

charity that ought to be performed. You are shirking that work, running into spiritual consumption, and when called to judgment and asked to render an account of your stewardship, what will you say? You may be able to say: "Lord! Lord! we have gone to church pretty regularly, with the exception of rainy and stormy Sabbaths, we have gone to prayer meeting occasionally, we have read five or six chapters in the Bible." But what have you done? Religion is practical. Faith is known by works. Brethren! it will be a serious matter with us if we neglect to fill our divinely-appointed mission in life, if the work that we ought to have done has to be overtaken by others. The reward will be according to the work done, and if there is no work done how much reward will there be?

3rd. The divine side of the bringing together of Cyrus and his work is clearly indicated in the remarkable words—"The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus King of Persia." God was in this matter. Here we have a distinct proof of the providence of God. "He does according to his will in the armies of Heaven and amongst the inhabitants of the earth." The phenomena of nature are under God's control, so also are the events of history. The inspired historian here reveals the secret working of God. This is one of the advantages of having the Bible, that we are able to trace the spiritual—the divine behind the secular. The Old Testament is largely a record of God's providential dealings with his ancient people. Supposing that we had merely a secular history of the Israelites—that God was left out of the record—we would wonder what it all meant. Why is it, we would ask, that these Israelites are leading such a chequered career, trudging for years in the pathless wilderness, again, storming the fortresses of Canaan, successively oppressed and overcome by surrounding nations. Again, they are in Babylon in captivity refusing to sing the songs of their native land. We would have wondered what it all meant. Bring God into the history, and a flood of light is thrown along the path. We understand the history of the chosen people in its ethical import. We see that there was a supreme God leading them at every step of their history. Believe me, God is in the history of every nation under heaven, controlling their destiny as he did the Israelites. There is the divine behind the secular if we could only see it. Providence descends to the minute, the individual. "The way of a man is not in himself." Man proposes the course that he will take in life, but God marks out a different track for him, and he follows in that