

Correspondence.

For the Christian Messenger.

Letters to a Young Preacher.

LETTER XXVII. SELECTION OF TEXTS.

My Dear Brother,—

So greatly diversified are the circumstances in which pastors are placed, that in reference to some matters one can hardly give specific advice which will be of general application. Such is the case with regard to the selection of subjects for the pulpit. While some men are continuously preaching to the same congregation, others occupy extensive fields, in which several congregations are to be addressed. A course which may be very properly adopted by the former class, would be quite unsuitable for the latter.

All parts of gospel doctrine and Christian duty ought to be presented before every congregation. No preacher should ever lose sight of this self-evident and important fact. Those points, however, which are of greater importance, and more practical utility, obviously demand the most frequent discussion. Matters which relate directly to the salvation of the soul, and the path of obedience in which all believers are required to walk, should always hold a prominent place in the preaching of the gospel.

Some congregations are composed principally of professors of religion; and others of non-professors. In some places, and at certain times, the cause of vital religion is advancing; in others it is declining. Occasionally one species of vice is specially prevalent, or some erroneous sentiment is being sedulously propagated. A preacher should duly consider the state of his congregation, and select that subject which seems best adapted to promote their spiritual welfare. This requires the exercise of caution, prudence, and decision, a text that will furnish a solid foundation for his discourse. It may be useful for a man who is capable of explaining obscure passages of Scripture, to discuss some of them occasionally. In general, however, it is advisable to select a text that plainly teaches the doctrine which the preacher designs to present to his hearers; or that clearly inculcates the duty which he intends to enforce; or one that naturally suggests the admonition, reproof, consolation, encouragement, &c. which he purposes to impart. If the text appear to require a considerable amount of explanation in order to show its connexion with the subject, some of the audience will be liable to question the correctness of the inferences drawn from it. They will not, therefore, have as full a persuasion of the truth of what is advanced, and consequently will not be so likely to derive benefit, as if it was clearly exhibited in the passage on which it is professedly built.

Some may, indeed, admire the ingenuity of a man who deduces a point of doctrine or of duty from a passage that has no relation to it. But the cause of truth is liable to suffer from such attempts. I have known an illiterate preacher—such men often choose difficult texts—to undertake to deduce the doctrine of election from Amos iii. 12. He read it, "As the shepherd taketh out of the mouth of the lion two legs and a piece of an ear," &c. From the smallness of the proportion of these parts to the whole body of a sheep, he inferred the fewness of the elect, or those who are saved. As "a piece of an ear" is much less than "two legs," he drew the inference, that many more of the lower orders of mankind than of the higher are saved. This seemed quite ingenious. But the text reads, "two legs, on a piece of an ear." Had the preacher read it correctly, he must, in all reason, have so changed his fine-spun theory, as to maintain that all the elect belong either to the higher or the lower classes. A very intelligent gentleman present, who was opposed to the doctrine taught, took strong exception, as well he might, to this way of proving it. Certainly a much more appropriate text, and one far more convincing, might have been chosen.

It is expedient for a minister to select his texts a considerable space of time before he preaches upon them. When he is unexpectedly called to deliver a discourse immediately, he should choose an appropriate subject, that is familiar to him. But when a preacher in ordinary cases prays just before reading his text, that his mind may be led to a suitable portion of Scripture, his petition is manifestly out of its proper place and time. It should have been offered in secret previously. The truly venerable John Burton, late of Halifax, related to me an instance in which he heard a preacher state to his hearers, at the commencement of his discourse, "I do not know any thing about what I am going to say to you." "I

thought," said Bro. B., "The more shame for you! But," he added, "I soon perceived that he had no need to make such a statement; for it was evident that he did not know what to say."

The husbandman should rely wholly upon the blessing of Heaven, not to give him a crop without his own labor, but to crown his diligent efforts with success. So likewise a preacher should depend implicitly upon Divine aid, not expecting that his indolence will be rewarded by an extraordinary influence of the Holy Spirit, but trusting that his sedulous endeavors will be assisted, and rendered successful. (James v. 7. 1 Cor. iii. 6—8. 1 Tim. iv. 13—16.) He ought, therefore, to have his texts chosen in good time, so that he may carefully investigate them, attentively compare them with other portions of Scripture bearing on his subject, and diligently meditate upon them.

Discretion ought to be exercised with reference to the length of a text. If it be long, and embrace distinct subjects, the impression designed to be made is liable to be weakened by the discussion of various topics: or else essential parts of it must be passed over unnoticed. It should, however, be long enough to contain some definite idea, and to furnish a basis for the intended discourse.

May you, my dear young Brother, ever be happy in the selection of your texts, and in your preparation for the discussion of them!

Yours in gospel bonds,

CHARLES TUPPER.

Tremont, Aylesford, Jan. 29th, 1862.

For the Christian Messenger.

Worldly Pleasure.

We have seen the splendid equipages of the rich worldling, rolling by, bearing their freight, of gay and fashionably dressed ladies and gentlemen, to scenes of frivolity and dissipation. There the brilliant repartee, mirthful song, exciting dance, alluring game, and epicurean feast, occupy the passing hours, till early morn; then borne to their homes, they fling themselves upon their couches, in a state of feverish, sleepless excitement. After next morning's sun has more than midway reached his meridian, they come forth, listless and unrefreshed, from their prayerless chambers into richly furnished apartments; to spend their enervated powers, turning the pages of some new romance, or planning and arranging new styles of dress for the following night, of system shattering, nerve enfeebling mirth and folly.

The wealthier class, speeding onward at the head of the tide of fashionable life, have a numerous throng, following in their wake; who gaze and admire them, with envious, desiring eyes; considering them far more highly favoured than themselves, with the means of gratifying their worldly aspirations, to their full extent. Youthful ones, just budding into manhood and womanhood, have been permitted to take their first sip from the shallow cistern of what they term innocent amusement; and a thirst is awakened for larger draughts, from what their youthful fancies deem a refreshing and exhaustless fountain. Parents, shall I, must I, say it, professing parents, smile at the impending danger; in their blindness, do not perceive the "glittering sword suspended by a single hair;" over the heads of those they love. Again, and again, their children attend midnight balls; their parents hear the vain and mirth-loving, praise their beauty, gracefulness and vivacity; yes, hear them and smile well pleased; becoming more and more deeply interested in the appearance those youthful forms make in gay assemblies; sparing no expense, in many cases, going far beyond their means, in order to deck them to grace the ball-room; and have them appear in no wise inferior to those, who have the advantage of them as regards worldly circumstances.

Pursuing this course, the childlike, and innocent, some of those youthful feet seemed tending toward the narrow way, speedily become thoughtless and extravagant; cast off all restraint; and launch out, fearless and reckless, on the broad sea of worldly pleasure, turning a deaf ear to all advice or guidance.

Thus onward, downward they go unresistingly, to themselves imperceptibly, until parents and children become inextricably entangled in the meshes which their own hands have woven; and from whose coils, nought, save the mighty power of divine grace, will ever be able to extricate them.

At whose door lies this great evil? which is rapidly, and widely spreading in families, whose heads are professing Christians; connected with denominations, whose members profess to denounce vanity; and every thing that murders time, unfits the mind for the sober realities

of life, and leads it away from all things pure and holy. Christian parents whose children are permitted night after night to frequent the ball-room, their love for such seems increasing, in proportion as it is gratified; fearful is the responsibility you incur. Your God, and their God, has committed those young immortals to your guardianship, that you may carefully watch over, and shield them, from the wily snares and seductive temptations, so thickly clustering around their pathway. Then how tremblingly alive should you be, to the dangers which surround them; how vigilantly, ay ceaselessly guard those nurseries of youthful plants, which your heavenly Father has given you to train, and cultivate for him; lest the green leaves should wither, and their life decay, lighted by the pestilential breath of fashionable worldliness; instead of brightly and healthfully blooming, sweet and fragrant plants of righteousness, gracing the garden of the Lord. But what do we see in many, many cases? what do those see, who term such amusements innocent, harmless, and even proper for professors of religion? They see youths whose parents have professed to disapprove of such vain, foolish pleasures, freely mingling with them in the mazes of the dance, intoxicated with the giddy whirl; their whole minds engrossed with gaudy dress, and fashionable extravagance. Can we call that innocent and harmless, which produces such results?—Though young in years and of limited experience, yet from personal observation, I consider it a painful evil, a prolific producer of gay, thoughtless worldlings. Can we call that amusement innocent, or harmless, which we have known as the means of transforming in a few months, childlike innocence and simplicity, into gay, reckless extravagance? True it may not always have such a marked influence on the character; but the principle remains the same. It has an earthward, downward tendency. The atmosphere of the ball-room, is death to spiritual life.

Christian parents, you have the word of God for your directory; wisdom and strength from above, are promised to those who ask; you are required to use all the means which have been put within your reach. And when you faithfully perform the part assigned, you can trustingly look up and expect your Father's approving blessing. When these are neglected, when you, who should protect the youthful from the snares of an alluring world, become "like cities broken down and without walls," and they are suffered to stray into the enchanted ground, when you even smile over the tempting sweets they pluck in their wanderings; you cannot, consistently, kneel and ask your heavenly Father to make your children his. He may, and sometimes does, in his infinite mercy and love, make them miracles of grace; but, such parents have not one promise they can plead before a throne of grace. Ye, whom God has made trainers of immortal spirits, awake to your duties; think of the weighty responsibilities which rest upon you. God is watching; Christ is watching; the Holy Spirit is watching. They wait to bless, and make your work effectual, if you are faithful to the great trust committed to you, to make "your sons, as plants grown up in their youth; your daughters, like corner stones polished after the similitude of a palace." They watch, to call you to account, if you neglect the spiritual interests intrusted to your keeping. Then let those who have been weakly and faithlessly yielding to the claims of this world, and complying with its maxims, until their sons and daughters have become constant and deluded worshippers at Folly's gilded shrine, use every means which is put within their power, to remedy the great evil which they have done. And oh! be persuaded, to keep those youthful blossoms, who have never yet been exposed to the blinding glare of fashionable, world-destroying pleasure, from the dread miasma, or you may yet, with dismay, hear them reproaching you with the loss of their souls.

Youthful disciples of the holy Saviour! a word to you. Never, on any account, let your presence sanction the giddy mirth of the ball-room; enter not the unhallowed precincts, for the dead are there. The air is pestilential; it will penetrate the inmost depths of your spirit; and its noxious vapours, dim the pure light, fanned by the breath of heaven, which illumines the inner temple.

TRUTH.

For the Christian Messenger.

The Liquor Traffic.

MR. EDITOR,—

It appears that Intemperance is on the increase, the question arises, what is to be done? by what means can the evil be stayed? And

the answer is not by any one means alone, but by every means which can be put in requisition to hedge in the army of the destroyer, impede his march, turn him back, and redeem the land.

Intemperance is a national sin, carrying destruction from the centre to every extremity of the Province, and calls upon the people to array themselves against it. It is in vain to rely alone upon self-government and voluntary Abstinence, this should by all means be encouraged and enforced, and may limit the evil but can never expel it. Alike hopeless are all the efforts of the Pulpit and the press, without something more radically efficient and permanent. It is knowledge only, or argument, or motive were needed the task would be easy; but argument may as well be exerted upon the wind, and motive be applied to chain down the waves. Thirst and the love of filthy lucre are incorrigible, many may be saved by these means, but with nothing more many will be lost, and the evil will go down to other ages. Alike hopeless is the attempt to stop intemperance by mere civil coercion. There is too much capital invested in the importation and vending of Ardent spirits, and too brisk a demand to render present legal enactments and prohibitions of sufficient influence to keep the traffic in ardent spirits within safe limits.

Magistrates will not and cannot if they would execute laws against the illegal vending and drinking of ardent spirits, amid a population who hold the right of suffrage, when they are in favor of free indulgence. The effort before public sentiment is prepared for it would hurl them from their elevation, and exalt others who would be no "terror to evil doers." The time has been when external morality could be enforced by law, but the times are changed and unless we can regulate public sentiment, and secure morality in some other way we are undone.

The remedy, whatever it may be, must be universal, operating at all times, and in all places, short of this, every means applied will be but the application of temporary expedient. There is somewhere a mighty agency of evil at work in the production of intemperance, and until we can discover and destroy the vital power of mischief we shall labour in vain.

Intemperance in our land is not accidental; it is rolling in upon us by the violation of some great law of human nature. In our views and in our practices, as a people, there is something fundamentally wrong, and the remedy must be found in the correct application of general principles, it must be a universal and national remedy. What then is the universal, natural and national remedy required for intemperance? It is the banishment of ardent spirits from the list of lawful articles of commerce by a correct and efficient public sentiment; such as has turned Slavery out of the British dominions, and will yet expel it from the world. Nothing should be said by way of crimination for the past, for verily we have all been guilty in this thing; so that there are few in the land whose brothers' blood may not cry out against them from the ground, on account of the bad influence which has been lent in some way to the work of destruction. We are not therefore to come down in wrath upon the importers and venders of ardent spirits, none of us are enough out of sin to cast the first stone.

Let the temperate cease to buy and the demand for ardent spirits will fall in the market, as the generation of drunkards shall hasten out of time. But intemperance is a social sin, and on that account exerts a power terrific and destructive as the plague. Where is the good produced by the traffic in ardent spirits to balance the enormous evils inseparable from the trade? What drop of good does it pour into the ocean of misery which it creates? and is all this expense for nothing? To remedy this evil let us have no ex-post-facto laws, let us all rather confess the sins which are past and leave the things which are behind and press forward in one harmonious attempt to reform the land, and perpetuate our invaluable blessings. This however cannot be done effectually, so long as the traffic in ardent spirits is regarded as lawful, and patronised by men of reputation and moral worth. I urge not this argument reproachfully but for the purpose of awaking investigation. We are a free people, if we go astray our own intelligence and moral energy must reclaim us, or we shall perish in our sins. But that mighty Despot whose army is legion, has invaded the land carrying in his course taxation, and chains, fire and the rack; inasmuch that the whole land bleeds and groans at every step of his iron foot, at every movement of his massive sceptre, at every pulsation of his relentless heart, and yet in daylight and at midnight he stalks unmolested.

Now ye venerable and honorable men raised to seats of legislation in a nation which is the freest, and is destined to become the happiest