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The Good Steward.

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S E R M O N,

Preached at BROAD-MEAD, BRISTOL,

BEFORE THE

EDUCATION SOCIETY,

AUGUST 14, 1776.

And published at their Request.

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By JAMES NEWTON.

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*Quem te Deus esse  
Fuffit: et humana qua parte locatus es in re.* PERSIUS.

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The Good Steward.

A

S E R M O N, &c.

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LUKE xvi. 2.

*Give an account of thy Stewardship.*

**A**T these annual meetings, for the laudable purposes of encouraging a rising ministry, you have been repeatedly addressed—The qualifications of an Able Minister have been set before you—Serious Advice has been given to Students and young Ministers—The important interests and blessings of the kingdom of God were presented to your view at our last meeting. These addresses were designed to animate you in the noble cause in which you are engaged, as well as to excite others to join with you in it. For the same valuable purpose also have I chosen this text; in which our character is set before us in a point of light; in which I hope it may be useful to take a view of it at this time.

The words, that are to be the subject of this discourse, are in a parable, which some have looked upon as very obscure, and which others have greatly abused. Julian the apostate, together with some of the Heathen philosophers, took an occasion from this parable to reproach the Christian religion, objecting, that acts of unrighteousness and injustice were encouraged and commended by the author of it.

But this objection is a calumny founded on malice or ignorance: for, as a good expositor well observes, it is no more necessary that all the actions related in a parable be honest and good, than that all the parts of it be true, as matters of fact. For parables are not, like the records of history, designed to inform us of matters of fact, but to point out some useful lesson of instruction by a fictitious representation. Nor are we to consider every part of a parable as pointing out to us some correspondent duty: but should attend to the general design of it.

This parable presents to our view a person of large property: the management of which is intrusted to the care and fidelity of a steward: which steward is accused of infidelity in his station. In consequence of which he is ordered to give up his accounts, and threatened with a dismissal from his office. This unjust steward, to make provision for his future subsistence, goes to several debtors, treacherously alters their account with his master, and reduces their debt considerably.

The conduct of this steward is commended by his master as artful and well designed to promote his own interest, for which he is solicitously concerned.

And

And it is improved by our Lord, who must be the best expositor of the parable, to recommend industry to his disciples, and a solicitous concern about the salvation of their souls. Hence, whilst the injustice and hypocrisy of the Scribes and Pharisees are exposed, in the character of the unjust steward, who manifests a solicitous care for the things of this world, there is also recommended to us a superior regard to those things which relate to our salvation; diligence in the various duties of religion, and such an improvement of what we have in this world, as may be subservient to our best interests. See ver. 9. *Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when ye fail they may receive you into everlasting habitations.\**

But without any further attention to my text in its connection with the parable, I shall, as suggested to us in it, observe,

I. That we are all stewards.

II. Point out our duty in this office, And

III. Urge an attention to it from the consideration, that we must give an account.

Let

\* As some think, *δεξωνται υμας* may be impersonal here, and then might be rendered, You may be received. Agreeably to which we read, Luke vi. 38. *δωσασιν εις τον κολπον υμων.* Shall be given into your bosom. And chap. xii. 20. *την ψυχην σε απαιτησιν.* Thy soul shall be required.

See *Pool's Synopsis Criticorum.* Also *Dr. Whitby.*

Let us remember then, as intimated in the text,

I. That we are all stewards.

A steward is, you know, one that is intrusted with the management of what belongs to another. His stewardship is that with which he is intrusted. Under this character we read of the ministers of the gospel, 1 Cor. iv. 1. *Let a man so account of us, as ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.* So also Tit. i. 7. *A bishop must be blameless as the steward of God.* In the ministerial office we are intrusted with the preaching of the gospel, the administration of the ordinances of it, and the pastoral care of souls. An high office; an important trust. For the proper execution of which are required *knowledge and prudence; industry and fidelity.* Without the two former we are unequal to the trust: without the two latter we shall abuse it. In a Christian minister there should be united *gifts and grace.* For if a man have not the former he is more likely to be useful in a private than in a public station; destitute of the latter he may be injurious to the interests of religion, if raised to a public office in the church; and fall under the same censure with the unjust steward in the parable.

But though ministers are called stewards; and in this office their employment might be enlarged on, together with the various duties to which they are called, I shall not confine myself to this contracted view of the subject, but consider it as extending to all, in the various stations we fill in life; in which

we



we may be considered as stewards of our *possessions*—our *abilities*—our *time*.

1. We are stewards of what we possess in the world.

Would to God that the observation I have now made were impressed, deeply impressed, on the minds of all men. For we are too ready to consider ourselves as *lords*, when we are in fact only *stewards* of what we possess. Our stewardship indeed is different. Some are intrusted with large estates, others with riches, but not so abundant; whilst many seem to be in circumstances rather straitned than extended beyond their necessities. Yet there are but few of us, into whose hands there has not been put more of the things of this world than what may be called *absolutely necessary* for our subsistence: for as a celebrated poet observes,

“Man’s blest with little, were his judgment true,  
Nature is frugal, and her wants are few.”

To the different possessions of this world’s goods with which we are intrusted, may be applied, if it be not the precise meaning of what we read, Matt. xxv. 15. “Unto one he gave FIVE talents, to another TWO; to another ONE.” And when we take a view of men in their different circumstances in this world, we may see the wisdom of Providence in the distinction that is made between one man and another: for valuable purposes are thereby answered to society in general. If all were in equal circumstances, many inconveniences would arise from such an equality; to which might be applied the reasoning of St. Paul,

1 Cor.



1 Cor. xii. 17. *If the whole were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?*—Agreeably to which method of reasoning might we say, If in society all were masters, where would there be servants? If all were servants, where were the masters? Both are necessary in our connections in life, and both are reciprocally dependent on each other. Without which dependence it is easy to conceive what difficulties would arise, both in cultivating the land, and conducting the trade of a nation.

But the servant, being dependent on the master for the means of subsistence, is thereby induced to labor, and that with cheerfulness, for it is sweetened with the hope of a reward. The master, on the other hand, is induced to communicate to the servant a part of what he possesses, in consideration of the advantages he receives from his service. And thus we see one man linked to another in society by this distinction of circumstances, as by a bond which cannot be broken.

But not to dwell on this subject; whatever be our substance, we are, as suggested in my text, not sovereign lords but stewards of it; which it is our duty to improve for the grand purpose of this trust under the great Lord of society. If any think that the abundance they have is put into their hands only to please their eyes with beholding heaps of gold in a coffer, or surveying extensive tracts of land with stately edifices erected on it, they are greatly mistaken. For it is put into their possession by the great Lord of the universe, as stewards under him, to be  
improved

improved for the good of society. And be it remembered, that he can easily take what we have from us, and thus deprive us of this part of our stewardship; from which some are dismissed, as a reproof in his providence, for negligence or infidelity in the use of it. And if we are but as stewards of what we possess in life, let us then consider what use we are to make of our substance, let us be excited from this view of our character to improve it for the good of society, and the glory of God: remembering that we must give an account.

2. We are likewise stewards of our different abilities.

As there is a great difference in the circumstances of men in life, so also in their capacities and abilities. Superior wisdom and knowledge are not always found with those, who are indulged with the greatest affluence. The wise king of Israel said, as recorded, Eccl. ix. 11. "I returned and saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong; nor yet bread to the wise; nor yet riches to men of understanding." If we conclude that a man, who has a larger estate than his neighbour, is therefore superior to him in understanding, we shall be frequently mistaken: for the same observation may be now made which stands on record, Prov. xxviii. 11. "The rich man is wise in his own conceit; but the poor that hath understanding searcheth him out." A rich man may be ready to conclude, that he as much excels the poor in wisdom as in riches. And in this exalted opinion of himself, he is sometimes flattered by those who are

**B** dependent

dependent on him : but such fulsome adulations are not to be depended on; for it is often seen that the poor man bows down to the rich, and with deceitful flattery celebrates his superior wisdom, when he secretly laughs at his folly and despises his ignorance.

Different abilities are however independent on different possessions. A man is not to be looked on as superior to his neighbour in his mental capacities, because he has a larger estate: nor on the other hand is he, who has but a small estate, or who is destitute of any property, to be considered as superior to him, who abounds in riches. The different abilities which God has given to us are as different stewardships, with which we are intrusted; for our improvement of which, we must certainly give an account.

Here may we take a view of those who are in the office of ministers of the gospel; with whom there is a diversity of gifts. Some have greater natural abilities than others. Some have greater acquired abilities than others. Which difference is manifest in the writings, both of the prophets, and apostles of Christ. Compare the writings of the prophet Isaiah who had a liberal education, and was brought up in the court, with those of Amos, who was an herdsman of Tekoa, and you will see a manifest difference in their style. The sublimity and loftiness of the former is admirable; while the plainness of the latter may nevertheless be as useful. Thus likewise, if we compare the writings of Paul with those of John: we behold a manifest difference in their style. From whence it may be concluded, that the extraordinary gifts of the spirit were conveyed without any respect

to the natural or acquired abilities of men, and that this distinction, as to their abilities, was apparent even when they were possessed with supernatural gifts.

Agreeably to this we see a diversity in the abilities of ministers. Some are more suited in their method of preaching to alarm the stupid conscience and convert sinners to Christ: whilst others have abilities more adapted to instruct the understanding, to build up those who believe and confirm them in the faith. In the vineyard of our Lord, in which we are all, as ministers, laborers, some are more immediately employed in planting; others in watering. Which observation seems to be confirmed, by what is recorded, 1 Cor. iii. 6. "I have planted, Apollos watered." But the different gifts and abilities, with which ministers are possessed, are for the use of the church. In the improvement of which, we are stewards, and must give an account.

The same observation may be made on the different abilities of Christians in private life. Some have larger capacities than others. And in some instances superior to those on whose ministry they attend. But however different their capacities for usefulness, there are few who may not in some way or other be possessed of abilities that may be useful. And be it remembered, that of these abilities we are stewards: in the use of which, diligence and fidelity are required of us, as stewards that must give an account. I add

3. We are moreover stewards of the time we enjoy.

Time is a treasure put into our hands, of which we must give an account.

“ O time ! than gold more sacred ; more a load  
Than lead to fools ; and fools reputed wise.  
What moment granted man without account ?  
And what its worth, ask death-beds, they can tell.\*”

Shall we consider time ; the time of life, the opportunities of doing and receiving good, as a stewardship in which we are placed ? Let us then consider what is our character, and what the duty of stewards. A servant is accountable to his master for the manner in which he spends his time. And we must give an account of the time with which we are intrusted. An argument this for diligence in the improvement of it ; and more especially may this be urged when we consider that this stewardship may soon be taken from us. “ My times are in thy hands,” said the psalmist.† The time for doing and receiving good|| is appointed by God. There is a time for labor ; and whilst this continues, we should be active and diligent, we should improve every opportunity that is put into our hands. For the time of action is but short, should our lives be extended even to three-score years and ten. Deduct from which the years of infancy, childhood, and youth on one hand, and the years of infirmity, sickness, and pain on the other ;

\* Dr. YOUNG.

† Psal. xxxi. 15.

|| Stat sua cuique dies, breve et irreparabile tempus  
Omnibus est Vitæ ; —————

VIRGIL.



other: how contracted the space that is intrusted to us for usefulness to others! God grant that we may be so active and diligent in this part of our stewardship, that we may be ready to give up an account of it with joy.

This leads me to point out as proposed

## II. Our duty in this office of stewards:

A steward is a servant, and his duty therefore is

1. To receive and follow the instructions of his master. Tho' he be intrusted with the care of property, yet is he not at liberty to follow his own inclinations, without any regard to the directions of him by whom he is intrusted with it. The will of his Lord is to be the rule of his conduct. Hence it is said, Luke xii. 47. "The servant which knew his Lord's will, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes." Of Abraham's steward Eleazar, it is recorded to his honor, that he implicitly followed the instructions of his master.

The will of our Lord and master, is to be seen in the scriptures: with which it is our duty to be conversant and to be directed by them.—Here let us see what directions are given to us in the improvement of what we possess. Luke xix. 13. "Occupy till I come." Our substance is to be improved to the honor of our master: And it is the duty of all of us, whether possessed of little or much, to manage it so, as to answer the purposes in society, for which we were intrusted with it. And the same may be said with respect to our abilities and our time; in  
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the improvement of which we are to observe and follow the instructions of our Lord: for if we disregard these we shall act the part, and fall under the censure, of the unjust steward.

2. It is the duty of stewards to be active and diligent.

“Thou wicked and slothful servant,” said the Lord to him, who neglected the improvement of one talent with which he was intrusted. As stewards diligence is incumbent on us in the improvement of the substance with which we are intrusted, the abilities we have and the time we enjoy. And when we consider the nature and extent of this stewardship, we shall find no time for idleness. The departments in which we are, demand our attention, and call for industry. Man, even in a state of innocence, appears not to have been brought into this world to be indolent: for in the garden of Eden work was appointed for him to do. And if we survey mankind now in the different stations in which they are fixed, even from the King on the throne to the humble peasant, we shall see there are duties peculiar to their situation, in which diligence is required. And I may say there is no station in life, in which industry is more needful than in the ministerial office. In which laborious study, diligent reading, and public exercises call for the exertion of all the powers. Hence is it represented by painful and laborious exercises, such as cultivating the land--digging--plowing--sowing—running—fighting.—And much study, it is well known to those who are diligent in it, is indeed a weariness to the flesh, as well as to the spirits.



rits. They therefore, if any there be, who enter into the office of the ministry, with a view to an indolent life, seem to be very ignorant of the nature and duties of this work: for of all men ministers are called to industry. Nor they alone; for remember, as stewards, industry is incumbent on us all. Let us then consider the several departments in which we are placed, let us survey our stewardship, let us be active and diligent in the duties of it.

3. Stewards should moreover be faithful.

It is required in stewards that they be found faithful. The steward of which we read in the parable is called an unjust steward: he was unfaithful to the trust reposed in him: a dishonorable character this. God grant it may not be the descriptive character of any here.

A faithful steward will be diligent in his office, and consider that with which he is intrusted as his own, with respect to the care that he is to exercise over it. The interest of a master is as dear to a faithful servant as his own. He will not therefore neglect his master's business—he will not be an eye-servant—he will not embezzle the property with which he is intrusted; much less will he convert it to his own private use, and thus defraud his master.

We may learn a useful lesson from this, and see what is our duty in the character we have been considering. And let us remember the importance of fidelity in this stewardship: which extends to our substance—our abilities, and our time.

The honor of our Lord is connected with a faithful discharge of the duties of this trust—the good of  
our

our fellow-creatures is interwoven with it : for they who are faithful stewards under God, are the best servants and most dutiful children ; they are the best masters, and the most useful servants : in one word, they are the best members of civil society. And to this I might add, they enjoy the greatest happiness in their own minds. For in keeping God's commandments there is great reward†. Fidelity is not without its reward in this life : and it shall meet with the approbation of our Lord in the life that is to come. The importance of the faithful discharge of the duties of this trust might be set before you, under a variety of particulars, beside what I have here mentioned—but I will now by way of improvement,

III. Urge an attention to our duty from the consideration that we must give an account.

God grant the thought of this may be deeply impressed on our minds, and have its proper influence on the whole of our conduct in life.

A steward, as we have observed, is a servant intrusted with what is not his own property, and he is therefore accountable to him from whom he receives this trust. In some instances stewards amongst men have eluded an examination of their accounts, by absconding from their master : or they have concealed their infidelity by giving in fallacious accounts. But the great God is our master, before whom our accounts are to be audited ; and we cannot evade an  
examination

† Psal. xix, 11.

examination by fleeing from his presence, Psa. cxxxix. 7.—12. “ Whether shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea. Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand uphold me. If I say, surely the darkness shall cover me: even the night shall be light about me. Yea the darkness hideth not from thee: but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee.” Nor can we deceive him by any fallacious account. For as we read, 1 Chro. xxviii. 9.—“ The Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts.” Our conduct therefore will most assuredly be examined by our Lord.

We are assured that we must all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ\*: when we must give an account of the things done in the body, whether they be good or bad—an account will be taken of our words as well as deeds. And we must then give an account of this stewardship which I have been considering.

We must, remember, give an account of the manner in which we employed the substance put into our hands: for that is not our own, to be hoarded up in coffers, or wasted in luxury, as we may please, but to be employed for the good of others and the glory of God. If so, what account will the covetous hard hearted miser give? What account will be given by

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\* Rom. xiv. 10, 12.

the extravagant spend-thrift, who wastes his substance in the riot of luxury and debauchery ?

An account must be given of the manner in which our abilities, natural and acquired, have been improved.

What account then will be given by him, who instead of improving his abilities for the good of others, has abused them to the worst of purposes, imposing on the ignorant, corrupting the minds of his neighbours, opposing the gospel of Christ, and ridiculing things the most sacred and important ? And What account shall we give, if we neglect the improvement of the abilities we have to the end for which they were given to us ?

We must give an account of our time. What account will be rendered by him who spends his time in indolence, neglecting the duties of life and religion ? What the account that must be given by him, who has abused his time in acts of fraud, violence and injustice to others ? What account will be given by him who, instead of attending on the means of grace, has despised all instruction and wasted his days in the worst of pursuits ?

Dreadful this day of account to the unjust steward, whether intrusted with little or much of the property of his Lord. He may well tremble at the prospect of it : for severe punishment awaits him : the vengeance of God.

Here let us take a view of an unjust steward summoned to give up his accounts before his Lord. Conscious to himself of injustice in his office, and infidelity to the trust reposed in him, he is terrified

at

at the thoughts of giving in his accounts: for he knows that his infidelity and wickedness will be exposed, and he justly fears the resentment of his Master. But he must give an account: the fatal day arrives, his conduct is examined, and the more accurately examined the more flagrant the instances of his infidelity. See the account of the manner in which he employed the substance committed to him. It was hoarded up in coffers—part of it wasted on himself in unlawful indulgence—his bowels shut against the cries of the poor—he took an advantage of their distress—his house was never opened to shelter them from cold, nor his table spread to relieve them in their wants;—the interest of religion has been neglected: and every application made to him to encourage it been refused: no good has been done to any with his substance.

And as to his abilities, they have been abused to the worst of purposes; and his time has been spent in indolence and excess of riot. How shocking this account, and how dreadful the resentment of his Lord! Behold he is dismissed from his office, he is clothed with shame. He is given up to punishment, to which there is no end.

From this unjust steward let us now turn our eyes to the faithful servant giving up his accounts. He receives a summons to appear before his Lord, and deliver up his accounts. What effect has this on his mind? He is calm and easy. "Just it is that my Lord should have an account of my diligence and fidelity. "Though in many things I am deficient, yet I know that my Lord is gracious, and I can appeal to him

“ for my sincerity ; conscious to myself that his glory  
 “ has been the object of my pursuit, his interest dearer  
 “ to me than my own.”

See the account he gives of the substance intrusted to him. Some of it was spent for the relief of the poor, the widow and fatherless—some has been expended in the promotion of the interest of religion, and in acts of beneficence, not only to the poor in general, but especially to those of the household of faith.—He has been diligent in the improvement of his abilities : instruction has dropped from his lips, and he has served the best interests of his fellow-creatures. His time has been spent, part of it in the duties of life—part of it selected for the exercises of religious worship, and part of it in visiting the widow and the distressed : in short he has not abused it in unlawful indulgences to himself, but improved it to the good of others. Thus under the influence of divine grace has he lived : and though the account is approved by his Lord, who knew his fidelity, yet is he ready to confess that he is unprofitable ; he claims no merit. What is consequent on this account ? His Lord says to him, “ Well done good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”

What is our character ? We are stewards. But are we faithful stewards ? Let the slothful and wicked servant take warning from the example of the unjust steward. Let the faithful servant take encouragement : for he will give up an account to a gracious Master, who will take notice of his good intentions, and acknowledge his faithfulness in his service : which shall be rewarded in the riches of his grace.

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As a farther improvement of this subject suitable to the present occasion I will address myself to those who are members of this society. Are you stewards of the substance you possess—of the abilities you are endowed with—and of the time you enjoy? And of this stewardship must you give an account? Give me leave then to recommend to the continuance of your patronage the noble cause, in the support of which you are united and assembled this day. It is, remember, the cause of Christ. And were I to say no more than this, it would surely be sufficient to engage the attention of every faithful steward.

This society is formed professedly to promote the interest of Christ, and that more immediately amongst protestant dissenters, especially of the Baptist denomination. We have the privilege to live under a government that grants a toleration, though no emoluments, to those who are engaged in the ministry amongst us. But we are, nevertheless, thankful that they give us liberty to exert ourselves in the service of Christ, in a way, which we apprehend to be most consistent with the directions given us in the New Testament. And whilst Christians of other denominations are exerting themselves to promote the cause of Christ in their particular departments, we would not willingly be negligent in ours. The dissenting interest indeed, as intimately connected with civil liberty, and having ever been friendly to the liberties of this nation, appears to me peculiarly entitled to the encouragement of all who would wish to support free inquiry into truth, and the simplicity of the gospel both in doctrines and modes of worship. And the  
Christian



Christian of truly liberal sentiments, whether churchman or dissenter, will rejoice to have the knowledge of Christ spread in the world, amongst all sects and parties. It is with pleasure therefore I take this opportunity of observing that the institution we are now met to promote, has not been thought unworthy the patronage of some generous members of the church of England, as well as of different denominations amongst protestant dissenters.

The particular design of this society is to assist young men in the pursuit of useful knowledge in their studies preparatory to the ministry: as also to give them encouragement, when first called out to public service. A laudable and useful design this. For surely it must be confessed, that a knowledge of language, and various other kinds of science may be useful to those who are to be public teachers: for they are to explain the word of God, and shew the meaning of many places, in which are allusions to customs, with which people in general are not supposed to be acquainted. And one would think that no man could be so ignorant, as to condemn such an institution as this, and plead for IGNORANCE as a recommendation of a public teacher. If Timothy was exhorted to apply himself with diligence to reading and study in private, in order to the performance of the more public duties of a minister with greater advantage to others: surely an institution, by which young ministers are encouraged and assisted in studying the scriptures, must be laudable and deserving our attention.

And as this design is laudable, so it is useful. This society, in its endeavors to serve the churches of  
Christ,

Christ, has (considering the few years of its establishment) been very successful. You know some, you have heard of others, who, assisted by you in their studies, have gone out to preach the gospel with acceptance and success. Some of them are fixed as pastors in churches, and so fill up that office, as to afford a pleasing hope of continued usefulness. An encouragement, my brethren, to proceed in this laudable design, and continue to support it. And this you will do, I am well persuaded, from the noble principles, love to God, and love to men. So acting you are good stewards of the substance with which you are intrusted. Would to God that some, who, instead of uniting with you in this noble design, rather discourage it, were to be excited by your example to assist us in this service of the churches.

Do they say that this is not the cause of religion—that it is inconsistent with the simplicity of the gospel—that God stands in no need of such endeavors of yours? We know that God can without any means work upon the hearts of men, and convert them to the knowledge of Christ. He stands in no need of us or of our services to answer his own purposes. But he is pleased to appoint the preaching of the gospel, as the means of revealing Christ, the conversion of men to him, and the edification of the church, And whilst God is pleased to work by such means, surely it is our duty to be diligent in the use of them.

As in the apostolic age of the church, so could God now inspire men with the gift of tongues, and endow them with extraordinary abilities: but he does not in this way convey gifts to ministers now: nor are we

to expect an increase of knowledge without the use of means, any more than that a child should read the New Testament without learning letters.

It would be taking up too much of your time, were I to enlarge in refuting the objections made by some, that too much stress is laid on these acquirements, and the operations of the Holy Spirit neglected. This is a mere calumny. For we lay no more stress on these acquirements than ought to be laid on them: we consider them *only* as means which it is our duty to use. We think as highly of the operations and assistance of the Spirit, as those who oppose our endeavors in this institution, in the support of which your dependence is on the blessing of God. To whom in the use of every mean of instruction would we look up for his blessing: on which depends the success of all our attempts to spread the knowledge of our blessed Redeemer in the world.

Persuaded I am, brethren, that when you shall in the near views of being called to give up an account of your stewardship to your great Lord and Master, reflect on what you have done in this good cause, the reflection will not be like that of an unjust steward, conscious of having embezzled or neglected to improve the substance of his Lord intrusted to his care. And though you renounce all dependence for your acceptance in the sight of God on any works of yours, relying alone on the righteousness and grace of Christ, (and God forbid that I should encourage any to hope but on this foundation,) yet the testimony of a good conscience, that you have endeavored to serve the interest of Christ, will be an ample reward of all your services.

Let us for a few moments anticipate the day of account: and suppose ourselves before our Lord. How does this institution appear to us? How does what we have done to promote the knowledge of Christ and the spreading of his gospel appear to us? Does it pain us with the thought that it will expose us to shame in the presence of our Lord? No surely, unless it be that we have done so little and have been so deficient. God grant that we may be faithful stewards, and meet with the approbation of our Lord when we shall give up an account of our stewardship.

I cannot conclude this discourse without saying a few words to those students who are here present, especially those who are encouraged by this society. My young friends, you have been reminded that we are all stewards, and must give an account. You are, remember, stewards intrusted in providence by the generosity of this society with the means of acquiring useful knowledge, and the improvement of your minds by reading and study. Diligence and fidelity are you know essential characteristics of a faithful steward. Suffer me then to press on you diligence in improving the opportunity with which you are intrusted. The youthful part of life is the time to lay in stores of knowledge. It is as a seed time which must succeed the harvest: and though this be a time of labor, yet is that labor sweetned with the hope of the fruits of it. As the husbandman cultivates the field and is assiduous in preparing it for a plentiful harvest; so, if you expect the advantages of various  
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knowledge, you must be diligent in the use of the means appointed for that purpose.

Your own advantage is connected with industry, and not only your own but the good of others; to whom, under the blessing of providence, you may be more extensively useful. Nor indeed without a diligent application to reading and study can you be faithful stewards, either to those by whose favor you are furnished with the means of improvement, or to God, in whose kind providence you are intrusted with these advantages. He is the great Lord and Master of us all, and to Him we must give an account of our stewardship.

In the use of these means of instruction, forget not to acknowledge the Lord: seek in fervent prayer his blessing on all your studies; and may they be directed to his glory. Be not elated with any improvement you make in literature, nor place your dependence on it for success in the ministry. For that depends on God: from whom is our sufficiency; a dependence on whose grace and diligence in study, are quite consistent with each other; and therefore are not to be separated.

A suitable deportment in your station has been pertinently recommended to you on a former occasion. Give me leave then to refer you to that good advice and press on you a serious attention to it.

My young friends, the cause in which you are engaged is noble and interesting to men. The churches to which you belong have fixed their eyes  
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upon you, as having abilities promising usefulness in a public station in the church: having first recommended you to the Lord for his blessing, they have, in compliance with your own desires, recommended you to this society for their patronage. They, considering themselves as stewards of the substance they possess, gladly embrace the opportunity of testifying their readiness to concur with the churches to which you are related in giving you assistance. Their motives are laudable, and will meet with the approbation of their Lord, whatever be the event. Their hopes, I trust, will not be disappointed by your negligence or unfaithfulness: but be abundantly answered in your industry, your improvement in knowledge and grace, and your usefulness in the church of Christ.

It is the cause of Christ, remember, in which they with you are engaged. To excite you to activity and diligence in which, I might use many arguments: but I am persuaded your character as stewards will be attended to by you. Are you intrusted with more than others? Yes, with much more than many in the Christian church. Much more then is required of you. Shall I remind you of the interest of precious souls? To be employed in serving which is an important trust: to be the instruments of serving which is an honor. For they that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever. Labor to be useful and to shine as lights in the world: not merely as lights in the literary world, though that is a laudable ambition, but as lights in the Christian world.

world. May you be as stars in the hands of Christ, and give light to those around you, in your doctrine, in your life, and in a shining example of every Christian virtue.

In the office of ministers in the church of Christ we are, remember, stewards; stewards of the mysteries of God: in which faithfulness is required. You have, I am persuaded, considered, seriously considered, before this time, the nature and importance of this trust. And may you ever be sensible of it. For the deeper and more lively your sense of this, the greater will be your diligence in study, and the more fervent your application to the throne of grace for assistance. May you ever be impressed with a sense of the importance of faithfulness in this office. Be ye faithful to your great Master in declaring the whole counsel of God: be ye faithful in warning, reproving and rebuking obstinate sinners: be ye faithful in exhorting, encouraging and comforting the believer. Be ye diligent and active in all the duties of the Christian ministry, that so you may give up an account of this stewardship with joy.

Look forward, my young friends, to that day, when you and I must give an account of our stewardship. Let this prospect animate us to diligence in the various departments in which we are placed by our Lord. He is gracious, and though when we have done all we can to serve the interests of souls, if our labors be crowned with success, we must say that we are to him unprofitable servants—or if our endeavors be not so successful as we could wish, yet being faith-  
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ful we shall meet with his approbation, when we give an account of this stewardship. Then may you with me have the pleasure of hearing from the lips of our blessed Master, Well done good and faithful servants, enter ye into the joy of your Lord.

To conclude. Let us all remember that we are stewards in the different stations in which we are placed—of our different possessions of the things of this world—our different abilities natural and acquired—and also of our time. And let us ever remember that we must give an account, that our conduct in these different stations, that the purposes to which we have employed our substance, the use of our abilities, and how we have spent our time, will be examined.

Let us now take a retrospect of our past conduct; let us examine into our accounts and see how they stand: for we know not how soon we may be called to deliver them up to our Lord.

May we be excited to greater activity in our stations. And let us think of the pleasure that will attend an account of this stewardship if approved by our Lord. O the ecstasy of joy to hear him pronounce, Well done good and faithful servants! Let this fire our souls with an holy zeal. Let us be industrious and laborious: for we serve a kind and gracious Master. He will reward his faithful servants, not as a debt which they can claim: but in a way of rich and abundant grace. For by grace alone are we saved. And has the grace of God been displayed towards us in calling us out of our native darkness into marvellous light?

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light? Have we been led to Christ for pardon and received the forgiveness of our sins? Are we made partakers of his grace, and have we a good hope of eternal life? Let this grace bind us to his service, and to his glory be devoted our substance, our abilities, our time, and all we enjoy. Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord when he cometh shall find so doing!

THE END.

