

15.0.8
5465
1855
S-K

S E R M O N

AT THE

ORDINATION AND INSTALLATION

OF THE

REV. THERON H. HAWKES.

Rev. Dr. Goodrich
with the affectionate regards of
W. B. S.

5665

A

S E R M O N

PREACHED MARCH 7, 1855,

ON OCCASION OF THE ORDINATION

OF THE

REV. THERON H. HAWKES,

AND HIS INSTALLATION AS PASTOR

OF THE

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH,

IN WEST SPRINGFIELD, MASS.

BY WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE, D. D.,

PASTOR OF THE SECOND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ALBANY.

ALBANY:

CHARLES VAN BENTHUYSEN, PRINTER, 407 BROADWAY.

1855.

S E R M O N .



ROMANS XI., 13—I MAGNIFY MINE OFFICE.

If ever there was a man who knew how to impress his own full and well defined image upon a single sentence, that man was the Apostle Paul. He was born a noble specimen of humanity. He became by education one of the most accomplished and erudite men of his time. Grace formed him into a finished model of Christian character; and afterwards conferred upon him those extraordinary gifts which crowned all his other qualifications for conducting the grandest enterprise ever committed to men. With a character which nature and culture, sanctification and inspiration, thus united to form, he entered upon his office as an ambassador of Christ; and never was an office graced with such rich and splendid endowments. And not only was he pre-eminently qualified for his work, but he gloried in it — “I magnify mine office,” saith he to the Romans, speaking particularly as the Apostle to the Gentiles — “I would fain show it forth to be an

excellent, honourable, exalted office." Were ever words more deeply charged with meaning — more characteristic of true greatness, even sublimity, of mind. "I magnify mine office" — Do not the energies of the man, the graces of the Christian, and the extraordinary powers of the Apostle, all seem to meet in this simple, yet triumphant, declaration?

Paul was indeed something more than an ordinary Christian minister — he was an Apostle; and as such was endowed with miraculous gifts. Nevertheless, the highest dignity that pertained to his office, is shared by the humblest ambassador of Christ. It was not so much that which was extraordinary, constituting him an Apostle, as that which was ordinary, constituting him a Christian minister, that rendered his office, in his own estimation, one of such superlative importance; and hence we do no violence to the text when we consider it as applicable to all who are commissioned to preach the Gospel. Your office and mine, my brethren, is one of transcendent dignity. For it derives its authority immediately from the Son of God; it is associated with and honoured by the agency of the Holy Ghost; and it contemplates, as its final result, the eternal triumph of a ransomed Church. I repeat — in all the greater matters pertaining to our office, we are on a footing with Paul — it is in regard to the less only that we differ from him.

My design in this discourse is to illustrate *the importance of maintaining the dignity of the Christian ministry.*

By maintaining the dignity of the ministry, I mean such a course of conduct on the part of ministers, as shall accord with, and bring honour to, their high vocation.

I. Let me, in the first place, notice some of the ways in which ministers offend against the dignity of their office, both in their individual and associate capacity; suggesting the appropriate means of maintaining it, as I pass along.

In their individual capacity: 1. They offend against the dignity of their office, *when they fail to render due honor to God's truth.* And this they do, either by not preaching the truth, or by preaching it in an unsuitable manner.

When I speak of their not preaching the truth, I do not mean that their preaching consists of unmixed error, or that it necessarily includes any error at all; but I mean that it fails to recognize those truths which give to Christianity a distinct character — those truths in which is emphatically bound up the whole economy of man's redemption — those which the Apostle had in his eye when he said, — “I determined to know nothing among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified;” and when he said again — “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross

of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Now, while there are many subordinate truths revealed in Scripture, which are important in their connexion with the great evangelical system, yet when viewed apart from that system, they seem fragmentary, and lose, in a great degree, their significance and value. As Christianity, in addition to her own peculiar doctrines, furnishes an improved edition of natural religion, it were quite possible that a Deist should take the Bible as a text-book, in expounding the great principles of moral duty; for he might recognize much that he found there as true and important, though he should allow no divine authority to the record. But however earnestly a man may preach the doctrines or enforce the duties of natural religion, or however skilfully he may defend the out-works of Christianity from the varied assaults of skepticism, rely on it, he cannot be said, in any proper sense, to preach the truth, unless he preaches that which, in Paul’s estimation, gave the gospel all its value — a crucified Saviour the only foundation of the sinner’s hope. This is the central point of the great system revealed in the Gospel; and every other truth is more or less important, as its relations to this are more or less intimate. I say then, I may spread the Bible before me every Sabbath, and never utter a sentence but what it fully justifies, and yet if I maintain an unbroken silence in respect to that in

which the power and glory of the Gospel especially reside, I cannot reasonably claim to preach the truth as it is in Jesus.

But ministers may dishonour the truth also, by *preaching it in an unsuitable manner.*

They do this, for instance, when they preach it out of its legitimate connections. Notwithstanding the truth, as revealed in God's word, does not take on a systematic form, yet the various truths to be found there naturally range themselves into a perfect system; each has its own appropriate place; and no one can be dropped, or even have a wrong place assigned to it, without marring the beauty and impairing the influence of the whole. Indeed so intimately are different doctrines of Christianity allied to each other, that, in failing to recognize the connection between them, we fall little short of preaching positive error. Take, as a familiar illustration, the teachings of the Bible in respect to the united agency of God and man in the work of our salvation. Suppose I preach the doctrine that man is entirely dependant on the Holy Ghost for his spiritual renovation; and that the work, unless God take it into his own hands, will never be accomplished—this is Bible truth to the letter. Suppose I preach the doctrine that man is bound to exercise repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and has really an important

agency in working out his own salvation — here again, I preach nothing but what comes directly from the living word. These two truths, when brought together, qualify each other; and when practically received, they minister to the production of that temper which is peculiarly evangelical. But suppose that, in my preaching, I separate these two doctrines, exhibiting the former apart from the latter, or the latter apart from the former — in the one case, I reach the point of downright fatalism; in the other I exalt man into his own Saviour. And thus it is in respect to various other of the Christian doctrines — when considered in their connexion, they seem consistent and glorious; when considered out of their connexion, you feel that they do not fairly represent the mind of the Spirit.

The same remark is applicable to that kind of preaching, in which the distinctive truths of the Gospel *appear only in the back ground*; being mixed up with a doubtful philosophy, or overshadowed by a splendid rhetoric.

Far be it from me to disparage true philosophy — I look upon her as the representative of the highest nobility of human reason — I would allow to her the honour even of being one of the nearest allies of Christianity herself; nor would I be slow to admit that there are certain truths revealed in the Bible, for

the elucidation of which, especially in their remoter connexions, her aid may be legitimately invoked. But then even she must always know her place and always keep it. She must be satisfied to act as an hand-maid, and never aspire to the main direction. She must do her work chiefly out of the pulpit, and let the results appear in more skilfully presenting and more rightly dividing the word of truth. But there is that which sometimes passes for philosophy, that is nothing better than a miserable counterfeit. I refer now to a creature of darkness; and if you attempt to bring her to the light, she instinctively draws back to her native element. She luxuriates in the regions of the abstract, and the ideal, and the possible. She knows how to weave plain words into dark sentences; and dark sentences into mysterious paragraphs; and mysterious paragraphs into splendidly unintelligible sermons; and though she may admit a liberal infusion of evangelical phrases, — nay, though she may actually incorporate with her own teachings somewhat of Christian truth, yet she takes care to maintain her place as the presiding genius; and the occasional glances that she casts at the cross, are but a poor substitute for knowing nothing save Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I would not pronounce the man who takes counsel of this spirit of the mist in the construction of his sermons, a preacher of error; for how can I pro-

nounce intelligently upon that which is unintelligible?—but I may safely say that his preaching, despite even of the measure of truth there may be in it, will be, to a great extent, profitless. You may find some who will profess their admiration of such preaching, as if in honour of their own superior penetration; but even they will not thank you for asking them to tell you what they have been hearing.

The same effect substantially is produced by a perverted rhetoric. Who needs be told that rhetoric is an important auxiliary to the effective dispensation of divine truth; but it performs its legitimate office only when it becomes the medium of light and power. It results from the very constitution of man, that the same sentiments clothed with one form or another, or uttered in one way or another, are more or less impressive; and hence the study of rhetoric is very properly made a branch of theological education. But suppose that the rhetoric of the sermon becomes so prominent that the truth is only a secondary affair—suppose that, instead of rendering the impression of the truth deeper, it actually prevents the truth from making any impression at all—there may indeed be, in such a case, a listening and delighted assembly; and the preacher may feel the warm incense of admiration coming up from the fixed throng, while they are yet hanging upon his lips; but believe me, those en-

tranced auditors never dream that it is the sword of the Spirit that he is wielding — still less do they feel it as a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. They remember the sermon and talk of it; but it is not because it stirred their consciences or warmed their hearts, but because it was a grateful offering to imagination or taste. The day of judgment will show whether it brought them a step nearer to Heaven.

I only add, under this article, that there is a vague and indefinite mode of preaching, by which God's truth is dishonoured. Christianity contemplates men in an individual capacity. Her provisions are all adapted to individuals. She comes to you — she comes to me — saying, “Thou art guilty and needest to be forgiven — thou hast lost God's image, and needest to have it restored — thou art a child of sorrow and needest consolation — thou art an heir of death and needest to become an heir of immortal life.” And though she proposes to renovate communities, yet she does this only by exerting an influence on the individuals who compose them. If then Christianity is designed to act upon men as individuals, it cannot be expected that she will accomplish her end, unless her doctrines and precepts take a definite form, and are brought home to the bosoms of men in the way of personal application. But you have been fortunate indeed if you have never heard

the Gospel preached as if it were a very good thing for those who needed it, while you have been left to find out as you could, — I had almost said, to what race they belonged. Under such ministrations, the Gospel is little likely to take effect. Even though its truths should all be preached, there is scarcely a probability that the conscience will be aroused, or even the understanding much enlightened.

In these several cases to which I have referred, and in some others to which I cannot now refer, God's truth is dishonoured. Not to preach it at all is to treat it with absolute contempt — to preach it in a manner that shall obstruct its legitimate influence, is nothing better than miserable trifling. But the truth is the great instrument, by which the Christian ministry is to accomplish its purposes — if, then the truth is dishonoured, who will not say that the appropriate dignity of the ministry is gone? Wherein is that office more exalted than any other, if, by the withholding or neutralizing of the truth, it becomes divorced from the Christian economy, and forfeits the promised grace of the Holy Spirit?

Would we, my brethren, maintain the dignity of this high office — let us see to it that we preach that system of truth, of which Christ is the centre, the substance, the glory. Let us take heed that we preach it in its right connexions; giving to each particular truth its proportional importance. Let

us exhibit it in its purity and simplicity ; accounting ourselves most felicitous in our efforts, when we have rendered the plain teachings of the Bible the most palpable and impressive. And finally, let us preach to men as individuals ; let us preach so distinctively that it shall not be our fault, if every conscience is not reached. Thus shall we render due honour to the word of God ; thus shall we magnify our office in the sight of men.

2. If a minister *loses sight of the decorum that is due to Christian ordinances*, he offends against the dignity of his office.

The ordinances of the Gospel are of divine institution ; and they are designed to accomplish a most important end in the Christian economy. Infinite wisdom has made them just what they are ; and has given no license to the wisdom of man to attempt or suggest any improvements. The general order of Christ's house has been fixed by divine authority ; and though something may be left to human taste and prudence, yet, in respect to all its essential features, our path is rendered plain by the light from above. It is manifest then that there is an essential dignity pertaining to this whole subject ; and that it justly claims to be regarded by us, in our conduct as well as in our feelings, with a corresponding reverence. And it is for ministers chiefly to decide whether this shall actually be

realized; for not only does it devolve on them to take the lead in all ecclesiastical legislation, so far as we are left at liberty to legislate, but also to administer the ordinances which Christ has ordained; to lead the flock in the way that Christ has marked out.

But it has come to pass in our day—aye, and long before our day—that the order of Christ's house has been sadly disregarded. Ambition and Fanaticism have made common cause in laying violent hands on the hedge which the Master has thrown around his own institutions. Order has been stigmatized as the twin-sister of formalism. Calm reflection has been frowned upon as the antagonist of Christian activity. Reverence has been driven into a corner, as if the covering of God's throne had at last been removed. Zeal has said to knowledge, I have no need of *thee*. Charity has gone forth weeping, with bitter denunciations ringing in her ear. And God's institutions have sunk just in proportion as man's devices have prevailed. I speak that I do know, when I say that not only sermons have sometimes been preached but even prayers offered, in respect to which, if I had been inquired of what were the prominent characteristics, I should have been obliged to say, vulgarity and impiety. That was emphatically, and in the worst sense, a dispensation of tongues;

and I bless God for the evidence we have that it has so nearly passed away.

It surely requires no argument to prove that such a state of things as I have here described, is greatly derogatory to the ministerial office. And why should it not be so, when ministers are supposed to be the chief actors in these scenes; or if not, at least to connive at them; for it comes within the province of a minister to preside over, or take the direction of, all the arrangements pertaining to social worship. If things go wrong here, they go wrong upon his own ground; and he will ordinarily be held responsible. Let him then who would shrink from such responsibility, guard with most scrupulous caution against the least departure from the orderly observance of Christian ordinances. Especially in those most precious seasons of a minister's life, when the Spirit of God is manifestly seconding his efforts, and the public mind becomes in a great degree engrossed by spiritual things, and there is the strongest temptation to resort to measures of equivocal import — then, especially, I say, let him take heed that all things are done decently and in order. Even admitting that, by relaxing his caution, in this respect, he should render the excitement more intense or more extensive, and admitting too that there should be some good results from this, yet he will have secured them at too great an ex-

pense, inasmuch as he will have done it at the expense of lowering the dignity of his office.

3. If a minister suffers himself to be *needlessly entangled with worldly cares*, he offends against the dignity of his office.

The ministry is a work requiring a vast amount of labour; and the man who does not resolve to bring to it his undivided energies, had far better betake himself to some secular occupation. The duties which a minister owes immediately to his own flock, are varied and arduous; but besides these, every minister, especially every one who occupies a station of any considerable prominence, sustains general relations to the Church that impose a heavy tax upon his time; and even when he uses the utmost diligence, he sees many things claiming his attention which he is obliged to decline. The work to which he has been consecrated is a purely spiritual work; and hence we regard him as acting in character, only when he is concerned with spiritual things.

Suppose then that we see a man who has professedly given himself with great deliberation to the work of the ministry, and has been duly set apart to that work in accordance with the evangelical constitution—suppose we see such a man dividing his time between the spiritual and the secular, giving to the secular the greater share;

suppose that nearly his whole work as a minister is done on the Sabbath, while the six remaining days are reckoned good for the service of Mammon; suppose that the spiritual interests of his people languish just in proportion as his own worldly interests flourish, and just because the latter are allowed the precedence of the former—I ask you, could a minister more effectually lay his high office in the dust than by such a course as this? Admit that this is an extreme case—yet it is by no means an imaginary one; and there are many cases that approach near enough to it to fall into the same general category. A secular minister—a worldly minister—a money loving, money making, money hoarding minister—who of us would dare to speak of the dignity of our office, if there were such an one near to be quoted as a specimen of it?

But suppose another case—the man who becomes a minister, does not thereby lose any of the attributes of humanity. If he had a body before that required to be sustained by something more substantial than air, the same body remains to him afterwards. If he had tender affections towards his own family, which responded sympathetically to their sufferings, the sacred office has done nothing to lessen their intensity. If another man who provides not for those of his own house, is worse than an infidel, surely *he* cannot be innocent, if he

leaves those whom Providence has made dependant upon him, without the means of a worldly support. What will you say then if the people among whom a minister labours, refuse to recognize the principle that the labourer is worthy of his hire; and, by withholding from him what is necessary to his support, oblige him to seek it in some other way? I care not what honest employment such a minister resorts to — let no man say — above all, let not his own unreasonable and unjust people say, that he is acting inconsistently with the dignity of his office. If there be an offence, it is chargeable not upon himself, who would gladly be wholly devoted to his work, but upon those who, by their stinted contributions for his support, will not allow him to do it.

4. If a minister *lacks circumspection in his ordinary intercourse*, the dignity of his office is sure to suffer.

Circumspection has regard chiefly to little things. In regard to the greater things, the moral sense of most men, especially where it has been suitably educated, may be safely trusted; it is in respect to matters of minor importance that the mind more frequently discovers its erratic tendencies; and here it is that the strongest guard requires to be placed. Let a man — any man, trust to mere impulse in regard to the little things of every day and every hour, — and no matter how scrupulously right he may be on all great occasions, — I venture to say that there

will be much in his character that you cannot respect; much in his conduct that you will feel constrained to deplore. And this remark is especially applicable to a minister, in consideration of his being a man of mark—distinguished even from other Christians by the peculiar sanctity of his office. It is for this reason that he is judged both by the Church and the world by a higher standard than other men: that which would be regarded as a trifling fault in another, becomes a heinous offence in him; and that which another might do without its even being noticed, will bring a spot upon *his* character, which it will perhaps require years to wash out. The truth is, a minister cannot safely forget his high vocation under any circumstances. He has indeed duties to perform not immediately connected with it; but even in the performance of these duties, he may not forget that he is a minister. He must remember it at home and abroad; he must remember it in the highway, and even in the market place; he must remember it in the casual meeting with a friend, as well as amidst the dignified associations of a deliberative assembly. I do not mean that he must take on professional airs, or say to any body by his conduct—“Stand by, I am holier than thou;”—but I mean that, as he would maintain the dignity of his office, he must be considerate and discreet in all circumstances; so that

his life shall be a faithful and edifying comment upon his preaching. It is quite possible for a minister to assume a stately manner for a great occasion, and still offend against the dignity of his office by habitual levity; but it is not possible for him to maintain the dignity of his office, without an habitual circumspection that shall extend to his most ordinary actions.

5. If a minister *stoops to a dark and disingenuous policy*, he offends against the dignity of his office.

There are some men who seem to have a natural antipathy to walking in a straight and open path—so sinuous are their tendencies, that they rarely attempt to accomplish anything by direct means; and though you may have ascertained the object at which they are aiming, *that* gives you no clue to the course by which they propose to reach it. In some cases, this is to be traced to nothing worse than a passion for originality—a foolish vanity that counts it a less sacrifice even to go wrong than to walk in a beaten track; but in others, it is associated with sinister purposes—it looks towards some real or imaginary advantage to be gained at a sacrifice of truth or justice or charity. I am aware that this quality, even in the more offensive form, sometimes dignifies itself with the name of prudence; but prudence is offended at the misnomer; it is a quality which she refuses even to recognize. Now I do not

say how far ministers are chargeable with this evil, in either of the forms to which I have referred — of the latter certainly, it is to be hoped that, if there are any examples, they are extremely rare ; but I do say that, just in proportion as they are chargeable with it, their office is essentially and visibly degraded. The Gospel which they preach is itself a transparent system, and is designed and adapted to form a transparent character. It not only forbids them to aim at any evil ends in respect either to each other or to their fellow men, but it forbids them to pursue even praiseworthy ends in the exercise of a dark and tortuous policy ; it requires that they should be not only above reproach, but above suspicion. If then, my brethren, we would magnify our office, let us see to it that we have no objects to accomplish, in respect either to ourselves or to others, that will not bear the light of an unclouded sun ; and that we employ no means for their accomplishment upon which may not be recognized the impress of simplicity and godly sincerity.

But it is not merely in an individual, but in an associate, capacity, that ministers offend against the high claims of their own office : of the various ways in which they do this, I must limit myself to a brief notice of one or two of the most prominent.

I say then, they are chargeable with delinquency here, when they *fail to guard with sufficient care*

the legitimate avenues to the sacred office. Ministers indeed in their best state are earthen vessels; even where you find the greatest assemblage of high qualifications, you still find them associated with more or less of the imperfection of our common humanity. But though we may not look for perfect men to occupy this office, we may look — we are bound to look, for those whose natural and acquired qualities render them best adapted to it. And it is a mistake to suppose that every young man of good intellectual endowments, or even of unquestionable piety, had better be encouraged to enter the ministry — I hesitate not to say that even where both these are combined, there may be such constitutional defects in regard to prudence, or sympathy, or the power of utterance, or even of requisite confidence in one's own ability, as to render the prospect of usefulness in the ministry exceedingly small and dubious. And if even such defects disqualify for the work, much more is this true of inferior natural powers, or of an equivocal Christian character. Let men come into the ministry who are unworthy to be there, — no matter what the nature of the disqualification may be, — and the office will be dishonoured, do what you will to prevent it. It will be necessarily associated with the men who hold it; and both will sink together.

There are various causes to which the evil of which I now speak, may be referred. It not unfrequently happens that a young man, from an honest desire to do good, and from a belief that the ministry opens a field of the highest usefulness, aspires to the sacred office; utterly blinded by his own zeal to the fact that he is naturally and essentially disqualified for it. In other cases, the wishes of parents and friends give a premature direction to the mind, and the profession is chosen rather from filial respect, than from conscientious conviction. In others still, ministers are so much impressed with the greatness of the harvest, compared with the scarcity of the labourers, that their discretion disappears in their zeal; and, by the same act, they make war upon the interests of the farm or the workshop, and rob the pulpit of its dignity and power. It is owing to such influences as these that many young men are educated for the sacred office, and finally introduced into it, who never are, and never can be, workmen that need not be ashamed.

It is obvious that this evil should be met by ministers primarily in their individual capacity; they should see that the influence which they exert on this subject at the very fountain head, be a wisely directed influence. And then, in their associate capacity, they should utter a solemn and enlightened judgment on this subject, as occasion may require,

or opportunity arise. They should consider it as far from being a matter of course, that every one who comes to the gate should be suffered to pass; and not even their respect for the feelings of the candidate should be allowed to interfere with their higher obligations to the Church. I am sure there is not one of us, but can think of individuals who are little less than an acknowledged reproach to the ministry, and yet owe their standing in it to the want of suitable vigilance or firmness, on the part of those through whom the office is conferred.

I can imagine that it has occurred to some of you that, however these remarks might be well enough at another time, yet that now, when the number of aspirants to the sacred office has so lamentably fallen off, it would be more fitting to speak a word of encouragement to those who are hesitating, than to seem to throw obstacles in any one's path. Let me not be misunderstood. I would not say a word to lessen — on the contrary, I would, if it were in my power, greatly increase, the number of ministers and candidates for the ministry, who possess, or are likely to possess, the legitimate qualifications for the work; and I will not dissemble my apprehensions that the fact to which I have just adverted, is to be interpreted as an alarming sign of spiritual decay, and as having an ominous bearing on the future prosperity of the Church.

Nevertheless, my hopes do not rest in a mere increase of numbers; and I deem it due to the dignity of our office, that I should protest against its being held by unsuitable persons, even now, when the wants of the world would seem most urgent, and the voice of the church for more labourers is loudest and most imploring.

Another way, and the only remaining one that I will mention, in which ministers, in an associate capacity, dishonour their office, is by *yielding to undue excitement*, and thus infringing the rules of a just decorum, in public bodies. When large meetings of ministers occur, it often happens that topics come up, upon which there is a diversity not of opinion only, but of interest and feeling; and it were to be expected that such topics should excite animated discussion, and sometimes, considering the weakness of human nature, should even give occasion to earnest controversy. But where is the denomination, unless indeed that which keeps silence by rule, and on principle, be an exception—within whose bounds there have not sometimes been clerical convocations, in which have been uttered burning and bitter words—words which should have been left to die upon the air, but which, the next hour, were put in charge of steam or lightning, to witness all over the land to the unfortunate capabilities of ministers? I confess, when

I have read column after column in our religious newspapers, containing details of collision and strife, in connexion with some of our deliberative assemblies, I have been ready almost involuntarily to look back, and see whether it was not the record of a political rather than a clerical meeting, on which my eye had fallen. And I am sure that we have all felt, in view of such scenes, that it became the whole Church to shed tears of humiliation, that the highest office entrusted to mortals, should be thus publicly and wantonly scandalized.

II. Let me now, in what remains of the discourse, direct your attention very briefly to some of the more obvious *reasons* why the dignity of the sacred office should be scrupulously maintained.

1. And the first which I mention is, that *in proportion as we offend against the dignity of our office, we obstruct its influence.*

We have seen that one of the ways in which ministers do this, is by withholding or perverting, or neutralizing the truth; but inasmuch as it is through the truth only that the legitimate ends of the ministry are accomplished, it is manifest that whoever lowers its dignity in this way, aims a direct blow at its efficiency also. But where the sacred office is dishonoured by other means, it is easy to see that its influence must be proportionably impaired; for men will be little likely to heed that,

which, from any cause, they do not respect; and so powerful is the principle of association, that even that which is acknowledged to be true and good, will often be disregarded, if it comes through an equivocal, much more a revolting, medium. Men naturally condemn inconsistency in others, even though they may themselves be examples of it. Not only the message with which ministers are charged, but everything pertaining to the office they bear, has the impress of a superhuman dignity; but if this office is contemplated in connexion with qualities or actions that are felt to be inconsistent with its high character, you have nothing better to expect than that the office itself will be degraded in the view of the people; and that the external duties that pertain to it, however they may be regularly performed, will be comparatively powerless. It is too much to expect of our hearers, that they should keep the man and the minister entirely distinct; or that, when they see the minister in the pulpit, they should be quite oblivious of the man out of it.

It will not, I trust, be thought invidious, if I ask you to let facts within your own knowledge illustrate this point. Doubtless you can think of examples of the several cases to which I have referred, as derogatory to the dignity of our office; and I submit it to you whether each of them is not also an example of ministerial inefficiency. Wherever

God's truth has been dishonoured, either by being withheld or perverted, have you witnessed results, such as the preaching of the Gospel contemplates, and is adapted to secure? You have known instances in which the order of Christ's house has been shamefully disregarded; in which religious exercises have been degraded into something that was little better than a farce; in which women, whose good influence, when appropriately put forth, it is not easy to overrate, have, in the face of decency, in the face of Paul, claimed and exercised strange rights in public assemblies—you have known such cases, I doubt not; but I venture to say you never knew one that did not ultimately recoil disastrously on the influence of the ministry itself. So too you have seen ministers opening their arms wide to grasp the world—so eager to increase their possessions as to give occasion sometimes to a doubt whether, in the adjustment of pecuniary claims, they always held the scales with an equal hand; you have seen those too whose want of circumspection, or whose want of ingenuousness, has made them a bye-word even with the world;—but I ask you, did you ever know an instance in which the labours of a minister belonging to either of these classes, were attended with a manifest blessing? And finally, you have seen men coming into the ministry who were utterly unqualified for the work;

and have heard of, if you have not witnessed, bodies of ministers who have forgotten their high vocation in the conflicts of party; but here again, has not the effect in each case, so far as you could trace it, manifestly been to hinder the influence of a preached Gospel—to blunt the edge of the sword of the Spirit? Would we then, my brethren, witness the full effect of our labours—let us see to it that nothing be wanting on our part to maintain the dignity of our office.

2. A second reason for our being vigilant in this respect is, that *religion itself is so identified with the dignity of the ministry, that if the latter suffer, the former will suffer along with it.* You may look through the whole history of the Church, and you will find uniformly that the character of the ministry is an index to the prevailing type of religion. It must necessarily be so; because ministers are the divinely constituted expositors of God's truth; and in this capacity, as well as others incident to their office, they are chiefly instrumental in giving the religious direction to the public mind. If the ministry, by its own culpable instrumentality, is brought into contempt, we surely can expect nothing but that religion also will be dishonoured; nay, in proportion as the character of the ministry is in any way marred, religion will be bereft of its purity and its power. Would we desire then to see God's truth

prevailing, free from all spurious admixtures, and in all its divine attractions;—especially would we desire to leave to the next generation the legacy of a pure Christianity, together with an influence that shall secure its transmission to other and more distant generations, I say again, let us take heed that we magnify our office.

3. I only add, in the third place, that if we fail in the duty we have been contemplating, we *dishonour the Son of God*. Are not we, my brethren, the ambassadors of the Lord Jesus? Are we not the only authorized representatives that He has on earth? Do we not profess to hold our commission as ministers, under his authority? And is the honour of the Sovereign independent of the conduct of the ambassador? Can the minister who comes hither as the representative of a foreign court, be regardless of the dignity that pertains to his mission, and stoop to things of mean and grovelling import, without dishonouring the government which he comes to represent? Believe me, not more can the minister of Christ behave unworthily of the high embassy with which he has been entrusted, without trifling with the authority under which he acts,—without insulting the glorious Being in whose name he appears. But who of us is willing to dishonour the Son of God? Who of us can so far forget his divine character that reverence will not prevent it?

Who of us can be so unmindful of his bloody baptism that gratitude will not prevent it? Who of us can think so little of the meeting with him at his bar, that a sense of that dread reckoning will not prevent it?

Is not the train of thought into which we have fallen, fitted to enlarge our views, and deepen our impressions, of ministerial responsibility? Not only are we required, my brethren, to aim at the highest personal usefulness,—to exert ourselves directly, to the extent of our ability, for the salvation of those who are entrusted to our charge, and indeed of all to whom we have access, but we have also a common trust committed to us in the dignity of our office; and as we are faithful or unfaithful in respect to this, we help or hinder each others' influence. Will any minister, who, by his indiscreet behaviour, loosens the tongue of scandal, say that others need not concern themselves with his delinquencies, as he injures no one but himself—let that minister know that his judgment cannot be sustained; he strikes a blow at his office, and through that, at the common usefulness of those who share it with him. True indeed the character of the office is, strictly speaking, independent of the character of the man; but the world like an opposite conclusion too well, not to rush to it even at the expense of bad reasoning, and we are obliged

in our conduct to have respect to their error. Let us see to it that our vigilance be proportioned to our responsibility. Let us remember that when we do anything to degrade our office, in the view of the world, we not only exert a direct personal influence adverse to the ends of the ministry, but we especially offend against the evangelical requisition that we should be fellow workers together unto the kingdom of God.

It can scarcely be necessary to remind our brother who, by these solemnities, is to be constituted the pastor of this Church, that this subject is highly suitable to engage his thoughts in entering on this important field of ministerial labour. Though it does not devolve upon me, my dear Sir, to be your counsellor or monitor on this occasion, I may at least be pardoned for saying that the relation into which you are now entering with my former charge, does not leave it at my option whether or not to feel a more than common interest in the success of your future labours; and I regard it as an occasion for devout gratitude that your ministry commences under such favourable auspices. I think I may safely assure you (though I must say it in the hearing of those of whom I speak) that you could hardly settle among a people whose character for Christian sobriety and Christian stability, and I may add Christian harmony, would promise a higher

degree of comfort or greater facilities for usefulness, than you may expect to realize in your present situation. Here, during the long period of sixty-three years, was enjoyed the ministry of one of the greatest lights of New England* — a man than whom — I say it without disparaging any other — I have never known a wiser; and he it was who impressed upon this society a character which it has never lost. I think of him — saint in glory though he be, as still the presiding genius of the place; and though there are but few present in whose personal recollections he lives, I am persuaded there are many whose characters bear witness that the influence of his ministry still lingers here. Here *let* it linger, my dear brother, and co-operate with your own, both being seconded and animated by the still higher influence of God's blessed Spirit. Here may you magnify your office through many coming years; here, in this privileged and delightful part of Christ's vineyard may there be trained, through your genial culture, many plants of righteousness, to flourish in the upper paradise, as witnesses not less to the success of your ministry than to the efficacy of Christ's mediation.

I doubt not that it may occur to some, in reviewing this discourse, that I have dealt freely, possibly too freely, with the imperfections and delinquencies of

*Rev. Dr. Lathrop.

ministers; but if I were ever so much disposed to throw a veil over them, I could not; nor can I suppose that anything would be gained by treating as a secret that which is heard every day from the house-top. I have spoken to you, my brethren, as a sharer in the common infirmity; and from a deep conviction that we need to put each other in remembrance of our dangers as well as our duties. But I should stop short of the full demands of the occasion, if I were not to add that they who *hear* the Gospel as well as they who preach it, are responsible in reference to this matter; and that whether the ministry receives due honour or not, depends not a little upon the Church. Need I say that there are instances almost without number, in which private members, and even officers, of the Church, lend their whole influence to degrade this high office, by complaining of their minister for not accomplishing impossibilities; by magnifying trifles into matters of real moment; by originating or conniving at injurious suspicions; and by uncovering and fanning into a flame the hidden and dying embers of discontent. If ministers betray their trust, far be it from me to ask for them an exemption from merited censure; but if they only evince that measure of infirmity from which human nature, in its present state, never escapes, let them have the sympathy and aid of the Church, instead of having to en-

counter distrust and crimination. I can point to more than one case at this moment, in which the dignity of the ministry has been most culpably assailed, by those who were bound by every consideration to strengthen their minister's hands, by a kindly and Christian co-operation.

I congratulate you, Brethren and friends of this Christian Society, that the light has been so quickly re-kindled in this candlestick, and that after a few months' vacancy, occasioned by the removal of my esteemed friend and brother,* you are privileged again to see before you the man whom you are henceforth to recognize as your spiritual guide. But while this may justly be reckoned by you as a day of jubilee, it can scarcely be regarded less as a day of mourning; for you have come hither fresh from the grave of an honoured member and office-bearer of this Church.† I am glad of an opportunity thus publicly to testify my affectionate respect for the memory of our departed friend; for though more than a quarter of a century has passed since he was under my pastoral care, *that* has done little to efface from my mind the impression of his deep spirituality, his glowing zeal, his energy of purpose and action, his truly philanthropic spirit, and I may add the exuberance of his kind offices towards myself.

*Rev. H. M. Field.

†Deacon Daniel Merrick.

I knew him when he was like careless Gallio; I knew him when he was like trembling Felix; I knew him when he was like a blind man first opening his eyes upon the light; I knew him when, like Abraham, he was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and though I have known little of him in latter years, I may fairly presume that his course has been onward, and upward, always. To his family and immediate relatives, to his brethren in the deaconship, to this Church of which he was so long a member, and to this community in the midst of which he dwelt, he has left in his example a legacy which, as they value their highest interests, they will appropriate and cherish. You have often heard his voice in tones of earnest prayer, and tender expostulation; but if you will hear it now, you must turn your ear towards the spot where we laid him. Let his grave be among you in the place of the living man; and by reminding you of what he was, and what he is, may it be as a minister of mercy to help you on towards Heaven.

And other work still has Death been doing among you. Within the last few weeks he has invaded several of your domestic circles in such rapid succession, that one grave has closed only for another to open; and the great lesson which the voice of Providence seems now to be urging upon you is the paramount importance of being habitually ready to die. And

when my thoughts, wandering back through the past, reach the point at which my own pastorship here was terminated, oh what a different congregation rises before my mind from that which appears here before my eyes! I inquire for one, and another, and another, of my former friends here, and the answer is,—“the places which knew them know them no more.” I walk through your graveyards, and the monumental inscriptions tell me where they are. Oh, my friends, we are in a current that is constantly rushing forward into the great ocean of eternity. God grant that each of us may do life’s work in the appointed time! So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom!