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Be Strong and of a Good Courage

For forty years Moses led the children of Israel through the wilderness. This was a daunting task, yet the Lord sustained his servant in the midst of difficulties and trials, and notwithstanding opposition from within and without. Under great provocation on one occasion at Meribah Moses struck the rock twice, and for this sin he was not to be allowed to lead the children of Israel into the promised land. "Because ye believed me not" the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "to sanctify Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them." Numbers 20:12. The task of leading the children of Israel into Caanan was to be given to Joshua.

The task allotted to Joshua was little less formidable than that laid upon Moses, as the land of Caanan had to be dispossessed of its inhabitants, such as the Caanites, the Hittites and the Amorites. For this task no ordinary measure of strength and courage would suffice, so that we find the Lord, after the death of Moses, encouraging his servant Joshua in these words: "Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I swore unto their fathers to give them." And again the Lord said to him, "Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest." These were surely words of encouragement to Joshua as he faced the task of taking possession of the promised land.

The need for strength and courage arose from two factors. One was the strength of the enemy. The inhabitants of the land were not to be easily dispossessed of their inheritance and, particularly in the low country, they had the use of horses and chariots. So, too, their cities were walled and could not readily be taken possession of. The other reason why there

was need for strength and courage, was the inherent weakness in the tribes of Israel themselves which came to light so clearly in the wilderness journey; that is, a lack of staying power and a readiness to be cast down in the face of discouraging and trying situations.

The strength and courage needed by Joshua at this time was not so much natural strength and courage but moral and spiritual strength and courage. It was not at this juncture that Joshua was first tried as to whether he possessed these or not. Early in the wilderness journey Joshua had been one of the twelve spies sent to spy out the land of Caanan. His moral and spiritual strength and courage was revealed in the report which he and Cabeb brought back. They assured the congregation that they were well able to take possession of the land. It was not reliance upon their own strength that they gave such a report, but as Joshua said: "The Lord is with us: fear them not."

The exercise of true strength and courage is bound up with obedience to the law of God. The Lord said to Joshua, "Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses My servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest." It is not a sign of weakness but of strength to cleave to the law of God and to yield obedience to Him who is worthy of it. Joseph's rejection of the advances of Potipher's wife was not a sign of weakness but of the highest moral strength and courage when he said "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God." Those who show such courage are valiant for the truth upon the earth. And Joshua was one of these.

How is this courage and strength obtained? Joshua needed to look to the Lord for it. Dependence upon the Lord for all things is God-honouring. To be self-sufficient is God-dishonouring. And such will be left to themselves. But the Lord also directs Joshua as to how he is to be strengthened with His strength inwardly and made very courageous. The Lord says to him, "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do accordingly to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success." This is the secret of moral and spiritual strength and courage. And does this not also reveal the cause of the lack of spiritual and moral strength and courage in our day? Is it not because the Word of God is not read and meditated on by men and women in all ranks of society? But Joshua on his part put the Lord's directions into practice and consequently took possession of the land. That the same spirit prevailed in him to the end of

his days is seen in that final bold challenge he gave to the children of Israel when he said: "Choose ye this day whom ye will serve . . . but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

Sermon

by Rev. Wm. Guthrie

"O Lord, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways and hardened our heart from thy fear?" —Isaiah 68:17.

It is likely, if we all knew how it were with us, and if it were given to every man and woman in this assembly, to know our own sores, and the plagues of our wicked hearts, it is, I say, more than probable, that there would be a very harmonious joining in presenting this unto God, as the matter of our sad complaint, that our hearts are hardened from His fear. But it may be, that it is with the most part of us, as it was with those that Elihu speaks of when he says, "The hypocrites in heart heap up wrath; they cry not, when the Lord bindeth them." Many are bound with the bond of a very hard and obdurate heart. It is an evidence that it hath gone a great length, and is come to a very great height with us, that we are not sensible of our bonds, and are out of capacity to cry unto God, because of this strong binding wherewith we are bound.

Now, these words are very sad words; the very mention of them, especially when they are so descriptive of our own condition, might make our hearts to tremble. It is one of the heaviest and saddest troubles from the hands of God upon men and women, to have their hearts hardened from His fear. And yet the business is not desperate, or past remedy, so long as there is so much softness of heart as to perceive or take up the hardness of our hearts, and to be capable of regretting it before God. Hard softness, as we may call it, is not the worst kind of hardness, or at least it is not the greatest degree of it. But alas! to be so hardened that all sense of discerning or feeling if it is worn away is very sad. Although the people who spoke these words were very far under this stroke; yet the Lord has so graciously set bounds unto it, that it had not gone the full length that it would have done. Hence they take notice of it, and say, "Why hast thou suffered our hearts to be hardened from thy fear, and to be so hard that we should not fear thy name?"

But before we come to any observations from the words, lest the expression should be mistaken, and lest any of our apprehensions should

be intermingled with wrong thoughts of the majesty of God, ye should know and consider,

1. That whenever it is said that the Lord hardens, it is not meant that He does so by infusing any sinful qualities into the heart of man: as it is expressed by the apostle, "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man." For He is incomprehensibly holy, and infinitely removed from being accessory to anything that is sinful in the creature. But,

2. It is said He hardens when He not only permits and leaves the man to the hardness of his own heart, which is natural unto the sons of fallen Adam, but also when He withholds or withdraws somewhat of that grace given to the creature, on which hardness of heart follows; and the majesty of God being under no obligation to give grace unto the creature, either by a natural necessity of Himself, or yet by merit in the creature, that hardness of heart cannot be charged upon Him, nor yet can He be blamed for the withholding of abused grace from them. Besides this, He may present objects occasionally, which may be good, nay, are good in themselves, and yet by the person's own corruption abusing them, they may harden the heart. For instance, professors may make use of the ordinances of Christ, and their own gifts, unto their own hardening. Also, He may give up a person to his own lusts, and to the power or hand of Satan, to be hardened, as a punishment of his former sins and iniquities. As the Psalmist says, "My people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of me. So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lusts; and they walked in their own counsels." And as this may come to a great height in the case of natural men, even so it may be some degrees incident unto the people and children of God.

Having thus premised these few things for guarding against mistakes, ye must look upon the complaint as not being spoken in a way of proud or ill-natured expostulation laying all the blame upon God, and evading or shifting it off themselves; no, the words intimate the Lord's carriage towards the church-members who are speaking here. Nor are we to think that these words are spoken irreverently in the way of complaining of God; but only in the way of expostulation with themselves; as if they had said, "Lord, what have we done that hath provoked Thee to deal thus with us?" There is an insinuation of a desire to know what sin in them it was that had brought on this plague or stroke of hardness of heart, which was grievous to them beyond anything in their external condition and captivity.

Now having taken the words in this sense, we come shortly to draw

some doctrinal observations from them. And,

I. In general, we observe, that a child of God, when in his own proper latitude, will be very diligent in taking notice of God's dispensations about and towards his own heart, and is in some case to make a representation to God how it is with his soul. Oh, how sad is it when God is dealing with our hearts, and yet we are not so much as taking notice what either God or the devil is doing about them! If the Lord reach not the carcase with some extraordinary judgment, heart-maladies never trouble many. It seems to be one of the evils of the time wherein we live, that many, even good folk, are become strangers in a great measure unto their heart's ease and condition. We are so seldom in our approaches to God, in any case to make a serious representation of the posture of our spiritual affairs, but just as if we were in one country, and our hearts in another, we are become so great strangers unto them. But,

II. And more particularly, I observe, that hardness of heart, or heart-hardening, is an evil incident unto the people of God. It is by such that this complaint is made, "Why hast thou made us to err, and hardened our heart from thy fear?" And we think that much hardness of heart, or blindness of mind, could not have seen and felt such a weight; and we think it is with much bashfulness uttered; being spoken by those who before were ashamed, that they could not plead an interest in God as their Father, being so much degenerated from their ancestors. Yet they are necessitated to lay claim to God. They are such as give much credit; as if the look of His eye could redress their condition, and they are in case to observe the former dispensations of God, and to compare them with their present case. They likewise take up a great alteration of His kindness towards them. The case of David is a proof of this, who for near the space of a year was bound up under hardness of heart. Solomon is a proof of this, who for some time was inclined to idolatry. Asa is a proof of this, who imprisoned the prophet, and oppressed some of the people, and under his disease sought unto the physicians, and not unto the Lord. It is probable the time wherein we live affords us likewise many a sad proof of the truth of it. Oh! hardness in part, and in many degrees is incident even unto the people of God. But that ye may the better understand this, we shall hint at a few symptoms and evidences of it. And,

1. Take this for one. When challenges for sin do not easily make impression upon us, that is, when we are more hard to be wrought upon by challenges than formerly we were wont to be, and become like green wood that, you know, is long a-kindling. For instance, when David was in a good case, and his heart tender, he was instantaneously alarmed with

any evil, such as the cutting off the lap of Saul's skirt; but when he was under hardness of heart, there was much ado to get him convinced in general. Though the case was particularly pointed out in the parable used by Nathan, yet that would not do; he takes little notice of it in the way of applying it to himself, until the prophet said, "Thou art the man." And is it not the case of not a few that a challenge doth not so easily grip, or draw blood upon them, as formerly it used to do? And,

2. When challenges are taken with, and sins acknowledged, without persons being so affected therewith, as to be made better thereby, it is true there may be a conviction that will extort a confession, but in this case the eye that sees the sin doth not affect the heart.

3. Another evidence of it is, when a challenge is much more easily put off than sometimes it was wont to be—that is, when the impression of a sin or challenge for sin is easier worn off than formerly it used to be. I think if there were a spiritual dexterity learned of sinking challenges for sin in the blood of Christ, there were no great skaith. But when the challenge is thrown off through deadness, passes away we know not how, or else is forgot before any satisfying views of pardon, our case is not right. It is likely this is very common. We have frequent challenges that things are not right with us; that corruption is strong, and grace is under a decay; but we let them go. Such a course evinces hardness of heart, and hath a great influence in hardening the heart still more.

4. When the conscience hath lost a great deal more of the power of reflecting upon ourselves, or our case, as to what is sin or duty, this is another symptom of hardness of heart. But,

5. There is another great symptom of hardness of heart, and that is, when we are under cross dispensations, and yet prayer is restrained from God. This the people of God, or the prophet in their name, regrets. "There is none that calleth upon thy name, or that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee." The same is signified by Daniel. "All this evil is come upon us, yet made we not our prayer before the Lord our God, that we might turn from our iniquities, and understand thy truth." And,

6. It is another great symptom when fear is in a great measure cast off; yea, this is the first degree wherein hardness of heart doth appear. The soul can scarcely be under any degree of hardness of heart, but it will soon appear in the want or decrease of true fear. Say they, "Why hast thou hardened our heart from thy fear?"

7. A seventh evidence of hardness of heart is when persons become rash, heedless, precipitate, and fearless in worship and in walking, rushing forward without ever considering their own condition, without

fearing lest God's name be taken in vain by them, in their worshipping of Him—or, at least, without fearing lest they should be deserted of God,—strengthening their own hands in their way, as if there were no hazard in people's walk and conversation; taking every little discourse or common tale by the end, without fear of being disposed for worship, or any kind of duty. When folk are become thus fearless, it is a great length they are come in hardness of heart. And,

8. In the eighth place, it is an evidence that there is much hardness of heart in this generation, that there is much fearlessness in our preaching, and that we have in a great measure cast off that reverential fear that we ought to have. We are grown very rash and foolhardy, as we used to say, as if we lived not in the midst of snares and manifold temptations, or as if we had not hearts ready to comply with every snare and temptation. We are not afraid of catching skaith by our excess of mirth and jollity. So that walking in the fear of the Lord all the day long is become a rare thing among Christians now-a-days. Standing in awe to look with the eye, speak with the mouth, and to do or forbear doing anything that may be displeasing to a holy God, without leave asked of Him and obtained. There is little fear of abusing God's goodness, which says that there is little fulfilling of that promise, "And they shall fear the Lord, and his goodness in the latter days."

III. The third observation is, That felt hardness of heart is, in the account of God's children, one of the heaviest and greatest of strokes that come upon them from the hand of God. It is pitched upon here as the worst of judgments. I think their hearts were at their mouths, and the tear in their eyes, when speaking out these words, "Why hast thou made us to err from thy ways, and hardened our heart from thy fear?" Here they do not complain to the majesty of God of their outward calamity, though it was more than ordinary; but this was the stroke that affected them, even hardness of heart. "And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee; for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us because of our iniquities." And "All this is come upon us; yet made we not our prayer before the Lord our God, that we might turn from our iniquities, and understand thy truth."

Now, the reasons why the people of God look upon this as a sad stroke are these:-

1st, The first reason is, because it is a sad and angry-like stroke, and hath somewhat judicial in it. As there is displeasure or anger in a stroke, so it is sad and grievous to a gracious heart. But of all strokes, hardness of heart hath most of God's displeasure in it.

2ndly, Because it borders very near upon the condition of the reprobate. I say it comes near to that which is their lot or condition. God gives up His children unto some degree of a reprobate mind, as He delivers them up to walk in the lusts and counsels of their own heart. Hence it comes to pass, that it is in a singular manner puzzling in that case for a child of God to get himself kept from concluding that he is none of His, and he is ready to say, "My spot or provocation is not like the spot of His children, and consequently my stroke is not like the stroke of His children, but only like that of reprobate or wicked men." And,

3rdly, Because this keeps back from a kindly resenting of all the evils done by them that are labouring under it. Yet though they see and know that they are in the wrong, yet they cannot mourn for them before God. They sin, and cannot repent; repentance is, as it were, "hid from their eyes." So that if a child of God be any time in his own proper altitude, his light always leads him to look upon that as a most grievous stroke unto him.

4thly, Because, while under this stroke of hardness of heart, there is no profiting under any of God's dispensations. But let Him smite as He will, their hearts grieve not. So that they, in this case, may say, "That all this is come upon us, yet have we not made our prayers unto thee."

Use.—For use, I would in short pose you, and desire you to put it unto yourselves:— What think ye of such a stroke as this, and how doth it affect you? Do ye feel it, and think it one of the heaviest and saddest strokes? Do you seriously think that if it were meet for you to enter into a paction with God, ye would be content to take any other stroke from His hand, upon condition that this were removed? If ye were kept tender, and your heart melting before the Lord, it were a good token. Ye will conceive that there is a merciful difference to be discovered betwixt a person that is plagued with hardness of heart, and one who is smitten with it in a kind of fatherly displeasure; that is, there is in the one a looking upon it as a grievous stroke, whereas in the other there is not. And therefore, I would say unto you that are under these bonds, and yet not affected with them, wrestle with Him that hath the keys of hell and death in His hand, that he would loose your bonds. If ye be grieving for it, and yet your grieving is not adequate, or according to your stroke, yet if it be looked on as a stroke, and lamented by you as such, so that ye are sensible of it, and that sense puts you upon making your complaint unto God—such exercise says that there is so much softening as that you have the knowledge of it. A quick feeling of hardness says ye are not given up altogether of the Lord, and "that there is yet hope in Israel concerning

this thing," and ye are in the way of getting your captivity turned back, as the streams in the south, and ye should not look upon your case as desperate.

IV. The fourth observation is, that there will be in a child of God, while under this stroke of hardness of heart, some serious search or enquiry accomplished concerning what hath been the procuring causes of it, and what hath provoked God to smite with this stroke. Therefore they say here in the text, "Why hast thou hardened our heart from thy fear?" Now there will and should be some search made into the cause where there is anything of God. And I would recommend this unto you that have hardness of heart as your burden, that you would take it as a favour from God that it was or is your burden. Perhaps that it is so little your burden makes you question if there be anything promising like in your case and condition. Search then into the causes; and for your help in this, I shall only touch at a few things, which I conceive have much influence for the most part in many degrees of hardening the heart, even in the case of the godly, and which may ere long bring this hardness upon those who are yet in any measure free of it. And,

1. Not taking notice of challenges of conscience and convictions, and trying to quench the motions of the Spirit, gradually harden the heart, and provoke God to let such a person alone. Smiting of this kind may sometimes befall a child of God. But where conscience tables a challenge, oh, then, let it speak out, and smite it not upon the mouth; when God hath given His deputy in the soul a charge to arraign, then it well becomes you to listen to what it hath to say. It is likely that David had his own stirrings of conscience at the beginning of his fall, but because he listened not unto them, he is smitten almost year and day with a benumbed and silent conscience.

2. Another cause may be this: When the Lord's calls are very urgent and pressing upon us to entertain grace, communion, and fellowship with God, when these are borne in upon a person or people, and the soul listens not but lets them pass by, and takes no notice of God's entreaties at all. This is observed by the Psalmist, "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." There is the offer. "But my people would not hearken to my voice, and Israel would none of me; so I gave them up unto their own hearts' lusts, and they walked in their own counsels." There is nothing hath more influence in hardening than this. Hence people that live under an entreating gospel, if they get not God's grace, or if they shift the offer of it, are the most hardened of all people. And when this deadness in the people of God prevails, and they are gadding after their idols, it brings on

many degrees of hardness of heart upon them.

3. A third cause is: When any sin that we know to be a sin is not seriously opposed, but gets leave to sit down upon the conscience unrepented of. As every act of sin strengthens the habit of sin, and disposes unto more acts of sin, so it hardens exceedingly, thrusts out from God, and keeps the soul still under its dominion; and therefore says the apostle to the Hebrews, "But exhort one another daily, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."

4. A fourth cause is: A continual custom of formal worshipping of God, either in public, in the family, or in secret; and when ye use no ejaculations in the time of your worship, and when ye reflect not upon it when it is over. Alas! we are killed in these days with much formality. There are symptoms of it in this place, in regard that there is so much sleeping even among good folk. There is much of it even where that evidence is wanting. And oh, what lightness is in the duty of family worship, even to such a degree that strangers may observe it! And,

5. The fifth and last cause we shall at present observe is: When people get a way of expostulating with themselves in the duty of prayer, and are near the putting of themselves unto the door, making the grace of God that is in them debatable; but then they leave it so, and immediately fall a-talking or laughing, but never mind or ask what becomes of these evils that they expostulated with themselves for; and so lie down, and as it were leave the door open unto wrath, &c. No marvel that, many a night, floodgates should break in upon them before the morrow. This is a very subtle cause. Many good folk have a custom of complaining of evils, who wrestle not with God for their pardon and victory over them; and hardness of heart is one of these evils. It is true there is a number under this evil that never complain of it, and it is a doleful prelude that it will be their death at last; but it is a good token, and some ground of hope, when a person is puzzled about it and burdened with it. The Lord convince us more thoroughly of it, and teach us to make use of the right remedy through Christ Jesus. Amen.

William Guthrie Biographical Sketch

William Guthrie was a native of Angusshire, and was born in the year 1620. He was the eldest of five brothers, four of whom devoted themselves to the ministry of the Gospel. The youngest, John Guthrie, was the author of the sermon that appears last in this Collection.

After a careful secular and religious training, preparatory to his higher

studies for the great work of his life, William Guthrie became a student at St. Andrews. Under the direction there of James Guthrie, his cousin, who suffered martyrdom in 1661, and Alexander Rutherford, he completed those higher studies in moral philosophy and theology, and received license to preach the Gospel. It was while studying at St. Andrews, "by the ministry of that excellent person," Rutherford, that William Guthrie had that gospel "revealed in" him which he was to proclaim to others. "His conversion was begun with the great terror of God in his soul, and completed with that joy and peace in believing which accompanied him through life." His consecration to the service of His Redeemer was marked from that time forward. He freed himself of all worldly entanglements, and gave himself up to labour in love for the salvation of souls, and in zeal for the Divine glory.

On November 7th, 1644, he was ordained minister of the newly erected Parish of Fenwick, in Ayrshire. The moral and religious condition of the people of his charge was such as to require all the consecration that the young minister brought to the discharge of his duties. An utter indifference to religion and many sinful customs prevailed throughout the district. But every proper expedient that could be thought of to reclaim them and make them servants of Christ Jesus, Guthrie employed. In a disguised manner he visited those who wholly neglected ordinances and had never seen him, and conversed and worshipped with them; he promised to make up the gains which some made by working on the Lord's Day if they should cease their work and attend public worship; he mingled with the people generally in their harmless games, and embraced opportunities in this way of speaking words for the Master—shooting arrows at a venture which reached many consciences. The main motive that seems to have actuated him in all his pastoral relations was that of the Apostle—"I seek not yours but you."

His excellence and eminence as a preacher of the Gospel, his faithfulness to covenanted attainments, and specially his opposition to the Resolutioners, drew upon him the envy and wrath of the Prelates. The Archbishop of Glasgow resolved upon his deposition from the office of the ministry, and his extrusion from the manse and rights of Fenwick. Even among the fawning curates it was difficult to obtain a man to carry out the iniquitous resolution. "There was an awe upon their spirits which scared them from meddling with this great man." For the sum of five pounds the curate of Cadder undertook the work, and proceeded with a party of soldiers to carry out the sentence. Guthrie and his attached flock observed suitable services in view of the trying ordeal through which they

were to pass. The text of the last sermon preached by Guthrie in the Church was from Hosea — "In Me is thine help." Having presented himself in the manse, the curate read his commission from the archbishop, and enumerated several offences which he laid to Guthrie's charge. The answer of the accused was fearless and noble. Guthrie assured his accuser and those for whom he acted that the crimes alleged against him were utterly false, that he laid no weight upon their sentence, that those who assailed him were guilty of defection from the cause of Christ, that upon them, in the sight of God, were chargeable all the consequences of the interruption of his ministry, and he continued in these words:— "And here I do further declare, before these gentlemen, that I am superseded from my ministry for adhering to the covenants and Word of God, from which you and others have apostatised." To the curate, who interrupted him by remarking that the Lord's work was carried on before the covenants were entered into, Guthrie replied: "It is true the Lord had a work before that covenant had being; but it is true that it hath been more glorious since that covenant: and it is a small thing for us to be judged by you in adhering to this covenant who have so deeply corrupted your ways." The people were hindered by Guthrie from opposing the sentence by open resistance, and the curate, after going through the form of deposition in a deserted Church, returned to Glasgow, but died in a few days thereafter "of a great torment, of an iliac passion," according to Wodrow, who adds, "Such a dangerous thing it is to meddle with Christ's servants."

Like many eminent ministers and other devoted servants of Christ, William Guthrie suffered long under a sore affliction. He was subject to severe attacks of the gravel, which caused him extreme pain, and brought him down frequently to the very verge of the grave with prostration. Being once in a meditative mood in the company of his cousin at St. Andrews, and being asked what he was thinking of, he replied — "I'll tell you, cousin, what I am not only thinking upon, but I am sure of, if I be not under delusion. The malignants will be *your* death, and this gravel will be *mine*; but you will have the advantage of me, for you will die honourably before many witnesses, with a rope about your neck; and I will die whining upon a pickle straw, and will endure more pain before I rise from your table than all the pain you will have in your death." Yet amid all his racking pains, his Christian fortitude did not forsake him. He was still strong in the Lord. "Though I should die mad," he said on one occasion after a violent attack, "yet I know I shall die in the Lord. Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord at all times, but more specially when a flood of

errors, snares, and judgments, is beginning or coming on a nation, church, or people." The deliverance he long sought for was at length granted him. On the 10th of October, 1665, in the forty-fifth year of his age, William Guthrie entered into the joy of his Lord.

His character is described by Livingstone, partly in the following terms:— "In his doctrine he was as full and free as any man in Scotland had ever been; which, together with the excellency of his preaching gift, did so recommend him to the affection of his people, that they turned the cornfield of his glebe into a little town, every one building a house for his family on it, that they might live under the drop of his ministry." He was "a man of most ready wit, fruitful invention, and apposite comparisons, qualified both to awaken and pacify the conscience, straight and zealous for the cause of Christ, and a great light in the West of Scotland." Though often tempted to leave Fenwick for larger parishes and a more influential position, he preferred abiding with the people among whom he first began his ministry, and where he had many clear evidences of success. Many souls from that parish, saved by his instrumentality, preceded and followed after him to the Church triumphant. "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For ye are our glory and joy."

Letter by Rev. Hugh Martin, D.D.

Edzell, Forfarshire, 18th May, 1875.

My Dear Friend, — I do not know that it is my turn to write, but I do not deal with a covenant of works in that matter, and I suppose you do not either.

I just write to say that my address will be as above for the next few days, having come to take part in the communion services here. I am pretty well at present, and have been working at the proof-sheets of my book—pleasant enough work if only the printed matter did anything like justice to the theme.

I enjoy this place. The pure air straight from the hills is delightful, and I had a walk this forenoon by a stream overhung with trees beaming in the beauteous childhood of their fresh green leaves. I do like the spring, and was thinking to-day how I would fain realize in my soul the gospel declaration "For lo! the winter is past, the rain is over and gone, the flowers appear on the earth, &c. (Song ii. 11-13). I preach to-morrow on the leper's prayer, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean," and hope to get some good of it myself, having some sense of need of His

cleansing me from all sin—sins of heart, of life, and of service. It will be 32 years to-morrow since I was licensed to preach the gospel of the grace of God. Most glorious privilege! notwithstanding all my sin and short-coming.

I do not expect to write you again until (D.V.) after the Assembly, to which I am not looking forward with feelings of pleasure, but rather with forebodings, for there is little seeking of the all-glorifying presence of the Holy Spirit who alone can take of the things of Christ and show them to His servants. Also many of those fathers and brethren to whom the reproaches of Zion were a burden are like "the flowers of the forest, a' wede away." I trust it may not be necessary for me to speak at all, for the question of our ecclesiastical relationships in Scotland is very far from being ripe for any decision on the subject. The foundations of the old National Church are eminently well worth contending for, her rights and privileges well worth fighting for; but the present occupants of the Establishment exhibit so little spiritual power that one is placed in an excruciating predicament in appearing to defend them when defending the constitution of the ancient Church of Scotland. Of course, it is absurd to say that patronage is not abolished, while it is perhaps equally absurd to say that its abolition had redressed the grounds of our Protest in 1843, and yet the Free Church seems quite indisposed to demand such redress, or to desire to be reinstated in the rights and privileges acknowledged to belong to the Church of Scotland by the statutes of 1592, &c. Indeed, some of our leaders are beginning to pooh-pooh the principle of State recognition and aid. But to say that the State is at present under no obligation to maintain a free, faithful, established church, I would require a fresh revelation from heaven to enable me to believe. Therefore, as I have said, the matter is at such a stage just now as that public discussion can do little good, perhaps harm, and if the Assembly would rather devote a day to discussing how best to promote in our pulpits the maintenance of the doctrines of grace, which are going down in Scotland every day, it would "set them better." I read quite lately a sermon preached a few weeks ago by — of — which was simply horrible. The ground of salvation is wholly cut away. The atonement is nothing but self-sacrificing love, no satisfaction to divine justice, no exhausting of the curse, no removal of guilt, nothing to enable a guilty sinner to approach Jehovah, nothing to pacify conscience, nothing to bring either glory to God or peace on earth, nothing but a senseless drivelling parody of goodwill to men. I don't see how I for one can hold my tongue as to this sort of thing. We must speak out. Churches that can put up with such doctrine may go to the wall to-morrow for me. Hoping to hear from you before I return to Edinburgh. — Yours,
&c.,

Hugh Martin.

The Dangers of Self-Deception

by Rev. John Angell James

(continued from page 236)

Secondly, let us now inquire into the *causes* of this delusion.

The first and chief is, mistaking the forms and restraint of a religious education, or a little temporary excitement of the feelings, for a real change of heart. Nothing short of this change is true piety. As partakers of a fallen and corrupt nature, we must be renewed, and not merely a little altered. "Except a man be born of water and of the spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven." The imagination may be interested, the feelings may be moved, the conduct improved, and yet the heart remain unchanged. As long as this is the case, there is no abiding principle, no root of godliness in the soul. Everything but the new nature, will subside; all will fall off but this. It is to be expected that under the exciting preaching of the present day (first half of the 19th century), many will be impressed, seem to be converted, and walk well for a time, who are not renewed; their opinions are Scriptural, their conduct is correct, and they are admitted into the Church upon a profession of their faith: and there is no reason why they should not be. After a while the novelty of religion ceases, their affections grow cold, and although they do not, perhaps, become profligate, or leave the Church, they settle down into a mere formal attendance upon the means of grace, and remain in this miserable state, till death sends them into the eternal world.

The danger arises also from the present external peace and unmolested liberty of the Church. In the primitive days of Christianity, and often since, the profession of religion was attended with imminent perils of goods, liberty, or life. Persecuting laws were in force against those who believed in Jesus, and confessed their faith. They had, indeed, to take up their cross, and it was through much tribulation they entered the kingdom of God. In such circumstances it might be imagined, no man would profess himself a Christian, who was not really one. We can suppose that a prison, and a stake, would be a sufficient check, not only upon hypocrisy, but upon mere nominal religion. But even this was not always effectual — self-deception existed even then. How much more likely is it that it should prevail now, when a profession of piety, so far from exposing us to scorn, contempt and suffering, is a means of procuring for us an increase of esteem and affection? Evangelical religion and an avowal of it, are become almost fashionable. There is now no fiery ordeal

to pass through as a test of our sincerity; no sifting process to separate the chaff from the wheat; and as a natural, though fatal consequence, many profess religion, who are strangers to its power and efficacy.

The wide and easy access to communion, which is afforded by some Churches, increases the danger. It cannot be said of them, as it is of the Church mentioned in the Word of God, that their gates shall be open continually, and shall not be shut day nor night, for they can scarcely be said to have any gates at all; or if they have, there is no porter at the gate, to ask the sign of him who enters. True it is, the entrance ought not to be made narrower than Christ has made it. No unscriptural terms of communion should be imposed; no bars nor obstacles set up to keep out those who have a right to enter in; no scaring usages adopted to frighten away timid minds: but surely somebody, either pastor, or people, or both together, should with holy caution, Christian tenderness, and experienced minds, examine those who wish to be admitted to fellowship; not, indeed for the sake of indulging and showing inquisitorial authority, but for guarding the young disciple against deception; and, also, if he be not correct in his views either of the truth or of himself, for teaching him the way of God more perfectly. If, therefore, nothing more be required, than for a person to declare himself a Christian without any examination, how great is the danger of his "thinking he is something while he is nothing."

The urgent persuasions of ministers and friends, have led many to make a profession of religion, before in fact they had any real religion to profess. A too eager wish to have a large church, and thus to magnify their pastoral importance, and to multiply the proofs of their usefulness, a most censurable, because an injurious kind of ministerial vanity, has made some far too hasty in introducing persons to Christian communion. Others from feelings of false delicacy have encouraged a profession, amidst many suspicions of its sincerity, rather than wound the minds of the candidates, by suggesting a doubt of their real conversion to God. While there are some, who acting upon the supposition that religious impressions are likely to ripen into conversion by the advantages of church fellowship, encourage the subjects of them to come forward and publicly profess Christ before they truly believe in Him. Nor is the conduct of good people less injudicious sometimes towards their relations. A husband feels a pang in his heart at every sacramental season, by the wife of his bosom rising and retiring from his side, when he is about to receive the eucharistic memorials. A wife, who to all her natural affection for her husband, adds a tender solicitude for his eternal welfare, feels it a great and painful deduction from her spiritual

enjoyment, that she goes without him to the Supper of the Lord. Parents long to have their children with them in the fellowship of the Church. Hence, in all these cases, there is sometimes much persuasion used to induce the unprofessing relative to assume the name, and make the confession of a Christian. Now when there is a firm hope, a hope founded on convincing evidence, that the object of solicitude is truly regenerated, and made a partaker of saving grace, this is very proper: but where this evidence is wanting, where there is no good ground, for believing that a spiritual change has taken place, it is a most misplaced and mischievous anxiety to wish such persons to enter into the Church. It is aiding their self-deception, and being accessory to a delusion, which places them at the farthest remove from salvation. They are much more likely to be converted out of the Church, than in it. Many who have persuaded their friends to make an untimely, because an insincere profession, have lived to repent of their mistaken anxiety, by seeing accumulated evidence, that their relative, though a Church member, was certainly not a Christian.

The improper reliance that some professing Christians place upon the strict mode of examination adopted by most of our Churches is another source of delusion. They have been interrogated by the pastor, whose scrutiny had been aided by some of the deacons or members; they have submitted either verbally, or in writing, a statement of their opinions and feelings, as well as a history of their alleged conversion to God, and on this ground have been received and approved as truly regenerated. "Can such judges," they ask themselves, "be mistaken? Such examiners, so competent, so impartial, so particular, form a wrong conclusion? No." Their piety they suppose is thus authenticated, their profession attested, and their safety undoubted. All is right. Such is their reasoning, and when in after times a doubt is raised, raised perhaps on grounds which ought to be conclusive, as to the fact of the falseness of their profession, they silence the voice of conscience, by pleading against its testimony, their admission to the Church after the most rigid examination. Hence, the importance of the pastor's never giving, at the admission of a member, an opinion that he is truly converted, but throwing the whole judgment of the case upon the member's own conscience as in the sight of a heart-searching God; and thus making *him* responsible for the consequences of any wrong conclusion he may draw concerning his spiritual condition.

Look at these things, and learn whence the danger comes, and how imminent the danger is, of self-delusion as to our state before God, and our safety for eternity. It is not saying too much to affirm that *multitudes*

are thus deluded. The dark memorial of the Laodicean Church, is a fearful proof that whole communities of professing Christians may be in this appalling condition. It is one of the cunning artifices, the deep devices, the artful machinations of Satan, to lead men into self-deception, when he can no longer hold them in careless indifference; to ruin their souls in the Church, when he cannot effect it in the world; to lull them asleep by the privileges of communion, when he cannot continue their slumber amidst the pleasure of sin. O how many is he leading captive this way! How many is he conducting to perdition, whom he has first blindfolded with the bondage of a false profession! How many are there in all our Churches who are in this awful state!

(To be continued.)

Ebenezer Erskine's Last Hours

The health of Mr Ebenezer Erskine had, for some time past, been in a declining state. His originally vigorous constitution had been gradually yielding to the increasing infirmities of age. For a short while before his death, he had become unfit to sustain the accumulated load of official duty connected with the public situation which he occupied as a minister of the gospel. His affectionate people, in order to relieve him from the active duties of his office, invited his nephew, Mr James Erskine, to take part with him in the work of the ministry; and this amiable youth was ordained to be the colleague and successor of his uncle on the 22nd of January, 1752. Only a short interval elapsed after the death of his brother Ralph, when Ebenezer was called upon to put off the earthly house of his tabernacle. When he heard of his brother's death, he exclaimed, "And is Ralph gone? He has twice got the start of me; he was first in Christ, and now he is first in glory." In a letter written to a friend soon after this event, he says, "According to the course of nature, it was my turn to have gone off before him. But the will of the good and sovereign God has determined otherwise, and that I should tarry behind for a while in this weary wilderness. It seems I am not yet made meet to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light, but need to be more beaten in the wilderness with the hammer of affliction, before I come to the upper temple and sanctuary. But good is the will of the Lord."

Though he was at this time in a very debilitated state, through the severity of his trouble, yet at the earnest request of his people who were desirous to see and hear him once more before his departure from them, he went from his bed to the pulpit, and preached for half an hour from

these words, "I know that my Redeemer liveth;" he then returned from the pulpit to his bed. This discourse was one which had been composed by him with a view to the improvement of the death of his brother. "His last sermon (his biographer informs us) was literally preached from his bed to a company assembled in his room, where he baptized a child, after discoursing on a text with which he had particularly wished to finish his ministry, viz., Psalm 48:14, 'This God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even unto death.'"

The following account of the holy exercise of this eminent minister, in his last illness, and of the concluding scene of his life, extracted from Dr Fraser's interesting memoir, is deserving of a place in this record.

"His private conversation with relatives and other kind inquirers, during his last illness, was at once cheerful and edifying. He often expressed himself in language to this effect: 'I have always found my times of severe affliction my best times. Many blasts I have endured through life; but I had this comfort under them, a good God, a good conscience, a good cause.' When one of his elders thus accosted him, 'Sir, you have given us many good advices, may I ask what you are now doing with your own soul?' 'I am resting on that word, "I am the Lord thy God."' Another friend, surprised at the serenity and cheerfulness he possessed in the immediate view of death and eternity put the question, 'Sir, are you not afraid of your sins?' 'Indeed no,' was his answer, 'ever since I knew Christ, I have never thought highly of my frames and duties, nor am I *slavishly* afraid of my sins.'

"To several friends who were conversing with him one afternoon, he expressed his assurance of perfect bliss in the following memorable words:— 'O, sirs, my body is now become a very disagreeable habitation for my soul; but when my soul goes out of my body, it will as naturally fly into the bosom of Jesus, as a stone will fall to the centre.' Or, as others relate the anecdote, he said, what is entirely to the same effect, and what probably he also uttered, either then or about the same time; 'I know that when my soul forsakes this tabernacle of clay, it will fly as naturally to my Saviour's bosom as the bird to its beloved nest.' To a relative he one day said, 'While age and infirmities are increasing, I desire to wait all the days of my appointed time till my change come, looking out for the everlasting day of the immediate enjoyment of the Lord, when sighing and sinning shall have an everlasting end.' To another of his relations who came to see him, and began to comfort him thus, 'I hope you get now and then a *blink* to bear up your spirit under your affliction,' he promptly returned this spirited reply 'I know more of *words* than of *blinks*. Though he slay me,

yet I will trust in him. The covenant is my charter; and if it had not been for the blessed word, my hope and strength had perished from the Lord.' To his beloved children he unbosomed himself in the most endearing manner, mingling consolation with his dying counsels: 'Though I die, the Lord liveth. I have known more of God since I came to his bed, than through all my life.'

"During the night on which he finished his earthly career, Mrs Fisher having come from Glasgow to visit her dying father, was sitting in the apartment where he lay, and engaged in reading. Awakening from a slumber, he said, 'What book is that my dear, you are reading?' 'It is your sermon, father,' she replied, 'on that text, "I am the Lord thy God."' 'O woman,' said he then, 'that is the best sermon ever I preached.' The discourse had proved very refreshing to himself, as well as to many of his hearers. A few minutes after that expression had fallen from his lips, he requested his daughter to bring the table and candle near the bed; and having shut his eyes, and laid his hand under his cheek, he quietly breathed out his soul into the hands of his Redeemer, on the 2nd of June 1754. Had he lived twenty-four days longer, he would have finished the seventy-four year of his age; and had he been spared three months more, he would have completed the fifty-first of his ministry, having resided twenty-eight years at Portmoak, and nearly twenty-three at Stirling." — *Mackerrow's History of the Secession.*

Testimonies for the Psalms in Worship

1. Stephen Charnock

"Human prudence is too low to parallel divine wisdom: what work will human wisdom make with divine worship, when it will presume to be the director of it; whence will it take its measures, but from sense, humour and fancy? Do not such tell the world, that they were of God's Cabinet Council, since they will take upon them to judge, as well as God, what is well pleasing to Him? Where will it have the humility to stop, if it hath the presumption to add any one thing to revealed modes of worship? How did God tax the Israelites with making idols according to their own understanding (Hosea xiii. 2)? —imagining their own understandings to be of a finer make and a perfecter mould than their Creator, and that they had fetched more light from the chaos of the brains than God had from

eternity in His own nature? How slight will the exercise be — ‘God hath not forbidden this or that.’ — when God shall silence men with the question, ‘Where or when did I command this or that?’ There was no addition to be made under the law to the meanest instrument God hath appointed in His service. The sacred perfume was not to have one ingredient more put into it than what God had prescribed in the composition; nor was any man, upon pain of death, to imitate it: nor would God endure that sacrifices should be consumed with any other fire than that which came down from heaven. So tender is God of any invasions of His wisdom and authority.* The praise of God is the choicest sacrifice and worship, under a dispensation of redeeming grace. This is the prime and eternal part of worship under the Gospel. The Psalmist, speaking of the Gospel times, spurs on to this kind of worship: ‘Sing to the Lord a new song; let the children of Zion be joyful in their King; let the saints be joyful in glory, and sing aloud upon their beds; let the high praises of God be in their mouths.’ (Psalms cxlix. and cl.) He begins and ends both Psalms with ‘Praise ye the Lord.’ That cannot be a spiritual and evangelical worship that hath nothing of the praises of God in the heart. The consideration of God’s adorable perfections discovered in the Gospel, will make us come to Him with more seriousness; beg blessings of Him with more confidence; fly to Him with a winged faith and love, and more spiritually glorify Him in our attendance upon Him.

2. Matthew Henry

“We have before us one of the choicest and most excellent parts of all the Old Testament; nay, so much is there in it of Christ and His Gospel, as well as of God and His Law, that it has been called the abstract or summary of both Testaments. They are spiritual songs, words which the Holy Ghost teacheth: the penman of most of them was David the son of Jesse, who is therefore called the Sweet Psalmist of Israel. — (2 Sam. xxiii. 1.) The far greater part of them were penned by David himself, whose genius lay towards poetry and music, and who was raised up, qualified, and Spirited for the establishing of the ordinance of singing psalms in the Church of God, as Moses and Aaron were in their day for the settling of the ordinances of sacrifice: theirs is superseded, but his remain, and will to the end of time, when it shall be swallowed up in the songs of eternity. Herein David was a type of Christ, who descended from Him, not from Moses, because He came to take away sacrifice (the family of Moses was soon lost and extinct), but to establish and perpetuate joy

*Charnock, vol. i p.402. Charnock on ‘Spiritual Worship,’ p.149.

and praise; for of the family of David in Christ there shall be no end. All Scripture being given by inspiration of God, is profitable to convey divine light into our understandings; but this is of singular use with that to convey divine life and power, and a holy heat into our affections. There is no one book of Scripture that is more helpful to the saints than this; and it has been so in all ages of the Church ever since it was written, and the several parts of it delivered to the Chief Musician for the service of the Church. There is, indeed, little or nothing in all the Book of Psalms of the ceremonial law. Though sacrifice and offering were yet to continue many ages, yet they are here represented as things which God did not desire (Psalm xl. 6), things comparatively little, and which in time were to vanish away. But the Word and Law of God, those parts of it which are moral and of perpetual obligation, are here all along magnified and made honourable nowhere more; and Christ, the crown and centre of revealed religion, the foundation, corner and top stone of that blessed building, is here clearly spoken of in type and prophecy; both His sufferings and the glory that should follow, and the kingdom He should set up in the world, which God's covenant with David concerning His kingdom was to have its accomplishment in. What a high value doth this book put upon the Word of God; His statutes and judgments, His covenant, and the great and precious promises of it; and it doth recommend them to us as our guide and stay, and our heritage for ever!" — Mr Henry's 'Preface to the Psalms.'

3. Bishop Horne

"The Psalms have advantages which no fresh compositions, however finely executed, can possibly have; since, besides their incomparable fitness to express our sentiments, they are, at the same time, memorials of, and appeals to, former mercies and deliverances; they are acknowledgements of prophecies accomplished; they point out the connection between the old and new dispensations, thereby teaching us to admire and adore the wisdom of God displayed in both, and furnishing, while we read or sing them, an inexhaustible variety of the noblest matter that can engage the contemplation of man. The offence taken at the supposed uncharitable and vindictive spirit of the imprecations which occur in some of the Psalms ceases immediately, if we change the imperative for the future, and read, not *let them be confounded*, etc., of which the Hebrew is equally capable. Such passages will then have no more difficulty in them than the other frequent predictions of divine vengeance in the writings of the Prophets, or

denunciations of it in the Gospels, intended to warn, to alarm, and to lead sinners to repentance, that they may fly from the wrath to come. If the imprecatory form be still contended for, all that can be meant by it, whether uttered by the Prophets, by Messiah, or by ourselves, must be a solemn ratification of the just judgments of the Almighty against His impenitent enemies, like what we find ascribed to the blessed spirits in heaven, when such judgments were executed.—(Rev. xi. 17, 18.)

“The Psalms of David convey those comforts to others which they afforded to himself; composed upon particular occasions, yet designed for general use; delivered out as services for Israelites under the Law, yet no less adapted to the circumstances of the Christians under the Gospel; they present religion to us in the most engaging dress, communicating truths which philosophy could never investigate, in a style which poetry can never equal. Calculated alike to profit and to please, they inform the understanding, elevate the affections, and entertain the imaginations. Indited under the influence of Him to whom all hearts are known, and all events foreknown, they suit mankind in all situations, grateful as the manna which descended from above, and conformed itself to every palate. The fairest productions of human wit, after a few perusals, like gathered flowers, wither in our hands, and lose their fragrance; but those unfading plants of Paradise become, as we are accustomed to them, still more beautiful; their blossom appears to be daily heightened, fresh odours are emitted and new sweets extracted from them. He who hath once tasted their excellencies will desire to taste them again; and he who tastes them oftenest will relish them best.”—Bishop Horne’s ‘Preface to the Psalms.’

4. William Romaine

“There is another thing relating to the Psalms, I cannot call it an abuse, for it is total neglect of them; they are quite rejected in many congregations, as if there were no such hymns given by the inspiration of God, and as if they were not left for the use of the Church, and to be sung in the congregation. Human compositions are preferred to divine. Man’s poetry is exalted above the poetry of the Holy Ghost. Is this right? The hymns which He revealed for the use of the Church, that we might have words suitable to the praises of Immanuel, are quite set aside. By which means the word of man has got the preference in the Church above the Word of God; yea so far as to exclude it entirely from public worship. It is not difficult to account for this strange practice. Our people had lost sight of the meaning of the Psalms: they did not see their relation to Jesus

Christ. This happened when vital religion began to decay among us. In this situation the hymn-makers find the Church, and they are suffered to throw out the Psalms, to make way for their own compositions; of which they have supplied us with a vast variety, collection upon collection and in use too, new hymns starting up daily — appendix added to appendix — sung in many congregations, yea, admired by very high professors to such a degree, that the Psalms are become quite obsolete, and the singing of them is now almost as despicable among the modern religions as it was some time ago among the profane. I know this is a sore place, and I would touch it as gently as I can with any hope of doing good. The value of poems above Psalms is become so great, and the singing of men's words, so as quite to cast out the Word of God, is become so universal (except in the Church of England), that one scarce dare speak upon the subject; neither would I, having already met with contempt enough for preferring God's hymns to man's hymns, if a high regard for God's most blessed Word did not require me to bear testimony; and if I did not verily believe that many real Christians have taken up this practice without thinking of the tendency of it, and come to consider the matter carefully, they will rather thank me than censure me for freedom of speech. Let me observe, then, that I blame nobody for singing human compositions. My complaint is against preferring men's poems to the good Word of God, and preferring them to it in Church. I have no quarrel with Dr. Watts, or any living or dead versifier; I would not wish all their poems burnt; my concern is to see Christian congregations shut out divinely inspired Psalms, and take in Dr. Watt's flights of fancy; as if the words of a poet were better than the words of a prophet, or as if the wit of a man was to be preferred to the wisdom of God. When the Church is met together in one place, the Lord God has made a provision for their songs of praise — a large collection, and great variety, and should not these be used in the Church according to God's express appointment? Why should the provision which God has made be so far despised as to become quite out of use? Why should Dr. Watts, or any hymn-maker, not only take the precedence of the Holy Ghost, but also entirely to thrust Him out of the Church? insomuch that the rhymes of a man are now magnified above the Word of God, even to the annihilating of it in many congregations. If this be right men and brethren judge: examine with candour the evidence which has determined by judgment, so far as it is conclusive may it determine yours.

“The Psalms are the Word of God, with which no work of man's genius can be compared. His attributes are manifest in every page, and prove the

author to be divine. His infinite wisdom shines throughout, His goodness appears to be matchless, His power almighty, to bless the hearing and singing His Word. In this view of the Psalms, what is there to be put in competition with them? What is like their author? What poetry is to be compared with the Psalms of God? Who can make the singing of any human verses an ordinance, or give a blessing to them, such as is promised, and is given to the singing of Psalms? For what reason, then, are they set aside in Church? Why are the words of man's genius preferred to the words of inspiration? Singing of Psalms is commanded by divine authority, and commanded as part of worship; not left to man's wisdom how to provide for it, but it is expressly provided for in the good Word of God. And is not great contempt put upon this infinitely wise provision when it is quite disused in the Church, and man's word is preferred to it? What would you think of them who should throw aside all the Scriptures and never read it at all in the congregation? And is it not an offence of the like nature totally to neglect a part, a chief part of it, which was recorded for the use of the Church, and in which its members were to sing the high praises of their God? It is hereby treated as useless and good for nothing. A very gross affront is put upon the love and wisdom which revealed this divine collection of hymns, and the Church is deprived of the blessings promised to the singing of them, whereby it is robbed of one of its choicest treasures. If anything be sacrilege, this is. The Psalms are stolen out of the Church, and thereby the members are deprived of the blessings promised to the singing of them; for God will not give you the end if you neglect the means. Frequent are His commands in the Old Testament to sing Psalms, and we have several in the New: for instance, 'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs? These are not different things, but different names for the same collection of Psalms, as they treat of different subjects. How poorly must it dwell in them who slight and despise the command, yea, so far as never to sing any at all.' — Mr Romaine's 'Essay on Psalmody,' p. 110.

Book Reviews

The Unsearchable Riches of Christ. An exposition of Ephesians three by D. M. Lloyd-Jones. Banner of Truth Trust. Price £4.

This publication of Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones has the merits and defects of former productions from his pen. The subject matter covered in these

pages is undoubtedly difficult, and calls for careful reading even out of deference to the painstaking effort on the author's part. While much of the content is sound, stimulating and readable, especially in the first nine chapters of the book, his exposition of verses 16 and 17, on Christ dwelling in the heart by faith, is far from clear. In all fairness to the writer, it should be conceded that he is so conscious of his insufficiency in expounding such a profound passage, that he *suggests* rather than *affirms*. Yet some of his statements regarding the Apostle's prayer for the Ephesian believers, that Christ might dwell in their heart by faith, are contradictory. The Doctor's thoughts on this particular subject are expressed and illustrated in a way calculated to offend the generation of God's children, and possibly adapted to confuse and discourage some of the most saintly and consistent of believers (in contrast it might help readers to read sermon 20 from John Calvin's Sermons on Ephesians.) It may be difficult to pinpoint the source of the confusion in the author's remarks, but I think the following may shed some light. In a believer's experience, the conscious sense of the Divine fellowship fluctuates from time to time, irrespective of any 'special' experience. Christ *dwells* by faith in the hearts of all who are truly born again: it is not unusual for Paul to pray that others may possess what they already have, only to indicate his desire for their enjoyment of greater degrees of such blessings along the line of perseverance and growth in grace: there are bounds which we should not pass when trying to explain the inexplicable.

We found ourselves once and again disposed to substitute a verse of a Psalm for a hymn. The hymn may be contemporary, and suit the author's style better, but the Psalm would be the inspired Word of God.

F.M.

The Three are One by Stuart Olyott. Evangelical Press. Price £1.50

In our view this is one of the best books we have read on the cardinal doctrine of the Trinity. Most attractively written in a simple but telling manner, it gives an excellent resumé of the deepest theological truths. Unlike many who have written on this glorious subject that baffles the understanding of proud man, the author has not attempted to elucidate by the use of analogies. Speaking of the unity in the Trinity he says, 'It is without analogy'. He leans most heavily on Scripture, and then on the admirably clear and cautious statements of the Confessions of Faith. There is only one sentence open to ambiguity. It relates to man's inbuilt sense of God, but does not indicate the 'divine spark', as far as we can

discern. In a day when modern Unitarians and Arians are roaring, this little paperback is well worth the price of £1.50.

F.M.

Notes and Comments

Homosexual Law Reform

The spiritual state of a nation is reflected in its moral state. Consequently, our low moral state is an indication of how far we have fallen spiritually. The extent of our spiritual plight is to be seen in the extent of our moral decadence. Surely only nations ripe for destruction or for awful calamities have ever fallen so low as once highly favoured Britain has fallen. It is surely a sad day that has come upon our beloved land when men call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness.

These thoughts are suggested by the successful attempt in Parliament to legalise sodomy. This brings the law in Scotland into line with the law in England and Wales where this obnoxious measure became law 12 years ago. It is still to be hoped that the House of Lords will take a different view and reject this proposal.

The change in the attitude towards the sin of sodomy has been growing for a considerable time, even church leaders advocating a more relaxed view. In San Francisco, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church were successful in fighting a legal battle over the dismissal of an organist who was found to be a practising homosexual. It is clear, however, that there are strong influences abroad trying to secure the legalising of sodomy.

When we turn to the Word of God there is no dubiety there as to the mind of God towards this sin. That God regards it as a heinous sin is clearly revealed in the Word of God, and particularly in the destruction of Sodom. So, too, is it evident in all reformations in the kingdom of Judah, that this was one of the first sins to be stamped out, and those kings who acted thus are evidently commended for it. May the day speedily come to sin-darkened Britain when righteousness will be exalted within her bounds and when sin will hide its face for very shame.

Other indications of our low moral state are plans for a reform of the law against incest, and the attempt in the Courts at present to challenge the law on obscenity. May these attempts fail.

Illegitimacy

A recent report has indicated that the number of illegitimate births in

Scotland in 1979 had reached 10.2 per cent, the highest figure in the last hundred years. This figure gives an indictment of the permissiveness which is prevalent in the land at present, and is the fruit of rejection of the claims of the divine law. It is a matter to be deplored, and yet it is difficult to see how it can be otherwise in view of the low moral climate prevailing in the nation, and in view of the encouragement to promiscuity given by the media in many ways. We are a nation pure in our own eyes and yet we are not washed from our filthiness.

Crematorium at Inverness

It is gratifying to know that the Inverness District Council have, at least for the present, put aside proposals for a Crematorium which they had been pursuing with other local authorities. One Councillor said that a survey last year showed there was little public interest in a Crematorium at Inverness. It is sad to think that any consideration whatever could be given in the Highlands to this pagan form of disposal of the remains of the dead. It is hoped that the Christian form of disposal of the dead by burial will long continue to be practised in our land.

Archbishop's Visit to Shrine

According to a "Scotsman" report, about 10,000 people were led by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Runcie, on the Anglican pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady, at Walsingham, Norfolk. The Protestant Truth Society organised a demonstration against this blatant mariolatry. The attendance of the Archbishop of Canterbury at this pilgrimage is a clear indication of the camp to which he belongs. May the day speedily come when the Church of England will cast from her all the ritualistic and Romanist trappings with which she is presently defiled so that God may be worshipped in her midst in a way that would be pleasing to Him.

The Act of Settlement

Four Scottish Labour M.P.'s have declared their intention of introducing a Bill to change the Act of Settlement. By the terms of the Act of Settlement the Prince of Wales must renounce the throne if he is to marry a Roman Catholic. Speculation about the Prince marrying a Roman Catholic Princess has brought the matter to a head, but Buckingham Palace had denied these rumours. Also the Ulster Secretary is alleged to have given a promise to Protestant leaders there that there would be no change in the Act of Settlement to allow such a marriage.

Whatever the outcome of this Bill, and it seems unlikely that the

Church of England would agree to it because of the Sovereign's headship of the Church of England, it is clear that there is strong pressure today from certain sources for the relaxation of the legal safeguards to our Protestant heritage. It is to be hoped that these undermining efforts will fail, and that Britain will be preserved from ever again falling under the rule of a Roman Catholic monarch.

Church Notes

Committee Meetings D.V.

The following Committees will meet at Inverness Church:-

Tuesday 7th October

9 a.m. — 10 a.m. Church Extension.

10 a.m. — 11 a.m. Church Magazines.

11 a.m. — 12 noon Religion and Morals. Sabbath Observance. Welfare of Youth.

12 noon — 1 p.m. Publications.

1.30 p.m. — 2.30 p.m. Training of Ministry.

2.30 p.m. — 4.30 p.m. Finance.

4.30 p.m. — 6 p.m. Church Interests.

7 p.m. — 9 p.m. Jewish and Foreign Missions.

Wednesday 8th October

2.30 p.m. — 4 p.m. Dominions and Overseas

Presbytery Meetings (D.V.)

Southern: At Glasgow on 16th September at 6 p.m.

Northern: At Dingwall on 23rd September at 2.30 p.m.

Skye: At Portree on 14th October at 11 a.m.

Western: At Laide on 11th November at 12 noon.

Acknowledgment of Donations

The General Treasurer, Mr W.D. Fraser, 20 Daleview Avenue, Glasgow G12 acknowledges the following donations with sincere thanks:-

Sustentation Fund: J.S. Dearness, Orkney, £100.

Home Mission Fund: M.M., South Harris £15; J.S. Dearness, Orkney, £100.

Jewish & Foreign Mission Fund: M.M. South Harris, £15; J.S. Dearness, Orkney, £100; Collection, Vrihe Ger. Gemeente, Urk, Holland, 3015 guilders for Jewish Mission, per Rev. A. MacDonald.

Aged and Infirm Ministers etc. Fund: J.S. Dearness, Orkney, £100.

Organisation Fund: Grahame House, Dornie £1.78; J.S. Dearness, Orkney, £100.

Trinitarian Bible Society: M.M., South Harris, £10.

Home of Rest Fund: Legacy from late Mrs MacRae, Melvaig, Gairloch, £100; Friend, Inverness, £5 for petrol; Friend, Anon., £10.

The Treasurers of the following Congregations acknowledge with sincere thanks the following donations:—

Barnoldswick: Two Dingwall Sisters, £10, Church Building Fund per Rev. D. MacLean; Inverness Friends £40, for Church Building Fund; Anon., £20 for Church Building Fund per Dr MacCuish; M.W., Isle of Lewis £10 for Church Building Fund; Anon., Edinburgh Coll. Plate £40 for Church Building Fund; Anon., £241 for Church Building Fund per Rev. D. MacLean; Y.C., Holland £15 for Church Building Fund.

Fort William: R.N. £50 for Sustentation Fund per Rev. J.A. MacDonald; In Plate £5.

Inverness: North East Adherent £100 for Inverness Sustentation Fund per Rev. A.F.M.

Kyle: Envelope in plate £10 for Manse Fund per Treasurer; Donation £5; Envelope in plate £100.

Laide Anon. £6 for Laide Manse Building Fund per Treasurer; Friend Edinburgh £5 for Laide Manse Building Fund per I.M.; Anon. £1 for Laide Manse Building Fund per Treasurer; Anon. £6 for Laide Manse Building Fund per Treasurer; Friend Strathburn £4.50 for Laide Manse Building Fund per Treasurer; Gairloch Friend £5 for Laide Manse Building Fund per Treasurer; Poolewe Friend £10 for Laide Manse Building Fund per Treasurer.

North Harris: A Friend, Kyles Scalpay £17, £7 for Car Fund and £10 for Church and Manse Property per Rev. A. MacKay; A Friend Stockinish £2, £1 for Car Fund and £1 for Church and Manse Property per Rev. A. MacKay; A Friend, Leacklee £5, £2 for Car Fund and £3 for Church and Manse Property per Rev. A. MacKay; A Friend, Gourrock £10, £5 for Car Fund and £5 for Church and Manse property per Rev. A. MacKay; A Wellwisher, Meavag South £10 for Sustentation Fund per A. MacLeod; A Friend Stockinish £1 for Sustentation Fund per A. Macleod.

Uig: Anon. £10 for Communion Expenses per Envelope in Plate; Wellwisher, Tolsta £3 for Communion Expenses per M.M.; M.M., Stornoway £5 for Communion Expenses per Envelope in Plate; M.M., Stornoway £5 for Church Door Collection per M.M.; M.M., Stornoway £10 for Congregational Purposes per M.M.; Stornoway Friend £5 for Minister's Car Expenses per Rev. D.A. MacLennan; Friends, Stornoway £10 for Minister's Car Expenses per Rev. D.A. MacLennan; C.T., Edinburgh £5 for Minister's Car Expenses per Rev. D.A. MacLennan.

Induction at Laide

For the Laide Congregation, Tuesday, the 22nd July 1980, was to prove an historic occasion when the Rev Donald A Ross who was formerly the first minister of the Bulawayo Congregation in Zimbabwe, and had served on the Mission Field for 6 years, was inducted as the first Free Presbyterian Minister to Laide.

A large congregation had gathered from near and far, and with suitable improvisation by the Deacons' Court and willing helpers in the congregation, all were comfortably seated at the Church. After the usual procedures of the Edict being returned as duly served, and proclamation having been made at the Church Door, the Moderator of Presbytery, the Rev Alexander MacAskill, preached from Hebrews 12;28,29 with special reference to the words, "a kingdom which cannot be moved". A brief narrative of proceedings in the Call was given by the Clerk. "Questions" were put and answered satisfactorily, and the Formula signed in the presence of the Congregation. Then with prayer made, the Moderator, in name of the Western Presbytery, inducted Mr Ross to the pastoral charge of Laide Congregation, and gave to him the right hand of fellowship. The newly inducted Minister was then addressed by the Rev A Murray, and the congregation exhorted as to its duty by the Rev A Macdonald who in the course of his remarks referred to the last Missionary of the Congregation, the late Mr A Maclean whose labours were long and acceptable. There were present from other presbyteries, Revs L Macleod, D B Macleod, J Macleod, F Tallach, Dr J Tallach, J Ross and A Morrison; and, on invitation by the Moderator, the first three mentioned conveyed their good wishes to the pastor and congregation. The Clerk read messages in similar terms from Revs A F Mackay and J Tallach.

With characteristic efficiency the ladies of the congregation provided fully for the needs of all at the conclusion of the service.

As was referred to in the course of the Induction Service, the small congregation at Laide (3 Elders, 7 Members and 29 Hearers signed the Call) has from the time of the Church's inception been faithful and warm-hearted in its appreciation of Gospel ordinances so that it is particularly gratifying to think that they have now obtained the services of a minister for themselves. The token is propitious, and may we pray that the little one would become a thousand, and always keeping in view that numbers in themselves are not the criterion of success, and that

where the few may grow much in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour, that such is well pleasing in the sight of God.

May pastor and people prosper abundantly!

Alex Murray, Clerk of Presbytery

Miscellany

Interpreting action. There is no word or action but may be taken with two hands; either with the right hand of charitable construction, or the sinister interpretation of malice and suspicion. To construe an evil action well, is but a pleasing deceit to myself; but to misconstrue a good thing is a treble wrong—to myself, the action, and the author. Bishop Hall

Assurance of adoption. A person who was an alien, when taken into the family of a citizen and recognised as a child, receives the assurance of his sonship in the smiles, favour, protection and name of the father. Also in the apparel given him to wear, and in the affection, kindness and union with the members of the family. Even so, he who was once alienated from God, but now adopted, has the assurance of his adoption in the Holy Spirit sent into his heart, in the smiles of God upon him, in the righteousness of Christ which clothes him, in the provision of grace that he enjoys, in the protection of grace, and in the love of the brethren.

Civil and sacred adoption. Betwixt civil and sacred adoption there is a twofold agreement and disagreement. They agree in that both flow from the pleasure and goodwill of the adoptant, and in that they both confer a right to privileges which we do not have by nature. But they differ in that one is an act initiating nature; the other transcends nature. In this too, the one was found out for the comfort of them that had no children, the other for the comfort of them that had no father. Divine adoption is in Scripture either taken properly for that act of God by which we are made sons, or for the privileges which the adopted receive. We lost our inheritance by the fall of Adam; we receive it by the death of Christ which restores it by a new and better title. G. Flavel

Purifying influence of adversity. Certain minerals called hydrophanous become transparent when immersed in water, as in the case of one variety of opal. So it is with many a Christian. Till the floods of adversity have poured over him, his character appears marred and clouded by selfishness and other defects. But by God's blessing, trials clear away the obscurity, and give distinctness and beauty to his piety.