

Religious Intelligencer

BIBLE SOCIETY, MISSIONARY, AND SABBATH SCHOOL ADVOCATE.

E. McLEOD, Editor.

That God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ.—PETER.

TERMS.— ONE DOLLAR A YEAR, IN ADVANCE

VOL. V—NO. 6.

ST. JOHN, NEW BRUNSWICK, FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 5 1858

WHOLE NO. 214

THE RELIGIOUS INTELLIGENCER

Is published in St. John, N. B., every FRIDAY, for the Free C. Baptist General Conference, (Incorporated by Law) under the direction of a Board of Managers, chosen annually by the Conference.

B. J. UNDERHILL, Agent.

Office—No. 25, GERMANTOWN STREET.

All letters on business connected with the paper, should be directed to the Agent.

TERMS.

ONE DOLLAR A YEAR IN ADVANCE.

If not paid till after three months Seven Shillings and Six Pence.

Persons remitting money for this paper should be particular in stating for whom it is paid; and great care should be taken to state the Post or Way Office, at which the paper is received.

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Doctrinal & Practical.

Moral Suicide.

SELF-MURDER is a crime which all men regard with horror. That a man should take his own life is not only contrary to religion, but so shocking to nature, that we find it hard to believe that one has done it in his right mind.

The act itself affords a strong presumption of insanity; and, therefore, as we stand over the body of a poor, self-murdered victim, instead of reproaches, we feel rather disposed to pity and tears, as we think of the probable suffering which preceded this last desperate attempt at relief.

We imagine the years of poverty and misfortune, or the domestic unhappiness, or the excruciating disease, which tortured him to madness, which crazed his brain, and drove him in a paroxysm of agony to this fearful deed. These reflections forbid us to accuse our unhappy brother. We take up his body and bear it to the grave in silence, and leave his spirit to God.

Against committing such an act men need no persuasion, for their natural love of life is more powerful than any command of duty. They shudder and recoil at the very thought, and to reason with them against suicide seems as needless as would be an entreaty addressed to every visitor to Niagara not to throw himself over the cataract.

And yet there is a self-murder which is very common, and which is far worse than this—a suicide, not of the body, but of the soul.

When a man loosens the silver cord of life, or breaks the golden bowl, he only abridges by a few short years his continuance in this world. But he may inflict upon himself a suffering which shall far outlast this period. He may strike a wound to the vital spirit, so that it shall gasp and breathe heavily for ages to come. He may poison the blood of the soul so that these spiritual veins shall run fire. He may charge his brain with black memories, that shall distil drop by drop upon his wretched spirit for ever. Thus he may destroy his eternal happiness, and commit murder upon his soul.

So violent is this impulse to self-destruction, that our Creator, who knows our danger, has to warn us against this dreadful act. How strange is that question, so often repeated in the Bible, "WILL YE DIE?" By this God seems to say to men, "Life and death are in your power. I have given you existence and everything to make it blessed. Do not sacrifice it to mere passion or self-will. Be not guilty of the stuporous madness of throwing away your happiness for time and eternity!"

Yet even this divine entreaty cannot check the universal madness. The process of self-destruction still goes on. Moral suicides are committed every day. The world is full of shipwrecked men—men who have cast away the brief happiness of this life, and who can have no hope for another. How often are we called to follow one to the grave of those life we can think with no satisfaction from whose future state we shrink back with horror. As we hear the clods fall heavily upon the coffin, our hearts sink within us, for it is the grave of the wicked. We are burying one whose life was a constant crime against his Maker, and whom the vengeance of God must follow into eternity.

Many now living are inflicting on themselves a slow torture which must end in death. The crime is not completed at once. They are not dead yet, and may not die for years to come; but the process of death is begun. They have commenced a slow self-murder; and though a long time may elapse before the pain is utterly and for ever lost, yet is the criminality in no wise abated because it is a lingering ruin.

A suicide is not less real because the effect is not produced immediately. Some poisons act slowly. If a man drinks a pint of poison, and is found dead in his bed in the morning, no one hesitates to say that he has committed suicide. But suppose he takes poisons in small quantities, and lives a few years, and then dies in horror, has he not as fully put an end to his life as in the other case? Only he has refined upon the former method, and contrived to die gradually and peacefully. He makes a luxury of death—it is not the guilt of murder on his soul; it is as truly a suicide as the man who takes a knife to his throat. He might live twenty years, and he dies at forty, perhaps unbidden to the bar of God, perhaps

to hear from his Maker the tremendous question, Why art thou come to judgment before the time?

So this murder of the soul is accomplished slowly. No man comes at once to the brink of hell and deliberately plunges into it. But by a long course of evil, and constant approaches to danger, he at last brings himself within the reach of that Melstoom which draws him down.

Is it, then, too strong language to charge such a man with self-murder? We only impute to him the natural result of his course. He does not intend his own destruction. But he goes in the path of ruin with his eyes open. No drunkard ever meant to kill himself, yet he follows the course which he knows will bring him to the grave.

The rage of sin is always a species of intoxication. Men keep their senses in oblivion, and try to extract a sweet from every guilty pleasure, even when they know that the end of their course must be unutterable horror. The influence of moral causes is slow and stealthy, but certain and inevitable. Look around—How many do we see who are hurrying to eternal ruin! Behold how malignant passions wither up the heart—how they embitter the happiest lot! and who can doubt that the same ungoverned rage will feed the fires of hell? Thus countless souls are dying under the influence of unrepented sin. They are pursuing a course by which they are daily making reductions of their happiness, degrading their nature, turning fountains of joy into bitterness, and at last subjecting themselves to the terrific penalty of God's violated law. It is this which the Scriptures hold up as the extreme of madness and of crime.

This is moral suicide—soul-murder—a killing of the immortal part of man, the most terrible act of which a human being can be guilty.

Let no man pursue this course, thinking that he shall escape though others perish. Who is this that is so great as to be exempted from the operation of universal law? Poison will kill him as well as anybody else; and sin will destroy his soul as certainly as another's. The language is universal, "If ye do these things, ye shall suffer for them."

But here comes the divine interrogatory—"WILL YE DIE?" If there were any object to be gained by the sacrifice, it might be made. When a man is called to die for his country, he can surrender life without regret. So if it could at all benefit mankind that one should lose eternal happiness, he might, in a burst of devotion, say with Paul, that he could wish himself accursed from God that others might be saved. But when his death can do no good; when one man's loss is not another's gain; when no human being reaps benefit from this self-sacrifice—except, perhaps, to take warning from a wretched example—why, when the ruin of one helps to drag others down, then the act of murder becomes doubly cruel. This thought alone should stay the guilty being from suicide. Let him have pity on others, if he has no pity on himself.

A Christian's Credentials.

What are they? Not the blossoms of a fair profession, but the ripe and mellow fruit of godlike actions. "Cornell's" prayers and alms came up as a memorial before God—not his prayers alone, nor his alms alone, but his prayers and his alms. Beautiful conjunction. Piety towards God, and an active charity to all mankind! the twin perfections of vital, saving piety. Salvation is of grace, not of merit, not of works, but of a man should have. But faith, without works, is dead. It is like an index, without a book; like hands without a clock; like sails, without a ship; like a tree, with nothing but dry and withered branches. "Possessed of discipline of Christ! To prove thy discipleship genuine, thou must surround thyself with Widows, whom thou hast comforted with Orphans, whom thou hast succored with the Ignorant, whom thou hast instructed with the Wandering, whom thou hast reclaimed with the Hungry, whom thou hast fed with the Naked, whom thou hast clothed with the Sick, whom thou hast visited! These are thy trophies!"

Practical Godliness Includes the Inner Life of Religion.

True piety is not a sentiment merely, it is experience; it is life, inner but vigorous life. You may construct out of various materials the very semblance and representation of some flower or plant. Every fibre of the leaf, every variety of delicate tint in colour, and the perfection of form may be there. So entire may be the resemblance, that you shall take it into your hand as the veritable plant or flower it represents, and not till then do you perceive that it has no life. It is constructed; it did not grow. It is the workmanship of the human imitation, not of the Divine Creator. Similar is the difference between the piety of a sound creed intelligently held and maintained—a credible profession of religion, together with external propriety of conduct, and that piety which, while it includes all these, springs from a heart whose affections are consecrated to God, and is sustained by an inner life of blessed experience and holy principle. The first man can construct; it is but imitative. The last is the workmanship of God, "created anew in Christ Jesus unto good works."

Church Members Column.

Hints to Church Members.

BY REV. JABEZ BURNS, D. D.

VIII.—Cultivate a Public enterprising Spirit in reference to the Religious movements of the Times.

There never was a period in the history of the church, when more activity and energy are required, than now. God in his providence is opening doors of enterprise, and fields of labor in every direction.

(1.) At home there is a vast and important sphere of usefulness before us.

The masses of the people in Britain are irreligious. Many ignorant—multitudes intemperate—and thousands upon thousands never hear the Gospel, and therefore cannot be saved by it. To bring all these classes in connection with the truth, should be our great and united object. Sabbath schools, and Ragged schools, and Adult schools, should all be furnished by intelligent benevolent and devoted teachers from our churches.

The temperance cause should have its committees, and managing friends, and laborers, from among those who love the Lord Jesus; and who, after they have induced men to abstain from deadly drinks, will lead them on to a knowledge of the principles of saving religion.

The church should supply hosts of tract distributors, and men to visit dark and desolate neighbourhoods, and invite, yea, and if possible, constrain them to come and hear the Gospel.

Charitable societies for visiting the poor and the afflicted, should enlist Christian ladies, especially in this very good work.

Now, dear reader, at home there is much to be done. Work, indeed, for the whole church. No member need be unemployed, every one may, and surely ought to be found working in some department of Christian truth and mercy.

(2.) Abroad, there is the vast heathen world. Multitudes of Pagans, Mahomedans, Jews, Romancists, &c. How vast the field! How numerous the victims of sin, and darkness, and death! Hundreds of millions perishing for lack of knowledge! Thousands of schools are wanted, and tens of thousands of missionaries! Say 700 millions are without the Gospel and the means of grace; why then, 500,000 ministers are wanted to convey to them the tidings of mercy, supposing each missionary to labor among 14,000 immortal souls. Then think of this, and ask what ought you to do in this matter? Can you go and labor in this great work? Will you go and live, and toil in the missionary field? If this is not your duty, will you give of your substance to the extent of your ability? Will you collect for the missionary cause? And will you, in addition to both, sympathize with those who are in the work, and constantly remember them in your prayers? I might advert to the many noble institutions of our times, as the Bible societies—the Sailors societies, the Tract societies, &c. Now, I urge you, as a solemn Christian duty, to cherish the spirit of Christian enterprise, and co-operate with all the good and wise to make the world better and happier by your influence.

To have the spirit and means of usefulness, it will be necessary to avoid the deadening influences of worldliness. The love of the world will eat out the spirit of vital piety. It will occupy your time, absorb your means, and morally unfit you for either receiving, or doing good. Avoid its slumbering atmosphere. Avoid its false hollow maxims. Avoid its gilded tawdry fashions. Avoid its delusive pleasures. Avoid all unnecessary intercourse with it; and if you would be happy, prosperous, and useful Christians in the world, be careful not to be of it; never forgetting, that friendship with the world, is enmity towards God.

Rules for Holy Living.

XVIII.—Of Reproving Sin.

"Reprove, rebuke, exhort."

Habituate yourself to speak to others on the concerns of salvation.

If reproof be necessary "deal prudently," but never shrink from it to any one.

Be faithful, pointed, plain, and affectionate.

Show that you have the good of the reprovand at heart.

XIX.—Of Personal Duty.

"Ye are not your own."

"Know thyself." Reverence thyself.

"Duty thyself." Govern thyself.

"Abhor" and flee from "the appearance of evil." Guard the senses.

Avoid all occasions to impurity of heart.

Eat and drink "to the glory of God."

Eat to live, rather than live to eat.

Be careful of health. Avoid repetition.

XX.—Of Relative Duty.

"Love thy neighbour as thyself."

"Do unto all men as you would they should do unto you," were you in their circumstances.

As a sacred duty, visit the sick. Always pray with them. Read to them the Scriptures. Ascertain their state. Lead them to Christ.

Cultivate the disposition of compassion to the poor; care for their spiritual interests.

Church History.

Martyrdom of Christians.

EIGHTH GENERAL PERSECUTION UNDER THE ROMAN EMPERORS.

After the death of Gallus, Emilian, the general, having many enemies in the army, was slain, and Valerian elected to the empire. This emperor, for the space of four years, governed with moderation, and treated the Christians with peculiar lenity and respect; but in the year 257, an Egyptian magician, named Macrinus, gained a great ascendancy over him, and persuaded him to persecute the Christians. He was accordingly published, and the persecution, which began in the month of April continued for three years and six months.

The martyrs that fell in this persecution were innumerable. Among the most eminent were Rufina and Secunda, two beautiful and accomplished ladies, daughters of Asterius, a gentleman of eminence in Rome.

In the same year, Stephen, bishop of Rome, was beheaded, and Saturninus, bishop of Toulouse, was seized by the rabble of that place, for preventing, as they alleged, their oracles from speaking. On refusing to sacrifice to the idols, he was treated with many barbarous indignities, and then fastened by the feet to the tail of a bull. On a certain signal the enraged animal was driven down the steps of the temple, by which the martyr's brains were dashed out; and the small number of Christians in Toulouse had not, for some time, courage sufficient to carry off the dead body; at length two women conveyed it away, and deposited it in a ditch.

Stephen was succeeded by Sextus as bishop of Rome. Cyprian tells us that he was beheaded August 6, A.D. 258, and that six of his deacons suffered with him.

Laurentius, commonly called St. Lawrence, the principal of the deacons, who taught and preached under Sextus, followed him to the place of execution; when Sextus predicted that he should meet him in heaven three days after. Laurentius considering this as a certain indication of his own approaching martyrdom, at his return collected all the Christian poor, and distributed amongst them the treasures of the church, which had been committed to his care, thinking the money could not be better disposed of, or less liable to fall into the hands of the heathens. His conduct alarmed the persecutors, who seized on him, and commanded him to give an immediate account to the emperor of the church treasures.

Laurentius promised to satisfy them, but begged a short respite to put things in proper order; three days being granted him, he was suffered to depart. Then, with great dignity, he collected together a great number of aged, helpless, and impotent poor, and repaired to the magistrate, presenting them to him, saying, "These are the true treasures of the church."

Provoked at the disappointment, and fancying the matter meant in ridicule, the governor ordered him to be immediately scourged. He was beaten with iron rods, set upon a wooden horse, and had his limbs dislocated. He endured these tortures with such fortitude and perseverance, that he was ordered to be fastened to a large gridiron, with a slow fire under it, that his death might be more tedious. But his astonishing constancy during these trials, and his serenity of countenance under such excruciating torments, gave the spectators so exalted an idea of the dignity and truth of the Christian religion, that many immediately became converts.

Among the several converts to Christianity from this event, was a soldier called Romanus, who attended the martyrdom. He had taken the opportunity of the martyr's imprisonment to make some inquiries concerning Christian faith, and it was reported that he had received baptism at the hands of the captive. So this as it may, he declared himself a Christian immediately after the death of Laurentius, and soon followed him by a less lingering and torturing martyrdom to the world of blessed spirits in heaven. On his avowal of the Christian faith, he was scourged and beheaded. He had a companion in both his faith and suffering, named Hypolitus, to whom he was much attached, and who evinced no desire to escape the fate of his courageous friend.

Fourteen years before this period, persecution raged in Africa with peculiar violence, and many thousands received the crown of martyrdom, among whom the following were the most distinguished characters:

Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, an eminent prelate, and a pious ornament of the church. His doctrines were orthodox and pure; his language easy and elegant; and his manners graceful. He was said to be so perfectly a master of rhetoric and logic, and so complete in the practice of eloquence and the principles of philosophy, that he was made professor of these sciences in his native city of Carthage, where he became so popular, and taught with such success, that many of his students afterwards became shining ornaments of polite erudition. He was educated in his youth in the maxims of the heathen, and having a considerable fortune, he lived in great splendour and pomp. About the year 246, Cæcilius, a Christian minister of Carthage, became the instrument of Cyprian's

conversion; on which account, and for the great love that he always afterwards bore for his adviser, he was termed Cæcilius Cyprian.

Before his baptism, he studied the Scriptures with care, and being struck with the excellence of the truths they contained, he determined to practise the virtues they recommended. He sold his estate, distributed the money among the poor, dressed himself in plain attire, and commenced a life of austerity and solitude. Soon after he was made a presbyter; and being greatly admired for his virtues and his works, on the death of Donatus, in A.D. 248, he was almost unanimously elected bishop of Carthage. The care of Cyprian not only extended over Carthage, but to Numidia and Mauritania.

In the year 250, he was publicly proscribed by the emperor Decius, under the appellation of Cæcilius Cyprian, bishop of the Cyprians; and the universal cry of the pagans was, "Cyprian to the lions! Cyprian to the beasts!" The bishop, however, withdrew from the rage of the populace, and his effects were immediately confiscated. During his retirement he wrote thirty pious letters to his flock; but several schemes then crept into the church gave him great uneasiness. The rigour of the persecution abating, he returned to Carthage, and did everything in his power to expel erroneous opinions and false doctrines. A terrible plague now breaking out at Carthage, it was, as usual, laid to the charge of the Christians; and the magistrates began to persecute them accordingly: this occasioned an epistle from them to Cyprian, in answer to which he vindicates the cause of Christianity.

Cyprian was brought before the proconsul Aspasius Paternus, A.D. 257, when, being commanded to conform to the religion of the empire, he boldly made a confession of his faith. This did not occasion his death; but an order was made for his banishment, and he was exiled to a little city on the Libyan sea. On the death of the proconsul who banished him, he returned to Carthage, but was soon after seized, and carried before the new governor, who condemned him to be beheaded; and on the fourteenth of September, A.D. 258, this sentence was executed.

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