

OUR MISTAKES.

BY THE REV. W. H. ALLWORTH.

We are, some of us, prone to think that we, as a denomination, are a large organized body, like what is termed the Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church, or the Church of England, or the Church of Rome; while the truth is, we are no such thing. We are as a body a number of churches of Christ; one in Him, as many distinct families make one nation. In the United States attempts are repeatedly made to organize the Congregational churches in semi-Presbyterian style. All such attempts will probably end in getting such churches to become Presbyterian. The two systems can hardly be blended.

Our churches must either be independent or not. If they submit to the dictation of a Union or Association or any central power, they are so far Presbyterian and lose their independency. It is, however, quite in keeping with the distinctive character of our churches to take advice or counsel from other churches or the assembled brethren, but not to submit to control. It is not to be wondered at that our young ministers, brought up in the midst of organizations with church courts and centralized power, should fancy that *we* as ministers should exercise some of the same kind of power, and think moreover that Presbyters would be much sater to manage the churches' business than the churches to manage their own. Then the enemies of our system tell us we are "a rope of sand," and some are much afraid of that. Hence repeated attempts have been made to bind the churches together by a creed and centralized courts.

Now, with Christ for a common rallying cry and the Bible and Holy Spirit to guide us, and love for a bond of union, we need no other rope to bind us. These strands are strong enough for all practical purposes.

It is another mistake to suppose that all the churches should be held responsible for the errors of one, any more than all the families should be blamed for the mistakes of one. It is also a mistake to suppose that all the denomination is going to be damaged by a church's mistakes or an individual's sins. If a deacon, minister or church goes wrong and a scandal is the result, it is a want of self-respect that prompts a man to go around whining about the damage this will do to Congregationalism. A local scandal will have a local influence in keeping with its character, and will injure not only the denomination where it originated, but all who bear the Christian name. If a scandal turns up in an Episcopal Church or a Methodist or a Presbyterian they never conceive that it will damage them any farther than it will damage the common Christianity, although they have much more reason to fear it than we, because they are supposed in some sense to make themselves responsible by the supervision of church courts and their authority over the churches. Why then should we count ourselves so inferior that we shall be held responsible for whatever transpires in the denomination? If a black man or a Chinaman commits a murder, he may be lynched, and the whole of his race persecuted in that vicinity. If a white man be guilty of the same offence, the offender alone, and not his race, will be made to suffer. Are we so weak that we shall, as a denomination, be held responsible and damaged by the errors of any local church or individual professing our faith? I trow not any further than all Christians are damaged in the eyes of the world by such doings. To illustrate what we mean we refer to a fact. A bad man went to St. Thomas and imposed himself first upon the Reformed Episcopal Church. After preaching to them for a time, for some cause he left them and formed a Congregational church out of such materials as he could get. He never asked or received endorsement from the other ministers of the body. In time his true character was brought to light, and he left for parts unknown. Now, some of our brethren say that our prospects for a church in St. Thomas are blighted henceforth. We ask, why? Are we indeed so weak that the doings of any impostor on his own responsibility can destroy our prospects in any place whither he may choose to go? Let us have more respect for

ourselves than to suppose that we, like the inferior races, are going to suffer as a denomination for individuals' sins. If we are indeed "a rope of sand," how can one pull the rest down? Let us each look after his own work, and do what comes to our hands faithfully. Let us remember that our ministers are not to expect to find churches built up for them, but to work faithfully and build them up.

One other mistake very common with our ministers, is the supposing that some other field is easier or better than their own. If a man is discontented in his field, he cannot build it up. He wants to keep moving; he is dissatisfied; he thinks he could do great things in Nova Scotia, or the Western States, or the North-west, or Vancouver, or Utopia. Some men want to move as soon as the glamour is gone off the field they occupy. They crave to be always working under the excitement incident to change. If the field is weak or discouraging let them work it by God's help into better shape, and not confess their weakness by continually running from place to place.

CAN WE FEEL SURE?

It was said of a certain magnificent speech of Daniel Webster that "every word weighed a pound." But there is a line in the thirty-fifth psalm—mostly made up of monosyllables—in which every word weighs a ton. David uttered it in a season of despondency, when he cried out: "Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation." The old monarch was in trouble. His own throne was assailed, and so he went to the Everlasting Throne. His own heart was assailed by doubts, and so he sought for a fresh and full assurance of salvation. Whatever David's own experiences may have been, he furnished a golden prayer for universal use in these pregnant, pithy words: "Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation."

The salvation which all of us most need is a deliverance from the guilt and dominion of sin. We need to be liberated from the bondage of that great slaveholder, the Devil. Beset with temptations, we need succour when we are tempted. The only salvation "under Heaven given among men" is by the atoning blood of Jesus and the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. This is a full salvation, a complete salvation; it is God's masterpiece of mercy to us guilty, depraved, and dying sinners. Can this salvation be made *sure* to a man, and can he be *sure* that he possesses it?

We answer, unhesitatingly: Yes. David did not ask for impossibilities when he asked God to assure him of his salvation. Paul knew what he was about when he said: "Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" There is no perhaps about the salvation of a true follower of Christ, any more than there is about the rising of to-morrow's sun. It does not depend upon my say, or your say, or any man's say. Only God can give the decisive and infallible assurance to us that we are safe for this world and for eternity.

Let it be carefully noted that the prayer is that God would say unto the *soul*: "I am thy salvation." There is no audible voice addressed to the ear; in fact, multitudes hear the offer of salvation every Sabbath by the ear, and yet their hearts are as deaf as adders. What God says can only be heard by the heart. We would define faith to be *heart-hearing*. And unto the docile, believing soul God says wonderful things, and things to make the soul leap for joy. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. I open the ivory chamber of John's Gospel, and read these words: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word and believeth on Me that sent me hath everlasting life and shall not come into condemnation." Again, Jesus says: "This is the will of Him that sent me, that every one who believeth on the Son may have everlasting life." "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them and they follow me. And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." He does not affirm that we may never, in a fit of waywardness and pride, throw ourselves out of that almighty and loving hand. But He does declare that while we stay there we are safe. And, being

safe, we have a right to know it, and to feel all the serenity and satisfaction which the ownership by the Lord Jesus can inspire.

Faith is the soul's trust in Jesus as our salvation. It *ought* to bring a delightful sense of security. But it does not always do so, because it is too weak and doubting to produce assurance. Faith is the milk, and assurance is the cream which rises on it. The richer the milk the more abundant will be the cream. Assurance is not essential to salvation, as faith is; for God will let a great many people into heaven who had a very feeble faith here on earth. Faith is life, though it be sometimes a very weak, anxious, burdened, and uncomfortable life. Assurance marks a higher degree of health, vigour, joy, and power to overcome. Peter possessed some faith when he screamed to his Master, from the waves: "Lord, save me!" He had reached a much higher attainment by the Spirit when he exclaimed in the market-place of Jerusalem: "This is the stone which was set at naught of you builders, which is become the head of the corner." Saul of Tarsus had an infant faith born in his soul when he was groping about in the house of Ananias at Damascus. The infant had grown into a giant when Paul had reached up to the eighth chapter to the Romans, and could shout: "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him." Jesus had really said to Paul: "I am thy salvation."

Paul had the witness of the Spirit that he was Christ's. There was an inward conviction and an outward life, and the two corresponded with each other. They both corresponded also to the Spirit's description of true piety in the Bible. When a tree produces the leaves of a pear and the fruit of the pear, we are sure that it is a pear tree. When a man feels the love of Jesus in his soul and keeps the commandments of Jesus in his life, he has the witness of the Holy Spirit that he is in Christ. Being in Christ, he is safe. There is no condemnation to such a man. He has passed from death unto life. The Lord has already said unto such a consistent believer: "I am thy salvation." But when an oily-tongued dissembler, who cheats his creditors or lives a life of secret uncleanness, rises in a prayer meeting and prates glibly about his holiness or his sanctified attainments, he simply unmask his own hypocrisy.

We have just said that assurance is not a positive essential of faith; but yet it is the privilege and the duty of a genuine Christian to possess the assurance of Christ's love and protection. Old Latimer used to say that when he had this steadfast trust in his Master he could face a lion. When he lost it, he was ready to run into a mouse-hole. Why should the soul to whom Jesus has said "I am thy salvation" be continually worrying itself sick with doubts and fears? If I have put my everlasting all in Christ's hands, He is responsible for the trust—as long as I leave it with Him.

Two men go out to Colorado and purchase tracts of mining land. One of them spends half his time worrying about his deed, and in running to the clerk's office to see whether his title is good. While he is tormenting himself in this idiotic way, the other man has worked his gold mine so industriously that he has sent fifty loads of solid ore to the crushing mill. Brethren, if we have taken Christ's word, and committed our souls to His keeping and our lives to his disposal, let us not worry about our title-deeds to heaven. Let us understand the power of the two pronouns "my" and "thy." It is *my* soul to which the Almighty Jesus says: "I am thy salvation." Go about your lifework, brother, and do it honestly and thoroughly. God is responsible for the results and the reward. If I check my baggage to Chicago, it is not mine until I get there. It belongs to the baggage-master. Surely, I ought to have as strong a faith that my immortal soul is safe in Christ's keeping as I have that my trunk is safe in the charge of a railway officer.

Assurance of salvation by the Son of God is no modern discovery. It is not a new invention, "patented" by any school of Bible students. It is as old as the Cross of Calvary. Paul built his Epistle to the Romans on this rock. The psalmist of Israel was