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Contributors and Correspondents

HOURS WITH A CHURCH COURT.

VII. NOONTIDE.

Taking our place in the meeting, on this the third evening of the sittings of the court, when such a matter as the drawing together of too sister communities of Christians into one, is to be considered, in order to a final decision been given in regard to it. We feel with more than usual vividness the impressiveness of the sight of so many leaders in religious thought, met in solemn council, and dealing with concerns on which so many sacred interests depend, and which have to do materially with the well-being and usefulness of not a few. We also feel, by a something in our consciousness, like the operation of an electric current, of the nature of sympathy—giving a certain tone to the social atmosphere around us, a tone more easily identified than intelligently defined, as if this were the prevailing state of mind. In view of the issues involved, one can hardly wonder at the sacredness with which a court such as this at any time is invested in many minds, some of them the greatest and best of any age. It seems indeed as if the more men are alive to the great spiritual realities that determine the destinies of men, the more profound are they apt to be in their regard for such a council of Christian men.

In the study of biography, it has struck us forcibly, that over and anon the names come to light a very notable interest mingled with a large element of reverence, in the greatest lights in the firmament of Christianity, in the proceedings of the church in her deliberative courts, and no less the prayerful manner in which they entered upon them, and carried them through. These may well enlist the hearts and prayers of every Christian individual.

The unspoken powers of the world around is a keen and plastic spectator too, capable of being impressively influenced by what is seen and done. The great Triune God looks down from the heavenly throne, cognizant of every step, and approves as faith triumphs over sense, and charity, which is the bond of perfectness, takes its rightful place with all its train of attendant graces. It is a noticeable fact, and one that carried an instructive moral in it, that the great and good Dr. Chalmers appears as having taken little interest even in the affairs of the Presbytery, under which he laboured during the first twelve years of his ministry. His "Memoirs" tell us that during all that time there is only one recorded act of his in the official records of its affairs, which would seem to indicate that he gave them comparatively little concern, a thing apparently quite in keeping with the religious temperature which is well known as characterising him at this period of his life. He had not as yet fully wakened up to the greatness of the claims of his high vocation, as a gospel minister. When this awakening came he became a leader among leaders in the council, concerned with everything, his heart in every movement, his voice in words of eloquence and power giving direction to the tide of great, undying principles. Such thoughts as these easily press in upon us, in the condition of mind which the sight of such a court as that before us now, so occupied as it is induces. Those men are surely in sympathy with the great occasion which has arrived. The God of peace is surely near. He will surely guide their deliberations to adequate and beneficial results.

The court having gone into committee of the whole, the method of dealing with the great subject in hand thought most suited to the occasion, the Rev. Mr. McTavish was called to occupy the chair, and the venerable Mr. Smith of Granby had assigned him the position of leading in prayer, as a fitting preparation for the momentous business to be undertaken. A good omen this, we should say, if any such things as omen there be. A symbol of peace also, we might conceive, if we were inclined to note the symbolic element in the acts of human life. Mr. McTavish opposed to incorporation with the Kirk on the terms proposed, for reasons which were weighty enough, taking his point of view in reviewing them; but not so with the other, so far as we have been able to make out gentlemen, both whom to know is to respect, as workmen who have obtained a good report, and done good service in their day, in the sphere of usefulness which they have been called to occupy. Were we to make distinctions as to characteristics of members in the ranks, we should regard the former as a Luther, and the other as a Philip Melancthon. If the Highlanders admire Mr. McTavish, many of us we are to say, know enough of his good qualities of head and heart to enable us to understand something of the ground of the admiration, and to be a good degree at least in unison with the feeling. May the church never cease to be solicitous to derive from separation from her men such a stamp as he has approved himself to be. But the voice of the other venerated father now ascends in the solemn words of prayer—a prayer for wisdom and blessing, for the approving smile of God in prayer; for the baptism of the Holy Ghost so useful for the hour. As the last accents devotions die upon the ear, and we resume our seats in business attitude, we have a strong conviction that that prayer was not in vain.

MEMORIAL

Thoughts on Revivals.

[At the request of an esteemed correspondent we publish the following letter by the late Dr. Alexander of Princeton, N. J., addressed to Dr. Sprague, the author of a work on "Revivals." The letter bears date March 9th, 1832.]

"REVEREND AND DEAR SIR,"—In compliance with your request, I send you a few thoughts on revivals. I am gratified to learn that you are about to publish some Lectures on this interesting subject. I hope they will be extensively useful; and if you should judge that any thing which I may write would subserve a valuable purpose, you are at liberty to make use of this letter as you may think best.

"1. A revival or religious excitement may exist and be very powerful, and affect many minds, when the producing cause is not the Spirit of God; and when the truth of God is not the means of the awakening. This we must believe, unless we adopt the opinion that the Holy Spirit accompanies error by his operations as well as truth, which would be blasphemous. Religious excitement has been common among Pagans, Mohammedans, heretics and Papists. And in our own time there have been great religious excitements among those who reject the fundamental doctrines of the Gospel, as for example, among the Christ-ians, who are Unitarians, and the Newlights or Schismatics of the West, and the Campbellites, who deny the proper divinity of our Lord, and the scriptural doctrine of atonement. The whole religion of the Shakers also consists in enthusiastic excitement. Hence it is evident, that revivals ought to be distinguished into such as are genuine, and such as are spurious. And the distinction should depend on the doctrines inculcated, on the measures adopted, and the fruits produced. 'Beloved,' says the Apostle John, 'believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God.'"

"2. Again, a revival or religious excitement may take place when a few persons only are under the saving operations of the Holy Spirit, but when many are affected by sympathy, and by the application of extraordinary means of awakening the feelings. I have seen a powerful religious impression pervade a large congregation, so that very few remained unaffected. I expressed their feelings by the strongest signs, and afterwards appeared, very few of them became permanently serious. Besides, when the Spirit operates savingly on some, there is reason to think that his common operations are experienced by many. The minds of the people generally become more serious and tender; and many are deeply convinced of the necessity of religion, and engage earnestly in prayer, and in attendance on other means of grace. Now while so many are affected, but few may be truly converted; and no human wisdom is adequate to discern between those who are savingly wrought upon, and those who are only the subjects of the common operations of the Holy Spirit. The tree which is covered with blossoms often produces little fruit. The wind which agitates the whole forest may tear up but few trees by the roots. Thus there may be great and promising appearances, and yet very little fruit. Temporary believers may use the same language, and exhibit to others precisely the same appearance as true converts. This consideration should be sufficient to prevent the practice lately introduced, of admitting persons to the communion of the Church at the very meeting at which they are first awakened. There may be cases in which well instructed persons of good character may be received to the Lord's table as soon as they profess a hope of acceptance with God, but these should be considered exceptions to the general rule. Often the impressions produced at a public meeting, when strong emotions are applied to awaken the feelings, are as evanescent as the morning cloud or early dew. Many who eventually become truly pious, entertain for a while hopes, which they afterwards are convinced to be unfounded, and to pronounce such persons converted at once, and hurry their admission to the Lord's table, would be the most effectual method of preventing their saving conversion. There may be an error on the other side, of too long a delay, and of discouraging real believers from approaching the table of their Lord, but the error is on the safe side. As to Apostolical precedent, it is just as strong for a communion of goods, and after all, there is no undoubted case of any convert being immediately received to the Lord's Supper. They were baptized immediately on their profession, but this our view is a different thing, for we admit infants to baptism, but not to the other sacrament. And the fact is, that in every part of the world, the plan of placing young converts in the class of catechumens, to be instructed even prior to their baptism, was adopted. God often leaves his servants to find out by experience what is most expedient, and does not teach everything by inspiration, as in the case of Moses in judging the people of Israel. And if experience has uttered her monitory voice clearly on any point, I think she has in regard to this; and I have no doubt that future experience will fully corroborate the lessons of the past.

"3. A real work of the Spirit may be mingled with much enthusiasm and disorder; but its beauty will be marred, and its progress retarded by every spurious and spurious mixture. Thus also individuals who are the subjects of special grace, may for a while be carried away with erroneous notions and extravagant feelings. We must not therefore, condemn all as deluded souls, who manifest some signs of enthusiasm. But under the same revival or general excitement, while some are renewed and engrafted into Christ, others may be entirely under the influence of error, spiritual pride and delusion. When the Son of Man

sows good seed in his field, will not the enemy be busy in sowing tares? And doubtless it often happens, that by the rashness, fanaticism, and extravagance of a few persons, especially if they be leaders, an ill report may be brought up against a work, in which the Spirit of God has been powerfully operating. The opinion that it is dangerous to oppose fanaticism, lest we hinder the work of God, is most unfounded. We cannot more effectually promote genuine revivals, than by detecting and suppressing fanaticism; which is their counterfeits, and injures their reputation among intelligent men, more than all other causes.

"4. Often also there may be much error mingled with the evangelical truth, which is preached in times of revival; and while God blesses his own truth to the conversion of men, the baleful effects of the error which accompanies it will be sure to be manifest. It may be compared to the case where some poisonous ingredient is mingled with wholesome food. I might here, perhaps, refer to some sections of our own Church, where the truth is not clearly inculcated, and it might be shown that there is danger of error on both extremes. But I refer rather to those churches, which we all think to be erroneous on certain points. No denomination among us has had more frequent or extensive revivals than the Methodists, and we have no doubt that multitudes have been truly converted under their ministry; but the effects of their errors manifest to an impartial observer. The same remark holds good, respecting the Cumberland Presbyterians, who greatly resemble the Methodists in their doctrines and mode of promoting and conducting revivals. And as an example from the opposite extreme, I would mention that portion of the Baptist Church which is tinctured with Antinomianism. They have revivals also, but their mode of treating the subjects is widely different from that of the sects last mentioned.

"5. But I come now to speak of genuine revivals, where the Gospel is preached in its purity, and where the people have been well instructed in the doctrines of Christianity. In a revival, it makes the greatest difference in the world whether the people have been carefully taught by catechizing, or are ignorant of the truths of the Bible. In some cases revivals are so remarkably pure, that nothing occurs with which any pious man can find fault. There is not only no wildness or extravagance, but very little strong commotion of the animal feelings. The Word of God distils upon the mind like the gentle rain, and the Holy Spirit comes down like the dew, diffusing a blessed influence on all around. Such a revival affords the most beautiful sight ever seen upon earth. Its aspect gives us a lively idea of what will be the general state of things in the latter-day glory, and some faint image of the heavenly state. The impression on the minds of the people in such a work is the exact counterpart of the truth; just as the impression on the wax corresponds to the seal. In such revivals there are great solemnity and silence. The convictions of sin are deep and humbling; the justice of God in the condemnation of the sinner is felt and acknowledged; every other refuge but Christ is abandoned; the heart at first is made to feel its impenetrable hardness; but when least expected, it dissolves under a grateful sense of God's goodness and Christ's love; light breaks in upon the soul, either by a gradual dawning or by a sudden flash; Christ is revealed through the Gospel, and a firm and often joyful confidence of salvation through Him is produced; a benevolent, forgiving, meek, humble, contrite spirit predominates; the love of God is shed abroad; and with some joy unspeakable and full of glory fills the soul. A spirit of devotion is enkindled. The Word of God becomes exceedingly precious. Prayer is the exercise in which the soul seems to be in its proper element, because by it God is approached, his presence felt, and his beauty seen, and the new born soul lives by breathing after the knowledge of God, after communion with God, and after conformity to his will. Now also springs up in the soul an inextinguishable desire to promote the glory of God, and to bring all men to a knowledge of the truth, and by that means to the possession of eternal life. The sincere language of the heart is, 'Lord, what wouldst thou have me to do?' That God may send upon his Church many such revivals is my daily prayer, and many such have been experienced in our country, and I trust are still going forward in our churches.

"6. But it has often occurred to me—and I have heard the same sentiment from some of the most judicious and pious men that I have known—that there must be a state of the Church preferable to these temporary excitements, which are too often followed by a deplorable state of declension, and disgraceful apathy and inactivity. Why not aim at having a continuous lively state of piety, and an increasing progress in the conversion of the impenitent, without these seasons of deadness and indifference? Why may we not hope for such a state of increasing prosperity in the Church, that revivals shall be no longer needed; or if you prefer the expression, when there shall be a perpetual revival? Richard Baxter's congregation seems for many years to have approximated to what is here supposed, and perhaps that of John Brown of Had-dington, and Mr. R. M. of London. And in this country, I have known a very few congregations in which a lively state of piety was kept up from year to year.

"7. We cannot, however, limit the Holy One, nor prescribe modes of operation for the Spirit of God. His dispensations are inscrutable, and it is our duty to submit to his wisdom and will; and to go on steadily in the performance of our own duty. If He, the Sovereign, chooses to water his Church by occasional showers, rather than with the perpetual dew of his grace, and this more at one period, and in one continent, than at other times and places, we should rejoice and be grateful for

the rich effusions of his Spirit in any form and manner; and should endeavor to avail ourselves of these precious seasons for the conversion of sinners, and the edification of the body of Christ. In the natural world the cold and barren winter regularly succeeds the genial and growing seasons of spring and summer; and there may be an analogy to this vicissitude in the spiritual world. One thing we are taught, that believers stand in need of seasons of severe trial, that they may be purified, as the precious metals are purged from their dross in the heated furnace. Paul says, 'For there must be heresias among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest.'

"8. As genuine revivals are favorable to truth and orthodoxy, so spurious excitements furnish one of the most effective vehicles for errors and heresy. The Church is not always benefited by what are termed revivals; but sometimes the effects of such commotions are followed by a desolation which resembles the track of the tornado. I have never seen so great insensibility in any people, as in those who have been the subjects of violent religious excitement; and I have never seen any sinners so bold and reckless in their impiety, as those who had once been loud professors, and foremost in the time of revival. If I had time I might illustrate this remark by a reference to the great revival of the West, which commenced about the close of the year 1800, in the south part of Kentucky; and by which the Presbyterian Church in that region was for so many years broken and distracted and prostrated—but I must forbear. When people are much excited, their caution and sober judgment are diminished; and when preachers are ardently zealous in revivals, serious people do not suspect them of holding errors, or of entertaining the design of subverting the truth. It is also a fact, that the teachers of false doctrine do sometimes artfully associate their errors with revivals, and by continually insinuating or openly declaring that revivals take place only in connection with their new theology, they succeed in persuading those who have more zeal than knowledge, that all who oppose their errors are the enemies of revivals. This artifice has often been played off with much effect, and they have sometimes gone so far as to deny the genuineness of great revivals which occurred under the ministry of those holding opinions different from their own, or who neglected to bring into operation all the newly invented apparatus of revivals.

"You may perhaps expect me to say something respecting what are called new measures; but as I am out of the way of witnessing the actual operation of these means, I will not venture on a discussion, which is both delicate and difficult, further than to mention some general results, which, from a retrospect of many facts, I have adopted, in regard to revivals of religion. On each of these I might largely expand, but my prescribed limits forbid it.

"All means and measures which produce a high degree of excitement, or a great commotion of the passions, should be avoided; because religion does not consist in these violent emotions, nor is it promoted by them; and when they subside, a wretched state of deadness is sure to succeed.

"The subjects of religious impressions ought not to be brought much into public notice. It ought not to be forgotten that the heart is deceitful above all things, and that strong excitement does not prevent the risings of pride and vain glory. Many become hypocrites when they find themselves the objects of much attention, and affect feelings which are not real; and where there is humility and sincerity, such measures turn away the attention from the distinct contemplation of those subjects which ought to occupy the mind.

"On this account, I prefer having the anxious addressed and instructed as they sit undisturbed in their seats, rather than calling them out to particular pews, denominated anxious seats; and if the pastor can visit the awakened at their houses, it would be better than to appoint meetings expressly for them. But as this cannot be done, when the number is great, these meetings may be necessary; but instead of attempting to converse with each individual, let the preacher address suitable instruction and advice to all at once; and if you are in great trouble and difficulty, let them come to the minister's house, or send for him to visit them.

"All measures which have a tendency to diminish the solemnity of divine worship, or to lessen our reverence for God and divine things are evidently wrong; and this is uniformly the effect of excessive excitement. Fanaticism often blazes with a glaring flame, and agitates assemblies as with a hurricane or earthquake, but God is not in the fire, or the wind, or the earthquake. His presence is more commonly with the still, small voice. There is no sounder characteristic of genuine devotion than reverence. When this is banished, the fire may burn fiercely, but it is unhallowed fire, fanaticism, however much it may assume the garb and language of piety, is its opposite; for while the latter is mild and sweet, and disinterested, and respectful, and affectionate, the former is proud, arrogant, censorious, selfish, carnal, and when opposed, malignant.

"The premature and injudicious publication of revivals is now a great evil. There is often in the accounts a cant which greatly disgusts sensible men, there is an exaggeration which confounds those who know the facts, and it cannot but injure the people concerning whom the narrative treats. But I must desist." "A. A."

The Presbyterians of Meaford, have placed an organ in their Church.

A UNANIMOUS call had been given by Chalmers' Church, Quebec, to the Rev. Peter Wright, of Ingersoll.

Knox Church Ottawa

The ladies of Knox Church, Ottawa, held a Fancy Fair on Tuesday and Wednesday, 15th and 16th inst. A fine display of useful and fancy articles were exhibited for sale. Luncheon was also provided and liberally patronized by the gentlemen of the city. A Social and Reunion in the fine spacious lecture room of the Church on Thursday evening terminated the proceedings very successfully, realizing upwards of five hundred dollars. In eleven months the ladies have raised about two thousand dollars; after paying for heating and lighting the Church, and the carpets, they have a small balance on hand.

The Rev. J. Armstrong of Daly Street Church, occupied the chair on Thursday evening, with credit to himself and great satisfaction and acceptance to the audience. The Rev. A. Melville made a very humorous speech praiseworthy of the ladies of the congregation, he could speak confidently of this affair a thirty years acquaintance. Professor Pöppe, Miss Champress and Miss Mutchmor favored the audience with some fine music on the piano; Mr. J. H. Bell, M.A., gave a very amusing recitation. "Shamus O'Brien" which was well received.

The chairman then announced a drama or dialogue. The conditions were that the parties interested would yield obedience to their names were called out, and proceeded to the platform. The following responded to their names as called by the chairman, viz:—Mr. A. Mutchmor, Superintendent of Knox Church Sabbath School, Mr. J. McMillan, B.A., teacher of the Bible class, The Misses Dyde, Hannum, Cunningham, and Buchanan, members of the Bible Class; Miss Florence Dyde, and the Misses Masson, Cunningham, Hannum, Buchanan and Dowsley, scholars in the Sabbath School. Miss Florence Dyde in the name of the Sabbath School read the following address:

ALEXANDER MUTCHMOR, Esq., Superintendent Knox Church Sabbath School.

DEAR SUPERINTENDENT,—The teachers and scholars of the Sabbath School—one and all, feel that they ought to avail themselves of this favorable opportunity to express in some tangible way their esteem and love for you personally, and their gratitude for the kind attention, earnest zeal and Christian love you have ever manifested towards the school. You have always been prompt and efficient in the discharge of duty, and ever anxious for the spiritual and eternal interests of each one under your charge. On behalf of the teachers and scholars we beg to present you with this chair, and we trust that when you recline upon it, your rest and repose may be sweetened and intensified by pleasant memories of your association of the Sabbath School. We pray also that you may belong spared to us to occupy the position you now fill as our Superintendent, and that the Sabbath School in the future under your care and supervision may prosper with even a more abundant success than it has attended it in the past. Dated this seventeenth day of December, A.D., 1874.

Signed on behalf of the teachers and scholars, FLORENCE DYDE.

Mr. Mutchmor replied in very feeling and suitable terms, thanking them heartily for the very handsome present. There was no place he felt more at home or takes a greater interest than at the Sabbath School. He assures them they would always retain a warm place in his heart. Mr. Alexander Faran performed the agreeable task of presenting the chair, which is really a magnificent one, valued at fifty dollars.

Miss Dyde then read the following address:

JOHN McMILLAN, Esq., B.A., Ottawa.

DEAR TEACHER,—We the pupils of the Bible Class of the Knox Church Sabbath School, Ottawa, beg to present you with this Ottawa and sofa pillow as a slight token of the love and respect in which you are held and regarded by us, the pupils of the Bible Class. You have ever been kind and courteous to each member of the class, and unaring in your efforts to instill into our young minds the seeds of truth—that truth which we trust will one day sprout up and blossom and ripen into the fruit of eternal joy. We beg to assure you that your labor and love and courtesy towards us have not been forgotten, and we trust that in the Sabbath School we may long continue to be cheered by your pleasant smile, and instructed and blessed by your teaching, and encouraged to walk in the path of duty and piety by your noble Christian example.

Signed on behalf of the pupils, MYRA DYDE.

Mr. Alex. Faran having again rendered service in presenting the valuable and elaborate gift, Mr. McMillan acknowledged them with deep feeling, returning his warm and hearty thanks for their handsome presents, and the very kind expressions expressed in their address. He hoped the class would continue to improve and prosper, and that in the end they would all meet in the many mansions of our Father's home above. The musical part of the programme was then resumed. The first was a song by Messrs. Garland and Atkinson, and was deservedly encored. A song by Miss Polly Mutchmor followed, and was exceedingly well rendered, and equally well received. A recitation by Mr. Lee, "A Disgrace to my School," was heartily applauded. A song was then given by Mr. McEwen, after which the doxology was sung, and a most pleasant evening terminated. May Knox Church enjoy many happy returns is the wish of your correspondent.

E. J. M.

ERRATA.—In the article on pulpit discourses by Dr. Willis in the *PRESBYTERIAN* of Dec. 11th, are two mistakes: "This style is far from being bold," should be "far from being bold;" "Treats by courtesy," should be "Treats with courtesy."