

NO HUMAN DEVICE

which may be altered from time to time, and, if we see fit, abolished; it is a divine ordinance. The existence of such a body of men is, indeed, a proof of the care and love of the risen Head of the Church. "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men." What gifts? The apostle Paul tells us, "He gave some Apostles and some Prophets, and some Evangelists, and some Pastors and Teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ," Eph. iv. 11-12. In the books of the New Testament, we have the ministry of the extraordinary gifts of the risen Saviour in a form more perfect than any early Church enjoyed, and in the services of these workers whom He still raises up to minister in holy things, we have the ordinary gifts of this dispensation of grace. This fact, that there is a distinct body of men set apart to spiritual work in the Christian Church, needs to be strongly insisted on in these days, for there is a tendency in some quarters, and under the delusion of a higher spirituality, to ignore this, and to forget the warning of James, "Be not many teachers." How many, when they have a mere smattering of divine knowledge, think themselves perfectly competent to stand up and teach every one. How many say that they have an unction from above, and know everything, whereas the Holy Spirit says, "If a man thinketh he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know it."

While there is

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in the Christian ministry, and any attempt to elevate any body of men into a priestly caste, as if they were in a special sense the lot of God, is utterly subversive of Christianity, still we must never forget that it has pleased God to call certain men to official positions in His Church, and that therefore the Christian ministry is stamped with a peculiarly sacred character. To despise it is to despise our Saviour's good gifts, and to throw contempt on His infinite wisdom. Paul, in all his labours for the Church, recognized this grand fact; therefore it was his practice to ordain elders in every Church, or cause them to be ordained. Nowhere did he leave a company of Christians without some among them who should labour in word and doctrine; who should rule and feed the flock of God; who should give themselves wholly to this work, and keep themselves therefore disentangled from the ordinary affairs of life. Such labourers are spoken of under various figures in the context. They are *soldiers*, fighting for the great Captain of Salvation—officers in His army. Some who follow divisive courses would reorganize this army, and have all officers and no privates. They are also *vine dressers*, tending the vineyard he has planted and watered and hedged in. They are to preserve and train and nourish the vines, so that they may produce abundant fruit. They are also *shepherds*, loving the sheep for whom the Good Shepherd has died; feeding them from day to day under the eye of the Great Shepherd, who rose from the dead, and looking forward to that time when they shall present each one blameless before the Chief Shepherd in His kingdom of glory. They are also *ploughmen*, breaking up the fallow ground by the plow of repentance and conviction, casting in the good seed of the eternal Word, harrowing it in by prayer and supplication, reaping and threshing the spiritual harvest on earth. They are also called *oxen*. This is the humblest figure

used, but it is very striking and instructive. The work of the Christian minister, like that of the ox treading out the grain, is

IMPORTANT.

Without the labor of the oxen the eastern farmer would have no bread; famine and death would stare him and his family in the face. So without the ministry of the Gospel the people perish for lack of knowledge. It was high wisdom as well as sincere piety which led to the adoption of the motto, "Let Glasgow flourish by the preaching of the Word." Where there is no breaking of the bread of life there is spiritual famine and spiritual death—aye, and an end is put to all true progress and prosperity. A family, a village, a town, a city, a province, a nation, outside the influence of the Christian ministry is dead in trespasses and sins, and passing on to inevitable ruin, moral, spiritual, and material. Those who scoff at Christianity little dream of the many indirect benefits they derive from it. We often hear the work of Christian missions pronounced a failure by those who have never taken the trouble either to record facts or to weigh their words.

THE LATE CHARLES DARWIN

was in no sense of the word a Christian—indeed he confessed that there were two things he felt no need of, viz., poetry and religion; yet, as an accurate observer of facts, he had no sympathy with those scoffers, and says that if any such happened to be shipwrecked on one of the South Sea islands their first hope would be that the missionaries had preceded them. Why so? Because, if the missionaries had not preceded them, their certain fate would be to be killed, and perhaps eaten; whereas, if they had preceded them, they would be sure of a kind reception. Surely the work of the Christian minister is important. We would say even more: It is indispensable to the highest good of the human soul. The work of the oxen in treading out the grain has, in many countries, been superseded. Threshing machines have been invented, and

THE USE OF THE OX IS ANTIQUATED.

Not so the minister of Christ.* So long as the human heart is stained with sin and weighted with sorrow, so long will it need to hear the old, old story of Jesus and His love. Whatever our advances in education, civilization, power, wealth, we cannot do without the ministry of the Gospel. The inventive brain of man will more easily find substitutes for air, water and light than it will for the Gospel of God's grace. Nothing has ever been invented that can take the place of those, and nothing that can supersede this. Many things have been tried, have failed, are forgotten. Many things are being tried, and will share the same fate, for, as has been well said, "they are nothing more than new balloon routes to empty heavens and obliterated gods." The more we see the good effects of the old Gospel on the hearts and lives of men, the more confidence have we in its power. Nothing else is needed to give peace to the conscience and purity to the life; nothing else on this earth is working constantly for righteousness. For a holy life, for a triumphant death, for a glorious eternity, how necessary, and yet how sufficient, is the ministry of the Gospel of God's grace.

* I met with two gentlemen, who told me that in the earlier days of settlement in Canada, oxen were used for this purpose. One said that to get on with them at all you had to feed them well. The other said you must treat them kindly. Let us join the two statements, "Feed them well, and treat them kindly." Good advice for the oxen on the Saviour's threshing floor.

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