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Poetry.

THE MODEL CHURCH.

Well, wife I've found the model church! I worshipped there to-day:
It made me think of the good old times, before my hairs were gray.
The meetin'-house was fixed up more than they were years ago;
But then I felt when I went in, it wasn't built for show.
The sexton didn't seat me way back by the door;
He knew I was old and deaf, as well as old and poor.
He must have been a Christian, for he led me boldly through
The long aisle of that crowded church, to find a pleasant pew.
I wish you'd heard the singin'; it had the old time ring.
The preacher said, with trumpet voice, 'Let all the people sing!'
The tune was Coronation, and the music upward rolled,
Till I thought I heard the angels, striking all their harps of gold.
My deafness seemed to melt away, my spirit caught the fire;
I joined my feeble, trembling voice with that melodious choir,
And sang, as in my youthful days, "Let angels prostrate fall;
Bring forth the royal diadem, and crown him Lord of all."
I tell you, wife, it did me good to sing that hymn once more;
I felt like some wrecked mariner who gets a glimpse of shore.
I almost want to lay aside this weather-beaten form,
And anchor in the blessed port forever from the storm.
The preachin'? Well, I can't just tell all that the preacher said;
I know it wasn't written; I know it wasn't read,
He hadn't time to read it, for the lightning of his eye
Went passing 'long from pew to pew, nor passed a sinner by.
The sermon wasn't flowery, 'twas simple gospel truth;
It fitted poor old men like me; it fitted hopeful youth.
'Twas full of compensation for weary hearts that bleed;
'Twas full of invitations to Christ and not to creed.
The preacher made sin hideous, in Gentiles and in Jews.
He shot the golden sentences down on the finest pews,
And—though I can't see very well—I saw the falling tear,
That told me hell was some ways off, and Heaven very near.
How swift the golden moments fled within that holy place!
How brightly beamed the light of heaven from every happy face!
Again I longed for that sweet time when friend shall meet with friend;
'Where congregations ne'er break up, and Sabbaths have no end.'
I hope to meet that minister—the congregation too—
In the dear home beyond the skies that shine from Heaven's blue.
I doubt not I'll remember, beyond life's evening gray,
The happy hour of worship in that model church to day.
Dear wife, the fight will soon be fought—the victory be won;
The shinin' goal is just ahead, the race is nearly run.
O'er the river we are nearin' they are throngin' to the shore—
To shout our safe arrival where the weary weep no more.

Religious.

THE RELATION OF CHILDREN TO THE CHURCH.

From a Paper read at the London Baptist Association, on Tuesday, June 17, by Rev. W. Brock, Jun., and printed by request.

This question has been warmly pressed, and certainly deserves attention: Is there anything in our current theory of church-membership, or in an

ordinary application of it, which tends to keep our young friends aloof? Such membership is no doubt an immense safe-guard. How can we extend its blessings? What may we fairly do so as to encourage an earlier and more extended application for it on the part of the youths and maidens, the boys and girls in our schools and families?

We are not at liberty, in deference to any pressure of imagined danger, to modify those fundamental principles on which our membership proceeds. The Church, a confederation of believers in Christ: its ordinances confined to them, its fellowships enjoyed by them, its duties binding on them all—this is our theory; and if it be the true one we must stick to it. We cannot invent an outer circle of disciples and an inner. We cannot put the names of unconscious infants on the church roll. We cannot admit some to the Lord's Supper and others only to baptism. We have no authority for setting on different spiritual levels children of believers and children of unbelievers. No! We will never, to gratify a mistaken feeling, throw that stumbling-stone in the path of the little ones! We will rather tell them candidly, You are not Christians by your birth; you will be Christians only if you love our Lord yourselves, and by your own choice believe the Gospel.

It is, however, quite another question whether our methods are appropriate to the circumstances of the day. Is there a want of elasticity and ready adaptation in our attitude towards the young, which may act as a discouragement to them, or even amount to a practical prohibition? Can we adhere to our principle, and yet so apply it as to remove reasonable impediments to its acceptance? Some of our churches have long ago answered these questions, and they have their reward. Their experience may free us from any fear in following.

First, then, as to the requirements which we make. The mere matter of age itself—do I err in saying that this has been often made so strong an objection as to foreclose all further investigation? Or if this has been over-borne, there have arisen such demands as these:—We must have in our members a ripper knowledge of these doctrines, or a fuller experience of the plague of the heart, the ways of the world, the working of the Spirit; or a lengthened course of conduct to establish openly, before the eyes of the church, the genuineness of the supposed faith. Now, if all must have all that, of course we cannot have the children. It is not to be desired that we should have them. Save us from precocious children in the church as well as in the family, from little Davids staggering under Saul's armour, and trying to force their minds into the time-honoured problem of theology, or the agonies of an experience like that of "Grace Abounding."

But why must we have so much in a church-member? What do our principles require but the reasonable assurance that the applicant loves our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity? Guard by all means against a premature profession. Secure the testimony of parents to the consistency of the home conduct. See that there is the intelligent apprehension of Christ as the Saviour from sin; an earnest acceptance of Him; a sincere allegiance to Him. But let no mere stereotyped rule, no tradition of the fathers, no conventional standards of our own, be permitted to bar a child of God from the baptismal water, or the Table of the Lord! Better break a hundred rules than rob the youngest disciple of his rights! The church is not a company of the perfect, but a nursery for the feeble, and a school for the untrained. What sadder contradiction than to keep carefully excluded the very souls that from youth, inexperience, and ignorance need its influence most?

Let us pass to another point—the encouragements which we may offer. It is not enough to take the padlock off the gate. We need to make it clear

that the gate is open. The younger people in our congregations must understand plainly that their age is no bar to their church-membership. They think it is. They have largely the impression that we do not expect them to come forward. They look for some mysterious change of feeling which must supervene before they move themselves. They should know that they need not wait, that so far as the action of the church is concerned, every barrier has been withdrawn, that the only one remaining they must themselves remove. They must choose the good part, they must be able honestly to say for themselves, "I too belong to Christ."

The special means which may be employed to produce this impression must depend upon the Christian judgment and the circumstances of each case. Some do not hesitate to advise the formation of children's churches, with separate meetings and organisations. Surrey Chapel has its "Children's Christian Band," membership being extended to all who answer "Yes" to certain simple questions about their disposition towards Christ. The Wesleyans are rapidly gathering the more hopeful among their young people into classes of catechumens, and are beginning to draw the members mainly from among them. The Calvinistic Methodists of Wales have in every congregation the "Children's Society," where special religious instruction is regularly given by the pastor, and the privileges and duties of church-membership are explained and enjoined. In all these cases there is the avowed object of familiarising youthful minds with the thought of the church, and of paving the way to their full entrance upon its fellowship.

With some of the methods mentioned we may feel sympathy; from some, I expect, we should turn with aversion. Much depends on the manner in which they are evoked. No unnatural pressure, no spiritual forcing of that fresh and beautiful life, which growth up, like the corn while the farmer is asleep "he knoweth not how." Children have their religious experience, sometimes a really deep and touching one, a genuine self-abasement, after holiness, a fervent love to Christ. It would be a mistake to arrest these Divine processes by any rigid mechanism, any abrupt, untimely interruption. "The piety of childhood," says the present chairman of the Congregational Union, "is a tender as well as a beautiful plant. Let it grow in the sacred shades of home. Beware how you transplant it too early into the glare of publicity, lest it droop and wither, or be stimulated into premature fruitfulness before its root is deep or its wood is firm. A wise delay shall nurse it for a fairer, stronger growth in after years."

Quite within the limits thus marked out, and without resorting to any novel method, there lie ready to our hands many means appropriate to our object. Every Sunday-school teacher has them. He knows how the scholars in his class are prone to slip out of his reach, and be never more heard of within the Church of God. Let him, not content with his ordinary lesson, learn to feel the pulse of each young heart, make opportunities of private intercourse, watch the first buddings of personal conviction, be himself the medium of leading this and that one forward, first to Christ and then to His church. Every Sunday-school superintendent has his fold to oversee. What fitter use of his office than to become the channel between school and church, to single out the flower of his flock, and knit them to the Christian fellowship. Every parent knows, as none else can know, each of the treatment fit for his own children; where to restrain, and where to encourage; whose prerogative but his own to press the claims of personal religion on their opening minds, and unfold to them the duties and delights of its profession? Deacons, and elders, and all older Christians, of the more persuasive as well as of the stronger sex, have here a field of work,

almost unoccupied, among the younger members of our congregations—opportunities, if they know how to seize them, of creating, by a few kind words, by a little fatherly attention, influences and impressions that shall abide for ever. And every pastor has, or may have, his children's meetings of one kind or another, his familiar way into the home and the class, his friendly correspondence with boys and girls at school, his word of question or entreaty in the garden, or the street—a private power, greater than the more public, which wisely used, may prove a magnet of attraction, not to Christ only, but to Christ and His church. Should we not all be in frequent communication with our teachers, that any hopeful children in their classes might at once come in contact with ourselves! As sons and daughters are born and grow up in the families of our members, while we cannot enrol them on our church registers, or admit them to our church ordinances, surely there should be as far as possible, some distinct place for them in the pastor's memory, in his thoughts and in his prayers.

When the late Dr. Wm. Jenner, of Edinburgh, died, there was found among his papers a long list, in his own delicate handwriting, of the children in his congregation, with private marks attached to each name, of a significance known only to himself, but indicating, no doubt, the fulfilments or disappointments of his hopes concerning them. One can imagine the gentle old man on his knees, with that book before him, laying one name after another before the notice of the Father in heaven, and then going forth to "feed his lambs." Little wonder that the children clung to him wherever he came, and loved to hear him speak; or that to this day his influence breathes over their hearts, and is fruitful and fragrant in their lives.

We have no rite answering to that which, in the Episcopal churches, meets the youth or maiden as they step out of their earlier years, and con-jure to them with the vows which they owe to God. Yet surely no child in our families, no scholar in our schools, but should once at least in his life, be brought personally face to face with the realities, the obligation, the urgencies, of religion. None should be able to say, I passed through your classes, I joined in your services, I was known to your members and your minister; but word of solemn warning, of hearty encouragement addressed to myself, I never had from one of you, parent, pastor, teacher, friend. It is to be feared that many can say that. Something, then, to save every Christian church from such discredit; a deeper sense of parental and pastoral duty; a combination among elder members, the fathers and mothers in our Israel; a league between ministers and teachers, to make the school work more directly and decidedly and personally Christian—if in such counsel there is no novelty, at least it is practicable, it lies ready to hand. "Whosoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might."

I will only add my conviction that, wherever it is right to admit young people to our membership, they should come in with all the honours. It is not likely that they will, at first, trouble our church-meetings much. Their parents may surely be trusted not to take them where they had better not be, nor to encourage them in what they had better not do. Do not by any distinct ordinance exclude them from attending a meeting or giving a vote. Let the welcome be unconditional. They will no more "swamp" a meeting than any other class. By the time they are able to attend, they will bring with them, I venture to say, as good a share of sense and moderation as any members that we have.

Nay, is it not to them, her own children's children, that the church must look for the backbone of her strength? Perhaps we are apt to undervalue the accessions that come noiselessly from the midst of our own community. We reserve our own rejoicings for con-

verted heathen, and great transgressors reclaimed. We speak sometimes as if the mighty work of the kingdom were only to be wrought by men like Saul of Tarsus, "preaching the faith which once they destroyed." Surely we err. Not to speak of Joseph, David, Daniel, Timothy, and the youthful martyrs, who emulated, if they did not surpass, the courage of their elders, were not the Wesley men who had feared the Lord from the beginning? Was not William Knibb such an one? Are not Robert Moffat, and Griffith John, of China? Mr. John was admitted as a member at the age of eight, and writes now in as many words, "Had I been discouraged then, I doubt whether I should ever have been a missionary or a member of the Christian Church at all."

Far distant be the day when we grow content, with cultivating our own vineyard, and fail to seek accessions from the vast outer world of ignorance and ungodliness! But there may be danger in the opposite direction. If we would have a church structure firm and stable,

"A tower of strength
That stands foursquare to every wind that blows."

let us not overlook the stones that lie ready-hewn in our own quarries. Doubtless, a disciple dug out from the terrible pit of long-continued sin may, under the impulses of a remarkable conversion, achieve an unequalled work and distance the less heroic efforts of homelier competitors. But for the main life and labour of the church, for the "patient continuance in well doing," are not those on the whole her most useful and trusty members, in whose hearts nature and grace dwell not merely as reconvered enemies, but as familiar friends whose early lives are stained with no dark disgrace, whose memories are haunted by no ghostly visitors from bygone scenes of sin; who, when challenged in their unobtrusive course by the eager voices of error or temptation, can make answer, "But thy servant fear the Lord from my youth"?

For the Christian Messenger.

NOTES OF TRAVEL.

VI.

CEYLON—MADRAS—CALCUTTA—RANGOON—BENTHADA.

Christianity is the greatest civilizer, it is also the quickest and the most thorough. How then is it to be accounted for that, as at Ceylon, a Hea-then people should be in contact with Christianity for more than a century, and yet still retain so much of barbarism? Look at that odd contrivance which the Cingalese make answer all the purposes of a boat; it resembles nothing so much as a pig-trough of extraordinary size with a peculiar, but simple arrangement, to prevent it from upsetting—a heavy log, as long as the trough itself, and strongly lashed to it by two poles, from stern and bow. From this last contrivance the whole concern takes its name and is called an "outrigger." Now, one would argue that Christianity and the "outrigger" are incompatible, and so they are. So are the "ratoning" of Trades' Unions—and Mormonism—and Free love, and any and all the sensational horrors with which every issue of the daily press teems. These are signs, not of Christianity embraced but defied—exponents, in fact, of Heathenism. It is, then, a very superficial scepticism which argues that Christianity is a failure because it has not supplanted Heathenism in Ceylon in the course of a century, and forgets that there is a Heathenism as pronounced in America, after many centuries of contact with Christianity. But, says sceptic, in America the external barbarisms, at least, as paint and feathers have yielded to the influence of Christian civilization—why does not the ridiculous "outrigger" and all the external barbarisms of which it is the exponent, disappear in Ceylon? The reply is