

A SERIES

OF

TRACTS

ON THE

DOCTRINES, ORDER AND POLITY

OF THE

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PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

IN THE

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

EMBRACING

SEVERAL ON PRACTICAL SUBJECTS.

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“RIGHT SOON.”

IT was in Doylestown, Pennsylvania; and around the public worship of that Sabbath, there seemed to cluster more than the usual discouragements of the Christian ministry.

The heat was excessive—one of those prostrating days, which leave neither preacher nor congregation energy sufficient to perform, with interest or satisfaction, the holy duties respectively assigned them.

The cholera had for some time been making its advances; and at our county alms-house, a few miles distant, two of every three of its unhappy inmates were fast being numbered among the victims.

After I had proceeded some distance in my sermon, the usual stillness of the assembly was interrupted by the tread of a young man, in his farming apparel, who was seen to enter the house. Without removing his hat, he advanced along the aisle with sober but steady step; and ascending the pulpit stairs, he leaned over, and said in distinct though subdued tones—“Mary R. is dying; she wants to see you RIGHT SOON.”

In conformity with long established custom, that Sabbath of the year was appropriated to the Bible cause. The specific object then before us, and its advocacy, the supplying of the destitute of our county, seemed,

in no small degree, to preclude the introduction of such topics as might have fallen in with the state of alarm and anxiety in the congregation.

Added to all this, as is often my allotment, I was borne down with an insupportable head-ache, and thus disqualified for either the performance of the day's duties, or enjoyment in them. And having mentioned, what had been plainly seen by all, that I was too unwell to attend an evening service, or to fulfil, in the afternoon, my promise to visit the Buckingham Sabbath-school, seven miles distant, where also appointment for preaching later in the day had been made, the assembly was dismissed, and began languidly to wend homeward their way. Through the seasonably proffered kindness of a parishioner, I was saved from a mile's walk, under an almost vertical sun, and was soon set down at the gate of the house where Mary was believed to be dying. She was a thoughtful girl, in her eighteenth year, of a worthy family connected with the society of Friends; but she often attended on my ministry. We had long known her to be of serious mind; and more recently were constrained to regard her as one truly inquiring—What must I do to be saved?

I found her still able to converse in broken sentences, with an humble, but calm reliance on the all-sufficient atoning sacrifice of Christ, as the only hope of her salvation. We prayed, we wept; we talked of sin and ruin, of redemption and heavenly joys; and, amidst our supplications and our tears, she ceased to breathe.

Taking the well-known and shady by-path through

the woods, I slowly returned home, depressed, because of all I had felt and seen, with this reflection—a Sabbath unprofitable to myself, and lost to the cause of religion.

The calls of usual and ever-pressing pastoral duty, soon left that day of depression, with the funeral scenes that followed, in which it was my mournful pleasure to share, as many others through which I had passed; claiming a common remembrance, tinged with sympathy for those who mourn, and sorrow that one so worthy to be loved should die so soon.

Months went round, when business leading me beyond the limits of my pastoral charge, I stopped at the public house of a small village; and giving directions respecting my horse—for I am conscientious against driving to the *minister's*, if I can otherwise “regard the life of my beast”—I stepped into the church near by, and enjoyed half an hour with the pastor and a few of his people, convened on matters pertaining to the congregation.

On returning for my vehicle, a young man, whom I did not recollect having before seen, but supposed to be connected with the hotel, accosted me in language and manner more than usually respectful:—“From Doylestown, I think, sir? I was in your church some time ago, and was very much interested in the subject of the sermon, ‘the Bible not a cunningly devised fable,’ and the manner in which it was discussed. You may recollect, sir, that various objections against the Scriptures being a revelation from God, were stated, and answers proposed to these objections.”

Not being able to determine from what the young

man said, whether he was interested on the side of the objections, or of the answers, I endeavoured to draw him out more fully. He gave me, in substance, the following:—That he was from the extreme corner of the State, having come to Bucks county on business, in which he was then engaged. Neither of his parents was professedly pious. His mother's family-connections were some of them church-going people, but his father was an avowed unbeliever. He had himself been mostly with a near relative, who was specially hostile to religion, and who treated with a sneer and bitterness everything like regard for the Bible.

I asked the young man if he considered himself an unbeliever. He replied—"I do not wish so to be. The Bible, undoubtedly, contains a revelation from God; but is it entire an inspired book—a safe and sufficient guide? On this question my mind labours greatly. From earliest youth everything I heard was against the Christian religion and the holy Scriptures. Objections commonly urged against the Bible I have never been permitted to forget, but I heard no answers suggested to these objections. Conscience and my better judgment tell me there is a God, and it seems reasonable that he should reveal his will to us. But the power of youthful training, and the control of established habit—it is not easy to resist the one or overcome the other. The sermon to which reference was made opened to my view an entirely new field of inquiry. The objections stated were among those to which I had so often heard my father and other relatives make appeal; and as you briefly replied to them, and removed the difficulty, it came forcibly to

my mind : Might not all my objections, on fair examination, be in like manner answered, and the Bible stand confessedly the inspired word of God ?”

After recommending, at his request, a Manual and a Tract or two, on the Evidences of Christianity, and for the Inspiration of the Scriptures, and above all the constant and prayerful reading of those Scriptures themselves, receiving an affectionate grasp of the hand, and being earnestly importuned that I would remember him, when I prayed for such as in bondage desire to be released, I went on my way, and have not been permitted to see the young man since.

Often have I been led to contrast the events of that desponding and sorrowful Sabbath, with what advancing time and more calm reflection have brought to view. And instead of a day unprofitable to myself, and lost to the cause of religion, I am constrained to regard it as specially encouraging and instructive.

Among the many trains of thought which have been thus awakened, I mention these few :

1. WE ARE TAUGHT NOT TO BE HASTY IN DECIDING THAT OUR LABOUR IN THE LORD HAS AT ANY TIME BEEN IN VAIN.

All may to us appear dark and discouraging ; but in the work of the gospel, through the agency of which God “withdraws man from his purpose,” it is the divine pleasure usually “to hide pride from man.” The parent, the Sabbath-school teacher, the minister of the gospel, in despondency, are constrained each to say, I have spent my strength for nought. But wait

on the Lord; even in this life you may be permitted to gather the fruits of your toil. To comfort a weeping family, to point a departing soul to the Saviour's cross, to reach forth the hand and help a stranger, who begins to long for the liberty wherewith Christ makes his people free; and to feel ourselves humbled in the dust, from a sense of our weakness and unprofitableness in the gospel work, is worth a day of prostrated strength, amidst darkness and conflict of soul.

2. WE SEE THE POWER OF EARLY ASSOCIATION.

That young man's heart was not worse by nature than yours or mine. He manifested unusual candor in weighing the evidences for the truth of the gospel. But he had been brought up in the midst of unbelief of religion, and contempt of a Saviour's death for sinners. He would be released, but he found himself a captive still.

And what a fearful account awaits those persons, who place their own children, or other youth committed to their care, where impressions only of evil can be received! They, too, who know something of the blighting influence of corrupt associations, and yet choose to mingle with profane and ungodly companions, how shall they answer for their contempt of God and ruin of themselves? "Be ye not mockers, lest your bands be made strong."

3. WE LEARN ALSO THE POWER AND THE ADAPTEDNESS OF GOSPEL TRUTH.

A young man brought up amidst the sneers of infidelity, who has been *taught* to look with perfect hatred

on all that claims connection with the gospel, is brought from the extreme border of the State to hear a plain apology for the Bible—not a cunningly devised fable. And in that self-same hour, with all its disadvantages, there is wrought in his soul a holy desire, that he might partake of those blessings he had from his youth known only to despise.

A young woman drops in at times to hear of redemption through atoning blood. On a certain Sabbath her place in the house of God is seen to be empty. The time had come for her to die. But, with simple reliance in the faithfulness of Him whose promises she had loved to hear, calm in a cheerful hope, full of immortality, she bids her friends adieu, and leaves the world in peace.

4. OUR TIME IS SHORT.

The work we have to do cannot be delayed. The young man is placed for the *first* time, as he regarded it, so as to hear the instructions suited to the state of his mind, and the peculiar wants of his soul. That opportunity unimproved, who could tell when another might have been granted? I have enjoyed since that day the privilege of *one* interview with him in relation to his soul's welfare, and only one—likely that will be the last. My agency in personal effort for his good I suppose to have terminated with that brief conversation.

“She wants to see you!” One hour had not passed away, until it would have been too late to point her departing spirit the way to heaven.

Are you *preaching* the gospel? There may be a

hearer there who will never again be so favourably placed for good impressions. Try and come near to that soul. Leave nothing that can be done now for the uncertainty of a future time.

Are you *hearing* the gospel? Whether it shall be to you the savour of life or of death, may be suspended on how you now hear. Make its blessings yours without delay.

Are you disposed at all to be *thoughtful and inquiring*? Improve the present hour. To-morrow may place you in circumstances adverse to seriousness and prayer. It is the messenger of God who tenderly speaks with your conscience; and he would have your answer, that he may bear it with him as he departs. It is the soft persuasive call you hear, of the lost sinner's Friend, whose ear, as none on earth can hearken, regards these faintest breathings of penitential grief and mingled trust.

“Under sentence of thy condemning, but righteous law, I am dying; Jesus, mighty to redeem, bring thy salvation near

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