

is necessary to your *retaining* the gracious influences of the Holy Spirit. It has been well said, that "there are no independent graces in Christianity," none, which do not require the continuance of prayer, of communion with God, and of obedience to Him, to secure their remaining in full vigor and fruitfulness. If an Apostle could say * "I keep under my body and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means, after I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway," surely it must be necessary for all the Ministers of Christ to exercise a constant watchfulness and self-government.

Deem not then, Brethren, that your past or your present feelings of piety towards God will suffice for the future, unless you continue to seek throughout your lives, the renewing influences of the Holy Spirit. Take an illustration from the natural world. Observe the course of a river, which God hath appointed to bless mankind with its refreshing stream, and which flows steadily onward in its appointed course towards the ocean, and as it flows imparts the most valuable refreshment to the earth, to animals and to men. There is no pause in its career, there is no failure in the supply of its refreshing waters. But whence does it derive this unfailing constancy, this unexhausted treasure? Far back in the remote recesses of the hills, unnoticed it may be, or unknown by man, a little fountain gushes up perennially from the bosom of the earth, and imparts to that river its inexhaustible supply.

Suppose for a moment that the fountain were to cease, that its waters no longer welled forth from the bosom of the earth; how soon would the river also be exhausted, and leave nothing but its bare and arid channel, instead of the healthful waters which it formerly gave. There might, indeed, for a short time remain a few pools of stagnant water, but these also would gradually disappear.

And what the fountain is to the river, Brethren, the habit of prayer and communion with God must be to you. He hath promised to place in the hearts of those who seek Him † "a well, or fountain, of living water," which, the Evangelist informs us, ‡ "He spake of the Spirit which those who believed on Him should receive," and which would not only satisfy the desires of their own souls, but also flow forth from them in living streams of grace to others. The influence of the ever-present Spirit of God must therefore be sought by you daily, in order that your daily lives and words may "minister grace to the hearers."

And there is indeed a danger that the very familiarity with sacred things which necessarily belongs to the Ministerial Office, may tend to weaken the feeling of deep solemnity and reverence with which they should ever be accompanied in the mind. That which it is the office of the Minister to communicate to others, he may gradually in some measure forget to be equally necessary in all its parts to his own soul. Against this and all other dangers nought can preserve him, except constant watchfulness, meditation and prayer. The process of renovation unto holiness must go on steadily within him by Divine grace, in

* 1 Cor. ix. 27.

† John iv. 10. & vii. 38

‡ Ephes. iv. 19