

so it is not yet. We will not assert that there has been no decline in religion. On the other hand, there is abundant evidence in numerous instances of departure from the Lord and his ordinances, sufficient to awaken deep apprehension. And as there is no necessity for declension in religion, any more than there is for sin, and as all religious declension is sinful, it becomes Zion's watchmen to sound the alarm when such declensions appear, or are justly apprehended.

But mistakes are sometimes made on this subject. Some regard a prevalence of certain doctrines as synonymous with religious prosperity. But these doctrines may not be the most essential; or circumstances may make others more prominent. And such a change does not prove a declension in religion. With others, certain frames of feeling or excitement are synonymous with a good state of religion. But our sensibilities, by a law of our natures, vary. Hence a change in those does not prove a deterioration in religion. Others are attached to particular forms and ways. To their minds they may be consecrated by experience and association; but as generation succeeds generation, customs and forms change in everything, religion included. Those, therefore, do not always speak wisely who affirm that the former times were better than these.

We are not here discussing the question whether the world is better morally now than it was twenty, a hundred, a thousand, or two thousand years ago. The point is that what is often called religious declension is not always such. There are, doubtless, some changes in religion that are unfavourable, but it is not wise to consider every change a change for the worse.

Almost every age and generation has its characteristics, its peculiarities with reference to religion. One is an age of intellect, another of feeling, one of controversy, another of research, one conservative, another radical. The present age is one of enterprise, investigation, progress, reform. Moral questions of great moment, but long neglected, are brought into great prominence. The subject of temperance, in its various applications, human rights, reciprocal duties, practical benevolence, engage a very large share of the popular attention. And they take a deep hold upon the ministry and the church.

Now it is a very stale remark, that these subjects ought not to interfere with religion, or take the place of religion—that a minister should preach the Gospel, and leave temperance, freedom, &c., to others. Such subjects constitute the Gospel. What is religion but love? Love to God and love to man. What is religion but doing our various duties?

The subjects above named have in a degree been neglected by some preceding ages, but circumstances have brought them into the foreground. Religion must have to do with them when thus brought into notice. What would be thought of me, if, when on my way to church, I should pass a man drowning, and refuse to give him succour, because it would make me late to meeting? Why, that I was a hypocrite, and justly. So if the church stands aloof from the calls of humanity, because she will thereby be diverted from the work of the Gospel, she most pointedly condemns herself as apostate from him who went about doing good.

Not that some may not have gone too far. There is, and always has been, a tendency to extremes. Some can do nothing for any cause without making it a hobby, and devoting themselves to it exclusively. Such have not well balanced minds, or at least lose their balance. Every thing should receive appropriate attention at the appropriate time.

The more attention is now given to benevolent and reformatory subjects by the church, than in some other periods of her history, is no just ground of alarm; that the aspects of religion are somewhat modified by this change should cause no alarm.—Should evidence appear that the church is falling into iniquity, departing from principle, losing her spirituality, becoming forsaken of God, then there would be ground for alarm. And with the besetments around us, and the tendencies to evil remaining within us, we cannot be too vigilant, that we follow the leadings of Providence, directed by an enlightened conscience and the Holy Spirit.

The fundamentals of religion are the same in every age. The essentials of religious prosperity are ever the same. But non-essentials and circumstantials differ. Hence there is need of the exercise of large charity, lest we needlessly fret ourselves and disturb others. Rejoice in all the progress made, in all the good done, if it is not in the precise way we have marked out, or have been accustomed to. Before you complain much of your neighbours, or the church, or the times, see that your own heart is largely pervaded with charity.

#### A DISCIPLE IN A BLAZE.

I knew that the cruel Nero wrapped many a Christian in a garment of pitch, and then set him on fire. But I fell in lately myself with a disciple in a blaze. Sure enough, he was all on fire! There was little or no snow; it was too hot for that. I looked about for some Nero who had done this, but I did not see any.

It was a very sad sight. I do not know how long the fire had been burning, when I saw him; but I was afraid it had been some time, or else it had burned with great fierceness, for there never were more decisive and painful marks of fire on a human being. He had been very handsomely dressed up to the time he took fire; but when I saw him, the beautiful robe of charity was burned to a cinder. It had been the "bond of perfectness;" but all was ashes when I saw it. A very valuable girdle, called truth, was shockingly scorched. And you can judge of the severity of the heat, when I affirm that the breastplate of righteousness, which he had worn, was melted down, and totally disappeared. He had before been "shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace," and capital shoes they are which are made of that article, but they were all crisped by fire.—You would not suppose anything like peace had ever had anything to do with them. And I could not but notice, too, that the shield of faith I had often seen him have, was pretty much reduced to a nonentity. It had been given "to quench the fiery darts of the wicked," which made it the more pitiful to see it perish in the flames. And the "helmet of salvation" had grown brittle in the heat, and was shivered; and the "sword of the Spirit" shared the same fate. In short, there was next to nothing of that comely array in which, as "a strong man armed," he was wont to move in the various scenes of the community. The fire had made such havoc there was scarcely any appearance of a man about him; certainly very little likeness to a Christian man. I did think, on close inspection, that there were some faint outlines of such a likeness. I did not quite like to give up that there were none.

The active use of an engine famous for putting out fires of this kind, called the "lively oracles," soon subdued the flames. The disciple had not suffered much up to this point, for the heat had very much blunted his sensibilities; but as he now began to