

Selected Articles.

THE SINGER.

Up the east a lark was singing; Down the yellow light was shining; Oh, that I were also and strong I am nothing but a song.

"WORDLINESS."

BY REV. J. HALL, D. D., NEW-YORK.

In the judgment of many excellent persons, the Church of Christ is now suffering from worldliness to such an extent as to raise grave apprehension, and call for special notice in prayer and effort.

The latter is the subject of complaint, though it is obviously not without some connection with the former, for an undivided and divided Church is not a formidable opponent to her enemies.

As a help to just thinking on this matter, the writer ventures to offer a few thoughts which may possibly disappoint some readers (because we are all accustomed to hear "worldliness" blamed rather than defined), but may yet awaken salutary thought in others.

We are all liable, as we learn from faithful friends and sarcastic neighbours, to judge severely those things which we have escaped, and to rate highly the virtues we possess. The "good young man," who neither uses tobacco or stimulants, and has been brought up so, may easily assign himself, or have given him by others, a high place over those who "smoke and take wine" while in the eye of God the smoker may be the better of the two.

These examples I give, because no one will suppose me to be in favour of tobacco, drink, fast living, or loose religious thinking, and because they illustrate, I hope harmlessly, the position laid down at the beginning of the paragraph.

What is true of persons is true of classes. Among the inhabitants of tenement-houses, there is a good deal of roughness, coarse speaking, rude boxing of human ears, blows even, in bad times; and some excess of wine, revelings, and such like, unrefined freedoms, and boisterous and unregulated jollity, in good times.

Now it is not meant that there is no right and wrong for the individual in these things, but that a general judgment upon particular points is so difficult as to make general judgments of little value.

in other people's coats. "I'm no worse with my dress—hair and all—than the devil with his hair'dye." "There was less naughty talking at my reception than at Mrs. Smith's Dorcas." And these retorts getting whispered about, and being in the air, the spirit of even good people is "rioted," and perhaps the minister is led to lay out as much force for a Sabbath or two, in disbanding from dress, or dance, or theatre, as he ordinarily does in disbanding from rejection of Christ and eternal death.

"Then do you think excessive dressing, and dancing, and entertainments, and theatrical displays, right things for Christian people? No, indeed, I think them generally excessively childish; sometimes very pernicious.

"Then would you do nothing? Do you advise 'masterly inactivity'?" No. There is something to be done. Let an example indicate what.

The pastoral epistles emphatically require gravity in ministers. Now, suppose it were put in the ordination-vows, or "charges," that a minister should never make a pun in English, Greek, or Latin; never wear a coloured necktie, never allude to Dickens or the like; never make people laugh with an "amusing speech"; never throw a fly, or shoot gape, or knock down nuno-pins (which things could be shown to be unfavorable to gravity)—would it mend matters? Would not a wise man say, "My dear sir, some of these things, in proper time and place, are well enough; 'est modus in rebus'; and if I am not capable of judging and obtaining help, to form a judgment on such things, if there is no way to keep me right on these points but by this formal prohibition, I am not fit to be a minister at all. If I am a true minister, my preoccupation of heart and life with God and the souls of men will keep me from trifling."

Now it is just here that the right line of treatment of the Church's worldliness seems to lie. To have a ministry grave, sober, such that no man can despise, let it be an educated an intensely earnest ministry, thoroughly engaged in God's work; and to have a church free of worldly trifling, let her be thoroughly educated, and intensely occupied in God's work.

But how to get this, or, rather, how to seek it? With great diffidence we venture a few hints:

1. There is a broad line drawn in Scripture between God and man, and Christ and Belial, flesh and spirit, the will of the flesh and the will of God. That which makes godliness is the love of God shed abroad in the heart. That is its essence, its animating principle, its life. That which makes worldliness is the love of what is not God, lust of the flesh, or the eye, or pride of life. The object may be dignified, like honour, or small and mean, like gain, or personal display. It may be pure, like literary-fame, or social influence, or it may be sensual and beastly, like the pleasures of the table or of the harlot.

What makes it worldly is not its high or low character; it is its godlessness. The "honourable merchant" loving his money; the "mother in Israel" loving her position; the deacon loving his power in the Church; the minister "purring" over the "society" of which he is the "honoured head"; all may be worldly in God's sight, as truly as the butterfly that shines in over-dress in the boxes, or the poor creature that gyrates on the stage in half-dress, and with less excuse. One may conduct a prayer-meeting, or manage a mission-station, in essential worldliness.

A ball thrown away on the top of a hill will obey the law of gravitation and run down. What side of the hill it will take will depend on the impulse given to it, and the lay of the ground. So human beings without the dominant love of God will be worldly, and what form of gaiety, display, hoarding, gossiping, self-seeking, self-indulgence, mean gains, or sense of power, the sin will take, is only a matter of detail, and of secondary moment. Men, like trees, will bring forth fruit after their kind.

2. Let there be close and faithful dealing with those whom we take into the Church. Let us be more concerned about quality than quantity. "They are not all Israel which are of Israel."

3. Let us keep the churches, as churches, free of wordliness. If they be the scenes of theatrical displays; if they parade themselves before the world; if they follow in its wake in style, "effects," music, and general accommodation to the fashion, can it be wondered at if the members, caught the spirit, and "better the instruction"? What minister does not know that it is possible to preach on humility, with a spirit as proud as Lucifer's? And so may a church be sound in creed, and most respectable in character, and yet differ from other institutions only in this; that they serve man's natural tastes and wishes on the six days, and it gratifies the same in the ways appropriate to the seventh.

4. Let us seek in all appropriate ways, by praying, studying, teaching, preaching, and holy living—the power which has not only resisted the enticements of worldliness, so-called, which enters the heart, dispels its old occupants; rouses the tastes; purifies the affections; sets the hands to work, makes life solemn, earnest, and useful; gives efficacy to labor, creates a new public sentiment, and renders all obedience simple, unconstrained, and spontaneous, holding men back from frivolities, not so much by the "iron fence" of "Thou shalt not," as by the "loftie" inspiration of positive Christian living, that replies to all given calls of the world, "Why should the work cease while I leave it, and come down to you?"

We may err in dealing with symptoms; we may mistake for governing too much; but we are safe in declaring, by word and deed, "I believe in the Holy Ghost."

SHALL WE KNOW EACH OTHER IN HEAVEN?

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