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THE POWER

OF A

CHRISTIAN LITERATURE:

A SERMON

ON BEHALF OF THE

ASSEMBLY'S BOARD OF PUBLICATION.

BY THE

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PHILADELPHIA:

PRESBYTERIAN BOARD OF PUBLICATION,

No. 821 CHESTNUT STREET.

1858.

PREACHED BY APPOINTMENT

BEFORE THE

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

OF THE

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

At New Orleans, Louisiana, May 11, 1858,

AND PUBLISHED BY ORDER OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY.

CHRISTIAN LITERATURE.

2 Cor. x. 10.

FOR HIS LETTERS, SAY THEY, ARE WEIGHTY AND POWERFUL; BUT HIS BODILY PRESENCE IS WEAK, AND HIS SPEECH CONTEMPTIBLE.

The traditional account of the appearance of Paul, as it has been preserved in the productions of early Christian art, represents him as "of diminutive" stature, with a "body disfigured by some lameness or distortion." This physical peculiarity often provoked the contemptuous notice of his enemies. The pretended Lucian, who wrote towards the close of the second century, calls him "a petty crooked shriveling of four feet and a half." Though this description was, doubtless, a caricature influenced by the caustic satirical spirit of the author, and his unconcealed hatred and contempt for the Christian faith, yet there must have been a generally conceded foundation for this allusion, or else the wit would have had no point at all. Traces that lead to the same conclusion

occur in the sacred Scriptures. When the miracles of Paul and Barnabas had led the men of Lycaonia to think that the gods had come down to them in the likeness of men, they gave the less honourable name of the messenger of the gods to Paul, and that which belongs to the father of gods and men to his companion, thus intimating, as I suppose, the impression made on them by the outward appearance of the two men.

Paul himself repeatedly alludes to some grievous bodily infirmity as accompanying him, and giving greater painfulness to his labours as an ambassador of Christ. To the Galatians, he says: "Ye know how, through infirmity of the flesh, I preached the gospel unto you at the first. And my temptation which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected." He compliments them for their overlooking the disadvantages under which he appeared to them, and regarding the power of the message rather than the weakness of the messenger. And perhaps we have in the immediate context an intimation of the specific form of this life-long trouble. "For I bear you record, that, if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me." This declaration, with the well known fact,

that Paul did not write his own epistles, except in very small part, and that even this was traced in such large and rude characters, as would naturally result from an unpractised hand and a dim sight, has given great plausibility to the supposition, that "the thorn in the flesh," which, as the messenger of Satan, "buffeted him," was a disease of the eyes, and was so painful, that he could not reconcile himself to bear it, until he was told by his divine Master of its benign object—lest he should be exalted above measure. And then was added the special promise, "My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness." Then, but not till then, did the long agony of this visitation—which for fourteen years, at least, had kept his body under—lose its sting, and the triumphant sufferer was enabled to say: "Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

With these indications before us all pointing in one direction, do we transcend the limits of reverent speculation, when we suggest that it may have been that the foundation of this protracted agony was laid in the time of Paul's journey from Jerusalem,

when a light above the brightness of the noonday sun shone around him, and he saw Him whom he had persecuted—a vision of glory which was followed by three days of physical as well as spiritual darkness, which brooded over him in Damascus—intimating a derangement of the visual organs?

It is a fact strikingly confirmatory of this speculation, "that Paul was almost never alone, and never appears, after the date indicated, to have taken the shortest journey by himself." He seems to have been unusually dependent on the kindly ministrations of Christian sympathy, and to have asked and returned thanks for them, as if they were not merely luxuries, but well nigh if not absolute necessities.

But whether we have been wise in concluding on the specific complaint which burthened his days, we may affirm with great confidence that he suffered under some bodily infirmity, "which detracted from the dignity of his personal appearance, exposed him to humiliations and difficulties, and might seem calculated to impede his usefulness." There was then a historical foundation for the cruel taunt of his enemies, that though his letters were weighty and powerful, his bodily presence was weak, and his

speech, to the cultivated and refined Corinthians, contemptible.

But that weak and worn body, which was but a body of death to his earnest spirit, has long since rested from its labours; the men who heard him have passed away; but those weighty and powerful letters, which even then his enemies dreaded, live still as the light of the church—mighty still for reproof, for instruction, for correction in righteousness, that we as men of God may be thoroughly furnished for every good word and work, and in the end be exalted to that third heaven to which he has gone, not as once a transient visitant, but a permanent dweller there.

In usefulness by the living voice he was probably inferior to many of the earlier preachers of the gospel, certainly so to Peter, but by the pen he achieved a preëminence unrivalled by them all. And so in his own ministry the word written has outrun the word spoken. And when he shall present himself before his Lord in that great day with the seals of his ministry, we doubt not at all, that in that constellation which shall be his crown of glory and rejoicing, the stars that have been kindled by his burning words, will bear no proportion to those which

have caught the light of hope and life from the luminous page which he wrote for our learning, in feebleness and pain.

The train of remarks into which we have fallen will be accepted, we trust, as an allowable introduction to the theme that at this time claims our notice, which is,

THE POWER OF A CHRISTIAN LITERATURE AS AN AUXILIARY TO THE WORK OF THE LIVING MINISTRY IN SAVING THE WORLD.

It should be distinctly perceived and kept in mind, that we plead for our Board of Publication, and advocate its great work simply as an auxiliary to the pulpit and the living ministry. It sustains not to this heaven-appointed means of salvation the relation of Ishmael or Jacob. It is neither rival nor supplanter. It humbly comes to prepare a way for him who brings good news of great joy; it gives to his work a wider extent, and a more universal application, and if in the mysterious providence of God, and because of the unfaithfulness of men, the candlestick be removed from its place, and deep darkness brood over the people, it supplies as well as it may by its

reflected light the absence of the living luminary, and by the transient tract or the permanent volume, keeps in contact with the minds and hearts and consciences of the shepherdless flock the counsels of those who being dead yet speak. There is no one who welcomes the productions of this Board of the church with a cordiality so warm and confiding, as the laborious, earnest, and successful pastor. They multiply his points of contact with his people, and deepen the impressions which have been made by his admonitions in private, or from the pulpit. He knows well how to send a suitable book into the family circle, to complement the work which he has been to able do by his personal ministrations; and how often is his heart cheered, and his hands strengthened, by seeing and gathering into his bosom the ripe fruits of this seed-sowing. We go forth then on this mission cheered by the prayers and coöperation of those who watch for souls.

A very superficial examination of the facts in the case will discover elements of power in this auxiliary agency of the printed page, which are invaluable to the church, and with which she cannot afford to dispense. It readily occurs that we can choose out of the vast storehouse (and museum often,) of religious

literature the ripest thoughts, and the happiest expressions of the best men, and give them at once a species of omnipresence and immortality. The pen of a ready writer is a rare and precious gift. Thousands write, who after a season are heard of no more. Their works float a while, and then sink by their own weight. But we choose out those that have the seed of life in themselves—the productions of the rare and favoured few who have penned immortal thoughts and feelings, in words that can never lose their power on the mind and heart, and which men are not willing to let die—such books as those described in Milton's plea for "Unlicensed Printing."

"I deny not but that it is of greatest concernment in the church and commonwealth, to have a vigilant eye how books demean themselves, as well as men; and therefore to confine, imprison, and do sharpest justice on them as malefactors: for books are not absolutely dead things, but do contain a progeny of life in them, to be as active as that soul whose progeny they are: nay they do preserve as in a vial the purest efficacy and extraction of that living intellect that bred them. I know they are as lively and as vigorously productive as those fabulous dragon's teeth, and being sown up and down may chance to spring

up armed men. And yet on the other hand, unless wariness be used, as good almost kill a man as kill a good book: who kills a man kills a reasonable creature, God's image; but he who destroys a good book kills reason itself, kills the image of God as it were in the eye. Many a man lives a burden to the earth; but a good book is the precious life blood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured on purpose to a life beyond life. It is true no age can restore a life whereof perhaps there is no great loss; and revolutions of ages do not oft recover the loss of a rejected truth, for the want of which whole nations fare the worse. We should be wary, therefore, what persecution we raise against the living labours of public men—how we spill that seasoned life of man preserved and stored up in books; since we see a kind of homicide may thus be committed, sometimes a martyrdom: and if it extend to the whole impression, a kind of massacre, whereof the execution ends not in the slaying of an elemental life, but strikes at the etherial and fifth essence, the breath of reason itself; slays an immortality rather than a life."

And utterances such as those so eloquently described are the outgrowth of the ministerial work. They are not the productions of mere students—

recluses who shut themselves up in studies to think and write for other and future times. That preaching or writing which is designed for posterity, with no adaptation to the present, has seldom been so happy as to reach its audience; while on the other hand, that utterance that comes warm from the living struggling mind and heart, and which meets the exigencies of the present, and its imminent and urgent demands, has the seed of life in itself. And this seed, like that which lay for thousands of years in a mummy's hand, preserves its own vitality, and is ready to take root, and grow, and bear fruit in any age, when it is cast forth abroad to seek its congenial soil. And its adaptation to all ages arises from its suitableness to this age. That which meets our wants now, is for all time and all men. And thus it has fallen out that living books are those which are most intensely personal and practical, and have grown out of the present time. Not that which is designed for that indefinite future, and which superciliously passes over the heads of the needy and hungering present living men, lives and works permanently for good, but it is that thought and truth that has grown out of and met the wants of living, thinking men, who pressed round its author.

Perhaps the two most widely useful and permanently valuable publications of our Board, are Alexander's "Religious Experience" and Henry's "Anxious Inquirer," books which never could have existed but for present and pressing demands, and derive their permanent value and suitableness from the fact that they met those demands then and there.

Such a precious achievement of the intellect and heart of the church becomes its property in perpetuity. And that too without the weaknesses and disabilities of its author. It is the Christian accomplishment of the fable of the iron man, who went unceasingly and unweariedly up and down the earth doing the will of his master. It requires no training for its work, but leaps full armed from the press, wise to win souls, and strong, so that it can run and not be weary, and walk and not faint. Needing no salary, it asks for no sustentation fund to keep life in it. It fears no epidemic, and is just as safe amid the fever jungles of India, as in the clear sweet air of the Allegheny mountains. Its preaching is not confined to appointments and set times. It bides its time, and can afford to wait the leisure or even the caprice of its owner. It lies at hand ready to be taken up in the intervals of labour, or when pleasure

has palled. It does not grow discouraged by long neglect. It is not capable of mortification from insult. It may lie unread upon the shelf till covered with dust, but it patiently waits the convenient season, and the set time, and then, when the providence, word, or Spirit of God has awakened the conscience, and prepared the anxious soul to ask, What must I do to be saved? its long silent voice is heard saying, Behold, I show you the way of life. Thus the word of salvation is often nigh him to whom the living minister is a stranger.

A stray copy of Luther on the Galatians finds its way to these ends of the earth, and teaches the way of life to the Virginia planters, Morris, Hunt, and their associates, so that the path of Christian experience, trod in anguish and bitter tears by the monk of Erfurt, is re-trod with wondering joy by these persecuted dissenters from a tyrannical church establishment. And an old torn, soiled, and unprized copy of the Scotch Confession of Faith lies in the window of a wayside inn, waiting till a storm of rain, in the providence of God, shall drive in one of these very men as he is on his way to answer for his delinquency to the powers that be, there to find in its neglected pages that they are Presbyterians, having

been brought to that pure faith by the simple teachings of the German Reformer and the word of God. And these insignificant books (as the world's wisdom would say) prepared for the coming of William Robinson and Samuel Davies, and the long and illustrious succession of worthies that has blessed that favoured part of our Zion, men of whom the world was not worthy.

It is a pleasant and triumphant thought, that as we pen those truths that have blessed our own hearts and cheered our people, we may be preparing to speak when we are dead more eloquently than when we are living, and to a far wider circle of hearers.

Doddridge lays his worn body in the grave, and rests from his labours. He speaks no more. The men that heard him and witnessed his earnest faithfulness, follow him to the silent house. Tradition becomes more and more dim in its delineation of his ambassadorship. And soon the wave gathers smoothly over the spot stirred by his descending form. The place that knew him knows him no more. The time in which we act directly is short, and let the proud remember that the work that any one can do and rejoice in while he yet lives, is generally small. But the "Rise and Progress of Religion" takes up

the line of this beneficent action, multiplies it into myriads, and perpetuates each one. And the book goes forth in some sense superior to its author. It never hungers, is not weary or discouraged, and never sickens or dies. Nothing earthly is so indestructible as a good book, broadly cast forth on the current of men, and committed to their languages. London may be sunk in an hour, but no destruction that man knows can reach such a book as that of which we speak. Bunyan's "Pilgrim" goes forth free from its author's prison, and still walks the earth with the light of heaven beaming from his countenance, and words of life upon his lips. These noble men preached well then, they preach better now, and will fill an ever widening field of usefulness till the heavens be no more.

The religious press makes each age the inheritor of the past. Its intellectual and spiritual wealth are treasured to make us wiser and better. It makes us pupils of the giants of old. The obscure peasant may say, Milton sung, Butler reasoned, and Baxter preached for me. And then it gives to every true interpreter of God's ways to men the vast and teeming future for an audience chamber. It makes the world a Northampton for Edwards and a Kidder-

minster for Baxter. Thus only is fulfilled the beautiful prediction in reference to the scattered ashes of Wickliffe,

> The Avon to the Severn runs,
> The Severn to the sea;
> And Wickliffe's dust shall spread abroad,
> Wide as the waters be.

If we had looked in on the little audience of children and servants gathered in the chapel of Lord Carberry, amid the mountains of Wales, to listen or not as they might to the vast and rich variety of discourse uttered by Jeremy Taylor, we would have exclaimed, Why all this waste! and have wondered at the mysterious providence of God. But the wonder ceases and admiration takes its place as we follow those almost unheard sermons to the press, and see that mighty agent giving them to all time, and calling unnumbered generations to listen with awe-struck attention to the Shakspeare of the pulpit.

Reasoning on general principles, then, we should conclude that his favoured servants, to whom God has given the pen of the ready writer, do more good where they are not seen face to face, and where their living voice is not heard. But the truth is presented

far more strongly by actual experience in the church's history than by the most enlightened speculation. Let us look at the bright chain of facts that bind the dead writer to a living audience. Aside from the well-known fact that the general diffusion of books and tracts has in so many instances preceded and prepared the way for great and extended revivals of religion, and always, when judiciously used, acts as an inestimable auxiliary in carrying on and crowning the work, there are many individual cases which fill us with conceptions of the amazing power of the printed page for promoting the conversion of souls, and showing forth the glory of our Lord.

Hervey's "Theron and Aspasio" sent Thomas Robinson to be to Leicester what Baxter was to Kidderminster, and the "Whole Duty of Man" aided by "Wilson on the Lord's Supper," kindled the light that was borne aloft by Charles Simeon at Cambridge, which, in that one of twin centres of learning and thought for the British empire, enabled him to communicate the impulse of his own pure and noble consecration to Christ, to so many who have been its statesmen, philosophers, and preachers of the gospel.

Who will venture to estimate the usefulness of Richard Baxter, not only as the earnest and success-

ful preacher, but as the writer of such books as "The Call to the Unconverted," and "The Saint's Everlasting Rest?" The calculus of heaven is necessary for the mighty computation. Young Baxter picked up in his father's house an old tattered volume which a poor cottager had lent him, and which awakened in him strong convictions of the evil of sin. It was Bunny's "Book of Christian Exercises appertaining to Resolution," whose great object is to press on all the duty of "resolving to become Christians indeed." Thus awakened, the young inquirer found peace and hope in the persual of Sibbs's "Bruised Reed," now a publication of our own Board. No wonder then, that when he came to the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus, he was so diligent in the use of the press for the conversion of souls, and forgot the protests of a feeble and suffering body, in the anxiety to preach Christ through the ministry of the printed page; and that not satisfied with the slower and more stately march of the bound volume, he used also the ephemeral broad sheet. These are his own words: "Another furtherance of my work was the writings which I wrote and gave among them. Some small books I gave each family, one of which went to about eight hundred. . . And I had found myself the

benefit of reading to be so great, that I could not but think it would be profitable to others. . . . . When the grievous plague visited London, I printed a half-sheet to stick on a wall, for the use of the ignorant and ungodly who were sick, or in danger of the sickness."

These isolated facts, and they could be multiplied indefinitely, shine like gems in the church's crown of rejoicing. And were these and those like them, all, this department of labour could vindicate its claim to a commanding position amid the agencies of salvation. But not unfrequently these gems are linked together in golden bonds, and thus form a bright chain, to be worn as a beautiful ornament by the rejoicing bride of the Lamb. Then that agency for good, which was before seen to be so noble, transcends our powers of expression. Let me call your attention to one specimen of this long protracted agency of an impulse originally given by a good book. "Baxter's Call" awakened and saved Philip Doddridge; and in 1745 Doddridge, moved by the advice of Dr. Watts, wrote and gave to the press his "Rise and Progress of Religion," a work he could never have produced but for his familiarity with his favourite authors, Howe, Baxter, and Tillotson. That work has been trans-

lated into German, Dutch, Danish, and French, and has thus sent its saving influences among the millions who speak those tongues. It has followed also wherever the well-nigh universal English language has gone. We shall not attempt to estimate the ten thousand instances in which it has silently and secretly blessed its myriad readers. These must be left to the revelations of the great day. But in some instances its beneficent work has come out from obscurity, claimed attention, and called on us to give glory to God that he has given its author to the church and the world.

During the year 1783, a talented, educated, and influential British statesman was travelling on the shores of the Mediterranean. Pleasure was his object in this interval of parliamentary labour. He was thoroughly devoted to the world, and ignorant of religion, and he pursued the pleasures of time with a keenness to which youth, health, rank, and wealth gave zest. He one day carelessly picked up a volume from the table, and running his eye over its pages, asked its character. His friend Milner replied, "it is one of the best books ever written, let us take it with us and read it on our journey." The advice was taken, and thus William Wilberforce was led to Christ by Doddridge's "Rise

and Progress." But not satisfied with his eminent services as a Christian statesman and philanthropist, Wilberforce wrote his "Practical View." A few months after its publication, a young Cambridge graduate undertook the curacies of Brading and Yaverland in the Isle of Wight. Orthodox and moral, and to a good degree zealous, he was still a stranger to the life and power of the gospel he preached. A friend loaned him Wilberforce's "Practical View." Its effects are best recorded in his own words: "The soul of the reader was penetrated to its utmost recesses. A change was effected in his views of divine truth, as decided as it was influential. He was no longer satisfied with the creed of the speculatist; he felt a conviction of his own state as a guilty, condemned sinner, and under that conviction he sought mercy at the cross of the Saviour." That young curate was Legh Richmond. And to speak of nothing else he did, he wrote "The Dairyman's Daughter," which has carried the words of life into uncounted hamlets and cottages, where the humble and obscure have found the love of Him who especially sends the gospel to such. And thus the pulsations of the pious heart of a British Senator are felt in homes of poverty, ignorance and crime, whose thresholds his foot never

crossed. But this is not all, for this stream of saving knowledge, like that which came forth from Eden, divides itself into many heads and sends life and healing along many channels.

About fourteen years after the publication of the "Practical View," there was a young Scottish clergyman, of vast grasp of mind, and magnificent eloquence of tongue. Nature and art combined to put him forth as a giant—a son of Anak. And he, too, is preaching an unknown Christ. He has the form without the power of godliness. But now the commandment, which is exceeding broad, had come to him. His self-righteousness was slain. Sin revived and he died. But his own words best embody his thoughts. "He attempted, in an agony of soul, to scale the heights of perfection, to quell the remonstrances of a challenging and not yet appeased commandment." But it was "like the laborious ascent of him who, having so wasted his strength that he can do no more, finds that some precipice still remains to be overcome, some mountain brow that scorns his enterprise, and threatens to overwhelm him." His very soul was troubled. He sought rest and found none. But in this time of sore need, God's providence opened before him a little book,

from which he would have turned with loathing and scorn in the day of his intellectual and spiritual pride. That book preached Jesus unto him, and Thomas Chalmers became the spiritual son of William Wilberforce. And it was the "Practical View" that sent forth the great Scotch divine to write, and teach, and preach as he did. Now take in these wonderful facts as fruits of Baxter's labours, and then glance at the far more numerous cases that are unrecorded, except in the book of God's knowledge, and also at those cases which, though parts of the church's history, are of a less illustrious degree, such as that of the Boston merchant, who says, "Doddridge's Rise and Progress was the bar which God threw across my pathway to perdition; and all that I am, and hope to be, I owe to the Divine blessing on that precious book"—words that are echoed by thousands of the best members of the American churches. Sum up all these influences, known and unknown, try to do justice to the mighty result, and tell me the value to the cause of God and the good of man of one good book. What would have been the feelings of Baxter, or Doddridge, if he could have traced the onward course, and the issues of that stream of blessing whose fountains he opened.

James Bruce has left on record his emotions on discovering the source of the Nile. When his guide pointed it out to him, as a hillock of green sod about two hundred yards in the distance, and he remembered that his was the first European eye that had ever rested on it, he lost self-control in the exultant enthusiasm of the moment. But his own affecting words are the only fitting expression of his feelings. "Half undressed as I was by the loss of my sash, and throwing off my shoes, (a necessary preliminary to satisfy the pagan feelings of the people,) I ran down the hill towards the hillock of green sod. The whole side of the hill was thick grown with flowers, the large bulbous roots of which appearing above the ground, and their skins coming off on my treading upon them, occasioned me two very severe falls before I reached the brink of the marsh. I after this came to the altar of green turf, which was apparently the work of art, and I stood in rapture above the principal fountain, which rises in the middle of it. It is easier to guess than to describe the state of my mind at that moment, standing on that spot which had baffled the genius, industry, and inquiry of both ancients and moderns for the course of near three thousand years. Kings had attempted this discovery

at the head of armies, and each expedition was distinguished from the last, only by the difference of numbers which had perished, and agreed alone in the disappointment which had uniformly followed them all. Fame, riches, and honour, had been held out for a series of ages to every individual of those myriads these princes had commanded, without having produced one man capable of gratifying the curiosity of his sovereign, or wiping off this stain on the enterprise and abilities of mankind, or adding this desideratum for the encouragement of geography. Though a mere private Briton, I triumphed here in my own mind over kings and their armies."

And this was a proud achievement for the great Scottish traveller, and well might he glory in his success. But profounder feelings become him who stands by the fountain head of the stream of which I have spoken; and still sublimer awe must swell the bosom of him who consciously unseals its springs, digs out its channels, and starts its never ending flowings. For this is a nobler stream than that. That does come forth from the mysterious and almost inaccessible depths of the desert, spreading its fructifying waves over the great granary of the ancients, and millions are fed by it: and it moves

with the air of a beneficent conqueror, as it passes towers and temples, and places famous in story, to lose itself in the blue waves of the Mediterranean. But this comes forth from a higher and purer source, bears a richer freight of blessings, and never ceases to flow. In this vale of tears its banks are green and blooming with the hopes of immortal life, and antepasts of heaven are plucked from the tree of life which flourishes by its side; and when time shall end, and earthly streams are all dried up, its flowings will go on immortally. Baxter could not have borne a full revelation of all that he had done for God and man, when he had penned the last sentence of the "Call to the Unconverted." It would have been overwhelming as Paul's exaltation to the third heaven.

It is not wonderful then that our noblest preachers have coveted the honour and blessedness of preaching by the press, which has more tongues than were heard at Pentecost. It was natural that Nevins, able and successful as he was in the pulpit, should have for years longed and prayed for the privilege of writing one good tract, and that his soul swelled with gratitude and praise to God, when he found that this grace had been vouchsafed to him.

A still more striking expression of the same truth is found in the recorded words of a man who combined in an eminent degree the power of the pulpit and the press, and whose teachings did more to shape the theology, and form the ministry of the American church, than any man that has ever lived in it. He says, "The man who is enabled to write a truly useful and evangelical book, or even a single tract of first rate excellence, may convey the saving truth of the gospel to a thousand times more persons than the living preacher can ever instruct by his voice. And hundreds of years after the death of the writer, the production of his pen may be but just commencing its career of usefulness, only to be terminated with the end of the world. Those men, therefore, who are blessed with the ability of producing one work of evangelical excellence, may be considered among the most highly favoured of our race, and must enjoy a rich reward hereafter." These words, written by Archibald Alexander, in the ripeness of his judgment, while yet his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated, prepare us to hear him say, "I am so convinced of the efficacy of this mode of diffusing the knowledge of the truth, that if I thought myself capable of writing good tracts, I should be willing

to spend the remainder of my days in that service."

These remarks of this eminent servant of God have peculiar interest, when we learn his own indebtedness to the religious press in the earlier stages of his experience. Soame Jenyns' "Internal Evidences" cleared from his mind all the doubts as to the truth of our holy religion that had gathered there. Flavel's "Method of Grace" awakened him to a sense of his sins in the sight of God, and Jenks on "Justification by Faith" showed him how God can be just, and yet justify the sinner that believeth in Jesus, and thus introduced him to the peace that passeth all understanding. Truly he was a debtor to the religious press, and well did he repay it. For our own Board alone, to say nothing of other agencies, has set in circulation forty millions of pages of his works, and the demand is still increasing.

If these remarks apply to a single book or tract, how much grander the office of controlling the religious literature of a people. And yet this is what our church has essayed to do in the establishment of the Board of Publication. It is manifest from the enactments of the Assembly in organizing this Board, and pointing out its field of labour, that it was designed

to put a choice selection of the religious literature of our own and other ages in close contact with the minds and hearts of our people; that these publications, which it is no boast to say have never been rivalled by any similar attempt, should be found in our Sabbath-schools, in our families, and in our congregational and pastors' libraries, and that thus the thought, feeling, and action of our entire church should be largely and powerfully influenced by this literature which the church was willing to endorse and send forth to the world, as the exponent of doctrines, order, and government.

But it is manifest that the scheme as thus far developed reaches only those who are already within the pale of our schools and churches, and those in whom a taste for the best religious authors had been so far cultivated as that they would seek out and purchase these books. There would then be a large, important, and most needy class of our population, who would be practically unbenefited by its operation. The aggressive character of the church would be left out of view. The vast "outfield" population, so far as our church is concerned, would be left to ignorance and spiritual death. And this destitute class, whose very destitution would make them insensible of their

need of the light of life, and thus prevent their seeking it, has for many reasons special claims on our church.

It is a fact that forces itself on the attention, and which has often been lamented by the lovers of our Zion, that we as a church have not more completely reached and leavened the lower strata of society. There is an actual want of church and ministerial accommodation for the vast masses that are perishing around us in ignorance and sin. We have not room for them if they were to come. But the difficulty is, that they do not come. Look over any of our Presbyterian congregations, in town or country, and you see the well dressed, orderly, and intelligent. The middle and upper classes are well represented. But where are they who crowd the highways, and shelter under the hedges, and spend their time in little else than "fighting the wolf from the door" of humble cottages, alike in the crowded city, and the sparsely settled country. You meet them in your daily walks. They work for you. They beset your doors with all a beggar's importunity, asking for work and bread. While you minister to their temporal wants, do you give them the bread of life as well? Is the gospel preached to them through your agency? I grieve to

say that they are not found in your churches. Ministerial visitation to the amount needed is physically impossible. Our elders and deacons are generally business men, and therefore find great difficulty in reaching this wide-spread legion of the ignorant and untended; and thus the sad fact is that their cases are not met.

We cannot say that we are doing our duty to this intellectually and spiritually destitute class, and which for the very darkness that is in them is rapidly swelling what is well called the dangerous class of our population. I am aware that a part of this deficiency is commonly attributed to our pew system, that attendance on our ministrations is rendered too costly. But it is a noteworthy fact, that where special and most generous efforts have been made to remove this obstruction, and the price of sittings has been made little more than nominal, the proportions of the several classes have not been very materially changed. Indeed the same general condition of things in this respect remains true in our country and village churches, where the pew system is unknown, and the sittings are entirely free.

It seems to be true, therefore, that the difficulty

lies deeper than a mere question of expense, and is to be found in a want of taste among the uneducated for our ministrations, and that the way to remove the difficulty is to elevate those we seek to reach in intelligence. And where can we find better mental and spiritual stimulants than are afforded by the publications of our Board? And by what agency can we reach those at whom we aim but by a well organized and vigorously prosecuted system of colportage—scattering these seeds of life by all waters, and carrying to the homes of the people those doctrines and discussions that are calculated to bring them to our churches, and make them intelligent and profited hearers of our ministry.

We cannot afford to give up the poor. The preaching the gospel to those in whose rank of life our Redeemer was born, and with whom he lived, and from whom he took the great mass of his disciples and apostles, cannot be foregone by any church which wishes to preserve the succession of the apostolic spirit. And they may be reached. Send forth the humble, earnest colporteur into the valleys and prairies. Let the "man in the blouse" forerun the ordained minister of Christ. Our church has done

well, therefore, in adding the Colportage work to that of the publishing department of this Board.

If these observations are true, then with our pure faith, educated ministry, and scriptural order, aided by the auxiliaries afforded by this Board, our Church goes forth fully equipped for the work of preaching the gospel of salvation to the world.

THE END.