

CIRCULAR LETTER

TO THE CHURCHES OF THE WESTERN BAPTIST ASSOCIATION.

Dear Brethren,—

That the time-honored custom of an annual epistle, from this body, to the churches composing it, filled with the utterances of hearts that deeply feel the importance of the doctrines, and precepts they inculcate, may not, with us, who have no less work to do, and no less subtle dangers to guard against than our predecessors, degenerate into an unmeaning formality, should be a matter of solicitude.

The subject we present for your consideration is FAMILY RELIGION, which should make christian households places of christian influence, and christian nurture.

The brief appeal to you, christian fathers, and mothers, will embrace first the duty, second the means, and last the claims of Family Religion.

As the duty is generally admitted, we might, perhaps, pass at once from this point: yet it may not be amiss to stir up your pure minds, by way of remembrance, in presenting a few considerations of importance, connected with the duty of early religious training.

1. From the Old Scriptures. Under the former dispensation God, everywhere, and always, required implicit obedience to his commands. How solemn the utterances of blessings to the obedient, and curses to the disobedient, as they floated on the air, across the valley, from Mount Gerizim by half the tribes of Israel, to Mt. Ebal; and from Ebal to Gerizim by the other half of the tribes! The occasion seems second in import, only to the thrilling scenes which accompanied the giving of the Law on Sinai:—and says God; "These words which I command thee this day shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them, diligently, unto thy children; and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way; and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."

2. From the New Scriptures. The New Testament inculcates the same duty. The children in the Temple shouted: "Hosanna to the Son of David," and while the chief priests and scribes were displeased, Jesus said unto them, yea; "have ye never read out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?" Thus the duty of early religious training, inculcated in the Old Testament, is continued, and sanctioned in the New. Timothy's unfeigned faith, and early knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make wise unto salvation, are accounted for by the instructions received from his grandmother Lois, and his mother Eunice. He who became the Babe of Bethlehem, when engaged in his public ministry was much displeased when young children were hindered from coming to him, and said: "Suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not." This rebuke, and invitation give the children free access to Christ. From his birth, John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Ghost. Here is the example, and the proof, that children at an early period may become the subjects of renewing grace.

3. From Reason. Reason, in the midst of the light we possess, teaches the duty of cultivating family religion—that children when born should breathe in a religious atmosphere—that their earliest impressions should be, that the household is dedicated to the service of God,—and that their first lessons should be of God, and of Christ, and salvation to our guilty race. Nor will occasion be wanting, at this early date, for lessons on human depravity. Among the many that might be presented, we offer but a few arguments in favor of early training, as a part of family religion.

1. The soil of the mind should be preoccupied with moral, and religious truth; for as surely as the garden unsown with useful seed runs to weeds and briars, so surely will the soil of the mind produce a crop more mischievous and poisonous than the deadly nightshade. The difficulty with the soul as with the garden is that noxious seeds are indigenous. Constant sowing and weeding are necessary.

Again: early impressions are most lasting. The last memories of age are of early scenes. How all-important then is it that the first impressions be correct. The young mind like the vine clings to the nearest support, and with a tenacity that is not easily overcome. How careful should we be that truth is the pillar to which it clings, and that step by step, as on Jacob's ladder, it may ascend to heaven. Habits formed in youth for good or evil can never be fully overcome. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil." But further, God requires all our life in his service. Probably christendom has yet to learn how early children can love God. As a very little religious truth seems the means of the conversion of some adults, parents are encouraged to commence very early in imparting pious instruction to their children.

Another interesting thought, in this connection, is that many are converted young—very young. How many in relating the dealings of God with their souls go back, as far as memory enables them, in giving their first serious impressions, on the subject of religion. Christian fathers and mothers toil on with your children. Your rest remains for you in heaven.

2. The means of maintaining Family Religion. The first, as underlying all the rest, is discipline—judicious and affectionate. Upright family government lies at the foundation of Family Religion. Without this, the household are disjointed parts, agreeing to no useful end. Jehovah, the God of order, who heads the first table of the decalogue, saying: "Thou shalt have no other God's before me;" heads the second by saying; "Honor thy father and thy mother;" and it is impious for children to affect obedience to the former, while the latter is disregarded. As the heart of the child is affectionately turned to its earthly parent, a foundation is laid for teaching reverence, and

obedience to the heavenly Parent. An imperious despotism should be guarded against, as but little suited to the law of love, which underlies all true obedience to God.

2. Another means, relating to the conversion of your children, and the religious ordering of your households is moral and religious instruction. Faithfulness in this matter, in the present age, is of incalculable importance. Snares are set in every direction to entrap the young. While it is true that volumes of the Holy Bible, tracts, and a sound religious literature are multiplied like autumn leaves, and counted by millions—that churches are rapidly multiplying, and Sabbath Schools, by tens of thousands, are doing a noble work, the painful conviction is forced upon us that error outstrips the truth, and that now, as never before, your children need to have thrown around them the wholesome influence of sound moral, and religious instruction, that they may be saved from semi-infidelity on the one hand, and licentiousness on the other. We therefore call upon you christian fathers and mothers to maintain family religion, with all fidelity, as a means of defending your children against the wiles of the enemy, and of securing their eternal well-being.

3. Another means to the end desired is family devotion. It is no abuse of language to pronounce a prayerless house a graceless one. True prayer may not be altogether neglected, nor special prayer for the children of the household. We freely grant this, but christian mother, family religion requires more than secret and occasional prayer. Your children need to hear your prayers, and to feel that religion regulates the household, and that it is not a fragmentary thing, separated from the common duties of life, but an all pervading influence, leading its possessor to be good, and to do good whatever their employment.

4. To give full efficacy to wholesome discipline, correct instruction, and daily prayer in your families, a consistent christian example is necessary. Failure in example, is failure in all. Children are acute observers of character, and sound logicians. Words, without deeds, are lost to them. Honesty, truth, fidelity, as the basis of christian character, beget confidence with children, as with men. In a word, your example must agree with your profession, then your words will sink into the hearts of your children as a nail fastened in a sure place.

Such are some of the means necessary to secure, by the blessing of God, the true and lasting interests of your families. How momentous the subject! How great the responsibility! Who shall make an appeal befitting a subject of such startling interest, or on what grounds may success follow its claims?

1. We urge you to the duties suggested by the influences that come from the cross of Christ. We forego an appeal to parental affection, though it is strong; and ask you to invite your children, with you, to the cross; where your hard hearts were melted, your sins washed away, and where you rejoiced with joy unspeakable and full of glory; and as your souls are again filled with joy in the Holy Ghost, point them to the Lamb of God, that they may look and live, rejoicing with you in the same deliverance, and in a good hope of eternal life.

2. Another imperative claim on you is that God has made you the natural guardians of your children, and, in a special sense, responsible for them. No man's responsibility ends with himself; much less that of parents. "Am I my brothers keeper?" is a question befitting a fratricide. Christian parents, cheerfully assume the duties arising from your responsibility to your children. They are dear to you. Lead them to Jesus. Tell them of his love. Win them to Christ by your pious instruction, and pure example. Leave not one behind—that you may say, at last; "Here Lord am I, and the children whom thou hast given me." Remember Eli!

3. Another claim for a high standard of family religion, is the peculiar dangers besetting the youth of our times. They stand on slippery places. Trashy literature—unsatisfied curiosity—chafing under moral restraint—premature manhood—sitting in the seat of the scornful, teach you how easy it is to lead your children from the path of rectitude. Think of this, and raise high the standard of family religion. Think of it and act, asking God to help you. Act constantly, perseveringly, and your labor shall not be in vain in the Lord.

4. The last claim we present is, the Lord has need of your children. He needs the young, and strong, to labor in his vineyard. He needs men of war from their youth, champions to go forth fully clad in Gospel armor, to overthrow spiritual wickedness in high places. As Jesus had need of the colt on the occasion of his memorable entry into Jerusalem, much more, fathers, and mothers, followers of Jesus, does He need your sons, and your daughters, to become the heralds of salvation to the lost. But Jesus our Lord has also made a spiritual entry into our world, and is to-day on his victorious progress, and we announce to you that He asks your children to follow with you in his train, and to grace his triumph; and let all christian parents say—Amen—for the Lord hath need of them.

Correspondence.

For the Christian Messenger.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.

By REV. CHARLES TUPPER, D. D.

CHAPTER V.

LABORS WHILE AN EVANGELIST.

(No. 3.)

Early in the month of October I suffered a violent attack of cholera, which brought me apparently near the grave. After a long season of deep distress the use of large quantities of castor oil, by the divine blessing, afforded me some relief. I was aware that my agonizing pains were light in comparison with my deserts, as a guilty sinner, and they

were designed for my spiritual good; and consequently felt no disposition to complain: but the anguish endured tended to depress my spirits. This rendered the season one of peculiar trial.

It may be added here, that the frequency and violence of attacks of this nature induced me to carry castor oil with me for a length of time, as I was often in places remote from medical aid, and where no suitably remedy could be obtained.

On the partial restoration of health, I again visited the people of my more immediate charge on the North side of the Bay of Fundy, and then crossed to Cornwallis in an open boat. A friend lent me a beast to ride, but apprized me that she was quite liable to stumble. While travelling over a rough road, in which were stumps, roots, and miry places, she appeared to step with such caution as led me to conclude, that the statement of her owner could scarcely be correct. When, however, she came into a plain sandy road, she fell twice in going about one mile. This suggested to me the need of continued watchfulness. A Christian should, indeed, carefully avoid all exposure to temptation, but when unavoidably so exposed, he will probably be upon his guard, and escape; and yet in circumstances of apparent safety he may fall.

On visiting considerable portions of the Counties of Kings and Hants, it became evident to me that the state of religion among our people in that region was quite low. Some persons who had formerly manifested much thoughtfulness, were now obviously very careless about their spiritual welfare. In one instance a man and his wife of whom the latter was a professor of religion, and seemed decidedly pious, had commenced keeping a tavern. Much as I disapproved of their occupation, I determined to call on them: but on my entering the hall the sound of horrid oaths, saluted my ears, and induced me to retire immediately, with a sad heart.

In the western part of Cornwallis, where I first taught school, it was pleasing to me to perceive a greater degree of friendliness than formerly between the Baptists and the Presbyterians. My visits in families of both these denominations appeared to be cordially received. At the close of my meeting there on a Sabbath I catechised the children and young people of persons belonging to these different bodies together. As the changes introduced by Mr. Keach to accommodate the Assembly's Catechism to our views are few, it was easy for me to allow the youths to answer the questions in accordance with that which had been respectively taught them. An opportunity was thus afforded to address these young persons directly and affectionately, inculcating mutual good-will, and urging the absolute necessity of vital godliness, on which all-important point there is no diversity of sentiment in the Catechism.

In Nictaux an interview with the venerable Thomas Handley Chipman imparted to me much consolation and encouragement. In narrating trials through which he had passed, he seemed to be uttering the very experience of my heart.

On the 18th of November I returned to Parrsborough, and resumed my labors there. Miss J. T. an amiable and intelligent young woman at Five Islands, had been long under deep concern, at times verging toward despair. Many of the people regarded her as "crazy;" and deemed it unsafe to listen to me, lest they should be so too. Her grandmother, Mrs. M. a pious member of the Presbyterian body, embraced an opportunity when her aged minister and her granddaughter were both at her house, to get him to converse with her: and then asked him, "Do you think the young woman is crazy?" "I wish," said he, "many of my congregation were as crazy as she is." She subsequently obtained a joyful hope, publicly confessed Christ, and ever adorned her profession. Doubtless a genuine work of grace is in some instances effected in a short time, and without much trouble of mind; but in this case, and others occurring about that time and in that region, long-continued and deep distress unquestionably issued in sound conversion. The effects were much more manifestly durable than those have been in many cases wherein the exercises were briefer, and apparently more superficial.

December 23rd I was called to preach a funeral sermon on an occasion more painful than the one formerly noticed. The deceased was an aged man who had been long addicted to intemperance. It was said that only a few days before his death, while he was uttering very profane language in a public house, a female reminded him of a reckoning day, but he replied, "It is long trust." Soon after this, however, he and three other men, all under the influence of liquor, left Partridge Island in a boat, with a supply of rum on board, designing to go to Economy. Two of the men, who were brothers, became embroiled in a quarrel, and proceeded to fighting. One of these left the boat at Five Islands; but the rest remained in her all night. Providentially she drifted ashore in the morning; but the aged man perished from exposure to cold while in a state of intoxication.

It has ever appeared to me proper to improve all instances of mortality for the benefit of the living. When a preacher can consistently address words of consolation to the mourning relatives, with reference to the future welfare of the departed, it is obviously right that he should do so. (1 Thes. iv. 13-18.) But what could be said in a case like this, when the word of inspiration expressly declares of "drunkards" that they "shall not inherit the kingdom of God"? (1 Cor. vi. 9, 10. Gal. v. 21.) As it would not have been consistent to augment the grief of the mourners, I silently left his case with his Judge, and admonished the living to seek a preparation for their approaching dissolution.

It now seems strange, indeed, that such lamentable instances of the fatal consequences resulting from the use of intoxicating liquors did not then arouse the sober portion of community, and especially the ministers of Christ, to a sense of the necessity of inculcating total abstinence, by precept and example. But the general prevalence of habit, however pernicious it may appear and due consideration, has often blinded the minds even of wise and good men.