

## "Without the Word."

**I**n urging Christian wives to respect the authority of heathen husbands, Peter gives a striking reason. "Ye wives," he says, "be in subjection to your own husbands; that even if any obey not the word, they may without the word be gained by the behavior of their wives." (1 Pet. 3:1.) When a husband and his wife were not converted together, the wife perhaps might be the first to embrace the Christian life. Such a step, however, would hardly be taken without conference with the husband. If he would neither listen to her presentation of Christian truth, nor go with her where it was proclaimed; if he proved not merely unbelieving, which *apetheo* means, but bitterly and actively opposed, which it implies, then this conduct, so far from freeing the wife from her obligation to him, puts upon her the duty of a still more scrupulous submission to his authority. The reason specifically assigned is that she may win her heathen husband to the gospel by the patient gentleness and irrefragable purity of her life. The remarkable phrase here is "without the word." The wife is to be a peacemaker in the family, and not a breeder of discords; if she cannot speak of revealed truth and her own experiences to those around her without stirring up controversies and strifes, she must depend on golden silence and the wellnigh irresistible power of a holy, gentle, self-denying life.

In presenting the gospel to men we are not shut up to the spoken word or printed page. Private exhortation, public preaching, and Bible-reading are indispensable agencies in persuading men; but the gospel, embodied in a Christian life, is an agency even more effective than these. It is the believer's privilege to be "a living epistle" which those are forced to read who never look into a Bible or step into a church.

Other evidence may be evaded or denied. Every link in the reasoning by which we establish the historical truth of Christianity and its supernatural origin may be without a flaw, and yet the reasoning does not impress men. They care nothing about it. But no man can escape the influence of a life that, without noisy debate or insistent exhortation, reveals itself day by day in cheerful endurance, ready sacrifice, prompt forgiveness, and unselfish love. As a Christian wife, joined to a heathen husband, by her patient endurance of hardship and insult, by the silent protest of her own purity against surrounding vice, and by her wifely submission to her husband's rule, would at first excite his wonder, then his admiration, and finally win him to her faith, so a consecrated life is still the one unanswerable argument for the truth of Christianity.

Many a man who has drifted away from the pious influences of his early home, and sees only superstition in current religion and hypocrisy in the church, has had his skepticism shaken and his mockery silenced by the memory of a Christian mother whose sweet and prayerful devotion has remained enshrined in his heart as the ideal of a true Christian life.

It has been the salt that has kept his own life from corruption, the light which, even if long unheeded, has directed his footsteps toward higher things. The passive virtues are the strongest. Icy hearts, capable of resisting any number of direct blows, melt spontaneously under the genial sunshine of Christian love. While we ought not to underestimate the power of the gospel as shown in seasonable words of counsel or admonition, we can never overestimate its power as revealed in a holy and consecrated life. When we are restrained from exercising a direct ministry of exhortation, there is yet open to us the silent eloquence of a life hid with Christ in God. The former without the latter is important. The latter, even when dissociated from the former, may become the power of God in breaking down strongholds of opposing unbelief.

Incidentally we learn, also, from Peter's exhortation, that we must be the best and noblest that we are capable of becoming, before we can

expect to be of great service to others. It is for us, through whom the risen Christ is at this moment working for the redemption of the world, to struggle with all our might against temptation and sin, not merely in order that we may save ourselves, but in order that we may save those around us. Next to the thought of pleasing God, there can be no stronger motive for high and holy living than the thought that we are hereby helping to accomplish His gracious purpose, not only in respect to ourselves, but for the world. We can win men "without the word," but only when we ourselves live the word.

## Weak Churches.

With the weak church abstractly considered, we have nothing to do in this article. It has, in itself considered, as good a right to exist as has that which is stronger. Many a time it does as important a work, and secures in as large a measure the Master's blessing. It is only as the weak church comes into relationship with us as asking aid from the denomination, that we wish at all to consider it. Looked at in this light, there are two or three considerations that we desire to offer and which we think are worth looking at.

A weak church that is so because of unchristian division can scarcely be regarded as having a legitimate claim upon the sympathy and the support of the denomination outside of itself. Too frequently its genesis is to be traced to this source. Some difference of opinion arises in regard to the minister or the choir, or some feature of public administration, or possibly in regard to something not worth consideration, and the result is a split. A new organization takes place, and where there was not more than adequate support for one interest two struggling ones are found. Appeal is then made for aid to support, as it is put the Lord's cause. That this representation is neither a caricature nor exaggerated, the history of many a church in different parts of our country will abundantly sustain. Without question, now the appeal for support under such circumstances should hardly meet with an unquestioning response. Differences or the divisive spirit should not be thus encouraged. If such divided interests cannot, in a spirit of devotion to the broad cause of Jesus Christ, bury their differences it might be no great loss to allow them to struggle, and even to die, separated. One of the conditions then, under which the weak church should be sustained, is that it should not be the result of the unjust division of one comparatively strong.

It is a question, also, whether the weak church which is the result of an organization where the ground was thoroughly preempted, should have its appeal for aid responded to without question. We are aware that there are those who will take issue at this point. They will say it is the duty of our denomination, for example, to bear witness anywhere where the truth, as we hold it, is not proclaimed. To a certain extent, this is true. We represent principles which ought to be set forth even though the general cause aside from these is well represented. At the same time, we question whether it is a wise use of the Lord's money to attempt to sustain year after year, and decade after decade, a Baptist church, where from the very nature of the case, the soil is inhospitable, and where the general principles of the gospel are well illustrated and set forth. We are inclined to answer the question negatively, and think that a vast deal of money and effort might have been better expended than in the effort to sustain weak churches under the conditions hereby indicated.

Where there are two weak churches, the one with little promise of increase or strength before it, and the other with the prospect of growth and enlargement because of more favorable conditions, the latter undoubtedly should have its appeal for help answered before that of the other. This may seem a little heartless, but it is just. The children of this world are wiser in their

generation oftentimes, than the children of light. They place their investments where the largest returns seem to be promised. We know of no reason why the Lord's people should not be governed in the main by the same principles. Sympathy will come in and minor considerations, but the governing principle should be that means and effort should be expended where there is promise of the most abundant returns.

These thoughts may not command the approval of all. They are written, however, with a firm conviction of their essential correctness. Many years' experience in connection with our Convention has only emphasized them in the writer's mind. They may not form the basis upon which that Convention shall act, but we are inclined to believe that the application of the principles therein indicated will aid in the solution of many a perplexing problem, and result in a better expenditure of the Lord's funds.

## Not Easily Provoked.

A little good humor is a panacea for the frictions and irritations of life. If what the Apostle Paul says about "love not easily provoked" is true, we fear there are a great many Christian people who are not largely endowed with this grace. This is a most provoking world if we judge it by the frequency with which people are provoked. It is no doubt, in many cases a matter of nerves, but it might be asked if the regenerating power of God has not anything to do with a man's nervous system. We want a sanctified nerve more than almost anything else.

It has been said that ill temper is the vice of the virtuous and a blot on an otherwise noble character. Perhaps we had better reconsider what a virtuous character is and resolve that irritability and censoriousness and jealousy and pique shall be classified among sins to be repented of and fought against as much as drunkenness and theft and profligacy. The distinctions we make between sins is damaging to our character. The ugliest sort of sins are those which are often counted no sins at all, but simple infirmities. Love has an element of good humor in it. It keeps back retort and places offensive words and actions in a light which gives birth to a facetious smile instead of bitter resentment. There are many people with such a surplus of conscience that they are ever feeling it to be their duty to get offended. And they are most faithful in following their peculiar conscience. It may not be very dignified, but if we cultivated the habit of laughing at those who lose their temper it would be the beginning of the regeneration of society. It is easy to withstand a retort or anger, but human nature cools off very quickly and gets ashamed of itself before a playful smile. The trouble with many is an excess of seriousness. The art of treating lightly the little differences that arise in social or church life is the secret of retaining friendship and preserving harmony. If there is one whom you have wronged or slighted meets you the next day with a pleasant "good morning," you think the more of him and less of yourself for your lack of courtesy and kindness. Perhaps, if we preached the duty of good-nature we should be adding to the world's happiness more than if we preached some higher ones.

Every real and searching effort at self-improvement is of itself a lesson of profound humility, for we cannot move a step without learning and feeling the waywardness, the weakness, the vacillation of our movements, or without desiring to be set upon the rock that is higher than ourselves.—William E. Gladstone.

The church is a spiritual body; its aim is spirituality in the people; its agencies are those given by the spirit; its power is the presence of the Spirit.

Zeal is never safe with caution tugging at its skirts.