

Circular Letter.

The importance of the Intellectual Element in the Christian Life.

THE LETTER OF THE N. S. WESTERN BAPTIST ASSOCIATION TO THE CHURCHES OF WHICH IT IS COMPOSED.

Dear Brethren,—

We are by no means disposed to ignore or to forget the fact, that the culture, which is recognized by the Scriptures as of supreme importance, is concerned not so much with the intellect as with the heart. It is a truth sufficiently well recognized by Baptists, in theory at least, that the education for which the natural condition of humanity most immediately and imperatively calls, is, in its character, spiritual rather than intellectual. Spiritual regeneration is the grand condition of entrance into the Christian life. But the "new creature" is a being of many powers and capacities and must grow on every side. He who would reach forward unto the attainment of the perfect manhood must cultivate all his faculties. It is our purpose in this letter to emphasize the importance of the intellectual element in the Christian's life. And, as the testimony of Holy Scripture, in regard to any doctrine which we teach, is of prime importance, it is well to inquire, what does the Bible teach concerning this matter?

It would be easy to cite passages which directly inculcate the seeking of knowledge and the getting of understanding, but the indirect testimony is still stronger. That loving service which the great and first commandment requires of man lays under contribution his whole nature. It embraces all the mind as well as all the heart. Jesus is satisfied with nothing less in those who would be his disciples than the devotion of their whole life and being to His service. But it is not evident that such service includes the consecration of a cultivated intellect so far as that is reasonably attainable! He who has failed to cultivate and inform his mind, opportunity being given, so as to be able to occupy positions of trust and perform important service for Christ when required, what has he done but wrap his Lord's money in a napkin and bury it in the earth?

But there are other important considerations in this connection. The Bible addresses itself to persons of intelligence. It is true that in regard to the things essential to salvation—the declarations and commands of the moral law, the doctrines of human sinfulness, of the need of repentance toward God, and of justification through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ—the Bible is level to the humblest comprehension, our "wayfaring men though fools shall not err therein" but it remains true that very much of that Scriptures which is "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness," is to be adequately comprehended only by those who bring to it intelligence, thoughtfulness, and prayerful study. It is the boast of Protestantism that it has placed the Bible in the hands of the people, but the very character of the Scriptures demands that the people who shall fully enjoy the legitimate benefits of this possession shall be an intelligent people.

But on the other hand, the effect of the religion of Christ is to make men intelligent. By setting men right in regard to the great first principles of religious truth—the truth concerning God and His relation to humanity, the truth concerning man, his nature and destiny, his relations to God and to his fellowmen, the gospel brings men from darkness into light, it breaks down the prison walls of superstition, lifts men out of the horrible and filthy dungeons of sin and makes them children of light by making them children of God. That liberty which is the birth-right of the child of God is something in which his whole nature shares. The mind, exulting in its emancipation, reaches forth on every hand, glad to exercise its powers and eager to drink in knowledge. It is our boast as promoters and defenders of evangelical christianity that wherever the gospel in its purity is proclaimed to a people and received by them, it enlightens the understanding and fosters intelligence. There are no

people on the face of the earth, who proudly contend, where the intellectual life is so free and strong, and, where all the happy results, which well-directed mental energy infallibly produces, are to be found in such large measure, as among those people whose minds are most thoroughly imbued, and whose life is in the largest degree regulated, by the principles of the gospel of Christ.

If, therefore, we consider the testimony of scripture, direct and indirect, the fact that the Bible addresses itself to the thoughtful and intelligent and the historical testimony, as to the power of the gospel to enlighten and strengthen the minds of those who receive it, we cannot doubt that on the one hand the Christian religion demands, and on the other hand, tends to produce, and to develop, not only spiritual but intellectual life.

There are some reasons which may now be urged, as being especially applicable to the present generation, why a larger and more vigorous intellectual life should be sought by our churches.

First then—the opportunities for so doing are greater than those which any previous generation has enjoyed. Not only has the free school system placed within the reach of all, advantages, which until recent years could be secured only by the comparatively wealthy, but the instruction now made available to all is, in general, of a vastly superior character to that enjoyed by any class in this country, fifty or even twenty-five years ago.

Probably not many of them who have come into our churches during the last ten years are wholly without education, but there are, it is to be feared, a large number of children even in Baptist families who are not reaping to the full the blessings which in this matter have been secured to us. This cannot be too strongly deprecated. We wish therefore that it might be impressed upon the minds and consciences of the parents throughout the circle of this Association, that those parents, who do not see to it that their children shall secure the best elementary education within their reach, are really remiss in a duty which is one of the most solemn and important which God has laid upon them.

Our young men and women should also be encouraged to secure for themselves the eminent advantages which our higher institutions of learning afford, not simply that they may fit themselves for professions, but in order that they may have a broader intellectual life, more mental power and consequently greater influence to be used in the service of Christ. We have reason to be glad and grateful that we have these institutions of learning, which God has blessed and made a blessing, and where the sons and daughters of Baptist families may obtain an education second to none given by any institution in these provinces. It may also be suggested that men of means amongst us could hardly find a better investment for some portion of their surplus capital than in giving to pious young men of energy and ability such a lift as would enable them to secure the education which they so ardently desire.

There is another means of education of which it is right that we should say a word. High schools and colleges are a luxury which a comparatively few only are able to enjoy, but good books, instructive magazines, and wholesome newspapers are within the reach of all. The best of literature both religious and secular is being so extensively published, and in forms so cheap as to place it within the reach of every one. This affords to all, who have secured the elements of an education, a great opportunity for mental improvement.

The fact that such opportunities as those above referred to lie within reach, puts us under responsibility in this matter. If parents have it within their power to give to their children such an education as would increase their happiness and usefulness in the world, if young men and women may by diligence and energy secure mental training for themselves, if men of means may help up to positions of honorable service those who are bravely struggling for an education, how shall any of their classes show that they have been faithful to their duties if these things have not been done?

Secondly. A second reason may be found in the fact that in the present age, as in no other of the past, there is need of men and women who are able to instruct others. The Sunday Schools and Mission Schools which form so important a department of Christian work at the present, call for a host of workers who need not only to be earnest Christians, but to be intelligent and apt to teach.

How often does a member of the church when asked to occupy some position of service and influence, as, for example, superintendent or teacher in the Sunday School, shrink back and say, "Oh! I cannot undertake this work. I am not fit for it. I do not know enough," which, in many cases no doubt, is perfectly true. But what excuse is there for its being true? In most cases, if the privileges which have been within reach had been made use of, those persons, who are shrinking from the positions of service and responsibility to which Christ and the Church are calling them, might have been well-equipped for the work. Almost every pastor sees around him work which needs to be done, work which his own hands are too full to undertake and which remains undone because men and women of intelligence and earnest piety are not found to go forward and take the lead in doing it.

Thirdly. We would urge, as one of the strongest reasons why we should seek to promote a vigorous intellectual life among our people, the fact that there are very great temptations to mental dissipation. There is a temptation to an evil use of almost every good thing. The ability to read is no exception. There are good books and cheap in plenty, good magazines and newspapers also, and the young man or woman, who desires to read that which is good and adapted to edify, need not want the means of cultivating the mind and enlarging knowledge. But we must not shut our eyes to the fact that the land is full of literary trash of the most wretched and despicable character, some of it positively and intentionally immoral which is merely weak, sickly, sloppy, sentimental and effeminate, fit only to enervate the mind, ruin the memory and create a distaste for everything solid and instructive whether written or spoken. This wretched stuff, which it would be a sin to dignify by the name of literature, is finding its way, only too readily, into Christian households, heralded by some flaming advertisement, baited for the old folks by an agricultural and a kitchen department and accompanied by a host of gorgeous chromos or a pile of brazen jewelry! Very surely it does its work, creating an appetite which grows by what it feeds on. But what kind of men and women are they likely to become whose young mental and moral natures are fed on such pabulum as this? We are not likely to overrate the evil arising from this intellectual dissipation. It is no doubt an evil of grave proportions which is becoming greater, and the effect will be, in so far as it reaches, to destroy the mental vigor of those who now are, or who are expected to become, the members of our churches.

It must not at all be supposed that we regard intelligence as the only important element in the Christian life. It is one among others. We only say that it is a very important one, and that it does not at the present time receive sufficient attention. The emotional element in religion is not by any means to be lost sight of, but emotion must be regulated by intelligence, and zeal must be according to knowledge. The whole nature should be brought into the Lord's service, mind, heart, soul and strength. If only the emotional side of our nature be enlisted then will our religion be of that fitful and uncertain type which is unfortunately so common in these days.

In view of what has been said it becomes a serious question, how the members of our churches and congregations and especially the young, may be so trained as to become thoughtful, serious and intelligent men and women, held to religious doctrine and duty, not only by emotional attraction, but by the grasp of the intellect and the consent of the understanding.

A good deal of course depends upon the pastor. If he is at all worth the office which he occupies he will

certainly be a serious, thoughtful and intelligent man and the legitimate result of these qualities will be to beget similar qualities among his people. If, however, the minister should find that, among his people, there is a portion, perhaps a large portion, which receives very listlessly his most thoughtful and carefully prepared sermons, and are better pleased with the sonorous platitudes or the quasi religious sensationalism of some windy Boanerges than with the winnowed results of his own most prayerful and conscientious study, let him not be in any hurry to lower his standard to agree with that of his hearers. Let him rather seek to raise theirs up to his own. In some cases at least, something may be done by the pastor, with the help of others, toward lifting the intellectual life, and with it the moral life, of his people into a higher plane, by organizing a literary society, through the influence of which, the young people of the church and congregation, may be led into good and wholesome lines of reading and of thought. Something also may be done by making the literature which is supplied to the families of the church through the Sunday School library of such a character that it shall inform the mind, develop right principles and cultivate a wholesome taste, instead of being as it too often is a feeder of mental dissipation.

It must never be forgotten however, that the great aim must be to inculcate religious truth, and for religious truth we must go to the Bible. If we would have men and women of religious stability and intelligence, we must feed them upon the Bible. But the problem too often is—how shall they be induced to feed upon the Bible?

It is not an encouraging thing to consider how much, or rather how little, Bible reading finds a place in the life of the average church-member.

Let the pastor then, by all means, instruct his people and especially the young in the truths of the Bible. But what if he find that his people refuse to be so instructed? If we are not mistaken, it is the ordinary experience of pastors that there is a demand for preaching rather than for teaching; and perhaps it is not going too far to say that the preaching is popular in proportion as it appeals to the emotions and imagination and leaves the understanding and the conscience alone. The demand is emphatically for preaching. There must be two or three sermons on Sunday, two or three prayer-meetings (so called) through the week, and a series of meetings from time to time. The preached-to-death minister finds no time to teach the Word, may scarcely for regular and vigorous study of it on his own account.

There is, if we mistake not, a grave danger in the perpetual preaching of the present day, a danger that those who preach the Word will preach themselves to death, not physically, but intellectually, and especially spiritually, and that their hearers shall be nursed into spiritual imbecility and sloth. One good sermon on Sunday is as much as any man, woman or child ought to hear.

But the pastor cannot do much alone to effect a reform in this matter. There must be co-operation. Let churches say to their pastors, "Go forward as our guide and teacher, and we will heartily unite with you in the study of God's truth." Let a part of every Lord's day be given to a study of the Word by the pastor and all the people. Let parents give their children good and wholesome books to read, and see to it that they do not read the ruinous trash that is every where so abundant. Let them reverence and read their Bibles, and teach their children so to do. Let young men and maidens, "cry aloud for knowledge and lift up their voice for understanding," let them "seek for her as silver and search for her as for hid treasure," so shall there come to be a greater desire to hear the Word of God than to listen to displays of mere human eloquence, and so might there come to be a vertebrated type of Christianity which is greatly to be desired.

The Rev. Rolle Ogden, one of the missionaries of the American Board in Mexico, writes that "if a man wants a place to do the very best that is in him for the gospel of Christ, and to be served to work by the constant pressure of the need of work, let him come to Mexico."

There is always room for a man of force, and he makes room for many.

Associational Sermon.

The Observance of Gospel Ordinances.

THE ANNUAL SERMON OF THE CENTRAL ASSOCIATION OF NOVA SCOTIA, PREACHED BY REV. J. C. BLEAKNEY OF BERWICK, KING'S COUNTY.

(Concluded).

Published by request of the Association.

"Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you."—1 Cor. xi. 2.

The same apostle declares that the inspired scriptures are a perfect rule of faith and practice. "And that as such they teach the complete will of God concerning the children of men; in doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction." Or in other words, "The design of the Scriptures and the end of writing them are, that both preachers of the word, and hearers of it might have a perfect knowledge of the will of God; that the former might be a complete minister of the gospel, and that nothing might be wanting for the information of the latter."

The departures from the laws and institutions of the gospel were seriously reproofed, and that by divine authority. As witness the cases of Paul's 1st letter to the Corinthians, and the message to "the church of Ephesus."

To the Corinthian church it was said: "I praise you not, that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse. . . . What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the Church of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? shall I praise you in this? I praise you not. For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, 'That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread; and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take eat; this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the New Testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world. Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat tarry one for another. And if any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto condemnation. And the rest will I set in order when I come."

This language explains itself, and all that is now necessary to be said, is that it proves beyond doubt, that the churches were not left to change the laws and ordinances, which Christ had delivered unto them. And that the apostles were careful to prohibit every departure from divine prescription. Again—John was instructed by the Lord to say to "the Church of Ephesus"; "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent." To which—if it were necessary I might add all that has been said by way of reproof, both by the Revelator and others to the churches on account of their departures from the divine rule. But I proceed by saying, that those churches which observed the ordinances, as they were delivered unto them, were praised for it. Paul said to the Corinthian Church, "Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you."—And to the Colossian Church he said, "For though I be absent in

the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ. As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him. Routed and built up in him, and established in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving."

Now there are two more facts which I purpose to adduce upon this point; one of which I have purposely reserved for this part of the discourse, although it might in one sense have been more befitting an earlier notice, occupying as it does a very important place in the teachings of Christ. But both of these portions of scripture, to which I shall now refer you, will confirm my position, and show that they who change the ordinances of God's house are both guilty of a grievous sin, and expose themselves to very great danger.

The first is the language of Christ, to his apostles, when giving the commission. He said, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen."

We are hereby taught that Christ, as God, having both instituted and ratified the laws and ordinances of his house, taught His apostles what ordinances were to be observed in the churches; commanded them to teach the observance of the things which He had commanded, and gave them the promise that He would be with all who observed his commands, "even unto the end of the world."

It is evident that by the "All things whatsoever I have commanded you," that Christ meant "all ordinances, not only baptism, but the Lord's Supper; all positive institutions and moral duties, all obligations, both to God and men, all relative duties that respect the world or one another, those that are without, and those that are within. . . . every thing that Christ has commanded, be it what it will, and nothing else." He both prescribes what he required that they should teach, and limits them to His prescriptions.

Then the Revelator puts on the topstone by declaring the terrible consequences of any one—either individual or church—attempting to change or legislate upon the teachings of God's word. His language is, "For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this Book, if any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this Book; and if any man shall take away from the words of the Book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the Book of Life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this Book." By this I understand that we are strictly prohibited from making any additions to, or subtraction from the revealed will of God.

Is it not, to every Christian, quite sufficient to know that these words of warning were given by our Lord Jesus Christ, the faithful witness? Hence, obedience to Christ demands that we "keep the ordinances as they have been delivered to us." The scripture order is repentance, faith, baptism and church membership, and the observance of all things whatsoever Christ has commanded, among which is the Lord's Supper.

These are important factors in the churches of Christ, and when changed they forfeit the character of the Head and Lawgiver. Therefore, the churches were not intended to be legislative, but executive bodies. They were not appointed to make new laws, or to change the ordinance, but they were appointed to carry out the laws and ordinances which Christ give them.

Third—It is implied in our text that a variation from the positive institutions which were commanded by the Lord, and recorded as the precept and example of the inspired apostles, is a violation of divine law, an offence against God, and subjects the offender to divine displeasure.

Every Christian must concede that Christ had both the ability and right to appoint the ordinances which were necessary to the fulfillment of the divine purpose in the furtherance of His king-

dom, and the obligation of God. We are authority, the observance tism and apostles, delivered the Paul says Lord that you." A Corinthian bared him ordinance them. T portions c Such as, ers of me unto you loved sons shall bri my ways every wh iv. 16, 1 tributed called ev so ordain vii. 17.) fast, and have be our epis we com of our I draw y that wa the tra (2) The these e not on all the doctrin and pr to divi Now influen brethren nances unto t that a cordin exam pleas No acted after Chur dinar to hi was circ that as th subj do the this point hav who God pri law not the ret red Sa wh qu th al of th S p h o r m r c a c