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"Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit."

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Poetry.

For the Christian Messenger.

A Prayer for Life.

Let me live a little longer,
For this life hath many charms;
Let me live till faith grows stronger,
Ere I sink in death's cold arms.

Let me live, for life is pleasant,
Friends are dear and home is blest;
Let me live here, for the present,
If Thou, Father, deemest best.

Let me live, enjoying pleasures
Thou hast kindly given;
Let me live, to lay up treasures
For a future life in Heaven.

Let me live, with heart o'erflowing
For thy kindness and thy love;
For the life Thou art bestowing,
And the hope of life above.

Let me live till faith has banished,
From my soul, each doubt and sin;
Till the fear of death has vanished,
Ere its gates I enter in.

Then oh, Father, if it seemeth
Good to take me hence away,
Where Thy glory ever beameth,
Let me here no longer stay.

M. M. C.

Dorchester, Mass.

Religious.

COMMUNION.

BY DR. HOVEL.

First Article.

THE NEW TESTAMENT THE ONLY AUTHORITY
ON THIS QUESTION.—THE CONSTITUTION OF
CHRISTIAN CHURCHES NOT SUBJECT TO CHANGE.
COMMUNION TO FOLLOW BAPTISM.

It is our purpose to state the chief reasons which have led the Baptists of America, with few exceptions, to invite only Christians of their own faith and order to the Lord's table; believing that such a statement will tend to promote Christian fellowship between them and others. It will be necessary for us to mention, at the outset, a few doctrinal principles which underlie the argument for "close communion." These principles are held to be true and fundamental by nearly all the members of Baptist churches in our land. We shall state them as briefly as comports with our design, not attempting an extended vindication of their truth.

One of these principles is, that the New Testament is our ultimate authority in respect to church order and action. Accepting without reserve the doctrine of the plenary inspiration of the Old Testament scriptures, and believing that to the end of time they will be exceedingly precious and useful to the Christian, we are nevertheless unable to discover in any of them any proper model or account of a Christian church. Their laws, and histories, and songs of praise, bear the impress of Judaism. Even their predictions of the Messiah and his reign are expressed in language determined by the peculiarities of that dispensation. And surely it will be admitted that the Mosaic economy differed greatly from the Christian. The former had a national organization; a national temple, a national atonement; the latter has none of these. The former had an extensive and burdensome ritual, sacrifices, oblations, purifications, to be made by those who served unto the shadow of heavenly things; the latter has almost no ritual at all. No ordinances of the earlier economy is preserved without change in the later. No rule as to meats and drinks, diverse washings and carnal ordinances, imposed until the time of reformation, is taken up by the new economy and laid on the necks of believers for all time. The handwriting of ordinances, that was against us, has been blotted out. The Jewish nation may indeed have been typical of the spiritual Israel or kingdom of Christ, just as the Jewish sacrifices were typical of Christ, the Lamb of God; but it would be as unsafe to infer the organization of the Israelites, as it would

have been to infer the manner of Christ's death from the manner of slaying a lamb by the Jewish high-priest. Bearing in mind, then, the difference between the two economies and the natural dependence of language in every age upon previous or existing usages and institutions, we are not surprised that the Old Testament fails to describe, beforehand with literal accuracy, the polity and working of a Christian church; much less are we surprised at the impossibility of deriving the rites of the new dispensation from those of the old. Evidently, so far as the Bible is concerned we are remitted to Christ and his apostles for light on all questions of church order and action. And as to extra-scriptural teaching, we shall hardly be expected to go far in search of it while the word of God is intelligible, and the language of Chillingworth is remembered: "The Bible only, is the religion of Protestants."

Another of these principles is that the constitution and work of Christian churches are definitely fixed by the New Testament. It is not true, we think, that the writings of the apostles authorize us to look upon the constitution of a Christian church as elastic, variable, discretionary, capable of being adjusted by the wisdom of officers or members to the ever-changing tastes and conditions of society. Christianity has indeed a spirit and a form, a soul and a body, but they are perfectly and divinely fitted to each other. If one of them suffers, the other suffers also. If the spirit degenerate, the form will be perverted; if the form be injured, the spirit will languish. Their mutual sympathy and dependence may not always be manifest, but they surely exist, and will in due time appear. The records of Christianity, in every age prove this. And we are satisfied that the New Testament nowhere authorizes Christians to adapt their ecclesiastical polity and action to the institutions, the prejudices, or the genius of any people or epoch. It rather makes it their duty to offer the world the same Christianity, both in spirit and form, which they find delineated by apostolic men. To found the church was the work of Christ and his inspired followers. The former prescribed the qualifications for membership, and laid down the rule of discipline for private offences; the latter organized numerous churches, administered the ordinances, attended to the appointment of suitable officers; and gave important directions as to the discipline of public offenders. And thus, by inspired example and teaching was the proper constitution of Christian churches determined for all time. On this point the writings of Paul are very instructive. He took care to ordain elders in every church which he planted; he insisted upon the maintenance of faithful discipline in the churches he evinced by his conduct great respect for church action and authority; he proclaimed in the churches he evinced by his conduct great respect for church action and authority; he proclaimed the value of unity, order, co-operation in every church; he exhorted Christians to respect, obey, and support their pastors; he exalted the custom of all the churches to the position of a moral law for believers; he affirmed his own directions in respect to order and decorum among the brethren to be "commandments of the Lord"; and he declared that his teaching, not only of doctrine, but also of duty, was the same in all the churches. Hence it is manifest that Paul attached no little importance to the proper organization and action of the churches. Nothing was left to accident or the caprice of uninspired men. The body was fully framed together; and it is only necessary to examine with care the words of this one apostle in order to ascertain the normal constitution and functions of a Christian church.

Another of these principles is that churches, as observing the Lord's supper must determine what are the scriptural qualifications for admission to it. The ordinance is placed in their hands with instructions, and it is practically impossible for them to observe it without interpreting those instructions. They spread the table for their Master, and they must also invite the guests. They may say, "The New Testament authorizes us to welcome to this feast all men, or all believers in Christ, or all members of Christian churches." But, having prepared the supper, they cannot well say: "Our responsibility now ends; certain

terms, of admission to this table, are laid down, we believe, in the New Testament, but it is a delicate point, and we forbear to indicate them;—let every man do what is right in his own eyes, freely partaking, if he thinks himself entitled to do so." This would be saying: There is instruction in the New Testament which the churches of Christ may pass over in silence; they are indeed "the pillar and ground of the truth," and should proclaim the terms of baptism, of membership in the church, of admission into heaven, but it is not their duty to explain the terms of communion at the table of the Lord; this portion of the revealed will of God they may forbear to teach, although it is often misunderstood. Such a position is wholly untenable. No man would assume it except by necessity. But if churches observing the Lord's supper must determine what are the scriptural qualifications for this ordinance, manifestly they can only invite those to partake of it who are believed to possess these qualifications. If the scriptures in their judgment make true faith in Christ a term of admission to the Lord's table, they cannot invite those who give them no satisfactory evidence of having such faith. If baptism is made another term by the same authority, they cannot invite those who are believed to be yet unbaptized. In all cases the invitation must express the views of doctrine and duty held by those who give it. For they have no right to make the opinions of others their standard of action. They have no right to place honest error on the same level with honest truth, overlooking the sacredness of divine law, and regarding only the sincerity of the human subject. Wrong does not become right, nor falsehood truth, because it is believed to be so. Christians should not, therefore, treat any man as if he had obeyed a command of the Saviour when they believe he has not obeyed it, for by so doing they disparage the objective divine rule; nor should any man wish to receive from them such treatment, for it is wishing them to honor his profession at the expense of Christ's command.

Another of these principles is, that Baptists ought to follow out the doctrine of baptism, if correct, to its legitimate results. If they are right in holding that nothing but the immersion of a believer into the name of the Trinity is Christian baptism, they may fearlessly accept all the consequences of this belief. Loyalty to Christ will bring with it no real unkindness to his friends. Obedience to one of his directions will not be found to violate any other. All his commands are harmonious, and no possible conditions of society can make them discordant. To believe them harmonious, when Christianity is in a normal and healthy state, as in the apostolic age, is not enough; they are equally so, it must be admitted, when the people of God are in a partly disorganized state. For true charity does not consist in assenting to every opinion, and endorsing every act of a fellow Christian, but in thinking no ill of his purposes, and seeking to rectify his errors.

Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful. Paul was not uncharitable when he rebuked Peter to the face, because he was to be blamed. The very plainness and boldness of his reproof betokened large confidence in the radical integrity of his brother apostle. So, likewise, a strict obedience to the law of baptism, with all it involves, although it may separate a part of Christ's disciples from the rest, at certain points, and may give birth to discussion and admonition, is yet entirely consistent with fervent charity between those who differ. It may not, indeed, be so easy for Christians to obey all the laws of their Master, when some of them have mistaken the path of duty, and discord seems to reign, as it would be if all were of one mind, walking visibly in the same path; but nevertheless, it is possible, and therefore no servant of Jesus can plead his desire to obey one command as a valid excuse for not obeying another. If, then, Baptists are correct in their views of baptism, they ought not to hesitate in accepting and justifying the consequences; but if wrong in their views of baptism, they are doubtless wrong in the consequences also. The latter error, however, grows out of the former, and must be corrected through it. It is all. We claim then, that the following argument

establishes the duty of "close communion" on the part of Baptists, provided the immersion of believers, in the name of the Trinity, and nothing else, is Christian baptism. This is believed to be true by all consistent members of the Baptist denomination. It is plainly the logical and, if true, the scriptural basis of their practice of restricted communion.—*National Baptist.*

Cloud-land.

In their pilgrimage, not a few Christians spend many of their days in cloud-land. For the most part they are strangers to that "joy" which is "unspeakable and full of glory," and that "peace" which is "like a river." They walk amidst dark, damp, chilly shadows, and are full of complainings. Their closest devotions are dry and lifeless; they have little fruitful meditation on God's word, and the whole round of Christian labors is a duty rather than a privilege. Very frequently their imperfect performance is a mere form, without heart or interest.

This is a lamentable state of things. They know it. They sigh and mourn because of their leanness of soul, and unfruitfulness of life, and wonder why the presence of God has departed from them. But do they truly adopt the prayer of the Psalmist: "Search me, O God and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me?" Is there not, upon many subjects of their practical life, a suspension of conscience, while there is no suspense of action? Is there not at least an indulgence in things of a very doubtful character? Departure from the true standard of Christian life is always the cause of the hiding of God's face. The ancient prophet of Israel has shown that there is no mysterious secret in this matter. He believes "The Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither is his ear heavy, that he cannot hear; but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you."

Need he who indulges in the use of tobacco to the sanction of that pernicious and expensive vice, or he who will not forgive, as he expects to be forgiven, or he who submits to an irritable disposition, or any principle or practice upon which he cannot ask God's blessing, expect to walk in the light of His countenance? As well might he expect the Holy One to sanction sin. Nay, verily, he who will not deny himself the lusts of this life, must expect to dwell in the darkness and gloom of God's displeasure. "He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul" as of old, is frequently true now, when men will ask, "if that they may consume it upon their lusts." For God cannot compromise with evil.

Let us not spend our precious and only life in delusion on this subject. The right arm and right eye sins must be abandoned. And how shall we ask the sinner to turn from his iniquities, if we are not able to set the example?

"Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame."

CURIOUS CHURCH CUSTOMS.—An old book written in Connecticut about 150 years ago, gives an account of some of the church customs which existed in New England at that time. The writer says:

The practice of seating the congregation by a committee annually according to age, rank and property, was long continued in Stratford. In one instance, 1718, it is directed that the "married men and ancient bachelors be seated in the west gallery, and the married women and ancient maidens in the east gallery." Then there was the method of taking the contribution of the Lord's day, upon proclamation, by the deacon: "As God has prospered you, so freely offer: the people coming forward in order of their rank, office, and station in life, and depositing with the deacon money, or other gifts, or written pledges to pay." Such a custom, now, would bear hardly on those in our churches who have "nothing to give."