

direction. There is no surer sign of weakness than pretended contempt, either of the past or the present labours of mankind. For God's providence is ever working, not only in nature, but in the minds of His creatures, and increasing intelligence and observation of His works, is one of those precious gifts of God, which we should esteem and value rather than depreciate. It is also of great importance to us to distinguish between "the faith once for all delivered to the Saints," which in its great fundamental varieties cannot change, and our understanding of these truths, which is liable to fluctuation and to progress, or decline. And the vast field of interpretation of Scripture admits of many conclusions differing from each other, yet compatible with general soundness of faith. When we see what the Bible in terms dogmatically asserts called in question, our path is more easy, and our duty plain; but in many questions, on which the Scriptures have pronounced nothing certain, we should be very slow to condemn as the fruit of unbelief, what more learning in ourselves might show us to be the result of long and patient research. For these and other like reasons, I would urge upon you all, both the elder and the younger clergy, a more careful and systematic reading both of the Old and New Testaments, in their original tongues, of sound works of divinity, of which there is an abundance in the present day, and of books which convey secular knowledge. You need not be afraid that you will ever become mere students; but my fear is, that you may become mere talkers—that in the absence or neglect of reading, even the little theological knowledge you once had may fail you, or degenerate into that empty verbiage, which is never so pitiable, as when it is associated with a claim to high and exclusive spirituality. No man knows what he can do in the way of reading, till he has made the attempt systematically. Map out your time into regular portions, get hold of some portion of knowledge before the world has had time to intrude, or in the long winter evenings; cease to thirst after that unprofitable, worse than unprofitable gossip, which is the bane of all our communities, and the ground of half our suspicion and distrust, and your minds will be improved, whilst you are placing yourselves daily in a better position to improve others. But the clergyman who reiterates the same discourses which his flock has perpetually heard, or teaches them nothing, but the same truths constantly insisted on as the only way to salvation, and not varied as the Bible itself varies its instruction, must either send his hearers to sleep, or must breed up a generation of ignorant and narrow-minded fanatics, ready to condemn every advance in knowledge as an error, and to brand with heresy every liberal and ingenuous mind. Into these mistakes many are in danger of falling, and I therefore caution you, that study and learning, under the blessing of God, are the surest preventives. I may also say a word on Sunday School instruction. As the common schools of the country are in no degree under the clergyman's control, nor are any definite religious principles taught in them, it is of great