

# Christian Messenger.

A RELIGIOUS AND GENERAL FAMILY NEWSPAPER.

"Not slothful in business: fervent in spirit."

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## Poetry.

### The Rights of Woman.

"The rights of woman"—what are they?  
The right to labour and to pray;  
The right to watch while others sleep,  
The right o'er others woes to weep;  
The right to succour in distress,  
The right, while others curse, to bless;  
The right to love whom others scorn,  
The right to comfort all who mourn;  
The right to shed new joy on earth,  
The right to feel the soul's high worth;  
The right to lead the soul to God,  
Along the path the Saviour trod,—  
The path of meekness and of love,  
The path of faith that leads above,  
The path of patience under wrong,  
The path in which the weak grow strong;  
Such woman's rights, and God will bless,  
And crown their champions with success.

## Religious.

For the Christian Messenger.

### "Despise ye the Church of God!"

The nineteenth Article of the Church of England declares that "the visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ's ordinance in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same." Whether the state of the Church of England now, or at any former period of its history, answers to this definition or not, it is unnecessary to inquire. But the general correctness of the definition may be admitted.

A Church of Christ consists of the "faithful." They understand, believe, enjoy, and practise the truths of Christ's gospel. Theirs is a personal Christianity. They are known by their "faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints."

It is "a congregation"—an assembly—a society of such persons. They unite in holding the same truths; they are animated by the same spirit; and they have covenanted together to serve the Lord, and to help one another in the service. A Christian Church is a society of Christians.

And then, as "the word of God" is the instrument of regeneration, so the renewed soul, in its subsequent history, is "sanctified by the truth." In the meetings of the Church the word is expounded and applied, and by means of the ordinances which Christ has appointed, the heavenly truths embodied or symbolised in those ordinances is continually presented to the mind, supplying spiritual nutriment.

It follows, that the Church of Christ is a divine institution, to be held in respect and reverence, and that in the management of its affairs there ought to be a scrupulous regard to the will of the Lawgiver, as far as that will may be clearly ascertained. It is a great sin to "despise the Church of God." When and how may that sin be committed?

1. When the standard of admission is lowered.

If none but true christians are eligible to membership—for none but they can truly serve Christ, or enjoy the pleasure and privileges of christian fellowship—then, how necessary is it that the greatest care should be taken to prevent the introduction of unworthy persons! But when the terms of admission are so framed that the doors are opened to those whose personal godliness is doubtful, or the haste with which candidates are hurried into fellowship precludes wholesome examination and inquiry, the character of the church is greatly injured. Its religious influence will be lessened, and it will be in danger of becoming a society of mere moralists or enthusiastical pretenders. The half-way covenant proved ruinous in New England. Hereditary membership, wherever practised (and it is the natural growth of paedobaptism) eats out the very life of piety. The fellowship of saints may be enjoyed by individual believers in such a body, but it is not the product of the church itself; and real christians in the church find themselves united with the worldly, the sceptical, the superstitious and the profane, all of whom

are weekly addressed as "dearly beloved brethren."

2. The Church of God is "despised" when the objects of Christian union cannot be secured.

This takes place, of course, when the standard of admission is lowered, as has been just observed. Ill-assorted materials cannot combine.

There is also another consideration. Equality and freedom are essential to union. There are no castes in Christ's church. "All ye are brethren." Wealth and rank do not give a man a position here. The most Christ-like man is the best member, and his influence will be proportioned to the degree in which Christ is in him. But sometimes the purposes of the Church are defeated by the indulgence of a spirit of reserve—a cold, haughty spirit, that freezes every thing with which it comes into contact. Then the society is divided into little coteries, the members of which know one another, and nobody else. The freeness of the social feeling is wanting. There is no warm-hearted brotherly love. This one does not venture to speak to that one, unless in a manner which seems to indicate that he is asking pardon for daring to open his lips; while the other replies in a chilling, patronising tone, as if conscious that he is conferring a favour. All this is wrong. "Sirs, ye are brethren." "Why dost thou judge thy brother? Or why dost thou set at naught thy brother?" If the Church of God is "despised" in any of her members, and loving union thus prevented, the cause will shrink and shrivel.

3. The Church of God is "despised," when the just rights and powers of the people are denied.

Nothing can be plainer than that the government of the Churches is committed by the Saviour to the Churches themselves. The exhortations and directions of the Apostles proceed on this principle. The Churches were commanded to "try the spirits"—to "warn the unruly"—to expel the disorderly and the impure—to maintain fellowship with other Churches—and generally, to perform all acts suited to the preservation of their associate capacity and the extension of the cause of Christ.

These rights and powers are ignored all over Christendom. The people have nothing to do with the government of the Church of Rome or of the Church of England. In Presbyterian bodies the whole work of government and discipline is in the hands of the kirk sessions. Nor have the people any control in Methodist societies. The few govern—the many submit. Other instances might be adduced. It is only in the Congregational Denominations, Baptist and Paedobaptist, that the people take their proper place.

4. The Church of God is "despised," when gifts and opportunities are not improved.

The law of Christ is explicitly laid down by the Apostle Peter:—"As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." Many passages in Paul's epistles express the same truth. It is undeniable that there is a large amount of work to be done by Christian churches. All their members are under bond to the Master for such service as they can render. Some can preach the gospel;—others can exhort; others can visit the sick—or relieve the poor—or instruct the ignorant—or train the young members in usefulness. None can claim exemption. "As every man hath received the gift —"

If the employment of gifts is discouraged, or permitted only under ungracious restraints;—if the pastors undertake to do every thing, and thus the spirit of the priesthood insensibly creeps in;—if the members of the Church are content to be unemployed, and think that all their duty is done when they have paid their subscriptions—the Church is "despised"—weakened—made useless.

5. The Church of God is "despised," when the work of the Church is devolved on other Institutions.

This is too much the order of the day. In some cases, there is scarcely a benevolent operation carried on but by a society established for the purpose; whereas the whole might be done, and ought to be done, under

the auspices of the Church and by its members. Nor can I imagine any thing so calculated to promote a healthy spiritual state as a division of the members of a Church into working classes, each having an appropriate duty assigned to it—labouring under the superintendence of the Officers—and reports of their proceedings regularly presented at their church-meetings. For want of some arrangement of this kind the Church frequently dwindles into feebleness, and its meetings cease to be interesting to men of vigorous piety.

6. The Church of God is "despised," when the enforcement of "godly discipline" is neglected, or has become impracticable.

In all national Churches, in which, of course, hereditary membership prevails, discipline is impracticable. The Church of England sighs over it, or professes to do so; that is, the truly pious among her members are grieved at the sad necessity of the case, not perceiving, it should seem, that it is an unavoidable defect in her constitution. In other Churches, such discipline as there is (it is reserved for notorious crimes) is administered by the officers. The people have no part in it. There is gross carelessness and neglect in this matter in many Churches which are professedly constituted according to the New Testament. Irregularities of conduct are unnoticed, and individuals are allowed to retain their places, as "members in good standing," with whom the other members can have no spiritual fellowship, and whom the world claims as its own. Thus the Church is "despised," and shorn of its strength.

7. The Church of God is "despised," when attendance on the means and ordinances is negligently observed.

The life of religion cannot be maintained without punctual regard to those appointments with which the Lord has connected his blessing. When the dust covers the family bible there is very little piety in the house. If the Lord's day is but half-kept by the members of a christian society, that society must be in a sickly state. If attendance on the means of grace is a matter of convenience, which small hindrances are allowed to interfere with, godliness is just gasping for breath. If one public service satisfies a church, and no effort is made to keep up social meetings when the pastor is necessarily absent, and thus to supplement his labours, the Church cannot thrive.

Many other observations might be made. Let these suffice for the present. Take heed lest ye "despise the Church of God." The salvation of the world depends, under God's blessing, on the holiness and activity of the Church.

J. M. C.

Feb. 26, 1868.

### Social Life in the Churches.

We are glad to see that the fusing warmth of social fellowship is coming to the consciousness of our churches; and that, under various forms, they are beginning to cultivate it. In one it takes the form of the love-feast or *Agapae* of the early Christians—and indeed all are, more or less, modifications of that idea. A social meeting in some convenient apartment belonging to the church—be it parlors especially built and arranged for the purpose, Sunday school-room or lecture-room—some places where all have equal right, and hence feel equal freedom; a gathering brought together simply on the basis of fellowship in the love of Christ, and interest in each other as happy children of a common Father; an occasion for cheerful, unrestrained intercourse with each other's families, and with the pastor and his family—divested of the formalities of "pastoral visits" or of regulation entertainments—enlivened by the contributions of those who can give enjoyment by literary, or musical, or any other pleasant social amusement which all can enjoy; and, above everything, a season in which all may be brought into quick and loving sympathy by the common, united singing of some favorite hymns, and perhaps, at the close, by the few pleasant remarks which the pastor may feel the impulse to make to his gathered brothers and sisters, and by the final prayer, which may bind all hearts more closely together. Such genial gatherings as this it is that our church members need, to make them

feel the reality and beauty of the tie that unites them in vital fellowship.

We know of a church which, while large and strong, filled with members many of whom are of intense individuality and self-will, a church containing more elements of spontaneous combustion than could be realized save by one who got an occasional view of its inner workings; and yet this mass of apparently discordant elements is compact, harmonious, united and singularly prosperous. The main secret is the freedom of individual development allowed, and the constant, unrestrained and vivacious social intercourse encouraged. From the first, the words "brethren and sisters" were accepted as if they meant something. And there never has been a time in the history of that church when there was not special and hearty provision made for the frequent commingling of its family in happy social intercourse; and that too, while its members have been and must continue to be, so far as ordinary worldly society is concerned, of every sort and condition in life.

We commend this fact, and the reflections it must excite, to the earnest attention of all our brethren who are lamenting the sluggishness of their churches. Make the "household of faith" a bright reality; not a traditional and empty phrase.—N. Y. Examiner.

### Prayer in Court.

Judge R—— relates the following incident as occurring in the course of his practice:

"He was trying a petty case, in which some of the party was not able to pay counsel fees, and undertook to plead his own cause; but he found, in the course of the trial, that the keen and adroit attorney who managed the case for the other party was too much for him in legal strategy, evidently making the worst appear the better cause. The poor man, Mr. A——, was in a state of mind bordering upon desperation, when the opposing counsel closed his plea, and the case was about to be submitted to the justice for decision.

"May it please your honor," said the man, "may I pray?"

"The judge was taken somewhat by surprise, and could only say that he saw no objection. Whereupon Mr. A—— went down upon his knees, and made a fervent prayer, in which he laid the merits of the case before the Lord in a very clear and methodical statement of all the particulars, pleading that justice and right might prevail.

"O Lord! thou knowest that the lawyer has misrepresented the facts, and thou knowest that it is so—" to the end of the chapter.

"Arguments which he could not present in logical array to the understanding of men he had no difficulty in addressing to the Lord, being evidently better versed in praying than pettifoggery.

"When he rose from his knees, Esquire W——, the opposing counsel, very much exasperated by the turn the case had taken, said:

"Mr. Justice, does not the closing argument belong to me?"

"To which the judge replied:

"You can close with prayer if you please?"

"Esquire W—— was in the habit of praying at home, but not seeing the propriety of connecting his prayer with his practice, wisely forbore, leaving poor A—— to win his case, as he did, by this novel mode of presenting it."

What a beautiful example for all of us is the resolution of the old lady, who from a crabbed and anxious body became quite the opposite. When asked what had induced the change, she replied: To tell you the truth, I have been all my life striving for a contented mind, and have finally concluded to sit down contented without it."

DISCRETIONARY WORSHIP.—On the principle of discretionary worship, you may introduce the dance and commence Welsh jumper; the *surplice*, and become Episcopalian; and even the mitre, and shake hands with His holiness.—A. Fuller.