

The Religious Remembrancer.



The wages of sin is death: but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.—ROM. vi. 23.

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FOR THE REMEMBRANCER.

PRAYING SOCIETIES.

A few thoughts on PRAYER-MEETINGS amongst the members of the Protestant Episcopal Church, presented to those who object to them, by a Minister of that communion.

Dear Brethren,

As we believe, if the New Testament is true, that social assemblies were held for prayer, and other religious exercises by the primitive Christians, we would not discourage them to save our right hand, or insure universal popularity. The proof is so clear that it cannot be controverted by those who read the Scriptures, unless they come under the description of those, "who having eyes see not."

It will not be difficult to prove also, from the best authority, even from Scripture, that such associations have been spoken against, are not innovations in our Church. They have met with the approbation and countenance of the most intelligent clergymen in different ages and countries. If they have been irregular, (to use the cant term of the present day) it is not known by the person who here takes up his pen upon the subject. But admitting the charge, would any disorder which might be practised in them, prove that they were necessarily irregular, and that they should be banished *in toto*? If we are to reject every thing which is abused, we must bid adieu to Christianity. An argument which proves too much, proves nothing. The best things, corrupted, become the worst, but we must not injudiciously have nothing to do with that which is good.

It is universally acknowledged, that no Canon* of our Church forbids Prayer-meetings, and such associations as some of her ministers and members are in favour of; and it is believed by many, that we have no more right to form Canons to prohibit them, than we have to gag and blindfold our people to keep them from conversing upon the subject of religion, and searching the Scriptures. The 20th Article of our Church says, "It is not lawful for the Church to ordain any thing contrary to God's Word written."

Bishop Moore,† although not an advocate for those meetings, has said, that "every clergyman must use his own discretion, as to the means most likely to promote the welfare of his parish, so he does not violate any established rules."

At the time of a revival of religion in the State of Maryland, their Convention in 1802, having passed several excellent canons to discipline the Church—

"Resolved, That it be recommended, and it is hereby recommended to the ministers of the Church on the western and eastern shores, to meet in voluntary associations on their respective shores, three times in every year; that they labour at these meetings, by frequent and earnest preaching and prayer, to awaken people to a more lively sense of the important concerns of religion; encourage themselves to a more ardent zeal in the work of their holy calling; and form such rules for their government at these associations, as to them may appear expedient: provided nothing be ordained contrary to the discipline of the Church."

* The Rules of Order, &c. of the Protestant Episcopal Church are called *canons* from the Greek word *kanon*, a rule of conduct or behaviour. It occurs Gal vi 16, Phil iii. 16.

† The Rt. Rev. Benjamin Moore, Bishop of the State of New York.

At these associations there was an evident increase of zeal among the clergy, who found no difficulty in commanding congregations two or three days together in the same place. The laity were much excited, and after the usual exercises, would gladly remain to hear the word of exhortation. See also an interesting letter upon this subject, published in No 34 of the Remembrancer.

Upon one of these occasions, the venerable Bishop of the Diocese* attended, and recommended several rules for promoting religion, which some of the clergy, by their signatures, engaged to observe. They give a decided and powerful sanction to Prayer-meetings, &c. Two of them will be brought forward, as sufficient for the purpose under our consideration at the present time.

ix. That the minister shall use his endeavour, to have little societies established in different parts of his parish, for catechising the ignorant, religious discourses, prayer and singing. These societies to meet once a week or fortnight, as may best suit with their other engagements.

x. That the minister shall select out of his congregation a small number of persons, who shall be communicants, remarkable for experienced prudence, humility and zeal, to act as a stated council for promoting religion in the said societies, one of whom, at least, shall attend at each meeting, and regulate the affairs of the same, to prevent, if possible, enthusiastic heats; or light, trifling, or worldly conversation in them.

As those rules are of a public nature, and the Bishop cannot be ashamed of them, the whole of them, with suitable observations, may be seen by any person who desires to inspect them. Other very high testimony might be adduced, if it was considered necessary.

But why should there be such a clamour against the laity, who hold those meetings, and the clergy, who give them their support? Our lay-members might attend a horse-race, the play-house, (the devil's chapel, as it is called by Archbishop Tillotson) the card-table, the ball-room, &c. and not be so severely reprov'd; and a clergyman might openly say that these, or most of these things are harmless and innocent amusements and recreations: might mix with the world in their pleasurable entertainments: might be guilty of great irregularities, to the disgrace of his character, his profession—his Church—without causing some of his brethren to frown upon his conduct as much as if he declined drinking unnecessarily, and went to a place "where prayer is wont to be made." O tempora! O mores!

But the principal objection may be to *extempore prayer*, that it does not shew respect enough for God. For public worship, a form of prayer is decidedly preferred by Episcopalians, (this is not said to the disparagement of other societies) and in some of the small meetings it is retained. Where a few people meet for mutual edification, it is not, however, considered material as it is the heart, and not the language, which God regards.

The canon which enjoins the use of the service before sermons and lectures, (and very properly, especially where false doctrines prevail) leaves to every clergyman the power of framing a prayer after sermon, if he chooses. Some ministers, both of the Church of England and of the Protestant Episcopal Church, are in the habit of closing with a prayer to suit their sermon; and although they are not disposed to censure their brethren, who

always use a collect taken from the prayer-book, they, for using their discretionary power are by some charged with *spiritual pride*.

Is there not a greater appearance of *spiritual pride* in a minister's composing his own sermon, when so many excellent ones are in print? It is certainly a much greater undertaking to write a sermon, than to frame a few petitions suitable to one. To be consistent, it should be moved that the composition of sermons ought to be prohibited. Perhaps a compromise might be made by such a regulation. The advocates of *extempore* or pre-conceived prayer, might be willing strictly to adhere to the prayer-book, if those who condemn them would be willing to unite with them uniformly in the use of the *homilies*. Thus, the objection which is sometimes urged, that different modes cause the unity of the Church to be broken, might be silenced. But after all that is said, "the soul of unity is love," and without this heavenly cement we are always exposed to divisions. Surely every Episcopalian ought to be diligent in prayer to Him, who maketh men to be of one mind, and let the experienced and judicious not withhold their salutary counsel, for "a world in season how good is it."

Let those, who are inclined to advocate prayer-meetings, and those who do not, cultivate a spirit of love and forbearance. "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil-speaking be put away, with all malice"—"endeavouring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace;" let those who are friendly to them, evince a desire to live upon proper terms with those who are of a different opinion; at the late general conventions it seems to have been natural. But upon some occasions, those who have been denominated *irregular* have had much to contend with, both abroad and at home. Other societies, displeased with the high-toned language of some Episcopalians, have been prejudiced against the whole, whom they are tempted to look upon as mere formalists. And although the greater part of the most influential among the clergy have been silent, if they have not altogether approved, some of their brethren have endeavoured to throw stumbling blocks in the way:—On the other hand, these have generally been patient sufferers, but duty may yet compel them to speak;—the cord which binds them, may be stretched too tight to be endured by those true sons of the Church.

FOR THE REMEMBRANCER.

EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

NO. V.

To every thing there is a season; and a time to every purpose under the heaven. SOLOMON.

Question 2. What is the nature of evidence?

THE calls of indispensable duty, and the irresistible demands of health, having for some weeks past suspended the prosecution of these essays; I find, on resuming the subject, such difficulty in recollecting the train and arrangement of my ideas, that I fear my readers will have lost all their interest, if they ever took any interest, in my humble speculations. It is the continuance of the chase that rouses and enraptures the huntsman, and causes an object of little, perhaps of no value, to engross his whole soul. The mind, like the chariot wheel, catches fire from its own velocity. In the regular and unbroken progress of a discussion, the under-

* The Rt. Rev. Thomas J. Claggett.

standing becomes trained to its exercises, and performs them not only without difficulty, but with delight. The materials of thought are all at hand, and orderly arranged; while endless associations unite them with other subjects of business and speculation, of duty and delight: the soul enjoys the full play of all its faculties; and the writer receives credit for all the pleasure that is felt in reading his composition, though by far the greater part perhaps, of the current was derived from the adventitious streams which were flowing in silently and imperceptibly all around. The case is very different when the mind is recalled to an old and half forgotten theme. It is the law of the mind as well as of the body, to move forward with ease and rapidity, while every backward motion is awkward and tardy. The struggle between recollection and invention is painful; and the present use of the intellectual powers is lost in an inefficient and mortifying labour to collect the fallen, and faded fruits of a former season.

I am sorry, that on the present occasion, the unpopular and unpromising nature of my subject offers but faint hopes of resuscitating a cold and expiring interest. The nature of evidence! My reader will say, Does not every one know the nature of evidence? Evidence is just—Just what, gentle reader? For surely if the nature of evidence had been understood, and the Scriptures searched with any reasonable share of judgment, we had never been troubled with the profound writings, nor pestered with the teasing though specious, the unintelligible though lofty declamations, of those philosophers who have arranged themselves under the banner of Infidelity, not so much for want of faith, as for the more deplorable want of common sense. Those gentlemen saw that Christianity was believed to be true by an immense mass of mankind; many of whom were not remarkable beyond other men for oscitancy and error; men who could not be called either weak or superstitious, or credulous.

The simple fact, that men of such a class and character accredited the Scriptures as the lively oracles of God, was so wonderful, so out of all the rules of ordinary computation, that philosophy was called on to assign an adequate cause for so strange a phenomenon. To say they believed the Scriptures on adequate evidence, was to give up the cause of infidelity. To say they were pure hypocrites, Christians only in profession, infidels at heart; was in effect to say that there is nothing in infidelity to make a man honest; that infidels can calmly and on a large scale profess a religion which they do not believe; and that being thus in mass a race of liars, they are entitled to no credit in any case. It was necessary therefore to say, that there is something so *like* evidence, that intelligent honest men sometimes mistake it for evidence, which yet the keener optics of Deists can distinguish from it. The question then was, What is the true, genuine, unadulterated evidence? what is its nature and essence? and how shall we distinguish it from the false and spurious species which have continued to gain currency in the religious world. Philosophy must answer this question. Evidence was *this*, and it was *that*, and a *third* thing, and a *fourth*; but whatever it was, still Christianity was found to possess as much of it as any religion could do; that it was perfectly filled and saturated with evidence. To cut the matter short, as it was determined that Christianity should not possess evidence, it was at last demonstrated that there is no such thing as evidence at all. The logic of this argument is irrefragable. For it is *perfectly evident*, that since there is *no evidence*, Christianity can have none.

A discussion therefore of the nature of evidence is indispensable to a full view of our subject. Indeed, here lies the grand and great difficulty. For any man who knows what evidence is, must admit, on a careful perusal of the Holy Scriptures, that they are amply proved. You may call this, if you will, an *abstract* subject, a *metaphysical* subject,

a *difficult* subject; or by whatever other epithet of degradation you please. Still a knowledge of this subject is essential. We must take the theme as we find it, and make the best of it. CRITO.

New-York, May 9th, 1814.

To the Editor of the Remembrancer,

Dear Sir,

My desire is to promote the cause of Christ, whilst in this vale of tears; therefore hoping it will not be in vain, I shall present to you a few extracts from a small journal which I have kept, in those places where the spiritually blind have received sight, and the dead in trespasses and sins have been raised to life, through the blood of sprinkling: they are the following, viz.—

March 21st. Arrived in Springfield (N. J.) This evening attended a conference with the Rev. Mr. Williams; this meeting is for the purpose of conversing with those persons who are sensibly concerned about the welfare of their immortal souls; one boy with whom Mr. W. conversed was but 13 years of age; here a blessed scene of mourning over the body of sin and death, and exulting thro' the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, was presented; a contrast which is desirable.

Sabbath, March 7th. I this morning conversed with a young man, who has, as he hopes, found the Saviour; he gives some good evidences of it; I endeavoured to direct him, as far as I was able, to the Rock of ages, to build upon that and that alone. I attended a prayer-meeting at noon; the house was large, and numbers left not being able to come in; the great attention and solemnity which is here observed is remarkable; the house of worship is generally filled: Undoubtedly angels are rejoicing in beholding a multitude of prodigal sons and daughters coming to themselves, and, for the first time, made sensible that they have been starving their souls upon dry husks, and rejecting the Bread of Life; and Satan is mourning in disappointment and fleeing from the vengeance of God; glory to God in the highest. I had a conversation with three young women, two of whom had obtained a hope some weeks past, the other was left in darkness, but now she has come out with great joy which is unspeakable and full of glory.

March 28th. I called at a house where four persons were under serious impressions, two of whom have, as they hope, embraced the Saviour, with one of these, who is a young man, I conversed; he was brought to view his danger about six weeks since, was under great distress of mind for a fortnight, when light and joy came to him gradually; he resides in Newark, came here merely on a visit, and was caught in the gospel net; I also conversed with one of the two who are still in darkness, he is a boy about twelve years of age, he has been distressed for six weeks; I asked him if he had been so long considering whether he would accept of eternal life or not? he appears to be sensible of the sinfulness of his heart; that he can do nothing of himself, and no help is to be derived from any other source but Christ Jesus; yet delays to apply for that balm which is in Gilead: I strove to direct him to the Redeemer; to go, with all his sins, and fall at the mercy seat of Christ, giving himself away to him without hesitation, lest the Spirit of God should be grieved at his long delay and depart. I this evening attended a conference; Mr. Williams requested those present who had obtained a hope since the commencement of the revival, to rise, they were counted, the number was sixty-four, after this he desired those that were still in darkness to rise, the number was forty; these are not all by many that are under serious impressions, but merely those that attend one meeting; after the service was ended, the people still tarried, and we conversed generally with those who were greatly distressed; to hear the precious souls weeping aloud for mercy, was enough to melt the heart of stone; shortly after, those that were rejoicing, began to

sing redeeming love with high tuned voices; and those who were weeping, to cry aloud in the greatest agony of mind; some of them had arrived but to their twelfth year; in me this excited singular sensations; I could not refrain from rejoicing with those that rejoiced, and again weeping with those that wept: "this is the Lord's doings and it is marvellous in our eyes."

April 1st. I this evening attended a meeting; Mr. Williams delivered a very affecting discourse, through the instrumentality of which I believe many converts were made: after service, weeping was heard in every part of the house, some however exulting in the belief that their sinful stains were washed away by the precious blood of the Lamb of God.

April 2d. I this morning, after conversing with persons in hopeful circumstance, endeavouring to encourage them in the Christian warfare, was obliged to leave Springfield, the place in which the Lord has been pleased to manifest himself with great power and glory; I presume that three hundred persons are now subjects of this Divine visitation, upwards of a hundred of whom have attained a good hope of an interest in Christ in this congregation: Since the revival commenced here, only six or seven weeks have elapsed; this shows forth the omnipotence of God.

April 8th. In conversing with the Rev. Mr. Finley of Basking Ridge, he informed me that a revival of religion took place in his congregation twelve years since, which continued for two years; this is mentioned for the purpose of shewing the absurdity of the idea with which many are impressed, that a revival cannot continue, at most, but a few months: I believe this is an insidious mean used by the great adversary of souls, in causing the people of God to be less diligent in duty, and after the Lord's visitation amongst them by his Holy Spirit in turning sinners from the hatred, to the love of God and holiness, has been effectual in making them give up their exertions for the benefit of others, as if the harvest was so great that there was no room for the admission of more, and therefore they leave sinners to perish in their sins, and remain satisfied to limit God's work in the conversion of souls: also it is to be feared that many under shepherds are guilty of this. Christian friends, why should you despond, has not God given you encouragement? Will he not hear and answer the fervent prayer of the righteous? yes, he has promised and he cannot lie; therefore be constant in prayer for the continuance of his Spirit, and you will be answered if you pray in faith.

April 24th. I this evening attended a meeting with the Rev. Mr. Philips of Parsippany which was truly interesting; Mr. P exhorted with great fervour, and from appearance with effect, for many eyes were filled with tears and some even sobbed, this causes me to believe that the glorious work is also commencing here; may it prove thus.

Apr 125th. I this day saw the Rev. Mr. Grover of Caldwell, who informed me that the revival was quite general in his congregation; upwards of a hundred persons had already begun to trim their lamps and prepare for the coming of the Lord.

April 26th. I was permitted, on my way home, to make a short stay at Springfield. I understood that upwards of a hundred persons have lately been before the Session as candidates for the communion, a number are still in darkness, who it is hoped and believed will very soon also profess to the world that they are on the Lord's side. How wise are the councils of God! In a number of those places which I mentioned to you in my last,* the Lord has been pleased to send the pestilence; here the people have had two visitations, the former (which was the revival) appears to have been sent to prepare the way for the latter. The Lord knows what is best for his people.

A person of my acquaintance in this city, a few days since received a letter from the Rev. Edward