

Sermon.

For the Christian Messenger.

THE PREACHER'S COMPLAINT, AND SOME OF THE REASONS FOR IT.

The Sermon preached before the N. S. Central Baptist Association at Bridgewater on Monday, June 30, 1873.

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(Published by special request of the Association.)

(Conclusion.)

Who hath believed our report? Isa. liii. 1.

II. Let us now consider some of the causes of failure that exist among the members of our churches. The idea obtains among many, that the whole responsibility in this respect rests upon the Minister. If the cause prospers under his administration he gets the praise. If it declines, he gets the blame. Every one must see, however, the absurdity of such a notion. In the church membership lie some of the most essential requisites for the success of the ministry. If these are not in active operation the cause of truth must of necessity suffer.

1. And in the first place, we observe that the want of sympathy with the minister and prayer for his success greatly tends to weigh down his spirits and consequently to destroy the effect of the truth he delivers. God has appointed in his church various officers. Gifts are bestowed on them according to their stations, and like the members of the same body, all are interested in the prosperity of the whole. The gifts differ, but it is the same spirit. Administrations are different but it is the same Lord. It is plain from the teachings of the Apostle in 1 Cor. 12. chap. that in order to the church's prosperity there must be a common sympathy between the Minister and Members. There must be a oneness of aim in all their engagements. But how frequently is this intimate relation almost entirely ignored, and the obligation of church members lost sight of. For instance a church possessing abundant means call to their service a worthy minister. They give him a liberal maintenance and then say to him practically, if not verbally, "we expect you to look after the spiritual interests of the church and congregation." "Our attention is necessarily occupied with our worldly blessings." And thus they leave him with no one to share his toils or help him to bear his burdens. He may be successful in drawing a congregation, and giving general satisfaction, but in his desire and longings for the conversion of the lost he feels himself alone. There are few if any who with him are found weeping between the porch and the altar—few to respond to the request of the Apostle when he said, "Brethren pray for us." Under these depressing circumstances his energies are weakened—his ardour chilled and his efforts crippled and disappointment weighs down his spirits. On the other hand, if the servant of the Lord is surrounded by a united band of warm-hearted, loving praying working brethren and sisters, he goes to his work buoyant with hope—his heart inspired with energy—his zeal set on fire of love, and his preaching will have a power that with the divine blessing will reach the cold and hardened heart of the sinner. If this state of things existed in all our churches, instead of coming to our Associations with sorrowful hearts on account of the few additions to our number, our letters would bring the joyous intelligence of hundreds and thousands turning to God, O when will our church awake to their solemn responsibility in this respect and as co-laborers in the great work of spreading the gospel, give the minister their sympathies, prayers and hearty co-operation.

2. Another hindrance to the success of the gospel is inconsistency of conduct with the christian profession. "See that ye walk circumspectly not as fools but as wise" is an apostolic injunction which fully carried out in our churches would give incalculable weight and force to the preaching of the word. Christian consistency is a standing illustration of gospel truth, while the smallest deviation from the path of rectitude on the part of professors will materially hinder its progress.

If this be true what must be the effort produced by the conduct of those "who profess to know God and in works deny him, being abominable and disobedient and to every good work reprobate"—who mingle with the "ungodly in their ungodly deeds," and thus "change the truth of God unto a lie." And are there no such professors in these days? Can all the

members of our churches plead "not guilty," when such charges are preferred? Are those truths less palpable now, than in the days of the Apostle when he wrote to his Phillipian brethren, with streaming eyes and aching heart; "For many walk of whom I have told you often and now tell you even weeping that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ whose end is destruction whose God is their belly, whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things." That such conduct of professors of religion has a tendency to produce infidelity is a fact too palpable to need any proof. Take a single instance, a young man attends the ministrations of the Gospel. He listens to the solemn appeals of God's word. His conscience is convicted by the truth, and he believes it. He sees his own depravity and deplors it. He feels the importance of religion and is inclined to embrace it. He goes home to ponder—to read, and perhaps to pray, and he is almost persuaded to be a christian. But as he goes out into the busy world on Monday morning, the first thing that attracts his attention is a church member driving a sharp bargain, in which the truth is not very strictly adhered to, and he wonders that a christian professor can indulge in what he knows to be dishonesty. Next he sees another, perhaps the deacon, tipping at the bar of some disreputable grogery; this throws his mind into a state of perplexity and doubt, as to the reality of religion. By and by he hears loud talking from some contending parties where angry words are followed by fierce blows, and a disgraceful quarrel ends the scene. On enquiry he finds that they are both church members. Thus religion suffers another fall in his estimation. After a while he sees several young members of the church engaged in flippant conversation interspersed with profane oaths, and the involuntary exclamation escapes his lip. "Can it be possible that this is the language of those who not long ago were buried in the baptismal waters!" By this time he is ready to ask, Is religion real? or is it a grand farce—a convenient hobby to be used by persons at pleasure to answer some selfish end? But on his way home from his business he hears the sound of music and the noise of merry feet keeping time to some old familiar tune. Old scenes now come up before him and the old love of pleasure revives. He looks into that gay and lively company, and recognizes a number whom he had seen not long before with bowed heads around the Lord's table. His impressions in favor of religion are now nearly all gone and he is ready to brand all professors with hypocrisy, and the Bible a fiction. And when he sees in the bar room of the hotel—which lies in his way home—men, whose voices he had often heard in prayer, around the gambling table, he is ready to trample the Bible under his feet and settle down into confirmed infidelity. This may appear to some a dark picture, but, is it not a true one? Are there not many members of our churches whose characters are a foul blot on the face of the church records, and whose conduct is a standing libel against christianity. Thank God such gross inconsistencies are the exceptions, not the rule, and yet there are far too many who are propagating infidelity by having a name to live while they are far worse than dead. In the words of a celebrated writer, "How many inquiring, almost christians have been shipwrecked by something they have heard and seen in a member of the church." And can we not add, how many a faithful Pastor has retired from the scene of his labors under the crushing feeling that his efforts for the conversion of sinners are constantly crippled by the ungodly conduct of some of the members of his own church. How many a Missionary, toiling under the burning sun of an unhealthy climate to convert the heathen to Christ, have had their hopes dashed to the ground by the ungodly conduct of visitors from christian lands. David Brainard informs us that when among the American Indians he stopped at a place where he offered to instruct them in christianity. He was met by the retort, "Why should you wish the Indians to become christians, seeing that the christians are so much worse than the Indians? The christians lie, steal, and drink worse than the Indians. They first taught the Indians to be drunk. They steal to so great a degree that their rulers are obliged to hang them for it, and even that is not enough to deter others from the practice. We will not consent therefore to become christians, lest we should be as bad as they. We will live as our fathers lived, and go where our fathers go when we die. Notwithstanding all Mr. Brainard did to explain to them that these were not christians in heart he could not

alter their resolution, but left them humbled at the thought that the wickedness of some professing christians should produce such prejudice. O how important that professing christians should be real, Bible christians—weekday as well as Sunday christians—christians in the family, on the street—in the counting house, and in all the walks of life—faithful, sober, earnest—heavenly minded; bright shining christians—"not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." How they would strengthen the hands of the preacher, and their example would set home the truth preached. God's cause would move onward with the march tread of an army—God would be honored and souls saved.

3. Again, the worldly conformity of christian professors tends greatly to destroy the effect of preaching. This I think will be readily admitted to be the prevailing sin of the church. Even among those who are free from the more glaring inconsistencies to which allusion has been made, there are very many who seem to exhibit a remarkable forgetfulness of that apostolic injunction, "Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." It is evident however, to every reflective mind that worldly conformity is a flat denial of the truth of God's word. God in the beginning said to the pure and innocent being whom he had made, in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," but God's greatest enemy said thou shalt not surely die; and there is the same persistent perpetual antagonism between God's word and the world. What the one asserts, the other denies.

God's word pronounces blessing on the head of the poor, the humble and the contrite. The world is ready to lavish its highest encomiums on the rich, the proud and the impenitent. The word of God commends the conduct of those who shun evil, and are of upright conversation, while the world is ready to sing the high praises of those who indulge in the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye and the pride of life, and who run greedily into all mischief and sin.

The Bible says, "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging." "Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth its color in the cup, when it moveth itself aright, at the last it biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder." But the world comes out with a flat denial and boldly declares that there is no serpent in the cup—no poison in the bowl, and thousands are deluded by the fatal fallacy, and drawn into the awful vortex of drunkenness, from which few ever escape. Now there is no middle ground to occupy. We are ranged on one side or the other. We are either with Christ or against him. And so far as professors of religion take sides with the world they give the lie to the gospel, and where this spirit generally pervades the church the preaching of the gospel will have but little effect. Of what use is it for a minister to persuade the ungodly to forsake the foolish and vain things of the world, while they see so many of those professing godliness, in love with the world—seeking after its pleasures—delighting in its degrading demoralizing dissipation? It is evidently the minister's duty to preach the pure gospel and not "shun to declare the whole counsel of God," but what headway can it be expected to make against the natural unbelief of men's hearts, and the combined testimony of so many witnesses in the church against its truth? It is no wonder that the preacher retires from the unequal contest weighed down and disheartened with the cry in his heart if not on his lips, Lord who hath believed our report. What a fearful responsibility rests on christian professors. What a pleasing contrast would be presented by a church acting under the transforming and renewing power of the Holy Spirit. Such a church, living above the world—walking in love and in the fear of the Lord—shedding around them the light of a pure life and a holy example would carry with them such evidence of the truth of the gospel, as would bear down all opposition. They would become "fellow helpers to the truth" the "pillar and ground of the truth," and all the attempts of the world with the combined powers of darkness to overthrow it, would be useless.

4. Disunion and dissension among professors of religion, present greater hindrances to the success of truth than all the opposition from without. Wherever these exist, whether between ministers or laymen—carried on in public or in private, the truth suffers a positive denial. For instance the Psalmist says, "Behold how good and

how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." But wrangling professors, by standing aloof from each other, and keeping the unholy fire of strife burning, "say it is better to remain at variance than to dwell together in unity." Our blessed Saviour whose lips were strangers to guile gave utterance to these gracious words, "But I say unto you that ye resist not evil, but whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek turn to him the other also." But what do many professing christians say? They go back to the killing letter of the law and say, "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." Nay, judging from the tone and spirit exhibited by the combatants often times, they seem to say, If my brother smites me on one cheek, I will smite him on both. If he wounds me deeply I will inflict a deeper and sorer wound if possible. If he lashes me with whips, I will scourge him with scorpions. This is the teaching of many professing christians of the present day. The Apostle has taught us the necessity of putting on the "whole armour of God that we may stand against the wiles of the devil." But many of the professed soldiers of the Cross say by their acts there is no need of this. They lay aside the heavenly armour—if indeed they ever had it on—and with the carnal weapons of malice and revenge make war on one another and thus destroy the peace of the church and throw formidable obstacles in the way of the progress of truth. How important that we should, one and all attend to the injunction of the Apostle which says, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking be put away from you with all malice; and be ye kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." Then might we hope to see the truth advance more gloriously. Not that we would for a moment presume to limit the power of God, or regard the accomplishment of His divine purposes as conditional upon the course of conduct we might choose to pursue. "He who makes the clouds his chariot, and walketh on the wings of the wind," is able to send his word to the ends of the earth on the swift wings of the lightning, and cause the thunder to utter his truth in the ears of all men. But he has not chosen to do so. He has designed by "the foolishness of preaching" to save men's souls. It is our duty therefore to recognize the relation between the means which God has appointed and the ends to be accomplished thereby, and to use those means in humble dependence on the promise of the Holy Spirit to give to the word abundant success.

May we all, ministers and people be largely endowed with the "wisdom that is from above which is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy." Then shall we be better fitted for our work, and more hopeful of success.

Correspondence.

For the Christian Messenger.

HALIFAX, July 18th, 1873.

Bro. Selden,—

Having been informed by you that at the Central Association, attention was called to an apparent discrepancy in the account of the Treasurer of Nova Scotia Baptist Home Missionary Society, I have looked into the matter and am prepared to offer an explanation which will make the matter quite satisfactory, I trust to all concerned.

The change of currency took place on the 1st July 1871, and in the manuscript prepared for the press, the balance was struck to that date, but by some oversight this does not appear in the printed account.

If you will add up the debits and credits in the account for the month of June, and strike the balance you will find that there was in the Treasurer's hands at that time \$512 33, N.S. currency, or \$498.67, D. C., add to this the amounts subsequently received with the addition of 50 cts. to the item from Bridgewater Church, which should be \$16 50, and you have the total as in printed account correct, the same may be ascertained by adding up the column on the debit side, leaving out the items for June, because the balance is carried to credit side to July 1st, as above. The balance in Treasurer's hands, June 1st 1872 is correct as appears in the account.

This statement may be verified by a comparison with the table showing gross receipts and expenditures, as on page 30 in the Minutes of Central Association, and page 27 in the Minutes of Eastern Association for 1872.

R. N. BECKWITH,
Sec. H. M. Board.

For the Christian Messenger.

A POINT AIMED AT POINT-LESSLY.

"Tis a point I long to know,
O! it causes anxious thought;
Do I love the Lord or no;
Am I his or am I not?"

With due deference to the learning, talents and piety of the author of the above lines, I venture to say, that had he used common sense upon this matter (presuming he believed the Bible) he would have known that he that cometh unto God must believe, not only that he exists, but that he rewards those who diligently seek him; that is, that he forgives, justifies, sanctifies and glorifies such. Also that the belief that God is love even to the extent of rewarding in the smallest measures of grace, begets or works love to Him, which love to Him brings the fulfilment of his promise, involving evidences the most conclusive that the man is born of God—in other words, that he loves the Lord, and that he is the Lord's.

"Now to the Lord who makes us know."

(By the witness of His Holy Spirit in our hearts who takes of the things of His and shows them unto us.)

"The wonders of his dying love,
Be humble honors here below,
And songs of nobler praise above."

Yours ever,
A. B. C.

For the Christian Messenger.

LESSONS IN MATTHEW, AND HYMN AND TUNE BOOK.

My Dear Brother,—

I wish to call the attention of our Pastors, Churches and Sunday School workers throughout the provinces to two very useful publications—one just issued by the Bible Union—the other, by the Publication Society, to be ready in about two months. The first is—MATTHEW WITH NOTES ON THE INTERNATIONAL LESSONS (for the last half of this year) BY FRANKLIN JOHNSON, D. D. Bro. Johnson is a good scholar; his notes are very much to the point, and extend to the contents of the Lessons. His practical remarks are just the thing to aid the teacher in making the application. We ought to try to put this in every teacher's hand. Marvelously, if this were done, would our schools and teaching improve. It can be had of the Publication Society, 2 Tremont Temple, Boston. Will not our brethren interest themselves in introducing it, and have it kept for sale at available points? We ought to encourage the Bible Union, in its laudable efforts to give us improved versions and helps in studying God's word, by a liberal patronage; besides we should be securing rich advantages for ourselves. The whole Gospel is given in Dr. Johnson's book, in the Revised version. Prepared as this was by eminent scholars, it will be very useful to compare it with the common version.

The other book is a CHEAP EDITION OF THE BAPTIST HYMN AND TUNE BOOK. It is to be lighter and smaller than the large edition. Good paper, good type and good binding. It will be very much cheaper. The hymns will be in the same order as in the Hymn Books. A copy of this book with a cheap edition Hymn Book can be had for the same money very nearly, as a single copy of the largest Hymn and Tune Book, or any similar work before the public. It strikes me this is just the thing to be immensely popular in the Provinces; and its introduction would mark a new era in the singing of God's praise. It will be well to communicate with the Society, at Boston. K. Y.

For the Christian Messenger.

IN MEMORIAM.

JAMES W. SHAW.

The following notice of the death of Mr. Jas. W. Shaw, son of Mr. John Shaw of Berwick is copied, by request, from the "Bay City Tribune." Deceased was a member of the Berwick Baptist Church:

MELANCHOLY DEATH.—A painful accident resulting in the death of James W. Shaw, a promising young man, took place at the Rifle River Boom yesterday. Mr. Shaw is a mechanic and came to Wenona a year and a half ago, and was employed in the planing mill of Arnold and Catlin. He was very ingenious and last fall invented a boring machine for boring long timber for rafting. It was patented in Dec., and about six weeks ago Mr. Shaw went up to Rifle River to put it into operation. They were at work yesterday afternoon about 2 o'clock, when the deceased started down the stream to the float about 30 rods distant after some tools to use in hanging the