

IS RELIGION DECLINING?

An impression seems to exist among some very good zealous workers in the Christian church, that the religion of the present time is vastly inferior in quality to that which marked the earlier history of our provincial churches, and it is further thought that spirituality continues steadily to decline. The subject is worthy of serious consideration.

There can be no doubt as to the fact that a spirit of worldliness and indifference prevails to an alarming extent in almost every community, and that many of our churches may be described as "having a name that they live, and are dead." But whether this state of things is peculiar to the present time may fairly be called in question. Indeed, the very quotation we have just made from the inspired word plainly indicates that the evils deplored in connection with our present religious history existed widely in the very earliest Christian churches. And a cursory perusal of the written testimony of our own pioneer provincial ministers, convinces us beyond doubt that the same evils have prevailed to a lamentable extent in every period of the history of the kingdom of our Redeemer, and in every community in which the gospel has been proclaimed. Men are prone to forget the disagreeable features of their past religious experiences, and to preserve in memory the brighter events of by-gone days. This may be regarded as a characteristic weakness of old age. Good old saints have in all ages of the world been in the habit of deploring the departure of the glorious days when they were young. Each succeeding generation keeps up the practice, and a custom so time-honored as this is likely to be handed down to the millennium.

An impartial study of the matter leads us to the firm conviction that the religion of the past and the religion of the present resemble each other much more closely than many persons seem to be aware. There are many elements of difference in the outward manifestations of the piety of to-day as compared with that of the past, but in spirit and essentially there is only too much similarity. The progress of general intelligence, the multiplication of churches and Sunday Schools, the more frequent and regular preaching of the gospel, all have contributed to effect a change in the outward manifestations of religion. When people heard sermons but once a month, it was but natural that they should be more deeply interested in them and more powerfully affected by the truth than when they are permitted to hear two or three sermons every Sabbath the year around, not to mention attendance at two or three week-evening religious services. The times are changed. It would be absurd to expect people to think and feel now as they used to under very different circumstances. Equally absurd would it be to suppose that, because they do not feel at present precisely as they or their forefathers did years ago, they are therefore degenerate and their spirituality decayed. There is unquestionably less emotion in a modern piety than of old, but there is, we think, more stability, intelligence and systematic effort in the religion of to-day than seem to have characterized the great majority of former church members.

We have much to lament over and to correct in our present religious experiences, but we question very seriously the wisdom or propriety of trying to mend matters by making invidious and unwarrantable comparisons between the past and the present, and by seeking to impress our struggling and hopeful religious workers with the idea that they are all on the downward road to certain ruin. Such representations are assuredly false and mischievous if there is truth in God's word, which clearly teaches that the progress of Messiah's kingdom shall continue with increasing rapidity until the whole earth shall be filled with the glory of God. Such a view as this is assuredly more encouraging and stimulating to the toiling disciples of Christ than the gloomy pessimism which regards the past as hold-

ing a monopoly of all goodness and piety. There is matter for profitable reflection in the words of an inspired writer: "Say not thou, 'What is the cause that the former days were better than these? for thou dost not enquire wisely concerning this.'" The Pauline plan of forgetting the things that are behind and pressing on to higher attainments is the very best one for us to adopt.

THE DALHOUSIE ALUMNI MUDDLE.

In our article last week on the Dalhousie Alumni Dinner it was the furthest from our intention to do any injustice to Professor Jones; and as he seems to think otherwise, we are glad to embrace the opportunity which the publication of his long letter below affords us, of trying to disabuse his mind. His impressions may have arisen from what he has seen in another place, and not in the MESSENGER. We think those who have read only what appeared in our columns will agree with us that it hardly warrants him in using the language he has in his communication. The tone and general bearing of his letter would lead to the supposition that we had spoken of him in terms of severity rather than of enquiry.

A very slight glance at our article will, we are assured, lead to a very different conclusion. We should be doing our friend a favor if we withheld his letter from publication, but it would doubtless not be so understood, we therefore place it before our intelligent readers and ask of them on his behalf the most favorable construction of the more severe things our friend has said:

For the Christian Messenger.

Letter from Professor Jones.

Mr. Editor,—

Your paper of May 2nd, contains, I notice, sundry remarks upon the toasts given at the dinner of the Associated Alumni of Dalhousie College. With the first two paragraphs of this article I have nothing to do; it is to the observations made in connection with the toast, "Our Sister Colleges," I wish to call attention, and upon which I am constrained to express my opinion.

Your readers have, I doubt not, observed that Mr. E. D. King's note which appeared in the Herald on Saturday the 28th inst. was the only thing that gave that toast particular significance, and that it was from the last sentence of said note that the great-to-me unknown "fact" must be gathered. So that all may see it for themselves we will quote the insinuating and ominous sentence: "He"—i. e. I—"was careful to explain, as I was glad to observe, that he spoke only for himself."

One cannot help exclaiming, as he scrutinizes this mysterious period, What clearness of vision! What power of exegesis! What subtlety of thought. Mr. King darkly hints something; upon the strength of this shadowy innuendo is written a paragraph the purport of which is manifestly to damage my reputation, and proclaim throughout the length and breadth of the land that the denomination has been nourishing an ingrate and a heretic. The writer of said paragraph would fain bring up with freshness the case of the reptile which fished its fang in the bosom of its benefactor. Are the times verily returning when a significant nod, or a look, will be deemed sufficient to consign a man to the limbo of despair, or a speedy death? Be this as it may, we are surely living in strange times. Mr. King was glad to notice that I spoke for myself. Was glad to notice! Ye gods! if a plebeian had penned the phrase, oblivion would immediately have covered it. But the words, you see, appeared in a letter which Mr. King caused to appear in the Herald, and, therefore, must be invested with peculiar and momentous significance. My censorial critic gets from these crucial symbols a whiff of something which seems to him to have the flavor of heresy; your sagacious correspondent snuffs deceit and disloyalty.

Again: why in the world did not the writer of the article which you saw fit to publish for reasons known only to yourself, go at once to Mr. King for an explanation when he found his suspicions were getting the mastery! Mr. King could and would have poured a flood of light upon the dark enigma—would have explained that for the want of a proper close to his note the last sentence had been hastily and inadvertently written—would have expressed his unfeigned regret that anything emanating from his pen and having his sanction had caused the shadow of a shade of suspicion upon naturally thoughtful and incisive minds. The sphinx would in that case have solved

her own riddle. Such a course would have saved me from feeling the tooth of slander, and prevented the MESSENGER from becoming the herald of dark and malignant insinuations. The framers of the Dalhousie notes did not adopt this course, and it is greatly to be regretted. The exact quantum of this regret time alone must determine.

Now for the courteous question, or the "fraternal courtesy." "He thinks Mr. King as President of the Associated Alumni of Acadia College would be the proper person to respond for Acadia College." It is just possible others may take a different view of this great question, a different view certainly was taken. If the toast had been "Sister Associations," Mr. King would undoubtedly have been the man to respond, but as it was in point of fact "Sister Colleges," perhaps it was not a monstrous transgression of civility to call upon me. Further this is the proper place to say that Mr. King's name was associated with the toast, "Sister Colleges," and he would undoubtedly have been called upon, had he not as if under the influence of some sudden suggestion suddenly and unexpectedly left the room. I may also add that Dr. Trenaman, President of the Alumni of his Alma Mater, I believe—made a hearty and happy response for King's College, and did not deem it a slight that others had preceded him. Mere order of time was not a matter of any moment, as some one must necessarily be first.

In the light of these facts, then, may I not ask where is the mystery that baffles the efforts of your thoughtful correspondent to solve? I was called upon to speak first, I pleaded with my friend who sat by my side to excuse me. He was inexorable. I did not know till just before leaving for Halifax that I would be expected to speak. I spoke first in order of time. O the mystery of this! Your correspondent does not pretend to solve it. His mind recoils at the very thought of it, so deep, so stupendous is the mystery!

Behold yet another mystery. It is this: "I was careful to explain that I spoke only for myself." Mark and inwardly digest the foregoing. I was present simply as a guest. The College did not send me to represent it, I did not want to do as the vendors of quack medicines do. It is best to let our works praise us—our friends praise us. I might have pronounced a panegyric upon Acadia. If I had, nobody would have thanked me, nobody would have benefited. In my judgment I deemed it better to speak for myself. It was easy for those present to connect me with the College. They knew I was one of the Faculty of Acadia College. Perhaps they did not know that I have been teaching in the service of the denomination for twenty-three years. I might have told them this and sundry other facts—talked shop by the hour. I preferred to speak upon the general subject of education. Where, then, is the mystery? Do my friends think I had any private ends to serve? Do they not know me well enough to feel sure that I detest and abominate deceit and hypocrisy? but not more than I abhor sneaks who make lunges at me in the darkness of ambiguity and insinuation.

Your correspondent's closing remarks sound like the first staves of a threnody over frail and peccable humanity, and as you listen you can without much stretch of the imagination see the last resting-place of one who promised well, but ultimately disappointed the hopes of his friends. I am spoken of as one "whom the friends of Acadia have trusted," as one "who has so long continued to enjoy their confidence," but now—think of the bursting heart?—We fear disloyal, seeking platforms on which to preach heresy, and hunting up occasions and places to express heterodox views of education. O, what a fall there has been, my countrymen!

In conclusion let me say that I do not plead guilty to what is tantamount to a charge of disloyalty and heresy. I did not on the night of that dinner utter one perfidious sentiment. I most respectfully ask my calculators to furnish the denomination with any views, ideas, or sentiments that smack of disloyalty or heresy. It will be easy for Mr. King, at least, to remember the gist of those remarks which so profoundly impressed him, and perhaps brought the blush of shame to his cheek, whether they do so or not, I will, if necessary, give a digest of my speech, or enumerate all the points I had to treat so briefly. Whatever I do, I will do above-board. I offer to do this for the sake of the friends of the College, when I do so all who have read the damaging statements respecting me will feel sure that the words I speak for myself—which I frankly acknowledge I used were prompted by the shrewdest modesty—that they have no dark or double meaning. Let me be fully heard before my detractors even crack the denominational whip. It seems very hard indeed that in this age of freedom and enlightenment I could not make a little harmless educational speech without hearing expressed in such an offen-

sive and dictatorial way the limits set to Professorial duties, and, what is far worse, made the subject of mischievous and slanderous remarks.

R. V. JONES.

The Professor spreads his shot so widely that it is not very clear at whom he is aiming. We copied the letter of Mr. E. D. King, which had appeared several days before in the Herald, and no reply was made by our friend to that. He now animadverts upon it, and in doing so also sends a shot or two after "your sagacious correspondent," and "your thoughtful correspondent," and some "detractors who crack the denominational whip." It may be that our friend does not mean that his piece shall convey anything obnoxious to ourselves, seeing that we hold no such position, and have no desire to any such office. It must be some one else he is castigating over our shoulders. We may just suggest to the Professor that he seems by his own intuitions to have been conscious of its not being just the proper time for him to speak, when he says, "I was called upon to speak first. I pleaded with my friend who sat by my side to excuse me. He was inexorable." We understand that the managers of the dinner allow that the whole matter, so far as their treatment of the President of Acadia Alumni is concerned, was a blunder, which, perhaps, in a dinner as well as in war, is equal to a crime.

The toast "Sister Colleges," must have meant "the Alumni of Sister Colleges." What had the Alumni of Dalhousie to do with "our Sister Colleges." They could not, surely, assume to be the College.

CONCERNING WILLS.

It has become a serious question with those who are possessed of large fortunes to determine how their property can be disposed of, so that when they die it may be distributed in accordance with their own wishes, and become a blessing to their families and friends, and not a bone of contention and a source of quarrels, often resulting in expensive litigation, and family scandals of a most shocking nature.

The suggestion that men should be their own executors has many advantages, especially as regards charitable gifts. One can thus see not only that his wishes are carried into effect, but he may also have the pleasure of seeing and enjoying the results of his benevolence. But it is generally impracticable for a man to distribute his whole estate among his heirs during his own life, and if it were feasible few men would be found willing to do so. The tendency of human nature is to hold on to possessions until compelled by death to give them up. The great need hitherto has been some method by which a man's wishes as to the disposal of his property after his death can be ensured of being respected and also save his estate from waste and his memory from obloquy.

This need has apparently been supplied by a suggestion which we have seen advanced, that it should become lawful for a man to prove his own will during his lifetime, and thus establish the fact that he is of sound mind, and also that no undue influence has been exercised over him in the important matter of disposing of his property. The cases would be few in which the relatives of a rich man who has been able to control and manage his fortune with skill would appear in court through his lifetime to contest his will. The risk of being disinherited would be amply sufficient to deter them from such action, except in a case where there was manifest evidence of the unsoundness of the mind of the testator sufficient to convince an ordinary jury.

The suggestion appears to us to be a good one. It would, if carried into operation, doubtless prove of benefit in abating public scandals, and thus serve the interest of good morals.

GREAT advancement is being made in the drying of fruits, and so of preserving them for winter use, and for transportation. It is found that the artificial mode of evaporating fruit by means of the American Fruit Drier or Pneumatic Evaporator, made by the American Manufacturing Company at Waynesboro, Pa., has great advantages over that of drying by exposure to the air and the sun:

About 1870 special appliances for evaporating fruit were introduced, and from that date the subject has received growing attention and interest, and has made wonderful progress, not only in the amount produced but in the revolution of comparative values.

Evaporated fruit is worth from two hundred to four hundred per cent, advance over the same fruit sun or oven dried.

The labor of preparing the fruit (one of the greatest items) being the same in both cases, the actual cost per pound of finished products, without regard to quality or value when prepared, is about the same.

At the village store or the warehouse in the metropolis, the unequal exchange was the rule—two or three pounds of dried apples for one pound of figs, dates, currants, raisins, or prunes, while our dried peaches in exchange were scarcely at par. Every pound of evaporated apples offered, has a value in American markets equal to about two pounds of tropical dried fruits, while evaporated peaches readily command from three to four pounds of their currants, figs, dates, raisins, or prunes, thus practically reversing old customs and values. It is difficult to comprehend the loss and discouragement attending the manufacture of a product by intelligent American men and women by old processes for centuries, at such comparatively contemptible figures, without realizing to some extent the value of evaporating machinery.

The pamphlet before us on this machine says:

The entire fruit crop of the country is immensely enhanced in value thereby, on account of so much perishable fruit being withheld from temporarily overstocked markets at certain gathering seasons. By its American fruits have attained a high repute and market value abroad, limited only by the supply, and has greatly increased the interest in fruit-growing in this country, and the further development of the evaporating business is assured from the profitable returns earned by those now engaged in it. It is fast supplanting in popular favor the canning process over which it has many marked advantages in economy, wholesomeness, safety, and profit.

AN INJURIOUS CUSTOM and one which should be discontinued, is that which requires us when attending the funeral of a friend to stand with our heads uncovered during the burial services at the grave. The origin and design of this practice are somewhat obscure. If it is intended to be a mark of respect to the deceased—it is certainly a singular way to signify such sentiment, and one fraught with very great danger to the health of those who are expected to comply with the unreasonable custom in all seasons in such a climate as ours. Why should it not be considered to be quite as respectful to keep our hats on at such a time and place? Besides, what difference can it possibly make to the deceased? It may be supposed however that it is respectful and reverend to have the head uncovered during the devotional services. Why should it be so considered? The Israelites were very punctilious in observing all devotional forms and ceremonies, and with them to uncover the head during religious services would have been considered irreverent and improper. The High Priest always wore his mitre when he entered the Holy places to appear before God either for himself or for the people.

As an instance of some of the anomalies which arise on the observance of this custom, we notice that during the session of our Parliament, in a well ventilated and comfortable room, it is considered dignified and proper for our worthy M. P.'s to sit with their hats on while listening to the speeches of that eloquent assembly—they have even been known to sleep quite comfortably with their heads covered during the delivery of an extended oration. But if it should be their sad duty to attend the funeral of one of their number, they are expected so soon as they have arrived upon bleak Camp Hill to remove their hats and expose their venerable heads to the cruel frosts and biting east winds which sweep mercilessly over the North Common.

We were forcibly reminded of the discomfort and danger to health which this unnecessary and irrational practice entails, when attending the funeral of a prominent and much esteemed fellow-citizen a week or so ago and observing the painful efforts of the large congregation to conform to the custom. The minister boldly took his hat in his hand,

others essayed to do likewise, but the majority of the hats would involuntarily return to the heads, some of them went quite on again, others were half on, indeed the effort required in maintaining the battle between the fashion and the cold April wind seemed to engross the attention of a large number of people to the exclusion of the religious services and solemn surroundings. We thought that a blessing would have been conferred upon the living, and also that the sad services would have been rendered much more impressive, if it had been intimated by the friends of the late Sheriff Bell that they would consider it a mark of respect for all hats to be kept on during the services at the grave.

We have heard of instances where severe illness has been occasioned, and even deaths have resulted from the exposure incident to the observance of this unwise custom. Why should it be continued?

We wonder if one in twenty of those gentlemen who doffed their hats so reverently as they passed through the cemetery gate on the day noticed could give a good reason for doing so. Was it a mark of respect for the gate, or the consecrated ground, or the bodies of the good people who rest therein? This custom was a mystery to us, until we observed a funeral procession passing into the Roman Catholic Cemetery—we then saw that as each devout mourner came before the large gilded cross which surmounts the entrance gate, he raised his hat, and the more devout ones piously made the sign of the cross. Have our protestant neighbours been unwittingly following this example? We know of no other explanation of the custom referred to, and as it is meaningless under the circumstances it could well be dispensed with.

We have received the Illustrated Catalogue and Price List from T. E. Smith of the Nova Scotia Nursery, Church Street, Cornwallis. In addition to the list of prices, &c., it gives valuable information, derived from experience, as to the proper management of the flower garden, the green house, and the vegetable garden.

It appears from an article in the Chronicle that a letter has been received by Lieut. Governor Archibald, warning him of an expected visit to Halifax of two suspicious American vessels, manned, it is believed by Fenians. Special vigilance will be taken by the police, and the military and naval authorities.

Personal quarrels are unseemly, whether between children, ordinary men, or Christian people. They arise from an unlovely state of mind in either one or both of the parties concerned, or from a misunderstanding which may be corrected by the use of proper means. Our Lord has given a very simple process for their correction in Matthew xviii. 15-17. No encouragement is there given to a hasty publication of the case to the world. Efforts to expose such matters to the public gaze, even in an enigmatical form, are to be deprecated. The publication of an *ex parte* statement calls forth the counter statement, and the world is not edified, but prejudiced more or less against both parties to the quarrel, and the church suffers.

The "withdrawal of fellowship" by a church from a member is the scriptural form of expression for his exclusion, or the more objectionable term, expulsion. 2 Thess. iii. 6; 1 Tim. vi. 5. The effect is the same. There is no such thing as the withdrawing of fellowship for a given length of time, or until the acknowledgment of an alleged fault.

It is humiliating to be obliged to record, as a truthful historian of current literature, that the most successful book of the day is Peck's Bad Boy. In three weeks 100,000 copies were sold, and the presses have been running night and day to keep up with the demand. We picked up a copy the other day in a bookstore, and spent a half-hour in turning it over. A worse mess of sickening vulgarity we never saw. But it is popular.

THE POPULAR PREACHER.—The Boston Journal has a capital, short, sarcastic article upon the elements entering into the character of a popular preacher. The old-fashioned preacher, it says, was the product of the seminaries, the popular preacher of the newspapers. The formula for making a popular preacher is, one-third voice and personal presence, one-third sensational selection of topics and one-third heresy. These proportions may be a little varied to suit different communities.

MAY 9, 1883. MAY The Q tion of eries Ex place. The ar American plete. E United S condition. is very exhibit have arri On Fr of Comm had recei in which that he w ness to-d the oth. Sir St he wou preclud form. On mo was deci own beh Bradle had thro the Affir which wo his seat. the oth. Mr. L of Sir St Mr. G vious qu would vo the moti The m a vote of Mr. H House, s to a sea hour be below the Mr. H tuency. An e Govern Priddy's It was tion of shells. right an The s second rmons by The E for Whi until the Lords the 24th The Gallagh Curtin, ton, wer ing and It is conspira of the cabled Consul, New Y conspira landed in At P one of t the city Friday as the work of believed a sewer. In the Grand Tynan, for mur accessory in the U posed to Now been fo no long refuse th Tynan Fitzh sory to Burke, Friday Lawr charge Denis I day mo servitud ing his the last informe When plead, h in the Burke mit the judge ex to a pl pleaded brought knowin from m had to or take in the l saw th no part on Kay truth, a were o Timothy saved J of my way by to the gu The begun