

DISCOURSE XII.

ON THE DUTY AND THE MEANS OF CHRISTIANIZING OUR HOME POPULATION.

“ And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature.”—MARK xvi. 15.

CHRISTIANITY proceeds upon the native indisposition of the human heart to its truths and its lessons—and all its attempts for the establishment of itself in the world are made upon this principle. It never expects that men will, of their own accord, originate that movement by which they are to come in contact with the faith of the Gospel—and, therefore, instead of waiting till they shall move towards the Gospel, it has been provided, from the first, that the Gospel shall move towards them. The Apostles did not set up their stationary college at Jerusalem, in the hope of embassies from a distance to inquire after the recent and wondrous revelation that had broke upon the world. But they had to go forth, and to preach among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And, in like manner, it never was looked for, that men, in the ardour of their curiosity, or desire after the way of salvation, were to learn the language of the Apostles, that they might come and hear of it at their mouth. But the Apostles were miraculously gifted with the power of addressing all in their own native language—and when thus furnished, they went actively and aggressively about among them. It is no where

supposed that the demand for Christianity is spontaneously, and in the first instance, to arise among those who are not Christians ; but it is laid upon those who are Christians, to go abroad, and, if possible, to awaken out of their spiritual lethargy, those who are fast asleep in that worldliness, which they love, and from which, without some external application, there is no rational prospect of ever arousing them. The dead mass will not quicken into sensibility of itself—and, therefore, unless some cause of fermentation be brought to it from without, will it remain in all the sluggishness of its original nature. For there is an utter diversity between the article of Christian instruction, and the articles of ordinary merchandise. For the latter there is a demand, to which men are natively and originally urged by hunger or by thirst, or by the other physical sensations and appetites of their constitution. For the former there is no natural appetite. It is just as necessary to create a spiritual hunger, as it is to afford a spiritual refreshment—and so from the very first, do we find, that for the spread of Christianity in the world, there had to be not an itinerancy on the part of inquirers, but a busy, active, and extended itinerancy on the part of its advocates and its friends.

Now, those very principles which were so obviously acted on at the beginning, are also the very principles that, in all ages of the church, have characterized its evangelizing processes. The Bible Society is now doing, by ordinary means, what was done by the miracle of tongues, in the days of the Apostles—enabling the people of all

nations to read each in their own tongue, the wonderful works of God. And the Missionary Societies are sending forth, not inspired Apostles, gifted with tongues; but the expounders of apostolical doctrine, learned in tongues, over the face of the globe. They do not presume upon such a taste for the gospel in heathen lands, as that the people there shall traverse seas and continents, or shall set themselves down to the laborious acquisition of some Christian language, that they might either have access to Scripture, or the ability of converse with men that are skilled in the mysteries of the faith. But this taste which they do not find, they expect to create—and for this purpose, is there now an incessant application to Pagan countries, of means and instruments from without—and many are the lengthened and the hazardous journeys which have been undertaken—and voyages of splendid enterprise have recently been crowned with splendid moral achievements; insomuch, that even the ferocity and licentiousness of the savage character have given way under the power of the truth; and lands, that within the remembrance of many now alive, rankled with the worst abominations of idolatry, have now exchanged them for the arts and the decencies of civilization; for village schools, and Christian Sabbaths, and venerable pastors, who first went forth as missionaries, and, as the fruits of their apostolic labour, among these out-cast wanderers, can now rejoice over holy grandsires, and duteous children, and all that can gladden the philanthropic eye, in the peace, and purity, and comfort of pious families.

Now, amid the splendour and the interest of these more conspicuous operations, it is often not adverted to, how much work of a missionary character is indispensable for perpetuating, and still more for extending Christianity at home—how families, within the distance of half-a-mile, may lapse, without observation or sympathy on our part, into a state of practical heathenism—how, within less than an hour's walk, hundreds may be found, who morally and spiritually live at as wide a separation from the Gospel, and all its ordinances, as do the barbarians of another continent—how, in many of our crowded recesses, the families, which, out of sight, and out of Christian sympathy, have accumulated there, might, at length, sink and settle down into a listless, and lethargic, and, to all appearance, impracticable population—leaving the Christian teacher as much to do with them, as has the first missionary when he touches on a yet unbroken shore. It is vain to expect, that by a proper and primary impulse originating with themselves, those aliens from Christianity will go forth on the inquiry after it. The messengers of Christianity must go forth upon them. Many must go to and fro amongst the streets, and the lanes, and those deep intricacies, that teem with human life, to an extent far beyond the eye or imagination of the unobservant passenger, if we are to look for the increase either of a spiritual taste, or of scriptural knowledge among the families. That mass which is so dense of mind, and, therefore, so dense of immortality, must be penetrated in the length and in the breadth of it; and then many will be

found, who, however small their physical distance from the sound of the Gospel, stand at as wide a moral distance therefrom, as do the children of the desert—and to overpass *this* barrier, to send out upon this outfield, such ministrations as might reclaim its occupiers to the habits and the observations of a Christian land, to urge and obtrude, as it were, upon the notice of thousands, what, without such an advancement, not one of them might have moved a footstep in quest of—these are so many approximations, that, to all intents and purposes, have in them the character; and might, with the blessing of God, have also the effect of a missionary enterprise.

When we are commanded to go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature, our imagination stretches forth beyond the limits of Christendom; and we advert not to the millions who are within these limits, nay, within the sight of Christian temples, and the sound of Sabbath bells, yet who never heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They live to manhood, and to old age, deplorably ignorant of the way of salvation; and in ignorance, too, not the less deplorable that it is wilful. It is this which so fearfully aggravates their guilt, that, on the very confines of light, they remain in darkness; and thereby prove, that it is a darkness which they love, and which they choose to persist in. Thus it will be found more tolerable for the heathen abroad, than for the heathen at home—and therefore it is, that for the duty of our text, the wilds of Pagan idolatry, or of Mahometan delusion, are not the only theatres—that for

its full performance, it is not enough that we equip the missionary vessel, and go in quest of untaught humanity at a distance, and hold converse with the men of other climes, and of other tongues, and rear on some barbarous shore, the Christianized village, as an outpost in that spiritual warfare, by which we hope, at length, to banish depravity and guilt, even from the farthest extremities of our species. These are noble efforts, and altogether worthy of being extended and multiplied a hundred fold. But they are not the only efforts of Christian philanthropy—nor can they be sustained as a complete discharge from the obligation of preaching the Gospel to every creature under heaven. For the accomplishment of this, there must not only be a going forth on the vast and untrodden spaces that are without; there must be a filling up of the numerous and peopled vacancies that are within—a busy, internal locomotion, that might circulate, and disperse, and branch off to the right and to the left, among the many thousand families which are at hand: And thoroughly to pervade these families; to make good a lodgment in the midst of them, for the nearer or the more frequent ministrations of Christianity than before; to have gained welcome for the Gospel testimony into their houses, and, in return, to have drawn any of them forth to attendance on the place of Sabbath and of solemn services—this, also, is to act upon our text, this is to do the part, and to render one of the best achievements of a missionary.

“How can they believe,” says Paul, “without a preacher,”—and “how can they preach, except

they be sent?" To make sure this process, there must be a juxtaposition between him who declares the word, and them who are addressed by it—but to make good this juxtaposition, the Apostle never imagines that alienated man is, of his own accord, to move towards the preacher—and, therefore, that the preacher must be sent, or must move towards him. And, perhaps, it has not been adverted to, that in the very first steps of this approximation, there is an encouragement for going onward, and for plying the families of a city population with still nearer and more besetting urgencies than before. It is not known how much the very juxtaposition of an edifice for worship, tells upon the church-going habit of the contiguous householders—how many there are who will not move at the sound of a distant bell, that with almost mechanical sureness, will go forth, and mingle with the stream of passengers, who are crowding the way to a place that is at hand—how children, lured, perhaps, at the first, by curiosity, are led so to reiterate their attendance, as to be landed in a most precious habit for youth and for manhood—how this tendency spreads by talk, and sympathy, and imitation, through each little vicinity; and thus, in groups, or in clusters, might adjoining families be gained over to the ordinances of religion—how the leaven, when once set a-going, might spread by the fermentation of converse, and mutual sentiment, through the whole lump; till over the face of a whole city department, the Christian fabric, which stands conspicuously in the midst of it, and whither its people are rung every

Sabbath, to the ministrations of the Gospel, might come to be its place of general repair; and attendance there be at length proceeded on as one of the decencies of its established observation. Some of the influences in this process may appear slight or fanciful to the superficial eye—and yet they are known, and familiarly known, to be of powerful operation. You must surely be aware, that it makes all the practical difference in the world, to the retail and custom even of an ordinary shop, should it deviate, by a very small hairbreadth, from the minutest convenience of the public—should it retire, by ever so little from the busy pavement, or have to be ascended by two or three steps, or require the slightest turn and change of direction from that beaten path which passengers do inveterately walk in. And human nature on a week-day, is human nature on the Sabbath. There is no saying on how slight or trivial a circumstance it may be made to turn—and odd as the illustration may appear, we feel confident that we have not, at present, either a profound or a pious hearer, who will undervalue one single stepping-stone, by which a hearer more might be brought to the house of God—who will despise any of the means, however humble, that bring a human creature within the reach of that word, which is able to sanctify and save him—who will forget the wonted style of God's administrations, by which, on these minutest incidents of life, the greatest events of history are oft suspended—or, who will deny that the same Being, who, by the flight of a single bird, turned the pursuers of Mahomet away from him, and so

spared the instrument by which a gross and grievous superstition hath found an ascendancy over millions of immortal spirits, that He can enlist in the cause of His own Son, even the least and slightest familiarities of human practice; and with links, which in themselves are exceeding small, can fasten and uphold the chain, which runs through the earthly pilgrimage of man, and reaches to his eternity.

But after all, though local conveniency may allure, in the first instance, to the house of God, local conveniency will not detain the attendance of multitudes, unless there be a worth and a power in the services which are rendered there—unless there be a moral earnestness in the heart of the preacher, which may pour forth a sympathy with itself through the hearts of a listening congregation—unless, acquitting himself as an upright minister of the New Testament, he expound with faithfulness, and some degree of energy, those truths which are unto salvation; and so distribute among his fellow-sinners, the alone substantial and satisfying food of the soul—unless such a demonstration be given of the awful realities in which we deal, as to awaken in many bosoms the realizing sense of death, and of the judgment-seat—and, above all, unless the demands of the law, with its accompanying severities and terrors, be so urged on the conviction of guilty man, as to make it fall with welcome upon his ear, when told, that unto him a Saviour has been born. These are the alone elements of a rightful and well-earned popularity. Eloquence may dazzle—and argument may compel

the homage of its intellectual admirers—and fashion may even, when these are wanting, sustain through its little hour of smile and of sunshine, a complacent attendance on the reigning idol of the neighbourhood—but it is only if armed with the panoply of scriptural truth, that there will gather and adhere to him a people who hunger for the bread of life, and who make a business of their eternity. To fill the church well, we must fill the pulpit well; and see that the articles of the peace-speaking blood, and the sanctifying Spirit, are the topics that be dearest to the audience, and on which the Christian orator who addresses them most loves to expatiate. These form the only enduring staple of good and vigorous preaching; and unless they have a breadth, and a prominency, and a fond reiteration in the sermons that shall be delivered from the place where we now stand,* they either will not, or ought not to be listened to.

Yet grieved and disappointed should we be, did he confine himself to Sabbath ministrations—did he not go forth, and become the friend and the Christian adviser of all who dwell within the limits of his vineyard—did he not act the part of an Apostle among you, from house to house, and vary the fatigue of his preparations for the pulpit, by a daily walk amongst the ignorant, or the sick, or the sorrowful, or the dying. It is your part to respect, as you would a sanctuary, that solitude to which, for hours together, he should commit himself, in the work of

* This Sermon was preached at the opening of a city chapel, which has a local district assigned to it, and whose rule of scattering is on the territorial principle.

meditating the truths of salvation—and it is his part to return your delicacy by his labours of love, by the greetings of his cordial fellowship, by his visits of kindness. It is a wrong imagination on the side of a people, when they look on the Sabbath for a vigorous exposition of duty or doctrine, from him whom they teaze, and interrupt, and annoy, through the week—and it is a wrong imagination on the side of a pastor, when looking on the church as the sole arena of his usefulness, he does not relax the labour of a spirit that has been much exercised on the great topics of the Christian ministry, by frequent and familiar intercourse among those, whom, perhaps, he has touched or arrested by his Sabbath demonstrations. You ought to intrude not upon his arrangements and his studies; but he ought, in these arrangements, to provide the opportunities of ample converse with every spiritual patient, with every honest inquirer. You should be aware of the distinction that he makes between that season of the day which is set apart for retirement, and that season of the day which lies open to the duty of holding courteous fellowship with all—and of hiding not himself from his own flesh. It is the gross insensibility which obtains to the privileges both of a sacred and literary order—it is the disturbance of a perpetual inroad on that prophet's chamber, which ought, at all times, to be a safe retreat of contemplation—it is the incessant struggle that must be made for a professional existence, with irksome application, and idle ceremony, and even the urgencies of friendship—these are sufficient to explain those

pulpit imbecillities, of which many are heard to complain, while themselves they help to create them. And, therefore, if you want to foster the energies of your future clergyman; if you would co-operate with him in those mental labours, by which he provides through the week for the repast of your Sabbath festival; if it is your desire that an unction and a power shall be felt in all his pulpit ministrations; if here you would like to catch a glow of heaven's sacredness, and receive that fresh and forcible impulse upon your spirits, which might send you forth again with a redoubled ardour of holy affection and zeal on the business of life, and make you look and long for the coming Sabbath, as another delightful resting-place on your journey towards Zion—then suffer him to breathe, without molestation, in that pure and lofty region, where he might inhale a seraphic fervency, by which to kindle among his hearers his own celestial fire, his own noble enthusiasm. If it be this, and not the glee of companionship, or the drudgeries of ordinary clerkship that you want from your minister, then leave, I beseech you, his time in his own hand, and hold his asylum to be unviolable.

But, we trust, that from this asylum his excursions will be frequent—and sure we are, that nought but an affectionate forthgoing is necessary on his part, that he may have a warm and a willing reception upon yours. It is utterly a mistake, that any population, whatever be their present habits, will discourage the approaches of a Christian minister to their families. It is a particularly wrong imagination, that in cities there is a hard or

an insolent defiance among the labouring classes, which no assiduities of service or of good-will on the part of their clergyman can possibly overcome. Let him but try what their temperament is in this matter, and he will find it in every way as courteous and inviting, as among the most primitive of our Scottish peasantry. Let him be but alert to every call of threatening disease among his people, and the ready attendant upon every death-bed—let him ply not his fatiguing, but his easy and most practicable rounds of visitation in the midst of them—let him be zealous for their best interests, and not in the spirit of a fawning obsequiousness, but in that of a manly, intelligent, and honest friendship, let him stand forth as the guardian of the poor, the guide and the counsellor of their children; it is positively not in human nature to withstand the charm and the power which lie in such unwearied ministrations—and if visibly prompted by the affinity that there is in the man's heart for his fellows of the species, there will, by a law of the human constitution, be an affinity in theirs towards him, which they cannot stifle, though they would; and they will have no wish to stifle it.

It is to this principle, little as it has been recognised, and still less as it has been proceeded on, it is to this that we confide the gathering at length of a congregation within these walls, and that too from the vicinities by which we are immediately surrounded. That the chapel will be filled at the very outset, from the district which has been assigned to it, we have no expectation. But we do fondly hope, as the fruit of his un-

wearied services, that its minister will draw the kind regards of the people after him; that an impression will be made by his powerful and reiterated addresses in the bosom of their families, which may not stop there; that the man who prays at every funeral, and sits by every dying bed, and seizes every opening for Christian usefulness that is afforded to him by the visitations of Providence on the houses of the surrounding neighbourhood, and who, while a fit companion for the great in his vineyard, is a ready, and ever accessible friend to the poorest of them all—it is utterly impossible, that such a man, after his work of varied and active benevolence, will have nought to address on the Sabbath but empty walls. After being the eye-witness of what he does, there will spring up a most natural desire, and that cannot be resisted, to hear what he says. It is not yet known how much such attentions as these, kept up, and made to play in busy and constant recurrence upon one local neighbourhood—it is not yet known how much and how powerfully they tell in drawing the hearts of the people towards him who faithfully and with honest friendship, discharges them. They will make the pulpit which he fills a common centre of attraction to the whole territory over which he expatiates—and we need not that we may see exemplified in human society, the worth and importance of the pastoral relationship, we need not go alone among the sequestered vales, or the far and upland retreats of our country parishes. It is not a local phenomenon dependent on geography. It is a general one, dependent on the nature of

man ; on those laws of the heart, which no change of place or of circumstances can obliterate. To gain the moral ascendancy of which we speak, it is enough if the upright and laborious clergyman have human feelings and human families on every side of him. It signifies not where. Give him Christian kindness, and this will pioneer a way for him amongst all the varieties of place and of population. Beside the smoke, and the din, and the dizzying wheel of crowded manufactories, will he find as ready an introduction for himself and for his office, as if his only walk had been among peaceful hamlets, and with nought but the romance and the rusticity of nature spread out before him. It is utterly a wrong imagination, and in the face both of experience and of prophecy, that in towns there is an impracticable barrier against the capabilities and the triumphs of the Gospel—that in towns the cause of human amelioration must be abandoned in despair—that in towns it is not by the architecture of chapels, but by the architecture of prisons, and of barracks, and of bridewells, we are alone to seek for the protection of society—that elsewhere a moralizing charm may go forth among the people, from village schools and sabbath services, but that there is a hardihood and a ferocity in towns, which must be dealt with in another way, and against which all the artillery of the pulpit is feeble as infancy—that a foul and a feverish depravity has settled there, which no spiritual application will ever extinguish: For amid all the devisings for the peace and order of our community, do we find it to be the shrewd and

sturdy apprehension of many, that all which can be achieved in our overgrown cities, is by the strength of the secular arm; that a stern and vigorous police will do more for public morals, than a whole band of ecclesiastics; that a periodical execution will strike a more salutary terror into the hearts of the multitude, than do the dreadest fulminations of the preacher's voice—and this will explain the derision and the distrust wherewith that argument is listened to, which goes to set forth the efficacy of Christian doctrine, or to magnify the office of him who delivers it.

We can offer no computation that will satisfy such antagonists as these, of the importance of Christianity even to the civil and the temporal well-being of our species; and we shall, therefore, plead the authority of our text, for extending its lessons to every creature—for going forth with it to every haunt and every habitation where immortal beings are to be found—for not merely carrying it beyond the limits of Christendom, but for filling up with instruction the many blank, and vacant, and still unoccupied places, teeming with population, that, even within these limits have not been overtaken. What! shall we be told, that if there is a man under heaven, whom the Gospel has not yet reached, it is but obedience to a last and solemn commandment, when the missionary travels even to the farthest verge of our horizon, that he may bear it to his door—and shall we be told of the thousands who are beside us, that, though their souls are perishing for lack of knowledge, we might, without one care or one effort abandon them? Are

we to give up as desperate, the Christian reformation of our land, when we read of those mighty achievements, and those heavenly outpourings, by which even the veriest wilds of heathenism have been fertilized—or, with such an instrument to work by as that of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which in the hands of the Spirit of God hath wrought its miracles on the men of all ages, shall we forbear, as a hopeless enterprise, the evangelizing of our own homes, the eternal salvation of our own families? “Be of good cheer,” says the Spirit to the Apostle, “I have much people for thee in this city; and that, a city, too, the most profligate and abandoned that ever flourished on the face of our world. And still the Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save. Neither is His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. It is open as ever to the cry of your intercessions—and on these, we would devolve our cause. We entreat the fellowship of your prayers. We know, that all human exertion, and eloquence, and wisdom, are vain, without them—that, lacking that influence which is gotten down by supplications from on high, sermons are but high-sounding cymbals, and churches but naked architecture—that mere pains are of no avail, and that it only lies within the compass of pains and of prayers, to do any thing.

And we, indeed, have great reason for encouragement, when we think of the subject of our message. When we are bidden in the text to preach, it is to preach the Gospel—it is to proclaim good news in the hearing of the people—it is to sound forth what surely must be felt welcome by many—it is

to sound forth the glad tidings of great joy—it is to tell even the chief of sinners, that God is now willing to treat him as a sinner no longer; that He invites him to all the honours of righteousness; and that in virtue of a blood which cleanseth from all sin, and of an obedience, to the rewards of which he is freely and fully invited, there is not a guilty creature in our world, who may not draw nigh. Should he who preaches within these walls, turn out the faithful and the energetic expounder of this word of salvation—should the blessing of God be upon his ways, and that demonstration which cometh from on high, accompany his words—should he, filled with zeal in the high cause of your immortality, be instant among you in season, and out of season—and devoted to the work of his sacred ministry, he make it his single aim to gather in a harvest of unperishable spirits, that by him as an instrument of grace, have been rescued from hell, and raised to a blissful eternity—should this be indeed the high walk of his unremitting toil, and his unwearied perseverance—then, such is the power of the divine testimony, when urged out of the fulness of a believer's heart, and made to fall with the impression of his undoubted sincerity on those whom he addresses; that for ourselves we shall have no fear of a good and a glorious issue to this undertaking—and, therefore, as Paul often cast the success of his labours on the prayers of them for whom he laboured, would I again entreat that your supplications do ascend to the throne of grace for him who is to minister amongst you in word and in doctrine—that he may, indeed, be a

pastor according to God's own heart, who shall feed a people here with knowledge and with spiritual understanding—that the travail of his soul may be blest to the conversion of many sons and daughters unto righteousness—that he may prove a comfort to all your hearts, and a great public benefit to all your families.