

THE HOME MISSIONARY.

Go,.....PREACH the GOSPEL.....*Mark* xvi. 15.
How shall they PREACH except they be SENT ?....*Rom.* x. 15.

VOL. II.

FEBRUARY 1, 1830.

NO. 10.

AN ADDRESS ADAPTED TO THE MONTHLY CONCERT OF PRAYER.

[Furnished by the Rev. William B. Sprague, D. D., Albany, N. Y.]

EVERY Christian will readily admit that the most glorious cause in which his thoughts and his efforts can be employed, is the extension of the kingdom of Christ. It is here that the Redeemer is seen "travelling in the greatness of his strength," and the riches of his grace, and the triumphs of his mediation are displayed, while there comes an infinite revenue of "glory to God in the highest." The design of this concert of prayer is to help forward this glorious work; and the ministers of Christ feel that they have gained their purpose on these occasions, only in proportion as they have succeeded in quickening the hearts of Christians to higher and holier efforts in this benevolent enterprise. Hence it has been common to urge upon them directly their obligation with reference to this object; pointing them to the magnitude of the work, on the one hand, and the various means which they may employ, and which they are bound to employ, for its accomplishment, on the other. This is as it should be, and there is no danger that the subject of direct obligation will be urged too strongly or too frequently; but in the few remarks which follow, I design to arrive at the same point by a different way. Instead of impressing directly your duty to be active and charitable, I shall urge you to cultivate the *principle* of religious action and charity; in other words, I would impress you with the importance of cultivating, in a high degree, the religion of the heart, as the best and only real security for a life of active benevolence.

Whatever you can do for the advancement of Christ's cause, must be done by means of fervent prayer, holy example, or what may be appropriately styled benevolent action. Look at the subject a moment, and see whether a pledge for each of these is not found in a tone of elevated piety in the heart.

1. Who is the person who will accomplish most for the cause of Christ by his *prayers*? Certainly he whose soul is most deeply imbued with the spirit of religion; who cultivates in the highest degree humility, faith, love to Christ, and all the other Christian graces. One of the first elements of personal piety is the spirit of prayer; of course the most devoted christian will possess this spirit in the highest degree. Another of its essential elements is the love of souls; and another still, the love of Christ. A spirit of fervent piety, then, will dispose the Christian to pray much; and it will not suffer him to limit his prayers to himself, or to his own family or kindred; but it must and will go abroad and embrace the world. His love for souls excites the desire that all may be saved; and his love to Christ excites the desire that the whole family of man may be brought under his gracious dominion. It is therefore only the natural operation of a principle of piety deeply implanted in the heart, that it produces a wrestling at the throne of

grace for the salvation of men and for the extension of Christ's kingdom. It is an effect legitimately flowing from its cause; and the cause and effect, here, are two things which God, in the economy of his grace, hath indissolubly joined together.

2. Who is the person who will accomplish most for the cause of Christ by his *example*? Undoubtedly, he who has made the greatest progress in personal religion; because, though it is possible for a man to act the hypocrite, and to appear, for a time at least, an angel of light, when he has really the heart of a demon, yet it is one of the laws of human nature, that "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." It is a legitimate conclusion, then, that he who has the most religion in his heart will act out the most in his life; in other words, the most devoted Christian is the one whose general example will exert the best and strongest influence in the world. But do you ask what this has to do with sending the gospel abroad to the heathen? I answer, the object of this meeting is to assist in bringing about the conversion of the world in its broadest sense; and though the influence of a devoted Christian's example should be circumscribed by the sphere of his daily walk, and thus should possess only the character of a "*Home Missionary*," yet it is one of the most persuasive and efficient missionaries that can be employed. If, as you move around among your neighbours and friends, you constantly diffuse the lustre of a holy example, you need not fear that you are living in vain; for such an example cannot finally miss its object. But you do not always stay at home; sometimes you are called in providence to go abroad, it may be, on your secular business; and perhaps you meet with individuals for a short time whom you may never see again. How do you know but that, if your deportment is that of a devoted Christian, you may thereby leave behind you a delightful savour of true piety, or may give a new impulse in many breasts to the tone of benevolent feeling, or may even be instrumental of saving souls from death, and hiding a multitude of sins? Rely on it, there is a charm in a godly example, which even the infidel cannot but admire; and, blessed be God, there is an energy in it, which the infidel has not always been able to resist! It is the living, breathing, speaking image of true piety.

3. Who is the person who will do most to advance the cause of Christ by a course of *benevolent action*? I answer again, unhesitatingly, he who has the deepest experience of the power of religion. I do not mean that mere worldly men, and even very wicked men, may not, from motives of which it is not necessary now to speak, exert their influence, and sometimes make splendid donations, in favour of the Redeemer's cause. All I will say of this kind of charity is, that, not being based on Christian principle, it is not to be depended on: it may last or it may not; or the same stream that has been directed into the garden of the Lord, to gladden, and fertilize, and beautify, may be diverted to nourish the plants of spiritual death; and the same hand that once brought offerings to the Lord's treasury, may, under different circumstances, be ready to drop its gold and silver into a bag, in the keeping of a traitor to Christianity. It is only Christian principle, combined with Christian feeling, that constitutes a pledge of persevering Christian effort; and in proportion to the prevalence of piety in the heart will be the degree of self-denial and activity manifest in the life. Here again, let me ask you to look back to some of the elements of experimental religion. Think of the love of Christ, and see whether it must not be, as the Apostle declares that it is, a "constraining" principle; and whether he whose soul is deeply imbued with this spirit, must not, as a thing of course, be an active promoter of his cause! Think

too of the love of immortal souls, a strong and yearning sensibility, in view of the wretchedness to which the soul is exposed, and the glory to which it may be exalted, and the watchful interest which it has excited, both in heaven and in hell, and tell me whether this is a principle which can slumber in the human heart; or rather, whether it is not a principle which must burst forth into living action, and bring not only the heart, but the head and the hands, under active contribution. Must not property, influence, life itself, seem of little value to a person whose heart is warmed with the love of his Redeemer, and the love of souls, except as they are consecrated to the salvation of the one, and the glory of the other?

Hitherto I have spoken of the tendency of a spirit of fervent piety in respect to the great interests of Christ's kingdom, without any reference to actual experience. I will invite you now to look abroad into the world, and see whether all that has been said is not accordant with fact. Who are the persons, who have been the persons in all ages, to pray most, and labour most, and give most, for the advancement of the Redeemer's cause? Precisely those who have most diligently cultivated the piety of the heart, who have possessed in the highest degree, a spirit of watchfulness, and humility, and self-denial, and deadness to the world. Such was the character of the apostles and martyrs of former days,—it was especially in the closet that they caught the spirit, which, though it may sometimes have convulsed, has nevertheless so richly blessed the world. And in modern times too, such is the character of our Missionaries, in distant lands, who are almost literally sacrificing themselves on the altar of Christ; and of the multitude of private Christians and ministers, who with burning love, and burning zeal, are coming up to the help of the Lord against the mighty. In short, you may read the whole history of Christianity, and you will find, as a general rule, that the measure of inward piety has been the measure of outward action; that he who has loved his Saviour most, has done most to advance his cause, and to glorify his name.

And now, what remains, Christians, but that I exhort you to cherish a deeper, stronger tone of vital piety. On another occasion, I would urge you to this from a regard to your own present comfort, or the increased glory of your future reward; but the grand motive which I would present before you now is, its intimate connexion with the salvation of the world. You desire—I know you desire—if your heart has ever been the seat of one pious emotion, that the redemption of the Gospel may take effect in the hearts of your fellow creatures far and wide; that the kingdom of Christ may come in the majesty of a universal triumph; and perhaps you sometimes indulge the hope that you may live to witness, at least, the dawn of millennial glory. All this is well—but let me entreat you to connect with these bright visions of faith and hope, a deep sense of personal obligation, and personal piety. Go then, Christian, to your closet, and open your heart for a larger measure of divine influence, and resolve, in the strength of God, that every Christian grace shall be in you and abound. And not only so, but do what you can to induce your neighbours, and friends, and all with whom you have influence, to go and do likewise. Endeavour to elevate the standard of experimental piety, not only in your own hearts, but all around you; and be assured that in the same degree, you will elevate the standard of benevolent action, and contribute to the accomplishment of the great purposes of everlasting love.