

fundamental, transforming character, like the first conversion coupled with the genuine new birth? And if it be not, shall we not indeed mean by using the same term, we assume that it is?

I am aware that the Lord said to Peter: "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren;" but this is a very special usage, meaning only when thou shalt be brought back from thy sin by penitence and pardon. In this case, justifies the usage now in question, then there may be not only a second conversion, but the hundredth—as many as there may be great sinners into which a Christian may fall and yet be restored.

Again, Authority for the doctrine of a second conversion will be sought in the great Protestant baptism of the Holy Ghost. I reply to this: (1) There were special reasons for marking this first great effusion of the Spirit very signal and demonstrative, yet even as to the original "one hundred and twenty," the change was not called a second conversion, and could not have been so called with propriety. (2) Their first conversion (the "three thousand") were told that upon their repentance and baptism they should receive the Holy Ghost. Hence their first conversion and their second were not distinguishable. They had no lower Christian life before they entered upon the higher. That is to say, this distinction is not elementary, but a distinction of every convert from that day to this. If properly taught, they receive the Holy Ghost in precious baptisms at the first, and may retain them from the first, even to the death. His first conversion and his second would thus become one and the same. The nature of the case, and the fact, necessarily for a first conversion which shall lack the baptism of the Spirit, and a second at some subsequent time, which shall bring it. He may have them both at once. Nothing in the nature, either of the Holy Ghost, or the Spirit's functions, forbids this and requires a first conversion without this baptism, and a second with it.

INDIFFERENTISM

There is a devout sentiment in which ever sect found (and that charity which never faileth believes they are found in all) a deep and growing conviction that the spirit of sect is contrary to the spirit of Christ, that it is a force the nearer to the weakness of the Christian Church. The growth and active prevalence of this sentiment is our hope for the future. But while we rejoice in the increase of an unsectarian spirit, we must be ever lest we fall into another error of still more dangerous tendency.

There are not wanting those who, while they sincerely deprecate the prevalence of the spirit of sect, still assume with unshaking confidence that the division of Christian people into numerous sects is an inevitable consequence of religious liberty, and must therefore be as lasting as the Church of God on earth. They therefore conclude that their own sect is to be maintained in all the future, as one of the tribes of Israel, and determine to adhere to it, and to their children to adhere to it, and to make converts to it from without whenever in their power. And yet they feel bound to repress any decided preference of their own sect over any other which they regard as Evangelical, and especially to avoid any open expression of such preference, and to disavowance it in their brethren. They regard any attempt to defend the system to which they adhere, and to point out the errors of other systems which differ from it, as a manifestation of a bigoted spirit, which tends to mar the peace and harmony of the one family of Christ. To call any attention to the matters which divide Christian denominations, seems to them a diversion of man's minds from essentials to non-essentials, and an occasion of religious controversy which they regard as always dangerous. One may adhere to his sect, but to adhere to it conscientiously and from earnestly expressed conviction, is to be a sectarian bigot. And if one's own sect should fall into a minority, and another sect should need and demand the whole ground, he ought cheerfully to give up his own little preferences, and fall in with the majority, provided only that majority is Evangelical.

I cannot sufficiently deprecate such views of the question of sect in the Church of Christ. It is not true that earnest convictions and outspoken utterances and defenses of our opinions on such matters is an indication of a bigoted and sectarian spirit. It is truly believed that the Apostolic mission is of the very essence of the Church of Christ, that the power of the bishop is directly derived from God, so that all who refuse submission live in rebellion against God, that man ought, with those convictions, to be a conscientious prelatist, and to insist on submission to Episcopal authority as the imperative duty of all Christians. In defending his position, he is not acting as a bigot, but as an honest man. We may wonder at the delusion he lives under. We may do what we can to waken him from the nightmare that is on him. But we have no right to reproach him as a sectarian. The High-churchman has no claim to our respect which I willingly concede to him. He adheres to the Church as a divine institution. He has not given it over to the domain of expediency and convenience and custom. He has not bowed the knee to the modern Baal. The same may be said of one who adheres to the narrowness and bigotry to what is commonly called Baptist

close communion. I may be, I am, astonished that he can believe as he does. But his position is conscientious. I have no right to call him a sectarian and a bigot. The only question between him and me is, whether his creed is true or false.

Let us suppose that in any one of those towns that are conscientiously overworked with churches, a goodly number of Christians belonging to different denominations, have become thoroughly convinced that the rivalries and antagonisms, the distinctions and weaknesses, the sects and parties, are no longer tolerable, and that they have themselves devoted to seek a remedy, to inquire how they may lay aside forever all their rivalries, and come into full cooperation in all the work of the Lord. There is but one possible course of procedure which promises them the best hope of accomplishing their desire. They must not forsake the Master. They must not in any particular disregard His known will. But they must cease to impose on each other any mere human devices. If they can unite in obeying all which they esteem the ordinances of God, and in respecting all the ordinances of man, the desired union is possible; otherwise it is impossible.

Let us now suppose, that, pursuing the inquiry in this spirit, they have come to a cordial agreement, and are united in earnest co-operation in all Christian work, would they be chargeable with a sectarian spirit if they were members for the church of their choice? Was it not an unsectarian spirit which led them to form it, and to lay aside their former zeal for its growth and prosperity? And will it render them any more liable to the charge of a sectarian spirit, if it should happen (as happens inevitably will), that this church of their choice coincides in all essential particulars with that polity which ceased the Atlantic in the Margines? May not, then, one be zealous for some form of the church, not because he is a sectarian, but because it is good? If I am rightly informed, the Church of the Disciples in New York, Dr. Hays' work, was organized in this very way, and they allowed

with the tenacity of a drowning man grasping the only plank that can buoy him up amid devolving waves. Let us all be done with such jawling. Let us set the man in this matter. If we have no good reasons for our denominational preferences, let us give them up, and stand shoulder to shoulder with all the Lord's host in this great conflict. If we think we have good reasons, let us frankly own them, and subject the whole question to the ordeal of a manly and Christian discussion. Let us no longer be indifferent in our words and on a few great occasions; but let us be in all our ordinary and daily religious life.

Nowhere, perhaps, is this indifference so prevalent as among us Congregationalists. From our point of view, this is deeply to be regretted for the past, and depressed for the future. If our conception of the church is that in which all the Lord's people inevitably unite and coalesce, whenever they devoutly seek to be one in Christ Jesus; if it is the solvent before which the compact structures of ecclesiasticalisms are to melt away, and the whole church of God to the natural structure of a common faith and a common love, why should I have lingered for more than a half-century on the left bank of the Hudson? And why should its friends hesitate or delay to carry its principles and to organize churches after its model, from the lakes to the Gulf, and from the Atlantic to the Pacific?

CHRIST OUR BEST FRIEND

Until we compare Christ with our human friends, we cannot realize how infinitely superior to them He is. They are not always with us. The necessities of this earthly life often keep loving ones apart. Duty calls them to different spheres of action, and widely separated places of abode. They may be as better than life itself, and yet be unable to help us in the hour of our need. And we are constantly liable to a wider separation than any pertaining to the earth. We may be called to another world; or they may be taken from us, and be left to look for their sympathy in vain.

But Christ is all powerful, can be with us when we need His aid, and we know that He will live and reign forever. He is our friend, and if we give Him our love, He will remain our friend through all the changes of time and the ebb of eternity. When we call, He will hear us, and will give without measure His sympathy and love. He will be with us in sickness and sorrow, and the sunshine of His love will cheer and gladden our hearts. And when we are called to leave the world, and enter upon scenes as yet unknown, He will give us strength and consolation, and receive us into His presence with joy. Let us give our purest love, and consecrate our lives to the service of this true and everlasting Friend.

HUMILITY IN YOUNG CONVERTS

I not long ago met a man who had recently indulged hope. On inquiring as to how he was getting along, his prompt reply was: "First night of my life." This was spoken with a self-confidence that, in the circumstances, did not strike me very favorably. The man had years before indulged a like hope, and made a public profession. But he had only dis- honored it, and had been disciplined and excommunicated. And now that, in a time of general religious interest, he had taken up hope again, it became him to be humble and self-doubting.

And such a spirit is becoming in all young converts. They have not yet attained. They are but babes in Christ; and it is well that they should realize it, and feel it. I like better the spirit of that lamb of my flock, who, on being asked in regard to his spiritual state, innocently replied: "I find that I can't do anything in my own strength." A very important lesson this to learn; and it is well that it be learned at the outset, and never forgotten. It is in accordance with the Saviour's own teaching: "Without me ye can do nothing." It was a saying of the great apostle: "When I am weak, then am I strong." He was "strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus."

Selections.

A NEW YORK MINISTER AND A BIGOT.

The *Hempstead, N. Y.* Register gives the following graphic account of a recent sermon of one of our Episcopal clergymen, and has for ever given preference to his words as such in New York City, though the great number, as usual, has kept its mouth as yet to his own as Hempstead.

On Friday of last week, Dr. Price had occasion to visit the city, while he went to officiate at the funeral of Mrs. E. W. Taylor, at St. Ann's Church, in Eighteenth Street. After calling at one or two places, he repaired to his own residence, 100 West Twenty-second Street, which was closed for the summer and consequently unoccupied. He unlocked the front door, entered an adjoining parlor, and three of his dauntless. While waiting for a moment, he heard the tread of footsteps coming down the stairs. Going to the door, he saw who might be, he was suddenly confronted by a powerful man, who pointed a revolver at his head and threatened, if he moved, to blow his brains out. So sudden and unexpected an encounter caused Dr. Price involuntarily to retreat towards the front door, but the burglar intercepted him, seized hold of him, dragged him into the parlor, and pressing the muzzle of the revolver against his forehead, by way of intimidation, ordered him to sit down.

The reverend gentleman, finding he was at the mercy of the would-be assassin, depended for his safety upon

Indifferentism.

Rev. J. M. Sturtevant, D. D., Jacksonville, Ill.

The Congregationalist (Boston, Massachusetts, Wednesday, September 20, 1876; pg. 2; Issue 38. (1960 words)

Category: News

Gale Document Number:GT3004402810