

THE POWER OF THE PULPIT

while his gifts promote their usefulness, they do not ensnare their souls.

We are no believers in an unsocial Christianity, nor do we desire to see its ministers unsocial and cheerless. This might be in keeping with the dark ages of Rome, but it has no alliance with the cheered spirit of the Gospel. Cheerlessness is not piety; gloom and depression are not piety. They are precisely that artful counterfeit of piety which the devil imposes upon many a minister of the Gospel, for the purpose of blasting those fruits of the Spirit, which are 'not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost'. There is a worldly joy, a joy that is found only in the world and from the world; but it is 'like the crackling of thorns under a pot'. But there is too a 'joy of the Lord', which is the strength of God's ministers, as well as the strength of his people; it is joy in God, and joy from God, through Jesus Christ. Some of the best, and most devoted, and most successful ministers I have ever known, have been distinguished for their attractive cheerfulness.

There are not wanting those who impugn the character of the Christian ministry, because they do not carry the *solemnity* of the pulpit into all the scenes of social life. Many indeed are the scenes of social life where the solemnity of the pulpit is called for; nor in any of them are the dignity and proprieties of the ministerial character unfitting. But as well might secular time be transformed into the Sabbath, and the busy scenes of the world into the formal services of the sanctuary, as the emotions of the pulpit pervade the uniform intercourse of a minister, either with the people of God, or the men of the world. Levity and worldliness are sufficiently out of place in him who is an ambassador of God to guilty men; but affected solemnity is even worse. Ministers there are who are so solemn that you never see a smile, or a pleasant expression upon their countenances; they are absolutely *fearful*. There is no piety in this. Were an angel from heaven to dwell with men, his spirit and example would be perpetual rebuke to such ministers. Christianity, though of divine origin, is not the religion of angels; it is ingrafted on the human nature. Angels would delight to be its preachers; but the treasure is committed to men; the whole arrangement is adapted to what is human; and while its great object is to purify and elevate, it is no part of its design to terrify. It is not a sort of personified apathy, nor is it some ghostly messenger that lives only among the tombs; it moves among men as the

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The Example of Ministers

messenger of heaven's tenderest mercy; and though wherever it goes, it rebukes iniquity, its footsteps are radiant with light and love. It multiplies the joys of men, and only admonishes them that they may not be sinful joys.

'Wisdom is justified of her children.' John the Baptist was accused of unsocial severity even to madness; while Jesus Christ himself was called a glutton and a wine-bibber. Let ministers, in their intercourse with the world, have a conscience void of offence. They are human; nor is there any generosity in denying them the relief of those occasional relaxations from toil, amid the interchanges of cheered thought and chastened feeling, which the better fit them for their appropriate work. We need not fear the influence of such men, but rather stand in fear of those who slander them, and whose severer piety expresses itself most spontaneously in the dark jealousies of a suspicious mind. Who would not prefer to stand in the place of Robert Hall, than in the place of some of his fastidious accusers? Much as the pulpit was indebted to the intellectual superiority of this wonderful man, it was not less indebted to his moral superiority. He was, by the universal consent of the devout and godly, himself an eminently devout and godly man. He had his faults. He was censorious, and sometimes abusive; he was occasionally so, even to excess, and witty and sarcastic almost beyond endurance.*

But we should do great injustice to ourselves and our subject, were these animadversions all we have to say on the subject of ministerial example. While we do not look for faultless conduct in the character of ministers, yet do we look for traits of character which carry conviction to the public mind, that they are men of God. The Apostle Paul, in enumerating the qualifications of a bishop, says, 'Moreover, he must have a *good report* of them that are without.' While he may not be the slave of popular opinion, he should commend religion by the influence of that 'good name', which is 'rather to be chosen than great riches'. We have seen him in the closet, in the study, in the pulpit, at the bed-side of the sick and dying, and at the grave of the departed; but there are other

*On being very gravely reproved for his faults by one of his brethren, and in a manner not a little dictatorial and solemn, he sat for a while in perfect silence. At length he replied, 'I suppose, brother W., it is just as you say. There is a difference between you and me. And it is just this: I let off all my nonsense in the parlour, and you keep yours for the pulpit.'