

With this panting of the soul for hidden treasures, the Christian cannot remain stationary. His will be an insatiable "hunger and thirst" for new acquisitions in knowledge, until he come into the glorious presence of his God and Saviour;—of Him who evinced, by the influence of his religion not merely upon our spiritual illumination, but by its obvious and immeasurable benefits to human knowledge and science, the truth of his own emphatic assertion, "I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD."

THE SATURDAY PREACHER.

No. IX.

RELIGIOUS INSTABILITY.

GENESIS xlix. 4.—Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel.

These were the words of the dying Jacob to his first-born son; and they convey a lesson which it will be profitable for Christians to reflect upon. They advert to a disposition to which even Christians are prone,—but which Christians should struggle against, and implore the grace of God to enable them to overcome,—"unstable as water, thou shalt not excel."

How lively and beautiful is this image! Who that has witnessed the suddenness of the transition from the peaceful calm, from the unrippled tranquillity of the sea, into the tumult and dashing of the mountainous waves,—but must be struck with the force and correctness of the dying patriarch's similitude!

But thus unstable, is his prophetic declaration, none shall excel; and of this result of instability of character, we perceive the certainty, in all the pursuits of life. In them we know that no excellence is to be attained, if not without ability and diligence, certainly not without perseverance: no approach to perfection in any mechanic art, or elegant science, or learned profession, can be made, without that untiring devotion, that zealous application, and that steady perseverance, which is so opposed to the object of the patriarch's censure.

And precisely so, in a higher and more important acquirement;—in that growth in grace, and advancement in spiritual knowledge, which, as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, and as candidates for heaven, we are called upon earnestly to make. To a similar purport speaks our blessed Saviour, "No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." No reluctant, wavering adherence to the cause of him who died for us, is consistent either with the magnitude of the privileges we possess,—with the soul's devotion which we owe to him,—or with our own advancement in the principles and works of godliness. No reluctant compliance with the Gospel's solemn precepts of self-denial and self-examination; no divided regard between the unseen treasures of the future world and the specious allurements of this one; no such division of the soul's affections—no unstable, unfaithful attachment like this to the Saviour's cross, will entitle us to the glorious reward of the Saviour's crown.

It were impossible to enumerate, in such narrow limits, the various ways in which this prejudicial instability of Christian professors is evidenced; but I shall endeavour to draw attention to a few.

One is,—a want of systematic attendance upon the duties and ordinances of religion. And here we shall discover a close analogy to subsist betwixt our mortal and our spiritual part. The body—if we would maintain its strength and preserve its health—must receive a regularity of nourishment:—to deny all sustenance to it on one day, and to grant to it a surfeit on another, would soon prove the means of undermining its vigour and bringing it to a premature decay. Nor is the same observation inapplicable to the necessities of the soul. This also must be fed with the "food convenient for it:" to this the regular nutriment, adapted to its peculiar wants, must not be denied. The soul's health can only be maintained by strict and undeviating regard to those devotional exercises which the word of God reveals as its constitutional support. And with the soul's health, therefore, a broken, irregular, occasional attendance upon those holy duties is utterly inconsistent. I think I can appeal to the experience of my Christian brethren, in proof of this; and receive from themselves the admission, that the more the duty of private and public prayer is omitted or interrupted, the more distasteful it becomes; and that the only sure way of gaining the hearty interest of their minds and spirits in those solemn services is to apply to them so earnestly and so frequently that they become part of the essential business of life. We may pray fervently to day; but if for many succeeding days we should omit that duty altogether, is it not a proof that the spirit of prayer, and the feeling of piety, and the love of God, must then have taken their flight also? And if so, can there be a doubt that thoughts and feelings of a *contrary* tendency will have usurped the empire of the breast, and enthroned themselves in the unstable heart? And who, need I ask, is most likely to be benefited by attendance upon the ordinances of God,—he who comes, sabbath after sabbath, to the Lord's house, with an humble desire and effort to make every word he there hears applicable to his own condition,—or he who is only drawn thither upon rare occasions, or at lengthened intervals? To the one, it constitutes a business—to the other a mere pastime; to the one, a means of implanting and nourishing all the graces with which the Christian should be adorned—to the other, perchance, an occasion of mere solemn trifling.

But suppose that a better motive prompts even this rare-attendance; it cannot but fail to keep up the tone and temper of sound religious feeling: any favourable impression that has been made will soon be lost or forgotten, unless the obliterating cares and engagements of the world be as soon as possible counteracted by a resort to the means of having the mind informed, and the spirit quickened in its duty. He, indeed, that has once been sensible—truly and deeply sensible—of the healing and refreshing influence of the waters of salvation, will often resort to their reviving fountain: he who has felt the invigorating power of the bread of life, will often apply to that heavenly nutriment: he who is duly alive to the soothing and comforting influence of the ordinances of God, will cry out, like David, for the courts of the Lord's house; and he that joins, with a Christian's awakened love and comfort, in the dying memorial of his Saviour's passion,

will often seek participation in the strengthening influence of that hallowed ordinance.

Here, too, I must advert to the pernicious effects of an unsettled habit of resorting to various modes of worship, and to a variety of religious teaching; for sensible as every Christian minister must be of the imperfections of the spiritual counsel the best instructed can offer, one thing we can freely and fearlessly recommend,—the efficacy of our public form of prayer to enliven and maintain in the Christian worshipper the power and force of genuine spiritual dispositions. This efficacy, in its fullest extent, cannot fail to attend these pure and chastened prayers, if they be joined in with the proper attendant feeling of devotion. But I need not, even on the point of religious teaching, scruple to interpose a word of exhortation as to the disadvantageous tendency of an indulgence of "itching ears." All know that a frequent change of tutors is injurious to the youthful disciple, in the progress of ordinary education; and that a firm adherence to one uniform system of learning, even of moderate excellence, will achieve better and speedier results than the periodical adoption of all the changes, perchance improvements, which the boasted 'march of intellect' may offer. So will it undoubtedly prove with the Christian learner:—he, assuredly, will find it his interest, as productive of more certain improvement, to adhere as much as possible to one system of religious instruction and to one manner of imparting it, provided that system be based upon Christian truth. By change and variety, the taste may be gratified and the fancy pleased; but to sound, substantial progress and improvement, that love of "hearing some new thing" is undeniably adverse.

The instability of which the dying patriarch spoke, as respects at least our religious training, may be ascribed generally to two causes. One is *enthusiasm*, which soon weakens its energies and exhausts its strength: the other is *indolence*, which will not bring its native powers into wholesome exercise, but resorts to the lulling charm of variety.

It is a great mistake, although it be one into which many well-meaning persons fall, that a very great excitement is necessary to the birth or growth of spiritual feelings. Some excitement must, indeed, be expected to exist, when such objects for the awakening of our feelings are presented as the love of God and the love of Christ; but any excitement which goes far beyond the standard tone of feeling must either be short-lived, or will produce an unhealthy, unnatural condition of the mind and feelings. I do not, by any means, mention this as a discouragement to liveliness of feeling on this momentous subject, which, God knows, is not in general too highly elevated; but as a warning to its well-meaning devotees that such extravagancy of feeling is a fruitful cause of the instability whose errors I have been endeavouring to point out, and is therefore incompatible with the hope and desire, in real religious acquirement, to excel.

Indolence, the other opponent to the same important advancement, is engendered usually by a feeling of selfishness,—by that fondness for ease and aversion to labour, of which self-love is the certain parent. While, therefore, to the one class I would repeat the apostolic admonition, to "think soberly;"—to the other I would address this startling exhortation, "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead."

But in striving to profit by the dying Jacob's caution, we must often strengthen our resolutions by appeals to the throne of grace. We must often renew the "vows of God" which are already upon us; trim our lamps; gird up our loins; and burnish our Christian armour for the conflict. No supineness, no wavering, no halting or lingering, can consist with the progress of the Christian heavenward. But by heartily embracing, and firmly persevering in the Christian cause, we may, with hope and confidence, claim our birthright; we may anticipate the blessed result of our adoption through grace; we may, for Christ's sake, regard our God as a reconciled Father; and look forward to be "joint-heirs with Christ" in his kingdom of glory.

E. R.

To the Editor of the Church.

OXFORD, U. C., May 10th, 1838.

REVEREND AND DEAR SIR,—Having been much engaged previously to my journey to this part of the country, I have been obliged to defer until now replying to the remarks in your 45th number. As you observe, my former letter was simply one of respectful inquiry. It was not my desire to enter even on a defensive, certainly not an aggressive controversy, in case of a friendly reply on the point in question. Your candid disclaimer of any intention to class the Wesleyan Methodists of this Province with the fanatics and enthusiasts against which your censures had been levelled, is all I could wish for, so far as that is concerned. And though I should have been glad of some generous expression, from the respected editor of "The Church," of a friendly feeling toward us as a body of Canadian Christians, who have laboured long and largely for the moral and religious good of the country, yet I am by no means insensible of the courteous manner in which my own humble professions of a friendly feeling toward your Church were acknowledged. At the same time that I should have preferred a kindness in which my brethren could have felt themselves included to any which might be construed to be of a merely personal application.

The Rev. Egerton Ryerson informs me he has taken up that part of your editorial article which bears on the proceedings of our Canadian Methodist Church in relation to the Clergy Reserves, from which I would in consequence so much the more readily retire, since he is so much better able to discuss that matter than I feel myself to be. Yet with your permission, it is my intention to trouble you with a brief avowal of my own view on the question; to which I feel the more strongly impelled from the circumstance that you seem to think my Canadian brethren have taken in some respects an anti-Wesleyan standing on the subject; and which I diffidently hope to shew is a misapprehension of their real position.

A kindly understanding, and an affectionate bearing towards each other, among all the various communities of genuine Christians is what every intelligent follower of the Redeemer must necessarily desire to see. And to my own feeling it would

indeed be most gratifying that such a state of things between the Church of England and the Wesleyan Methodists, should partake rather of a more special than of a merely general character. It has long appeared to me that there are to be found many powerful considerations, mutually to urge on these two communities the intentional and cordial maintenance of such a kind of relationship between them.

In the earlier days of Wesleyan Methodism it was desired and hoped by our venerable and immortal founder, that our Religious community should entirely merge in the Established Church of England; of which it is well known he was a regularly ordained minister and ardent admirer. It was his fondest wish that the multitudes gathered through his instrumentality from a thoughtless and an ungodly and a neglected population, should be received into the communion of the venerable Establishment. The Rev. Robert Alder, like a true son of the venerated Wesley, expressed a kindred feeling as characterising the connexion in after times. And in the former days, had the parties involved been so disposed, such a measure would have been possible, and perhaps attended by some happy results. With great deference however to the sacred judgment of such a man, yet, with the advantages of the knowledge of subsequent events, I am myself led to the opinion, that the consequences of a disappointment, in that respect, which was often painful to that honoured servant of God, have been far more beneficial at once to the Church, the Methodists, and the world, than any which now appear likely to have arisen from the most ample realization of that favourite wish of his noble, generous, expanded, and anti-schismatic spirit.

It is to be hoped that the clergy of the present day, connected with the Church of England, will not now blame the Methodists for a state of separation, which the cruel persecutions and still more objectionable characteristics of too many of "their fathers" persisted to produce, in defiance of the most persevering adherence to their church of thousands upon thousands of the early members of our Societies, who were habitually assailed in her sanctuaries, and driven from her altars, to make the best provision they might be enabled to make for their own eternal interests and those of their children. With these circumstances of "olden times," the reverend editor of the Church is not to be supposed to be unacquainted. But, were I subpoenaed, I am prepared, however unwillingly, to give the most irrefragable evidence, before "the men of this generation."

Still, as it respects an absolute incorporation of the Church and the Methodists as one body, were the two parties solicitous for such a kind of union,—which I am not prepared to say is the case with the members of my own church,—reasons are not wanting, and to be found in the present circumstances of both the parties, to satisfy every candid and pious churchman that such a union now would be as undesirable as it would be found to be impracticable. It is felt that this is not the time and place for the enumeration of those reasons. But an occasion may, some day, be presented, for an inoffensive statement of them, as they appear to present themselves to my own mind. It should seem, therefore, that separate we must now continue to be; unavoidably so. But, I would affectionately ask, are we to scowl defiance or to deal out anathemas upon each other on that account? Is there to be no reconciliation after a century of injuries? May we not become "distinct as the billows, yet one as the sea?" Or, to adopt a metaphor of higher sanction, is it impossible for our two communities to be separate as are the members of the body, and yet feeling united to one living Head; one vital current flowing alike in each and all, and having "the same care one for another?" 2 Cor. xii. 25.

Fain would I invite the leaders of the two parties, to advance still farther in front of their respective hosts, if indeed they are in advance already, and on the central ground of undisputed love to hold a friendly parley, explaining their mutual demands and agreeing on the premises of an undisturbable pacification.

For my own part I should be sorry to conclude it to be an absolute impossibility for the Church of England and the Methodists of this Province to maintain with each other the most amicable relations of good will. In this I am united by some of my most respectable and intelligent friends, who feel the force of those motives to a pacific temper which may be drawn from the state of the world, and the conduct and temper of our Divine Master, as well as from a sense of what will be most conducive to the maintenance of our own personal piety. "For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work." James iii. 16

In giving expression to these feelings, some persons may misunderstand and even suspect my motives. But it is not difficult to prove that expressions of kindness on our side are purely disinterested. As it respects myself, I am, by the grace of God, and ever have been, a Wesleyan Methodist by choice and on conviction. I should not deem it an advantage to leave my own communion for that of any other in the whole world, under any circumstances whatever. No, Reverend Sir, I am rather thinking that ere long I may be promoted to an unmerited station in the kingdom of heaven above; and fain would I cultivate, as well in myself as in my fellow Christians, a greater degree of assimilation to the only temper of that bright world, the goal alike of all who endeavour consistently to sustain the Christian profession on earth.

As a friend of peace, permit me to state my concern,—kindly expressions towards the Church of England having recently originated on the part of my friend Mr. Ryerson,—that the respected Editor of "The Church" should have spoken of that utterance of sentiment in terms which might seem to imply doubts as to its sincerity. May I hope, in that respect also, this real intention has been misunderstood?

At the same time I am not disposed to sacrifice any of my principles nor to dishonor any of my friends. And to such of the latter as are in circumstances to exercise "patience with me," I will promise to leave an ample legacy of remembrance to that amount.

I remain, Rev. and Dear Sir,
In Christian regard,
Yours respectfully,
W. M. HARVARD.