

nature will assert itself in the most sacred associations. But generally, the body of Christ is loth to hear an evil report of one of its members, slow to take action, and averse to affix the penalty. As a general thing, not until every means has been tried, is the offender cast out. But once outside the fold, he broods over his disgrace, magnifies or distorts all the proceedings against him; imagines there is no friendship to him now, and throws himself into the camp of the enemy.

Take another common illustration, in which one brother has been injured by another. He refers it to the church. They adjudicate as best they can. The result is that one of the brethren is dissatisfied, declares that he cannot walk any longer with so unjust a people, and withdraws himself from their fellowship. Such a course is as illogical as it is unchristian; but it is a source of defection from which few of our churches are exempt.

Many other illustrations of this sad theme will suggest themselves. Perhaps it is unnecessary to extend them.

THE PRACTICAL EFFECT.

The advance of the Kingdom is everywhere retarded by these examples of what the Gospel seemingly fails to accomplish. In every hamlet of the land, men are questioning the power of Christianity, because of the failure of its professors to manifest any true idea of what it demands. A person who thinks at all, as he sees so many relapsing into their former state, naturally says: "I fear to unite with a church, to make a profession which I may belie in the course of a few months or years." Or, he may reason that the periodical influxes into the churches are not all they appear to be. Again, and again, he has seen the process repeated, with the same results, multitudes at such times glorying in the cross, and in the intervening seasons by their conduct, trampling it beneath their feet. (Phil. iii. 18.)

It ought to be a standing argument for our steadfastness, that any defection on our part from the life and power of godliness may be an effective means of hindering men from entering into the kingdom of heaven.

CAN THE EVIL BE MITIGATED?

Prevented wholly, it cannot be. The "sow that was washed" must return "to her wallowing in the mire." (2 Peter ii. 20-22.) But there may be sheep going astray, and there should rise within us the desire to go after them, the blessed impulsion of love to the brethren—the feeling born of the Holy Ghost, akin to that with which the Great Master looked upon Peter (Luke xxii. 61), and sent to him the message of the Resurrection. (Mark xvi. 7.)

Let us beware of the spirit of the ancient Pharisee, which looks loftily down upon those who have fallen, those who have wandered off into the inviting fields of worldliness, or those who have simply cooled from the fervor of their first love. We, the spiritual, must not despise them, the unspiritual. We sometimes excuse ourselves