

Value of Church Membership.

BY J. B. GAMBRELL.

Unorganized forces have never accomplished much in the world and never will. George Whitfield was a much greater preacher than Wesley. He moved people very powerfully but he left them unorganized, while his co-laborer organized everything he touched. It is needless to say that Wesley's work remains while Whitfield's has been scattered.

When Christ began his ministry, he quickly gathered around him a few disciples as a nucleus of his world-wide movement. With the ongoing of his kingdom there was a steady absorption of every convert into an organization—a church. The converts at Pentecost were baptized and added the same day. The Scriptures leave no place for the convert outside of a church. There never was a convert who did well outside of a church. Christianity could not be maintained without churches. To say that churches do not save people is saying nothing to the point, when the matter of Christian duty is involved. Churches do not save people instrumentally by upholding and preaching the truth. If churches fail all fails in the long run.

But the blessings of organization are manifold for the saved. Every convert needs exactly what a true church can give him—sympathy, love, support, instruction, comradeship, protection. The churches of Christ were ordained to meet the deepest needs of the new life. Life of every sort needs environment for its comfort and development. Nature provides environment, light and atmosphere with a proper temperature in which to bring all its products to perfection. The God of all grace, who is also the God of nature, has provided a resting place, with suitable environments, and a heavenly atmosphere in which to bring spiritual life to full fruition. The home of God's child on this earth is a New Testament church.

Paul's conception of a church still further enforces the value of church organization. He takes the human body to illustrate. Christ is the head and all the members are members one of another. They co-operate to the mutual comfort of all. No one Christian is strong enough or complete enough to meet all his own wants. Some are far ahead of others, but all need supplementing. The eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue, the hands, the feet, all supplement and help each other. The same thing is true in a church.

Sometimes it is said that, if one is converted, one can live all right in or out of a church. It is a mistake. One can do well in a life of disobedience to Christ, and whoever refuses to unite with a church sets the wisdom and the command of the Master aside. For such as one there is no real spiritual growth or happiness. Whoever saw a great Christian grown up outside of the fellowship of a church? I certainly never saw one or heard of one.

Many years ago, when I had time and a place for it, I greatly enjoyed gardening, and was reasonably successful in it. One year, following the usual custom, I sowed cabbage seed in a bed, and in due time transplanted the young plants to the rich, mellow soil of the open garden. Here they were cultivated and grew to large proportions. Passing by the neglected plant bed, I opened the weeds and grass to see what had become of the plants left in the bed. They were there still living but leafless and with only a little bud at the top to show that there was life left. They had been choked with the weeds and grass. This is a picture of a converted man, left out in the world. He will never perish, neither will he grow.

And then there is that other great question, the question of usefulness. We are kept in the world for what good we can do for others. It will be next to perdition to live and die having done no good in the world. A converted person out of a church cannot be useful. He cannot help doing harm by a pernicious example. He is a rebel in the kingdom of grace. If his heart kept warm, which would never be, singlehanded, he could do but little. There is a heavenly arithmetic which works in God's kingdom and warfare. Here it is: "One shall chase a thousand, and two shall put ten thousand to flight." How marvelously do we increase our usefulness by combinations. Beyond the weighty obligation to obey Christ there is, running through life, a moral obligation to do those things which make for our highest usefulness. A stray soldier in any army counts for very little. Marathon is forever glorious, for on that field the immortal ten thousand Greeks locking shields, standing and marching shoulder to shoulder, cut through and defeated the almost countless hordes of the barbarians, while the victors sang their psalms of victory. A church like that will be a conquering force anywhere in the world.

Why write all this? Just to set on a fine idea? No; far from it. Just now thousands are turning to God, and I notice a great disparity between the number of professions and the number joining the church. This may be explained many ways. All who profess are not real converts. Many converts have their church notions set toward other denominations. But I raise the question whether in their zeal for soul-winning many are not painfully lax in giving converts timely and faithful instructions. Is this not true? Let every preacher and worker answer before God for himself. "I trust I am not censorious, but I much fear that a sinful laxness in not teaching converts their duty in respect to joining the church results from a kind of unwritten compromise with error. For one, I have no sympathy with

much that goes under the fine title of defending the faith. But I hold this to be true and self-evident: Preachers are to preach the teaching revealed in the Scriptures. It is not our primary duty to take care of any church or denomination. Our duty is to preach straight on, just as if every one believed the truth or would do it, when he heard it. We owe a grave duty to God and a solemn obligation to the converts to lead them in the way of their highest happiness and usefulness. If some one says people will not hear us, if we preach the full truth, the reply is, that is mostly a mistake, provided we preach the truth in love; but anyway, we are not obliged to have everybody to hear us. We are obliged to be true to God and his word. But beyond all human wisdom there is a supreme factor in the problem of successful preaching, and that in unction, the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Men will hear whom God anoints, and he never anoints trimmers nor makeshifts.

My plea is for faithfulness right up to the Scripture standard on this, as well as other matters. We are no way responsible for what is in the Bible, nor for people's notions unless, indeed, we have failed to declare the whole counsel of God, and thus contributed to their false notions. There are plenty of texts for preaching what is here suggested—Baptist Standard.

From Unbelief to Faith.

BY REV. GEORGE P. PERRY, D. D.

We have been passing through a period of discussion which has created an atmosphere of doubt, unsettling the faith of many. Some of those who care anything for religion have lost much of their reverence for the Bible and the church. Superficial thinkers have taken for granted that the conclusions of modern critics warrant them to become a law unto themselves in things spiritual. It would seem that the popular feeling is not so favorable for Christian faith as it was a generation ago. There seems to be an unusual indifference to worship and church activity which would indicate a current of life that is away from real faith in Christ as Lord and Saviour.

Now while this may be true of those who form their opinions from the sensational reports of the secular press, which almost always feeds its readers with the views of radical critics, it must be remembered that among the educated classes there seems to be a return to simple faith in Christ and the Gospel. Those in places of learning who have antagonized Christianity have more recently renounced their unbelief. You have all doubtless read the statements made by Prof. Orr not long ago, showing that nearly all the eminent scientists who supported the Haeckel movement in Germany had abandoned their materialistic theories. He cites the fact that the most eminent men whom Haeckel arrayed on his side in his "Riddle of the Universe," could not longer be counted with him. "In reading the book," says Prof. Orr, "as I have had occasion to do, and write about it also, I was impressed by this, that nearly all the great scientific authorities that he quotes, and certain of them quoted in favor of his opinions, changed their view thirty or forty, or twenty-five years ago. He mentions Virchow, Du Bois-Raymond, Wandt and Prof. Romanes. The attitude of these scientists indicates clearly that there is a drift from scepticism to faith.

In recent years there has been undoubtedly a drift of religious thought in regard to the composition of the Bible toward the position held by the radical critics, modifying the old ideas much. The notion that the Scriptures, especially those of the Old Testament, are more an evolution than a revelation, seems to have become quite popular. The effect of this conception has greatly lessened popular reverence for the Bible. More recently, the opinion of conservative critics has turned the current of feeling back again. Many of the extreme views of sensational critics have failed to really move the old foundations. Scholars of high repute have made bold to deny their ultra theories. As an illustration we might cite the case of Delitzsch's interpretations of the Babylonian discoveries. He claims that the Scriptures of the Old Testament can be readily explained as a mere adaptation of the teachings found in Babylonian literature and are not special revelations to Israel. Not a few scholars have met this theory with strong arguments in opposition. Prof. Kuyper, of the Free University of Amsterdam states the conservative view. He says, "There are no reasons for making any material concession to the radical critics of the day. The claim that at bottom the religious contents of the Old Testament are only the natural product of man's religious genius can not be supported, and those meditating theologians who endeavor to repudiate such fundamental doctrines as that of man's fall, make undue concessions to the clamor of materialistic philosophy. Recent results of investigation confirm the Bible claims of the original monotheism of the Semitic peoples, and even if it should prove true, as Delitzsch claims that the name of Jehovah is already found in the cuneiform literature, that would only emphasize the primitive purity of the Semitic religion. A any rate, actual facts fairly interpreted do not prove an evolutionary process in the development of early religion, but rather the opposite—a deterioration from something originally good to something worse."

There was a time when hasty deductions like those given above would be world by Dal much unce

than they have today in determining the general trend of thought in estimating the value and authority of the Bible. Not long since, Prof. James Robertson, of Glasgow University, on his address to his old students, entitled "Five and Twenty Years in a Hebrew Chair" said: "In so far as the prevailing school of criticism has given a verdict on the significance, quality and history of the Old Testament religion I am free to give it as my opinion that the verdict is mainly wrong, and that as time goes on it will be found inadequate to the case. And it is because I believe that a great deal of the partition and rearrangement of documents proceeds upon a mistaken verdict as a presupposition that I hesitate to accept the so called 'ascertained results of criticism.'"

Such conservative views of eminent scholars have held in check the current of opinion which for awhile was strongly away from the old view of the value of the Old Testament's authority in religious matters. There is now a reaction which will no doubt result in re-establishing the authority of the Scriptures in the minds of those who have been misled by superficial criticism. Hence we may look for a more intelligent and more enthusiastic faith in the Bible.—Watchman.

A New Creation.

So intimate and vital is the relation in which the believer stands to Jesus Christ that the writers of the New Testament can only express it by the phrase "in Christ." The words will bear an interpretation that is almost literal, for if Christ is our Saviour we can truly say that he is all about us. He is beneath us, for he is the foundation on which we rest. He is beside us, for he is our friend and helper in temptation, perplexity and sorrow. He is above us, for he has passed into the heavens and our hearts are lifted thither continually by his promise: "Where I am there shall also my servant be." With Christ beneath, beside, above me, enfolding me on every side, it is not too strange a thing to say, "I dwell in him."

When this wonderful relationship is established it produces results no less wonderful in the life of him who is "in Christ." There takes place a new creation, the man in Christ becomes a new creature. The result is wonderful, but it is not unnatural. Remarkable transformations take place through the influence of one life upon another. A great temperance reformer who was once a drunkard had the current of his life turned by the touch of a kindly hand and the sound of a friendly voice. Men have often been saved and enabled by the companionship of wife or friend. And if a human life, imperfect at the best, can thus uplift and bless another, what may we not expect for one who keeps company with Jesus Christ?

When a new creation has been formed it necessarily manifests itself in many ways. Old things pass away; they become new. New relations are established with God. One's thought of God, one's attitude towards him, is changed. Guilt and fear are banished. The soul which shrank from the presence of a king and law-giver now seeks with joy a father's face.

In the new creation the man himself is changed. That which may have ruled his life as the supreme and final motive—ambition, money, pleasure—is dethroned and the constraining love of Christ now exercises sway. The change of motive leads to change of action. He who dwells in the presence of Christ can no longer associate with the vile; a body which is the temple of Christ's spirit cannot be surrendered to the evil one to be made an instrument of sin.

A new relationship is established also towards one's fellow-men. For those who are together in Christ are joined by a bond more close than any other, and they must act towards one another with all brotherly love.

The fabled fountain of perpetual youth had power to make the aged young, to bring back vision to the failing eyes and vigor to the trembling limbs. More marvellous is the transformation when a man, poisoned and defiled by sin, bathes in this fountain of divine renewal, when by faith he enters into the life of Jesus Christ and finds instead of guilt and condemnation, pardon, peace and life eternal.—The Presbyterian.

Religion and Morality.

We are accustomed to the thought that religion and morality often times do not mix as they ought. We laugh at the negro who goes from his fervent camp meeting and pays an unnecessary visit to his neighbor's hen-roost on his way home. Familiar to us is the story of the grocer who would rise from family prayers and give directions to his clerk to water the milk and sand the sugar. All probably know of those who are far more fervent in prayer than they are in paying their just liabilities. It comes about because there is not a proper conception of the relations that religion and morality should bear to each other. Hence instead of their coalescing and each influencing the other, are kept separate and apart in too many and too frequent an instance.

But there is another phase of this matter. Religion may sometimes not only fail to mix with morality but becomes positively antagonistic thereto. There is a passage in Mr. John Morley's life of Mr. Gladstone, as given in one of the latter's letters which is very suggestive on this point. It