

perseverance, self-denial and purity of motives in the path of duty. In this, that saying may have peculiar meaning,—“The last shall be first, and the first last.” But in urging on you the importance of moral courage you will miss the main lesson that I wish to teach if you fancy it is only required for great occasions and high places. There are, no doubt, situations in which it is peculiarly needful, as in these the moral coward is sure to do unspeakable mischief. No tongue can utter the mischief which must spring from moral cowardice in *statesmen, high judicial persons, or in ministers of religion*. The wisest cannot weigh with accuracy the effects of moral cowardice. Yet it may be fairly questioned, whether open villany has done greater harm to the best interests of society, than moral cowardice, when it has played falsely with the weighty claims of great trusts. For instance, how often have persons, utterly incompetent, been appointed to the most responsible situations, rather than displease friends, or offend partizans? History records instances of thousands perishing, and even great nations brought to the brink of destruction by the appointment of incompetent persons to places of great trust. Now this evil is not less dreadful, although not so apparent in its immediate results, when the incompetent are appointed to be the moral and spiritual guide of their fellow-men. Large communities have in this way, for generations, been grievously injured. We see but dimly the connection here betwixt cause and effect, or to what extent the cause may reach in producing its effects. Yet no one can fail to see that there is heinous wickedness in appointing a man to such a post, with neither intellectual nor spiritual fitness for the task. Let me be understood. A man applies for *ecclesiastical qualification*, or for *induction* into the work of the gospel ministry. Now, if those in whose hands the power is placed of judging, see his unfitness, yet declare him competent,—how fearfully do they trifle with a most solemn duty. These men do not act in opposition to their understanding, but to their conscience. Plainly they ought to have set aside the applicant. They needed not “the power of discerning spirits” to know that the man was unfit to have the care of immortal souls. But then, to have been honest would have hurt the feelings of the young man, displeased his friends, or exposed themselves to some loss or uneasiness, and on the whole,