

## The Debt of Knowledge.

*Written for the Review.*

God's glory is the chief end of man. He is a spiritual being, and in all his occupations he should have a spiritual aim. All his gifts are bestowed to qualify him, directly or indirectly, for spiritual activity. He has received his intellectual gifts among multitudes of others, that he may employ them in the interests of religion. Now the English speaking races are superior mentally to the majority of nations. They excel in both their endowments and attainments for the useful purposes of life. The memory of the Chinese is quicker and more retentive than ours. The mind of India leads the world in subtlety, that of France in vivacity and brilliance, that of Germany in profundity; but in that practical wisdom, sound common-sense, and indomitable energy that are necessary for worldly success and power, the British intellect is surpassed by none. This qualifies us pre-eminently for receiving and propagating the truths of the Gospel, for it is essentially practical in its methods and results.

Individually we have great opportunities for the exercise of these powers in the interests of men. In personal conversation we can advocate our convictions, in prayer-meetings and other gatherings we can urge them publicly, and in the church organization and in every civil, educational and benevolent institution we can exert our executive abilities, and organize men to strive together for the temporal and spiritual well-being of the race. Our aim should be first, to teach the truth, second, to persuade men to accept and act upon the truth, and then to move them to work for the spread of the truth and of the blessings that it brings. Everyone of your abilities makes you a debtor to its full extent to all below you, for God has bestowed these gifts on you for their sake, and as you have received, even so you must minister the same. There is a crying need of just this kind of work all around us. The press and pulpit are doing much, but the work of elevating the masses will never be accomplished until all the educated and thoughtful in every community endeavor to instruct and cultivate the minds of those less favored than they. The amount of ignorance in our land is appalling, as may be seen by the prejudices and passions that sway many minds, and by the wide spread neglect of some of the most important duties, such as those of patriotism and public morality. Great numbers of our fellow-countrymen do not think for themselves, and are led by the cleverest and shallowest demagogue who appeals for their suffrage, and he who panders to their worst passions often gets their best support. The evil effects of this state of affairs are felt in society, in politics, in business, and in the relations of the masses to philosophy, science, literature and art. But in nothing are its results more evident and odious than in religion. Many who call themselves Christians have not mastered the doctrines on which their faith is based. They could not expound the doctrine of justification even to save a soul. Many who have grasped these truths are unable to apply them to the needs of sinners. Consequently the majority of the unchurched have no clear knowledge of the Gospel they reject and yet they may have intermingled with church-members all their lives. Once a negro was travelling in a car with some Christian ladies. He was a stranger to them, and when one of them dropped a contemptuous remark about the hopeless condition of the blacks, he begged them to show him the way of life. They could not think of a solitary passage that would assure him of salvation, nor could they explain how he could find forgiveness. At length one of them offered him the address of her pastor at the end of their journey. But he said that they might never reach there and pled for light. They were silent. It happened that he was a preacher, who soon taught them what they needed to know, but can you imagine the anguish of a penitent seeking light from such oilless lamps? Yet I believe that the Church would be astonished and humiliated, if we could see the number of our members who are in that condition. Why, I have heard of students in our colleges, and ministers in our pulpits who could not deal with inquirers. And we are told frequently of men, going out from our churches into the most darkened portions of the land who are unable to speak or do anything for Christ. Ask our missionaries in the North-West, and they will tell you of many who have been brought up in our Eastern congregations, and who, when they go into the churchless districts these become as indifferent as the mass around

them, and who are as useless in religious work as those who have been schooled in atheism from their youth. It is a disgrace to our teaching and training, to our lives and work. The first remedy is a deeper spiritual life in believers, a fresh baptism of the Holy Spirit for the whole church. This is the object for which all sincere followers of Christ should incessantly strive and pray. Then every Christian should know the truth himself, and should prove his knowledge by seeking and instructing others. After this his executive ability should be used to organize all for systematic labor for Christ. The work of salvation must be done by the many, not by the select few. They may blunder at first, but a little experience will cure that, and when they are drilled to move and march together they will be a mighty army in the cause of truth. More emphasis should be laid on the obligation of every Christian to be a preacher of the Gospel, more avenues should be opened for the energy of the individual in each congregation, more attention should be paid to the personal influence of the converted over the unconverted on which the hope of the Gospel is chiefly based. Every believer should feel that it is his duty to seek the salvation of every unsaved soul he can approach and the development of those already in the Kingdom, and that he is responsible to God for them, until he has done his utmost to reach these ends. The Sunday-school, the Christian Endeavor Society, the prayer meeting are all openings for this activity but a larger place must still be given to the cultivation and direction of the talents of our church members, for there is no doubt that the failure to utilize the abilities of her communicants is the great weakness of the Presbyterian Church to day. As you increase the knowledge and efficiency of Christians, you expand the church's capacity and power, and so, not only every minister and elder, but every believer should be ready to impart all the knowledge he has acquired to exert all his strength in inducing men to accept and live for Christ, and then to lead them into work for Him that will confirm their faith, quicken their love, systematize and utilize their knowledge, and save the souls of those for whom they toil and pray.

The great need of the hour is for men to live in more complete submission to and dependence on the will of God. Let every Christian seek and follow God's guidance in his choice of a calling in life and in everything he undertakes. Let the prayer of each hour be—"Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" and then let him do his best to have his prayer answered. We recognize the necessity of a call to the ministry, but since God has a special work for everyone to do that no other can do, His will should be consulted in everything, that all our labors may be the fulfilment of His designs. How many mistakes have been made because men have ignored this principle! In the body of Christ, the eye has sought to do the work of the ear, and the feet to fulfil the functions of the hands. The head has tried to supplant the heart, and the tongue has usurped the throne of the character. He who is endowed to give has envied the place of him who is qualified to teach and exhort, and he whose forte is human kindness has sought to surpass in thinking the leader of thought. The skillful organizer has pined for the poet's inspiration and the orator's fire, and, in exchanging his place for theirs, he has wasted his life by working with a weakness, when, by developing his strength, he might have crowned it with success. Consequently we have men in our pulpits who should be at the plough, and we have great intellects rusting in retirement, and noble souls smothering in seclusion who should be stirring the hearts, and swaying the minds, and guiding the efforts of the people of their age and nation. God expects you to do nothing but what He has fitted you for, but He does require you to do that; and the only way of avoiding this confusion is to practice a principle that lies at the base of Christian morality—let every man seek God's guidance as to where He wants him to go, and what He wants him to do, and then let him exert himself to fill the place and perform the duties allotted to him. It is the only way to crown our lives with true prosperity. No matter how great your success from man's standpoint, no matter though your exit from earth be through a gateway of gold, festooned with the garlands of a nation's praise, if your life be out of the course of God's will, it will look hideously mis-shapen in the light of Heaven, and all your triumphs, combined