

# Christian Messenger.

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"Not slothful in business: fervent in spirit."

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## Religious.

### NEHEMIAH.

Jerusalem was in ruins. Her walls broken down, her gates burned, and her children enslaved. She sat disconsolate under the willows in Babylon. But in an incredibly short time those walls sprang up in beauty and strength, and joy and prosperity were restored. How that was accomplished is a profitable study, as showing how God turns the spiritual captivity of his people and builds up Zion.

It began with one man, far away in Babylon. When Nehemiah was reminded of the desolation and distress of his people, he first "sat down and wept and prayed and fasted before God certain days." That is where salvation usually commences. Somebody's heart is turned to weeping and prayer till sleep departs, and perhaps necessary food is forgotten.

Then Nehemiah ventured upon God. He took his life in his hand, and went into the presence of the king with a sad countenance. But God gave him favor in his sight, and he sent him up to Jerusalem, furnished for his work. So the Christian must throw himself upon the promises of God, and as he goes from a weeping closet he shall find favor.

Then he went up and surveyed the ruins—a circuit of miles; great heaps of rubbish, shapeless and useless. This is an important work in every spiritual desolation.

So far his designs were shut up in his own heart; he had told no one; but now the time for development had come. He called the nobles and the people together, and said: "I see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and her gates are burned with fire; come let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach."

Then he told them what God had already done for him; and they said, "Let us arise and build." So they gave themselves heartily to the work—all "the people;" not merely the masons, but the goldsmiths and the merchants, the lawyers and apothecaries, the gentlemen as well as the burden-bearers. Not an excuse from any one—except the Tekoites—no plea of business or unfitness or inability; and the walls went up; and the reason assigned is, because "the people had a mind to work." Not to enjoy, to applaud, to look on with hope or words of cheer, but to work.

So now, when some yearning, burdened heart unfolds its experience to the gathered friends of God, and receives the response, "Let us arise and build;" and they strengthen each other's hands for this good work, pleading no excuses, but offering themselves willingly, the walls of Zion go up, and the reproach is wiped away.

But there is one feature of this work which deserves attention—the wise division of labor. A great number were engaged in it. Had they been left to crowd to one point, they would have hindered each other, and perhaps consumed their time in unprofitable discussions about the best way of doing it; but Nehemiah, as a wise master-builder, set them to build "every one over against his own house."

So now God has set his people in families, and ordained all the sacred ties of friendship, not for a momentary enjoyment, but that they may win each other to Christ; and if every Christian build over against his own house, how wonderfully do the walls of Zion go up.

A minister was called to a congregation in Ohio, where was a large circle of gay young people. He found the church in a deplorable state of declension. For three months he preached mainly to the church; and when he proposed to call a meeting to examine candidates for admission, it was suggested that there were none, for he had hardly preached a sermon to the impenitent. The meeting was held, and to the astonishment of all, thirty young persons offered themselves for admission to the church.—One young lady said she was gay and thoughtless till one Sabbath her mother came home from church and took her to her chamber, and with streaming eyes confessed

her past unfaithfulness, warned her of her danger, and knelt with her in prayer. A young man said his father came home and took him out into the field to converse with him, which was the means of his awakening. Almost all traced their conversion to some change witnessed in Christians at home. The walls were silently going up and a glorious work followed.

Dear brother or sister, is the wall built over against your house? You have God's covenant promise, if you are faithful. I know your heart sinks within you, and you are ready to say, as many have said, "You must talk with my children or my husband. I can speak to anybody else, but I cannot to them." But are you not writing bitter things against yourself without cause?—Your family think better of your religion than you suppose; and all the tender ties that bind them to you are eloquent in your behalf, giving you weight and influence with them. Renew your walk with God; go humbly to them, confessing your shortcoming, and they will listen to your entreaties. Love is not strict to mark offences.—*Am. Messenger.*

For the Christian Messenger.

### PEN SKETCHES—NO. 13.

#### MEEK PERSONS.

Meekness is a virtue of which history makes little account. The persons who attract the attention of the historian, those whose deeds are sung in verse and chronicled on marble monuments, are those who have been heroes in the fight, or occupants of splendid thrones—those who have been overbearing, proud, and ambitious. There are those who have had a courage to suffer in silence unnoticed by the great mass of men. What is spirited and energetic in action the world admires, but the passive virtues it affects to despise. One who receives insults tamely, who will take a reviling word without hurling it back to the teeth of the speaker, who has not the fire to return the scoff or blow, who pockets wrongs without exacting redress, or laying them up for the time of avenging, is set down as a mean-spirited pusillanimous fellow, likely to suffer much elbowing as he goes through life. These are the meek ones of the earth.

*A meek man has few enemies.*

It is hard to make up a quarrel where the angry feelings are all on one side. A battle is an exchange of blows. Resenting a provocation generally causes it to be repeated. Retaliation is an excuse for fresh injury. But receiving the first burst of irritation from a passionate man without returning it, gives him time to cool, usually puts him to shame, and quells a disturbance that might easily have widened to open war.

The meek overcomes the violent. There is a moral dignity in taking a wrong in silence and passing calmly on, that awes and abashes the persecutor. He cannot but feel the power of such a spirit. It sets high above as on a throne. Such a presence humbles him. It is infinitely harder to do a wrong to such a man than to one who half challenges you to a trial of forces. To be meek persons we must receive an injury without allowing ourselves to write Debtor against the one who inflicts it. We must endure a slight without that rebellion of heart, that commotion of tumultuous feelings clamorous to render back a kindred humiliation, of which nearly all my readers know something. We will bear a reviling word without suffering it to rankle and fester in our bosom. It is to meet all such provocations patiently,—calmly, with no thought of making offsets, striving to forget it, and to look kindly still upon the offender. Many of my readers are professed followers of One who styled himself meek. Are we like Him. Let us cultivate meekness.

JOHN.

The following paper from the *Sword and Trowel*, (Feb.) will be read with interest. We do not suppose the plan would be suitable for any other place than the Metropolitan Tabernacle, yet the adaptation of

Baptist principles to meet varying circumstances and peculiar necessities will be made apparent by its perusal, and gratitude to God will be felt that two such men, brothers—C. H. Spurgeon and J. A. Spurgeon,—have been placed in such a position, co-pastors of the largest church on earth, in the metropol's of the world:—

### DISCIPLINE OF THE CHURCH AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE.

BY J. A. SPURGEON.

The object of this paper is to direct attention to the discipline of our churches as distinguished from their creeds and constitution, thus contributing it may be hoped, some assistance to the discussion of the best methods for securing and maintaining purity and peace within the gates of Zion.

The subject of the paper is the discipline of the church at the Metropolitan Tabernacle. This particular example has been selected because with it the writer is more familiar than with any other. It is moreover the discipline of one of our oldest churches, and not the least successful of them, and it has been thought that there are elements of peculiar interest connected with it which it would be superfluous to enumerate.

We are anxious to disclaim, at the outset, any pretensions to perfection in our methods of action—we have found them work best for ourselves hitherto, but we are anxious to find out a more excellent way. Our plans have been the outgrowth of necessity, not of theory; they were not sketched on paper and then carried out as an experiment, but the circumstances of the church drove us to our present methods, and we hope we have seen a line of scriptural precedent justifying our obedience to providential indications. We should regret exceedingly if for a moment it were supposed that we would recommend absolute uniformity in the methods of discipline adopted by churches; but to our minds this much is clear, that the congregational churches both Baptist and Pedobaptist, have gone as far in the direction of diversity as possible, and weakness rather than strength has been the result. That no room should be left for the different peculiarities of pastor and people, but all be bound to one undeviating standard of action, would be to cramp and not to benefit; but, on the other hand, that so few points of agreement should be accepted as a common basis of action, sustaining a sense of confidence in each other's discipline is little short of a calamity. Mutual confidence arising from known adequate, though it may be at times dissimilar courses of action, leading up to one result, must be a source of blessing to any denomination; and at present we frankly admit, as the result of a somewhat wide observation of the methods of receiving, and the all but uniform want of method in removing names from our church rolls, we have but small faith in ecclesiastical statistics, and what is worse, a limited confidence in letters of commendation from our churches. That we may find room for improvement is undoubted, and that we may at once make the discovery and act upon it, is the object and prayer of the writer of this paper.

We remark at once that at the Tabernacle we have no written code of laws but the *Book of Inspiration*, and we unhesitatingly assert that all such printed rules as some have desired, and others adopted, are only fetters at the best of times, and snares and traps in periods of dispute and difficulty. We have faith in sanctified common sense, resulting from an application to the source of all wisdom by prayer and reading of the word. If churches would only act with the prudence of any assembly of mercantile men, much evil would be averted, and more good secured. Acting in things temporal after a truly business principle, and in things spiritual as God's word and Spirit dictate, no formal system of rules, in our opinion, will ever be required. Certain recognised courses of procedure, from which, without cause assigned, no deviation shall be made, are certainly necessary for mutual co-operation and peace

in any church: but for emergencies, special action should be adopted to suit the exigencies of the case, and no rules or traditions must forbid the course which wisdom suggests, even though it should be contrary to all the precedents of the previous history of the church. A general understanding of leading principles, and an elastic interpretation of them as cases may require, will be all the rule outside of the Scriptures required in churches where confidence abounds between pastors, officers, and members; if this be wanting, no rules, human or divine, can make them work harmoniously together. We must have faith in each other's intentions and integrity, or we shall loosen the pins of church action, and all will lapse into confusion and conflict.

#### I. CHURCH OFFICERS.

Principles of action however clear, and methods of procedure however established by custom, will be of little avail if they be not sustained by a vigorous executive.—Amongst the officers of the church, foremost stands the pastor, who, though its servant, is so to rule, guide, and discipline it as God shall help and direct by his Holy Spirit. In connection with the church at the Tabernacle two such officers are now labouring. It is a trite remark that if two men ride a horse one must sit behind, and he who is in the front must hold the reins and drive. Co-pastorships have been sources of discomfort or blessing as this principle has been understood. Wherever it may have been disregarded, it is not (by the grace of God) likely to be so in the case in hand. Where one of the two brothers has been so instrumental in creating the necessity for additional help, from the very fulness of blessing resulting from his labours; and is, moreover, so superior in talent, influence, and power,\* it is a privilege to follow in the order of nature and birth, which God, from the first, had evidently designed. The discipline of the church thus emanates from a common centre, acting through recognised division of labour. All meetings and institutions are subject to the influence, and when required, to the action of the Pastorate. It would be, at least, unseemly to have a hydra-headed band of Christians. Sunday-school, college, orphanage, almshouses, psalmody, are all under the supervision of a common headship, so as to prevent almost inevitable confusion, if not conflict, as the result of divided action. Strife without measure has arisen from rival authorities disputing about the boundaries of their little empires. The spirit of peace has kept us from this evil, but a judicious arrangement has been helpful in producing the result. There are still Diotrephes in the present age—men loving to have the pre-eminence—but it is the duty of the minister to magnify his office, and rule even these, which is best done not by assertions of power or complaints of want of influence, but by possessing such personal weight of piety and prudence, zeal, godliness, gentleness, and forbearance, as will inevitably place him in the front in course of time. In the long run, the measure of any man's power and influence is the measure in which he deserves to possess them; and no man is entitled to expect any more. It is quite certain that no efforts to assert official dignity, when sound judgment and weight of character are wanting, will ever result in anything short of failure and contempt. We have known some whose claims for deference and respect were in the inverse ratio to their deserts; and the only outgrowth of their priestlyism was to ruin and break up every church they attempted to guide and control. How much we need the wisdom of the serpent with the harmlessness of the dove! How gently, as a nurse among her children, should the pastor behave himself! With what unassuming brotherly love, and paternal wisdom, should he hold intercourse with his people! True pastors must be both made and born; and day by day must be sustained, or their office will be a shame to themselves and a burden to their flocks. From this may the Lord keep his servants evermore.

\* We are not responsible for the affectionate prejudices of our contributor. We think he over-estimates his brother, but the error is too inveterate with him for us to hope to reason him out of it.—(C. H. S.)