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N. S. Eastern Association Documents.

The Annual Letter to the Churches.

THE CIRCULAR LETTER OF THE N. S. EASTERN ASSOCIATION, TO THE CHURCHES OF WHICH IT IS COMPOSED.

Dear Brethren,—

The subject of our Annual Epistle is one to which we commend your prayerful attention, viz:

DEFLECTION FROM CHRIST.

To any observing Christian, it must often have been a source of sorrow to see so many dropping out of the ranks of the militant host. Some who seemed destined to be specially useful, who apparently possessed not only talent, but that which sanctifies all talent, spiritual-mindedness, have soon succumbed to the adverse influences bearing upon them. Others have during a longer period, borne some fruit, when mildew has fallen upon them, and checked further productiveness. There are instances, not a few, in which members of our churches have continued in the Christian course for ten, twenty, or thirty years, and after all, have belied their profession, and stained the record of a life-time. So frequently have these instances presented themselves, that the Arminian view of "falling away," has necessarily suggested itself as being at least tintured with probability. There is, indeed, a side of truth to it. Wherein, we are led to inquire, lies the difference between the two great systems? A proportion of those received into Arminian churches "fall away," and the system recognizes the fact as a doctrine. A proportion of our own converts in like manner "fall away," but we strenuously urge that the doctrine is not true. It is not true that a person can be regenerated more than once, but it is a melancholy fact that each body loses a large number of its converts. The Saviour declares that "if a man do not abide in Him he is cast forth as a branch and is withered." (John xv. 1-6.) It is better for us to face the truth that Jesus utters, that the branch not bearing fruit is *dead*, no matter to what church he may have been united.

Not impugning for a single instant the doctrine of the complete salvation of those regenerated by the Holy Spirit, the question still remains, what about the multitudes who have been baptized, and walk no longer with us? What becomes of those "who for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away?"

Compelled to recognize its existence, let us ask

WHAT CONSTITUTES RELIGIOUS DEFLECTION?

There may be no open departure from the ranks. Unlike the familiar illustration in which the politician actually leaves his party, the Christian may be there in presence, while his spirit is not engaged in the work of the Master. Spiritual deflection includes a weakening in the grasp with which eternal realities are held. A man may gradually relax his hold, until he cannot tell whether he has a real grip of them or not. It is true, he may delude himself by the sound of certain words he utters in public or in private; but how much of his religious phraseology is "words, words, and nothing more." If once in a while, he were to ask, what do I mean by all this, there would be some hope of him. But alas! how many of our people are steadily yielding to the world in the various forms in which it presents itself to their desires! One is drawn away by pleasures such as no child of God ought to need, &c., dancing, or gambling, or is found in the company of sinners in the bar room, or at the horse race. Another is carried away by that which in its just measure is laudable and right, but which pursued to excess "drowns men in destruction and perdition." (1 Tim. vi. 9.) He may by simply over-attention to business, "choke the seed of the kingdom, so that it becomes unfruitful."

A man may cease to exist as a church member while he is an up-right, industrious merchant, farmer, mechanic, or professional man. His name may remain on the roll of membership through the rest of his life, and he be in the condition of the people at Sardis: "Thou hast a name that thou livest and art dead!" (Rev. iii. 1.) This is spiritual deflection, deflection from the life and power of the gospel, while yet the individual may retain his place in the church.

But a clearer line of division is drawn when from any cause members forsake their brethren. Denominational deflection, when one who has been brought up a Baptist, or has professed to put on Christ among us, is not so much to be deplored. When Baptists go over to other bodies, holding more lax discipline, or none at all, it is a high testimony to the purity of our principles. Our churches will always, we trust, be too hot to hold those who openly serve the Devil. Besides, it is no loss to have the unspiritual go where they belong. Judas Maccabæus, on the eve of one of his battles, sifted his army of its timid members, and with reduced bands completely routed the foe. Our tears need not be shed over these, but should be reserved for that increasing company in the borders of all our churches, who, by their follies, their perversities, or their sins, have placed themselves *nowhere*. It is a common story to any of us who have an extended experience, that charges of transgression are brought against a brother or a sister, then the following investigation, then the feelings of pride and resentment aroused, then the cavilling and quibbling of the accused party and his friends; and finally the withdrawal of fellowship. There are, no doubt, occasionally injudicious action and offensive words on the part of the church. Human nature will assert itself in the most sacred associations. But generally, the body of Christ is loth to hear an evil report of one of its members, slow to take action, and averse to affix the penalty. As a general thing, not until every means has been tried, is the offender cast out. But once outside the fold, he broods over his disgrace, magnifies or distorts all the proceedings against him; imagines there is no friendship to him now, and throws himself into the camp of the enemy.

Take another common illustration, in which one brother has been injured by another. He refers it to the church. They adjudicate as best they can. The result is that one of the brethren is dissatisfied, declares that he cannot walk any longer with so unjust a people, and withdraws himself from their fellowship. Such a course is as illogical as it is unchristian; but it is a source of deflection from which few of our churches are exempt.

Many other illustrations of this sad theme will suggest themselves. Perhaps it is unnecessary to extend them.

THE PRACTICAL EFFECT.

The advance of the Kingdom is everywhere retarded by these examples of what the Gospel seemingly fails to accomplish. In every hamlet of the land, men are questioning the power of Christianity, because of the failure of its professors to manifest any true idea of what it demands. A person who thinks at all, as he sees so many relapsing into their former state, naturally says: "I fear to unite with a church, to make a profession which I may belie in the course of a few months or years." Or, he may reason that the periodical influxes into the churches are not all they appear to be. Again, and again, he has seen the process repeated, with the same results, multitudes at such times glorying in the cross, and in the intervening seasons by their conduct, trampling it beneath their feet. (Phil. iii. 18.)

It ought to be a standing argument for our steadfastness, that any deflection on our part from the life and power of godliness may be an effective means of hindering men from entering into the kingdom of heaven.

CAN THE EVIL BE MITIGATED?

Prevented wholly, it cannot be. The "sow that was washed" must return "to her wallowing in the mire." (2 Peter ii. 20-22.) But there may be sleep going astray, and there should rise within us the desire to go after them, the blessed impulsion of love to the brethren—the feeling born of the Holy Ghost, akin to that with which the Great Master looked upon Peter (Luke xxii. 61), and sent to him the message of the Resurrection. (Mark xvi. 7.)

Let us beware of the spirit of the ancient Pharisee, which looks loftily down upon those who have fallen, those who have wandered off into the inviting fields of worldliness, or those who have simply cooled from the fervor of their first love. We, the spiritual, must not despise them, the unspiritual. We sometimes excuse ourselves by saying that we cannot drag them along. But who draws us along—bears with us—even when we are very froward? "We cannot spend our time upon them." But who bears patiently with us, saying, "Behold I stand at the door and knock"—waiting long days until we give Him full possession of our heart? Having by their conduct alienated themselves, we suppose that we are not bound to take further care of them. The exclamation, "Am I my brother's keeper?" may not be audible, but the sentiment is imbedded in our practice.

We would appeal to you, beloved brethren and sisters, to exercise the spirit of the Master. Go to the wanderer from the fold, and beseech him to return. "Brethren, if any one among you do err from the truth, and one convert him, let him know that he who converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins." (James v. 19, 20.) This exhortation is particularly appropriate to the subject. The "sinner" of the last verse is the "erring brother" of the preceding. If we bring him into the household again, the reward will be ours which is due the traveller who chafes into life his benumbed companion. Could we not approach the brother wasting his energies upon foolish indulgence, and make a kindly suggestion? Is it impossible to gain the ear of the man of business, who is neglecting his privileges, and forgetting his vows to God and his brethren, and invite his presence and his aid? Money these brethren sometimes freely supply, but money will not purchase exemption from the conflict. There are no substitutes in this warfare. They must be invited back to their Christian duties, and warmly urged to return to the Father's house. We are aware that much discrimination and tact are needed in thus dealing with our cooled-off brethren, but we should be encouraged by the promised aid of the Holy Spirit. We may also rest assured that we will find a response wherever a spark of grace remains. These very brethren may be awaiting our approach.

At all events, let us bear them in mind: let us ponder their miserable condition. The instincts of brotherly affection will be aroused; we will cry unto the Lord on their behalf, and the joy will be ours, the peculiar, sacred satisfaction of seeing brethren who for long years have wasted their energies, return to the Shepherd and bishop of their souls, and to their place in His fold.

Report of the Committee on Missions.

Your Committee on Missions beg to report their deep sense of our responsibility as a denomination in this regard: whatever success may have crowned our efforts hitherto, it is not yet time to stay our hand. From the day of Pentecost down through the centuries, the Baptist Church has been fired by missionary enthusiasm, and she has been weak or mighty in proportion as this sacred flame has burned dimly or brightly.—in other words Christ has to a large extent committed the propagation of the Gospel to His people, and the results have ever been proportioned to their efforts. His Word does not return unto Him void.

By a remarkable chain of Providences God has led us to occupy the land of the Telogoos, a people without God, perishing in their idolatry. He has given us as missionaries, young men and women who grew up in our homes, were led to Jesus by the influences operating in our churches, and whose missionary zeal developed in, and by means of the religious atmosphere surrounding them. The offspring and representatives of our churches, their success or failure, their joy or sorrow is ours by the tenderest of sympathies. Hence our delight that God has shown them so much honor. Even during the first years of their labor, already schools have been gathered, extensive fields of labor surveyed, the most promising points of attack, noted and some souls won to Christ.

But now the sad tidings come that our dear sister Armstrong has been prostrated by disease, and that Bro. Armstrong must accompany her home. All of the many who love these highly honored servants of God will now pray especially that He who has been with them during these long years, will in a particular manner be with them now, and that He will care for their work while they are recruiting. Nor will you forget those that still remain in the field whose duties are now increased.

Our Home Mission work is not second in importance to any

other. Each church should regard itself as set up by the Lord for the purpose of extending His Kingdom, and each disciple should consider it his especial duty to lead men to Christ both by teaching and contributing as God has prospered him.

We would urge, therefore, upon all the churches in this Association the necessity of enlarged benevolence, that our missionary efforts be not crippled. We would urge it upon each disciple that he place himself in the fullest harmony with his Lord, in this respect, and would urge it upon each pastor that he be a wise leader to his people in these matters that so immediately pertain to the salvation of men and to the glory of our Redeemer.

Respectfully submitted,

WM. GEORGE, Chairman.

Report of Committee on Education.

During the last decade, the Institutions of learning connected with our Denomination have been placed in a position which is gratifying to contemplate. Modern structures, well adapted for the purposes for which they are designed, have been erected, these are equipped with the latest improvements, and much has been done for the convenience of the instructors, and the comfort of the students. It must be borne in mind, however, that perfection in the equipment of our higher schools is always in the distance. No College in any country is ever considered finished. There is always abundance of room for improvement; and your committee would urge upon the people out of whose heart the College sprang, not to slack their hand in giving, so that any necessary new thing may be at once provided.

We should take a just pride in keeping our Seminaries of learning in a high state of efficiency.

The work done will bear comparison with that of older institutions in America. The governing body aim to secure a sounder training, (rather than a superficial) and in this, are fully aided by the instructors in the different departments.

Your Committee would emphasize the fact that in the history of the College, the blessing of the Lord has been openly and constantly manifested in the salvation of the pupils. Not in isolated instances, but so frequently that we can point to it as a general occurrence, have the influences of heaven descended. Many have been there convinced of the absolute need of the wisdom that cometh from above, and have sought and found that which is far above every intellectual attainment. As in the past, so for the future, the Denomination must look for her pastors and teachers, and cultured men and women, to come forth from those walls.

We have at last that great desideratum, a Female Seminary. After a quarter of a century of agitation the building has at length arisen. It has been comfortably fitted for the reception of pupils, and we can recommend the school for young women to all those who desire to give their daughters the advantages of a higher education.

Your Committee are glad to learn that in all the departments a good degree of proficiency has been attained during the past year. There have been 70 in attendance at the College, about the same number in the Male Academy, and 60 at the Ladies Seminary. The studies in these departments have been successfully pursued. Classes in Theology have been instructed, and the professors feel that more effort should be made to call the attention of the young men to this department?

In conclusion your Committee would express regret that some officer of the Institutions is not present at this Association. It seems to us that in order to keep the bond closely interwoven between the Institutions and the people there should always be a representative at our denominational gatherings.

D. A. STEELE, Chairman.

Pope Leo xiii. and Leopold ii. of Belgium.

The Pope is evidently alarmed at the turn which ecclesiastical affairs have taken in Belgium. There is no country in the world which has been more loyal than Belgium to the Vatican. But in an evil hour, the Vatican, while speaking smooth words to civilians, encouraged ecclesiasties to insist on the supremacy of priests in the control of State schools. On this, the Belgian Legation was withdrawn from the Papal court. No wonder Leo xiii. feels concerned lest a devoted son should "slip the collar," and cease to be a slave, and claim his freedom. Under these circumstances the Pope has written an autograph letter to the King of Belgium, in which he makes an earnest appeal "to the heart and religious sentiment of his Majesty," entreating him "not to tolerate the slight to the Catholic Church" implied in and expressed by the act of his Government.

Shall priests be masters in State elementary schools? The Belgians say, No; the Pope says Yes. Hitherto the King has agreed with the people. Leopold must find it difficult to choose between the two.

A New Argument for Sprinkling.

A pastor in one of the towns of Pennsylvania informed me of the following as related to him by an old lady before her death:—

"About four years ago I read a story about baptism in the Young Reaper, and it troubled me. I had been a member of the Lutheran Church, but began to fear I had never been converted. After finding peace in the Lord, I was troubled about baptism. I went to my pastor and told him my trouble; he said, 'tut, tut.' I then showed him the story in the Young Reaper; he read it; then tore it to pieces, and said it wasn't fit for me to read. I then showed him Romans vi. 4, and said: 'You surely won't tear this book and throw it aside. What does it mean to be "buried with Christ?" He thought a moment, then said: I see you are in earnest, so I will tell you the truth about it. The Apostles did baptize by immersion, but they only baptised perfect Christians, but it would be a mortal sin for you to be baptized all over.'"

The old lady never could commit so great a sin, and hence never requested to be immersed.—Watchman. E. M.