

THE
CHRISTIAN TREASURY.

CONTAINING

CONTRIBUTIONS FROM MINISTERS AND MEMBERS

OF

VARIOUS EVANGELICAL DENOMINATIONS.

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CHRISTIAN TREASURY.

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SCRIPTURE FACTS AND ILLUSTRATIONS,

GATHERED DURING A RECENT VISIT TO PALESTINE.

BY PROFESSOR HACKETT, NEWTON INSTITUTION.

THE EASTERN PLOUGH.

This implement is differently made from what is customary among us. It is lightly built, has a wooden colter, is joined to the yoke by a pole, and has only one handle. I first saw it in use in the neighbourhood of Gaza, the country of the Philistines. I often saw the peasants breaking up the soil, and always with a plough having but one handle. The fashion of it recalled to my mind the manner in which the Saviour has expressed himself in reference to the inconstant and faithless disciple. "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."—(Luke ix. 62.) It was interesting to remark this instance of nice and often unobserved conformity to oriental habits. Had the plough in that country been made as ours is made, the language would have been, "No man, having put his *hands* to the plough, and looking back, is fit," &c. A learned commentator, uninformed in regard to this point, would be apt to talk of an *enallage* of number in the above passage, an exchange of the plural for the singular, for the sake of definiteness. As the soil is generally thin and the plough light, the machine glides rapidly over the surface; and unless the labourer keeps his eye continually on it, it is liable to slip aside, without breaking up the earth at all. The Saviour's illustration derives its pertinence from this circumstance. The plough is drawn by oxen, sometimes by camels, and also by cows and heifers. This use of heifers is recognised as an ancient practice in Judges xiv. 18. As the driver of the

team employs but one hand in holding the plough, the other hand is at liberty for carrying a goad. This is a very different affair from our ox-goad. Maundrell, who measured several of these goads, found them to be "about eight feet long, and at the biggest end six inches in circumference. They were armed at the lesser end with a sharp pricker for driving the oxen, and at the other end with a small spade or paddle of iron, strong and massy, for cleansing the plough from the clay that encumbers it in working." Those that I saw I should judge to be quite as large. It is manifest that such an instrument, wielded by a strong arm, would do no mean execution. It is easy to credit the account of Shamgar's achievement, who made such havoc among his enemies with an ox-goad. See Judges iii. 31. We may suppose, (so fragmentary is the notice,) that he was not entirely alone; that some others rallied to his aid with such implements of labour as they could snatch at the moment.

PRAYING ON THE HOUSE-TOPS.

Many of the roofs of the larger houses are surrounded by a wall or balustrade, two, three, or four feet high, so that a person there, while he has a view of the horizon on every side, does not necessarily expose himself to any great extent to the observation of others. It might seem to us, without a knowledge of this fact, as if the apostle Peter was almost chargeable with a degree of ostentation, in repairing to the house-top for the performance of his devotions. The roof in this instance, however, may have had such a protection as I have

A DECLINING CHURCH.

BY WILLIAM S. PLUMER, D.D.

GALATIA (or Gallogrecia) was a district of Asia Minor. It was settled by portions of different tribes from ancient Gaul. Its inhabitants first heard the gospel from Paul and Barnabas, about fourteen years after Christ's ascension. Up to that time they had preserved the language and idolatrous practices of their forefathers. At first, the truth seemed to have free course among them, and miraculous gifts were bestowed on many. This pleasant state of things was soon marred. Sad declensions occurred. They gave up the simplicity which is in Christ Jesus. Their career was no longer one of triumph.

The steps which led to this sad state, and the signs of its existence, should be known. They give us salutary warnings. Modern churches should acquaint themselves with these ancient troubles. Human nature is ever the same. The same or similar causes of deterioration are continually at work. The entire history of religious distraction and apostasy shows but slight variations from the facts recorded concerning the churches of Galatia.

A degenerate church is sure to have lax notions concerning the truth. Men let go the grace of Christ, and go after another gospel, which yet is not another. The sorcery of error is of the most bewitching kind. Like wine it is a mocker. It promises strength, pleasure, victory; but behold weakness, misery, disaster. It holds out false lights. It begets false hopes. It deludes many. It promises them liberty, while it makes fast their fetters. They are ever learning, but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Error is full of sleight and cunning craftiness.

In particular, a declining church is sure to err respecting the vital doctrine of justification. Her members forget that as many as are of the works of the law, are under the curse: for it is written, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them." They remember not that salvation by the works which we do is impossible. If men could be persuaded to stand fast in all the liberty wherewith Christ has made them free, and not be entangled again with the yoke of bondage, what churches we should have!

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He who errs respecting justification, is easily led into other errors. Well did Luther call this the article of a standing or falling church. He who seeks pardon and acceptance otherwise than by atoning blood and imputed righteousness, is in the highway to ruin. The light that is in him is darkness.

A declining church will hearken to false teachers. Eloquence, novelty, plausibility will be more potent over them than truth, reason, Scripture. Woe to him who gives up substance for forms, spirituality for ceremonies, the Saviour for the sacraments. He may seem to begin in the Spirit, but he ends in the flesh. He may multiply observances of days, and months, and times, and years, and rituals; but inward, hearty piety he will lightly esteem. Whenever any man prefers visible signs to invisible grace, he throws away the kernel and keeps the shell. False teachers may flatter his vanity, and he may dote upon them; but they will do him no good.

Like the Galatians, he will also lose confidence in God's real ministers. For their fidelity he will count them harsh, severe, inimical. The very man who was once received as an angel of God, even as Christ himself, the man for whom he once seemed ready, if it had been possible, to have plucked out his eyes, and given them to him, is now esteemed an enemy if he dares to speak the truth. One of the most distressing spectacles is that of men forsaking the safe guides of their earlier days.

Nor can a declining church long be happy. Misery follows transgression. To forsake God, to let go Christ, is to bid farewell to the blessedness experienced by those who find the Saviour and are washed in his blood. He cannot long rejoice whom the truth makes sad. Sin is a lie. Sinners love darkness rather than light. They are like the troubled sea.

Great declension is not inconsistent with much false zeal. One may be mightily stirred up, but not in a pure, peaceable, benevolent way. Some men think that the wrath of man worketh the righteousness of God. When bitterness takes the place of kindness, and fierceness the place of charity, we know whence such tempers come. In a declining church a better spirit

will be but temporary. The most carnal men are often zealous of denominational peculiarities.

Nor can pure brotherly love be long maintained in such a church. In the ears of its members, he would speak as a madman who should say, "I would not give one hour of brotherly love for a whole eternity of contention." Some men are salamanders. The fire is their element—strife is their pastime. Brotherly love perishes with the love of the Father and of the Son. "If ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another. . . . Let us not be desirous of vain-glory, provoking one another, envying one another." Evil habits will regain their former ascendancy. The works of the flesh will begin to be manifest. Conformity to the world will give pain to all Christian spectators.

And the fruits of the Spirit will be sadly lacking. Love will shed no genial warmth. Joy will sing but few songs. Peace will take wings and fly away. Long-suffering will give place to severity; gentleness to irascibility; and goodness to bad tempers and bad manners. Faith will begin to stagger at the promises; meekness will be supplanted by fretfulness; moderation will yield to extravagance. Rash and hard judging will succeed the charity which thinketh no evil. In such a church many will forget that with what judgment they judge, they shall be judged, and with what measure they mete, it shall be measured to them again.

If in this state of things a brother be overtaken in a fault, he will not be restored in the spirit of meekness. Nor will the members bear one another's burdens. The bond of tender sympathy will be broken. They will think themselves something when they are nothing. They will be slow to prove their own works by sure, infallible tests. They will grow weary in well-doing. Little things will keep them from the closet and the sanctuary, from the Sabbath-school and the prayer-meeting.

If any are found in this state, let them awake to righteousness. Let them do their first works. Let them repair to the one Shepherd and Bishop of souls. Their life, their honour, and the glory of God are at stake. Return, ye wanderers—Return, RETURN!

SCRIPTURE FACTS AND ILLUSTRATIONS.

(Continued from p. 4.)

USE OF TENTS IN THE EAST.

THE use of tents in Africa and Western Asia extends back to the earliest times. In Gen.

iv. 20, it is said that Jabal "was the father of such as dwell in tents, and of such as have cattle." Abraham was a tenant of one of these changeable abodes during all his life. Of Isaac we read that he "pitched his tent in the valley of Gerar and dwelt there."—(Gen. xxvi. 17.) "Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents."—(Gen. xxv. 27.) The Hebrews lived in tents during all their sojourn in the wilderness. Though they had towns and houses of stone after they took possession of the promised land, many of them still led a wandering pastoral life, and occupied tents, like their fathers. Such statements as the following are frequent in the Old Testament:—"On the eighth day Solomon sent the people away; and they blessed the king, and went unto their tents."—(1 Kings viii. 66.) "Every man to his tents, O Israel," (2 Samuel xx. 1), was the common watchword for dismissing the people to their homes. "And the people fled into their tents."—(2 Kings viii. 21.) "And the children of Israel dwelt in their tents, as beforetime."—(2 Kings xiii. 5.) Gideon "sent all the rest of Israel every man unto his tent."—(Judges vii. 8.) A great part of the inhabitants of the East live in the same way at the present time. A custom so universal and permanent would be expected to influence the language of the people. Many scriptural illustrations are drawn from this source. The poetry of David, who was a shepherd's son, abounds in reminiscences of his first occupation. Some of the most touching passages in the history of the patriarchs are connected with their tent-life. The great apostle of the Gentiles, it will be remembered, was a tent-maker.

It was my lot to live in one of these primitive abodes for several weeks. This gave me an opportunity to form some acquaintance with this phase of oriental life. The tents used by foreigners are not like those of the natives, in all respects; but they are so far fashioned after the same model, and employed under circumstances so similar, that the traveller is constantly reminded of allusions to this subject in the Bible, and led to perceive a force in them, which nothing but some experience of this kind could so adequately disclose to him.

The pitching of the tent forms the first labour, at the close of the day, in preparing for the night. An upright pole is fixed in the ground, and the canvas is then stretched out around it, by means of cords, fastened at one end to the upper part or roof of the tent, having loop-holes at the other end, through which a stake or wooden peg is passed and then driven into the ground with a mallet. The tents of the Arabs are secured in the same manner, though when occupied by families they are larger, and rest often on a framework of several poles. Every one sees here the origin of a mode of speaking, which shows clearly where the Scriptures were written. It is said of God, as the Creator: "He stretcheth out the heavens