

For the Christian Messenger.

Baptists in Trinidad.

It is very refreshing to the Christian traveller to meet in his wanderings with those who cherish "like precious faith," especially in this case after having been for weeks on the water, shut out from all communion with brethren and friends. During a recent voyage to the West Indies, I found that in Trinidad, the southernmost of the windward islands, there had been a mission for some years, under the auspices of the London Baptist Missionary Society. It was commenced in 1843, by the late Rev. G. Corven, whose efforts were quickly followed by the formation of a church and the establishment of stations in the districts of Port of Spain and Savannah Grande. The Rev. J. Law, the present missionary at the former station, reached Trinidad in 1845, since which he has been patiently laboring. Much good has already been effected. More recently the Rev. W. H. Gamble has arrived from London, and is now in charge of the station on the coast.

Since the commencement, the church has slowly and steadily increased. In 1849 an addition was made to their numbers by the arrival of Protestant refugees from Maderia, who had been driven thence by the Roman Catholic Government of that Island. Several of the English residents have united with the church. These, together with the colored members, form a church of considerable numbers.

A fine stone chapel, 60 feet by 40, costing £1,000 sterling, has been built, in which services are held in Portuguese and English. The master-builders—mason and carpenter—were both black men.

The inhabitants, for the most part, are Roman Catholics, many of whom add to the superstitious practices of Popery, the darker and degraded rites of Obeahism, and other African enormities. Mr. Law has zealously labored to rescue these deluded ones, and, by means of tracts, etc., which he has himself written and printed, together with the living voice, he has sown much good seed, which will yet spring up and bear fruit to the master's glory. The Archbishop was for a time quite indignant that the Baptists should presume to scatter tracts against "the Church" in his diocese, and at first some animosity was shown by the people; but ere long they concluded to let the missionary alone in his "labors of love."

A few days were happily spent at the Mission house, and in company with the dear friends in Port of Spain who all seemed glad to see a strange brother. Earnestly do I hope and pray that the Divine blessing may rest on the Missionaries and their flocks, and that they may grow up into their living Head, Christ Jesus Halifax, June 18. SIGMA.

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Circular Letter

FROM THE WESTERN BAPTIST ASSOCIATIONS TO THE CHURCHES COMPRISED IN THAT BODY.

Dear Brethren,

The subject of DISCIPLINE is that to which we would ask your attention on the present occasion, and, in doing so, claim your kind forbearance with any sentiments, should there be such, which may appear to be uncalled for, or deficient in Christian charity. We profess not to present any thing new or striking, but hope, by thus stirring up the subject and holding it under consideration, to elicit, at no very distant day, from some one of deeper experience, something more telling and worthy of regard.

It is evident from the word of God that the church has power given to it, in certain cases, to discipline its members. Paul says, in his 2nd Epistle to the Thes. 3rd chapter and 6th verse,—"Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which ye have received of us." Here, then, is not merely a permission granted but a positive duty enjoined in the name, that is by the authority of the Saviour.

The object of discipline appears to be twofold. First, as regards the church, Secondly, as regards the disorderly brother. First to keep the body pure, and thus give beauty, strength and glory to the church. How exquisitely delightful are some of the descriptions of the church as given in the word of God. "My dove, my undefiled is but one; she is the only one of her mother, she is the choice one of her that bare her." "Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair; thou hast doves' eyes within thy locks: thy hair is a flock of goats, that appear from mount Gilead." "Fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners."

A church holding in its fellowship members walking disorderly is certainly to the full extent of such disorder stripped of its beauty and shorn of its strength. Not the influence, not the members, not the wealth, but the holiness is the measure of the church's power. There is a kind of omnipotence in a godly life that makes even the ungodly quail. In the language of another: "Argument may be resisted, persuasion and entreaty be scorned; the thrilling appeals and monitions of the pulpit, set forth with all the rigour of logic and all the glow of eloquence, may be evaded or disregarded; but the exhibition of exalted piety has a might which nothing can withstand: it is truth embodied—it is the gospel burning in the hearts, beaming in the eyes, breathing from the lips, and preaching in the lives of its votaries."

An ungodly life in church produces a double evil, the extent and result of which no human wisdom can calculate. There is the effect upon the world, leading the unregenerate to doubt the sincerity of all religious profession, and conducting thousands doubtless through the paths of neglect, stupid indifference, vice and infidelity, to the chambers of endless night. There is, secondly, the effect produced upon the church itself. "Can one take fire in his bosom and not be burned?" Is it not according to a constantly operating law of our nature that we catch the spirit and imbibe the sentiments of those with whom we associate? Will not carelessness, neglect of duty, indulged in upon the part of one member of a church, tend, unavoidably, to produce its like in the case of others? And as none are impervious to evil influences, not only the younger, the weaker, but the older, even the deacons and ministers, are liable to feel the benumbing effects; and thus the entire church, by a preponderance of unholy example, although containing in its bosom many sincere followers of the Lamb, become almost, if not entirely, inefficient, as an instrument of good. Hence the importance of discipline to keep the spiritual house cleaned, lighted and well supplied with all the luxuries of a spiritual life, that weary, destitute travellers may be drawn towards it,

and find, when they enter, a sympathizing family and a happy home.

The object of discipline, in the second place, has a reference to the disorderly brother whose case requires attention. Paul in writing to Timothy says of Hymenæus and Alexander, "Whom I have delivered unto Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme." It is very evident, from the epistles to the Corinthians, that discipline had a salutary effect upon the individual whose conduct had given the apostle so much anxiety and sorrow. In his first epistle Paul censures the man and the church for harboring him, and commands them in the name of the Lord Jesus "to deliver such an one unto Satan, for the destruction of the flesh, that the Spirit may be saved." In the second epistle he refers with melting tenderness to the same case, telling them that the punishment inflicted was sufficient, and that they ought now rather to forgive him and comfort him, lest the penitent brother should be "swallowed up with over-much sorrow." Similar results have frequently been noticed. Discipline judiciously administered has often been the instrument, in the hand of God, not only of bringing a wayward brother to repentance as perhaps nothing else could, but also of leading a self-deceived professor to see himself as a lost sinner in the sight of God.

Discipline, then, may be regarded as a very important duty of every Christian church. When an occasion occurs it is doubtless a time for the sincerest and deepest sorrow—the most heart-searching humiliation, earnest and agonizing prayer; for while excluded members may draw a kind of unholy and, we think, unenviable consolation from the thought that exclusion from the church is not exclusion from heaven, we do believe that when a church with "one accord," and in the fear of the Lord, moves forward in this duty, according to the Word of God, the two exclusions referred to, excepting of course all cases of future repentance and reconciliation, are more nearly allied than is by Protestant communities generally supposed. We think, moreover, that the acting members in the case should always be the holiest men in the church, and that the voters should be quite certain that they are not themselves guilty of similar offences. What a sight for holy angels and a holy God: lands alike unholy, and yet uplifted for the expulsion of an "erring brother."

But there is a question in connection with this general and important subject which appears to me not very easy of solution, viz., when shall a brother be regarded as walking disorderly to an extent sufficient to deserve expulsion from the church? As there is no catalogue of offences given in the word of God having special reference to this subject the reply will probably be "that we are as in many other cases to proceed upon general but well known principles." This places the whole matter in the hands of each separate church to be disposed of as such in the exercise of its judgment may seem most in agreement with the mind of the Spirit as made known in the Word. The power and responsibility are thus placed where we suppose they ought to rest, and where they would always be safe providing the acting members of each church were at all times sufficiently under the influence of the Spirit to act only with a view to God's glory. But may it not be possible, as we claim no infallibility, for our churches, that this is not always the case? and that apostolic epistle written in the 19th century, could there be such, would be equally severe with those of the 1st, upon the subject now under consideration.

We must certainly acknowledge that if we take our Standard of piety or christian life directly from the word of God, the holiest man in view of it exclaim, "Who then can be saved?" for the commandment is exceeding broad, reaching to the intents and thoughts of the heart; and that the only consolation for one troubled in consequence of his own imperfections is to be derived from the thought "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin," and "what is impossible with men is possible with God."

Notwithstanding however the manifest and acknowledged imperfections of the holiest, both of the present and all past time, notwithstanding the boundlessness of the forbearance and mercy of God, notwithstanding the difficulty amounting perhaps to an impossibility of adopting any plan that would be either universally received or in all cases applicable, may it not brethren be truthfully affirmed that the cause of God now demands of the churches, that by a more rigid and scriptural discipline the standard of practical and every day piety should be greatly elevated and thus brought, at least a little nearer to that marked upon the inspired page, and exhibited with greater or less faithfulness each week from the sacred desk? We scarcely need remark that reference is not made here to open immorality; cases of this description are usually, when known, promptly dealt with, but rather to such neglect of Christian duty as may indicate or rather prove an absence of real piety.

Is it enough that a member of a christian church be moral, honest, and in all his intercourse with the world above reproach or suspicion? Are not the duties of religion emphatically active? Our adorable Redeemer "went about doing good." His command is "be ye followers of me as dear children," the apostle says, "Therefore my beloved brethren be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." "If ye do these things ye shall never fall. For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ." If everlasting life is promised to those and only to those who by activity and zeal in the cause of God show that they have drank from the fountain of life and become partakers of the Divine nature, can a christian church consistently with its obligations to the world, to itself, and to Him who has loved it "even to the death" continue to fellowship as consistent members, those, however exemplary they may be who give no evidence of piety beyond what the ordinary civilities of society or the laws of the country demand of all? will not such fellowship have a direct tendency to satisfy the conscience, and more and more to deceive an unfortunate brother who through the inexperience of youth, ignorance of the extent, and holiness of the law or undue excitement sometimes attending revival seasons, may have been led to take up with something short of a saving knowledge of the Saviour? ought not such member, after the employment of proper means to awaken him to a sense of his obligations, to be told by an outspoken act of the church, that, however consistent as a citizen of the world or as a neighbor,

he is very inconsistent as a professed follower of the Saviour? True, the preaching may have been faithful, exhortations very pointed, but if the light that is in one be darkness how great is that darkness, and when all other means failed the voice of God in an act of discipline might have been heard.

As an illustration of the general truth we would select one or two from among the great variety of christian duties. The study of the word of God is acknowledged to be indispensable to a consistent and intelligent piety. The "Bible the only rule of faith and practice" is one of our much loved doctrines. "Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life." This we urged as a command to the individual christian. We hold to personal responsibility in matters of religion. Can we consequently contend for this truth from the pulpit and press and yet recognise as members in good standing those who habitually and constantly neglect this pleasing and important duty, and are in consequence left ignorant of the truth exposed to the attacks of infidelity and liable to be carried away by every wind of doctrine? If it be the will of the great Teacher that his words which are life be studied, in order that they may be understood and obeyed, does not a failure to comply in this respect show disregard to, and utter contempt of his authority as manifestly as would a misdemeanor of a more notorious character.

Again prayer is very frequently enjoined in the word of God and certainly is the Christians sweetest privilege. We are brought by it into the immediate contemplation of God's character as a pure and holy being. The image of Christ is by frequent communings with Him left firily imprinted upon the soul. That was a good idea of some old divine "Prayer will make a man leave off sinning, or sinning will make him leave off praying." The apostle says "But we all with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." If prayer is in reality indispensable to holiness of heart and life ought not every christian church, the light that God himself has set up, to scatter the surrounding darkness; to exhibit that truth by refusing fellowship to those who constantly neglect such important duty.

Among the numerous difficulties which present themselves, it may be said that it is very difficult for a Church to know when there is culpable neglect in this respect. We believe however if a man really prays it will be known, the fact will come out, in some way. "Pray to thy Father which is in secret and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly."

To say nothing however of secret prayer there is a clause in our Covenant which either has a meaning or it ought not to be kept there. It is this "Promising by Divine help to walk in our houses as becomes those professing Godliness and to maintain the worship of God in our families." The covenant is frequently read in our meetings for conference, and its sentiments endorsed usually by the members rising to their feet during the perusal. Can the frequent renewal of the covenant engagement in connection with the habitual and continued disregard of its requirements be regarded as any thing better than trifling with God and making a kind of mockery of the most solemn vows? Ought not the church to speak out in an audible voice by her discipline as well as by her pulpit and press, saying in no unmistakeable language to the world "we honor our God and his laws, and demand at the sacrifice of all feeling and of all our dearest joys, that whoever ask our fellowship as christians, shall have it only so long as they with us bow to the authority of heaven, and aim to walk in the narrow path marked out by our Saviour."

We would illustrate the evil resulting from neglect in this matter by a very familiar example. Suppose the case of a respectable family composed partly of professors of religion and partly of the unconverted. On Sunday morning they all go in company to the house of God. The minister, who is learned eloquent and pious has occasion in his morning's discourse to dwell to some extent upon the beauties and the wonders of the Bible, its antiquity, its disclosures, its promises and its Author, warming up however into far more than an earthly zeal, he exhausts himself in trying to tell what exquisite delight the child of God experiences while perusing those sacred pages, and exhorts in burning words his impenitent hearers to taste for themselves of this heavenly joy. The congregation is dismissed—the people retire, many no doubt highly delighted and some perhaps astonished at themselves for so long neglecting their Bible. The family referred to above goes home,—the dinner hour passes, no one opens the Bible,—the bell for S. School rings, no one goes to teach the young the doctrines of the Bible,—the afternoon and tea-hour passes, the church bell again is heard and no one has perused a chapter or talked of a fact or a promise contained in the much extolled Bible. The preacher is again found in his place, his subject prayer. If he was more eloquent in the morning, he is more subdued and solemn in the evening, his language sounds of heaven. 'tis that of one who has talked much with an unseen world. The duty of prayer is not left doubtful, the power of the prayer of faith is shown to be wondrous and sublime. His own tears and some smothered sobs in the assembly tell that there must be a reality in these heaven born doctrines, the appeal to those who never pray was not without effect; and many retired with hearts beginning to throb with desires of an endless life. Our family again seek their happy home. One member is more quiet and thoughtful than usual—he ponders—can these things be so? What are my prospects then? Oh for some one to tell me! While he is thus musing, his eye falls perhaps accidentally upon the words of the covenant referred to, "promising by divine help to maintain the worship of God in our families"—he is all agitation, O that I could pray, O that I knew how to pray, and while the storm within him is still raging the christian father informs the family that it is time to retire as the business of the coming week will call for early and prompt action on Monday morning. Just here, brethren, we believe around the hearth stone of many a home circle called christian has been cruelly crushed the all but bursting bud of a heavenly and glorious hope.

We cannot close without saying that a conviction has fastened itself upon us that a dying deluded world is calling just now most loudly upon the christian church for a little brighter light to guide it to God and glory. O that the light might be made much more brilliant by a more rigid discipline.