increase of the church. Nor does a partiality in their favor necessarily infer an idolatrous dependence on their efficacy, or a sinful neglect of the other means of grace appointed by Heaven. Nor can it, I think, be denied, that in a variety of instances, these meetings have been evidently crowned by the blessing of God, and the saving influences of his Spirit. As little can it be questioned that many, even of the pious, have placed an unwarrantable confidence in these measures, and have looked to them too exclusively, as instruments of conversion; while, in the mean time, the precious appointment and privileges of the Sabbath have been too much undervalued and neglected. It is equally evident that by many, the success of these measures has been greatly overrated; and that in various instances, they have brought numbers into the church, who have subsequently proved themselves to be either hypocrites or apostates. Who, indeed, can think it strange, that in those cases where a complicated and powerful machinery has been set to work on the passions of human beings, great numbers should be deceived, and mistake the excitements of natural feeling, for the operations of divine grace. We are called to notice with pain and grief, the remarkable languor and deadness in religion, by which these seasons have been frequently followed, and the awful withdraw of the divine Spirit from most of our churches, of which there is now such melancholy and conclusive evidence. Let the churches, then, humble themselves in dust before a justly offended God. Let them meekly accept his righteous rebukes. Let them search out, and mourn, and confess, and forsake their errors and their sins. *Corrected by their own wickedness, reproved by their own backsliding, let them know and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that they have forsaken the*

Lord their God. Let them remember, too, that while he may, in *sovereignty*, bless *human means and efforts* sincerely directed to the promotion of his cause, he has pledged his *truth and faithfulness* to prosper *his own appointments*. What judicious Christian can doubt that the present aspects of the time and the church significantly and loudly demand a return to these neglected appointments. Should the churches turn a deaf ear to the call; should they, in the face of all the instruction, and all the reproof which they have received, prefer measures of human invention to the ordinances of Heaven; should they, in seeking to rise from their depression, turn from the sabbath, and the ministry which God has appointed, to other means, and other instruments, the experiment may prove as abortive, as it is unwise and preposterous. And in this case, faithful ministers will have a most arduous part to act; and all their wisdom, their firmness and independence may be but sufficient to meet the exigencies of so alarming a crisis.

I will touch but a single topic farther; and that, as briefly as possible. At the present era, when men move rather in masses, than as individuals; and when a variety of objects are pursued through the medium of associations, frequent and strong claims must of course be made on ministers of the gospel. Of the objects in view, some are of vast and universally acknowledged moment; for they aim at spreading the light of divine knowledge, and the blessings of salvation through our country, and through the world. Others are calculated to unite all benevolent hearts, as they are directed to the removal or alleviation of some of the principal forms and sources of human suffering. A third class may be somewhat *utopian* in their character; and if they excite a smile, may well be suffered to pass without opposition. A fourth class may be more questionable; as, though they may present interests of vital importance, and dear to humanity, they may be embarrassed with serious difficulties. The evils to be removed may be political, as well as moral; they may be inwrought in the frame-work of society; of government, laws, and civil institutions; and their sudden and violent removal might induce general convulsion, misrule and ruin.

In a case so distressing as this, to whom shall the Chris-

tian minister resort for instruction, but to his Savior. That Savior was wholly devoted to the preaching of his gospel; a gospel which offers salvation to all, and claims a sovereign control over all; a gospel which, wherever it goes, sheds a most salutary influence on rulers and subjects; on the rich and poor; on the elevated, and the depressed; on laws and liberty; on every interest of man. But he let civil institutions alone. He addressed men as individuals; and he designed, through individuals, to bless communities, by cherishing among them every thing excellent, and removing, ultimately, every form of evil.

St. Paul pursued the same course. When he wrote his celebrated letter to the converts at Rome, the empire was the seat of the most absolute and cruel despotism. But he inculcated no sedition. He preached no revolutionary doctrines. "Let every soul," said he, "be subject to the higher powers;" and this, when the highest of those powers, the Emperor, was a monster of cruelty, oppression, and every vice. And when, among those to whom he wrote his epistles, *slavery* existed, and in its most repulsive forms, he made it his great object to preach—courageously, tenderly to preach—both to masters and slaves, that gospel which was the grand instrument of softening the ferocity of the one, and healing the lacerated spirits of the other.

Surely, these examples may be imitated with perfect safety, by ministers of the present day. In the fondness of speculation, we may have discovered better forms of government, and better laws, than those we now possess. Yet rather than become preachers of politics, it were preferable, perhaps, that we should treasure up our discoveries for our own private use. And if the evils of slavery, and the sufferings of the slaves are enormous (and who can deny it? who can doubt it? where is the heart of sensibility that does not *feel* it?) let us beware lest, by an injudicious and violent interference, we exasperate those evils, and those sufferings. If we have confessedly no power over the masters, but that of moral suasion, let that moral suasion consist of something different from exasperating menaces, and bitter invectives. If the cause of African liberty and emancipation is a sacred cause, let it not be polluted by

impatience, by intolerance, by recklessness, by expedients which obstruct, rather than promote, its advancement. If the evils to be removed, being deeply seated, and intertwined with a thousand interests, demand the calm deliberation of the wisest, let not excitement and passion attempt the hopeless work.

I know that to some, the moderation now recommended may seem to be the very thing we do not want. But I am equally assured, that without it, our peace, our government, our union, are lost. And the cause of freedom, of African freedom, is lost too. A civil war; and worse, a *servile* war, the most terrible of all wars, may be at our very doors. Of such a war, the issue is but too easily seen. And how lamentable would it be, should that race, already so deeply injured, find itself reduced, through the injudicious interference of its professed friends, to the dire dilemma of a more cruel bondage, or absolute extermination.

Let us, then, as ministers of the gospel of peace, as friends of our country, and of the African race, have the courage, in this season of excitement, to be calm. Let us resolutely and mildly adhere to our proper calling, and our proper work. Let us go on *preaching the gospel*; that gospel which is destined to regenerate the world; to remove all its sins, all its oppressions, and all its miseries; that gospel which is the best friend of liberty, and of man; that gospel which accomplishes its work, not like the earthquake, or the tornado, but like *leaven*; by a process mild, noiseless, gradual, yet effectual, and ultimately complete and universal. Let us not be precipitated into measures from which our conscience and our best judgment revolt. If, in this cause, we are assailed with reproach and denunciation, let us meekly and patiently bear it. Let *none of these things move us*. Let us be solicitous only to know and do our duty; and let us cast every other care on the Master we serve.

MY DEAR YOUNG BROTHER,

You have heard something, this day, of the design, the spirit, and the duties of the Christian ministry. And I have perfect confidence that these suggestions find a ready response in your own views and feelings. Indeed, they have for years been familiar to you; and it is our gratification to introduce to this people, this day, not a novice, but one who has given ample evidence of his devotion to the Savior's cause. What an honor, my Brother, to have received from such a Savior, an office which meets the sublimest aspirations of the most exalted mind, and affords scope to the kindest, noblest feelings of the most benevolent heart. What a delight, to go forth in his name, and carry to our poor, dying fellow-men, not the wealth of the Indies, not the treasures of the universe, but indescribably more—the *gospel of the grace of God*; the INFINITE BLESSING, which can becalm a troubled conscience; which can heal a diseased heart; which can enrich and felicitate and save an immortal soul. In such a cause, who would not be willing to labor and toil and suffer? For such an object, who would not wish to live? Who would not be willing to die? With such motives to go fearlessly forward, where are the obstacles that shall deter, and where are the perils that shall dismay, and where are the seductions that shall turn us aside? May you, my Brother, have the combined fidelity and zeal; the mingled tenderness, courage and magnanimity of the great Apostle of the Gentiles. And in the strength of an infinitely greater Apostle; the glorious High Priest of our profession, may you fight the good fight, finish your course, keep the faith, and receive at last from your Redeemer's hand, the incorruptible and everlasting crown.

From my earliest acquaintance with you, and emphatically, from the period of your consecration to Christ, my interest in your character and course has been deep and unintermitted. The scenes of affliction through which you have been mercifully sustained, in the early period of your ministry, have but prepared you, I trust, to comfort others in their troubles, with the same consolations with which you yourself have been comforted of God. And now, that his providence has trans-

ferred you from the scene of your former labors, to this beloved people, may you come to them in the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ. May your ministry be fruitful in the richest blessings to the aged, and the young; to those who love the Savior, and to many, very many, who are now far from God, and from peace. Long may this people rejoice in your light. Long may you be happy in their love. I need not ask your tenderest affection and respect in behalf of my beloved Brother who, in this place, has borne the burden and heat of the day. His long and faithful devotion to his Savior, and to the interests of the church, has secured to him a general love and confidence. And I know that it will be your favorite wish and joy, to comfort his heart, and to cheer, by every kind attention, the evening of his life.

And now, my Brother, may the God of heaven and earth bless you out of Zion. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. AMEN.

NOTES :

Note B. page 10.

In thus pressing the importance of maintaining the truth of God ; of adhering to those great and fundamental doctrines which, from the first era of Christianity, have stood the test of the strictest scrutiny, and the severest opposition, I would be far from advocating a spirit, either of bigotry or contention. Let the *truth* be maintained and defended in *love*. Let every preacher of the gospel, and every student in theology, exercise his best powers, and avail himself of the most valuable auxiliaries, in investigating the Scriptures. Let creeds and confessions of faith have their proper place, their just estimation ; and no more. Let the word of God be the grand determiner, the sovereign "Judge" that shall "end the strife" between conflicting opinions, and contending parties. And let its decisions command universal homage.

It will not be contended that an excessive attachment to antiquity, or that a blind submission to prescription, or authority, is the characteristic of the present day. It will scarcely be denied that the very reverse is true ; that a rage for novelty, with a determination to consider nothing as ascertained and fixed, even in religion, greatly prevails. Thousands in the Christian community seem to be absolutely impatient for some new religion ; some new, and shorter, and smoother path to heaven. And hundreds of minds and pens seem to be at work, to gratify the strange inclination. Such being the case, it is not wonderful that the determined friends of gospel truth should feel, with new force, the duty and importance of defending it ; of defending it on its own simple and unalterable principles ; nor that they should be even sensitive to every deviation from it. Almost all the great errors in religion, the heresies which have marred and distracted the church, have commenced in fair and plausible forms. Nor has the evil become apparent, till it has gained a pernicious and alarming ascendancy. The celebrated Arminius uttered no bold and startling errors. But the aim and tendency of his writings was to undermine established principles, and to promote a kind of universal scepticism. Thus he gained, for one of the most dangerous systems of religion, a far easier admission, and more extensive spread, than if his designs had been avowed and apparent from the first.

There is, then, much sound common sense in the long received maxims ; *Obsta principis—Venienti occurrere morbo*. And if, in a thousand cases of little importance, the beginnings, the very approaches of evil are to be resisted, it would be preposterous to maintain that in religion, they are to be trifled with. While we treat with much candor and tenderness

those deviations from correct thinking, which touch no vital point in religion, let us guard, with sacred vigilance, against every corruption of fundamental truth, and every approach to it. Who can doubt that erroneous, or even superficial conceptions, on the subject of *human depravity*, on the *change in regeneration*, and on the *terms of acceptance with God*, are serious evils? Who can doubt, indeed, that they tend to corrupt and undermine the whole system of experimental and practical religion, and imminently to endanger the souls of men?

Note B. page 13.

I can offer no apology for the freedom of my animadversions on the levities of the pulpit. Nor am I in doubt whether they will find a response in the feelings of every judicious Christian; indeed, of every reader of unperverted taste. Could I for a moment suspect that there are informed and reflecting Christians, to whom they will appear needless, or unduly severe, I should be but the more deeply convinced of the duty of lifting up a loud voice on the distressing subject. Who can suppose that if there be levity in the pulpit, there will be seriousness in the pew? Who can suppose that if men are not serious in the house of God, they will be serious any where? Shall the exercises of the Sabbath become the instruments, not of exciting serious thoughts and emotions, but of dissipating them? Shall those who attend the sanctuary to learn their danger and their remedy, their character and their eternal doom, be mocked with pleasantries and jests? Should the Savior return to earth, and pay a visit to his temple, would he not, with his *scourge of small cords*, indignantly banish these unhallowed and hateful intruders?

But let a poet speak. Let a poet, for once, become the monitor of the preacher.

He that negotiates between God and man,
As God's ambassador, the great concerns
Of judgment and of mercy, should beware
Of lightness in his speech. 'Tis pitiful
To court a grin, when you should woo a soul;
To break a jest, when pity would inspire
Pathetic exhortation; and to address
The skittish fancy with facetious tales,
When sent with God's commission to the heart.
So did not Paul. Direct me to a quip,
Or merry turn in all he ever wrote,
And I consent you take it for your text,
Your only one, till sides and benches fail.

COWPER'S TASK.