

The Christian Messenger.

A RELIGIOUS AND GENERAL FAMILY NEWSPAPER.

NEW SERIES.
Vol. XXVIII, No. 26.

Halifax, Nova Scotia, Wednesday, June 27, 1883.

WHOLE SERIES.
Vol. XLVII, No. 26.

(Published by special request of the Association.)

Spiritual Life in our Churches.

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

Dear Brethren,—

We call your attention to the need of a deeper spiritual life among you. It is evident that the church polity of the New Testament is adapted to the needs, activities, and growth of spiritual life, just as our bodies are formed to meet the demands of our natural life. It is, therefore, no more an objection to the constitution of a church that it falls to pieces when spiritual life is at a low ebb, or dies out, than it is against the constitution of our bodies that they are broken up when their life departs. The body is not to produce life, nor does it in the deepest sense, preserve it, neither can it exist alone. The life is the reason for the body, and is its preserver. When the life departs it decays, as do all things else which have outlived the wherefore of their existence. So also of the church which is the body for spiritual life. It cannot produce life, nor, by virtue of its form, preserve it. The life of the church must preserve the church. If the life dies out, the church, its body, which exists only as its servant, is of no separate use, and falls to pieces. This would be a ghastly world should all bodies remain when life has become extinct. Death would soon crowd out all life, and reign. So, also, we believe, God so constituted the bodies for spiritual life—the churches—that when they are dead they do not long cumber the earth, and stand in the way of new life. If a church does continue to hold together when the life has gone out of it, we may well suspect it has been formed by human hands, like a statue, which will outlast a hundred generations. But God does not act as a sculptor, neither does he turn corpses into mummies. The fact then, that our churches are harder to sustain and more easily dissolved than the most when spiritual life decays, may be but a proof that they have the stamp of the divine on their constitution.

From what we have said, as well as from a glance at the facts of the case, it can be seen that our very existence depends upon spiritual life. With it in full force no churches flourish as ours; without it none are so utterly undone. There is nothing to preserve your unity but the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is no ironbound creed, nor force of external authority. Nothing but spiritual power can secure our increase. We do not gain in membership by natural but by spiritual birth. There is little to tempt ambition, or induce union with us from hope of place or power, because each church is independent, and each member the peer of all his fellows. Leathing all alliance with the civil power, there is no attempt to win by social influence and patronage. Neither is there any gaudy ritual or splendid service to attract. In the competition which is on all sides, you as churches are thrown back for success, for very existence, upon spiritual power. It is well for us distinctly to understand that nothing can be a substitute for this. As we have seen, the idea that the scriptural constitution of our churches will sustain them, in any case, is wide of the mark. It is this which most certainly assures their dissolution, unless they are vitalized by spiritual energy. The church which has the life has the advantage, in spite of a bad constitution. Life will sustain a deformed body, while the most splendid corpse decays. Neither let us suppose the fuller and clearer truth we hold, will, in itself, sustain us. Truth is but the food for the inner life. A man may have his table loaded with

the most plentiful supply of the best food, but if he does not eat of it he is no better off than the starveling. A man with less and inferior food, if he but partake of it, is more profited than he. The only way the fuller truth we hold can serve us and others, is by making it contribute to the growth of a higher and stronger Christian life. If we do not assimilate this truth, and make it contribute to the increase of the inner man, the plethora of truth, like a plethora of undigested food, may but make us irascible spiritual dyspeptics.

So, brethren, nothing but deep, earnest spiritual life can preserve and prosper you as churches. And we are not sorry that this is so. May the time never come when our churches shall be held up by outward props and bands. When the upholding life departs let the corpse crumble away, or be buried out of sight. But the heritage of truth which God and the centuries have committed to our care is too precious to be lost. There is more involved in the progress of our denomination than the spread of the name Baptist. Let us then, as a people, in loyalty to God, and in love to men, seek to take the truth and principles we hold into our souls, to make strong a life implanted by the Holy Spirit. Thus adapting our life to the scriptural constitution of our churches, which is so admirably fitted as a medium through which the strength and ardor of that life may act on the world, and making no attempt to adapt the constitution of our churches to a low-ebbed life, we shall make a grand mark on this age and the future.

But we as churches should seek this deeper spirituality, not only to preserve ourselves and the truth we hold, but also for the sake of those whom God is entrusting to us.

The truth is, each church stamps her image upon the new convert as the die does the new coin from the mint. The infection of low spirituality spreads and descends to coming generations. The new member is, in a sense, grafted into the stem of your church, and is affected by her condition as the scion by the health of the stock into which it is set. The law of heredity holds in churches as well as in families. Let us, then, do our best to avoid entailing upon the church a heritage of spiritual weakness. Let us rather seek to make her strong for the sake of the future which depends so largely upon the tone she gives to men's souls and lives to-day.

But we should seek this deeper spirituality for the sake of the world at large.

It is only as the church shines in the radiance of Christian character, and is revealed in the ripeness of Christian fruitage, that she can be as a city set on a hill, exerting her full power to win and bless men. She must be true to her professions or she will court a contempt which will put men beyond her influence. Especially must we, who proclaim that our membership is restricted to such as have in their souls the throbbings of a regenerate life, give evidence in character and deed that this is no baseless assertion. The higher the claim the deeper will be the scorn aroused, if it be proved vainglorious. But with life and action in keeping with such a lofty claim, our influence will be proportionally high.

And never was there an age when the world was in greater need of the power of a spiritual, consecrated church. Skepticism in the form of rationalism is rolling in upon us from over the sea, and a blatant, blasphemous atheism is sweeping back upon us from the West. The former is assailing the faith of the cultured and the thoughtful, the latter that of the sensual and unintelligent. I believe that infidelity can be lived down better than argued down. Before religion, proving her power in lives made pure and noble and devoted,

skepticism falls prone as did Dagon of old before the ark of God. On a Christianity untrue to itself it fattens as a leech upon diseased blood. All the learned tones hurled at the head of the dragon of deism nurtured in the slime of the church under Charles II. did not kill it, while the revival of true religion begun by Whitfield and the Wesleys, dealt it a blow which has kept it stunned ever since. All the discussions of orthodox divines in New England did not avail to turn the tide of Unitarianism which began to sweep over the land in the last century, while the earnest Christianity of our churches changed its flood to ebb. And so today, where men are feeling the power of faith in Christ, they know Him in whom they have believed, and all the rationalism of German theorists cannot make Him a myth to them. And so of all the truth of God. It is discerned by the spiritual because there is a response within, which no force of outward reasoning can disturb, and no clamor of blatant Ingersols can silence. With the church pure, active, assured, and strong in spiritual power from Christ and His cross, there is a bulwark around our land which will breast and roll back all attack upon the old faith which has made life noble and death easy, as the rock-bound shore does the rage of the sea. Let it be ours as churches to do our best to help in raising the impregnable rampart of regenerated and consecrated life against the onrush of the infidelity of the times, and we shall have fulfilled a noble mission.

And never, also, were men more worldly. A desire to excel others is abroad. Tastes have become more expensive in all grades. Competition is keen in all departments of business. Success to meet the increased wants, under these circumstances, tends to absorb all thought and energy, and leaves but a few shreds over for higher interests. Where the life is not earnestly worldly it is very largely frivolous, pleasure-seeking, excitement-loving. So the spirit of the time is feverishly earthly. And what is to wrest men from the clasp of power of this present world? Not churches which are conforming to the ideas and tastes of un-sanctified men. Not churches which are but a little less worldly than the world. It is only a church which steadily in its life, its activities, and its aims is making it evident to men that the soul and its interests claim and have the chief concern, which can have vantage-ground enough to pull men out of the tide of worldliness which is sweeping its thousands' perditionward.

A church up to the breasts herself in the tide can exert little power to this end. To be able for this high work, the members of our churches must have more claim to a life above the world than names on their rolls, and a mere profession. The law of gravitation earthward can only be overcome by rising so high heavenward and Godward as to be under the control of a stronger attractive power. A church in the world and yet not of the world, is God's great agency to draw men away from a worldly life. Just as the steel which has felt the touch of the magnet draws other pieces of steel, so the life which is in continued contact with God and the world to come is the great means by which God and heaven lay hold of men bound to earth and sin and death, and draw them upward to themselves. O that we all were thus continually magnetized by what is divine and eternal! What power would they then not have to meet the demands of this age of growing worldliness? It is not for us to assume the office of the censor. But is it not sadly and plainly true that as churches we are generally deficient in this deep toned spirituality? Are not too many like trees with but here and there a

green and fruitful bough? Upon how few do the chief burdens fall! How many in all our churches are listless and restless! How evanescent is deep concern in soul interest! How many lives are a succession of spurts with intervening exhaustion and slumber! Are not the energies of many wasted and worse than wasted on internal chaffings and frictions, and divisions? How much of the strength of your pastors is demanded by the members who should be his helpers in the work of saving the lost? Are you all in a position to claim, and compel the respect of the world for superior virtue, revealed in honesty, charity, beneficence, unselfishness, purity? Are your ideals high and noble? Is your giving what the love of our Lord and the needs of our fellowmen should prompt? Do you live for God and eternity, or much as others? These and many other questions demand serious attention, and sincere answers before God.

But how can this spirituality, so indispensable to your existence and progress, and the fulfillment of your mission, be secured and maintained? It is much easier to discover disease than to prescribe a remedy. We have but time to mention a few points in this direction, elaborating them but little. As it ever is when our ideal is worthy of the name, we can only make an approach toward it. But yet much can be done. You must begin with the reception of members.

An unregenerate soul in a church of Christ is as a dead limb on a live body, a weakness, a contagion, and a perpetual peril. Such an one has thus more power to lower the tone of the church's life, and to breed strife and do evil. If, in the end, as it so often is, it is necessary to exclude him, scandal has been brought on the church, her moral power injured, and she herself left wounded and torn, perhaps. How much of the variance, inconsistency, and low spirituality generally in our churches is due to the reception of the graceless into their membership God alone knows. But I am afraid that the last day will make terrible revelations of discrepancy between church rolls and the record in the Book of Life. Let not, then, any desire for apparent success, any impatience for results, tempt either pastors or churches to receive such as do not give good evidence of a change of heart.

But you must not only do your best to keep spiritual death out of the church if we would have them fitted for their mission, we must also expel it as soon as we find it has crept in. The surgeon does not hesitate to amputate a dead limb, for he knows it will spread deadly mortification if left. And no more should you delay to cut off a dead member from the body of your church, even though it be painful, and for a similar reason.

Much can also be done to preserve and increase the efficiency of our churches by keeping up a judicious discipline in a spirit of brotherly love. To delay to begin to labor with the unfaithful until there are so many, and the inconsistency so glaring that the church is driven to action in very desperation, is about as wise as the delay of a sick man to treat his disease until it has spread to many parts of his system, and is threatening death.

Another matter of prime importance in the interest of deep spirituality is the training of the babes in Christ entrusted to you by God. Here, we are convinced is both the chief hope for the future, and that hope is made vain in most cases, because here is where there is general carelessness. Our hope to have a strong, vigorous race physically is not in reinvigorating the middle-aged and the old when they have become infirm, but in guarding and fostering the health and growth of the young who are free from disease. Let a man's health but break down and

there is small prospect of full energy. So also in this spiritual life. When old professors are weak, their case is well nigh hopeless. They may be electrified now and then into spasms of activity, by appeals and special influences, but they are only spasms, leading to the exhaustion of reaction. Your hope for a strong deep toned spirituality among you is in the nurture and training of the new-born babes which God gives you, on the principle that it is easier to promote the growth of a strong healthy life in a child, than to restore such a life when it has become enfeebled.

And it is just here we fear that we are most careless. There is considerable earnestness to get members into our churches, but when this is accomplished many act as though all were done. The young convert may gradually neglect duty, become increasingly trifling and worldly, and there is little effort beyond, perhaps, what is done by the pastor to stop the sad downward progress. It is only when he has gone so far as to be liable to exclusion that the church bestirs herself. Even then, her action is too apt to be coldly formal, having respect to her own reputation rather than the erring one's good, and not from a personal loving solicitude on the part of many. If you are ever to become what you need be, for God's glory and men's good, we are sure there must be great improvement here.

Finally, brethren, if you as churches are to become strong in spiritual life, that life must have exercise and nourishment. If the life is to have exercise, you must, we are sure, become more systematic in your efforts, so that there is at least an approximation to the rule that each of your members shall have a special work. If that life is to be nourished, there must be a more general and persistent study of God's word, which, in the truth it teaches, is the food for this life.

But, above all else, may all of you remember to look up to God for the descent of His Spirit and His abiding presence. Then shall you prosper, God be glorified, and the world blessed.

News from the Churches.

NOTE FROM PORT LORNE.—The church in this place is still enjoying the fruit of the great revival of last year. Although the field has been destitute of pastoral labor since September last, yet a deep spiritual interest has been enjoyed, and all religious meetings have been faithfully sustained. Unity of thought and action among the brethren is peculiarly gratifying.

The former pastor made occasional visits to this place during the last College year, and is, at present spending the vacation in his old field of labor.

The church has extended a call to the Rev. W. L. Parker of Digby, and is now anxiously waiting for a favorable response.

We have enjoyed a pleasant visit of late from the Rev. F. E. Hudson, a recent graduate of Morgan Park Theological Seminary. His relatives and friends here, from whom he has been separated for more than five years, are elated over his attainments as a preacher. He has already accepted a call from the Baptist Church of Pawnee City, Nebraska, U. S., and will start for the West on the 19th inst. The prayers of many in this place will follow him.

Yours &c.,
E. H. SWEET.

June 16th, 1883.

ATHOL.—Our Brother Hans Mills writes, June 11th, 1883:—Dear Editor,—It rejoices our heart to know that the work of the Lord is still prospering in many of our churches; yester-

day was an interesting day with the church at Parrsboro', and also that at West Brook, and Southampton. Our pastor, Rev. J. A. McLean exchanged with Rev. D. G. McDonald, of Sackville, N. B. Bro. McD. baptized six persons at 10 o'clock, a. m., into the fellowship of the church at Parrsboro' Village, preached at 11, drove to West Brook, baptized one at 3 p. m., preached immediately after, and again at Southampton at 6.30 he baptized two persons, and preached at 7 p. m. Bro. McDonald seems to be blessed with a strong physical constitution which enables him to perform a great amount of labour in one day.

Our prospects are encouraging in both of the churches over which our pastor presides. The truths of the gospel are faithfully proclaimed and we have the promise, "His word shall not return unto him void."

Rev. J. W. S. Young writing from Melvern Square, June 19th:—informs us that on the 17th inst., he baptized two happy converts, and gave the hand of fellowship to three, making in all 31 since the beginning of the revival. He says further, "I visited Aylesford part of the day on Sabbath with Rev. J. L. Read. I found a Sabbath School alive—to my mind second to none I ever visited. The School is large and its interest is increased much by the purchasing of a new library, which with some other literature cost over \$100. I preached for Bro. J. L. Read to a full house. We visited many friends on Monday the 18th, meeting in the evening at Aylesford. After my remarks over forty persons took part in the meeting, most of them young converts, all thankful to the Lord for the great work done there."

I had returned to my home in Carleton Co., N. B., for about four weeks, and visited five of the churches there on my old fields. Baptized one Sabbath at Wakefield. Had a pleasant time and returned to Melvern Square.

Dear Bro. Selden,—

The friends of our Zion will be pleased to know that two professed believers in Christ were buried with Him in baptism last Sabbath in Scot's Bay. In other localities where I labour there are enquirers. We ask the prayers of all.

Yours fraternally,
D. FREEMAN.

Canning, N. S., June 22, 1883.

NEW HARBOR.—On Lord's Day, the 10th inst., it was my privilege to administer the ordinance of Christian Baptism at Tor Bay, where it has not been administered for many years.

I expect to baptize more in that place before long. "I say unto you that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth," and "It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad" when even one sinner turns to God.

D. McLEOD.

June 21st, 1883.

AT WALLACE RIVER.—Rev. H. Bool baptized one on the 17th inst.

Dr. Cesar Malan once met an infidel in the streets of Paris, and to every one of his sharp assaults he simply responded by quoting a text of Scripture and saying: "Thus saith the Lord." "But," said the Frenchman, "I don't believe it." "Nevertheless," answered the good man, "It is the Word of the Lord, and if you don't believe it, you'll be damned." Years later the same man met Dr. Malan, and reminding him of the occurrence, said: "It was that which convicted me. You did not let me get hold of the hilt of the sword and begin to examine and criticize it, but you thrust the sharp point of it right through me every time, and it wounded me to death, and also to life eternal."