

Sunday Reading.

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CIRCULAR LETTER.

The Cause and Cure of Religious Declension.

THE CIRCULAR LETTER FROM THE NOVA SCOTIA EASTERN BAPTIST ASSOCIATION TO THE MEMBERS OF THE CHURCHES OF WHICH IT IS COMPOSED.

Dear Brethren,—

It is cause of deep regret that in many of the letters from the churches complaint is made of coldness in spiritual life, and of not much having been accomplished in church work.

I. One of the causes of religious declension is a want of proper regard to the Word of God. It has pleased God to magnify His word more than His name, and only when Christians love the truth are they found walking in the truth.

If transgressors are exposed to the eternal displeasure of God; if a door of hope is opened to them; if it is at no less expense than the death of God's dear Son in man's nature; if through the atoning death of Christ God can be just, and the justifier of him who believes in Jesus, if this is the only possible way to escape the punishment of sin, and through this way we are acceptable, and become well pleasing to God, it is of vast importance to every man.

Truth is important in its relation to philosophy, history and politics, or any other branch of science, because it affects the present and future condition of mankind. But what is truth in this direction, compared with the truth that involves the eternal destiny of the human soul. To answer the question, "What must I do to be saved?" is infinitely more important than the latest work on evolution or materialism.

(a.) By neglecting to read and meditate upon revealed truth. The Sacred Scriptures are a rich mine, abounding in diamond treasures, but it is a mine that must be worked. If men read the Word of God to advantage, it must be in meditation and prayer.

The truths of salvation are in God's Book, and by study and meditation we can receive them into our minds. If close application is required, close application and sincere thoughtfulness can be given. Among insects that subsist on the sap of flowers, there are two very different classes. One is remarkable for its breadth of wing and beautiful plumage, and as it circles from flower to flower gracefully, you admire it; but in the same field is another worker, whose brown vest, and straightforward, business-like habits may not be as pleasing to the eye.

(b. By not reading the Scriptures for the purpose and end for which they were given. We are told that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.

(c.) By forming low opinions of the value of the truths taught in the Scriptures. It appears to be the spirit and opinion of the present

age that no matter how polluted the fountain is, if the streams are only pure, but the question is, Can the streams be pure when the fountain is corrupt? Our Saviour said: "A corrupt tree cannot bear good fruit." Actions apparently good and beneficial to society may flow from a heart at war with the doctrines and teachings of God's Word.

II. The second cause of religious declension is the way many regard daily prayer to God. Prayer is the desire of the heart ascending to God in petition and supplication; the soul's moving in the presence of God in holding communion.

(a.) When we pray, do we really desire the things we ask? It is an awful thing to come intentionally into the presence of the great Heart-Searcher, and not feel the need of the things we ask.

(b.) When we pray do we confess our sins, and desire to forsake them. Confession of sin must come into every acceptable prayer. "If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

(c.) Are we desirous at the throne of grace? We ask God for such things that we need, do we wait for the answer. We feel the power of sin in the soul, and a spiritual stupor settling down upon us. Do we take it to God, and ask him to revive us again, that we may rejoice in him? Do we seek the submissive spirit to trust unreservedly to God whether he gives or withholds. There are two kinds of mercies for which we have to pray. Mercies which God has not promised to give directly, but indirectly, such as earthly comforts and some things in a religious life.

III. Another cause of religious declension is a lack in benevolence. God still loves a cheerful giver, but for want of time I cannot enlarge — 2 Cor. ix. The cure of religious declension is already sufficiently indicated in what has been said. If we study and meditate upon the truths of God until they become part of our inner lives, and comprehend the true purpose for which the Bible was given, and place all the doctrines side by side as being of equal importance, we shall grow in grace and in the knowledge of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ.

on the first day of every week a portion of his income as God hath prospered him, not of necessity, but as a bounty, there will be a higher type of Christian manhood in our churches, and the doors may expect a hundredfold in this life and in the world to come life everlasting. "Brethren, meditate upon these things, give thyself wholly to them that thy profiting may appear to all. For if these things be in you and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The following report of the Committee on Missions, adopted by the Eastern Association, will interest many of our readers:—

Report of Committee on Missions.

The people of this body have had the honor to be intimately associated in the work of evangelizing the world, some of our best missionaries having gone from this Association. We trust that they will take an ever-deepening interest in this the great business of all the disciples of Jesus Christ; and that they will pray and contribute in order that our missions may be sustained at an ever increasing rate of efficiency.

Your Committee note with great satisfaction that during the year two of our sisters, Miss Hamilton, from New Brunswick Women's Missionary Aid Societies, and Miss Wright from the Nova Scotia Societies, have devoted themselves to the Foreign work. These ladies are commended to the sympathies of the churches of this Association, and we trust that the fond desire of their hearts may be realized, of becoming good missionaries of the Son of God.

We would record our gratitude to God that the Rev. Geo. Churchill and wife have been brought home in safety, and would assure them that the kindest welcome awaits them in all our churches. We trust that they may find needed rest and strength in their native clime, to return to their loved missionary labors at an early day.

Another man is wanted for the Foreign department of our Missionary work, and we would again urge the oft repeated command, "Pray ye the Lord of the harvest to send forth labourers into His harvest."

OUR HOME WORK

Under the efficient management of the Board in Yarmouth, is being prosecuted with vigor. There is room for more aggressive effort in these Eastern Counties of Nova Scotia. Your Committee deeply feel the necessity of following up with scriptural training the work of the evangelist and the missionary. We must study how to build up churches. We must see to it that they are supplied with pastors, else we shall lose what we have gained.

Our Home Mission has taken an unexpected turn. Provisionally, as your Committee believe, the thoughts of one of the youngest of our ministers, the Rev. Walter Bars, has been directed to the extreme west of this Dominion. The soil there is virgin to the Baptists, and Bro. Bars goes out under the auspices of our American brethren to be the pioneer of what will, under God, be a great work. The Baptists of the Lower Provinces cannot stand uninterested spectators of this forward movement. They see the promise of a great return from a generous seed-sowing of New Testament principles, and trust that, as in so many other instances in our history, this may prove but the beginning of a work that shall increase from one small body owning our principles, to an Association of churches like that assembled here to-night.

D. A. STEELE, Chairman.

A Short Memoir of G. W. Fisher, Esq.

BY REV. D. O. PARKER.

"Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord"

As a small token of affection, and as a duty to a valuable citizen, I beg to put on record this humble tribute to his memory. Mr. Fisher was born in 1820, near his late residence in Somerset, and was a connecting link between the pioneer settlers and the living present. In early life he was an attentive hearer of bible truths as preached by the late Rev. Wm. Chipman, and from an intimate acquaintance with him acquired business habits of remarkable readiness and precision. In the confidence of the public he moved over a large circle, and filled offices of trust with fidelity and honor.

The first Sabbath School in Western Cornwallis was organized in May, 1825, in a log school-house, where the village of Berwick now stands. Mr. Fisher, then in his sixth year, was one of the original scholars of that school, and often graphically portrayed to the third and fourth generation, the rise and progress of the many schools emanating from it. In a poem, "Scenes of the Past," he once wrote, the many fond memories that gathered about the old log school-house,—

Though cares roll on and troubles come,
And age with chilling blast,
Be eighteen hundred twenty-five,
A "green spot in the past."

From then to the close of life he claimed an active, yet pleasant, home in the Sabbath Schools, and for many years officiated as Superintendent. As teacher and superintendent in the Union School of Somerset, he closed life's work with the harness on. Many now even in distant lands fondly cherish his memory. An old pupil in California, on hearing of his death, writes that she spent a sleepless night, but felt that another guardian angel was hovering round. A few years since he met a young woman at the Berwick R. R. station, who had been absent some time, teaching in an American college, and who is now a devoted missionary in China. She there assured him that as her teacher, God had made him instrumental in inspiring her with lofty purposes, in leading her to Christ, and in moulding and directing her future life. In a letter under date of 1881, addressed to this distant missionary sister, he wrote so feelingly that I cannot be more faithful to his memory than in an extract let him speak for himself. Aside from its connection with this review of a faithful teacher's life, it is worthy in its own merits of a permanent record, and I need not apologize for its length. He writes: "I have been striving since my seventeenth year, as Sabbath School teacher, to win for the Master, and to save from the errors of this sin-stricken world, such as would hear from my lips the story of Jesus and His love, with how much success, God only knows; but if only one soul is bettered through my influence, it is to the glory of my Redeemer, and I am thankful. Your remarks to me the day we met at Berwick were like 'cold water to a thirsty soul,' and only those who are

engaged in the pursuit of Christian knowledge for themselves, and in its impartation to others, can know the deep depression of spirit that sometimes, like the ocean's waves, sweep over us. Mine was the picture of a wasted life, myself the central figure, and beautiful material in wreckage and ruin scattered all around, making the desolation more desolate. Your remarks concerning our past associations as scholar and teacher in S. S. life awakened some of the most pleasing associations of past

life, and revived the assurance in my own mind, that my feeble efforts, under the blessing of the Great Teacher, had encouraged one at least to trust, to study and pray. You will allow me to say dear sister, that the brief, very brief conversation we had at the station in Berwick gave me consolation and strength to rise above my fears, and press forward in the good old way, teaching the story of Jesus and his love, and to-night, although three score years of my poor, fruitless life for good have passed I can say, all the dearest reminiscences are connected with Sabbath School work, and to-day "I would rather be a door keeper in the house of God than dwell in the tents of wickedness." It is true I see but little of the fruit of all my labors for the Master, but that is no reason for discouragement, I am not the harvester but the sower, I have the unwavering conviction that I am sowing precious seed, and am encouraged to know that some will fall upon good ground and bear fruit, some thirty, some sixty, and some an hundred fold. What shall the harvest be? Be glory to God and a finished salvation to man. I frequently turn up the map of Palestine when preparing my Sabbath School lesson, and sometimes, may, often find the city of Jerusalem peopled, in imagination, as it was when Jesus walked its streets and taught in the temple before the proud and aristocratic Pharisees who listened to his teaching with malice aforethought in their hearts and contempt in all their manners, yet afraid to open a controversy with the poor untutored Galilean, lest the people should see their confusion in his answers. I notice with heartfelt satisfaction the innovations his teaching made on the established customs of their worship, the enlargement of the common people's liberties and last, not least, the prominence he gave the children, allowing them even to shout Hosannas in the temple, and not a Pharisee to lead the choir. Angels soon heralded the advent of Jesus to earth, child-song his ministry to man. For this we teach, as far as in us lies, the Sunday School to sing. If the Divine placed such a value upon song, we should never cease to sing. His advent to earth was announced in song, his ministry was begun with song, and when the supper was ended, and His public ministry was closed, they sang a hymn and went out." Constitutionally gifted with a genial nature, and always buoyant with cheerfulness, he never appeared to grow old. During his last brief sickness he suffered much. A little before his death, with my hand pressed in his, the last words I heard him speak were, "It is just as I would like to have it, asleep in Jesus." And so he fell asleep on the 30th of May, 1884. His funeral was on the ensuing Sabbath. A procession almost a mile long followed his remains to the Berwick cemetery. Venerable old men from distant parts of the county were there to pay their tribute of respect. The Rev. Mr. Johnson and Rev. E. O. Read, pastor of Wesleyan and Baptist churches in Berwick, together conducted the funeral solemnities. This was befitting a neighbor, teacher and brother, everywhere respected, esteemed, and beloved.

"The sweet remembrance of the just, Shall flourish when they sleep in dust."

I am of the opinion that one element of our heavenly felicity will be found in our employments. These capabilities of ours, restored and perfected, will be employed in some service worthy of their highest exercise, and which will afford the purest pleasure. The rest of heaven will not be found in sleep. It will be found in exemption from all annoyance, and in adequate power to sustain the vision of God and all the fruition of the spiritual world. Nothing will exhaust our power, but everything will increase our strength and energy. To work without weariness—will not that be blessed? To worship without fatigue—O how glorious? To be with God uninterruptedly and eternally—how infinite and exalted to bliss! "Forever with the Lord." That is my heaven. Still, I have no desire to be dismissed from His service here. If I can only spread the savour of His name among perishing sinners, and bring them to behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world, I can joyfully wait a great while before I sit down with my Master on His throne. The pleasure of advancing His kingdom on earth is only second to the felicity of His presence in heaven.—Bishop James.