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Contributors & Correspondents.

MAKING LITTLE OF THE SIGNS OF THE COVENANT.

BY REV. W. T. McMULLEN.

Many it has probably been a puzzle how the cutting of Samson's hair could have wrought such a marvellous transformation on the man of giant strength who rent the lion limb from limb as if it had been a kid, and who carried the gate of the city of Gaza, posts and all, to the top of the hill before Hebron, to turn his captors into ridicule. Moreover, the other expedients which Delilah had previously tried, seemed far more likely to accomplish the object which she had in view, than the one which finally proved successful. Did then Samson's strength lie in his hair? Certainly not. No interpretation of the narrative could be further from the truth, and yet the cutting of his hair manifestly resulted in his strength departing from him. What then is the explanation of the seeming enigma? Samson was a Nazarite by the direction of God, and the act of his parents, and by his covenant obligations he was bound to observe those conditions, understood to be symbolic of a negative, positive and relative purity, and these external conditions, signs and pledges of his covenant standing were abstinence from the fruit of the vine in any and every form, avoiding all contact with the dead, and permitting his hair to grow to its natural length.

These were very simple and easy conditions, but that the neglect or violation of any one of them involved tragic consequences, Samson's subsequent history impressively illustrates. It was not the mere loss of his hair, but the forfeiture of his covenant standing, as a Nazarite, by his placing one of the signs of his consecration at the disposal of the inquisitive and heartless Delilah, that was the real cause why "his strength went from him."

And to every covenant that God has made with his people, he has been pleased to attach certain external and visible tokens or signs, very simple in themselves, but in their relative importance, capable of being measured by the covenant to which they were attached. It was a marvellously simple and easy sign that was attached to the Eden covenant as the test of man's obedience and the pledge of his security, but to tamper or trifle with that sign was to make the appalling experiment of what a breach of the covenant meant and how far its consequences would extend. In like manner the sign of the Passover Covenant was very simple and easy of observance—the sprinkling of the blood—but to disparage its importance and neglect its use was simply to forfeit the protection from the destroying angel, which God promised to every house on which the sprinkled blood was found. To the covenant of grace there are attached certain sensible signs too, baptism and the Lord's Supper, very simple in themselves, but unspeakably sublime and solemn in their significance. A bit of sealing wax or a wafer is a very simple thing in itself, but it is not the least suitable on that account, when affixed to a bond, to serve as the recognized sign of the formal ratification of that agreement, and of its acknowledged binding nature on each of the contracting parties. And it were the climax of folly to disparage that seal, or tamper with it because of its being such a simple thing in itself. Nothing short of extreme ignorance or a desire to rob the document of its validity, could account for such a procedure. Now there are many ways in which the covenant of grace may be made little of, and spiritual consequences incurred in striking analogy to the startling and melancholy change in the circumstances of Samson so simply brought about. He hoped that his covenant standing as a Nazarite still held good, but the Lord was departed from him and his strength was gone! Let those who, like Samson, have by the appointment of God and the act of their parents, had the sign of covenant consecration to God, put on them in baptism beware of thoughtlessly forfeiting every benefit the covenant brings to them, by slighting their baptism and the covenant of which it is a seal, acting as if that baptism meant nothing, and instead of cleaving to the covenant, in Christ as that in which their strength lies, permitting evil associates of the world to entice them into practical abandonment of it as Delilah enticed Samson. Baptism is not salvation, yet it signifies and seals your ingrafting into Christ, your partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace, and your engagement to be the Lord's. Your covenant relation is not the less valid, nor the benefits less secure to you on God's part because the transaction took place in your infancy, for the history of Samson's Nazarite-ship was in this particular precisely analogous.

And is it not equally perilous by wilful neglect or sinful irregularity in reference to the Lord's Supper, to make little of this other sign and seal of the covenant? By a heartless outward observance we may profane it, but what language can fully describe the daring and perilous peradventure to which those are committing themselves who treat it with neglect, and assume that its observance or non-observance is a matter of indifference? Was it not in just such a spirit of presumed security that Samson trifled with one of the signs of his Nazarite-ship, and in consequence discovered "that the Lord was departed from him?"

THE RIGHT SORT OF RELIGION.

BY K. C.

There is nothing which, to ordinary rightly disposed persons, it is more easy to talk about than religion. But in most of our religious talking, there is very little Religion. There is just as much difference between talking about religion and religion itself, as between talking about going to the sun and going there.

Everybody sees the difference. Some persons have long been alive to the difference, and have, with some earnestness, been striving to rise above mere religious talking into the peaceful, joyful atmosphere of religion itself. But the great question is how? Religion is like a lake of pure, transparent water, with not a weed protruding its head to remind you of the slimy bottom. But, around it stretches the muddy waters of formal religiousness. Continually your boat is grounded, continually the oar becomes entangled among the weeds, before you can shoot out into clear and open sailing. "We feel," people say, "that we want to attain to true religion in our language and lives; but our tongues are always paralyzed, our hands are in irons, when we try to speak or act as we imagine a religious man would speak or act. We never get beyond the 'common-places.' We like to hear about the experience of Christian people. But we have no experience of our own—at least none that is so clear and intelligible, that we can shape it into words."

People talk about whatever their hearts are fullest of. If they think most about *decrees* they will run into Calvinism and that kind of conversation. If they think most of *Christ* they will talk a good deal about him. Some people know that they should not speak about business and politics on Sabbath; and they find instead a very dry subject for very constrained conversation in the criticism of the pastor or the scandal of the congregation. That is about their nearest approach to religion.

What is religion? I venture to say that nine out of ten of those who have the shorter catechism at their tongue's end cannot answer that question. Let us see. We all go this far, that religion is something more than simply profession; that, if it is any real thing, it must appear in a man's living. But what do we expect a religious man to do? He will certainly not swear, nor drink, nor be nor steal, nor profane the day of the Lord. Is there anything else that he will not do? Perhaps a few more sins may be added to the forbidden list, and many would consider such a life to be not unworthy of a Christian. But some would incline to add that there are some things that he must do. He must be a Bible-reader. He must pray sometimes and be pretty regularly in his pew on Sabbath. To most persons, these observances will do very well for a professor of religion although, if he is to be considered a very pious man, he must not laugh much, and above all things he must never dance.

A man may do all these things and be no better than an infidel. Thousands of unconverted men have done them all. Unless religion is something more, and above all these things, it is nothing. When a man has no open vices, all that you can say is that he is not an immoral man, that he has not descended to the grosser forms of wickedness. When a man is a rigid Sabbatarian and a maker of long prayers, he may nevertheless, be just as great a hypocrite as any of those against whom Christ Jesus uttered his most fearful "Woes."

Religion has very little to do with mere *negations*. What is valuable in it is what is *positive*. The root from which it grows is faith in Jesus Christ as a Saviour. One of its positive elements is that habit of mind and heart by which we habitually live in the presence of God and see as present Him who is invisible; by which we feel His power, by which we hear His voice when he speaks to us through His Word or through our own consciences. Another positive element is that feeling of helplessness that begets trustfulness in God. Another is the consecration of one's powers and talents to the

promotion of his work. Another is that spirit of dependence which leads us, like little children, to hold on by His parental hand for guidance when we err, and for support when we stumble.

Those who teach or preach a religion which consists in mere regulation of the outward life, inculcate a religion which can neither win the heart nor benefit the life. Such is the religion that is often enforced by those whose business it is to instruct. Children revolt from its irksome bondage, and, for men, the only alternative is hypocrisy or infidelity.

No religion can win the heart, that does not, after it has chastened the frivolity of the giddy and eradicated the love of sin, fill up the vacancy it has created, with the love of what is Christ-like and the blissful experiences of a freer liberty and a purer joy. Every heart has its afflictions. The more buoyant the heart the stronger will the afflictions be. Therefore to tell a young person of exuberant spirit that he must wear a long face and attend *dried-up* prayer-meetings is simply to ask him to smother out of existence all that grand nature which God has put within him, and leave his life a joyless, profitless blank. Why, the affections of the heart are what make life worth having and heaven worth seeking. But, let the Christless feel that there is something in Christianity that will fascinate the affections, that will expand the nature, lighten its joys and intensify its impulses; the delusive unsatisfying pleasures that all else can offer will soon be forgotten. Begin at the centre of the affections. Get them just right; and you need not fear the miserable powerless enticements of the gambling den, or the ball-room.

"Let your light shine before men." The brightest light a Christian character can cast comes from the fire of warm affection. In the Sabbath Assembly and in the prayer-meeting, surround the unawakened, and especially the stranger, with the warning influences of genuine kindness and overflowing sympathy, and when he has learned that religion is a far higher exercise of the affections and of all that is highest and noblest in the nature, than anything that he has ever experienced, he will lose his antipathy towards it. Worldly men think that religion is only another name for *sanctimoniousness*; and, perhaps, as a rule, judging from the lives of professing Christians, their judgment is correct.

Religion will be utterly profitless and unattractive until it takes hold of all that is most God-like within us and brings it into its noblest and purest line of exercise, while it would eradicate whatever is devilish. The possession of a heart that can trust God and love is true religion. If you trust in God, your feet will not "run to evil." When you love him, you will find no time to spend in trifling with the pressing wants of your undying soul.

PRESBYTERIAN WRONGS.

NUMBER I.

Editor British American Presby. Jan.

DEAR SIR,—Like a dashing charger, the world will not stand still. Everywhere people are busy. Everybody thinks. If anybody wants to do anything he must not take long to think about it or somebody else will do it for him. Everything is going ahead—but *Presbyterianism*.

A gentleman whose words are worthy of consideration told me the other day that the genius of Presbyterianism was such as to confine its growth pretty much to the sons of the Gael. I do not believe anything of the kind. The longer I live, and the more I learn, I become the more thoroughly convinced that the principles of Presbyterianism are true and Scriptural, and not only so, but that they are the only denominational principles which approach towards a complete grasp of the *roundness* of divine truth, embracing at once the gentleness of its man-ward bearing and the sublimity and awfulness of its eternal absoluteness.

But, that there is something wrong about the practical *working* of these principles, I cannot, while my eyes are open, entertain a doubt. Whatever fortunes or misfortunes may be befalling our brethren in other quarters of the Globe, it seems to me that in Canada, we are doing worse than standing still. I would be very hard to convince, (and I judge from what I see,) that we are keeping our position, relatively, with some other denominations. Our members are continually being stolen by other sects; but the few who cross the fence to our side deserve special credit surely for conscientiousness. Whatever we may say about the *genius* of our creed, the fact is, that it is clad in such straitened garments that it cannot grow. I believe that it holds in its

hand the great truths which are to make vigorous, true-hearted Christians,—truths, therefore, which are fitted for the uplifting and beautifying of the human heart, and whatever colour of skin it throbs and by whatever language it renders its thoughts. Nevertheless, with all its fitness for a world-wide work, it is confined, or very nearly so, to the sons of the Gael.

The fact of the matter is, that Presbyterianism is in shackles. It must breathe a freer air. Its spirit must be rekindled. It must learn the great lessons, which it has never yet learned, of energy and adaptability. If it does not, and does not do so at an early day, (for I believe these years through which we are at present passing are pregnant with critical turning-points in our churches' history,) it may expect to lose even the ground which it now holds. Our church courts will wake up some day and find themselves without a quorum.

I propose, with your permission, Mr. Editor, through your columns, to point out, in a series of short articles, what I consider, to be some of the *wrongs* under which the Presbyterian Church is labouring, and in what way, it seems to me, very many of them may be *righted*. I am to be understood as writing from the standpoint of a *Canada Presbyterian*.

And now, after these introductory remarks, I shall only have room in this letter to take up *one* of my list of Wrongs. It is however a very great one. It is this: *Our people are not interested in the affairs of the church, and very little effort is being made to interest them.*

It was long felt to be a great grievance that we had no Paper in which to ventilate our views on matters connected with our church. There might be a monopoly of mischief making at headquarters, but hardly anybody knew anything about it. And what people never hear of can scarcely be expected to interest them very much.

Now, thanks to yourself, we have a Paper, and a good one. It has passed through a very critical period of its existence; for the public confidence had been shaken by previous failures; and many were slow to give it their support. But it has come through the trial well. I have never yet heard a remark of disparagement regarding it. It is, certainly, worthy of the fullest support.

But what about the way in which the people are doing their duty towards the Paper? The fact is, that ministers and church officers have, generally, well performed their usual part of *negligence*, in respect to it. They have not realized, that, upon the way in which they interest themselves on its behalf, depends to some extent its existence; nor that the alternative lies between *its success* and *no Presbyterian newspaper* for many and many a year to come.

What have they done? Why, in many congregations, *not a single copy* of the Paper is taken. What interest in ecclesiastical affairs can ever be started among the people, if they are not induced to read? Our Canadian people are *such* readers, at any rate, that I can point to many a locality in which your Paper has never been heard of.

Now here is a plan. The beginning of 1873 is coming on. Let the minister of every congregation set some one—say the superintendent of the Sabbath School, to work to form a committee—the S. S. Teachers would do well—to *canvass* the congregation for subscribers. Ministers should remember that if they are going to have *alive* people in their congregations, they must see that they read, and post themselves on current affairs.

This negligence about ecclesiastical work and news, arises out of a want of *denominational spirit*. Of such a spirit we are so destitute, that it is impossible to incite any enthusiasm, unless it be perhaps over the *death bed* of John Knox. And after all, probably only about one fourth of our people have ever heard yet that Knox *did die*. Sir W. Hamilton once said that ignorance of the writings of other nations was a thing peculiarly British. Ignorance of the affairs of *our own church* is a thing peculiarly Presbyterian. INDEX.

DISTRESSING SIGHT.

A short time ago, as some persons were standing by the seaside at Matane, 80 miles below Metis, they saw a ship Eastward bound plunge down bow first and utterly disappear. It is supposed that she was laden with grain which having become wet, swelled and made a leak in her. As no news of any persons having come ashore have been received, it is most likely that all have gone to the bottom. The ship was too far from the shore for help to reach those who belonged to her. Besides the sea was too stormy for a small boat to "live" in it. A ship's boat has come ashore in the neighbourhood since the above mentioned circumstance took place but nothing is known concerning it.—*Com. 21*

EVENING PARTIES.

Editor British American Presby. Jan.

SIR,—I was pleased with the remarks made by your last week's correspondent on "fashionable follies." They represent a state of things alas! only too truly prevailing, even among those who profess to be followers of Christ. I am not able to say from personal knowledge what Professor Cavan affirmed at the missionary meeting in Gould street on Monday night, that members of our Presbyterian Churches will spend \$400 and \$500 on a single entertainment, while they may throw a dollar or two to the Missionary Society of the congregation they are connected with in the course of a year. But it is a matter of notoriety that large sums are in this way expended, and that for gaiety and ostentatious extravagance there is no apparent difference between many who are professedly good Christians and those who do not claim to be Christians at all. If such expenditure can be afforded, the question rises, whether it is of such a character as that the blessing of God could be asked upon it. This can be done on all unaccounted and becoming recreation, but I fancy that the less of it that is attempted over champagne suppers or dancing parties, with refreshments in the shape of wines, brandy, &c., set out for the benefit of the young revellers, and to be used at discretion, whenever, as Sairoy Gamp would say, "so disposed"—so much the better. At these parties it is notorious that persons are sometimes found who, if not to be described as drunk, are certainly "flushed with wine," and in that condition are allowed to dance with young women or ladies who have avowed their desire and determination to live and die for Christ, and who have done this at the Lord's table. What a manifest inconsistency is all this, and how calculated not only to make thoughtful young persons turn from such individuals as humbugs, but cause them to harden their hearts against the religion of the Cross, and go stumbling on through life unguided and unsustainable by that which they have come to think has lost its power for good, if it ever had any. Must I be called an "old fogey" if I feel sad and indignant about such things, and call to mind the woe denounced against those who make little ones stumble and fall, it may be never to rise more? Perhaps so, yet after all I cannot help doing this, and saying that of all the contemptible ghastly Vanity Fairs in this poor world, the most contemptible and the most ghastly are those which have a slight flavour of religion thrown into them, to improve, as it is thought, the relish of the dissipation, and to give that last zest for which the gay lady sighed, arising from conscience whispering that throughout it all there is something very like sin. I know that "sin" is rather an ugly word, that has gone greatly into disuse since Broad Churchism became fashionable and convenient Euphonism came to be employed to soften the offensive asperities of the Word of God. But let it stand, Mr. Editor. I am neither soured myself with the world, nor do I wish others to be, but I more than doubt if these revellings and banquetings are quite in accordance with using the world as not abusing it, as well as with Christian carefulness to pay every one his due, and Jesus Christ and his cause among the rest.

I am,
A TORONTO SUBSCRIBER.

SESSIONS.

Editor British American Presby. Jan.

SIR,—In the last issue of your excellent paper you say that a correspondent asks, "If Sessions in what may be called their normal condition are open courts to which the members of the church are admitted whenever they choose?" The answer given to this question is in the affirmative. Many, I am persuaded, will not be surprised to see that answer. Yet it is not the correct one. The very reverse is the truth. Sessions are not in their normal condition open to all the members of the church who may choose to attend. In this respect the Session differs from the other courts which are constitutionally open courts use and properly claim this difference; for the Session has largely to deal with private character. Serious difficulties have often arisen in congregations and Sessions by neglect of this rule. However, it is not necessary to say more. If authority be asked it can be easily given. However, it may suffice to refer to the "Digest of the Rev. Robert Forbes on the Rules and Procedure of the Inferior Courts of the Free Church of Scotland." See page 37. Hoping to be excused for the liberty I have taken in writing to you on this matter.

I remain, Sir,
Yours truly
JOHN MACMILLAN.