

GENERAL DUTIES OF CHURCH MEMBERS.

Every man who would have a conscience void of offence, should understand his various obligations and duties. What duties are of higher importance than those of members of the church of God; and yet what duties are more generally neglected? As this neglect may in some measure arise from not well knowing or justly appreciating these sacred duties, I will suggest a few ideas presented to my mind in consideration of them.

1st. One branch of duty of every church member, as such, relates to the pastor of the church. He is himself a church member, and may claim from his Christian brethren in common with themselves, whatever regard that designation gives a right to. But there are special reasons why the members of a church should hold their pastor in respect. He is to them and with their consent the messenger and minister of Christ, whose official acts rightly performed, have their seal and sanction in heaven. Besides he ought, at least by his own people, to be highly esteemed in love for his work's sake, the object of which is the advancement of their everlasting good, and the measures and methods of which are, of all others, the most laborious and wasting to flesh and blood; including deep and continued meditations, preaching in season and out of season, numberless spiritual conferences with individuals and families, and daily solitudes about the success of his work. Paul in two places instructs his brethren in this respect: 1 Thess. v. 12, 13. We beseech you brethren to know them, &c. Again, Heb. xii. 17. Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls as they that must give account.

2d. Certain men in churches are called to assist the pastor in government; and these persons will receive peculiar regard from every worthy church member. Their station is not held for their own sake, but as necessary to the peace and prosperity of the people, and as a state dishonours itself when it does not hold its own officers in respect, so every church member is divided against his church and does it dishonour, who behaves himself unseemly towards these brethren while discharging their appropriate duties. This only let me say, that when a member of a church disdains to receive admonition from those authorized to give it, as occasion requires, or when he speaks of them contemptuously; or carries himself proudly towards them in any way, he reproaches his profession, and reflects no honour on the church.

3d. The members of a particular church, ought, if possible, to acquaint themselves with one another. They being associated with each other in the same communion, and united to one another, like the members of the body, professing sameness of character, of spirit, of interest, of hope; professing to have their hearts occupied and swayed by that pure love which rules in heaven, and meeting together in the same place several times every week; joining their hearts and voices in prayer and praise; communing together often at the table of the Lord; co-operating in various voluntary associations for the furtherance of their common cause; mingling thus together continually in holy places and services, it is therefore reasonable and right that there ought to be among all the members that kind and fraternal feeling, which makes mutual access easy, and gives free scope for the prompt exercise of Christian sympathy and fellowship as occasion may require.

4th The law of brotherly love should have special sway over the members of a church. This law as being enforced with unparalleled motives, was Christ's new commandment to all his followers; obedience to which would demonstrate their discipleship to a master in whom love to them and all mankind was so powerful a principle. And if it be so necessary for Christians to cultivate the love of one another, shall members of the same church neglect it and be guiltless? If the Church be very large, it may be with love as with personal acquaintance, each may not be able to form a confidential affection for every one of the rest; and earthly minded and inconsistent members, cannot be the objects of brotherly love, which is the love of complacency, delight in Christ's image in his saints. But with these restrictions, if the members of a church are not kindly affectioned one toward another in brotherly love, they are a people devoid of spiritual comfort and strength; forsaken in a great measure by the Holy Spirit, and in danger of irretrievable declension. It was that love as exhibited by the primitive saints, that

enabled them to make their triumphant way against the united powers of hell and earth, and extended the kingdom of their Lord and Master.

5th. The members of a church ought to cherish a lively sympathy and seek each other's spiritual advancements, and edification. Persons so related should take a deep interest in each other's happiness; bear each other's burdens, and enjoy each other's blessings. They should have the same care one for another; and whether one member suffer all the members should suffer with him, or one member be honoured, all the members should rejoice with him. If any be overtaken in a fault, they who are spiritual ought to restore such in the spirit of meekness, considering themselves lest they also be tempted. If any be in spiritual trouble, they who have endured like conflicts ought with tenderness and sympathy counsel and encourage them. If any be feeble minded in the faith, the strong should strive to confirm them. If any go astray they ought to be sought after by those who observe their wanderings. In general all the members should pray with and for one another, admonish, exhort, and consider one another to provoke unto love and good works, cheerfully employing their graces and gifts for the edification of the church.

6th. Every church member should avoid and resist all cases of alienation and division among his fellow members, and strive to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.—If it is the duty of Christians to live peaceably with all men, it is much more their duty to live peaceably with all Christians. "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." A divided brotherhood of Christians is not adapted to their growth in grace, or consistent with the church's progress in spirituality. When members, instead of confessing their faults, carry themselves as though they had none; and treat others as though they had nothing but faults, they sow the seeds of discord, and prove themselves the children of contention and confusion. How sacred then the duty of resisting the first appearance of whatever has a tendency to produce division.

7th. Every member of a church who walks orderly and according to his covenant with God and his brethren, will pay regular attendance on the ministrations of the word and ordinances. Allowance being made for extraordinary and unlooked for hindrances, it is as much the duty for every church member to attend the stated meetings for public worship, as it is the pastor's duty to conduct the exercises of those meetings. It is true the stated meetings of a congregation may be too numerous, especially during seasons of revival, to admit of their being all attended by every member, but when they are not more numerous than custom in the church requires, habitual attendance on all the stated meetings is not more the pastor's than all the people's duty. For if some may justifiably forsake the assembling of themselves together, so may all.—Strong excuses are thought to be urged by some and none ought to be received unless they are actually of such a nature as to preclude the possibility of attendance, or our stated meetings will soon be entirely forsaken.

8th. Every member ought to bear his just portion of the church's necessary expenses.—It is the will of God that they who preach the Gospel should live by it. Their maintenance is obligatory on the church, and a share of the burden falls on every member; for if one may exonerate, so may all, the faithful labourer is worthy of his hire; there are, also, other expenses incident to the continuance of a church, needless to enumerate, which ought to be distributed in just proportion among its members, together with the relief of poor brethren and the sustaining of those institutions which have for their object the spread of the Gospel and the salvation of immortal souls.—*Religious Telescope.*

On Brevity in Orators.

The Boston Transcript justly observes that the French far surpass us in this respect.—Our public speakers must be taught to shun the besetting sin of prolixity and irrelevancy. In reading the debates of the French National Assembly, published in full in the *Courier des Etats Unis*, we have been struck with one admirable feature: the speeches are all of them models of sententious brevity. The most effective speeches of Lamartine would not occupy two columns in the Washington National Intelligencer, and Tocqueville, Thiers, Coquerel, and in fact, all the most influential

speakers at the tribune, say what they have to say in a space which would not serve some American speakers for a preliminary flourish. There is the utmost compression of thought and argument in the phrases of these French Statesmen. The consequence is that they produce effects which few of our orators can ever achieve.

The Bible in the Pulpit.

We live in an age in which there is but little avowed opposition to the Scriptures. Infidelity no longer directly denies its inspiration; for, with a marvelous exuberance of faith, it ascribes the same high character to all works of genius, to art, to nature, and to humanity. Science bows to it blandly and respectfully, even while taken for granted unproved positions which contemptuously nullify its authority, and that too, in matters connected with some of the highest moral and spiritual truths. Almost all parties in religion praise the Bible. It is sometimes magnified with a reverence which might almost seem idolatrous. It is almost worshipped by some as the very religion of Protestants. And yet can we say that this is an age distinguished for that pious knowledge of the Scriptures, which forms an element of the popular mind, in distinction from that mere critical learning, for which it must be confessed the period is distinguished? It is brought forth even by professedly religious men as the first argument, as the main argument, as conclusive authority in all questions respecting the Divine nature and the Divine government? Is expository preaching a favourite with the people? Do our clergymen in the pulpit love to draw directly and frequently from its rich stores of ideas, begetting ideas, or is it rather a prevailing characteristic of preaching and preachers, that they prefer to spin their argumentative and casuistical homilies respecting human obligation and the divine government out of the soon exhausted stores of their own brains? How many discussions of what are called the great moral and social questions of the day are carried on by means of endless logomachies respecting right and wrong *per se*, with no more reference to the Bible, except in the occasional rhetorical introduction of a few perverted texts, that is made to the Shaster, or the Koran of Mohammed!—*Tay Lewis in Biblical Repos.*

Wishes.

Wishes are parents of large families of idle, vain dreams, and air castles. Wishes usually respect a good not within reach. But that wish brings up the contemplated good, and gives fancy wings, and the vain and trifling mind flies abroad on all sorts of excursions in all direction. He who loves to wish, generally loves, also, to give his imagination the reins. And the idle wish will start him off on a journey of imaginings, and he is far gone, and sometimes long gone, from the sober and substantial realities of life. He comes back drooping and languid from that profitless excursion, and greatly unfitted for the actual serious business of life. It was the idle wish that sent him away from home. He gained nothing by the journey but mental emptiness and some stripes of conscience, if it were sharp enough to discern and act in view of such folly.

Wishes are sources of self deception. How many exclaim, and that countless times, "I wish I were a Christian—I wish my heart were right—I wish I had my portion with the people of God—I wish I knew more of the Scriptures" &c. This wishing for good things, it is believed, is not seldom taken for real desires of the heart after spiritual good. It is taken as evidence of a mind somewhat, at least, set towards God and holy things.—There seems, therefore, to be some goodness in it. Good wishes are mistaken for goodness—are put in the place of goodness itself, the spurious in the place of the genuine coin.—Good wishes are a very cheap substitute, and it is to be feared a very common one, for prayer, effort, zeal, and energy in doing good.—The one is so much easier than the other, that with the additional motive that such wishes have a specious appearance of real goodness, they take the place of doing good.—*Pascal.*

Luther and his Dying Child.

He approached the bed, and said to her, "My dear little daughter, my beloved Margaret, you would willingly remain with your earthly parent; but, if God calls you, you will also go to your heavenly Father."

She replied, "yes, dear father, it is as God pleases."

"Dear little girl," he exclaimed, "oh how I love her! the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak."

He then took the Bible and read to her the passage,—"Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing ye that dwell in the dust, for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead."

He then said, "my daughter, enter thou into thy resting place in peace."

She turned her eyes towards him and said, with touching simplicity, "yes, father."—*Luther's Life and Times.*

The Evils of Idleness.

All degrees of indolence incline a man to rely upon others, and not upon himself; to eat their bread and not his own. His carelessness is somebody's loss; his promises are a perpetual stumbling block to all who trust them.—If he borrows, the article remains borrowed; if he begs and get, it is a letting out of waters—no one knows when it will stop. He spoils your work; disappoints your expectations; exhausts your patience; eats up your substance; abuses your confidence; and hangs a dead weight upon all your plans; the very best thing an honest man can do with a lazy man, is to get rid of him.

Indolence is a great spendthrift. An indolently inclined young man can neither make nor keep property. I have high authority for this: "He that is slothful in his work, is brother to him that is a great waster."

When Satan would put ordinary men to a crop of mischief, like a wise husbandman, he clears the ground and prepares it for seed; but he finds the idle man already prepared, and he has scarcely the trouble of sowing; for vices, like weeds, ask little strewing, except what the wind gives their ripe and winged seeds, shaking and scattering them all abroad. Indeed lazy men may fitly be likened to a tropical prairie, over which the wind of temptation perpetually blows, drifting every vagrant seed from the hedge and hill, and which—without a moment's rest through all the year—waves its rank harvest of luxuriant weeds.

First, the imagination will be haunted with unlawful visitants. Upon the outskirts of towns and scattered houses, abandoned by reputable persons. They are not empty, because all the day silent; thieves, vagabonds, and villains haunt them, in joint possession with rats, bats, and vermin. Such are idle men's imagination—full of unlawful company.

Indolence as surely runs to dishonesty, as to lying. Indeed, they are but different parts of the same road, and not far apart. In directing the conduct of the Ephesian converts, Paul says, "Let him that stole, steal no more, but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good." The men who were thieves, were those who had ceased to work. Industry was the road back to honesty. When stores are broken open, the idle are first suspected. The desperate forgeries and swindlings of the past year have taught men upon their occurrence, to ferret their authors among the unemployed, or among those vainly occupied in vicious pleasures.

The terrible passion for stealing rarely grows upon the young, except through the necessities of their idle pleasures. Business is first neglected for amusement, and amusement soon becomes the only business. The appetite for vicious pleasure outruns the means of procuring it. The theatre, the circus, the midnight carouse, demand money. When scanty earnings are gone, the young man pilfers from the till. Many a man who has carried on good and profitable business has been ruined, and had to fail, by what his clerks have stolen from his draw. They steal in the first place, because they are in hopes to repay, and next, because they despair of paying—for the disgrace of stealing ten dollars or a thousand will be the same, but not their respective pleasures. Next, he will gamble, since it is only another form of stealing. Gradually excluded from the reputable society, the vagrant takes all the badges of vice, and is familiar with her paths; and, through them enters the broad road of crime. Society precipitates its lazy members, as water does its filth; and they form at the bottom, a pestilent sediment, stirred up by every breeze of evil, into riots, robberies, and murders. Into it drains all the filth, and out of it, as from a morass, flow all the streams of pollution. Brutal wretches, desperately haunted by the law, crawling in human filth, brood here their villain schemes and plot mischief to man. Hither resort the ruculent demagogue, to stir up the foetid filth.