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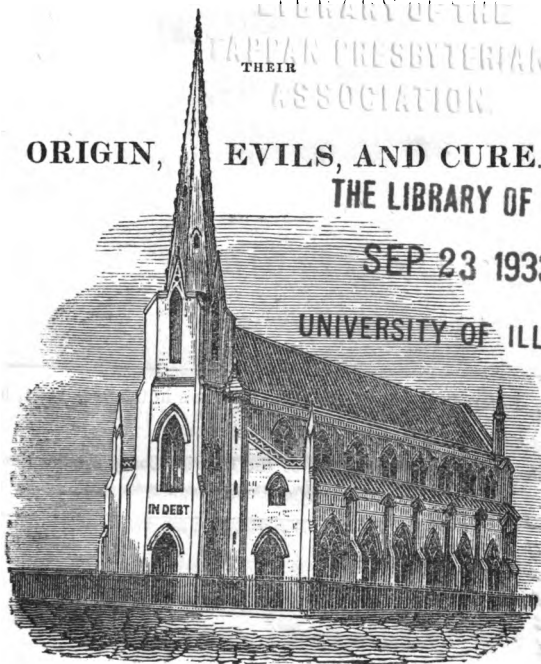
THEIR

ORIGIN, EVILS, AND CURE.

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BY

WILLIAM RAMSEY.

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DEDICATION.

To all who truly reprobate,
As well as those who do not hate,
With perfect hatred, and sincere,
The Debt on Churches; but adhere
To customs based on love of gold,
With all their evils manifold,
I kindly dedicate this work,
Alike to Christian, Jew, and Turk.

W. R.

Philadelphia, March 22, 1851.

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TO THE READER.

THESE letters were written under a feeling sense of the enormous curse of Church Debts. They were all published in the "CHRISTIAN OBSERVER," of this city, except a few of the last pages, which were withheld, because some of our debt-oppressed Christians felt that they had as much light on the subject as their consciences could then bear. That the discussion of this subject has done incalculable good, there can be no doubt. Many have been "provoked to love and to good works" in paying off their Church Debts, who will be slow to thank the Author for the assistance he has rendered them in their work. But he has his reward in the knowledge of the fact, that many of his brethren in the ministry have been delivered, through his instrumentality, from the bondage under which they were made to groan by a money-loving church. They are now republished at the earnest request of many, who hope that the smooth stone, which has slain some of these haughty Philistines, which have defied Israel, may not leave one of the race to curse the Church of God. That they may accomplish this blessed work, is the sincere prayer of

THE AUTHOR.

CHURCH DEBTS.

LETTER I.

Mr. Editor,—In conversing with a friend, a few days ago, the subject of “church debts” was introduced. In the course of the conversation, I expressed the sentiment, that “*a standing debt* upon a church was *a standing curse* upon it,”—that it was not only a curse resting upon that church and congregation, but that it had a most blighting influence upon those who had no connection with the Church of Christ. He replied that he did not think so; but that, on the contrary, it was in many cases *a blessing*. One of the benefits arising from church debts was then mentioned, viz: that it acted as *a bond of union*. We did not stop to discuss the sentiment, but separated; each one in the undisturbed enjoyment of his own opinion.

As this gentleman is one of the most liberal hearted Christians in this city, and is behind no others in deeds of benevolence, so far as God may enable him to act, I have been led to inquire, whether the remark was not made to elicit my views on the subject, rather than to express his own decided judgment in the case. The more I have thought on the subject, however, the more firm I am in the belief of the sentiment, that a *standing debt* upon a church of the Lord Jesus Christ, is a **STANDING CURSE**. The thing is displeasing to God—injurious to the souls of Christians—ruinous to the souls of men—one of the greatest hindrances to the spread of the gospel and the salvation of men—and the grand reason why the flock of Christ is kept in perfect infancy, and hindered from arriving at the fulness of the stature of men in Christ Jesus. This perpetual infancy of the Church in strength, zeal, and power, is not only her *disgrace*, but her *sin*.

I am willing to grant that the views which I hold on this subject are *one-sided*. Nor can I appreciate the strength of the arguments that may be adduced in support of the *blessings* of church debts. The arguments may be powerful in the eyes of those who present them; but, to me, they are like Samson under the shears of Delilah. So long as I have the Bible to sustain me, I am content to be "one-sided" in my views, and am perfectly willing to bear any reproach, or encounter any opposition that may be waked up against an honest effort to cast out this demon from the church of the living God. And with your aid, I purpose to agitate this subject, until it shall be as *disgraceful* in the eyes of the *church*, as it now is in the eyes of the *world*; and until this foul blot shall be wiped out forever from the Church of Christ.

If "church debts" are church blessings, may I not ask for some of your gifted scribes to write them down so plain that all may read, and let the public be enlightened on the subject. But that *church debts* are *church curses*, I trust will appear to all, before we conclude. Take them in what shape you please, either in *Alopathic* or *Homœopathic* doses, the curse is there still, and no power on earth can alter it. It is like the carnal mind; it is enmity against God. It never can harmonize with the will of God. It must be destroyed. These church debts are some of those "little foxes that spoil the vines," and although it may be difficult to catch them, still, we hope, in due time, to save "our vines, which have tender grapes," from their future annoyance.

In my next letter I will endeavor to point out the *ignoble parentage* of church debts. In the meantime, it would be well for those who have a fellow feeling on this subject with the writer, to "read, study, and inwardly digest" that portion of God's word, which is found in the prophecy of Malachi, 3: 8—12.

Yours, sincerely, in the war against *Church Debts*.

WILLIAM RAMSEY.

June 2, 1845.

LETTER II.

Mr. Editor,—I REJOICE that you have given my first letter a place in your valuable paper, and that you have thus introduced this important subject of *Church Debts* to the notice of your readers. I am, therefore, encouraged to proceed. If church debts are church blessings, then let us pray that they may be continued; but, if they are *church curses*, the sooner we can get clear of them the better. My object is good, my motives are good; and I trust that all my remarks will be in the spirit of kindness.—But I desire that they should cut so deep, as to cut out this plague-spot from the Church of Christ forever.

I will now turn your attention to the *parentage* of church debts, and we shall see how much there is in the system to commend it to the patronage of the churches. After a most careful search, I am constrained to say, that the plan of erecting churches professedly for the worship of God, and not paying for them, is

1. *Not of Scriptural Origin.*

The first account which we have in the Scriptures of any building being erected for the worship of God, is a description of the *tabernacle*. The history of this transaction is found in Exodus, chaps. xxxv.—xl. It is briefly this: When Moses was on the Mount, he received from the Lord a command to build the tabernacle, which was to be carried with Israel in their journey through the wilderness. On his descending, he “gave to Israel the command of the Lord,” which was in these words: “This is the thing which the Lord commanded, saying, take ye from among you an offering unto the Lord; whosoever is of willing heart, let him bring it, an offering of the Lord; gold, and silver, and brass.” In compliance with this command, we learn that the people came, every one whose

heart stirred him up, and every one whom his spirit made willing, and they brought the Lord's offering to the work of the tabernacle of the congregation. In this work all the men, women and rulers united. Men were selected to build the tabernacle, and to prepare the various articles of furniture, out of the voluntary contributions of the people. Moses was soon informed that there was more than enough brought for all that was to be made. He then gave the command to the people, saying, "Let neither man nor woman make any more work for the offering of the sanctuary. For the stuff they had was sufficient
v for all the work, to make it and *too much*."

Here, then, we have the account of the first building erected for the public worship of God, of which there is any record. And what is the fact in reference to it? Simply this, that it was built by the free-will offerings of the Lord's people. So far from there being a large debt remaining upon it after its erection, there was more than enough collected to pay for every thing. When the work was finished, it was dedicated to the service of the Lord. "Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle." This house was emphatically the Lord's. No man had a personal claim against it. It was not built by *joint-stock*; nor was it built by money raised on *mortgage*; but by the *voluntary contributions* of a poor people, who had nothing but what they asked of the Egyptians before leaving Egypt; and yet the mere gold and silver used in the tabernacle amounted to about \$550,000. And the presents of silver and gold, which were offered by the twelve princes of Israel, after its erection, amounted to about \$12,300 more. The conduct of the Israelites in this case, gives no sanction to the modern and approved mode of erecting churches.

If we follow the Jews in their history, we shall find that the temple of Solomon, the glory of the world, was also built by *voluntary contributions*. David, before his death, had prepared for its erection about

£940,000,000!! When this building was finished, there was not a farthing of debt remaining upon it. It was built for the Lord, and dedicated to his service, and no man could say that he held any legal claim against the house of the Lord. It was the Lord's, and his alone.

After the return of the Jews from Babylon, they rebuilt the temple. It was done in troublesome times. They were few in number, and poor; and yet they found favor with God in their work. It was ultimately built without their being under any obligation to the Sanballats, the Tobiahs or the Geshenis, of their day. It was built by the free-will offerings of the people of God. So far, then, as the example of the Old Testament saints is concerned, we find that, in no instance, was the house of the Lord left in debt. It is true that, through discouragement in part, they had stopped, for a time, in building the temple after their return; but still it was paid for as far as it was built, and when it was completed, it was all paid. It was then the Lord's house, and no Jew, much less a heathen, could say that he held any claim against the temple of the living God.

When we come down to New Testament times, we find that Christians conducted the worship of God in a very simple manner. An *upper room* or a *private house* was used for their place of meeting. And in times of persecution, the caves and the dens of the earth, or some unfrequented place, was their sanctuary. The first notice that I find of houses being set apart especially for public worship, is at the close of the second century. Tertullian, in his treatise *de Idolatria*. c. 7, says that "they came from the idols into the church—from the shop of the adversary into the *house* of God, in domum Dei." One thing is very certain, they did not erect churches at an expense of from \$5,000 to \$50,000 to hinder them in the work of the Lord, and to vex and perplex those who should come after them. If need be, they sold their own houses and lands, and laid the money down at the apostles' feet for the pur-

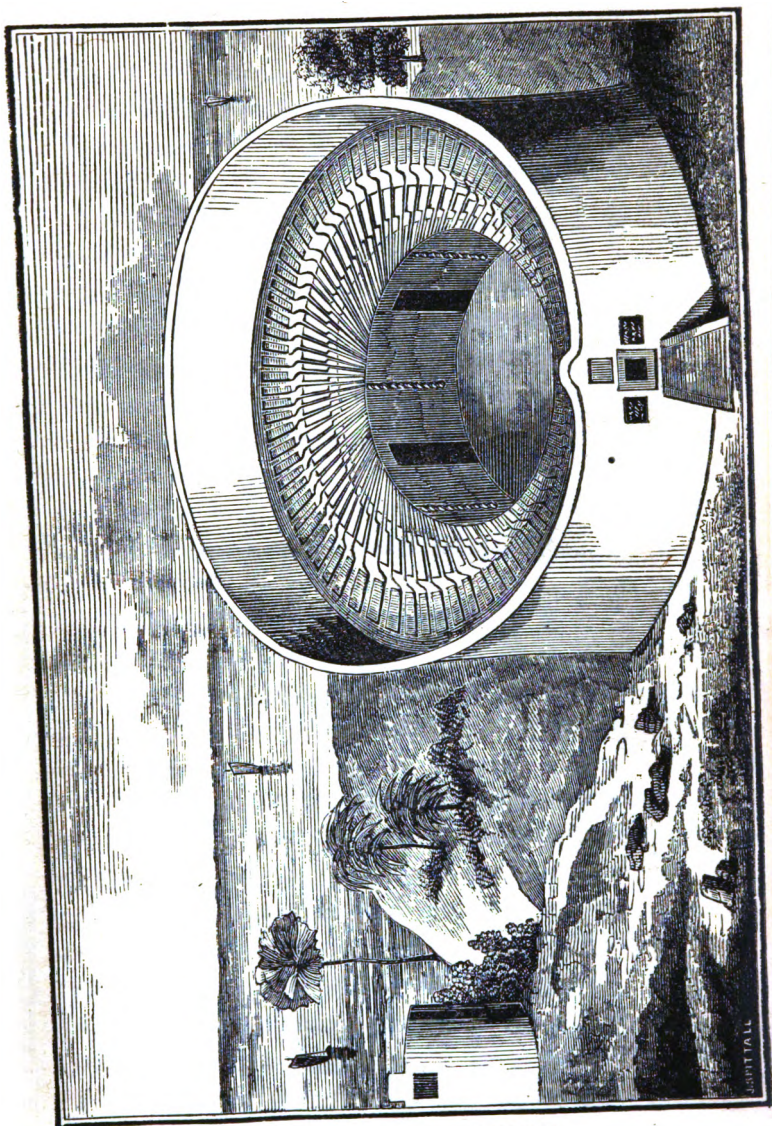
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pose of aiding their brethren. This was more needful than to erect large and costly edifices which might be taken from them at the will of their persecutors. Eusebius tells us that under the reign of Dioclesian the *Bible was burnt*, (this is an old practice of the enemies of God,) and their *churches were demolished*. There were about forty churches in Rome which were destroyed during his reign.

But, when Constantine came to the throne, he gave Christians liberty to repair and rebuild their churches. He not only prohibited pagan worship, but gave command that the Christian churches should be built *higher* and more *capacious* than before; and also that the governors of the different provinces should assist them, and furnish them with whatever was necessary in the erection of churches. So then, down to the fourth century, we have no account that the modern custom of building churches without paying for them, was ever thought of. This work is left for the *improvements* of the 18th and 19th centuries.

2d. *Church Debts* are not of *Heathen Origin*. I have been permitted to enter many of the temples of the Hindoos; the Mosques and Musjeeds of the Mohammedans; the "towers of silence," and the temples of the Zoroasterites; and the sacred caves of the Buddhist, as they are found in a heathen land. I have looked with astonishment at the magnificence of some of those structures, and have admired the zeal, the industry, and the self-denial of those who erected them, and often have wished that their zeal had been devoted to a better cause. But, while I have admired their zeal and their devotion to idolatry, I have at the same time, been reproved, in reflecting that the people of God are far behind them in zeal and effort for the promotion of the cause of Christ. In Bombay, for example, the Hindoo population in 1835 was about 200,000, and they had upwards of 400 temples, or one temple to about every 500 of the inhabitants. But this is not all. *Not one of these temples is in debt*, so far as my knowledge of



PARSEE CEMETERY.

them extends. They have all been erected, either by the former Hindoo government; by the legacies of the rich, or by private contributions. It is so with the Mohammedan population. Their Mosques are all paid for. The Parsee population is about 20,000. They have several temples, all out of debt. The last "*tower of silence*," as it is called, was built by Framjee Cowasjee, on Malabar hill, at an expense of about \$25,000. He then gave it as a *donation* to his nation. Now, when I think of these things, and then cast my eye over this city, and look at her churches of all denominations, (about *one-fourth* enough for the population,) and think of the fact that, so far as I know, there is scarcely one of them out of debt, I grieve that the cause of Christ is so dishonored. As to the Presbyterian churches in this city where is there one, from the First Church, with its immense wealth, down to the humblest mission station in connection with us that is free from debt? * Is there one? If there be *one*, Mr. Editor, please name the church, and let the fact be known that there is religion enough, in at least *one* church among us, to lead them to pay off their debts. We send money to a heathen land with an ill grace, to convert the heathen from the error of their ways, when in *zeal and benevolence* in the matter of *building churches* and *paying* for them, they put us to the blush. When I have urged upon the heathen the duties of repentance and of faith, they have often told me, "Sahib, go convert your own people before you come to us, for they are worse than we are." I have had to confess that many of the Sahibs are worse than Hindoos: but then I have told them, these are not Christians, though they bear the name. It was well that they did not know the sad truth, that even those who gather around the table of the Lord, often do it in a house, whose rafters are splitting under

* To the honor of the members of the First Presbyterian Church of this City, I must state, that since the above remarks were published in June, 1845, they have paid off the debt that was upon their own church, and have nobly assisted other churches in paying off theirs.

October 1, 1850.

the weight of the curse of a church debt, or I should have heard that reproach also cast upon the church of Christ. But, not to dwell longer on this part of the subject, let us look at the *real parentage* of church debts. You will find it, not in the *Bible*, not in the *practice of the ancient Jews*, not in that of the *Primitive Church*, nor even in the practice of the heathen, for they would be ashamed of such conduct:—but, in the *pride and covetousness* of the church in these latter days. As this statement may not be self-evident to all my readers, I will defer the proof of it till my next letter. If any one can show a nobler origin let him do it: and let all pray, and pray earnestly, that the God of heaven may speedily deliver all his churches from the *curse*, the *unutterable curse* of church debts.

Yours, truly, in the war against Church Debts.

W. R.

LETTER III.

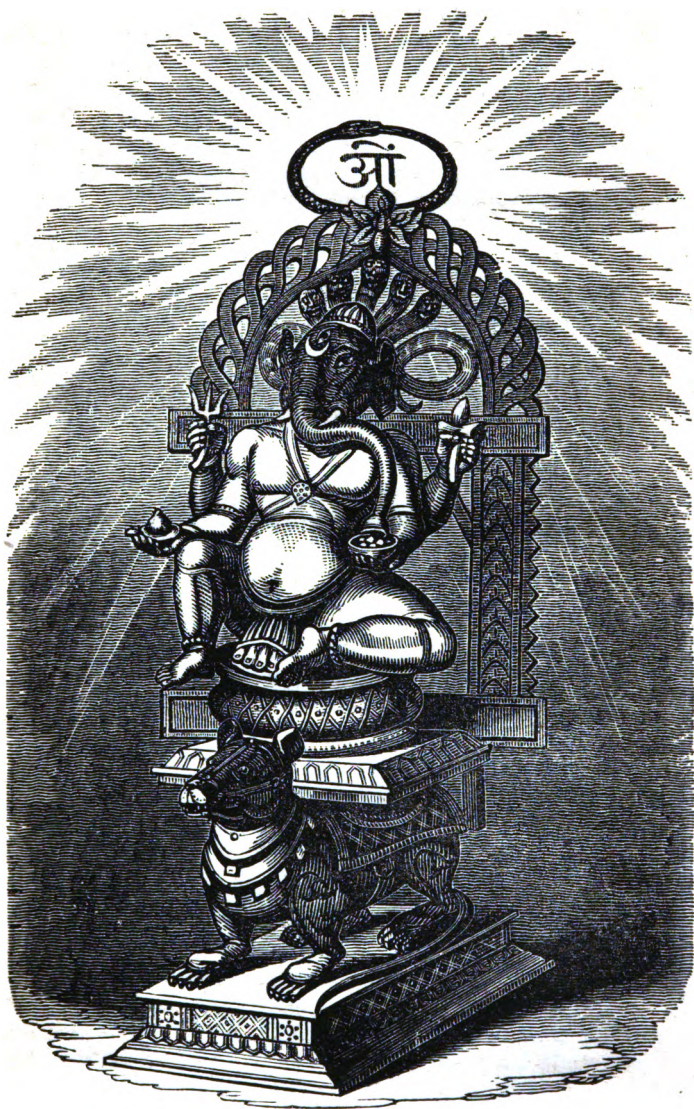
IN my last letter, I said that the origin of Church debts must be traced to the *pride and covetousness* of the church of Christ. It most assuredly is not found in the *humility* and *liberality* of the church. If the professed followers of the Saviour were now really poor, and did but possess the spirit of their Lord or of the Apostles, they would no more think of building churches, and then leave them pressed down by a heavy debt, than the apostles would have thought of making an Elder of Simon Magus, or a Deacon of Alexander, the Coppersmith. The thought would be as far from their minds, as the proud and the covetous are from the kingdom of heaven.

Do not suppose, however, that I am now speaking against the custom of erecting *costly* houses of worship. I am only speaking against the practice of not *paying* for them. The propriety, however, of building

such churches, and the religion of the measure, we shall consider at another time. Nor would I have you suppose that I am an advocate for that *niggardliness* of feeling, which would make the house of God the most uncomfortable, and uninviting place in the town or community. There are such buildings, which are not only a disgrace to the Christian character of those who worship in them, but also a reproach to them as a civilized people. Some people seem to think that the practising of that religion, which requires them to endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ, consists, in part at least, in doing penance, by sitting on hard and uncomfortable seats; and not in "trembling at the word of God," but in *shivering* under it, while coldly spoken in a cold and cheerless house. But, broken windows—hostility to paint—the absence of decency and comfort in the house of God—the prostrate walls around the chambers of the dead—and the graves of their fathers trodden down by the lowing herd, or uprooted by the swine of the field—accord not with the views which I entertain of the religion of the gospel. A people who have not religion enough to take care even of the graves of their fathers, or to make themselves comfortable in their own house of worship, have not religion enough to sustain their minister, or to profit by the means of grace. And if such a people do not ultimately starve their minister out of his office among them, it will be owing to influences over which they have no control.

I have said that the practice of building churches and not paying for them, has no precedent in the word of God, as exemplified either in the conduct of the Jewish, or of the Christian Church. Nor does it receive any countenance from the conduct of the heathen, who may, in this case, follow the light of nature, or the promptings of their feelings as men. I venture here the declaration, that you will *not find a temple of any description, among any of the Heathen nations now on the face of the earth, that is in debt.* China, with her more than 300 millions, and India, with her 130

millions, have not one temple in debt. Did ancient Greece, or Rome, or Egypt ever have one in debt? No; the temples of the gods belonged to the gods. They were sacred, They were built by the people for the gods, and were freely and unreservedly dedicated to their service. It is left for those, who glory in the light of revelation, and civilization, and refinement to do a deed, which never disgraced the annals of a heathen nation, sunk in the deepest of moral degradation. Oh! it looks like sanctified mockery, to see the hoary-headed and reverend ministers of Jesus Christ, the devout looking company of elders and deacons, and the multitude of consecrated followers of Christ, all unite together, and by one solemn act of prayer and praise, lay the foundation; rear up and dedicate to God, a house for his worship, which they know belongs not to them to give, and which, in a few months or years afterwards, may be seized on, and made merchandise of in the market. Such a scene reminds me of what I have often witnessed in the festival of Gunputtee in Bombay. *The Moor-tee-kur-ta*, (the maker of images,) fashions the idol—the Brahmun consecrates it—the multitude dress it in costly robes, and after adoring it for ten days, and carrying it in solemn procession from temple to temple, they strip it of its costly attire, and then *most devoutly*, cast it into the sea. This is heathenism. But does Christian conduct exemplify itself in devoting a house to God by solemn prayer, and then after a few years, sacrifice it under the hammer of the auctioneer? Is there any real religion in such a course of conduct? Ananias and Sapphira tried the experiment, upon their own responsibility, of devoting property to God, and keeping back a part of the same. Is there less guilt now in a whole church doing an act almost parallel to it! Judge ye. As to the conduct of the heathen in the case above cited, every unprejudiced man must confess, that it is far more consistent and common-sense-like than that of Christians in their mode, oftentimes, of managing the worship of God. The Hindoos build their temples and *pay* for



GUNESH.

them, and they are never sacrificed for debt. In the festival of Gunputtee, (the god of wisdom,) the idols are made of clay for the occasion. The casting of them into the sea is designed to prevent them from being touched by unholy hands. It is worthy of notice here, that they never go in debt for these idols, nor for the things they need for the festival. Those who are to conduct the ceremonies collect the necessary money. If they succeed in getting a large sum of money, the ceremonies on the occasion will be the more imposing; and if the amount collected be small, the expense of the idols and their ornaments will be small in proportion. There is good sense and practical wisdom in this part of their conduct. *Fas est ab discere hoste.*

Now, let us see how the great mass of Christians proceed in carrying forward the worship of God. They meet together and agree to erect a house of worship. A small portion of the whole amount is obtained, and the work is begun and completed. A mortgage is given upon the property for the balance; and if they can meet the interest upon the mortgage, they are content to remain so, never intending to pay the principal themselves, but very *piously* leaving this debt to be paid by their children. A few years roll round, and circumstances, over which they have no control, prevent the church from meeting the demands against them. Discouragement ensues; the minister is dismissed for want of support, and the building (that is *God's house*?!) is sold to the highest bidder, and the flock of Christ is scattered! Now, why all this? The answer is, they are like the man spoken of in the gospel of Luke, (xiv, 29, 30,) whom the people mocked, saying, "this man began to build and was not able to finish?" But why were they not able to finish? Because they have spent more in laying the foundations and in completing a part of it, than might have been sufficient to build, and pay for a house of a smaller size, and one which would have afforded ample room for them for years to come. But why did they not

build such a one? Do you think there was any *pride* about it? Was there not a desire to erect *such* a building as would attract—whom? God's children? No: but men of the world, so that *they* might fill the house and help to pay for it. The *conversion* of such men is a secondary thing. No matter, now, what may have been the motive in erecting such a house for God's worship, at an expense beyond the means obtained for paying for it; was there not still money enough in the hands of the church to be used for the glory of God to pay for it? Certainly there was. Why, then, was it not obtained? It cannot be because the object was not in itself a good one. Nor can it be because there were so many other and superior claims upon the benevolence of the people of God, that this object was as nought, in comparison with them, and was overlooked. By no means. There was, and there is now, in the hands of the church of God, more than enough of money to erect and pay for suitable houses of worship in every part of our land where they are needed. Why, then, was the work not paid for? I can see no adequate cause for it, except the wonderful *cohesiveness* of the money to the hands of those who possess it. Covetousness has seized upon the professed church of Christ, with such a powerful grasp, that nothing but the merciful interposition of God can save them from spiritual death. Oh! that the fire of God's love were kindled into a flame in the hearts of all professing Christians; then would their grasp on God's money be loosed, and the wealth of the church would flow forth in one continued stream of life and salvation, to bless and save the souls of men!

That the people of God have an abundance of His money in their hands, which should be disposed of for the glory of their master, no one can doubt. Do they not live, many of them, in their ceiled palaces, and nearly all of them in the enjoyment of the comforts of life, and I might add, of its luxuries too? Is there a scheme of worldliness that promises temporal gain;—is there a

scene of national joy and amusement not in itself sinful; is there a new fashion or a new mode invented to make life more easy; is there a new enterprise to promote the political prosperity of the nation, or to increase the glory of our country both at home and abroad; is there any society founded for the promotion of the arts or for the cultivation of letters in this great nation that does not draw largely upon the treasury of the Lord through the hands of His people? Point me to one if you can. Why, then, does the house of the Lord lie waste, and why are the watchmen on the walls of Zion faint and dying, for the lack of those means which God's people have directed, in a great degree, from their appropriate channel? I am not finding fault with the activity of Christians in any plan, whose tendency is to promote the temporal good of man. But why should they be active in pushing forward their researches in science, in the improvement of the arts, in the improvement and refinement of society in general, and yet leave the *cause of God* to languish? Does this latter cause promise less temporal gain? Or does the money thrown into the treasury of the Lord, yield less interest, and less comfort to the body, and less joy and peace to the soul, than the same amount invested in the stocks of earth, that church members are induced to trust their *thousands* in the hands of man, while they will not commit their *tens* to God for safe keeping? There is something here radically wrong. If the pride, covetousness, and selfishness of the church be not the cause of the evil, do tell me what it is. If I am wrong, set me right. And if I am right, then help me on in this work of reform.

In my next letter, I shall speak of the *direct benefits* of church debts, as they have been enumerated to me by those who plead for the continuance of *the blessing*!

Yours, as ever, in the warfare against church debts.

W. R.

LETTER IV.

IN my last letter I promised to speak of some of the benefits of church debts, as they have been stated to me by the advocates of the system. So far as I have been able to collect and arrange them, they may all be included in these two, viz.:

1. Church debts act as a *bond of union*.
2. They produce a *spirit of activity*; they keep the church *stirring and awake*.

To secure, then, these blessings, I have been told that "it is not the design of those who erect churches to pay for them. Their successors, who are to be benefited by these churches, should help to pay for their erection."

Such is the mode of reasoning in the case. Let us look at it for a moment. It is said, that it is not the intention of those, who are immediately engaged in the erection of a church, to pay for it themselves, but to leave a portion of the debt to be paid by those who may succeed them. Is this acting according to the principles of the gospel? Is it honest? What right have any set of men to engage in an enterprise which they do not mean to accomplish; but, as soon as they can, throw the burden of sustaining it on the shoulders of others; and all this, too, for the glory of God? It may accord with the spirit and with the wisdom of this world; but it is the antipodes of the spirit of the gospel.

Now, what course does such an association, or church, or congregation, or whatever you may choose to call them, pursue. They agree to build a house for the worship of God, in a style and at an expense far beyond *their spirit of liberality*, or their present available amount of funds. This they do for *respectability's* sake. The house must be *just so*, or it will not be *attractive*. It must be "second to none around them." That is settled. The next thing is to raise the funds.

Messrs. A., B., C., and D. subscribe so much towards the object, and lend, *on interest*, a much larger amount. Subscriptions from the widow, the orphan, and the fatherless, and from all who may feel disposed to contribute, swell the amount. The house is built. But a balance of some thousands remaining, Mr. E. lends that sum, and secures himself by a mortgage on the property. *God's house?* is now ready for his people to worship in. It is devoted to His service *entirely!* A minister must now be had. Where can one be found? Paul, in his Epistle to Timothy, describes the character of the man who was adapted to the work of the ministry in his day. He must be *blameless, vigilant, sober, not given to wine, not greedy of filthy lucre*; one that ruleth well his *own house*, having his *children in subjection* with all gravity; *apt to teach, &c.* He did not require him to be *apt to draw money out of the purses of the saints*; or of a *popular address*, or to be *eloquent*, and of *polished manners*. The reason of this, however, is manifest. For,

1st. Paul had all his ideas of ministerial character and qualifications directly from his Master, who was more strict than the feelings of the present age demand.

2d. He did not live amidst the refinements and the improvements of the nineteenth century, especially in building churches.

3d. Christians had nothing else to do in his day but to labor for the *salvation of souls and the spread of the gospel*, besides the care of their own families. They had nothing to do with their money, but to lay it by on the first day of the week as the Lord had prospered them, for spreading abroad the knowledge of Christ, and for aiding their poor brethren, so as to allow their ministers "to give themselves continually to the ministry of the word and to prayer," so that they might not neglect their appropriate work to feed the flock of Christ, as they were not ordained to the work of collecting dollars and cents.

4th. The church had no interest then in the stocks

and schemes of earth. They held no Sabbath-breaking offices under the government; they had no engagement to transport the mail on the Sabbath; they owned no Sabbath-breaking rail road or steamboat stock, and of course had both time and means enough to do all their duty, and to leave the apostles to do theirs. The politics of the world did not need the aid of Christians as now.

5th. As Paul was "in bodily presence weak, and in speech contemptible," according to the testimony of an enemy; and, as he says himself, he was not sent to preach the gospel "with wisdom of words;" and since his own "preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom," it would not be very appropriate for him to mention *eloquence* as a necessary qualification in a minister of the gospel.

Thus you see that Paul recommended just such kind of ministers as were suited for the work of the Lord in *his* day. But things are very different now, as any body may see. The most of our congregations have something else to do than merely to support the *gospel* among them. They have to support their *pride* and *worldliness*, not only in their persons and families, but in their *churches* also. In the selection of a minister, therefore, it is often a consideration of the greatest importance to find a man, (*a good man, of course,*) but *such* a good man as will help them, by preaching the gospel, to do all this, and to share with them also the burden of the church debt; this first-born of pride and covetousness. Could they not do it themselves, without the aid of the minister, and let him pursue his appropriate work to labor for the conversion of men to God, and to build up the saints? Certainly, they could. They could go to their own coffers, or their wealthier brethren could go to theirs, and take from thence the gold and silver which is cankered, and the rust of which shall witness against them, and shall burn their *flesh* as fire in the last days, and in one hour pay off all the debt that remains upon their church. Not only so; they could pay off all the debt of all the churches

of the living God, and build as many more as the cause of Christ demands, and, after all, have *more than enough* to *hinder* them in their journey towards heaven. But it is not their intention to pay off the debt. They mean that others too shall share in this work of *benevolence* and of *love*! *This* is the work to be done. How, then, shall it be accomplished?

The first thing now to be done is to arrange the pecuniary matters of the church in such a way that the members, by keeping together, and by continued or by special efforts, may collect enough to pay the interest of the debt on the church, as it becomes due. And the next thing to be done is to induce others to unite with them (no matter where they come from) in the pious work of bearing each other's burdens. There was a time, and there will be again, when "God will make a common man more precious than fine gold, and a great man than the golden wedge of Ophir;" but, for the present emergency, a man *without gold* is of little value. And hence it is, that a man *with gold*, and *without religion*, is frequently more valued than a man *with religion*, but *without gold*.

Stocks rise in the market, according to the demand for them. And so it is in the churches in these latter days. If the demand be for *polemic preaching* to promote pugilism in the churches, or for ponderous purses to push forward the car of *pride*, *pageantry*, and *pomp*, then will polemics and purses command a premium in the churches. But if, on the contrary, the demand be for broken and contrite spirits, to widen and deepen the river that makes glad the city of our God, as it flows through this curse-smitten earth, then such will be highly prized. It is no strange thing, then, to see churches now leave the road marked out for them by the Captain of their salvation, to turn to the right or left, according as they have their own purposes to accomplish by it.

The thing so much sought after now is not *GRACE*, but *GOLD*. How shall it be obtained? Men must be brought into the church who possess it. But, how

shall they be brought in? The following conversation, that was heard in this city, no matter now *when* or by whom, will help to explain this difficulty.

Elder A. Good morning, brother B. Say, how did you like Mr. C.'s sermon yesterday?

Brother B. Very much, indeed. It is just the kind of preaching we need. It is so plain that every body could understand it. And then it was so scriptural. I think, if we had such preaching, we should soon see a change in our congregation. Were you not much pleased?

Elder A. Well, I can't say but I was; but then he will not do for our congregation. He is not *the* man for us.

Brother B. Why not? I think our best people would vote for him. I know they were greatly edified yesterday. I really was hoping that——

Elder A. The truth is, brother B., such preaching will not collect the *kind* of people that we need just now. I don't doubt but he could do great good; but a church full of a certain kind of people don't add much to the treasury. You understand me. But there is *Mr. D.*; he is just the man we need. He is a *popular* man. If we get him, (and he can be got,) you will soon see a row of carriages, every Sabbath, extending from the church, down —— street, for more than a square. He would soon fill our church, and pay off our debt. But I must go. Remember the congregational meeting to-morrow night. Good morning.

I will merely state here now, that at the election for a pastor, Mr. C. was not chosen, nor is their debt yet removed. They don't mean to pay it, but are laboring and praying that others may help them to do what they might easily manage to do themselves.

Such conduct reminds me of a singular custom that exists among the Hindoos, which I will mention, and conclude this letter. It is this. Every Hindoo, who is not physically incapacitated, must be married, according to the laws of Menu, at least *once* in his life. To secure this result, the parents do all the *courting*

for their children, whom they betroth at the ages of from six to twelve years. This is, in fact, the marriage. The ceremony on this occasion occupies *ten* days. When these betrothed ones arrive at the age of maturity, having lived in the meantime at their respective homes, the betrothing is confirmed, and the husband takes his wife now to his own house. The services on this occasion occupy several days. As marriage is considered one of the most important events in the life of a Hindoo, no expense is spared to make the wedding *honorable* to the *caste* to which the parties belong. The Brahmuns and the musicians are to be *paid* for their services, and all the friends present are to be *feasted*. Each one must carry home with him a present of a *fan*, *money*, or something else from the hands of the married pair, that they may supplicate the gods to bestow upon them many sons. In a vast majority of cases, the parents have not the means to meet all the expenses of the occasion. They give what they can, and borrow the balance from the *shroffs*, (brokers,) for which they pay, never less than twelve per cent., and oftentimes twenty-five. Time rolls on. These parents die, and the borrowed money is not paid. The *shroff* then makes his demand on the young man, who has to bear the burden of the debt his father contracted at his marriage, to support the *dignity* of their *caste*, and to propitiate the favor of the gods. He is thus, at his entrance on the business of life, encumbered with a debt which weighs him down, and which keeps him at the mercy of his creditor all his days. Should he, in his turn, have children to marry, he pursues the same course. If I had you there now, I could point you out men who are in debt, not only for their *own* marriage, but are paying interest for the money which was expended at their *father's*, yea, their *grandfather's*, marriage! This is what I call inheriting the blessing of their fathers, *a-la-mode Hindoo*.

But, seriously, where is the *justice* or the *religion* of such a system of things? I am sure there is just as

much *good sense*, and quite as much *religion* in it, as there is in the unscriptural practice of congregations incurring a debt in the erection of a church, which they cannot or do not pay, and which they *piously* throw upon the necks of children. It is an abominable iniquity.

I shall consider, in my next letter, the "*bond of union*" and the *activity* which church debts produce.

I remain yours, as ever, in the war against church debts.
W. R.

LETTER V.

WE are now prepared to look at the two great blessings of church debts, as mentioned in my last letter. We are gravely told that church debts, in the first place, act *as a bond of union*; and, secondly, that they *keep the church members active and awake*.

1. Church debts act *as a bond of union*; and, therefore, are not only to be endured, but are, in themselves, actually good.

I certainly have no objection to unions, when properly formed and of the right kind. But surely every union is not a blessing. If a worthy young lady should unite herself to a young man, honest, industrious, intelligent, and sober, and in other respects worthy of her, no one could find reason to object. But would you, for the sake of promoting union, recommend her to marry a drunkard, or a drunkard in the bud, or, what is infinitely worse, a *drunkard-maker*? Surely not. That would be the union of virtue to vice, and the spirit of life to the body of death. Neither would you favor the union of Church and State, though it should be done with silken cords by the soft hands of the sons of Loyola. It is not *union*, in itself considered, to which I would object, but it is the *kind* of union contemplated which we oppose.

But let us look at the union that a church debt produces. And before we do so, it may not be amiss to refer again to the Apostolic church, to see what was the bond of union among them. By reference to an ancient history, we learn that the members of the church continued steadfast in the Apostle's doctrine and *fellowship*, and that the same grand objects which occupied the thoughts, excited the feelings, and prompted the daily and fervent prayers of the Apostles, possessed the minds of the church members, and bound them together as one family in Christ. They had all things common, because they had *one common cause*. They who possessed an abundance, parted with their goods to give to their poorer brethren, as they had need. The love of God shed abroad in their hearts, and untiring zeal for the salvation of their fellow-men, and their keeping in view the recompense of reward, formed a three-fold cord, not easily broken, to bind their hearts together. It was tied tight around them by the hand of *persecution*. This was *their* bond of union. Is it not surprising that they never seemed to think of the magic power of a church debt as a bond of union? They might then just as easily have dispensed with their three-fold cord of *love, zeal, and hope*, and the *hard knot* of persecution with which it was tied, as the enlightened churches of the nineteenth century have done. But, it is presumed, they did what they thought right in the circumstances in which they were placed. I certainly am not blaming them for the course they pursued; for they seemed to be wholly ignorant of any other way of doing the work of their Lord, and of journeying home to heaven, than by facing danger, enduring the cross, despising the shame of it, and resisting unto blood, striving against sin. All I mean to fix your mind upon now is, the simple fact, that they could be united *without a church debt*. But, do not forget the objects which these simple-hearted Christians aimed to obtain by their bond of union. It was, to glorify God in the salvation of their fellow-men, *irrespective of their grade in society, their*

name, or nation. With them, a man was a man, whether he was found "faring sumptuously every day," or "sitting by the wayside begging." But times have changed, and men with them. And now a *church debt* must do for us what *love* and *zeal* did for the Apostolic churches.

Let us see how this bond unites now the members of the same household of faith. Here is a congregation regularly organized, on the improved plan in these latter days, with her full corps of *Trustees*. Men like Stephen, "full of faith and of the Holy Ghost," are not *essentially* necessary here, as the work to be done may be done without prayer, and without the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, as it often is. This congregation have procured for themselves a house of worship. It is just the thing. It is large enough for them, and for generations to come. It is not paid for. A large debt remains upon it, and *that* is the bond of union. Now they are ready for action. The work to be done is three-fold. 1st. To *convert men*; 2d. To pay the *interest* on the debt; 3d. Then the *debt* itself. These are the grand objects of their aim as a church. At first, the weight of souls, dying in sin, presses heavily on their conscience, and impels them to action, and to be *united* in their action. But another claim comes in upon them—the interest of a heavy debt. Now it always happens that, when two things claim the attention at the same time, the one which the man *feels* to be the most urgent at the time is the one he will attend to, however the other may be neglected. The one *must* be attended to; the other *may* be postponed. It is just so in the matter of *saving souls* and *paying interest* money. This last item the church feels *must* be attended to; and hence, for the time being, the saving of souls becomes a *secondary* consideration. They seem to reason thus: creditors won't wait on *us*, but God will wait on sinners; and of course they act accordingly. It is a hard thing, as every minister can testify, to recall the minds of the people back to the work of laboring directly for the salvation of men, af-

ter a special effort has been made to pay the interest of a heavy debt. Where, now, is the spirit they once manifested for the conversion of men? It is gone. Their conversation and their thoughts are turned, and necessarily, too, *from souls and salvation to debts and dollars.*

Church debts, we are told, act as a bond of union among the members of the church. I grant it. The union which they form, however, is not one of *love to each other*; but one of *obligation* to those who hold legal claims against the property. It makes the people slaves; for the Bible declares that "the borrower is the slave of the lender." And, in many cases, the lender has no more real love for the house of God, and his people, than Sanballat had for the *temple* of the *Jews*. How would it appear in our eyes if the Jews had erected the temple of the Lord in the days of Nehemiah, and to do so had borrowed, on mortgage, the necessary funds from Tobiah the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian? Bad as they were, they had too much religion to do so. But Jews, in our day, and men "who deny the Lord that bought them," hold mortgages on Christian churches.

When the members of a church build a house for the Lord, not by voluntary contributions, but on the *joint-stock* principle, then the debt on the church forms a strong bond of union among the *stockholders*, at all events, to bind them together. But what is *the* thing for which they *feel* that they are bound together in such tender bonds? Is it to save souls only, or is it, in part, to secure their property invested in God's house? I wonder if there is no desire, at any time, among some of the stockholders, *to have an attractive preacher, so that the house may be filled, and that the value of the property invested in the house may rise in proportion as the fame of the preacher is in the ascendant?* I do not say that it is so. I remember that I once asked a captain in the British army in Bombay, whether he ever felt desirous that some of the officers above him should die, so that he might be promoted? He frankly con-

fessed that he often had such desires. He had no special desire that his brother officers should be shot in battle, but he did desire that he himself might be promoted; and as the only chance of that was to have some of the superior-officers fall *gloriously* on the field of battle, he had no special objection to that mode of his being promoted. Now, as Solomon tells us that "as in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man," we may conclude that the heart of a Christian man in the *church militant* answers to the heart of a Christian man in the *army militant*. And we may draw this conclusion the more readily from facts like the following: Elder Nameless, of the City of Brotherly Love, owned property in one of God's houses, in the shape of a pew, to the amount of nearly \$400, including a *cushion*, (not a pillow for the elbows to lean on, according to the Asiatic custom, but a simple cushion.) He was induced to worship God elsewhere, and his property was offered for sale. After various offers and refusals, he finally, as a special favor, sold it to his brother Christian at an advance of \$200. Thus, by this simple speculation, he had refunded to him more than he had given to the support of the *gospel* in that church for the previous five years. In giving me this account, he did not fail to point out to me *one* of the benefits of *good preaching*, viz.: it raises the value of the stock in the churches. Do you not see how strong a bond of union a church debt is?

There are others who are under similar bonds of attachment to God's house; but with them the attachment arises from another consideration. The stock is *below* par. Still, their love for the church flourishes, first, from a consideration of the good already received; and, second, from the hope of a future and greater good in the rise of the stock.

Persecution for righteousness' sake united the hearts of primitive Christians in a firm bond of love; and laboring to win souls to Christ has done the same thing. But, we are informed in these latter days, that the

family of Christ can be united, not on the principle of *attraction*, by the love of Christ, but on the principle of *compression*, by the specific gravity of a church debt. Why did not the primitive Christians discover this principle? Alas, they had not learned to *spiritualize* the words of their Lord. They supposed that they must understand His words *literally*. And that when he told them not to lay up for themselves treasures on the earth; that it was more blessed to give than to receive; that he that giveth must do it with *liberality*; and that they should "lend, hoping for nothing again," not even *interest* on money lent to build a house for the worship of God; they supposed He meant *just what He said*, and they acted accordingly. But if they could only have followed the churches in this land, instead of the church in Jerusalem, as their model; if they could have seen the happy influence of church debts, to unite the hearts of Christians in bonds of love to God and one another; how tenderly they love one another; how deep their sympathy flows; how willing they are to pluck out their *own* eyes (not their neighbor's) for their ministers; how tender they are of their reputation; how *willingly, promptly, and liberally* they support their ministers, by yielding them "that competent worldly maintenance which they promise, and *whatever else* they see is needful for the honor of religion and their comfort among them;" how careful they are to roll all the care of worldly things from off their pastors, so as to enable them to give themselves "continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word;" how tenderly and patiently the stronger churches support the weak; how united in their prayers and efforts to restore the wanderers from God to the bosom of their Father; how quickly churches arise all over the land, where they are needed; how firmly they resist error, and especially the error of those who hold that "gain is godliness," and that justify the wicked for reward in church or state; how firmly they resist the encroachments of the Man of Sin; and how careful to train up their children in the

nurture and admonition of the Lord;—yes, if they could have seen all this, and had but followed the example of the church in the nineteenth century, we should not have had the sad accounts we have of their being *stoned* for infringing on the rights of others; *losing their heads* for reproving adulterous rulers; and being *beaten* for producing such Ephesian, uproarious tumults as they did. But they were ignorant of *the blessing of church debts* as a bond of union, and of the mighty power of *UNPAID FOR houses, bells, costly organs, and steeples*, to draw men from the love of the world to the love of God. They acted ignorantly and in unbelief of the blessings of church debts, and surely we ought to forgive them. What think ye?

I will consider the *stirring effect* of a debt upon the churches in my next.

I remain yours, as ever, in the warfare against church debts.
W. R.

LETTER VI.

THERE is but one more of the so-called blessings of church debts, which I wish to consider before I speak of the positive evils of the system. That one is the *spirit of activity* which a debt produces in the members of a church: “it keeps them in exercise,” (we are told;) “it gives them something to do;” “it keeps them at the work.”

Activity is essential to the spiritual health of any church. As in the natural, so in the spiritual world, *activity* is the very *soul* of existence. Look at yonder Asiatic pool of water. Why that death-like silence which reigns over it? No voice of the wild bird is heard there. No ripple is made on its green and leaden surface by any of the finny tribe which God has made to sport in the waves. The broad leaves of the Lotus

lie lazily on its surface, and spread themselves far and wide amid the mosses which luxuriate among them. Baleful exhalations rise up, and spread contagion and death all around. Why all this? You tell me it is no surprising thing. It is, must be so. It is a *stagnant pool*. And like the dark waters of the fabled Acheron, or the bitter waters of Meribah, it must spread disease and death all around.

But look now at the little stream which gushes out from the *Gae-mooch*, the cow's mouth.* It tumbles over rock after rock in its onward course. At one time it dashes forward with wild impetuosity. At another, it glides smoothly on with majestic stillness. Its waters teem with life. Here, in the gently whirling eddies, and, there, in the foaming waves, the fish leap and sport at their ease, and rejoice in their healthy and secure abode, as if conscious of the fact that they have been deified and are adored by the inhabitants of the land. The wild beasts of the forest, the lowing herds and the bleating flocks of the plain, wend their way to its margins, and drink of its life-giving stream, while the air resounds with the melodious warbling of the songsters of the wood, which here find a shady retreat amidst the groves and the flowers which skirt its banks. Temple after temple, and village after village, adorn its shores, while myriads of the people plunge into the waves to drink, to bathe, and to adore this *incarnation* of the God. Beauty, health, freshness, life, and joy abound. And why all this? I answer, the Krishnu is a flowing stream. "It lives," as the Hindoos forcibly express it, and it retains its life by its activity.

What is true in regard to the fountain and the pool, is true of the human frame. See yon vile *Yogee*. His hair is matted and twisted in with *coir*, (fibres of the cocoa-nut,) and formed into a huge rope, which is

* The Hindoos have chiseled a large rock into the shape of a *cow's head*, with open mouth, through which the waters of the Krishnu river flow, as they issue from the mountain.

twined around his smeared brow. The vermin crawl over him. His arm is paralyzed. His nails are long and twisted, like the horns of the *Hureen*, (a species of antelope.) His senses are stupefied with the intoxicating *bhang*. He is but one remove from idiocy itself. Why all this? The answer is—want of the needful exercise.

But what is true in regard to the body is also true in regard to the faculties of the soul. Nor is it less true in spiritual things. There is just as much necessity for Christians to exercise the graces of the spirit, to cause them to grow and flourish, as there is for the child to exercise its limbs, that it may grow up into the stature and strength of a perfect man. God has made men for activity. And it is only when they do violence to the laws of their rational and moral nature, that they feel disposed to sit down in inglorious ease, and spend their lives in *laboriously* doing nothing. Like the *Fakeer*, many seem to think that the very essence of bliss on earth consists in stupidity, or in being the mere passive recipients of such joy as may find its way into their souls through their half-closed organs of sense. And like the Hindoo devotee, with them glory itself consists in mere absorption.

It is owing, I doubt not, to the erroneous views which many in the church have on this point, that we see so many overgrown infants in the Church of Christ in these latter days. When they should be strong men, and enduring hardness as good soldiers of Christ, they have need to be fed still on milk. They have, like Jeshurun, "waxed fat" in their spiritual indolence, and are now both a burden to themselves and to those who have, in self-defence, to carry them forward. A man, laboring under an attack of the gout, once called on Dr. A., of London, for a remedy. He said to the man, in a stern tone, "Go home, sir; live on sixpence a-day, and earn it." If all the members of our churches would, as Christ tells them, *labor* for the meat that perishes not, we should not find so many smothering spiritually in their own indolence. *Activity*



THE YOGEE.

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is the cure. The Christian who is active in the cause of God is, and must be, a growing Christian. Place him where you choose, he will ripen for heaven. Let him labor in the Sabbath school—in the Bible class—in the prayer meeting—in visiting the sick—in doing good, by conversing with his fellow-men, and in inviting them to come to the house of God, or in conversing with them of the love of God; and he will be like the tree planted by the streamlets of water, which, being thus watered daily, will bear fruit abundantly.

It was so with the primitive Christians. They were oft-times driven from their homes by the hand of persecution, but they went every where preaching the gospel. I have no doubt but there are multitudes of persons in this city, men and women, who imagine they are Christians, for they bear the name; and yet, after all their professions of love to God and man, they have never yet had so much religion as to ask their friends and their neighbors to come to God, or to go with them to heaven. Yes, there are many in the churches who are transacting business with their fellow-men, whom they know are on the road to endless woe; and yet, perhaps, for fear of losing their custom or their favor, they permit them to go on and perish in their sins. These are active in the world, but stupid in the church.

If anything can be done to arouse the man and make him active in the cause of God, so that he may be saved, (for I hold it a self-evident truth, that no lazy man can get to heaven,) it will be a blessing to the church and to the world. But will a church debt do it? It has been proposed; it has been tried; and it has invariably had the contrary effect. What minister ever preached or prayed better because he was encumbered with a church debt? Do the elders pray better for being in debt? Does it promote the holiness of the members to be in debt, when God says, ✓
"Owe no man anything?" When, I ask, has a church debt made Christians pray more for each other? When has it released them from the perplexity of worldly

affairs, to enable them to devote their whole hearts and their time to the service of God? It never did, and never will.

It may produce activity, but not for the salvation of men. None of the Apostles ever needed this stimulus to urge them forward. The love of Christ constrained them to be active for God; but *we* need a church debt!—a sad exchange for the love of God. It is the refinement of nonsense.

But I have said enough on this part of the subject. I have a few thoughts on the positive evils of the system.

I am yours, as ever, in the war against church debts.
W. R.

LETTER VII.

As I have considered, in my previous letters, the so-called blessings of "Church Debts," I will now turn your attention to some of the innumerable positive evils of the system. Eternity alone can fully reveal these evils. The system is in the highest degree injurious to the cause of Christ on earth. It ruins souls; it hinders the spirituality of the church, and, as to some churches, it operates more powerfully than all other causes put together to render the preaching of the gospel of no effect. It is more to be dreaded than the legion of demons which possessed the man of Gadara. Him they stripped, and drove out to dwell in the tombs, and they drove the whole herd of swine to destruction. But a church groaning under the weight of an enormous debt shuts many out of the kingdom of God, by preventing them, at the outset, from hearing the word of God.

To give point, however, to my remarks, I observe that the system of going in debt in the erection of churches leads, directly and unavoidably, to the sin of hypocrisy.

I do not say that any church means to act the part of hypocrisy in the matter ; but the system leads to it. I am not tenacious of the word in this case. I will give you my meaning, and you may call it what you please.

I take it, then, for granted that the Lord Jesus Christ has a people on the earth, who are called by his name, and who profess to possess His spirit. To them, and not to others, has he committed the glorious work of spreading abroad the knowledge of his name and character throughout the earth. To them, especially, does the command apply to keep his Sabbaths and to reverence his sanctuary. They are to be the lights of the world ; the reflectors of the glory of God ; living epistles, to be read and known of all men. Just as in a looking-glass, the natural features of the man that looks into it are seen, so God designs that those who look into his word, or at the lives and conduct of Christians, God's "living epistles," may see there the holy character of God drawn out in clear lines, and, by contrast, also their own moral deformity fully exhibited. But if Christians will not conform their lives to the precepts of the gospel ; if they will manifest a different temper in the world than what the word of God requires, then are they found "false witnesses" for God. The great mass of mankind never will go to the Bible to know what religion is, or what the real character of God may be. They look at God's "living epistles," to find out from them what is the character of both. And accordingly as they see Christians act, so will they decide for or against the truth, and the excellency of that religion which they profess. Is it not so ? How often have ministers had the cutting remark made to them, by the man of the world, as he pointed to the inconsistent life of some professor of religion—"Ha ! if such are your Christians, I wish not to be one ; and if this be the fruit of Christianity, the world is better without it." I doubt not but you have often heard the remark. And what could you say in reply ? You must either acknowledge that the man is

no Christian at all, or, if he be, he does not, in this instance, live up to the profession he has made. He professes one thing, and does another. What do *you* call such conduct?

Now, when I look at the Bible, I find that it requires every follower of Christ to be devoted to his service, and to consecrate himself and all he has to the promotion of God's glory in the world. And the man who professes religion, professes to do so. Look now at this little band of Christians. They profess to be pilgrims and strangers here. They have taken their Lord for their pattern, and his word for their guide. They seek a city, that is, a heavenly one. They profess that all they have belongs to God, and that they are only stewards appointed by him in the distribution of his gifts and favors. They are laying up treasures, not on the earth, but in heaven. Their grand object on the earth is to glorify God by promoting their own spirituality and that of their brethren, and by instrumentally saving their fellow-men from the wrath that is to come. This is their aim. Everything else is and must be in subserviency to this. Jesus must be glorified, and they are happy in doing it. Earth must receive Him as her king.

In carrying forward, then, the single object of their union, see yon Christian band; they meet together in an upper room. They sing; they praise; they pray. And while they talk of the love of God, their hearts burn within them. But they have a work to do for others as well as for themselves. Jesus has died, not for these alone. He is the Saviour for the world of sinners. The Bible is for the enlightenment of the world. They are but the depositories of the truth. They must give it to the world. How, then, shall this be accomplished? Some must go far hence to the Gentiles, while others must stay and edify the flock of Christ at home, and seek to gather into the fold of Christ the wanderers that are near at hand. To aid them in this work, how necessary is it that there should be a house erected which shall accommodate them in

their worship, and in their celebrating the ordinances of the Lord's house. But their object is to let their light shine out also to others. They are to show forth to others the Lord's death till he come. Looking, then, upon themselves and upon all they have as the Lord's, they contribute, as God may enable them, to erect just such a house as may honor him whose they are, and whom, in this work, they mean to serve. They build not to gratify their pride, for they have none. They build not to attract the admiration of the world; for that would defeat the very object they have in view, viz.: to turn the eyes of men away from the vanities of this world to the glories of heaven. They build not that they may have the chief seats in the house of God here, for that very spirit would deprive them of a seat in the temple above. They build not that the ungodly may admire their skill in architecture, in sculpture, and painting, for that would turn their eyes from Jesus. They build not that they may make merchandise of the house of God, by selling the chief seats in it to those who pay the most for them, for that would give the preference to the rich worldling, and crowd out of the very sanctuary of God the devout and the humble poor. They build not that they may invest a portion of the Lord's money (falsely called theirs) in the house, and thereby get gain to further plans of their own. They build not under a show of great benevolence to men, to do their souls good, by enticing them into the church through pomp and show, and by abstracting money from their pockets to pay for the house they have erected, so that these worldlings may not be hindered by too heavy a purse from going to heaven. They build not to get them a name in having the "finest house" in the land, while their children shall have the unspeakable pleasure of paying for the pride of their fathers. On the contrary, they build just such a house as will best comport with their character as Christians; one which they can *pay* for, so as to "owe no man anything;" a house which, when it is completed, they can, with grateful hearts, and in sincerity, dedicate to the service of God, to be his, and his alone.

Now look at this band of Christians; poor they may be in this world's goods, but rich in faith, and heirs of the promises. They meet together, and by solemn prayer, and in the deep sincerity of their souls, they devote this house to the service of their God. It is the Lord's; and no man on earth has now any personal claim to it, further than the right to worship in it, both he and his household. Whatever was given towards its erection, was given freely, and without hope of gain. All can now rejoice in the work of their hands. And as they have brought their tithes and offerings to the Lord, they can reasonably and scripturally look up to God for the blessings of his grace to descend and to rest upon them and their families and neighbors. Here is sincerity. Anything else is the contrary. This is according to scripture example and scripture precept. This is the apostolic mode of preparing a house for the Lord. Do you approve of it?

Now look for a moment at a modern church, with their "building committee." A house is needed. One of 3,000, 5,000, or \$10,000 cost would be large enough for the church and the community. But no; the expense must be twice as large, at least. A small portion is given, and in many cases by the widow and the fatherless. Those who are wealthy give sparingly, but often lend liberally. The house is built, but not paid for. Mr. A. has lent the money, and has taken a mortgage on the house. It is his in fact, though perhaps not in form. And what now? The ministers of God, old and young, the elders and the people, all assemble. A sermon is preached—the liberality of the people is commended—the beauty of the house is praised—great castles are built about prospective good—and perhaps that very house, it is predicted, will be a grand means of hastening on the millennial day—songs of praises are sung—God's name is invoked—and the house is most solemnly given to God—and to show the deep sincerity of the people, they have sealed up a Bible in the corner-stone of the building, which had previously been laid there by solemn prayer. Now

all are glad. One man rejoices with trembling. He has hope and fear. It is the man who holds the largest claim against God's house. He *hopes* the house will be filled, and that he will be paid. But he *fears* it may not be so; and then his conscience troubles him; for how can he sell God's house, to get back his money?

But time, which waits for no one, moves on. Mr. A. becomes involved in the perplexities of this world. Creditors press on him, or other causes urge him to do what he had never thought of doing. But it is done. A sheriff's or auctioneer's bill finds its way to the walls of God's house! It is for sale. What! is God in debt, that his property is seized to pay his debts to man? It cannot be. Well, who is? Mr. A. is in debt. Very well, suppose he is! But what right has any man to seize upon the house of the living God to pay Mr. A.'s debts? That is worse than robbing the church. Robbing takes but part, this takes all. But Mr. A. has a mortgage on the house, and his mortgage is his property. His property in God's house! But was not this house given to God by the people, and did not the ministers and the elders say, Amen, and confirm the deed of gift to God? And who now has a right to nullify this act! Yes, they did it in *appearance*, but not in *fact*, for the house was not theirs' to give. And must all this praying, this solemn consecrating, these hopes of prospective good, go to the winds? It is even so. The house is sold, because it never was the Lord's. And now the world sees, and the church feels, that their act, in professing to give to God what did not belong to them to give, is, and must be, viewed in no other light than that of hypocrisy. If that be too hard a name, then call it by a softer. But call it what you will, it is conduct which should disgrace the actors in the matter in the eyes of all men, as it does incur the displeasure of God. Heathenism would blush at a deed like it.

Yours, as ever, in the warfare against church debts.

W. R.

LETTER VIII.

ANOTHER great evil of a church debt is, that it perverts the gospel ministry. Next in importance to the gift of Jesus Christ, and the influences of the Holy Spirit, stands the ministry of reconciliation. It is God's appointed mode to reclaim sinners from the error of their ways, and to bring them back to God. Although this plan may be foolishness in the eyes of the men of this world, it is nevertheless the wisdom of God. For, although God does not confine himself to one mode of operation in the conviction of sinners, His ordinary mode is by the preaching of the gospel. Even the circulation of the Bible itself is never, according to God's plan, to take precedence of preaching the gospel. When the Saviour was about to ascend to the throne of the Father, he sent forth his servants to preach the gospel. Ministers are Christ's ambassadors to a revolted world. They act in Christ's stead. And now God, through them, beseeches men to be reconciled to Him. They that despise them despise God, whose servants they are. And they that hinder them in their appropriate work are contending against God, and are hindering the work of salvation in the world. No thanks to ministers for preaching the gospel; for wo is to them if they preach it not. Their salvation is intimately connected with their duty of preaching, as the salvation of the people is connected with their duty of hearing. Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. But how shall they hear without a preacher?

When the Saviour sent down his ascension gifts on the church, we find that he gave them "apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." This, then, is the work of God's ministers. They have no right, if really called of God to the work, ever to give it up, till he

who gave them their commission shall give them a release from their work. And fearful will be the account which those must give who neglect the work of the Lord, to heap up for themselves the treasures or the honors of this world.

As the work of the ministry is for the perfecting of the saints, and for the edifying of the body of Christ, those churches which receive God's ministers among them, should receive them for the purpose of accomplishing this work. If they receive them for any other object, or hinder them in their work, He that walketh in the midst of the candlesticks doth know it. The Son of Man hath placed these stars, whom he holds in his right hand, in the midst of the churches, "to give them the light of the knowledge of the glory of God." And is there not a fearful responsibility resting upon those who, in any way, resist the great design of God in this matter? My soul trembles for the churches, when I think of the spirit that has seized them in these latter days. Their pride and their worldliness have gotten the advance of their humility; and now they must have ministers (if such can be had) whose labors among them may foster the feelings of their hearts. Hence it is, that when a congregation is about to call a minister of Christ, in a vast multitude of cases, the inquiry is, not so much whether they shall be made perfect in holiness through his ministrations, as whether he can, in their judgment, rear up and perfect that which their pride and worldliness have begun. In the choice of a minister, *who*, I ask, is consulted by the congregation, and what motives too often influence them in the choice they make? Do they leave this matter wholly in the hands of the Lord of the church? Do they hear the Spirit who speaketh to the churches? and do they hear *what* He speaketh? Do they draw nigh to God, and by prayer do they receive the baptism of the Holy Ghost, so that they are able to perceive the mind of the Spirit of God? And being thus illumined from on high, do they then hear God's messengers, and, from a knowledge of their own spiritual

case, can they discern that this or that one is the "star" that Jesus designs should shine in the midst of their candlestick? Is the choice of a pastor made by the flock of Christ? Are they for whose salvation the ministry was appointed, and who are to be made perfect in Christ Jesus, the persons who choose their shepherds to lead them by the still waters? Ah, how seldom is it done so! The man of wealth or influence in the world, and without religion, is called upon to decide the question, and to say who is to feed the flock of Christ!! His opinion is preferred to that of the child of God, simply and solely because, if his feelings be consulted, his purse will be open to sustain the man called. If this is not preferring gain to godliness tell me what it is?

But, again. The church is in debt, and how does such a church pray? If Heaven's records were unrolled, you would find that prayers have been sent up breathing the following spirit: "O Lord, thou Head of the Church; send us a man after thine own heart—a holy man of God. But Oh! grant that he may be a popular man—a man who shall be able to draw into this church such men of influence and of property as shall enable us to pay off our debts; and may they be saved. We ask not such as many of thy churches now possess, and under whose ministry they may be ripening for heaven, for they would not suit us. Oh! send us 'a man whose eloquence and whose powers of mind shall shake a city like this,' that we, as a church, may be glorified in the eyes of our brethren, and that thine honor may thereby be promoted. Send such an one, and send him speedily. Behold how thy flock is scattering to other churches. Our debt is increasing, while our ability to pay is on the decrease. Oh! save, we beseech thee, this beautiful house from passing into the hands of strangers. Save speedily, for thy great name's sake. Amen."

Did you ever hear a prayer like this? First, answer this question. Did you never hear conversation like this in spirit, and perhaps partly in word? If you

have not, I have. Let me here speak in God's name to the churches. I do, then, most solemnly protest against this wicked perversion of the ordinance of God. Ye churches of the Saviour, God's ministers are not ordained to the work of collecting funds from your purses, or from the purses of the men of the world, to pay for your pride or worldliness in erecting houses for the Lord. Why will you transform them from angels of mercy and of salvation to you and your families, to mere beggars for the silver and the gold of earth, to pay for your pride, and thus save you from a lasting disgrace? Why will you sit in solemn judgment, and pass sentence against God's ministers, because you judge they are not popular enough to accomplish your schemes of grandeur and folly? Why will you allow the men of this world, "whose god is their belly," to decide who shall feed, with spiritual food, the souls of your Christian brethren, and of your children, aye, and your own souls also? Oh! why will you stand in the way of God's ministers, in their efforts to edify the body of Christ, and degrade them to the work of building up piles of brick and mortar, and drive them from their houses, and from the study of God's word, to collect funds to pay for the tinkling cymbals or the tinselled ornaments of your houses of worship? Why will ye do it? I beseech you, by the mercies of God, that ye sin no longer against your risen Lord, by throwing upon his servants a work He never gave them to do. If Jesus should come back to earth in humanity, as he will, would you set him to work to garnish the sepulchres of your fathers, and decorate your houses of worship? Why, then, give his ministers, "the angels of the churches," this work to do? Oh! repent of your sins. Do your first works, else Jesus will fight against you with the sword of his mouth, and remove your candlestick out of his place. May the Saviour have mercy upon his churches!

Yours, in my heart-felt opposition to the sin, the
curse of church debts,

W. R.

LETTER IX.

IN my last letter I endeavored to show you that church debts tended directly to prevent the great object of preaching the gospel, and to lead churches to seek for ministers, not so much to save souls and build them up in the faith, as to help them to pay their debts. I merely remark now, in passing, that this course of the church is exceedingly impolitic, as well as wicked. For, in the first place, ministers, as a class of men, by their very studies and training, are unfitted to engage in the management of the financial affairs of the church, as is necessary in a case like the one contemplated. And, second, if they should do so, they must, as a matter of course, neglect the appropriate duties of their office, in a greater or less degree. And, third, there are multitudes of men in the church, who could attend to the subject a great deal better, and with less sacrifice of time. And there is no reason, that I can conceive of, why they do not attend to it, other than a want of love to God, or a fear that it may interfere, in some way, with their temporal interests. But, fourth, it is absolutely wicked in the sight of God for any congregation to turn the minister of Christ aside from his work to supply their lack of service in the matter of collecting dollars and cents. But the supremacy of wickedness in this matter is, their making the preaching of God's gospel a mere hook to fish for silver and gold. It is abominable.

My design, in this letter, is to show you that church debts tend to degrade the ministry of Christ.

The ministers of Christ are called, by the Saviour himself, "the stars" which he holds in his right hand, and which he has placed in the midst of the churches, to impart to them that light which they receive from him. They are his ascension gifts to the churches. They are his watchmen, placed upon the walls of Zion, who are to hear the word from the mouth of their

Lord, and to warn the people from him. They are Christ's ambassadors to treat with men to be reconciled to God. Their work, in the fulfilment of these various offices, is manifold, and yet one. It requires much study, prayer, watchfulness, and zeal, and especially freedom from perplexing and unnecessary cares. Anything, then, which will turn them aside from the appropriate work of their office, must, in the nature of the case, tend to diminish the regard which the churches should have for them as God's ministers. It tends, also, to degrade them in the eyes of the men of the world, and thus prevents them from exerting that influence over them, in reference to their salvation, which they should have, in virtue of their office, and which the church, that seeks their good, should desire her ministers to possess.

But let me illustrate my meaning. Suppose the king should descend from his throne, and turn shoe-bearer, or a mere cooley, (a man who carries burdens on his head in the East;) or let the emperor turn groom; let the queen turn scullion; let the judge turn tipstaff; let the President turn street-sweeper; or let them individually rather unite both of these respective offices, and pursue them alternately, as occasion may demand, and who does not see that the dignity of the higher stations must be brought to the level of the other? I am saying nothing here as to the moral worth of those who usually fill these different stations in life. They may be all equally good, or, if there be any difference, it may be in favor of those who hold inferior stations. All that I mean to say is, that the dignity of the offices is different. And if the king will turn cooley, or the queen a scullion, the dignified stations of king and queen are necessarily lowered in the estimation of all. Not only so, but the king and queen will also lose that respect of the people which their stations demand.

Now let us apply this illustration to the ministry. Let the minister descend from the high station where God has placed him, and let him engage in the political discussions or the speculations of the day, and

what will be the result? Evidently this: he will be put on a level with other politicians and speculators, and whatever motives may urge them forward, they will attribute similar motives to him. The man sinks from the dignity of an ambassador for Christ to the standing of a mere wordy politician. And if his political sentiments should not agree with those with whom he may converse, or if he should mistake in judgment in political matters, he will lose the credit he ought to have in matters purely religious. They reason thus: If this minister is so illy qualified (in their estimation) to manage in these worldly affairs, he can scarcely be wise in spirituals. The man and the office both sink in the estimation of these men, and of others.

So it is with any other work that the ministers of Christ may engage in, that does not properly belong to the work of the ministry. Let them, for the time being, lay aside the work of the ministry to collect funds, either to foster the pride of the people in building a more costly church than is necessary, or to pay for one that the congregation, in their imprudence, have erected without the means of paying for it, and the effect will be the same; it degrades the office. The minister is turned aside from his work, and his time is wasted in matters which, in the nature of the case, must be to him exceedingly perplexing and vexing. Take the following facts for the sake of illustration:—A sermon was preached (no matter now when or where) in behalf of the American Board of Missions, a cause which should be dear to every Christian's heart. After the sermon, subscriptions were made on cards. It was made my duty to collect these. I called on Mr. Blank, and presented him his card for \$5. He took it, and after looking at it, said with a surly tone, "Well, I suppose I must pay it; that's the way they're always begging at our church, and they're sure to catch me." He handed me very coolly the pledged \$5. I thanked him for Christ's sake, not his, and came away. I had a bow from him, but I was not told that I was welcome. Immediately after leaving the counting-house, a young

man ran after me, and gave me \$10 for the same cause. He said he was not at church yesterday, when the cause was presented, but had heard of it; and he begged I would accept of the sum offered to aid the cause, and regretted that he had not more to give. What a difference in the spirit of these men!

On a certain occasion I called upon a man who is independently rich, and asked him for a donation to a church, after having stated the case to him. He treated *me* very politely, but the cause was dismissed without a dollar.

After three unsuccessful attempts, I saw a wealthy man, a communicant in the church, and stated the same case to him; and after all my efforts to convince him of the goodness of the cause—the pressing need in the case—I received, as in the first case, nothing. In cases like this, the minister of Christ is placed at the feet of the members of the church, and of others, to beg of them to do for God and his cause what their consciences cannot make them do. Such persons (and their name is legion) feel at perfect liberty to reject the counsel, and advice, and wishes of those whom they acknowledge as Christ's ministers, especially when they come on errands of this nature. Having treated them once in that manner, it is easy to do it again. Even if the next time they see these ministers they should be in the pulpit.

In making special efforts to collect funds to pay off the debt of a church, some may and do receive you pleasantly; but is it so with all? Why do the churches throw this burden on their ministers. Is it because of the unpleasantness of the work? Is it because it is too small a matter for them to attend to, and it is, therefore, very fit work for the ministers of Christ? Is it because they look upon the work of the ministry as essentially including the work of begging for money? Whatever may be the motive, one thing is certain—the thing is a sin against God and his church. I know that there are many ministers whose presence in the pulpit is exceedingly unpleasant to many

of the congregation. These go away, and others, who, for politeness' sake, will stay, often make the remark, "Well, we must bear another begging sermon to-day." And so they do; but they learn to associate, ever after, the feelings they have on those occasions with those ministers of Christ, so that they are seldom benefited by their ministry.

"We never can succeed in our church," said certain elders to a minister, who inquired after their spiritual prosperity, "we never can succeed, until we get a more *popular* minister. The people (that is, those who have wealth to pay church debts) will not come in." What is the thing aimed at by such persons? Not the salvation of souls, as the grand work for which they should labor, but the payment of church debts. The feeling is very much as it was in the time of David, when, we are told, that

"A man was famous and was had
In estimation,
According as he lifted up
His axe thick trees upon."

A man, then, who can bring down a heavy hand upon these forest trees in the church, and cause the silver and the gold to fly from their coffers, as chips under the axe of the woodman, will be had "in estimation." Knowledge of the word of God—skill in dividing it—fidelity in warning men to escape from the wrath to come—diligence in visiting from house to house—success in gathering in those whom "God hath chosen," viz., the weak, and the base things of the world to confound the things which are mighty, (1 Cor. i. 27,) and also faithfulness in directing the inquiring sinner to the Lamb of God, or in smoothing the pillow of the dying Christian in his passage to glory—are all as nought, if the minister possess not the one essential requisite, the ability to collect funds for church debts or church purposes. Such a degrading view of the work of the ministry, I will venture to affirm, would never have found its way into the minds

of any of our church members if it had not been for church debts. With such views of the work of the ministry, how can such persons have that respect for the ministers of Christ, their office, and work, which they should possess? It is impossible. Can they profit under the ministry of the word with such feelings? It cannot be. A system of things, then, still continued in the church, which tends to such sad consequences, is a curse of no ordinary magnitude. Shall it be removed? Or shall it continue to blast the church for generations to come?

In my next letter, I shall turn your thoughts to the effects of church debts in unsettling ministers.

I remain, as ever, yours in the warfare against church debts.

W. R.

LETTER X.

In the present letter, I wish to turn your attention to another enormous evil of church debts, viz.: the influence it has in separating ministers from their congregations.

There was a time when the installation of a minister over a people meant something. The subject interested not only the minister himself, and the congregation of which he was to become the pastor, but the churches generally felt a deep interest in the matter. The relationship was something like the marriage bond—for life. It was not to be dissolved by every breeze of dissatisfaction that might spring up in any breast. It was a sacred tie. The people felt that the minister was theirs. He was the “star” that the Head of the Church had placed in the midst of that congregation. And the minister felt that unto them he was to break the bread of life, and that his duty was to edify the flock of Christ, and to train them up for heaven. His counsels were heeded. The parents paid

him reverence, and the children learned to respect and love him. He was the head of the spiritual flock, and among them could he number many of his spiritual children. While he labored for their spiritual good, they were not unmindful of his temporal wants. They had promised him, not only "a competent worldly maintenance," but also to give him "whatever else they might see needful for the honor of religion, and his comfort among them." The first they paid him punctually; and as to the "whatever else"—his library, his table, and the wardrobe of the family, bore ample testimony that their eyes were open to see what was for the honor of religion, and for his comfort among them. These things tended greatly to unite the hearts of the pastor and his flock together, so that they felt that they were indeed as one family, and that their interest and object were one. A dissolution of the pastoral relationship between such a pastor and his flock was witnessed only when the Great Head of the Church laid him aside from his labors here, or called him to his reward on high.

Now, if you will look into the secret of these long and tender unions, you will find, if I mistake not, that they are intimately connected with the financial affairs of the church. The house in which they worshipped their God, and the God of their fathers, was the Lord's house, and not man's. There was no debt upon it; or, if there was, it was becoming less and less every year, under the influence of a feeling that was determined, in all things, to act honestly. The people were honest towards God, and hence they were honest towards his servant. It was only when the ancient Jews refused to bring their promised tithes into the storehouse of the Lord, that their priests were compelled to abandon the service of the temple, and flee to the fields for a support. And it is owing to the same cause, in the vast majority of cases, that ministers are now compelled to abandon fields of labors, where much fruit might be gathered. If a people are not honest towards God, they cannot be towards the

shepherd God has placed over them. If they have not religion enough to erect such a house as their necessities require, and their means can pay for, they would not be content with Paul or Apollos as their pastor.

It would be interesting to trace out the origin of that disaffection, or whatever else it may be, that ends in the dismissal of a pastor from his flock. As a general thing, he would not leave them, if his situation was rendered comfortable among them. But, by degrees, he finds his position becoming more and more unpleasant. His temporal affairs are embarrassed. Promises on which he relied have not been fulfilled. His mind is harassed in consequence of it. His studies are interrupted. He cannot bring a mind "free from worldly cares and avocations" to investigate the word of God, so as to feed his flock on the Sabbath, and to give to saint and to sinner a portion in due season. The effect is manifest. The people see it; nor are they slow to speak of it.

"Do you think our minister was as interesting to-day as usual?" said Mr. A. to his brother B., as they were returning from church one fine Sabbath day, after hearing a sermon on the words, "Faith without works is dead." "I thought not," said Mr. B., "but I did not like to say so." "But I will," says Mrs. C., who was in company with them; "I could preach as good a sermon as that myself, and I don't profess to be a minister." Encouraged by the example of others, Miss D., one of the pert beauties of the congregation, gave her head one of those significant tosses for which she is noted, and observed, "The sermon was so dull and prosing, that (I'm ashamed to say it) I really fell asleep." The little children said they could not understand the sermon, and so they spent their time in throwing paper balls at one another. Ere long they caught up with elders E. and F., who were walking soberly along, and talking about the state of things in the church. And after some conversation, Mr. A. ventured to say something about

the sermon. The minister was dull—there was in the sermon nothing new said, and nothing old well said—such preaching would not build up a church, &c. “Well, friend A., I suppose that there is some truth in what you say. But you know our minister *can* preach well.”

“I believe he can; but I don’t think that he preaches even as well as he used to do. There must be some reason for it, I suppose.”

“There certainly is; and elder F. and I have been trying to find out the cause of it, and we think we have discovered it in the Old Testament.”

“Well, truly, elder E., you have gone far enough back for the cause,” said Mr. A., laughing at the thought. “But what do you mean? You must explain yourself.”

“I will do so. Elder F. and I both think that our pastor has been treated something like the Israelites were treated by Pharaoh and his task-masters.”

“I hope you don’t mean to say that I am opposed to our pastor! I am always at church when my engagements will permit me to attend. I do not understand you.”

“Have patience, and you will. You remember that when Pharaoh disobeyed the voice of the Lord by Moses, and refused to let Israel go free, that he began to oppress the people more and more. He told his task-masters not to give the people straw to make brick, but to let them go and gather straw for themselves. He required them to make as many bricks daily as they had done before, when the straw was furnished to their hand. ‘So the people were scattered abroad throughout the land of Egypt, to gather stubble instead of straw.’ The task-masters urged them on, saying, ‘fulfil your daily tasks.’ The people could not do it. The task-masters were beaten. The officers of Pharaoh tried to reason the case with him, and reminded him of the fact that the people had *no* STRAW. Still he would not diminish any of the task, but demanded the same as before. The people then

saw it was an 'evil case' with them. And they were in their deep distress, till God appeared for their deliverance."

"That is all very true, elder E.; but what has this to do with our minister's sermon this morning?"

"You will hear, only attend. You remember what an excellent man our former minister was, and how useful he is now in his new congregation. You know we all loved him, and how mortified we were when he mentioned to the Presbytery, that the only reason for his leaving us was a want of support."

"I know it; but we could not help that. You know that the debt upon our church was about \$12,000, and the interest (which must be paid, whoever may want) was about \$720, so that we were not able to give him a proper support. Indeed, when I think of it now, I wonder how he could stay as long with us as he did."

"It is true, our debt was very large for us then, and though it is reduced a little, still it is too burdensome for us to bear it very long. But I have thought, if the people had done what they could, we might have kept him. There are a number of the members of the church who gave nothing to his support. There are Miss Love-self, and Miss Small-waist, and her cousin, Miss Follow-fashion, and a number of young men, who gave nothing at all. And there are Mr. Starch, Mr. Prim, and Mr. Lady-man, who only subscribed a dollar or two, and they did not pay all of that. And there are others who acted in the same way. I am afraid we are pursuing the same course towards our present pastor, and the Lord will remove him from us as He has done our former one. I think, Mr. A., there are a good many in the church like yourself, (for the truth had better come out at once;) who find fault with the minister because he don't make as good brick as usual, and yet you don't give him the straw that he needs. You make him run about to gather stubble, and then blame him because he has not made as many brick as formerly, and because he uses stubble in them instead of straw. And now, Mr. A., let me ask you,

are you not a year in arrears with your pew-rent? You have had fine crops, and your orchards are loaded with fruit. Have you thought of your minister's wants in the midst of your abundance? And, Mr. B., you have succeeded in your business this year very well; and don't you think that you might have added to his comfort considerably, by some tokens of your favor, without diminishing your own comforts in the least degree?"

"Well, I suppose I might, but I never thought of it."

"That is very probable; but, you may rely upon it, the poor Israelite thought of the straw, when he had to gather the stubble, and to make the brick."

"I wish we were out of debt, and then we could support our pastor very easily. But it is very discouraging, especially when the burden falls upon a few."

"That is true, brother B.; and now if you will do what you can, and won't expect our pastor to preach labored discourses, without giving him the time and the means to prepare them—if you will be punctual in your attendance on the means of grace, and prompt in the payment of all dues to the church, and will unite with us in prayer and effort to sustain the church, and to pay off this debt, I think we can succeed in keeping our minister, and the church, too, from being sold by the auctioneer."

Here the company had to separate, and the conversation stopped.

Now, in thinking on this conversation, and the situation of ministers in former days, I have been led to think, that one grand reason why the pastor and the people loved each other so much, was the fact, that there was no church debt to be a source of dissatisfaction. The people called the minister to preach Christ to them. The minister came to do so, and in that work he was sustained. But now, a minister is called for many reasons besides preaching the gospel. He is called to fill a house greatly in debt. Few men can do that. He is called "to shake a city." He is

called to keep up the dignity of the congregation. He is called to harmonize a people who have quarrelled about a church debt. He is called to do his own work, and the work of the people; and the Presbytery put him there to do it! As he can't do it, the Presbytery are called together again to put him out of his office, and to break a bond which they ratified by solemn acts and by prayer. In looking at the causes of this growing evil, I am disposed to think that no small amount of the sin lies on the shoulders of ministers, and hence it is that God chastens them in the thing in which they have sinned. Have they not encouraged people to build a fine church, when they knew that they could not pay for it? Have not some been gratified in being pastors of fine new churches, in debt? Have they not installed their brethren as pastors over churches which were in debt, and under the curse, and when they had abundant reason to believe that they could not succeed? Have they not dismissed pastors because of the debt of the churches? and have they not, in the face of this fact, and perhaps at the same meeting, made preparations to throw another brother into the same furnace? Has not the fear which ministers have had, to openly and sternly rebuke the pride of the people, tended to increase the evil under which they groan? I believe it. And until ministers will refuse to be settled over churches in debt, or to place their brethren over them, the evil will continue. Let the Presbyteries take this stand, and God will bless them. Let the oldest and greatest sinners in our midst repent first, and let others follow. Let the Presbytery of Philadelphia (the mother of us all) repent of their sin, and pay off honorably the debt of their churches, (for they have the ability to do both,) and let others, younger in age, but equal in crime in this respect, follow her example; and the solemn mockery of installing ministers only to dismiss them again, and the perpetual lamentation of barren ordinances will be heard of in our midst no more forever. The work of reform will go through the land, and the Holy Spirit

will descend and rest upon the churches. Who will lead the way?

Yours, sincerely, in the warfare against church debts.
W. R.

LETTER XI.

THERE is one thought more which I wish to present, before I speak of the remedy for the evil, viz.:

The blighting influence which church debts have upon the cause of missions.

When we take up the New Testament, and inquire into the nature of this dispensation, we find it stated by the Apostle in the following language:—"God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name." The object, then, is to gather out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation, a church for the Redeemer. The instrumentality to be used in this work is the preaching of the gospel. Hence, the command of the Saviour is, "Go, ye, into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." This is the imperious duty of the church. Nothing should be allowed to hinder her in performing it. The apostles felt that the preaching of the gospel was *the* work to which they were called, and therefore they allowed nothing to hinder them in the performance of their duty. The church also felt that they were to be coworkers with them in gathering in the elect church; and hence it is, that when they were scattered abroad by persecution, "they went everywhere preaching the word."

As this was the grand object of their organization as a church, they kept it constantly in view. Their labors ceased only with their lives. Their money, time, talents, influence, and lives were devoted to the work of the Lord. They lived for God, and not for

themselves. And having once felt that their lives were the Lord's, their money became valuable, only as it aided them to carry forward the great commission of their Saviour. They never lost sight of the fact, that the full establishment of the kingdom of the Redeemer was the end to be kept in view, and that the preaching of the gospel "in all the world, for a witness unto all nations," was essentially necessary to the accomplishing of that end. Hence they labored and prayed for the time to come when the world should be blessed with universal peace, and when "the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High."

With such views, *self* was a little matter in their eyes. They kept their eyes fixed upon the return of their Lord, and as that could not take place till the gospel should be preached unto all nations, we see at once the secret of their unremitting zeal in preaching the gospel. No wonder, then, that the gospel was carried as far as the Pillar of Hercules on the west, and to the Ganges on the east, before the last apostle was dead. And if the same spirit which animated the apostles had continued for one hundred years longer, the Man of Sin had never risen up to curse the church and the world. To build large and costly churches, and go in debt for them, and then compel themselves to pay an annual tax in the shape of interest money—thereby starving their pastors, crippling their exertions, or preventing them from sending forth missionaries to preach the gospel, taking nothing of the Gentiles—was a course of conduct which never entered their minds. It would have been the consummation of folly in their eyes, as it should be in ours. It would have been a complete demonstration of their lack of practical wisdom, consistency, and of a proper sense of religious duty.

Let us look at this for a moment. The apostles professed their faith in the speedy return of their Lord. They were looking for that event. They declared that

the preaching of the gospel unto all nations was an essential prerequisite to that event. Now, if in the face of these confessions, instead of using their money for the purpose of sending the living preacher to the ends of the earth, they had used it to gratify their pride in building palaces for themselves, or in erecting costly churches, and in paying the interest of the debts remaining upon them, it would have manifested such a total want of consistent conduct, as to prove that their faith in this matter stood not in deeds, but in words. But they did not act so. They manifested their faith by their works. After the apostles were dead, a new generation sprang up, who had not the spirit of their fathers. These began to feel that their own comfort and ease were the *first* things to be attended to, and that the command of the Lord was a *secondary* matter. Their own wants, comforts, luxuries, and pride made such heavy drafts upon their purses, that there was but little left to send the gospel abroad, and thus obey the command of their ascended Lord. Well, what has been the result of this sad experiment? Let the dark ages and the reign of Popery give the answer. A Reformation took place. But where now is the spirit of the reformers? It is found on the page of history, but not in the heart of the church.

But is the duty of sending the gospel to the ends of the earth less binding upon us now than upon the apostles, or upon the reformers? Certainly not. The great work of the church is to preach Christ, and him crucified, to the ends of the earth. She has all the means, so far as wealth is concerned, to accomplish that object. But how does the church, as such, feel upon this subject? If we are to judge from the facts in the case, we must come to the conclusion, that, whatever the church has to do, her work is not to hasten the coming of her Lord, by first carrying the gospel to the nations of the earth. If she felt as she ought, she could not act as she does. The church pays more to gratify her pride, and for things absolutely injurious to her spiritual growth, than she does to send the gospel to

the heathen. You may take the churches of this city for a specimen, if you choose, and what is the result? One church, you will find, has

A debt of	\$22,000,	and pays	\$1,320	interest.
Another,	20,000,	"	1,200	"
Another,	17,000,	"	1,020	"
Another,	11,000,	"	660	"
Another,	10,000,	"	600	"
			\$80,000	
				\$4,800

Now, here are five churches, with a debt of \$80,000 resting upon them, and which pay an annual interest of \$4,800!! If you had the debts of all the churches in this city presented to your view at a glance, it would fill you with utter astonishment. But let this suffice for the present. Now, what a handsome sum is here from five churches, that ought to flow into the treasury of the Lord, to prepare the world for the full establishment of His kingdom.

And if you will add this to the sum they now actually give while under such a heavy curse, and then add to it the additional sum they might give if the curse were removed, you can readily perceive how large an amount of the Lord's money is kept back from accomplishing the work he designs by it. And you can see how easily the church could more than double, yea, quadruple, her contributions every year, and how rapidly she might hasten on the glory of the latter day. And why all this debt? I answer, it is the legitimate fruit of pride and covetousness. There is no manner of use for its existence. The thing is a sin against God. It shows that the church of the Saviour has lost the spirit of her Lord, and of his holy apostles. Jesus and his disciples never could have acted as the church now acts. And no church now can go in debt that possesses the true spirit of her Lord. Yea, more, the church that sits still under the curse of a church debt—that has not repented of her sin—and is not now exerting herself to throw off this body of sin and death, does not possess the true apostolic spirit.

We talk of revivals, and pray for them while under the curse of church debts. But what ground have we to hope for the descent of the Holy Spirit while we withhold from God and his cause his rightful due? And if God does grant some few drops of mercy, what are the converts good for? They may be saved, but they are of necessity a puny race. The stream can not rise higher than the fountain. And converts brought into the churches that are thus under the displeasure of God, will soon sink down to the same level of those who surround them.

There is one fact, in connection with this subject, that must strike every observer; it is, the double influence of the curse of church debts upon the cause of foreign missions. And, 1st. It robs the heathen of all that money which is taken to build more costly churches than is needful, and also of the sum that is annually expended for the payment of interest. And, 2d. It forms a stereotyped excuse for not giving to send the gospel to the heathen, and to aid the cause of Christ at home. When the call comes loud from the distressed, and from those who have no light, but are perishing for lack of vision, the churches say: "We are sorry we cannot help you; but we have a large debt upon us, and it is just as much as we can do to bear up under that." And hence the cause is dismissed. But, it is a mere excuse, for they neither give as they ought, nor do they try to pay off the debt of the church. The effect upon the churches themselves is most sad. How often are they compelled to part with a minister who is doing good in their midst, because of their debt! Such conduct is about as common sense-like as the conduct of some young people, who have just got married, and who wish to make a show in the world before they are able to do it. They spend so much in fine clothes and in fine furniture, that they have nothing left. They have bought the dishes for the table, but there is nothing to put in them.

But one thought more before I conclude. My firm belief is, that church debts is one of the deep-laid

schemes of Satan to hinder the progress of the gospel, and the coming of the kingdom of Christ. I will explain my views on this point. Satan has had the usurped possession of this world for nearly six thousand years. He knows that his time is short, and that ere long the kingdoms of this world must become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ. He also knows that the gospel must be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations, *before* that event can take place. If, then, he can prevent the preaching of the gospel among all nations, and the fulfilment of this part of the church's duty, he still will hold the sway over the earth. Hence it is, that in Christian lands, he is endeavoring to keep the Bible from the youth, so that they may be educated without the principles of the gospel. This he is accomplishing through the aid of the Papal power. And as to heathen lands, he is keeping them from being blessed by the light of the gospel, by diverting the Lord's money from the missionary work to the building of splendid and costly churches at home—paying interest on church debts—building palaces for ourselves—dressing extravagantly—and in every variety of way that he can to keep the gospel from the heathen. Thus it is that Satan is using the church and the men of the world (they being unconscious of the fact) to aid him in keeping the possession of the earth. Oh! when will the people of God awake to a sense of their duty in this matter? I am aware that this thought will strike a certain class of readers as a mere speculation. But I know also that there is another class, who, with the prophetic page open before them, will see and understand that this is the truth. Look at it. The church of the Lord squander away more of the Lord's money in pride and extravagance on their church establishments, than they give to the cause of missions; yea, more than is sufficient to evangelize the whole world: and all this for the glory of God! They are deceived by Satan. It is a plan of the adversary. And it is the more difficult to convince the church of her error and sin in

this particular, because she believes that she is, in the course she is pursuing, doing God's service. Strange infatuation! But so it is. May the Saviour have mercy on his church!

Yours, as ever, in the war against church debts.
W. R.

LETTER XII.

A MINISTER, who resides in the country, met me in the street, a short time ago, and, in the course of our conversation, introduced the subject of church debts. "I am glad," said he, "that you have spoken so plainly on this subject. Go on. The churches ought to hear the truth on this point. But it will do them no good. They will not do their duty. Still, they ought to hear the truth, and I hope you will continue to tell it to them. Go on in your work." I thanked him for the interest he took in my effort to expose the sin of the church in this matter, and also for the cool encouragement he gave me to continue my efforts. And as he gave me a hearty shake of the hand in parting, I really did feel encouraged to say something more, having this consolation, at least, that the truth must ultimately prevail. It may be that the churches have fallen into a sleep so deep, that nothing but the coming of the Son of Man can wake them up. Well, if we cannot awaken Christians to a sense of their duty, perhaps we may aid in keeping their consciences somewhat uneasy.

I hope that the prediction of this good brother may not be realized. But if many of the members of our churches possess the spirit of one with whom I lately conversed, it may be so. He remarked that "the church of which he was a member, was in debt \$10,000, and that they paid annually \$600 interest. He hoped that the church would pay off \$2,000 of this amount, and allow the balance to remain."

But why not pay off the whole amount? You are able to do it? "I know it," he replied. "But if we should pay off that debt, our treasury would soon be full, and we should not know what to do with the money. The first thing, then, would be to raise the minister's salary, and I am not in favor of giving ministers so much money."

Very well, if your minister is well supported, there are many others who are laboring faithfully for their Master, and have to contend with many pecuniary difficulties. You might aid them, or you might sustain a minister entirely, in many parts of our country, upon the amount you pay away as interest."

"I know that; but our people won't do it."

What do you think, reader, of such a spirit as this? Is it really so, that God's people are more willing to pay their hundreds and their thousands, in the shape of interest, to gratify their pride, than to erect plain and suitable churches, and pay for them, and sustain the ministers of the Lord, who are laboring for the salvation of men? Sad times are these on which we have fallen!

After what has been said on the subject, I will now suggest

A REMEDY FOR CHURCH DEBTS.

1. The first thing to be done is, to prevent any further increase of the evil. If the churches which are now involved in debt should be relieved, and if nothing be done to stop this iniquitous system of building churches without paying for them, we shall make but slow progress in this work of reform. It certainly would not show much wisdom in the friends of temperance, if they should spend all their energies in trying to reform drunkards, without aiming to prevent another generation of them from rising up to be a scourge and a curse to society. The young must be kept sober, or they will become drunkards. So it is with church debts. If we pay off the existing debts of the

churches, and still countenance the sin of building new churches without paying for them, we shall soon have the same evil to mourn over that we now have. The practice must be resolutely frowned upon by every lover of the Church of Christ. Let no church be erected through vain glory or party spirit, or to gratify the pride or feelings of a few. But let them be erected only when and where they are needed. And let them be paid for before ever a Christian minister shall, in the name of the people, stand up in their presence and dedicate to God that which they know does not belong to them. This evil may easily be prevented. It is in the power of the ministers to do it at once. Let them resolve that they will not dedicate a church to God that is in debt, and that they will not destroy the comfort and peace of a brother; and hinder his usefulness, by placing him over a church that is in debt, and soon the evil complained of will be cured. If this were done, we should seldom hear of ministers leaving their people for want of a support. The members of the churches would then understand what they must do to have a minister of Christ placed over them; and when they had him, they would be free to labor for the salvation of souls, without the continued annoyance of a debt. I might ask you now to look at the churches in this city, and to tell me what it is which perplexes the minds of the officers of the churches. It is their debt. What breaks in upon the studies and pastoral duties of the settled pastors? The church debt. What turns off the minds of the elders and leading men of the church from the great work of saving souls? It is their church debt. What is it that leads the people to lessen the salary of their ministers, or to fix it at the lowest possible rate, or to be always dilatory in paying their minister, so that he is often pressed beyond measure for the mere necessities of life? It is the church debt. What is that brings down the curse of God upon the churches throughout our land? It is the awful fact that they are robbing God of his due. Do you ask, wherein do they rob him? I answer,

"In tithes and offerings." It surely is not the time for those who call themselves the stewards of God, to be dwelling in their ceiled houses, while the house of God remains unfinished or in debt. May the churches have grace to "consider their ways," and repent of this great evil, that the blessing of God may rest upon them!

In a former letter I mentioned the interesting fact that in Bombay the Hindoos have upwards of four hundred temples for a population of about 200,000, that is, one temple for every five hundred of the people, and that they are all out of debt. Some of those temples have cost not less than 50,000 dollars, and some of them 100,000 dollars!

At a missionary meeting, held on New Year's day in the Rev. Mr. Gillette's church, I asked the Rev. Mr. Kincaid whether any of the temples or pagodas in Burmah were in debt. He replied, *Not one.* Many of these temples have been erected at a vast expense, and not a few of them by individuals.

It appears, then, to be a dictate of nature, and of natural and revealed religion, that God should be worshipped in houses not in debt. The heathen act up to the light they have on this subject. It is left for Christian people, in the nineteenth century, to act in a manner so unworthy of themselves, and so totally inconsistent with the profession they have made. It is well the heathen do not know what the conduct of Christians is in this respect, else they would, I fear, despise us as much as they do those who make their god and then eat him. As we are sending to the heathen missionaries to convert them to Christianity, would it not be well to ask them to send missionaries to Christian lands to convert the people from the sin of professing to give to God houses which belong not to them, and which the sheriff may seize at any time for debt!

Yours, as ever,

W. R.

LETTER XIII.

In my last letter, I showed you what we must do to prevent an increase of the evil of church debts. I will now turn your attention,

2dly. To the remedy for the present existing evil. It is our duty, as honest men, and as Christians, to pay the debts which are now upon the houses devoted to the service of God.

This can be done, 1st, immediately, by Christians taking some of the Lord's money, which they, as the stewards of God, have laid by for their own use, and with it paying off the debts upon the houses in which they worship their Redeemer.

Or, 2d, it can be done in a short time, by a number of Christians, who are not needed in the larger and wealthier churches, uniting their contributions, efforts, and prayers with those who are laboring in the feebler churches. In this manner they will obey the injunction of the apostle, who said, "I have showed you all things, how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak;" and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, when He said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Permit me now to turn your attention to the first of these plans, viz.: the immediate payment of the debts now upon the churches.

I remark, first, that it can be done. The debt upon the churches in this city, under the care of the Third and Fourth Presbyteries, is about \$100,000, which, at the rate of six per cent., draws out of the churches the nett sum of about \$6,000 per annum, in the shape of interest; or rather, I should say, as a tax for pride and covetousness. The debt upon the churches under the care of the First and Second Presbyteries is by no means small. It remains to be seen whether one of their churches will not yet pass into the hands of the

Romanists for debt.* The Methodist, Baptist, and Episcopal churches are large stockholders in the curse of church debts. The amount of debt upon all these churches is not far from \$200,000 more, which will be \$12,000 more of interest. Here, then, we have \$18,000, which the churches of this city are paying annually, as interest upon their church debts. Quite enough to support thirty ministers in country charges, at \$600 each; or enough to send out and support twenty missionaries among the heathen. And all this is spent to gratify a foolish pride. I doubt whether the churches in this city give half as much annually to obey the last command of their ascended Lord, to carry the gospel to the heathen, as they do to gratify themselves in the matter of church adorning, and in paying the interest on church debts. No marvel that six hundred millions of the heathen are still without the gospel, since this is the spirit of the church in the nineteenth century. Let us weep that it is so, and pray that it may not remain so.

Notwithstanding the great debt that presses upon the church, it could be paid immediately, because the people of God are able to do it. I speak advisedly, when I say they are *able* to do it. Look at the immense wealth that is in this city. Now ask, into whose hands has God entrusted all this wealth? You will find that a very large proportion of it is in the hands of those who are the avowed friends and followers of Him who became poor for our sakes. A large portion of the remainder is held by those who, although not the professed followers of Christ, are the decided friends of Christianity—are regular in their attendance on the means of grace, and are ready to contribute to the support of every benevolent enterprise. The wealth of this city is not held by the misanthrope and the foe of the Bible. If the people of God do not now possess as much of their Lord's money as is needed to carry forward his work, there is still enough

* They now have it.

in the hands of others to do it, which they may obtain. For, as "the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof," as "the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just," and as the promise is, "ask, and ye shall receive," the amount may be had, if the proper means be used. There is money enough, and more than enough, in the hands of Christians, to release the houses of their God from the pressure of mortgages and judgment-bonds, which now weigh them down. The pewholders in one congregation alone, in this city, hold property to the amount of, at least, thirty millions of dollars! What a trust is this! And what a fearful responsibility rests upon those who are the stewards of so much of God's money. There are individual Christians among us who hold property from the value of one hundred thousand up to two million of dollars. A gentleman, who certainly has the means of knowing facts like the following, and who is not apt to make groundless statements, recently informed me that the Saviour has entrusted in the hands of one of his people in this city, and which he now holds, more money than has been received into the treasury of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions since the year 1812—say, some two and a half or three millions of dollars! There are at least two hundred and fifty thousand communicants in the Presbyterian Church in this country. Each of these could, on an average, give five dollars per annum, towards paying off the debt of the Lord's house. Yes, they might do it easily, and not lose a single meal by the gift.

Now, take what view of this subject you choose, still, I think, you will agree with me in the belief, that the people of God have enough of their Lord's money in their hands to pay off all the debt that now rests upon the churches dedicated to his service. The work *can* be done. If the work can be done, it may be asked, why is it not done? I reply, that many Christians have not seriously thought of paying off the debts of their churches; and yet they would cheerfully aid, if any one would lead the way. There may be some

who do not wish to do it, and the reason is, they imagine they can make more money for themselves by the operation. I will explain myself. Suppose Mr. A. has the sum of \$5,000, which he chooses to call his own. He is a member of a church that is in debt some \$8,000 or \$10,000, and is now called on to aid in paying off the debt. He reasons thus: I can give \$1,000, and so can others; but, as the interest is only six per cent., if I keep my thousand dollars, and trade with it, I can make ten, twenty, or even thirty per cent. profit out of it. I will, therefore, cheerfully pay my portion of the interest as it becomes due. I will trade with my Lord's money, and whatever is over the six per cent., which I must pay, as my share of the interest money, I will put in my own pocket. And when I am dead, the money may go to pay the debt. ✓

There may be some who feel and act in this way, and it is probable that they think they act wisely. Perhaps they do for this world, but not for the next. Is this the proper course for those to pursue who are the Lord's stewards? Judge ye.

Yours, as ever, in the war against church debts.

W. R.

LETTER XIV.

THE debts upon our churches can be paid. There is money enough in the hands of Christians, which belongs to their Lord, to pay off all the debts which are now upon the houses dedicated to His service. The simple question is, Will they do it? A brother in the ministry says, No. It may be so. It may be that the people of God do not possess enough of the spirit of their Lord, to do their duty in this respect. The time, however, will come, when it will be as disreputable for a congregation to be in debt for the

house in which they worship their Creator, as it is now for ministers or elders to be "given to wine." The conscience of the church is beginning to awake. May it yet speak so as to be heard.

But, who will lead in this matter of church reform? Who will propose a plan which shall meet the approbation of God, and of his church? Let some church act promptly in this matter. Let them pay their debt. Let them tell that fact to their brethren, and show them how it was done. Let others follow their noble example, and soon the curse will be removed.

I would say, let the pastors of the congregations which are now in debt, bring the subject before their people. Let them confess their sins in this matter, and resolve to do, immediately, what they can to deliver themselves from their debt. In this way, they will show, at least, that they are sincere. Let the rich give liberally of their abundance; and let the poor, from the depth of their poverty, cast their mite into the treasury of the Lord. Let there be a willing mind, and a self-denying spirit, and soon the churches will be delivered from this, worse than Egyptian bondage.

I am disposed to think, that the church, as a body, have lost sight, in a great degree, of the grand design of their organization. And hence it is, that their efforts, influence, and money, are so often turned aside to the promotion of other objects than the advancement of the cause of Christ. The object which the Saviour has, in sending the gospel to us sinners, is, that we may know the truth; that we may believe on him, and obtain everlasting life. Peter tells us that "God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name." Paul tells us, that "the great God, even our Saviour, Jesus Christ, gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." The gospel is God's testimony in the case, that these things are so. It is "good news" to us, and to all who hear it. When any are converted, and brought into the church, they become, professed-

ly, at least, co-workers with God, in extending the knowledge of the Redeemer, and the plan of salvation through him. The grand work, yea, the only work of the church, is to obey the last command of her Lord. No other object, however good in itself, should be allowed to interfere with the work which the Saviour has committed to the church to perform.

Ministers may be engaged in a great many useful works, besides preaching the gospel; but they were never ordained for any thing else than to preach the gospel. That is the work which God gave them to do. And let them see to it, that they "take heed to the ministry which they have received in the Lord, that they fulfil it." The members of our churches may also be engaged in many useful and benevolent works; but the work which the Lord has given them to do, is to glorify him by bearing the fruits of the spirit, and by making known to others the unsearchable riches of Christ. Christians are to be the light of the world. They are to let their light shine; and so shine, that others, seeing their good works, may be led to glorify God. This is, then, the grand duty of the church of Christ on the earth. For this specific purpose the church has been organized, and has been kept in existence until the present time. It is her business to labor for the salvation of men. It is her *only* work. No other work that she can engage in, can ever, in any degree, compensate for her neglect of *this* duty. The Saviour has assigned it to her, and she *must* do it.

There are multitudes of persons in the world, to attend to the interests of commerce, of agriculture, and of science. There are societies formed for attending to all those varied objects, and they will do it. But the church of Jesus Christ, as such, has nothing to do in these matters. Her business is to attend to the last command of her Lord, and to see that it is obeyed. As individuals, and as members of society, Christians have duties to perform, in reference to this world, as well as other men. But, as members of the church of Christ, their only duty is to see that the command

of their Lord is obeyed to the very letter. As this is their work, and as he has made his people stewards of his property, for the express purpose that they may do the work, for which he has chosen them from out of the world, what right have they to divert their Lord's money from its appropriate use, to any thing else? We certainly have no objections to rail roads and steamboats, or any of the improvements of the day; but, we would ask, again, with all sincerity, where does the Christian find his authority for entering with a whole soul, and with an open and liberal hand, into all the speculations of the day, while he gives so sparingly to the very cause which he has solemnly pledged himself, in the sight of God and of man, that he will sustain? There is a discrepancy between the conduct and professions of such Christians which no man can reconcile. If that is the spirit of Christianity, then I say heathenism is consistency compared with it. Ah! how eager are many, who bear the livery of heaven, to catch the first news of the state of the markets at home and abroad; and yet, how slow are they to inquire after the prosperity of that very cause which God has placed them to watch over, and for the promotion of which he has entrusted so much wealth in their hands! Such conduct is very much of a piece with that of those parents, who are constantly visiting their neighbors, and are caressing their children, but show little or no concern for the temporal or spiritual good of their own. There is, certainly, something wrong here. I do not say that there is hypocrisy in the souls of such; but it really looks like it. However, we must not say so, lest we should offend any of our readers. Still, I should like to know what name they would give such conduct.

To those, therefore, who possess their Lord's money, I would say: Remember that you are but stewards. Your term of office will soon expire. "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations." If you prove unfaithful to

your trust, if you will spend your Lord's money in attending to your own business, and neglect his work, will he not require it at your hand? He became poor for your sake, and you became rich by being unfaithful to your Lord. How can you meet Jesus, and tell him that you left his sanctuary in debt, because you wished to get gain through the unfaithful use of his money? As an honest Christian, resolve, "I will, God helping me, do my duty in this matter."

There is a church in this city about \$40,000 in debt! There is another about \$30,000 in debt! Another \$28,000! Now, in the nature of the case, such churches cannot be blessed of God. To pray for a revival of pure and undefiled religion, in such churches, and under such circumstances, is absurd. With the solemn declaration of God in Malachi iii. 8—10, sounding in their ears, I wonder how they dare pray for the descent of the Holy Spirit. With the views I have of the character of God, I do not see how he can be true to his word, and revive churches that thus rob him. But it is not what the writer thinks. The question is, what are the dealings of God in the case of such churches? See, and judge for yourselves. Does God revive his work there? Does his word have *free* course? Is it glorified? Alas! it is chained by a debt. As well might a Christian mount to the throne of God with the world tied to his feet, as God's word have free course with such a clog appended to it. Oh! the dishonesty (or hypocrisy, if you choose) of men, who call themselves by the name of Christ—who gratify their pride and covetousness with their Lord's money—who refuse to bring *all* the tithes in the Lord's storehouse—who hide their sins from the ministers of Christ, till they are called and settled over them, and who then hope through the prayers and preachings of God's ministers to grow in grace, and to ripen for heaven, while the word of the Lord thunders in their ears: "Ye are cursed with a curse; for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation." Oh, ye servants of the Lord, lift up your voices like trumpets; cry aloud and spare

not; declare unto the people their sins, and make known to them their transgression. Why do you labor in vain? Why spend your strength for nought? Cease not to warn the people, till they remove this Achan from the camp of the Lord, that Israel may enter the land of promise.

Come, then, ye stewards of God, be faithful to your trust. Keep not back your Lord's money. Pay the debt upon his house. Then will the windows of heaven be opened, and a blessing be poured out upon you, upon your families, and upon your ministers, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. Prove the Lord by doing your duty.

I have a few thoughts for the ladies in my next.

I am yours, as ever, in the war against church debts,

W. R.

LETTER XV.

TO THE LADIES.

I have promised, in this letter to say something to the ladies on church debts. The Apostle Paul (and certainly he should know) says, that "there is a difference between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy in body and in spirit; but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband." Now, if it be so, that there is a class of persons in the church, who do care "for the things of the Lord," I certainly may hope to enlist them in the good cause of trying to deliver the Lord's house from the curse of a debt which rests upon it. But I by no means think that those who "care for the things of the world, how they may please their husbands," have lost their "care for the things of the Lord." Far from it. Many in ancient and in modern times have been, and still are, among the foremost in

every good work. I have not forgotten that it was through the influence which Lady William Bentick exerted over her husband, while he was Governor General of India, that the horrid system of *Suttee* was abolished throughout the English provinces. Women have a power over "the lords of creation" which is mighty. And the simple truth is, after all said and done, *women rule the world*. Queen Victoria rules England. And Dr. Giustiniani tells us that the Countess Giovennino rules the Pope. (See his work, page 29.) When they rule well, I would say amen; but, when ill, woe is unto the world. The operation of the thing reminds me of a Sungskrit Shlok, which I will repeat :

Devadheen jugud surwam ;
Muntradhenuch-u-divatum ;
Tun muntro Brahmunadhenum ;
Brahmuno mum-u-divatum.

Englished thus :

The world is subject to God ;
God is subject to the muntru ;
The muntru is subject to the Brahmun ;
Therefore, the Brahmun is my God.

A more free translation of the idea would be—

The church is subject to a withering debt :
The debt is subject to men, who keep the purse ;
The men are subject to women, (wives and daughters ;)
Therefore, women can deliver the church from debt.

If this is not good logic, I am certain the conclusion reached is a very pleasing one. At all events, I believe it can be done by them. Yea, more, I believe it will be done by them; if not directly, it will be done indirectly, through the influence they may exert on this subject.

But to the point in hand. There are two classes of unmarried ladies in the church, to whose consideration I would now present a few thoughts, viz. : those who *have not*, and those who *have*, an abundance of this world's goods. I take it for granted, that all of you

love your Lord and Saviour; and that you have sincerely consecrated your all to his service; and that you consider yourselves as not your own, but the Lord's. To you I say, the house of your Lord is in debt! It must be redeemed. Many of you have but little of this world's goods; but you have what is far better. You have *influence*. You have influence at a throne of grace; and you have influence over the minds of many. Use your influence at the throne of grace, that God may incline his people to do what is honest and right in this matter. You may influence a father, or a mother, or some friend to do, in this cause, a noble work for God and for the church. Resolve that you will try. And when a plan shall be laid before you, for liquidating the debt upon the churches, give as God may enable you. I ask no more of you, except to follow your efforts with prayer, fervent and continued.

To those ladies who have an abundance of their Lord's money at their disposal, I would say, (1st,) remember that Jesus Christ became poor for your sakes; not that you should become rich in this world, but that you should be rich in faith and in good works. Remember (2d) that you are only stewards, and that soon you must render in your account to the Great Shepherd and Bishop of your souls, and receive your reward according to the mode in which you have acted for your God. Some of you may have friends who are dependant on you for a temporal support. Of course, a portion of the Lord's money in your hands must go for their good. But many of you are otherwise circumstanced. You have far more than enough to support you, even to old age. And when you shall have passed into eternity, you will have left some thousands of God's money to be divided among those who may use it only for their own gratification, and to the injury, if not the ruin, of their souls. Oh! how it would grieve you now, if some one should find their way into your coffers, and should squander away all your wealth in vanity and in sin, just leaving you

enough to sustain you while you lived, and to bury you when dead! Should you not grieve to think that while you are on the earth, you are keeping riches to your hurt, and that when you shall die, they will fall into the hands of, you know not whom—perhaps a wise man, perhaps a fool? No matter into whose hands they may fall, you have no guarantee that the property God has put into your hands, to be used for his glory, will be thus used. God will hold you accountable for it. He has made *you* a steward of his property, and you cannot roll your responsibility upon another. Is it, then, wise, is it safe, for you to waste it upon yourself, in needless expense, or to hoard it up, to be a curse to others when you are gone?

This is a solemn thought. It is one which you should most devoutly ponder and pray over. It will meet you on your dying pillow. It will meet you, as you stand before the Saviour as your Judge, in the great day. Ah! my wealthy friend, how can you meet the Saviour, and there confess before the universe that you injured your soul and hindered the work of your Lord, by spending your time, on earth, in pleasing yourself, and in laboriously striving to keep the Lord's money together, instead of scattering it with a wise and prudent hand, for the glory of God, and for the salvation of souls. When the elders of the Jews came to Jesus, beseeching him to come and heal the centurion's servant, they said, "He was worthy for whom He should do this; for he loveth our nation, and hath built us a synagogue." How much better for you, both now and at the appearing of your Lord, to have some redeemed congregation of saints, from among the heathen, or in a Christian land, rise up and say, concerning you, "She is worthy—for she hath loved us, and hath built us a church," than to have them rise up in judgment, and condemn you, because, for your own gratification, you had kept back your Lord's money, left his church in debt, and ruined souls, for want of that aid you neglected to give?

There is a custom which prevails very generally in

India, of young females devoting themselves for life to the service of their idol gods. Their business is to wash and dress the idol, to keep the apartments clean, and to assist the worshippers in a variety of ways in the worship of the idol. These girls never marry. The idol is their husband. Their whole energies, youth, beauty, soul, and body, are given, without reserve, to the promotion of the glory and honor of the idol and of the temple. The idea is a beautiful one. I would that the youthful, beautiful, and wealthy maidens of our land could be induced to devote themselves, without reserve, to the service of a pure and holy God, and thus exemplify the idea of Paul, that the unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord. I do not mean that they should go into nunneries, for that is a perversion of God's plan in reference to this portion of the human family. But I do mean that they should devote their energies to the service of God, in doing good, and in letting their light shine, so that others may see their good works, and be, in like manner, led to glorify God. Unreserved consecration of heart and life is needed.

I am fully convinced that the Christian female has a heart to feel for the miseries of others. The cry of the destitute from India, from Burmah, and from the islands of the sea, has not been unheeded. Many have followed in the footsteps of Mrs. Newell and Judson, those pioneers in American missions. Their names are embalmed in the memory of the churches. Many more are willing to make similar sacrifices, and to forsake all at home for the cause of Christ. But is it not too often true, that

“’Tis distance lends enchantment to the view,”

while objects quite as worthy our attention are overlooked, because near at hand? There certainly can be no good reason for our feeling so deeply for sinners afar off, and for giving liberally to save them, and yet feel so little and give so sparingly for the conversion of sinners at our very doors. The destitutions of this

city are far greater than the most of persons imagine. In East and West Kensington there is a population of about 46,776. For these there is church room for 10,000 out of 46,000 !

In the District of Moyamensing there is a population of about 27,000. Of this number about 4,000 are colored. They have church room for only 7 or 800.

For the white population there are only *four* churches, viz.:

1 Presbyterian Church,	seating	800.
1 Methodist	" "	1,000.
1 Episcopal	" "	300.
1 Roman	" "	1,000.

There is, then, church room for about 3,100 out of the 24,000.

There are *unlicensed* groggeries, 280 !!

" *licensed* " 10 !!

2,000 children go to no school.

2,000, above the age of fifteen, cannot read or write.

About 12,000 adults have no church room.

The District of Southwark and the City proper are no better supplied. How can 150 churches, accommodating only about 75,000, be sufficient for 340,000 people? But I am told that the churches which are built are not full. True; but that is not the worst of it. *They never will be, under the present system of things.* Let Christians pay their debts to God, by paying the debts of their churches, and then they can, in honesty, urge their fellow-men to do their duty. When church members, who are in debt for their church, go out to invite their neighbors and friends to the church, it looks a little like asking them to come and help them pay their debt. I can assure you that many understand it so. Let Christians pay their debts; then let them ask their friends to come and hear God's word, in God's house, without a debt upon it, and soon the sanctuaries of the Lord will be filled with devout worshippers. Now, ladies, can you not deliver some of the churches from debt? I know you can. You will

leave your wealth after a while to those who may not deserve or may not need it. Why should you not give it to your Saviour now? Who will lead the way? Blessed will be the memory of her who will thus devote the Lord's money, which she holds as a steward, for the promotion of his cause.

I shall consider the second mode for removing the curse of church debts in my next.

Yours, as ever,

W. R.

LETTER XVI.

I WILL address this letter also to my respected sisters in Christ, who are the stewards of a larger portion of their Lord's money than they need for the benefit of themselves, or for those who are dependant on them.

My object in addressing you, my Christian friends, is to interest your hearts more deeply in the work which the Lord hath given you to do. I desire that you may be found faithful; so that when your Lord shall call you to give an account of your stewardship, you may do it with joy, and may receive the plaudit of "well done!" If any do not prove faithful in the use of the unrighteous Mammon, which God hath put into their hands, He will not commit to them the true riches. He will not receive them into his glory. This is a solemn thought. The possession of everlasting habitations is made to depend on a right use of the wealth and influence which God has committed to our trust. Covetousness excludes from heaven. It debases the nobleness of the soul as certainly and as deeply as the act of worshipping a dumb idol.

Let me sketch a portrait of one, it may be of many, who are known to you. She is (1st.) a lady of wealth,

and a member of a Christian church. (2.) She lives at ease, in a degree of splendor and pomp. (3.) Her dress is of the best, for she has the means to procure what she fancies, and therefore lacks nothing that her heart can desire. (4.) Her house is neat, if not grand; her furniture costly and fashionable; her table, if not sumptuous, is always laden with the best the season can produce. (5.) Her time is spent in the way most agreeable to herself. On the Sabbath she visits the church, provided she has no fears of soiling her dress by exposure to the weather. Her days are spent in the oversight of her house; in giving and in receiving visits of friendship; and in visiting places and scenes that may gratify and amuse. (6.) Her mind is stored with what may be gathered from the lighter publications of the day, as annuals and magazines, for her education was finished when she left the school-room some years ago. (7.) She has a heart to feel for the distress of others, when a case is properly presented to her mind; and will give, if she has anything she can conveniently spare. She doubts not but that many widows and fatherless children might be fed and clothed with the excess of her wardrobe and table, above what she needs for herself to live in Christian simplicity, but she knows not who they are, and does not feel disposed to search for them. She sees not the deep distress of many of the children of God, and hears not the cry of distress. Her enjoyments and amusements lead her amid other scenes, where plenty always crowns the board. She does, at times, do good to others, but that is with her a secondary consideration; and even then it is made a matter of convenience, rather than of conscience.

Now let me contrast this conduct with that of Him whose disciple she professes to be. (1st.) He was rich, but became poor for our sakes. (2d.) His life was one of industry and labor, and he led a life of humility, despising the pomp of this world. (3d.) His dress was simple and plain. (4th.) His house could not be grand, for oft-times he had not where to lay

his head. (5th.) His time was spent, not in doing his own will, but the will of him that sent him into this world. He went about doing good. (6th.) His mind was filled with knowledge drawn from the fountain of truth. (7th.) He sought out objects of charity and of distress. He denied himself, that others might be benefited. To do good was the object of his life, and not an occasional act.

What think you of this picture of the contrast? The world, and many in the church, may think that such a lady is not an idolater. But God's word has settled that question: she "that liveth luxuriously or extravagantly (*spatulosa*, Greek) is dead while she liveth." 1 Tim. v. 6. She is a lover of self more than of God. She is spiritually dead. I beseech you, imitate not such an one. How much better for you to imitate the example of your Lord, in going about doing good to others, rather than in seeking your own comfort and convenience in all things.

The world is full of objects upon which you can bestow your benevolence. As you have espoused the cause of Christ, and hold your Lord's property for the promotion of his glory, how can you glorify God more than by giving it for the advancement of his cause? There are many feeble churches which are struggling for existence. Their pastors are faithful and laborious, but their efforts are crippled, and their spirit crushed within them, under the weight of a burden which they cannot remove, but which you could with one of your fingers. And yet it is not done. If you will but take the trouble to inquire, you will find many churches which have been compelled to part with their pastors again and again, because they were not able to give them the small sum they had promised them. They had hoped that the stewards of the Lord's money would have aided them in their holy enterprise. But, no; they have been left to struggle and die. Others are gasping for life, while it is in your power to say unto them, "Live." I have often wondered why it is that wealthy Christians, in wealthy churches, can look

with such composure upon the struggles of their brethren in carrying on the work of the Lord, and yet, either give them no aid, or only such aid as merely keeps them alive, and compels them to drag out a miserable existence. By a single word they could infuse new life into the whole congregation, could place the church free from all embarrassment, and lift up the downcast spirit of the minister of Christ; but they do it not. Is it because they wish to glory in the fact that they are "rich and increased in goods, and have need of nothing?" Is it that they may compel their Christian brethren to enter the kingdom of heaven through great tribulation? What gratification can they have in seeing a Christian church groaning under a church debt, and struggling for existence, when they might so easily make them powerfully instrumental in doing good, and in making inroads upon the kingdom of darkness? I really am at a loss to know why it is that Christians, and especially Christian ladies who are wealthy, have overlooked this great and important duty of delivering the churches of their Lord from debt. For wealthy Christians in a wealthy church to be in debt for the house of their God, it is a deep disgrace. They may make all the apologies they choose for the sin, but they cannot throw off the reproach, nor can they convince the world that there is any other cause for the continuance of the curse than the covetousness of the people or lack of piety.

Now, Christian ladies, let me ask you, what better disposal can you make of your Lord's money than to redeem his house from the bondage of a crushing debt? This will be a conquest worthy of your efforts. You will win, not one heart, but many. It will be honorable. It will bring glory to God, and will result in the salvation of many souls.

The Rev. Mr. Kincaid, missionary in Burmah, in speaking of the great temple at Ava, says: "This structure is 200 feet square, the walls being 8 feet thick and 70 high. On the top of it is a structure 150 feet square and 50 feet high; on this a third, 120 feet

square and 30 feet high; and on this a fourth, 75 feet square and 10 feet high, from the top of which ascends a magnificent spire. From the top of this spire, and of a spire ascending from each of the four corners of each of the four structures are suspended bells, in all two hundred, with clappers so constructed that a strong wind keeps them ringing. On walking along by this temple, when the wind is strong, and all these bells are ringing, a wonderful sensation is produced, as though music was falling all around from the clouds. This temple was a free-will offering from the heathen to their gods, with which it is filled."

I might make many reflections on this fact, but shall conclude with the following lines on seeing

A HEATHEN TEMPLE OUT OF DEBT.

As near a temple once I stood,
I saw a mighty multitude
Of heathen, prostrate on the ground,
While music filled the air around;
Two hundred bells, in concert met,
Proclaimed, "This temple's out of debt."

The priests arose amidst the crowd;
With stentor voice they shout aloud,
We've cheered the heart of Gaudama,
By rearing up this pagoda;
The bells around, with wond'rous glee,
Ring loud, "From debt this house is free."

This house we freely dedicate
To all the gods, both small and great;
The people rose, and upwards went
A shout which e'en the heavens rent:
Great Gaudama! we give to thee
This costly fane—from debt 'tis free.

Again they bow'd, and shouted loud—
One joyous feeling filled the crowd;
In exultation loud they sing,
And yield their hearts an offering:

Hail Gaudama! Still glorious be;
Dwell in thy house! From debt 'tis free.

A Christian church I entered then—
Within were women, children, men;
A deep-toned organ sounded loud,
To gratify the well-dressed crowd;
But now and then 'twas heard to say,
I am in debt, and should not play.

The organist the keys did fret,
But still it said, "I *am* in debt."
The thund'ring bass, the sharp falsette,
Repeat the sound, "I am in debt."
And Echo did all else forget—
She cried aloud, "In debt—in debt."

The pastor preached, and prayed, and wept—
The people thoughtless heard or slept;
The cause of this now understand:
Upon the wall I saw a hand,
Of awful form, write "I-cha-bod—
A debt is on this house of God."

Just o'er his head, where all could see,
The hand records, "Ye have robbed *me*;
Your vain oblations I despise,
They're despicable in *mine* eyes;
In vain ye have together met,
While still *my house* remains in debt."

The preacher cried, Awake! awake!
Your pride and worldliness forsake;
Your God reproach and rob no more,
His free forgiveness now implore.
Repent;—His house redeem from debt;
Echo, responding, says, "from debt."

I turned and wept, in deep distress,
To see the church's worldliness.
Lord! in thy churches can it be
There is so little piety?

Thy people, covetous, forget
 Their vows, and leave thy house in debt!

Why weepest thou? a heathen said;
 Are all thy friends and kindred dead?
 Ah! no; the Church through gold is curs'd.
 He said, "Of sinners you're the worst;
 We're not as bad as Christians yet;
 Our gods have temples out of debt."

Yours, as ever, in the war against church debts.
 W. R.

LETTER XVII.

I WILL now turn your attention to the second plan already suggested, for the purpose of liquidating the debts upon the churches. The plan is very simple. It is this: *Let the strong help the weak.* Let some of those Christians who are not needed to sustain the cause of God in the wealthier churches, leave them, and go and aid their brethren in the feebler churches. In this way they will help to bear each other's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.

I will illustrate my meaning by a case which is worthy of being recorded. There are, I trust, many like it. May there be many more! It is this: In conversing with Mr. K., a worthy member of the Methodist Church, the following conversation took place:

I. Where now do you attend church?

K. I attend the Wharton St. Church.

I. When did you go there?

K. I will tell you. You know we built a church there some time ago. We had a very good minister; but, as the population was very much scattered, and there were but few members, the church did not prosper. It was then proposed that a number of members

from the city churches should go and aid them. About two hundred of us volunteered to go. Some go as far as two miles or more, every Sabbath and through the week. I have been there about two years. Our coming inspired the minister and the people with new zeal. We went to work, and we have now a membership of about six hundred.

I. Well, my friend, you adopted the right plan; and if other weak churches could be aided in the same way, they might prosper too.

K. No doubt of it. Feeble churches need something else besides money.

I. I suppose you are not sorry that you have left your old church, to labor there?

K. No, sir. We have seen some precious times there. But, as they are pretty strong now, some of us are drawing off, with the intention of aiding some other feeble church.

I. Go on in your good work, my brother, and may the Lord prosper you!

We shook hands, and parted.

Now, something like this might be done, with the greatest ease imaginable, for every feeble church. Yea, more, it ought to be done; and then the word of God would have free course, and be glorified. But will Christians do so? Probably not. But the time will come, when God shall raise up another generation of Christians, who will possess a different spirit. "The inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the Lord, and to seek the Lord of Hosts. I also will go." They will not only go to different parts of the same city, to excite their brethren to praise God, but they will go to different cities. Ah! says one, that is all prophecy. That is a future event. When that time comes, then we'll do better. We cannot expect things to be much better now. But is it not just as much the duty of Christians now to excite each other to love and good works, as ever it can be? I certainly think so. Why, then, do they not do it?

The feeling of many Christians on this subject reminds me of a conversation I once had with my former teacher, Sukha-Ram, an intelligent Brahmun, on the subject of the downfall of Hindooism. It was in the year 1832. I observed to him, that the religion of Jesus Christ would ere long supplant that of Boodh, of Krishnu, of Mahmood, &c. He replied, "I believe it. It is written in the Shastru, that in about FORTY YEARS from this time (1870) the Hindoo religion will be destroyed; and I think that Christianity will do it." "Well," said I, "if that be so, you had better take the lead of your countrymen, and give up Hindooism, and embrace Christianity." "No, no," said he; "our religion must exist till that time, and I must try to hold it up till then. When it is God's wish to let it go down, then I am willing to give it up, and embrace something else."

A great many Christians are fond of talking about the Millennium, and the future glory of the church—of the happy times that will then be, and how they would rejoice to live then, and be engaged in serving God; while they are doing nothing, comparatively speaking, to hasten that day they so much desire. But these persons mistake their feelings. There is more of Hindooism than Christianity in such a spirit. Sukha-Ram had no objection to become a Christian, or anything else, after the temple of Hindooism should fall; but while it would stand, his shoulder must lend its strength to keep it up. So with these professing Christians. They are perfectly willing (at least, in words) to help on the cause of God in the Millennium, for then all things will go on smoothly; but for the present, they prefer to float on the current of worldly feeling, and wait patiently for a better state of things. I have long since come to the conclusion, that those persons who talk so much about doing good at a future time, and are always ready to take offence at the present plans of doing good, and therefore stand aloof from them, are either greatly deceived, or else very great hypocrites. The word of God settles the mat-

ter for ever, that the man who will not employ, at the present time, the talent his Lord has given him, is an unprofitable servant, and will be justly condemned for his wicked neglect of duty.

There are many weak churches now in our country. They have been brought into existence by the advice and aid of the older and the wealthier churches. They have acquired a certain amount of strength, but they have not that amount of strength which is needful for them to sustain themselves, and to make them efficient instruments for doing great good in the world. And there they are destined to remain, till they kill themselves by over exertion, or die in despair. The stronger churches look on, and say, "Live," and very piously pray, "The Lord help you—but we won't."

Such conduct reminds me of a fact which I will here relate. A Mr. B., of this city, had a fine little boy, of about four years of age. He appeared to be the pride of both father and mother. He always was neatly and tidily dressed. He was a little gentleman. He was furnished with a cane and dumb watch. In short, he was quite a dandy. I have often seen him strut alongside of his father, as if there was not a particle of the child about him. But the high curb-stones were sad things in his manly path. When crossing the street, he would for a moment forget his manly airs, and, child-like, get up as well as he could. His father, seeing this, would pull him back, and make him "step up like a man." If he appeared like failing, a little external stimulus would often make him perform the deed. This little gentleman, after all, was only a child. One day, in making an attempt to "step up on the curb-stone like a man," he sprained his back, and was a cripple for life. My heart has been pained to see the dear boy lying on the floor, unable even to sit up; and all through the hateful pride of a parent, who put a heavier load on the child than his age could bear. He died after a few years of suffering.

Some of the wealthy churches in our land are just as merciful. They have more men and money than they

know what to do with. And in their self-complacency, they behold their brethren, who are laboring beyond their strength to sustain the cause of God, and yet give them not the aid they need. Or, if they do, it is only to keep them in such a position, that it is as impossible for them to rise above it as it is for a *Shoodroo* to sunder the bonds of *caste*, and enter the ranks of the Brahmins. There is a reason for this unnatural apathy on the part of some in the church towards their brethren. To point out the cause of this apathy, and to rebuke this foul spirit, shall be my object in my next letter. In the meantime, I would ask all the members of the churches who may read this letter one or two questions. And,

1. What are you doing in the church to which you belong?

2. Could not that church prosper just as well without you, as with you?

3. If so, then are you not bound, as an honest man and a Christian, to go where you can do some good, and be of some use in the church of Christ?

4. Are you willing to stay where you are, and be a cypher in the church, while you might elsewhere be the means of saving many souls?

What does conscience say?

I am, as ever, yours in the war against church debts.

W. R.

LETTER XVIII.

THE plan proposed for liquidating the debts upon the churches is, for some to leave their churches, where their aid is not essential to the prosperity of the church, and to unite with their brethren in some feeblar church, where their aid is needed, and where their influence can be felt. This plan could easily be adopted in this city, and with decided advantage. But, will it

be done? I doubt it. It certainly will not be done, unless the churches repent of their great sin in this matter. How much more time they need to repent, I cannot tell. A worthy friend has suggested to me that I should pause, and give the churches time to think on the subject. I will give them time to bring forth fruit meet for repentance. But this, surely, need not hinder me from pursuing this subject, or from encouraging them in their duty. A young man, on his way to Northumberland, in this State, some time ago, saw some cherry-trees by the wayside, laden with fruit. Just as he was about to take some of the fruit, a woman appeared. When she came to the fence, the young man said, "Madam, can I have some of these cherries to eat?" She replied, "I don't know about that." "Oh! well," said he, "I'll just eat on until you can make up your mind on the subject." He did so; and after he was done, he said to her again, "Madam, can I have some cherries?" She crossly replied, "No, sir." "Thank you, madam," said he, "and now I'll go." Now, while the church is making up her mind whether she will repent or not, I will help her in the matter, by suggesting a few thoughts for her encouragement. I'll go on, while she thinks about it.

I have said that I doubt whether the churches will adopt this plan or not. My reason is, that the churches seem unwilling to do their duty in this matter unless *driven* to it. To give you my meaning, I would ask you, how many churches in this city, for example, have been built through simple love to God, and through an ardent desire to promote His glory alone? Again, how many have been built, because the members in the old church fell out with the minister, or with one another, and therefore determined to go and worship by themselves? Again, how many have been built, because a few desired a handsomer church than the old one? It would seem that, in most cases, something besides the love of God constrains Christians to build churches. If the love of God alone had prompt-

ed them to build churches, the same love would have compelled them to pay for them. So I judge.

But Christians have always needed something to push them forward in duty. The primitive Christians were no doubt, very happy while they were all cooped up in Jerusalem, and could every Sabbath attend church, and hear a good sermon from James or one of the apostles. They began to feel, perhaps, that one part of religion consisted in hearing sermons, and the other in praising or condemning them, which appears to be the religion of not a few in our days. But God did not bring them into the church merely that they might be fed. He converted them that they might *do* something for His glory. They were not, however, going to leave their good preachers and their good meetings to go out and labor among the ignorant and degraded. Not they. They felt too comfortable to make any change, though they were doing little or no good where they were, and might do much elsewhere. Seeing this wrong feeling in the church, the Lord soon corrected it. He allowed persecution to arise against the church at Jerusalem, and soon "they were scattered abroad, and went everywhere preaching the word." God is determined that his people shall be as salt scattered abroad in the earth. If they will not go willingly, he will find means to make them go and do their duty.

Now, it is the same spirit of apathy in our days, mixed with a good deal of pride and worldliness, that leads many church members to crowd into and stay in churches where they must know they can do no good in promoting the glory of God. A question here may be asked, why do they stay? I answer, it is not,

1st. Because the gospel is preached nowhere else, and hence they stay there for the purpose of hearing it.

2d. Nor is it because the gospel is preached better in their churches than anywhere else. If we are to judge from the number of sound conversions which

take place in a church, whether the gospel is preached in its purity or not, we must come to the conclusion, that the gospel is preached in the weaker and poorer churches, as well as in the stronger and richer ones.

3d. Nor can it be because they are needed in their own churches to carry forward the work of the Lord. So far from this being the case, the minister would be just as well supported without them as with them. The prayer meetings and the Sabbath school could and do move on without them. They are, in fact, of little use, except to swell the number of hearers, and to add to the respectability of the appearance of the congregation. That, however, is a very important item in the opinion of some. These brethren are almost cyphers in the church. This does not arise from the fact that they are, in themselves, good for nothing. On the contrary, they may be very good, and we presume they are; but they are out of their place. There is either no room for them to work, or else there are others in the church who do it all, and leave nothing for them to do but to look on, and praise the work done, or else find fault with it. A wheel is a very essential part of a wagon, but is of no use if out of its place. It may be a good, or a good-for-nothing wheel, according to the place it occupies. So it is with many church members. They forget the command, "*To do good and communicate, forget not; for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.*" And being out of their place, they are good for nothing.

The question still arises, why is it that so many Christians feel disposed to crowd into the large and wealthy churches, and stay in them, while they must feel that they are of very little use there, and might be of use elsewhere? I answer, there are many reasons:

And, 1st, family pride.

I will mention to you *a fact*, while I conceal the names, and you can give the proper name to the feeling, if I have mistaken it. A Mr. A. B. was a member of the congregation C. in this city. After some

time he left it, and united himself, with his family, to another church of the same denomination, which contained a larger number of members, and a wealthier class of people. Being asked one day by a friend why he left a church where his influence was felt, to go into one where he could do no good, and where he must be a perfect cypher? He replied: "I know it is so; but, then, that poor church is a miserable place for a man to get his daughters married off!"

Now, look at this man's conduct for a moment. He connects himself with a church where there is a prospect of his doing some good. He professes to be actuated in this matter through love to God alone. The Lord gives him a family. These he professedly dedicates to God, and solemnly promises to train them up for the service of God. His family grow up around him, and he begins to feel concerned for their settlement in life. And now what shall be done? He has a lovely daughter or two. The seal of God's covenant is on them; they are His. The father, however, begins to doubt the faithfulness of God. He is not willing, now, to stay where he can do good, and labor for the glory of that God who has given him these lovely daughters, and has preserved them in health till the present time. He cannot trust God to order their lot well in after life. Satan shows him the kingdoms of this world, and the glory of them, and his heart is captivated by the phantom. His purpose is now fixed: "I'll leave this church. The people are pious; but they are not wealthy. I'll unite with another church, where there is more wealth. Then I can introduce my family. My daughters can form alliances which will enable them to live, if not in affluence, certainly at ease and in plenty, for life." The deed is done. The man is received by the minister and elders, who hold out to him the right hand of fellowship, and who trust that he will be a helper in the vineyard of the Lord. But, oh! how sadly are they mistaken. They have taken an Achan into the camp, and instead of being a blessing, he is a curse to them. He does no good, for

that is not his aim. He keeps up the forms of godliness, but his object is to sacrifice these devoted daughters upon the altar of Mammon. He consults not for the spiritual good of his children. Whether they shall be saved or lost, is now a secondary consideration. The grand idea is to exalt the family by an alliance with wealth. Let us suppose it is done; and what now? The pride of the family is gratified; but the child is sacrificed through the "cursed love of gold." The father has thrown a barrier in the way of his child's salvation that may never be removed. He has been deceived through the deceitfulness of riches. The death-bed scene of such a man is not to be desired.

Let me here say to all those who are in danger of being thus tempted, Beware of what you do. Have compassion on the souls of your children. Grace is better than gold. If God, in his providence, should make you the steward of much of his goods, he can bless you in the use of them. But if you forsake the path of duty, and the place where you can do good, for the sake of worldly gain or family pride, you will grieve the Spirit of God, you will injure your own soul, and will be a hindrance to the spirituality of the church with which you may be connected. I pray you, do not so wickedly.

Yours, as ever, in the war against church debts.

W. R.

LETTER XIX.

A SECOND reason why some professing Christians crowd into churches where they know they can do but little, if any, good, is *for the sake of gain.*

I met a gentleman some time ago, and asked him how the work of the Lord prospered in the church of

which I supposed he was still a member. He replied, "I do not know. I have left that church, and have joined another." "Why have you done so?" He said, "It suits my business better."

I would here remark that he was doing, what the world calls, a very good business. He was supporting his family well, and was laying up money, and is now the owner of considerable property. There was no necessity in the case for such a move. By removing from one church to another, he did not change the place of his store. But his hope was, that by coming in contact with a certain class of men in the church, who had wealth, he might so far gain their confidence as to make more money by the acquaintance. Keeping this in view, he gets a certificate of dismissal from the pastor of one church, and is recommended to the pastor of another as a brother in good and regular standing. He is received. That church rejoices in the addition of another member, and perhaps boasts of their gain, while the church he has left mourns over its loss. If they knew, however, the real motives of the man for the change he has made, their feelings would be the very reverse.

I mention this case, not because I suppose the thing is of rare occurrence, but the contrary. Calvin said, in his day, that "on all hands there is an abundance of ostentatious ceremonies, but sincerity of heart is rare." I fear that the remark will apply with equal force to our times. If the case referred to above be a specimen of the feeling found in the churches, we need not be surprised at the low state of piety, and the consequent heavy debts which are upon the houses professedly dedicated to God. There is an amount of hypocrisy exhibited, and of deception played off on Church Sessions and on churches, which deserve the severest rebuke. Look at the matter: this man applies to his pastor for a certificate of dismissal, to connect himself with some other church. He must give a reason for his request, unless he act like some church members, who *slough off*, (as the physicians would say,) or who go off, in

direct violation of their church engagements, without any regular dismissal, and are thus received by other churches. In giving his reasons, he must, of course, conceal the true reason, and leave the impression that there is a prospect, where he is going, of his doing or receiving more good. He is dismissed, and recommended to a sister church. The session of that church receive him; he is welcomed as a brother. He attends the house of God, engages in the duties that may devolve on him; and while all around suppose he is actuated by love to God, he is actuated by selfishness, and is deceiving his fellow members. His constant aim is to increase his worldly business. His connection with the church is only a means to attain that end. Covetousness has now taken hold of his heart, and he has left a place where he might have done good, to be a curse to those where he has gone by the exhibition of a worldly spirit. But "it suits his business," and hence he is there.

This spirit manifests itself in another way. Some church members act upon Franklin's advice, when he said, "a penny saved is a penny made;" and hence they crowd into large and wealthy churches, where their aid is not needed, and save money by the operation. To make this matter plain, I will take a case that is not a fancy sketch. Mr. Aliquis was a member of a church in Philadelphia, where he was doing good. The Lord had bestowed on him some wealth, and he was often called upon, as a steward, to use it for His glory. He ultimately began to feel that the money he held in his hands was *his own*, and not his Lord's. And although he had enough, and more than enough, for his family, besides what he gave to the cause of benevolence, he determined to unite with a wealthy church, with the hope that he would be called upon less frequently to aid the cause of his Redeemer, than he was in his present situation. He did so; and now he gives a small amount, just enough to keep up his standing in the church, and the rest he hoards up for heirs, he knows not who. The church he has left

feels the loss of his contributions, while the church where he is now does not need his aid. He is a cypher in the church of God. It is true, he has the glory of being in connection with a church where the cause moves on, but no thanks to him. He receives glory from man, but none from God. He is increasing in riches; but Solomon says, "there is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, viz.: riches kept for the owners thereof, to their hurt," and he may find it true in his case.

In conversing with a worthy man, who was doing some good in his own church, but was not essential to its prosperity, and who might do a great deal more elsewhere, I said, Why do you not, for the sake of your Redeemer, go to such a church, where your influence will be felt far and wide, and where you may do infinitely more good than where you now are? He replied, "I have often thought of it, but my wife will not go." He gave his reasons for it, and they all amounted to this—she would be among a *different class* of people. But suppose they are not so rich or so refined as some others, are not their souls equally valuable, and is there not a prospect of your doing far more good there, and of your obtaining a brighter crown of glory? "That is true," said he; "but still it is so, and you cannot control the feelings of women in these matters." I gave him to understand that I thought he was acting like Adam in blaming Eve. He was a greater sinner than his wife.

I need not dwell upon this subject any longer; but I would ask, has it come to this, that church members are to consult their own ease, in preference to the glory of God, and yet maintain their standing in the church? If it be so, who is to blame for this state of things? A brother in the ministry has written me a letter, in which he expresses the opinion, that the sin, in this matter, does not lie at the door of the church members alone. He shall speak for himself. He says:

"Brother R., this worldly spirit (of which you speak) is not confined to laymen. Some 'teachers in Israel,'

who ought to know better, and talk better, are strongly tinctured with it. In their estimation, churches not strong in lucre are worse than useless appendages to Presbyteries, and are regarded in the light of 'poor relations.' It has been more than once intimated, with a smile, that they had better form alliances elsewhere, with such denominations as operate principally among the 'humble classes' of society. With such men, it matters not what may be the spiritual wants of a neighborhood, or the prayers and piety of a weak church located therein, or the number of the souls of the poor converted there; if said church has not enough money, and some to spare, it is deemed an unprofitable concern, and had better die than live. I speak what I know when I say, that there are those who feel but little interest for a weak church, whose sole recommendation is the conversion and edification of poor men.

"Dear brother, in writing you this, I am not influenced by that spirit of petty envy which sometimes prejudices the poor against the rich, for, *personally*, I have no reason to complain of poverty; but it is evidently seen a worldly policy, a sordid feeling are prevailing among some men, which should be rebuked, because contrary to the spirit of the gospel.

"Yours, &c.,

C. B."

In reference to this letter, I would say, in the language of an aged Quaker, "this friend speaks my mind." Yes, I am disposed to think that the evil lies as much, if not more, in the teachers than in the taught. If the church members were made to understand their duty in this matter, when they unite with the church, they would, I am persuaded, act differently. But this *do-nothing* spirit in church members is, in many instances, encouraged by ministers. Report says, and I presume it is true, that there is a church in this land where may be found some fifteen or twenty ex-elders, who have laid aside their office *pro tem.*, and are crowded together as mere absorbents of the word. When Napoleon opened the doors of a certain nun

nery in Spain, he turned out all the nuns, saying to them, "Begone, you jades, and spin." Oh! that some Napoleon would arise in the church, and scourge the slothful into activity, or else drive them out from the temple of the Lord, for they do more harm than good, and those who would do good they hinder.

Well, it may be asked, would you have such persons to unite with feeble churches? By no means. But we would have ministers raise their voice of warning against such drones in the hive. If they cannot be converted, and be led to do good, let them be cut off from the communion of the church. But there are some who would work, if there were room for them, in the large and wealthy churches. Now the proper course is for some brethren to leave those churches, and unite with those that are feeble. This will afford them the opportunity of doing more good, and it will also make room for others to work, who would, but cannot, and it would aid the feeble churches in sustaining themselves. This would bring Christian character to a test, and we should then soon know who is on the Lord's side, and who is not.

Immediately after my arrival at Bombay with my brethren, the Mission held a meeting to decide on some plan of distribution. It was thought that seven missionaries were too many for that city, though it contained more than 200,000 people, while other large towns had no missionary. Their plan was to be united in heart and aim, but not in place. They did not consult whether or not "the society of the Hindoos was such as they had been accustomed to," or whether it would "suit their worldly business better" to stay in one place rather than another; but the simple question was, how can we dispose of ourselves so as to do the most good among the heathen? A plan was adopted, and the mission families were divided. Now, if God requires his people to deny themselves, and if the church expect that missionaries and their families should make sacrifices of comfort, of wealth, and of refined and intellectual society, I should like to know

where so many professors of religion, in this city and elsewhere, get their authority for crowding into large and wealthy churches, to sit down at their ease, and do nothing for God or the salvation of men? Are there two Bibles? Are there two rules of life? Has God given some of his people a kind of indulgence to do nothing but hear the word of life, while others have to bear the heat and the burden of the day? Has He allowed some to please themselves in all things, while others, if they would be saved, must please Him? Are there two plans of salvation? Is self-denial needful only for a few, while others can hoard up their wealth, and enter heaven too? If God has given some of his people wealth and knowledge, and if they are refined in their manners, are they therefore to be released from working in the vineyard of the Lord? Alas! alas! that Christians should imbibe such notions of *caste*, as to be, in fact, practical Hindoos in the matter of laboring personally for the good of others. The Saviour was in good society in heaven, and yet he was willing to instruct the ignorant, and to labor for the good of the poor and the wretched in this sinful world. What are we, that we should pride ourselves upon our refinement or birth, and refuse to labor for God? I have seen the haughty Brahmun turn aside, lest the shadow of a Shoodroo (a man of low *caste*) falling on him, should defile him, and I have pitied the deluded heathen; but when I see professing Christians refuse to labor for God, because they imagine they have more sense and refinement than their neighbors, and when they refuse to contribute, according to their ability, to redeem the houses of their God, which their pride has built at a useless expense, I am forced to ask, can this be the spirit of Christianity? Can such persons possess the spirit of Christ? Can such conduct be pleasing to God? Can such persons be traveling the narrow way to heaven?

Yours, as ever, in the war against church debts.

W. R.

LETTER XX.

A THIRD reason why some professing Christians refuse to aid feeble churches, in their efforts to advance the cause of Christ, is the fact that they have become "weary in well doing," and are stricken with the disease of "itching ears."

I met a Christian man in the street one day, and after the usual salutations, the following conversation ensued :

How does the work of the Lord prosper in your church now ?

I know not ; I have left the church.

To what church have you gone ?

To Mr. Blank's church.

Why did you go there ? You can do no good in that church.

I have not gone there for that purpose. I have been *doing* good for many years, and I have become tired. I want to *get* some now.

I fear you will not profit much by the change ; for those who refuse to labor for God, do not prosper in spiritual things.

Well, I think I have done my share of labor in feeble churches ; let some others try it. I mean to rest awhile.

We parted with a mutual good-bye.

The next time I saw this man, he was loud in his praises of the sermons of his new minister. I lately heard that he has removed to another church, because it suits his business better.

Take another specimen of a similar feeling.

Good morning, Mr. A. You are just the man who could do great good in the —— church, if you would go. (The field was spread out before him, and he was urged to engage in the work of the Lord.)

Mr. A. I acknowledge that there is a prospect of doing more good there than where I am ; but it is so far from my dwelling. I live in ——.

True, that is a great distance for a Philadelphian to go to church; but it is not more than fifteen minutes' walk, and you walk farther than that every morning to your counting-house.

Mr. A. I do not care for the walk for myself; but it is too far for my family. My children could not get to Sabbath school in time, and my wife's health is not good. It would be too far for her.

As to her health, you are the best judge of that. But don't she go to market, and also a-shopping occasionally?

Mr. A. Yes, she attends to these matters.

Then, my word for it, she walks much farther than the distance I speak of. When ladies go a-shopping, a few squares are of no consequence in their view. As to your children, the distance is nothing for them; they need exercise. Only give them their breakfast early enough, and send them off, and they will be at school in time. You would lose nothing on the score of preaching; and then the joy of doing something for the cause of Christ would more than compensate you for any self-denial exercised.

Mr. A. The gospel, I doubt not, is preached there; but then I fear Mrs. A. would object to the distance.

Well, if she could not go always, she could go occasionally; and her self-denial, in this respect, would encourage others who have better health to unite with you in this good work. And as a good wife, she would be willing to aid you in doing more good in the church. I think she would go, if you would present the case properly before her mind. What do you think?

Mr. A. Perhaps she might. But, to be candid with you, the people there are not such as I have been in the habit of associating with. And I do not wish to go.

Oh! now I understand you; you speak plainly. And (laying my hand upon his shoulder) all I have to say is this, if the Saviour had been influenced by such feelings, when on the earth, you would never be saved. Good morning.

So we parted. I never saw this professing Christian afterward, to speak with him, but I watched his course. He soon after left his church, to unite with a still richer one. He was of no use there. He grew dissatisfied, and removed to another place, where he heard preaching less frequently than formerly, but where it suited his business better. As to the good he did in advancing the cause of Christ, it is not mine to say. His Master is his Judge. (N. B. He shortly after met with great pecuniary losses, and is now dead.)

In conversing with an intelligent man, who had been in the church some eight or ten years, I urged him to unite with his brethren who were doing good in a destitute portion of the Lord's vineyard. But he positively refused, and the only reason given was, it was too great a sacrifice for him to lose *one* sermon that *his* pastor might preach.

Well, we need not be surprised that churches are erected, and not paid for, since such a spirit prevails so extensively in the churches. Pride, *caste*, convenience, gratification, good society, peculiar associations, and covetousness sway the minds of many Christians in their choice of a place of worship, far more than the simple questions, "How and where can I most glorify God?" I have been in the ministry now twenty-five years, and I have never asked a man or a woman, whether converted under my ministry or not, to unite with us, if I thought they could do more good elsewhere. Nor have I ever asked a man to stay and labor with me, if he felt he could do more good elsewhere. On the contrary, my uniform practice is to say to them, Do not come with us, unless you feel, in the providence of God, that you can do more good with us than elsewhere. Nor do I ever refuse for a moment to dismiss a member who may feel that God would be more glorified by his laboring elsewhere. Every man is bound to ask himself the question, Where can I most glorify God? and to act accordingly. He has no right to bury his Lord's talent in the earth. He is to glorify

God by bearing much fruit. And sad will be the death-bed scene of the man who lives for his own gratification, and refuses to do what he might for his Lord and Master.

When I look at the number of church members who are crowded together in some of the churches, when I think of the wealth they possess, of the influence they might exert in saving perishing men, and that they are absolutely in the way of each other, often quarrelling with one another, and, in fact, stumbling blocks in the way of sinners coming to God—I feel exceedingly sad. Multitudes upon multitudes, all around them, are perishing for lack of vision, and no man of them cares for their souls enough to build a house for God, pay for it, and support the gospel, so that they may be saved. They might do it, if they would. There are many men and women in our churches who could, without losing a meal by the effort, build a neat house of worship, and support a minister of the gospel, and thus be the means of saving many souls. But they choose not to dispose of their Lord's money in that way. Well, what is the consequence? They will not labor to make men good; men grow worse and worse. These men of wealth in the church are taxed the heavier by the government to aid in punishing crime; their property is sacrificed by the faithlessness of the wicked; and in the end the church loses more through the influence of crime, than she would need to spend in reforming and saving these sons of Belial. But we have high authority for this kind of economy. Our government spent about forty millions of dollars, besides a multitude of lives, to shoot a few Indians; whereas, half a million spent in instructing them in the fear of God, would have saved all this waste of property and life—this ruin of souls. And now, again, she has spent more than one hundred millions of dollars, and thousands of precious lives, for a little contemptible glory in Mexico, when she might have had all this, and far more, for one-tenth of the sum.

But where is the hope that things will be better?

The church has lost the spirit of the apostles, and is but a stripling, when compared with her former giant greatness. I knew a man who stood high as a Christian in a church in this city. He chose to leave it, and to unite with another wealthy church. He did so. He could not find a pew that suited him; and for six months he waited for somebody in the church to die or remove, so that he might be accommodated. He did obtain a pew, and, in six months more, he too was dead. What account will such a Christian be able to give to the Great Head of the Church of the last year of his life? But why censure such men, when we find similar feelings in some who are set apart to be teachers in Israel? It often happens that a young man has his license in his pocket to preach the gospel, and yet remains at home, in hope of a call to some congregation where he can find a good and large support, instead of going forth, in the fear of the Lord, to labor in the vineyard of his Master, wherever a door may be opened to him. If the ministers of Christ, who do conscientiously labor for their Master, would frown upon such conduct wherever exhibited, and if they would so preach as to urge their people to be *doers* of the word, and not *hearers* only, we should soon see our churches delivered from the curse of church debts. Yea, more, we should soon see the whole land dotted with churches, erected to the honor of the true God, paid for, and full of devout worshippers; the ministers of Christ supported and encouraged in their work, and the word of the Lord would have free course and be glorified.

Again let me ask you, my Christian readers, are you glorifying God, in the station you occupy in the church, as much as you might do in some other part of it? Could you not alone, or by uniting with a few others, easily deliver this or that house of God from debt? Could you not easily build a house to God, and support a good minister of Christ to preach the gospel in it? Have you not lost already, by the failure of banks, or houses, or individuals, vastly more

than you have ever given to pay off the debts of God's houses, or to erect new ones? Does not God require more at your hand than He receives? Will you then do what you can to save the Church of Christ from a lasting disgrace? There is a Protestant church now in this city loaded with a debt of some \$10,000, or more, and if the sum be not soon paid, it must pass over into the hands of the Pope.* Then will the citizens of this city be permitted to witness the farce of purifying, with smoke, and water, and Latin prayers, the sanctuary of our God, to make way for the idolatry of the mass, and the abominations of the confession! And yet there are men ecclesiastically connected with it who are groaning under the weight of their wealth, and who must soon die and leave it all, and still they gaze upon it with cold indifference. Oh! thou blessed Spirit, that moved upon the hearts of apostles and reformers, return, and leave not thy church to utter desolation!

I am yours, as ever, in the war against church debts.

W. R.

LETTER XXI.

THE RECAPITULATION.

LEST I should weary my readers by my prolixity on this subject, I will bring these letters to a close. The subject is by no means exhausted. The half has not yet been said, that might be said, of the withering curse of church debts. But I will leave it for abler pens to present the evil, in some other form, before the churches, with the hope that the consciences of those who are interested in this matter will not slumber over the subject, as in days past.

* It has gone into the hands of the Romanists.

As some of my readers may have forgotten some of the ideas presented in these letters, I have thought that it might not be amiss to give a versified recapitulation of the whole matter, with some additional thoughts. I do so, not because I wish to exhibit any specimen of sublimity in poetry. Those who look for this may rest assured that they will be disappointed. I am no poet, and aim not to wear a poet's laurels. But as it is a relief, at times, to leave the monotonous motion of a car for the less rapid, though more pleasing, goings of even a homely carriage, so I feel it to be in the present case. I promise my readers I shall not trouble them much longer with either poetry or prose.

I feel thankful for the encouragement I have had from those who have said, "Go on." Whether the predictions of my brethren, who have said, "Go on, but you will do no good," will be fulfilled, remain to be seen. I am unwilling yet to believe that the Christian church cares less for the glory of God, and the churches of their Saviour, than the heathen do for their temples. If, however, they do not speedily redeem the Lord's house from the curse of a debt, which now rests upon it, they will show that they love themselves more than the cause of Christ, and value their own houses more than they do the house of their God.

Sad times, indeed, we then shall see,
When saints grow covetous and cold;
Then Pride shall conquer Piety,
And Grace resign her sway to Gold.
This cursed love of sordid dust
Doth mar the Christian name as yet;
It grieves the Spirit by distrust,
And blasts his churches with a debt.

A DIALOGUE ON THE STATE OF THE CHURCH.

Mr. A. calls upon his friend B., and finds him in his room, and at leisure. Mr. B. rises, and accosts his friend thus:

Mr. B. Welcome, dear sir; come, take a seat;
And, since we do so seldom meet,
Come, let us speak of heavenly things,
For such discourse true pleasure brings.
Then, first, (for surely thou canst tell)
Say, is it with the churches well?
Does piety within them thrive?
Do Christians after glory strive?

Mr. A. I would, dear friend, that I could give,
An answer in the affirmative.
Oh! that I could sincerely tell
That with the churches "all is well!"
In some, devotion's flame is bright,
Diffusing round a sacred light;
And now and then a sinner turns,
Forsakes his sins, and o'er them mourns.
Some manifest, by trifling talk,
They're turned from Christ, nor with Him walk.
The world has captivated them;
They've ceased its deadly tide to stem;
The wise with foolish virgins sleep,
And seldom o'er their follies weep;
But God preserves a remnant still,
Who always aim to do His will.
The world is courted and pursued,
As if it were the only good;
The church grows rich in sordid pelf,
And seeks to gratify herself;
Christians abound in wealth and ease,
And many live themselves to please.
I oft feel sad, that worldliness
Usurps the place of godliness.

Mr. B. I'm well aware the world is bad,
And pious men may well be sad;
But still, I pray you, grieve not so—
That does but little good, you know.
E'er since the fall, the world has been
Groaning beneath a weight of sin;
The wheat and tares together grow,
And thus does God his patience show.
The day will come, I hope 'tis near,
When our Redeemer shall appear:
Till then, we cannot hope to see
The church from imperfection free.
The church is far, I'll freely grant,
From what she was, or what we want;
But still she is the only Light
That keeps this world from endless night.

Mr. A. I so believe. But might not she
Walk in her pristine purity?
Say, what doth hinder now her way
That was not in th' apostles' day?
Idolatry did them surround,
And everywhere did vice abound;
Yet still corruption they withstood—
A firm, devoted brotherhood.
Their very lives they held not dear,
Confessed they were but pilgrims here;
Their all was on God's altar laid;
Their lives confirmed the vows they made.
With Christians now it is not so;
The mass seem led by empty show.
In many things, as living, dress,
They manifest great worldliness.
They imitate a Chinese priest,
Who vowed to give his god a feast
He slew a hog—gave him the *soul*,
But for himself he kept the whole.
He reason'd thus: "The gods above
Don't feast on things that mortals love;

As spirits, they on spirits feed,
But food more solid mortals need.
I'll give my god the soul; for that
Is far more dear to him than fat.
The soul he never will refuse,
But flesh and blood he cannot use.
Thus, while upon the soul he'll feast,
I'll have the carcase of the beast;
And thus shall both be satisfied,
While both are fed and gratified."
In Christian lands some do the same,
And yet retain the Christian name:
They give to God what they can spare,
And keep for *self* the largest share.

Mr. B. I must confess, 'tis sometimes so,
But then the case is rare, you know:
I still must think that, after all,
The censure does too heavy fall.
Concerning some, your words are true,
And yet they seem like Christians too;
That all are so, I can't but doubt,
Until you clearly make it out.

Mr. A. I don't affirm that ev'ry man
Withholds from God just what he can;
But this I say: there are but few
Who give to God what is His due.
Suppose that, for example's sake,
You do our city churches take:
Is one in ten redeemed from debt?
If so, I have to learn it yet.
Will any man pretend to say,
That all these debts they cannot pay?
They can redeem them, if they would;
Yea, more, their conscience says they should.
Then why is not God's house set free?
The cause is not in poverty.
Ah! no; but this, our deep disgrace,
Arises from the want of grace.

These debts on churches are a curse,
Which always grow from bad to worse;
From worse to worse they onward go,
Like an Apocalyptic woe.

Mr. B. I cannot here with you agree—
A debt may oft a *blessing* be.

Mr. A. What! a blessing! And think you so?
Do let me, then, your reasons know.

Mr. B. Perhaps my language is too strong,
But still I think that you are wrong.
I cannot think that ev'ry case
Of debt betokens want of grace;
Or that a church, by debt oppress'd,
Can never in her work be bless'd.
The fact is plain, that churches do
Still keep in debt, and prosper too.

Mr. A. That they're in debt, that fact I know;
But that they prosper you must show:
You'll find that work is hard indeed—
But I will hear, so now proceed.

Mr. B. I will. And, first, I wish to say,
They're "bonds of union" in our day.

Mr. A. Tremendous bonds they are, I know—
Most galling bonds of sin and woe.

Mr. B. Have patience, man, and I'll explain;
If you'll allow, I'll make it plain.

Mr. A. Most certainly: I hope you will
Go on, dear sir; I'll now be still.

Mr. B. The debts on churches, I maintain,
Bind men together like a chain,
Which doth the people firmly hold—
Especially when made of gold.



SALE OF PEWS.

Their operation, when you see,
You will perhaps, agree with me.
For instance, here are eight or ten,
Or more or less, of Christian men,
Who now agree a church to build,
And hope, of course, it will be filled.
Each one pays in a fixed amount,
Of which he keeps a strict account;
But, mark! this money is but lent—
It yields a gain of six per cent,
The church is up; it must be paid;
A price upon the pews is laid.
A day is fixed to sell the pews;
The daily papers give the news;
The people come—the auctioneer,
Within God's house, does then appear.
The crowd the costly pulpit view,
The organ, seats, and cushions too.

THE SALE OF PEWS.

“Who'll buy this pew?” the salesman cries;
“Location good—a pleasant size.
Two hundred—fifty—three—go on—
Three fifty—four—five—going—gone.
Who'll have the next? Best in the church—
Bid up—don't leave us in the lurch.
’Tis gone. The next? They must be sold.
Come, gentlemen, don't mind your gold;
Money enough, when you are gone,
For sons-in-law to revel on.
Three hundred bid? Well done, I say;
We'll make a splendid sale to-day.
It can't be beat—the stock is good—
First rate—I see I'm understood.
Bid up! Now show that you're alive;
Three fifty—four—four fifty—five—
Five hundred dollars for this pew—
Going at five—a bargain, too—
’Tis gone. It is yours, Mr. Great;
I do you, sir, congratulate.

All now are sold, except two more—
 Those in the corner, near the door;
 But since they're kept for charity,
 I've been advised to let them be.
 For your attendance thanks are due;
 My thanks I give, kind sirs, to you."

Thus, by this plan, (the very best,)
 The principal and interest
 Of money lent can be repaid;
 It yields the church substantial aid.
 You see, the man who owns the pew,
 If he should choose, can sell it too.
 If things succeed, there is a chance
 The pew in value will advance.
 There is our neighbor, Mr. K.,
 Who sold his pew the other day;
 Four hundred dollars he had paid—
 He sold the pew for six, and made
 A handsome profit by the trade.
 The furniture he sold by lot,
 And more than what it cost he got.
 I do not say that there are any
 Who join the church to make a penny;
 But in a case like this, you see,
 A *pew* is not bad property.

It seems to me quite fortunate
 That pews escape a tax from state;
 Most other things are taxable:
 Hence pews all other *stocks* excel.
 When people can this understand,
 This stock will be in great demand.
 Now, after all, without pretence,
 The money has the influence.
 The man who has such ties as these
 May not be quite so hard to please;
 His pew he will not sacrifice;
 Thus to the church the man it ties.
 Some churches have an interest,
 Which they can pay as suits them best.

Indeed, the ladies often raise,
 By fairs, and sales, and other ways,
 Enough to put them out of fear,
 And push them on from year to year.
 And now, my friend, I hope that we,
 About church debts, at length agree;
 That they are *blessings*, I maintain;
 Say, don't you think the case is plain?

Mr. A. I thank you, sir, for what you've said;
 You have the subject clearer made.
 The case is plain; debts are a curse;
 In vain you'll search to find a worse.
 Your plan is hateful to my mind;
 It seems iniquity refined.
 Suppose that now Bartholomew,
 Or James, or John, should need a pew;
 Or if Mary, Jesus' mother,
 Should desire to have another;
 Say, would their piety and grace
 Secure for them their proper place?
 Or would you say, pews must be sold,
 And can't be had without the gold?

Mr. B. A poor man is a poor affair,
 In money matters, anywhere;
 We much prefer, I'm free to say,
 The man who can the money pay.
 His money will secure a place,
 Which can't be had alone for grace.
 In many churches seats are free;
 (For instance, in the gallery;)
 So, if the poor will choose to come,
 They'll find "above" enough of room.
 Now don't suppose we shut the door
 'Gainst any man who may be poor;
 We do not so; we only say,
 That gold, at times, does grace outweigh.

Mr. A. Your plan I understand at last:
 You have adopted Hindoo *caste*.

They, by their birth, their *caste* adjust ;
 But here 'tis done by sordid dust.
 To keep up *caste* a church is built—
 A debt's incurred, and also guilt ;
 Some saint or sinner must be found,
 To whom you mortgage house and ground ;
 You borrow largely, and you say,
 "We're safe, if we the int'rest pay."
 The principal you leave to be
 A curse to your posterity.
 To pay that off, you ne'er intend ;
 This is the truth, I apprehend.
 But now, the interest to raise,
 You must resort to various ways :
 A sale is made, to aid the cause,
 Of fancy trifles and gewgaws ;
 The brain is tortured to devise
 Some whim to aid the enterprise ;
 Nothing comes wrong—'tis just the thing,
 Provided it does money bring.
 Men without grace you try to please,
 And so you make of them Trustees.
 God's enemies are courted now—
 Religion to the world must bow ;
 As he that borrows is the slave
 Of him that lends, perhaps a knave,
 Christ's church must bow to knavery,
 In base and abject slavery ;
 For, as regards the mortgagee,
 A foe to Christ he oft may be.
 If this be so, the wicked's rod
 Then rests upon the house of God.

Say, was it thus the Jews of old
 Lent out their silver and their gold ?
 Did they their money thus invest,
 And charge Jehovah interest ?
 Did not the people promptly bring
 To God a free-will offering ?
 They gave Jehovah first their heart,
 Then set their wealth to him apart ;

They brought of every kind of stuff,
At God's command, more than enough
Of silver, gold, and brass, and wood ;
And soon, in glorious beauty, stood,
Built freely, and with one accord,
A tabernacle to the Lord.

They reared the Temple free from debt—
There God in mercy with them met ;
The holy people worshipped Him,
As seen between the cherubim.
In after days, that house they made
A place of merchandise and trade ;
But though their sins were manifold,
Jehovah's house they never sold :
This sin of sins remained to be
A blot on Christianity.
Oh ! deep disgrace ! a *Christian* sells
The house in which his Saviour dwells !
Go, search the earth, from east to west,
And every clime by men possessed—
Among them all, you'll find not one
Where such iniquity is done.

Mr. B. But why refer us to the Jews ?
You know they've customs we don't use.
We've nothing now to do with them,
Since they our Saviour did condemn ;
I say again, we've nought to do
With Jewish law—we have the New.

Mr. A. I can't agree ; but, for the sake
Of argument, the New I'll take.
I pray thee, then, show me the plan
On which the Christian church began ;
If they pursued the plan you do,
Then I'll confess the truth's with you.
We both can take them as our guide ;
Let them this question then decide.

Mr. B. This seems but fair, I must confess,
And in this plan shall acquiesce ;
But yet we can't make every man,
In everything, pursue their plan.

Mr. A. Our error can't be very great,
If we their conduct imitate ;
Their principles will stand the test,
For, I assure you, they're the best ;
And, notwithstanding all our show,
We'd better to the apostles go ;
They may not all our plans commend,
But their's are wisest in the end.

Mr. B. What course did they pursue, to build
Their churches, and to have them filled ?
I feel quite anxious now to know,
And, if you can, I hope you'll show.

Mr. A. At first they worshipped where they could ;
An upper room, a cave, a wood,
A desert mount, or open air,
Witnessed their fervent worship there.
To build their churches, I've to learn
That e'er it gave them much concern.
On saving souls they were intent ;
Their thoughts were to that object bent ;
They met for prayers at Christ's command—
A faithful, firm, devoted band.
They felt that they must greatly err,
Unless they had the Comforter.
Ten days and nights they strove in prayer,
That God might show His presence there.
Their prayer was heard. The God of grace
Then with his glory filled the place ;
A sound like rushing, mighty wind
Filled all the house—o'erpowered each mind.
In glorious form the Spirit came,
Like cloven tongues of lambent flame ;
And with his grace each spirit filled,
Like gentle dew from heaven distilled.

Thus qualified, they go to teach
The nations, and the gospel preach;
With logic, fired by love, they show
The way t' escape from endless woe;
By gifts unswayed, by frowns unawed,
They sought alone to please their God.
The people prayed, God's servants preached,
And multitudes the gospel reached;
In penitential grief they all
Upon the Lord for mercy call;
Jehovah speaks their sins forgiven—
His Spirit seals them heirs of heaven.
The infant church thus daily grew
In numbers, and in graces too.
Those blissful days seemed coming on,
When Satan's power shall all be gone,
And Earth, redeemed, her glory gain,
Beneath Messiah's peaceful reign.

Mr. B. I hope you don't pretend to say
That any churches, in *our* day,
Reject the Blessed Comforter,
Or do their gold to grace prefer?

Mr. A. I've often thought, I must confess,
That churches show great worldliness.
I do not say that they reject
The Spirit's aid; but they expect
They can a better plan pursue,
Than what the apostles used to do.

Mr. B. Why, think you so? I've always thought
That from the apostles we had got
The plan that is most rational—
By far the best, and scriptural.
Our ministers, at any rate,
The plan, I judge, do approbate;
And if 'tis wrong, they ought to know,
And to the church a better show.

Mr. A. I've sketched the path the apostles trod
 In building up the church of God—
 I think, with candor, you'll admit,
 That bless'd results have followed it.
 If Christians had that course pursued,
 They'd done incalculable good.
 Too much on men of wealth and pride,
 Instead of God, they have relied ;
 The sad result you can't but know—
 'Tis manifest where'er you go.
 Oh ! that I could a mantle cast
 O'er present sins, and o'er the past !
 But this I dare not—cannot do,
 And to the church be faithful too.

The churches now God's plan reverse,
 And hence their debts—this standing curse.
 At first a costly house they build,
 And then they strive to have it filled ;
 It matters not, it seems to me,
 If saints or sinners they should be.
 The thing that rests with greatest weight
 Upon the body corporate,
 (Or you may name them, if you please,
 The Board of Elders and Trustees,)
 Is not the saving souls from woe,
 But how the church in wealth may grow ;
 Why thus they act, the reason's plain :
 A debt doth on the church remain.

A minister, whose eloquence
 Will draw the men of influence,
 Must next be called and settled there,
 And this is done without much prayer.
 In olden times, the church would meet
 In prayer before the mercy-seat,
 And supplicate her risen Lord,
 That He a pastor would afford ;
 But, in our day, it is not so ;
 Now, Elders to Advisers go,

They state their case, and ask that *they*
Would send a man without delay.
“Observe!” they say; “the man must be
Of great respectability;
He must be right in politics,
And keep his eye on heretics;
A knowing man, without pretence;
A man of real eloquence;
And ’tis desirable that he
Should be astute, and a D. D.;
In travell’d lore, refined display
To none be second in his day.
His sermons must be full of sense,
Showing superior excellence:
Our folks are critics, and require
That kind of preaching all admire.
One other thing we wish to say:
We’ve an enormous debt to pay;
And pay that debt we never can,
Unless we have just such a man.
We need the man; pray, don’t forget—
The man who’ll get us out of debt.”

And now these kind Advisers write
To Mr. Black or Mr. White;
The glories of the place reveal,
But carefully the debt conceal.
Allured by what, I cannot say,
They leave their flocks, and haste away.
They’re doing good, but think they will
A more important station fill;
Or that their talents, if revealed,
Would gain for them a wider field.
Each candidate appears, and tries,
By sundry means, to win the prize;
Ere long they’ll find the prize, indeed,
Is something like the Indian’s steed:
“He’s hard to catch, and when he’s caught,
The creature is just good for naught.”
The phantom let these men pursue,
And listen while I speak what’s true.

A certain church (no matter where)
Had long enjoyed a pastor's care;
At last they found, "He's not the man
To suit the times, or meet our plan."
He was dismissed; and now a host
Came hov'ring round t' obtain the post,
Like bees in summer 'round a flower,
Which would its sweetness all devour,
Or as the birds on Malabar,
Which scent the *Parsee* from afar,
And hasten there, with claws and bill,
Their hungry crops with flesh to fill;*
So, in this case, the crowd is led
To cringe, for sake of being fed.
The Angels of the Churches now
Before the golden calf must bow.
Oh! deep disgrace, that they're for sale,
And highest bidders can prevail!

The test-day comes for candidates;
Each patiently his turn awaits.
One now begins; he sings—he prays;
Things new, and old, and good he says;
The others, full of rivalry,
Display alike their workmanship.
There sit the people, old and young,
Of pious heart or impious tongue;
The friends of God, and also foes;
The man that much or little knows;
The rich, the poor, the bad, the good.
The thing, it seems, is understood
That custom, now, does authorize
Such Christless ones to criticize
God's messages of love to man,
And thus pervert the gospel plan.

* The dead bodies of the *Parsees*, in Bombay, are laid in the "towers of silence" on Malabar hill, so that the vultures and ravens may devour them.

The hearing o'er, they now decide,
For they the candidates have tried.
The point before them now is this:
Not who shall lead their souls to bliss;
Nor who shall most of Jesus tell,
And save their fellow-men from hell;
Nor who shall best God's truth unfold:
But which of them can get most gold.
This is the object, after all,
Which sways in making out the call.
The thing is base as base can be;
'Tis consummate hypocrisy.

Mr. B. Hold here, friend A.! Not quite so fast,
Or I'm afraid you'll lose your *caste*.
The people here are not Hindoos,
Nor will they approbate your views;
'Tis probable that they pursue
What conscience says they ought to do.
Our moneyed men, in church or state,
Who see their gold accumulate,
Don't wish that you should trouble them,
Or any of their plans condemn.
The pastor's business is to preach—
Their motives he should ne'er impeach;
And if he would his church retain,
He'd better from such things abstain.
There's nothing which the people hold
With firmer grasp than glitt'ring gold;
And when people pay for preachers,
They want, of course, first-rate teachers.
When money's paid, or even lent,
They look for an equivalent.
One thing, I think, you can't deny:
The preacher ought to edify
The church, and obstacles remove,
And then the people will improve;
Therefore, 'tis right that they should get
The man who'll bring them out of debt.

You have described a fancy sketch,
I judge, unless the proof you fetch.

Mr. A. For fancy sketches, I've no tact;
I deal, dear sir, in sober fact.
I could give names, but then I fear
At once you'll say, "You're too severe."
I'll give you *facts*—I think that best—
And leave you then to guess the rest.
Concerning *caste*, I've none to lose;
And, as regards the poor Hindoos,
They're not as bad as Christians yet—
They've not a temple now in debt!
And, as to conscience in the case,
There's just as little as there's grace.
The fact is plain, that pride controls
The churches, more than love of souls.
If Mr. Dives should appear
Within the church but once a year,
Or if, perchance, he'd buy a pew,
Yet still his worldliness pursue,
The thing would make a greater noise
Than if a score of girls or boys,
In humble life, should turn from sin,
And should a life of faith begin.

Two things this fact does clearly show:
The first, that piety is low;
The second is, that worldliness
Is more esteemed than godliness.
Some welcome Dives for his gold,
Because it does the church uphold;
Others rejoice to have him there—
'Tis not because he'll lead in prayer—
But 'tis because they hope they'll be
In quite "genteel society."
One is glad because his daughter,
Like a lambkin for the slaughter,
May be caressed a little while,
And end her days, perhaps, in style;

And there are some whose joys are high,
Because they think redemption's nigh;
Not of his soul—that they forget,
But—that he'll help them out of debt!
And thus it is, that Pride's caress'd,
While humble Piety's depress'd,
Christ and his cause are both despised—
At Mammon's shrine they're sacrificed.

From what I've said, I judge, 'twill be
Sometime before we can agree;
Yet, still I'll wait to hear from you,
What farther good these debts can do.

Mr. B. If not convinc'd from what I've said,
And from the light that has been shed,
Upon the blessing of a debt,
(This charming Christian amulet,)
I think 'tis likely I cannot
Present to you a single thought
That would convert you to my view,
But still I'll try what I can do.

As you request, I'll now proceed;
But first, I must, in truth concede,
That from your argument 'tis plain,
That Christian love would be a chain,
Which would on Zion better sit,
And be a much more graceful fit.
But since we don't have that as yet,
There's nothing better than a debt.
They're bonds of union, I have shown,
As men of candor now must own.
Another benefit which they
Confer on churches, in our day,
Is that, (as you can clearly see,)
They lead to great activity.

Mr. A. To me the thing is far from clear,
But I'll not judge, till first I hear

What kind of action debts produce ;
'Tis this which indicates their use.
We both, I trust, in this agree,
That exercise mere bodily,
That is, mere exercise as such,
Can never profit Christians much.
But 'tis not so with godliness,
Its exercise does many bless.
If debts do holiness promote,
They certainly shall have my vote.

Mr. B. I cannot say that they produce
Much holiness ; but they conduce,
In various ways, to keep alive
The zeal of saints, and make them thrive.

I've said that people firmly hold
Their stock of silver and of gold.
The reason is, that influence
Is in proportion to the pence.
A settled truth it seems to be,
"He's not a man of energy,
Who don't grow rich and rise above
The sphere in which the humble move."
If we have wealth we're men of worth,
No matter what has been our birth ;
'Tis wrong, as wrong itself can be,
To search into one's pedigree.
Just let a person look genteel,
That will a host of sins conceal.
Let Ignorance but make a show,
And after her the world will go.
Yea, even Vice, if she's well dress'd,
Will be by multitudes caress'd.
A rivulet of grace for show,
Will, with a rich man, farther go,
Than ocean's depths of righteousness,
With him who does no gold possess.
Since this is so, the reason's plain,
Why Christians do their wealth retain,

For those who're wealthy, as you see,
Gain great respectability.
This sentiment, it will be found,
In churches rests on solid ground.
And multitudes of Christians do,
This course most rigidly pursue.
There's one exception in the case,
Which does the ministers embrace :
For their respectability
Consists in grace and poverty.
In rail-roads, sanctioned by the State,
Or stocks, they must not speculate ;
Nor should they be, in any wise,
Engaged in trade and merchandize.
As wealth their usefulness impairs,
The less they have the less their cares.
That this is so, we feel quite sure,
And hence we try to keep them poor.
Of course they'll in the pulpit be,
With or without their salary ;
Hence congregations feel at ease,
And pay their pastors when they please.

But 'tis not so if we've a debt,
The mortgagee will not forget
The day his interest is due,
Whatever course we may pursue.
To pay that sum we must not fail,
For promises will not avail.
He may call once, but seldom twice,
For in his business he's precise.
The Trustees now are plainly told,
Their house of worship will be sold :
That he will sue his mortgage out,
No one now entertains a doubt ;
Unless the claim be promptly met,
The Church must go to pay the debt.
To meet the claim is now the thing,
Hence ev'ry one must something bring ;

The ladies ply their needles too,
 And manifest what they can do.
 The young and old together vie,
 And little children too must try
 What they can do, to save the place
 From deep and permanent disgrace.
 'Tis this that makes some Christians feel,
 And fills them full of holy zeal.
 Such zeal is not to be despised,
 Multitudes have been canonized
 For less religion, 'tis confess'd,
 Than in this case, is manifest.
 Now I say, without demurring,
 Debts will keep the Churches stirring.

Mr. A. I certainly with you concur,
 That debts on Churches make them stir;
 But all the stirring they produce,
 Is verily of little use;
 Just as a Miss, who's tightly laced,
 The pressure has her ribs displaced;
 It makes her stir, but 'tis—for breath,
 Her "bonds of union" are her death.
 'Tis so with churches, e'en the best,
 That are by heavy debts oppress'd;
 They labour, toil, and tug, and strive,
 But 'tis to keep themselves alive.
 They draw with pain their ev'ry breath;
 And scarce can save themselves from death.

The other day I chanced to see
 A decent little Honey Bee;
 It seems he'd ventur'd far from home,
 And while away, did often roam,
 O'er hills and dales and flow'ry meads,
 Where bees of various sects and creeds,
 Were wont to meet and spend their hours,
 In sipping honey from the flowers.
 By chance, one day, a Dragon-fly
 Came, at his leisure, saunt'ring by;

He roved about quite at his ease,
He only cared himself to please;
He fixed his eye upon the Bee,
And said he was surprised that he
Should labour thus from hour to hour,
In gath'ring food from flow'r to flow'r;
Come, follow me, I'll show you where
Thy life may be quite free from care,
Or if thou'd rather, it may be
A life of great activity.

Our Bee was easy to persuade,
And so the Dragon-fly obey'd;
At once the flow'ry mead he left,
He seem'd of reason quite bereft;
From rural scenes where nature smiled,
'Mid flow'rs luxuriant and wild,
He went to revel 'mid the sweets,
That may be found in crowded streets.
He had not wander'd long nor far,
Till he espied a splendid jar,
In which was nectar like a sea
Of bliss, e'en an infinity.
Exulting now he ventur'd near,
And sipped those sweets without a fear.
But vain presumption urged him on,
Discretion had entirely gone;
He ventured on beyond the place,
From whence he could his steps retrace;
Perceiving danger when too late,
He strove himself to extricate.
He used his utmost energy
From pending danger then to flee;
He strove in vain—exhausted fell—
Of all his hopes it was the knell.
Oft did he climb quite to the brink,
But would as often backward sink.
His strength and his activity
Were fruitless spent.—Despairing, he

Gave up as lost.—He closed his eyes—
In grief and agony he dies.

Before he died, he weeping said,
“How foolishly I have been led!
Oh! that I had my work pursued,
According to my habitude!
Oh! that I'd been an humble Bee,
Then Pride had never ruin'd me!
If I'd repell'd that Dragon-fly,
And let his words pass heedless by;
With sweets I might have fill'd my cell,
And still amid enjoyments dwell.
When wisdom's ways are thus transgress'd,
Enduring peace can't be possess'd.
Activity, controll'd by pride,
Ne'er leads to bliss.”—'Twas thus he died.

In churches now, it seems to me,
There's some resemblance to this Bee.
The path in which they should have trod,
Is marked distinctly by their God;
Through Pride rejecting that, they say
We much prefer some other way.
They choose some phantom of their brain,
With an activity insane.
Their course is foolishness supreme;
Aye, more, 'tis madness in th' extreme.
They go in debt, to show, no doubt,
Activity in getting out.
There is a church that has a debt
Of 30,000 on her yet;
It keeps her stirring, I dare say,
A heavy interest to pay.
She gives her hundreds for her pride,
And a few pence to God beside.
Her greatest energies are spent,
In paying interest and rent.
Why should her strength thus wasted be,
In this the nineteenth century?

The Church has met a sad reverse,
But still perpetuates the curse.
'Tis strange, as strange itself can be,
That she her folly does not see.
Two mighty evils she hath done,
Not clearer is the noon-day sun.
Her God she wickedly hath left,
And gone to cisterns that are cleft.
Where founts of living waters flow,
Where pastures in luxuriance grow,
Where grace like showers distills, e'en there,
Where Jesus is to answer prayer:
How few appear in meekness now,
Or with a contrite spirit bow!
How few thirst after righteousness,
And humbly after glory press!
Some seem content to grow in pelf,
And live and act, each for himself.
They'd rather hear, yea, ten times o'er,
Than speak of Christ from door to door.
They seek not God to glorify,
So much as self to gratify.
For saving souls they little care,
And hence they seek locations, where
They'll never once *be asked to pray*,
Or work for God in any way.
They judge *absorption* to be bliss,
And *doing nothing* glory is.
As this is so, I now can see,
That heavy debts of use may be,
As when a corpse you galvanize,
It starts and opens mouth and eyes;
The tongue exerts itself to talk,
The limbs attempt again to walk;
But vital power it ne'er regains,
It still a lifeless corpse remains;
And back it falls without a breath,
Locked in the cold embrace of Death.
So debts do these Absorbents start,
And momentary life impart;

Compell'd to move, they quiv'ring rise,
And gaze about with vacant eyes.
Their hands convulsive seize the purse,
And portions of their gold disburse;
They grasp the balance, and resume
The death-like torpor of the tomb.

Mr. B. Well, well, friend A., I thought you'd see,
That Debts produce activity.
I've some encouragement as yet,
You'll be an advocate for debt.
I'm glad you yield to evidence
When once produc'd. This shows good sense;
But all their blessings you don't know;
With your consent I'll others show.

Mr. A. I hope you'll show the full amount;
But you perceive there's some discount
To be deducted from the sum,
Which will reduce the blessings some.

Mr. B. With discounts I have naught to do,
I'd rather leave that work to you;
I give the blessings as they are,
With some, I know they'll pass at par.
The're various ways, as I may state,
In which these debts do operate,
To wake the Church's energy,
And rouse them from their lethargy.
I will at present mention one,
To show you how the thing is done.
The love of souls, most verily,
Don't wake up half the energy.

The plan is this. You must begin
By ev'ry art to get folks in;
For if the Church can once be fill'd,
You'll have in each new life instill'd;
You know our Pastor's influence
Is measured by his audience.

If he were Paul, and preached to few,
He could but very little do ;
But to a crowd, should Demas preach,
His words the inmost heart would reach ;
E'en braying would like music be,
For crowds are judges, certainly.

Since this is so, I'll tell you how
You may secure a number now ;
Where'er you go, the people tell,
"The music in our church goes well ;"
Or tell them that "the organist
Is 'mong the best that does exist."
Invite them then to hear him play,
And e'er you part, secure their yea.
And should you find some family
That go some where quite steadily,
But, where they are, 'tis understood
They can't give much—but do some good,
Invite them still to come with you,
And see you take them to your pew.
Then whisper : "Friends, the trustees will
Give you a pew if it you'll fill ;
Your family is good, I know,
They'd make with us a handsome show.
It would our Pastor gratify,
Yourselves and us 'twould dignify :
Now, Sabbath next I hope to see
With us your lovely family."

And should you find a lad or lass,
A member of some Bible-class,
Invite them to your class, or where
You often meet for social prayer.
No matter if they do forsake
Their church, and thus their cov'nant break.
And as regards the Sabbath-school,
The little ones you can be-fool ;
Just offer them some costly book,
Like silly fish they'll bite the hook ;

They'll leave their school and come with you,
Perhaps they'll bring their parents too.
This rule you must still keep in mind,
"Take ev'ry one that you can find."
If from a Church, it matters not,
Don't give that thing a second thought;
The object keep before you still,
And try your empty pews to fill.
Thus by degrees some men you'll get,
Who'll greatly help to pay the debt.
Now all this zeal would not be shown,
Without a debt as you must own.
To lead a soul from woe to bliss,
Yields not activity like this.
And now, I think, you must conclude,
That debts on churches are a good.

Mr. A. Debts are quite good, I must confess,
To bring on churches worldliness;
They're better still to foster Pride,
And Vanity and Strife beside:
Yea, more, the very best, you see,
For lying and Hypocrisy.
I know you'll think me het'rodox,
But, I affirm Pandora's box,
(Suppose that fable to be true,)
Ne'er cursed the world as Church debts do.
Those varied ills men's bodies smite,
But these the inmost spirit blight.
Then cheering hope was left behind,
But here is nought to cheer the mind.
The curse is like the leprosy,
That smote the house of Gehazi;
Besides himself, his household were
For ever doomed the curse to bear.
Your plan I heartily despise,
'Tis despicable in my eyes;
If you must steal, I'd say, in brief,
Do be, at least, a decent thief;

And in your hateful robbery,
Don't steal from zealous poverty :
Men don't despise a hungry thief,
If stealing be to find relief ;
But those who steal for sake of gain,
If they are cursed, must not complain.
'Tis so with churches not a few,
Which do this worldly course pursue ;
They steal from others, not through need,
But pride and worldliness to feed.
Go to the world, draw men from thence,
Thus show your great benevolence.
You rob Saint Paul to pay Saint Peter,
Then in a tune of grave long meter,
Give God the praise for your increase,
And glory in a stolen fleece.
A course like this God never bless'd,
You'll find at last, 'tis curse possess'd.

If Christians would respect command,
From men of thought throughout the land ;
If they'd secure the Spirit's aid,
To stay their course now retrograde ;
If they would rescue men from woe,
As on in multitudes they go ;
If they desire God's will to do,
They must a diff'rent course pursue.
There are some men who're more intent,
On shaving notes to make a cent,
Than e'er they've been to save a soul,
Or rescue men from sin's control.
And yet these men profess to be
In thought and feeling, heavenly !
There others are, for they abound,
In ev'ry Church they can be found,
Who, like great sucklings, fed on milk,
And wrapp'd in swad'ling bands of silk,
Still seem to think and feel and act,
As if it were a sober fact,

That they must by absorption rise,
To dwell in glory in the skies.

Now, take the churches ev'ry where,
'Tis manifest, their greatest care
Is to defend themselves, and hence
Arises their great impotence.
The Church at first did not act so;
Christ gave command that they should go
In all the world—the nations teach—
To ev'ry soul the gospel preach:
They went, and 'gainst the world they fought,
And never once its favour sought.
Their movements were aggressive still,
Thus they obey'd their Saviour's will.
The Church moved onward steadily,
From victory to victory;
Now, with the world she's made a truce,
And hence for armour has no use.
Christians, alas! have ceased to be
Rebukers of iniquity.
Who does the worldliness oppose,
That now through all the churches flows?
Where are those men who fearless tell,
The worldling and the infidel,
Of coming wrath—and urge them now,
In humble penitence to bow?
Where are the men who feel that they
Must all Jehovah's laws obey?
From serving self they never swerve,
And would by proxy Jesus serve;
Their full responsibility
They shun with great facility.

Said Worldly-wisdom once to me,
"The Church pursues bad policy,
We have too many stations, where
Is offered up the poor man's prayer.
Had I my way, I'd break the neck
Of all weak churches. Then I'd check

Henceforth their birth, and would create
Each Church at once in manhood state.
We'd from long nursings then be free,
It would be great economy.
I'd then select the nicest spot
That could, in any place, be got;
And there a splendid house I'd build,
And soon, I'm sure, it would be filled.
Just make the Church respectable,
Then ev'ry thing will go on well;
The rich and poor I'd there unite,
To see such union I delight.
As pews below are high, you see,
The poor will take the gallery.
If I had millions I'd pursue
The plan I've sketched, say would not you?"

To Worldly-wisdom, I replied;
When Piety once marries Pride,
I have no hope that e'er she'll be,
Of any great utility,
In saving souls from endless woe,
For now her heart is bent on show.
The humble man God chooses still,
To execute his gracious will;
But if the church will foster pride,
And will not in his plans confide,
He'll leave them curs'd by Pride and Debt,
And all the woes which they beget.

Mr. B. From what I've said, you have at length,
In all their beauty and their strength,
The varied uses of a debt,
And all the blessings they beget.
I now shall wait to hear from you,
What injury Church debts can do;
And if Church debts, church curses are,
I hope you'll be particular,
To point the curse distinctly out,
Nor leave on any mind a doubt.

If you their real evils show,
On all a favour you'll bestow.

Mr. A. Their evils, Sir, are manifold,
Nor can their magnitude be told.
Eternity, with all its light,
We need, to see this curse aright.
By facts, I shall corroborate
The truth of ev'ry thing I state.
I'll place the facts before your face—
Appoint you judge in ev'ry case;
And, in the end, I trust you'll see,
That Debts lead to Hypocrisy—
That they, the Church of Christ, disgrace;
The gospel ministry debase—
The Pastor from his flock they rend;
And souls who'd come to Christ forefend;
Yea, more, that they God's plan pervert,
And Christians from their work divert;
They stop the angel in his flight,
To spread o'er earth the gospel light;
Of all the evils, they're the worst,
That have the church for ages curs'd.

Mr. B. If these Church debts are half as bad
As you affirm, the case is sad.
But I confess, I cannot see
How they promote hypocrisy;
Or, how they can, in any way,
Confirm the truth of what you say.
But you have studied well, I know,
Their influence for weal or woe:
In silence, then, I'll gladly wait,
To hear what facts you have to state.
So now proceed, and prove to me
That Debts produce Hypocrisy.

Mr. A. I'll mention, then, a common case,
That shows no honesty or grace;
And leave you free the act to blame,
Or, if you can, commend the same.

It happen'd once, no matter where,
Some Christians met, for such they were;
At all events, they bore the name,
In common parlance 'tis the same.
On sober thought, it seem'd quite clear,
That they for God a house should rear.
A difficulty now arose
('Tis oft the case, as each one knows)
About the size, the price, the style,
Which occupied their thoughts awhile.
It soon appear'd that ev'ry man,
As master builder, had a plan;
And each one thought his plan the best,
And 'gainst the others did protest.

Said one, "I'm for a building grand,
That admiration will command;
'Tis for our God, and he'll provide,
If in his pow'r we'll but confide.
We'd better build one large enough,
And trust to God to furnish stuff."

"Good Music," said our Elder Wright,
"Is what we need for the ELITE;
Just let the Organ be first rate,
'Twill give the truth tremendous weight.
It will a crowded house secure,
Which faithful preaching can't procure.
They for the Gospel little care,
It is the Music brings them there."

A third one differ'd from the rest—
He said, "I have but one request,
That we'll erect a Church the best
That gold can rear or thought suggest!
And not stand carping at expense,
As if we'd no benevolence.
We'll make it for our interest,
To build a Church, the very best."

The thing was argued well, and each
Was privileged to make a speech;
The talking o'er, they then agreed,
That with the building they'd proceed.
The work moved on with rapid rate,
Each workman seemed to emulate
The others, till the work was done,
Which they so nobly had begun.
The workmen now must all be paid,
And this is done through borrow'd aid.
Friends pay a part, and lend the rest
At six per cent. on interest,
By *bond* and *mortgage* on the place,
Where Jesus manifests his grace!!

The day arrives to dedicate
This house to God. In solemn state
The people come from far and near,
They seem to be, indeed, sincere.
Here rev'rend Ministers are found,
In theologic lore profound,
Attended by a retinue
Of Elders and of Deacons too;
And multitudes of folks beside,
Who in the present plan confide,
Of giving God a house not theirs,
And sanctifying sin by prayers.

The services begin, and now
The crowd in supplication bow;
And earnestly they ask in prayer
The presence of Jehovah there.
A hymn was sung—a sermon preach'd,
Which neither purse nor conscience reach'd,
Of saint or sinner on the ground,
Although the preacher was renown'd.

The sermon o'er; the preacher spoke
In solemn tones—"Let us invoke

God's blessing, while, with hearts elate,
 This house to Him we dedicate."
 The people rose, and then in prayer,
 They did most solemnly declare—
 "We've rear'd, O Lord, this house for thee;
 Here may thy name still honour'd be.
 This house apart for Thee we set—
 (¶ They ne'er confess'd it was in debt.)
 May generations yet unborn,
 With grateful praise Thy house adorn.
 Accept this gift we now present,
 Father, to Thee, with one consent;
 Accept this gift, we pray again,
 'Tis Thine for aye. Amen, Amen."

Not many years had pass'd away,
 When, with a friend, I went one day
 To worship in this temple, where
 I'd heard that dedicating prayer.
 I thought with joy on scenes by-gone,
 As mem'ry viewed them one by one.
 While musing thus with heart elate,
 I found myself before the gate.
 I saw some one the door had shut,
 And on the wall a notice put,
 I read the notice with surprise,
 Scarce giving credence to my eyes:
 "This house for sale, to pay the debt
 Remaining on the building yet."
 My friend inquired, "Whose house is this?
 Why, have the people been remiss,
 To pay the debt and save the place
 From such a permanent disgrace?"
 "'Tis God's," I said. Not so, said he;
 What! *God in debt!!* That cannot be.
 And tell me, who has right to claim
 This House devoted to God's name?
 Has man a right to buy or sell
 God's house, if it should please him well?

Who gave to him the privilege
 To do such deeds of sacrilege?
 I've heard of some that often do,
 First *make* their god then *eat* him too;
 But men of truth cannot act so,
 They can't be hypocrites, you know;
 They say sincerely what they mean,
 And by their works, their faith is seen."

I then replied, I still affirm,
 The house is God's, and can confirm
 The truth of ev'ry thing I say,
 By Elder D. across the way;
 For he was present years ago,
 And recollects the facts, I know.
 We call'd the man, and hoped that he
 Would explicate the mystery.

Elder D. The Elder came. Kind Sirs, said he,
 Since you've referred the case to me,
 I can confirm what has been said;
 I saw the corner stone when laid.
 I watch'd the building as it rose,
 And all its hist'ry can disclose.
 The house, when finished, was involved
 In heavy debt; but we resolved
 To give just what we had, and pay
 The rest, perhaps, some other day.
 We felt ourselvss quite in the lurch,
 In dedicating ALL the Church.
 As we had only paid ONE-THIRD,
 It seemed to us somewhat absurd,
 To dedicate one-third of it,
 And all the other parts omit.
 To save the thing from looking droll,
 We thought we'd dedicate the WHOLE.

If that's the way, my friend replied,
 The work was done, the people lied;

For all their singing and their prayers,
Can never prove the house was theirs.
The thing is wrong, as wrong can be,
There's lying and hypocrisy.
If men should treat their fellows so,
They'd act the hypocrite you know;
Now, what is sin 'gainst man, can't be
Esteem'd God-ward as piety.

Mr. A. I must agree with this friend's views,
But you may differ if you choose.
But say, friend B., and is it so,
That men will dare on God bestow,
A house, or any property,
On which some man, as mortgagee,
Has prior claims, and which he may
Put up for sale his claim to pay?
In acts like this, I must confess,
I see no truth nor righteousness.

'Tis sad that ministers should lend
Their influence, and should commend
A plan so fatal; aye, the worst,
That has the Church for ages curs'd.
If they'll by praying sanction sin,
And keep this curse the Church within,
No man of sense can ever doubt,
They'll preach in vain to turn it out.
So long as they are gratified,
To see the people, in their pride,
Devote to God a house unpaid,
And thus the Christian name degrade:
They'll keep from God what is his due,
And will this wicked course pursue.
Great sin rests on the ministry;
For, such bare-faced hypocrisy,
The people will forever quit,
If ministers won't sanction it.
And now, friend B., 'tis left with you
To judge if what I say is true.

Mr. B. I cannot well decide the case,
Without the facts before my face;
Present the facts, then I can tell
If these Church-debts work ill or well.
But, with your views, I must confess,
I seem disposed to acquiesce.
I will, however, hear you through,
Perhaps, I then may think with you.
It may not be hypocrisy,
Nor even insincerity,
That leads some Christian people yet,
To give the Lord a house in debt.
I still maintain, they mean to do
The thing that's right; say, do not you?

Mr. A. I don't think so. They know 'tis wrong;
The house does not to them belong;
I've no faith in transmigration,
Nor in transubstantiation.
I cannot think when men say prayers
Within a house, that it is theirs;
Pray much or little, short or long,
The house does not to them belong.

'Tis said, that once a Priest was sent
On business, in the time of Lent;
He lost his way in coming home,
And through the forest had to roam.
Fatigued by travelling and oppressed,
He sought a shelter where to rest;
In looking round from side to side,
A lowly cottage he espied:
He entered it with great delight,
And found a lodging for the night.
He asked his host for food to eat,
His host replied, "We've only meat."
The Priest responds, "Don't think it strange,
I can its nature quickly change."
Then solemnly the meat he took,
And praying, plunged it in the brook.

"Hæc est perva—Go down gammon,
Hic est pisces—Come up salmon."
Thus by an art well understood,
The Priest had fine fresh fish for food ;
These Latin prayers are just the thing,
That out of *ham* can *salmon* bring.

But men, in vain, such tricks condemn,
While they themselves still practice them.
The Priest may call the gammon fish,
And eat as much as heart could wish ;
And, by "Distinguo," get free
From penances, most probably.
Yet, still the thing is but a lie,
As truth and conscience testify.
And ev'ry Church acts falsely too,
That does a sim'lar course pursue.
It is a kind of "pious fraud,"
(Abhorrent in the eyes of God),
Which men have practiced, now, so long,
That some aver, it is not wrong
To give to God a house by prayers,
E'en while they know it is not theirs.
But unpaid workmen don't forget,
That on the house there rests a debt
Which must be paid, ere it can be
The house of God, in honesty.
But lordly sinners have a way
Of managing, in this our day,
That quadrates with the laws of man,
But, with God's law it never can.
The plan is this—they say we owe
A very heavy debt, we know
The house, if sold, won't bring, we guess,
Th' amount of debt—say, one-third less ;
The house we'll sell and buy it in,
And by the trick some thousands win,
The carpenters and masons too,
Will lose some hundreds, that is true ;
But that's not our concern—'tis theirs,
We'll get the house—and then, by prayers,

And singing hymns, wash out the stain
That on our conscience may remain.
No matter how the men may curse
The Church as hypocrites, or worse;
The law protecting, we'll be free
From this Church-debt perplexity.

Such is the plan. But God must hate
Such hypocritical deceit;
How can such men draw nigh to God,
While workmen's wages are by fraud
Kept back? The Lord does them condemn,
And honest men should them condemn.

A fact I'll state, if you'll permit,
It is in point, you must admit.

A Hindoo once prepared a feast,
To entertain the village Priest;
He asked the Brahmuns far and near,
Who did the rules of caste revere,
To join with them in festive mood,
To eat the consecrated food.
A host appeared, and all were dressed
In flowing robes, the very best.
The man was gratified, that he
Should entertain such company;
For in the Priests, without pretence,
He'd placed the utmost confidence.
He hoped that they his house would bless,
And thus increase his righteousness.
And so they did, but not as he
Had hoped, as in the end we'll see.

The Priest, a worshipper of Sheve,
Had brought a *Lingum* in his sleeve;
But ere the feast was fully o'er,
He rose, and standing on the floor,
In Sungskrit verse, a *Muntru* said,
While they stood round with bended head,

And thus concealed from outward view,
The thing the Priest was then to do.
While he was mutt'ring o'er his prayers,
One of the Priests a hole prepares;
Another sprinkles water round,
And thus he consecrates the ground.
Then, in the hole the god is set,
And with the sacred oil is wet.
'Tis now for adoration fit,
So, down they fall and worship it;
And now, proclaims the wily knave,
This house belongs to Maha-Dev.
The Priests, uniting shout aloud,
As round the senseless stone they crowd;
Henceforth this house, a fane must be,
Great Maha-Dev! alone to thee!
Here let no Shoodroo show his face,
Let none pollute this sacred place;
But, let it still a temple be,
To thee, Great Maha-Dev! to thee!

The man protested; but 'twas vain,
His house was turned into a fane;
The laws confirmed the wickedness,
But paid the man in righteousness.
The full amount of what it cost;
'Twas all he got. The house he lost.

Mr. B. But surely you don't mean to say
That Christians act in such a way,
They'd certainly these Priests condemn,
And such hypocrisy condemn.
If Churches now should act like that,
I don't know what they'd next be at.
There's much that's wrong, I know full well,
For good and ill together dwell;
But that which now the Church annoys,
Was ten times worse when we were boys;
The world is growing better fast,
And soon these ills will all be past.

Mr. A. Upon this point we'll disagree;
But for the present, let it be.
I'll only say what God has said,
That wickedness will greatly spread,
And hence, as 'twas in days of old,
The love of many will grow cold;
But half the church will grace possess,
The balance, without righteousness,
Will to the world still wedded be,
Till earth from Satan's power be free.
But if the world, as you declare,
Is growing better ev'ry where;
Then, why, I ask, does it not show it,
And why so few that seem to know it?
The churches, too, are growing cold,
Caressing these, who have the gold;
For wealth is loved 'fore godliness,
And humble faith grows less and less.
The reason why the Church of God,
At home, doth languish, and abroad,
Is found in Pride and worldliness,
That now the Church's soul possess.

You certainly will not allow
That Christians are so poor just now,
That they, in truth, can't pay the debt
Resting upon their churches yet.
They have the means, but want the will,
This part of duty to fulfil.
Oh! if for God they had the zeal
That heathen for their idols feel;
If they would be what they profess,
Lovers of God and righteousness;
And spend, in saving men from woe,
But half they spend in Pride and show,
No debts on churches would be found,
On Christian or on heathen ground.
They'd all be paid most speedily
By Christian liberality.

Mr. B. I must confess that Christians could
Redeem their churches, if they would;
They have the money, that is plain,
Though oft of poverty complain.
It may not be through want of grace,
So much as knowledge in the case,
That leads so many to withhold,
From God, the silver and the gold.
I well remember, years ago,
That I would scarcely ever throw
More than a sixpence in the box,
And thought that this was orthodox.
But, by degrees, I found I could
Give twice as much, and yet have food.
Thus, I continued giving more
Each time, than I had done before;
Till, finally, at church, one day,
I gave a dollar note away!
Encouraged and amazed, I then
Advanced to five, from five to ten;
And now, I find that I can give
Hundreds instead of tens, and live;
Yea, live far happier than the time
My contribution was a dime.
It may be, others have, like me,
Measured by pence their charity.
It may not be sheer worldliness
That makes them give a great deal less
Than we are confident they would,
If they the subject understood.

Mr. A. Men, doubtless, do sincerely try,
In various ways, to justify
Their prodigality and pride,
And sordid worldliness beside.
But all their efforts will be vain,
To justify their course profane;
For no excuse that can be given,
Can stand the test of righteous heaven.

Now, here's a Church that has a debt
Of twenty thousand on it yet;
The int'rest on this sum, you see,
Will just twelve hundred dollars be.
This sum is paid, and must be paid,
While other debts aside are laid;
By doing so, they may keep clear
From Venditor, the auctioneer.
But see how this the Church affects,
And leads to sundry sad neglects.
And first: the cause of Missions gets,
Her heaviest blow, from these Church debts;
The people are involved, and say,
"We cannot give our funds away;
Our int'rest money must be paid,
Or things with us will retrograde.
The Mission-cause is good, we know,
And, were it not for debts we owe,
We might a large donation give;
But, with us, there's no alternative,
We must refuse, in honesty,
Whate'er the consequence may be."
And thus it is this work of God—
The Mission-cause, at home, abroad,
Must be kept back, if it don't get
Its quietus, through this vile debt.

But, next: how fares the minister?
Oft ill enough, as he'll aver;
He's often blamed because he can't
Open the hearts of adamant,
And force the misers to repent,
And be for once benevolent.
He's blamed because the rich will not
To debt-cursed Churches join their lot,
And thus of funds supply the lack,
Which fraudulently is kept back.
And now retrenchment must be made,
And where begin, but at the head?

The minister, of course, must be
Diminished in his salary;
'Tis always done with deep regret!
But then—the int'rest must be met.
Of course, the people can't give up
One draught from their luxurious cup;
They've got their funds in this and that,
So that they ne'er can be got at;
Their stocks and stores must be increased,
Hence ministers must needs be fleeced,
And driven from their flocks, to roam
Abroad on earth to find a home,
And friends whose hearts have not, as yet,
Callous become through a Church Debt.
With man this policy seems wise—
'Tis despicable in God's eyes.

Oh, what a pity 'tis, that now
God don't the heavens weekly bow,
And send the churches, Peter, Paul,
Th' Apostles, Prophets, Martyrs, all,
And bid them preach one day in seven,
And take them up again to heaven.
'Twould save expenses, and would be,
With some, first rate economy.
Then, splendid churches they might build,
And with the godless have them filled;
Magnificent they'd have them be,
To shut out humble poverty.
'Tis true that God converts the poor,
And heav'n is filled with such, we're sure;
But Churches now are well content,
To do without the indigent.
With itching ears, from far and near,
They daily run new things to hear;
They seek themselves to glorify,
And not the poor to edify!
To make a show and foster pride,
And pay the minister beside;

Demand too much, and hence the plan,
To keep their pride and starve the man.

But time would fail to speak of all
The ills that on the churches fall,
Through this vile system of Church fraud;
This wholesale robbery of God:
Suffice it here to say, they claim,
Most justly, "Legion," as their name.
They're an unmitigated curse,
You'll search in vain to find a worse.

But what has now the Church possess'd,
To throw away, in interest;
Such sums of money which should go
The Powers of sin to overthrow?
Why not pay off their debt, and be,
At once, from ev'ry fetter free?

The truth is this—men understand,
That with God's money in their hand,
They can afford, as suits them best,
To pay the yearly interest;
For with the balance, which they take,
They speculate, and fortunes make;
But if they'd do the thing that's right,
And in the law of God delight,
They would, at once, His house set free
From this debasing slavery.
God would then His word fulfill,
By pouring out His spirit still
Upon His Churches all around,
Thus making joy and peace abound.
"Bring all the tythes"—thus saith the Lord,
"Within my house, with one accord;
Let there be meat—a full supply,
And prove my faithfulness hereby,
In sov'reign mercy I'll provide,
That heav'nly founts be open'd wide;
And streams of blessings from them flow,
To enrich the Church and world below.

Yea, such a blessing will I send,
That far and wide it shall extend,
Till ev'ry earthly dwelling place
Be filled with overflowing grace."

But, oh! the Church, controll'd by Pride,
Doth in her selfishness confide,
She does too little for her God,
And hence she falls beneath His rod;
Of barrenness and drought complains,
But yet her worldliness retains.
Oh! that she would the truth believe,
" 'Tis not so blessed to receive
As 'tis to give"—and spread abroad,
Where'er the foot of man hath trod,
The joyful news that God is Love,
And Christ's our Advocate above.
Oh! then she would, with God-like heart,
Salvation to the world impart;
And be, as God would have her be,
The image of His purity.

Mr. B. I'm forced, at last, in truth to say,
The Church has wander'd far away
From the example of her Lord,
And simple precepts of his word.
Nor does she seem at all to feel,
That holy joy—unwearied zeal,
With which the early Church was bless'd,
And Apostolic men possessed,
The cause of this, no doubt, must be
A sad decline in piety.
The world, by flattery and art,
Hath made inroads upon her heart;
Its schemes of wealth, its maxims, ways,
Its popularity and praise,
Have hidden from her eye the woe
Which must a godless world o'erflow.
She does not see, or seem to see,
The wretchedness and misery

Of millions of the human race,
 Who're dying destitute of grace.
 Nor does she now, as she did then,
 Devote her strength to saving men;
 No, not a tythe of it is spent
 To save from endless punishment,
 The souls of men, more precious far,
 Than earth and all her jewels are.
 The Church has men, and money too,
 And rare facilities to do
 The work that God to her assigns,
 In forwarding His great designs.
 If with these means she had the will,
 She'd soon the world with knowledge fill,
 And hasten on that blessed day,
 When righteousness shall have the sway.

Mr. A. Right glad am I that now, friend B.,
 We seem so nearly to agree;
 I have no doubt, that you will yet,
 Sincerely hate this vile Church Debt.

Mr. B. I see the evil of the plan,
 And shall exert what power I can,
 To have God's house forever free,
 From this Church debt iniquity.

Mr. A. I pray you do; for I am sure,
 Church debts curse both the rich and poor;
 And just so long as men withhold
 From God his silver and his gold;
 And, through their worldliness, neglect
 To pay for Churches they erect,
 So long will He their ways condemn,
 And showers of grace withhold from them.

May God, by power Omnipotent,
 Constrain His people to repent;
 And, in great mercy, quickly set
 His Churches free from a CHURCH DEBT.

W. R.

NOTES.

NOTE A.—Pages 11 and 122.

THE Parsee Cemetery, or, as it is called, "The Tower of Silence," is the place where the Parsees deposit the bodies of their dead.

The engraving gives us an accurate bird's eye view of the one built on Malabar Hill, on the west side of the island of Bombay, by Framjee Cowasjee, a wealthy Parsee. The engraving is copied from a drawing taken by my friend Mr. Arthur D. Fallon, an excellent artist of Bombay. I am indebted to his kindness for the drawing, and for the following description of the Tower: "The drawing is a bird's eye view of the Cemetery, which is built of grey stone, and chunammed (plaistered) outside. It is about 80 feet in diameter; the well in the centre is in diameter about 40 feet; from the top of the building, to the platform, where the bodies are laid, is about nine feet. On the platform are three rows of receptacles for the dead bodies of the Parsees. The outermost or largest is for the men; the middle one for the females; and the innermost and smallest is for the children. The deep lines on the platform are to carry off the fat, &c., of their bodies into the large well in the centre. The building is open at the top. The two doors observable in the well in the centre, are each perforated with about 100 small holes, which carry off the rain, &c., that falls into the centre. These doors communicate with wells under ground. There are altogether four of these doors, with four large chains, used as ladders, by which you may go down into the well. The bottom of the well in the centre is convex. When this well is filled with the bones of the dead, a new Cemetery is then constructed.

"This one is made so as to contain 237 bodies at one time, viz: the bodies of 79 men, 79 women, and 79 children. The small hole in the building to the left of the door, is to allow a person from the inside, to observe the sacred fire which burns, not far distant from the spot.

On each side of the door, which is made of iron, is an inscription commemorative of the building. The one to the right is in English; the other is in the native language.

"The site of the building being so elevated, there is a beautiful view from it of the whole island, together with the harbour and shipping. I have understood that it cost Framjee Cowasjee about half a lack of rupees, (\$25,000,) including every thing.

"A. D. FALLON."

This Tower was erected in 1832. It is said that Framjee Cowasjee had set apart for his young and only daughter, the sum of half a lack of rupees, as her portion. But, as she died before her marriage, he considered this money as sacred, and would not devote it to any private use of his own. He, therefore, resolved to build this "Tower" for the benefit of his nation. When it was finished, and before its consecration, he gave a general invitation to all who wished to visit it, to do so. Accordingly, in company with the Rev. D. O. Allen and others, on April 5, and on the following day with Mrs. Ramsey, I visited this depository of the dead. The description of it, as given by Mr. Fallon, is in all things correct. I would merely add, that the height of the Tower is above 20 feet.

I was highly pleased with the beauty of the place and the delightful prospect it afforded of the island and the ocean. But the multitude of horrid looking, voracious vultures which had grown fat from feasting on the bodies of the deceased Parsees, and which were perched all around you, on the neighbouring palm trees or on the tops of the other towers, together with the thought of the revolting manner in which the dead are here disposed of, absolutely chilled my blood and made my flesh crawl upon my bones. The staring eyes of these lazy vultures, as they watched us wherever we went, seemed to say, "we should be glad to pick the flesh off your bones also." To the Christian it is one of the most revolting modes of getting rid of the dead bodies of our friends, that the mind can imagine. The idea of having my sepulchre in the filthy stomachs of those hideous vultures, is to me unutterably horrible. If this body must be devoured, let it be done by some decent wild beast of the forest, or by some monster of the deep; but the idea of having my flesh torn from my bones by the beaks and claws of a host of vultures fighting for the tenderest morsel, and to be gulped down bit by bit, makes me shudder to think of it. It would give me no satisfaction, as it does the Parsee, to have some one peep

through the hole in the wall, and to see which eye of my departed friend the vultures have torn out first. The whole thing is so opposed to all the refined feelings of our nature, that I am at a loss to conceive how such a mode of sepulture could have been devised. Christianity is a blessing to man if it had taught him no more than how to show proper respect for the bodies of our departed friends.

When I visited this "Tower of Silence," there were three others within the same enclosure. They were smaller than this one, but all were alike in their construction.

My design in speaking of this singular custom of the Parsees is twofold; first, to inform the reader of this strange mode of burial; and second, to illustrate the benevolence of the Parsees in matters pertaining to religion. One man makes a donation of \$25,000 to his nation, for their "Towers of Silence," as well as their temples, must be free from debt. And if men, who are strangers to the grace of God, manifest such a commendable spirit of liberality, what must we think of those who profess to be the Lord's, and who acknowledge that all they have belongs to Him, and yet have not religion enough to build their Lord a house, or to pay the debt on those they have built, though they are able to do it. This state of feeling surely cannot be right.

NOTE B.—Page 14.

GUNESH.

The name Gunesh, or Gunputtee, is composed of the two Sungskrit words, *Gun*, a troop or host, and *Esh*, or *Puttee*, Lord or Ruler. The word means "the Lord of Hosts, or Ruler of armies." This god is considered, in the western part of India, as *the god of Wisdom*, as well as *the god of Hosts*. He is the son of Sheve and Parwutee. He is described as a short person with four arms, an elephant's head and a huge stomach. There are three different accounts of the way in which he became honoured with so huge a head. Serpents are bending over him. The mysterious and sacred symbol of the Hindoo trinity is over his head, encircled by a serpent. The word is A. O. M., and is com-

posed of a letter taken from one of the names of each of the gods Bruhma, Vishnoo, and Sheve. None but Brahmuns are allowed to pronounce this sacred name. The boys in school, however, are taught to write it. *Gunputtee* is worshipped by the Mahratta people as much as any of the gods of India. The images are made of brass or copper; but for the annual festival they are made of clay, and vary in the price and beauty, to suit the taste and purse of the buyer. The trade in gods is a *cash* trade. No Hindoo buys an idol, or hires a palankeen for the annual celebration, without being prompt in paying for all. Their gods, as well as their temples, are out of debt. Yea, more; the Priests of the temple are provided for. In all this, they put to shame many professing Christians, who, not only worship God in houses loaded with a heavy debt, but also meanly support their ministers, because they must pay the interest on their debt or forfeit their house. When will God's people act wisely in this thing?

NOTE C.—Page 32.

THE YOGEE OR FAKEER.

Throughout India there is a vile set of men who are known by the names Yogees, Sunyasees or Beiragees, among the Hindoos; and a corresponding set among the Mohammedans, called Fakeers. As a general thing, they are an abominable class of men. They wear but little clothing, and many of them go nearly naked. This is done to convince the people that their holiness has subdued all the natural feelings of humanity within them. But their conduct in secret contradicts their public profession of deadness to the world. They are arrant hypocrites. This mode of life is, in the majority of cases, chosen because the man is sure of a support from the alms of the people, and he is thus enabled to lead a life of comparative indolence, besides being worshipped as a god by the people.

The Yogee here represented is a good specimen of the class. His arm has been bound in its present position so long, that it cannot be altered. The flesh has withered, and the nails have grown to a won-

derful length. It is no longer of any practical use to him, except to exhibit his self-righteousness and pride. His business is to beg. In that way he expects to enter heaven; and those who give him alms, may expect to enter heaven also, and be happy in proportion to the amount contributed. So he tells them. This man was a Bengalee, and was to be seen some years ago walking through the streets of Calcutta. While the Rev. Mr. Percival and Hodson, Wesleyan missionaries, were one day preaching to the natives on the bank of the Ganges, this man appeared in the crowd and became a listener. Mr. H. sketched his likeness while Mr. P. preached to him and to the company the truth as it is in Jesus. It is very correct, and while it gives a good likeness of the devotee, it shows also the hatefulness of that system of self-righteousness which leads men to hope for bliss hereafter, by torturing themselves here.

My object in referring to this specimen of deluded humanity, is to show the reader that if a member of the body be rendered inactive, it will become useless. So also with inactive professors in the Church of God. They are our Christian Yogees; and many of them are just as useless in promoting the spirituality of the Church of Christ, as the Yogee himself. Happy would it be for the Church if such were out of her communion.