

Sum

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"The Lord God is a Sun and Shield."

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A Pious and Enlightened Ministry.

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[Continued.]

Thus it appears that cultivated talent and learning, as well as deep piety, have been associated with every important moral revolution, under both the Jewish and Christian dispensations. When learning declined, religion degenerated. When learning had vanished, religion was nearly extinct. When letters revived, religion again flourished and assumed a purer form. From this fact, we deduce an argument for a ministry of native talent, cultivated intellect, and elevated character. There is as much scope for effort, as much demand for energy, for skill, for comprehensiveness of plan, and boldness of action now, as at any former period of the church. The great principles upon which the Divine Sovereignty has always acted, are still in operation, and will continue to remain in operation through successive ages to come. And that ministry which would be useful and successful, must be conformed to the Divine plan of operation. If the Providence of God has glorious objects to be achieved, and the gospel ministry be its chief instrumentality, it will still demand a ministry of intellectual strength, of moral courage, of rich resources, as well as of personal piety.

The importance of an able ministry may be further argued from the express provision God has made for training and supporting it. Under the Jewish economy, various provisions were made, designed to secure eminent qualifications in the sacred office. There were nearly fifty schools established, for the express purpose of educating those designed for the priestly office. None were allowed to enter the priesthood till thirty years of age. Large funds were appropriated and set apart for sustaining men, both in their

preparation and actual service; funds so ample and so abundant, as to take away all temptation to deviate from all appropriate study and labor. And none were expected to entangle themselves in the affairs of this life, either before or after entering the sacred office. These wise and salutary provisions proved a most effectual bulwark and safeguard to the Jewish religion; and, especially, to the preservation, in their original purity, both of the law and the prophets.

The spirit of these arrangements was transferred to the Christian dispensation. The twelve Apostles, as has been already observed, had the very best of instruction and training, before they were authorized to preach the gospel. They were under the direction and tuition of the great Teacher himself, with little interruption, during his ministry of three years. When he sent them forth on special messages to different parts of Judea, he forbade them taking either bread or money, or even two coats a piece; but instructed them to rely entirely on others for the means of support. He also conferred upon them miraculous powers. After his crucifixion and resurrection from the dead, he bestowed upon them still higher gifts, larger measures of the Spirit, and the power of speaking in different tongues; gifts, all designed and adapted to make able ministers of the New Testament. Thus qualified with both gifts and graces, they assailed the powers of darkness with astonishing and surprising success. The word of God, as proclaimed by them, had free course and was glorified. How efficacious and resistless was the majesty of truth from their lips!

But the personal example and instructions of Christ are now withdrawn. The power of miracles, the gift of tongues, and the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit, have ceased. And what does this provi-