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"Not slothful in business: fervent in spirit."

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## Religious.

(Abridged from the London Baptist Magazine.)

### The Influence of Modern Heresies on our own Denomination.

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Read at a meeting of ministers at Bootle, Lancashire, on the 4th March, 1867.

(Concluded.)

II. We proceed, secondly, to consider another direction in which our denomination appears to me somewhat changed—namely, that of

#### RITUALISM.

Perhaps I am scarcely justified in using so formidable a term as a heading for the remarks I am about to make. The ritualism at present among ourselves is very unpretending and harmless, and is entirely free from that priestly assumption and symbolism, which constitute its most objectionable and hurtful features in some other communities. Still I know of no other term which would so fittingly express the changes in our places and modes or accessories of worship of which I have to speak. Those changes, so far as they have gone, may not be very serious or important; but they do indicate a considerable change of thought and feeling in our body, and may only be introductory to others. Larger changes are in some quarters talked of and advocated; and those that have already taken place would have been sufficient to astonish and alarm some of our forefathers.

The circumstances which our Nonconformist ancestors occupied were not favourable for the cultivation of the æsthetic of worship. They had to fight a fierce battle against a gigantic system of error, clothed in a gorgeous and imposing ritual. Their hatred of this system was comprehensive and intense, embracing it as a whole, and extending to every detail. Everything pertaining to it was to them intolerable; and hence it may have happened that some forms or accessories of worship were regarded with suspicious disapproval, not on the ground of their real merit, but simply because found in connection with a system so hurtful and erroneous. In addition to this they were persecuted, were forbidden the public worship of God, and their services had to be conducted by stealth, in barns, secluded nooks, and lonely forests. Even here they were liable to pursuit; and, in case of detection, to fines, imprisonment, or death. These circumstances furnished them with little opportunity, and left them with no heart to consult the outward conveniences of Divine worship. To be able to unite at all in the public exercises of religion was to them the grand object of desire; and, having this they thought and cared for nothing else. The spirit of worship was indeed theirs; and this so animated and absorbed them that they neither sought or desired external aid or adornments. Only too happy to be able to worship anywhere, or anyhow, they rose above the thought of outward form, and poured forth the gushing fulness of their hearts in spontaneous and unfettered freedom. Since then great changes have taken place. The disabilities under which our forefathers suffered have been removed, and at the present day we have the fullest liberty of worship.

Now look at the changes in our religious edifices. The excessive love of grand and costly buildings, richly carved, with lofty spires. The question now, when a new place of worship is required, too often appears to be, not how shall we obtain a good substantial building, best suited for our own method of conducting the public worship of God, but how to get a place that in external adornment and appearance shall be the feeble imitation or miserable parody of some fine old ecclesiastical structure.

Again, of late years much dissatisfaction has been expressed with reference to the old methods of worship, and attempts have been made to render them more varied and attractive. Indeed, one is led at times to imagine that attendance upon Divine worship is regarded as a painful effort, or self-denying exercise—that those who enter upon it are wor-

thy of deepest pity and commiseration, and that no effort should be spared to lighten and alleviate their sufferings. Now, is there not reason to fear that much of this can only indicate a diminished interest in Divine truth, and a deteriorated piety?

We do not hold up our forefathers as models of perfection, nor would we resist any change simply on the grounds of its being a departure from their example. If we can construct places of worship better fitted for their high intent, or discover forms or accessories of worship which shall give more natural and truthful expression to our religious feelings or aid us to holier and more familiar intercourse with God, by all means let us do so. But when we seek to preserve and enlarge our influence by external attractions and meretricious aids, we demean ourselves—we enter upon a competition in which we are sure to fail—we expose ourselves to the sneers and contempt of the upright and thoughtful, and lose far more in self-respect and moral power than we can possibly gain by the accession of half-hearted and worldly adherents.

III.—Thirdly, I fear there may be detected in our body indications of increased

#### WORLDLINESS.

There can, we think, be little doubt that every year it becomes a more difficult task for the Christian to lead a life of simple godliness. The spirit of elevated piety and fervid devotion requires for its development and maintenance much of calm repose and solitary communing with God. The increasing bustle and excitement of life render their attainment a difficult and painful effort. In this respect the position of our fathers was greatly different from our own. Their distractions were fewer—the demands upon their time less diversified and absorbing. It is acknowledged on all hands that in business, competition is excessive, requiring undivided and ceaseless attention, exposing to anxious solitude, and not unfrequently presenting strong temptation to the adoption of dishonourable expedients. The ever rapid progress in art, science, literature and amusements—the tendency to adapt them to all classes and bring them within reach of the poorest—has transformed the face of society.

The slightest glance must be sufficient to show that these circumstances involve no little peril to the piety of the Church. Our multiplied engagements leave us less time for religious exercises.

I do not deny that in some respects as a religious body, we have advanced. In numbers, respectability and influence, we are more powerful than ever; the spirit of liberality appears to me to have increased, and perhaps we never had more of general philanthropy.

Here, may be included the increased efforts to bring religious truth to bear upon all classes, and especially the new and varied efforts to reach the irreligious among the working and poorer classes, though some of those efforts may be open to criticism and censure. Going beyond the pale of our own, and all denominations, I am disposed to think that, throughout the population generally, there is less hostility, and perhaps some little increased regard for religion. If the Church has lost something of its spirituality and fervour, the world also has lost something of its hostility to religion, and seems more willing to admit that the Scriptures are not to be wholly and indiscriminately rejected.

But, whilst freely admitting all this, it still appears to me that there has been in our body some loss of deep religious tone and feeling; that we have become less spiritual and more worldly. I can scarcely avoid the conviction that there has been some diminution in the warm attachment to evangelical truth in earnest believing prayerfulness, in the firm conviction of the minute, the loving and ever-watchful providence of God. I fear that we have lost something of that elevated piety which ever realizes the Divine presence, and which finds in the possession of the Saviour's love a value, before which the treasures and enjoyments of earth pale into littleness and vanity—a piety which realizes the greatness of things unseen, and the littleness of those seen—which makes the interest and charm of life consist, mainly, in its relation to God, and to eternity—which fortifies the mind against the allurements and cares of earth, and controls and regulates all the actions of life.

It may be difficult to justify these suspicions and perhaps they are not fully warranted. Still, one, or two, considerations may show that they are not wholly without foundation.

In our churches, has there been no tendency to lower the standard of church membership, to make admission into their fellowship more easy; and to relax their discipline? In many cases is there not found a diminished interest in prayer-meetings, and increasing difficulty in getting anything like a good attendance at them? Have not many ministers to complain of the little interest manifested by the members in the business of the Church and of the difficulty of getting an attendance at Church meetings?

Again, is there not a change in the class of books generally read in our religious families; and are they not frequently of a questionable or even hurtful character? Is there not less love for solid and instructive religious reading and a yearning after novels and exciting books? Has not our religious literature created, of at least greatly fostered, a craving for excitement, until its success is found to be mainly dependent upon the amount of fiction and amusement it furnishes? We can many of us remember the time when fiction of any kind was scarcely known among us, and when a religious novel would have been regarded as an incongruity and anomaly. Now, is it not relied upon as a medium of communicating religious knowledge, and employed to set forth the doctrines and precepts of Christianity, so that even our children may acquire their knowledge of the Bible through the aid of novels, and the meaning of the beatitudes and ten commandments be learnt from fictitious tales.

We may ask, Is there no tendency to neglect week-evening meetings for worship, and in some cases, to attend only one service on the Sabbath? Is our private intercourse one with another as religious and profitable as formerly; and are stated seasons for fasting and prayer as frequent as they used to be among our ministers and fathers? Is there in our Christian families the same amount of religious instruction and discipline? Is family prayer attended to with the same regularity and frequency; and, in some instances, have not forms of worship been substituted for the warm expressions of the heart? Are not our social gatherings, in many cases more frivolous, and less frequently closed with prayer? Has not the love of worldly pleasure increased, and is there not in some cases a laxity in regard to public places of amusement that, at one time, would have been considered as quite incompatible with a Christian profession? These are grave questions; but ought they not to be asked?

#### The Prince of Wales's Chair.

The Divine promise, "Them that honor me I will honor," is as truly fulfilled in the experience of individuals in the present day, as it was in the times of Eli and his sons, to whom it was first spoken.

The writer of the following interesting narrative was a cabinet-maker, and came to London to finish learning his trade. We give the narrative in his own words:

"I was fortunate to obtain admission to the firm of Messrs. \_\_\_\_\_, upholsterers and cabinet-makers to her Majesty, and helped to make the Queen's furniture when she was married. When the heir to the throne of England was a year old, he was to go with the Queen to open Parliament. A beautiful chair was made in the shop; but though we all worked hard, it was far from finished when Saturday night came. Parliament was to be opened at one o'clock on Monday. What was to be done?—finished it had to be. At tea-time we held a consultation, and all the Scotchmen and lads agreed not to lift a tool next day. We have been taught by our parents to honor the Sabbath day and keep it holy, and we cannot break it."

"The English workmen said, 'If you do not work, the chair will not be finished; it is a work of necessity.'"

"We will not quarrel with you," said a tall noble-looking man from the Highlands, "but our consciences will not allow us to break God's law."

"I fear you will be paid off," said one on the other side.

"Well my lads said the foreman, when

pay-time came, 'I suppose you know you must all go to work to-morrow. I am very sorry for it but necessity knows no law; if you do not, the Prince's chair cannot be finished in time.'"

"The English workmen said, as it was a work of necessity, they were willing to do so. We were asked what we intended to do. The same man who spoke before now stepped forward, and said, 'Sir we are very sorry, but it is quite impossible for us to work to-morrow. Some of us have wives and children depending upon us for bread, but we have been taught to reverence the Sabbath; we cannot break it now. We do not say that we are better than others—only we think it right. If you will allow us, we will strip our coats and commence now, and continue until twelve to-night, and to-morrow night at twelve we will resume work.' This was said firmly, but respectfully and for a few minutes there was silence.

"'I cannot accept your terms,' said our superior, 'so I discharge you; you will get no more work here.'"

"'Very well; we are willing to go.' So we turned and went out; but we had scarcely reached the street when we were recalled, and allowed to go on with the work on our own terms."

"The throne was finished just in time, and when our young Queen sat with her son beside her, surrounded by her Peers, she little thought that she, who rules an empire on which the sun never sets, had those in her dominion who had refused to work for her on Sunday—though her Scotch subjects did not love her less than her warm-hearted English ones."

Two of these afterwards emigrated to Australia. The one who had stood forth as the Sabbath champion rapidly prospered, and in a few years ranked as one of the most influential and wealthy farmers in the colony. The other the writer of this narrative, was likewise blessed of God and became the owner of an extensive upholstery establishment.

"Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." "Trust in the Lord and do good, and verily thou shalt be fed."—*Cottager and Artizan.*

#### A true Lady.

I was once walking a short distance behind a very handsomely dressed young girl, and thinking, as I looked at her beautiful clothes, "I wonder if she takes half as much pains with her heart as she does with her body?" A poor old man was coming up the walk, with a loaded wheelbarrow, and just before he reached us, he made two attempts to go into the yard of a small house; but the gate was heavy, and would swing back before he could get through.

"Wait," said the young girl, springing lightly forward, "I'll hold the gate open."—And she held the gate until he passed in, and received his thanks with a pleasant smile, as she went on.

"She deserves to have beautiful clothes," I thought, "for a beautiful spirit dwells in her breast."—*Little Corporal.*

#### "Replete with every Convenience."

The following is an exact copy of a document found in the cell of a prisoner who has just been discharged from the Bath City Prison, after three months' imprisonment for felony:—"To be let, Ready Furnished, a very snug apartment in the Bath City Hotel, Twerton. The above Hotel is replete with every convenience, and is situated on the rise of a lovely hill on the left of the Lower Bristol Road, within ten minutes of the Station, from which a Royal Bus will convey you. The Hotel has a beautiful view of Lansdown, Beacon Hill, Beechen Cliff, with the whole of the city of Bath like a Panorama. The rustic village and Mills of Twerton is within ten minutes' walk, and the healthful and soul-inspiring Combe Down. The Manager of the Hotel, or Governor, keeps it that respectable that no one is admitted as a resident without a special recommendation from the Mayor and Magistrates of Bath. The Hotel has a spacious Chapel, with a visiting Chaplain, and the responses are daily accompanied with