

the Spirit be poured out from on high, he may as well preach to mouldering skeletons and marble statues, as to men dead in trespasses and sins. But when once the Spirit accompanies the message, and breathes upon the slain, then there is a shaking among the dry bones; and an exceeding great army starts up in that vale of moral darkness and spiritual death, to celebrate the praises of the living God. This lesson is taught us in the circumstances attending the first preaching of the Gospel in the world. Who were the first heralds of salvation? Were they men of high rank, with a name and authority that commanded universal homage and respect? Had they the princes and potentates of the world ranged on their side to overthrow all who opposed their doctrines or resisted their progress? No. They were fishermen, tax-gatherers, net-makers. They were, with a few exceptions, taken from the very dregs of society. They had no learning—the Sanhedrim soon discovered that they were unlearned and ignorant men. They had no arms, save that spiritual panoply with which their Master had furnished them. Yet these men went forth in the face of opposition and resistance the most formidable; and, in spite of persecution, imprisonment, death, the cause which they abetted triumphed; the tree which they had planted grew and took deep root in the soil; it became fairer, firmer and more vigorous by every drop of martyred blood that was shed, till it stretched forth its arms far and wide, covered with luxuriant foliage, laden with the richest fruit. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.

This instrumentality is still in our possession, and, if it is employed in humble dependence on Divine assistance and with a single eye to the glory of God, that agency which alone can render it effectual will not be wanting. The residuum of the Spirit is with God, and He will pour it out in abundance on His faithful disciples.

This, the ministry of the Gospel, is as essential in our day as in the days of the Apostles, to the existence and progress of religion in the soul. In Rom. x. 13, we read, “Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” “How, then, shall they call on Him of

whom they have not heard, and how shall they hear without a preacher?” Here, calling on the Lord is declared to be answered by salvation, faith is asserted to be the ground of that calling, hearing of that faith, and a preacher, essential to that hearing. In agreement with this the Apostle says elsewhere, “Faith cometh by hearing.” The necessity of the preaching of the Gospel is also evinced by the consequences clearly shown where it is neglected either in a nation or individual. The moral character of a people advances or declines with the state of the ministry among them; where this divine ordinance is unknown, there the heart of the inhabitants is a moral wilderness, where no fruits of richness bloom or ripen. Man forgets God, and God forsakes man; violence and immorality prevail, and before it even the arts of civilization and refinement recede. And equally necessary is the preaching of the Gospel to the existence and support of religion in the individual. The practise of private prayer, of reading the Scriptures, and even the obligations of morality, are all relaxed, and may we not believe that these means of grace, even supposing they were diligently persisted in, would fail of being attended with beneficial effect as long as this single ordinance was neglected?

We do not limit the infinite extent and power of Divine grace when we speak of the necessity of a Christian ministry. God can work without it. Its uses are not and cannot be necessary to Him. But He has appointed and rendered them necessary for the accomplishment of His own purposes of mercy in the world. This, therefore, is the ordained means of conversion and subsequent establishment in every age of the Christian life; and its necessity must continue, while there is a single sinner to be brought into the family of God, or a single grace in the heart of the believer to advance to perfection.

Thus there is a connexion established between the ministry and the power and efficacy of the Gospel. All things are of God, “who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ, and hath committed to us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imput-