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The Knowledge of God.

A Sermon Preached by Rev. Lanning Burton, D. D., Before the Southern Baptist Convention in Baltimore, May 7th, 1884.

"That I may know Him."—Phil. 3:10.

I may stand without, upon the common pathway, and contemplate an imposing mansion, delighting myself with the harmonious blendings of art and nature and the joyous confusion of terrace and arcade and piazza and tower, and by a simple mental process know much of its master. I know his name for that is blazoned upon the gateway. The profusion of luxury speaks of his wealth. Decorated walls and groupings of shrubbery with nesting fountains and statuary, describe his culture. He is kindly nature for happy children play unchecked upon the lawns. I know of his benevolence because I see distressed poverty return from meeting him with the gleam of gratitude distilling away the tear of suffering. But though I know much about him, I do not know him. His enemy may know as much.

And so when I trace the hard work of God in smiling landscape, or in the scintillating heavens; or regard his power in the fury of tempests or the silent marshalling of worlds; or contemplate his gentleness in his care for wounded sparrows; or reflect upon his limitless resources in the luxurious purveying of his providence. I may know much about him, and yet be a stranger to him and forbidden his presence.

Such a knowledge as this, it is evident, could not meet the earnest aspiration of the Apostle. "The excellency of the knowledge of Christ" was not mere understanding of the doctrines concerning him. He desired a knowledge that was a life within him, and not a knowledge that was only information. A knowledge that resulted more in purity of heart rather than a clearness of intellect—a knowledge that is the true test of the new life. The new birth is not a new notion—it is a new life. We are born of God and are not born of something about God. The distinction between the old life and the new, is that in the former state there is an unsatisfactory knowledge about God, while in the new condition there is the expectation of a sequence of facts worked by a stern, unbending will of righteousness—of a personality that is to be such a knowledge to the burden of the Scriptures. The knowledge of God in the knowledge of Jesus Christ, makes us full, so that he wants

that to know Christ is to know God, and that apart from God is altogether unsatisfactory. In that chapter, which is the 14th of John's Gospel, it is plainly affirmed by Jesus, that the knowing and seeing of him is identical with the seeing and knowing of the Father. (John xiv: 7-10).

The manifestation of Jesus Christ was the full answer to the heart-cravings that from the very flame-guarded portals of Eden had been sighing, "That I may know him." Sainly ambition had searched anxiously for "the seed of the woman," then for Abraham's seed, then for David's seed, then for Messiah, that "should come," it saw the day afar off, and was glad; it sought for the knowledge by which the "Righteous Servant" should justify many; and when "in the fullness of time," the flash of angelic wings and the splendor of guiding stars led Simplicity and Wisdom to the incarnation, they saw not the beauty of innocent infancy, but "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." (II Cor. iv:6). As the Light of the world developed from the hidden glow in the carpenter's home, astonished men recognized it as a revelation; they became convinced that when they heard him speak, they heard God's gracious words; when they saw him act, they beheld the very power of God; when they beheld his spirit they understood the love of God. "No man had seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he declared him." (John i:18).

The revelation of God was declared to be a specific purpose in the incarnation of Christ. No man knoweth the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him." (Matt. 11:27). This office-work of divine unfolding continues as a perpetual mission. And how does he reveal God? Not by frigid declarations and abstractions; but by "the development of divine sympathies." There is a vast difference between the intellectual apprehension of a fact, and the getting at the essence of the fact. How do you understand the spirit? Not by any physical outline do you apprehend a great spiritual fact, as the affection for mother, wife or child. "Unless something beside the mere scientific intellect grasp a fact as present, unless there is faith to apprehend and take hold of the spiritual reality, we get nothing but the dead, abstractive form of things." The "unearthly astronomer" may trace a star-beam until it is chilled to darkness in the limitless void, and find no God. The skeptical anatomist may peer within the scarlet blazes of the mortal tabernacle, and find no judgment for an immortal soul. Is there, therefore, no guiding star?—the millinery and music—tulle and lace—the pomp and political elections—the pomp and

neither can God be revealed in the depths of a soul and earthly mind. It has been well said, to understand a philosopher requires a philosopher, to understand a patriot requires a patriot, to understand purity, one that is pure. So to understand God requires a God-like spirit.

Just that is the aim of faith in Jesus Christ. We look upon a personality. His character and his nature, so unselfish and consequently so un-earthly, so yearningly affectionate and therefore so unusual—affect us so that we give up to a simple impression of goodness. We accept and believe his word, because He says it. He with such a spirit, with such love, with such proof of self-abnegation. We have an evidence of Christianity that is not argument but apprehension, not a balancing of affirmatives and negatives, but a direct sight-seeing. The words that he speaks, "they are spirit and they are life." (John 6:63).

Let it be true that our knowledge of God is limited because our faculties are limited, and therefore at the best we have only partial views of him. I would not care for it to be otherwise. I need a higher, a nobler, a more far reaching God than I can imagine. I can not worship an Analyst. The voice of the spirit is like the moaning of the sea shell, repeating the hollow murmur of the sinuous ocean, whence it came, and whither it would go, and unlike the shell, I am powerless in my inability to satisfy my yearnings. But Jesus Christ comes to me, with a yearning infinitely greater, and with an affection infinitely able, and the cry of the spirit is answered. I may not understand him whose habitation of righteousness and judgment is amid clouds and darkness, but the One who teaches mine eyes so that I can see, and heals the paralysis of my guilty heart, and whose whisperings of peace kindle my dull ear into acute hearing—I can understand him. I may not know him whose voice is in the thunders, and whose path is in the sea, but I can comprehend the voice that tenderly invites, "Come unto me," and the way is clear when he condescends, "Follow me." I may not understand how terrible is the consuming fire of wrath against sin; but I can comprehend him who sits down to weep over my sin. I may have feeble conception of the everlasting life of God—I who am so finite, the creature of such a winter's day—but I can understand him who gives himself up to death for me. And when he who does all that for me, assures me that that is the spirit, and the grace, and the character of God, I say, "Yea, Lord, thou art the truth—Thou art God! My Lord and my God!"

II. I further submit that to know Christ is to apprehend Truth. For it is not sufficient to have simply a revelation of the character of God. He has a purpose of grace to us. Not like a king, who conceives it to be gracious to allow his subjects to gaze upon his countenance; he, but like a king who has devised a great prosperity for his people, and who would have them give ear to him. The best education is that which gives a man the right use of his own powers. It would make men not simply do the right, but enjoy right things; to be industrious and pure and just because of a love for these things. That is the aim of Christ's teaching—to quicken right sentiment and desire. Therefore it is not an outward communication of notions, precepts, commands, so much as it is a real communication of himself. The theme of the teaching is the Teacher. It is the very reverse of egotism and the only communication of certainty. Confucius and Plato—yes, the whole college of ancient learning had been content with saying, "Accept our doctrine, believe these truths which we utter." The word of real wisdom is, "I am the Truth, believe in me." That is the calm insistence of the Gospel, drowned sometimes by the hoarse bellowing of wild Schemistic prophecies into the ears of men that search not but vainly dispute. Over against the philosopher's negation of things and his "Eternal No," stand "the promises of God," which "lighten as day and in him are Amen." (II Cor. 1:20).

The foundation of doubt is the world's ignorance of Christ. The philosophers do not know him. If he was the Christ of the "New Theology" I think I should be a skeptic. If he was the Christ of the priestcraft I know I should turn away sorrowing, if not rebellious. A yearning world, in the twilight of uncertainty, like Mary in the garden, may well cry out, "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they find him." The revolt of mind is not against religion; it is against the painted pretence that is called religion; it is against the religion of mummery and hollow platitudes, and perversions of truth, and bowings down to Caesar, and interferences with conscience, and no Christ. It is only the refusal to take the stone instead of the bread, the loathing of the serpent that is offered for the egg. It is a revolution against Rome, and the Komish tendency outside of Rome—Papist and Apeist; and I honor the man that peers through the slimsy veil, and concludes that there is nothing in it. Right! There is nothing in it. Being Christless, it is like a painted skull, with the fire of intelligence simulated by a lighted candle placed within it. Who shall be awed by that? and who shall be won by it? Is he wrong who, beholding the genuflections and the stately millinery and music—the pomp and political elections—the pomp and

gaudy parade of that which calls itself Christianity—is he wrong who declares religion to be fit only for women and children? No; he is not wrong. Better the worship of but one deity than the adoration of paint and tabernacle. Humanity at least is for light. Why should it not turn away from the chill and gloom of a church where Christ is outside the door knocking and beseeching ears that are deaf, save to compliments and adulation. There is no doubt where there is a free gospel, and an honored Christ; but why should there not be doubt and fear too when men are like the disciples upon Gennesaret, toiling in the jaws of death upon a tempestuous sea, amid howling winds, dark, and Jesus not come to them?

When Christ is known there is a doubt that the beyond is unknowable. Without the touch of Christ's teaching it is misty and rayless. With him, however, we see something "as through a glass, darkly." The legitimate and logical conclusion of a dim sight is faith, and not skepticism; for if we see dimly, yet we see. Are there shadows? There is no shadow without a substance. Have we only reflections? There must be brightness to cast reflection. That is why Christ stands urging, "Learn of me," as if he should say, "I only can tell you; I only know the Father; the future is in my hands; you are disturbed and distressed because you can not solve the problem of human destiny; for this cause I came into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth; I will teach you if you will be patient and learn." It is not irrational to believe the word of a higher and nobler nature. Man sneers, "Seeing is believing," yet sees and believes not. God's doctrine is, "Believing is seeing," and believing the man does see. He is no longer like "a clever archæologist" on his knees, in a church-yard, spelling out defaced inscriptions on the marbles, and in-crisping in a knowledge ever pursued by a mark of interrogation. He has a real, not a notional knowledge. Being able to say, "I know whom he believed," he can also say, "I know that all things work together for good to me."

Is there a royal road to learning? The wise say they have not discovered it, but that truth comes slowly as a succession of sustained verities. Yes, that is it. The royal road to spiritual truth is a close following of the pathway of the Great Teacher, and certainty springs from the succession of corroborated confidence and sustained trust we make in him. III. I further submit that to know Christ is to understand self. It is not enough to comprehend the character of God, or to apprehend the vital truths concerning him; it is needful that we derive a lasting benefit from this knowledge. This is possible, for the knowledge of Christ possesses a renovating, regenerating power upon the human soul. It is a great thing to say, "I am a believer," for that is saying, "I am born of God—I am of a Divine Original—I am governed by his spirit."

It is from the natural deductions of the personal knowing of Christ, that men dazed by the blindness of self, so persistently shrink. They complain that it is a receding from the proper dignity of manhood. They urge that the becoming a little child is a reversal of the true order of things. They complain that men ought to develop into bravery and independence, and that being meek and humble and patient is a belittling of self. They turn away from this diminishing in petulance, like a child playing truant because the school is a check and a discipline upon the sunny nature of childhood. They commit fatal error, as does the child who casts away the golden hour of opportunity. To know Christ is to be awakened to the conception of growth, and development into a greater, higher, nobler, stronger life, wherein weaknesses are conquered, infirmities are rehabilitated, passions are curbed and the soul let out, like an imprisoned bird from her cage, into the liberty and power of greatness. "What is weaker than pride, self-will, revenge, the puffing of conceit and rationality, the constricting littleness of selfish passions? And in just these things it is that human souls are so fatally shrunk in all their conceptions of themselves; so that Christ encounters in all men the first and most insurmountable difficulty—to make them appreciate their real value to themselves." But when they know him, and they are awakened to the sense of the dignity of character as it shines in his face, nothing can restrain them; it is a new inspiration; it is a turning away from the mean, and base and groveling subservience of self; it is a recognition of the higher and nobler qualities of patience, forbearance, sacrifice; it is a discovery of wondrous energies of which the soul is capable; it is a sense of the "element of all greatness."

We know greatness only by example. We are good as we imitate the illustrations of goodness. We only understand our capacities as we are constrained to attain to what others have accomplished. When we behold greatness and goodness we say, "Oh to be like that!" and examining into the springs of conduct which produce that admirable character, we strive to set them in motion within ourselves. If we are content to drift on, insensible to the influences around us, as some are content to buy and sell and get gain, and live only unto self and for self, the fatal mistake ere long is realized. Nothing sadder than the hardness and coldness of a soul that has misapprehended its own purpose and destiny, con-

gealing like the white winter of a far north, where the bay of fish and wild swans dying of hunger and thirst upon the rivers whose waves are changed to stone and the reeds of whose margin are grown hard upon spears of iron.

The Sun of Righteousness arising upon the rim and deadness of a wintry soul, quickens it to new conceptions of self, of duty, of living. As the picture of Christ spreads out before the astonished eye, there is no need of exhortation to be like minded. That sublime spectacle is powerful enough. The face marked by sorrow, the soul, grieving for sin, yet patient and meek; the body, wearied with labor, yet unselfish and ministering; the whole life a benediction upon the hearts and homes of men, and the end of life an expiation and a forgiveness—that is the dignity and greatness of human nature. "The boast of heraldry and the pomp of power"—the genius of invention and the cunning of art—the glory of statecraft and mad ambition that climbs to fame upon slopes of trampled dead—how they fade away when the Light of the World reveals the true uses and mission of living! To know him quickens the desire for imitation; the increase of the knowledge of him engenders the power of imitation. To discover the possibility of attaining to his likeness, and thus of throwing off the coercing fetters of sordidness and baseness, is the joy of living. To grow in that likeness even unto the fullness of stature, becomes the ambition of living. The disappointments and tribulations of the way of pilgrimage are recompensed in the heart's song of anticipation, "I shall be satisfied when I awake in my likeness;" and trial and warfare and contact with earth's debasement, in no wise undermines the patience that waits for the manifestation of redemption when "we shall be like him."

IV. I finally submit that to know Christ is Eternal Life. The result of the powers of the soul is described in the Gospel as far different from the conceptions of the sensual philosophers. Heaven is not a Nirvana; the bliss of eternal being is not carnal. Sweet fields there may be, but not for dreamy languor; pavements of gold and vases of crystal there may be, but not for gaudy display; mansions there may be but not for the extravagance and ease of luxury. In rest in idle baskings beneath the breezes of a perpetual summer—not sweet companionship in reunited bonds of earth—not these alone denote the privilege of the blessed. Yes, there is rest, and there is sweet and holy occupancy of things revealed to us in types of material things, and there is ecstatic re-union and recognition of faces that made life a weariness a blessing, but they are only accessories. Something better than that. And is there aught better? Aye, indeed, for "this is life eternal, to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent." (John xvi: 3).

To know God—to know Jesus Christ—the hiding veil, through which the light has been coming sparsely, torn away—the fleshy tabernacle with its windows all begrimed with sin, demolished, and the new house built upon its ruins with every window open to the blessed sunlight of the Divine Glory—the night shadows, whose long cloakings held our vision in thrall and dampened the fine colorings into half distinguishable greys, now chased away by the dawn of the eternal morning—the little limit of view which we caught in the valley of humiliation, widened because of our uplifting upon the mountain peak of God's exaltation—to know!—yes, that is life.

What is living without knowledge—living, I mean, here and now, with intellects thrown out of balance, for want of the perpetual guidance of the Holy Spirit, like a watch with an untempered mainspring, working, and yet lacking reliability? What is living without knowledge, even when the fleshy and temporal has prevailed over the finer spiritual nature? The pain of sin, the distress of the warped nature is the stretching out after something unobtainable. The cravings of the spirit are like the voice of a prisoner crying out of his deep cell for the light he has forgotten, and calling for comrades that have forgotten him. Its meaning is, "I should like to know." With all the disadvantages growing out of the mastery of the flesh, to know is better than to eat, to sleep, to gain. The widening of the mental horizon, the solving of the wonderful problems in the material universe around us—the understanding of the hidden springs that lie coiled up within ourselves—the timid touching of the borders of the great unknown—this is living. Knowledge is power and power is life. The man who moves amid the scenes of the day, calm, majestic, self-contained, is the man that knows. I do not say that he knows everything; he may know but little; but I mean that his content and success and lofty enjoyment spring out of the fact that he knows that there are some things, the most important things to him, that are open to his view, and contained within the limit of his understanding. What have been the great victory shouts of the earth-born? Like watchmen calling from their towers through a darkness that veils their vision, I hear the afflicted Job cry out, "I know that my Redeemer liveth," "I hear the answer sounding back from the imprisoned Paul, "I know whom I have believed."

Now strip away the flesh, cast off the garments of the spirit that have been fouled by earth, retune the harp

that has become harsh and jangled—free the soul from its fetters, and let it stand disenthralled and reburnished with all its faculties playing in harmony the universe unveiled, and what shall be the ground of joy of strength, of existence? What, indeed, but the gloomy shadows have been dissolved, and the without the presence of a single uncertainty—it knows; knows the purpose of its being; knows the reason for its discipline of tears; knows the meaning of the strange Providences that have chequered the life; knows why the burden-bearing and the journeys in the night—knows the deep mysteries of God—knows God himself; that is heaven—that is life; to know, and knowing, to acquiesce and endorse; looking back upon the "days of earth, and forward to the "days of heaven" with a fruit of righteousness, "just and true are thy ways thou King of Saints."

The day of the resurrection will be a reproduction of the day of the nativity. There will be a converging together of those who desire to look wise men will be increased to the numberless multitude of them who are wise indeed, and who shine forth as the sun for beauty. The stable of the God-man will be the object of their quest, but the throne of the Man-God. He will be again "the desire of all nations." Every eye will be strained to catch a glimpse of him that was pierced. They come up from their graves, rising out of the sea, gathering from the four corners of the earth—diverse in nation, diverse in culture, diverse in language, diverse in ages of development—yet unified by one common desire, one common hope. They re-echo the question of the enquiring Greeks: "We would see Jesus!" In a myriad tongues breaks that one heart-born query: "Where is he?"—the fathers and the martyrs—the missionaries and their redeemed flocks—European, Asiatic, American, African and the dwellers in the sea isles—streaming toward the one common centre of Hope and Life—with the last lingering look of earth depicted in their anxiety of gaze—searching for the Babe of the Manger, the Teacher of the hillside, the Sacrifice of Calvary. And they draw nearer; the splendor of the throne flashes upon their countenances; the strains of the welcome chorus rise to a mighty climax: "There he is! that is he! that is the brow that was crowned with thorns! that is the side that was pierced with a spear and through those are the feet that grew weary with searching for me! that is the smile that kissed my dull heart into life! I see him—I know him—there he is! there he is! Nor is that all; to know him is to be known by him. I see him greet them as they crowd around him. That is his mother, that is the woman that washed his feet, there are Joanna and Susanna that prepared bread for him, there is the woman who wove the seamless garment, the fisherman who followed him, the child that crept up to him to kiss him, they who led him, who suffered for him, who preached and taught for him. His hands stretch forth in welcome. "Oh I know you! I know you, true yoke-fellow, I have been with you many an hour when you have preached my Gospel to unwilling ears. I know you, feeder of my lambs, I have been beside you many a time when you were teaching my name to infant lips. I know you, brave conqueror; I have been with you in many a battle with temptation. I know you, child of suffering; I have been beside you, your bed of pain, and heard your songs in the night. Yes, I know you—and you too—and you. Come ye blessed of my Father, come home." And they follow him where-soever he goeth!

Comment on the season and its fruits.

The Commencement season is upon us. We shall have account of something like an "Infinite series" of the doings at these commencements—from Harvard and Yale and Brown Universities, down to Cross Roads places. Will the writers in memory abridge what they have to say—"boy it doth!" Will editors spare us, as far as possible, allow, as many of these accounts as they can? The monopoly becomes intolerable to readers. We will take it for granted that every school is surpassing anything in the past history of schools; that the greatest orators are being preached; the greatest orators holding forth. In the meantime, if these public speakers say anything specially new, pointed, fresh, or remarkable in any way, we will accept the essence of it in abridged paragraphs. You see I am not to speak, so far as I yet know, this summer, and can afford to talk saucily. Most any of us take praise very patiently when it comes, but others are not interested in it as much as we are.

Oh, what a crop of Doctorates coming to maturity! Dr. Fuller, I took it to be, many years ago, humorously complained of "watering the stock"—of conferring upon "boys" the dignities once reserved for "birds" old gentlemen. Well, envy, if it exists, will soon be repressed, pride, if it is fostered, soon abated, by giving titles to the many instead of the few—making well nigh all Doctors, as Dr. Tucker has proposed. The value of gold turns almost wholly of gems entirely—on glitter and scarcity. Ere we are aware the lustre will fade, and all dwindle into "diamond fardels." I remember how I was amused by the hour, in looking

over the minutes of an ecclesiastical convocation, whose members were very largely titled, every page blazoning with D. D., Ph. D., L. L. D., D. C. L., (Oxon. et Cant. occasionally) repeated every time the name was repeated. The Minutes of the wholesome humble Baptists begin to sparkle, not to say blaze, a little. Brethren will excuse us, the next six months, if we do not say "Doctor," but "Brother" when we meet them—it will probably take that time to get posted up.

I am not opposed to commencement—care not how much they be multiplied. I grow young again when I attend them. They stimulate reading among the young, as did the reading of select pages or the exhibition of paintings at the national gatherings of the Greeks. They are occasions when mature ability may be occasionally advised and encouraged to a life. But I sympathize with the preachers who officiate in connection with them, expected to give eclat by the exhibition of learning and talent, and who usually feel the depressing effect of an atmosphere not very redolent of devotion, as they enter the pulpit, or essay an approach to the throne in prayer. However, I am glad to believe that better men than I am sometimes largely surmount these difficulties.

Intellectual and moral health to all the colleges and schools, instructors and friends! E. B. T.

For the Alabama Baptist.

Russell's Valley.

Bro. West: Some time since, having a few days vacation from my regular work, I accepted an invitation from my esteemed nephew, the Rev. Jno. B. Steadham, of Russell's Valley, North Ala., to visit his family. My visit brought me through the beautiful valley of the Tennessee from Decatur to Tusculum, a distance of 45 miles, down the river and through one of the grandest districts of the State, except at Trinity there is not a Baptist church so far as I was informed. At Tusculum we have a house, but no pastor, Tusculum is a little city, and yet the Baptist church is without a pastor, and outsiders speak of the situation as if there was no Baptist church there. Five or six miles away, and across the river is the town of Florence, rather a little city, and there is no Baptist church there. This is about a fair sample, so I was told, of the whole Valley of the Tennessee. Such a state of affairs was not calculated to make a Baptist feel very cheerful. Somebody is to blame for such a state of affairs. I am sure such a condition of things would not exist if our doctrines had been fairly and intelligently presented from the early settlement of the Valley until now. Baptist pastors are usually held responsible for our failures, I believe, and if this is correct, then the Baptist pastors of the Valley of the Tennessee have much to account for.

At Tusculum we met our kinsman and jostled over some almost impassable road for about 20 or 25 miles to Russellville. This village of about 300 inhabitants is in Russell's Valley. This is a beautiful valley separated from the Tennessee Valley by a range of low mountains, and is from 40 to 60 miles in length and from 3 to 7 miles wide. It is one of the most charming little valleys in Alabama. This is in Franklin county. The valley is fertile and the uncultured lands are rich with cedar, walnut, cherry and ash. The mountains that environ this lovely country are rugged with great masses of limestone at their bases, and higher up their sides huge boulders of brown hematite iron ore indicate the great wealth of those iron-hearted hills that are soon to play such an important part in the future activity and wealth of North Alabama. It is here that the city of Sheffield must get much of her wealth. The new railroad from Birmingham to Sheffield crosses this valley and runs near Russellville. In this valley the Baptists are numerous, but they must excuse me for saying that they are not as active as they should be. The Russellville Baptist church is strong, strong in numbers and strong in financial ability, and I am proud to say has in its membership much piety and stability of character. The Eastons, Nances, Sargents and others belong to strong and well-established families, but these dear brethren must allow me to say that they do not exert themselves as they might do, and as they ought to do, and as they must do or soon be responsible for Russell's Valley's getting into the same condition that the Valley of the Tennessee is now in, so far as Baptist interests are concerned. Bro. West is pastor of our church at Russellville, and is esteemed by all to be a man of much piety. One thing struck me forcibly in Russell's Valley, and that was that it was supposed by the people to have been finished about a quarter of a century ago. You see nothing new. Houses stand now in the costume of 40 years ago—not a change in 40 years. The houses of every character, with only a few exceptions, are built of cedar logs, whether the owners are worth hundreds or thousands of dollars. I should say that the country appears to be quite healthy for adults, but not for small children. The people are very hospitable, and I shall not forget my visit soon. I was

thrown among the Methodists, and they were quite kind to me. Dr. Clark, of the Methodist church, showed us much kindness, as did Bro. Wilson and others. The Methodist church at Russellville is a spirited and progressive body of Christians with my old friend, Bro. Davis, as pastor. I was glad to meet my dear old brother, with whom I had associated so pleasantly at LaFayette, while we both were pastors there some years ago. Col. Harris is the school man of Russellville, and is a gentleman of broad culture and a devoted member of the Methodist church. It is no wonder that the Methodist church there is lively and progressive. With such families as the Harrises, Leucases, Clarks, Steadhams, Wilsons, and others, it could not be otherwise. But oh, what might not our brethren do in Russell's Valley, if they would!

From the Birmingham side the sun falls on almost an unbroken Baptist empire clear across the valley with the grand old Russell descendants—the Sargents—family in the center of it; with thenceward dashing across every acre of it. I hope to hear soon that our people have a new and comfortable church at or near Russellville. I hope that our brethren of Russellville church may not be offended at my friendly criticisms, but that they will arise in all their might and work faithfully and intelligently for the Master; for, Russell's Valley is ours, and we ought to possess it, and I would have them bear in mind that this cannot be done by sitting down. It must be done by work, and much work. Things do not do themselves. Success in any cause, right or wrong, is not of spontaneous growth, but is a result. Too many Christians, and especially Baptists, undervalue activity, Christian activity.

After many years of confinement, without even a week for rest, my trip was quite a treat to me. The Lucas and Steadham families, whom I was visiting, will accept my gratitude for the special kindness and numerous attentions which I received as their invited guest. The Sargent family must allow me to return them many thanks. JNO. F. SLAFTER.

For the Alabama Baptist.

Church Letters and Absent Members.

I cannot hope to add much, if any, that is new, to what has already been recently said in these columns on the subjects of church letters, and of members absent without letters. Dr. Roby's article expressed the view to which I have long inclined as to what should be the effect of a letter of dismission from a church. The present custom as to church letters is not only marked by some inconsistencies, but may be so easily, and is so often abused, that it appears to me that a better practice ought to be adopted if possible.

Why should a letter of dismission be regarded as a severance of the relation that had existed, between the individual and the church? Practically it is so, though it is not in theory; and the difference between fact and theory presents one of the reasons for a change of theory. A church letter ought to say, in substance, that "Bro. John Smith is dismissed from us at his own request. There are no charges against him, and we know of no sufficient grounds for any." That would be simply a certificate of his church membership, and of his dismissal in a peaceable and regular way; and he would be received by another church upon his own merits, without the often misleading influence of a good recommendation. By the common practice, sometimes a very shabby member is given a good recommendation to other churches. His standing was not good, though he was careful to avoid any act that would give ground for a definite charge. A number of the members did not entertain for him a feeling of fellowship, because he had offended them, yet not sufficiently to justify them in preferring charges. But the letter giving him certifies that "he is in good standing and full fellowship." The church knew that was not true, yet according to custom it must be affirmed, else another church would refuse to receive the bearer, and he would complain of unjust treatment. But the church was anxious to be rid of him! But it is not rid of him so long as he may choose to hold the letter. It has merely pushed him aside. I have known a member to absent himself from the conference of the church, so that he would not be obliged to object to the granting of a letter to another member who was expected to apply for it, and whom he was anxious to have out of the church, because he did not believe him to be a Christian, nor even a man of common honesty; and the letter was granted, stating that the brother was in good standing and full fellowship with his brethren and sisters! This has occurred more than once. And because of these and other things, every pastor of experience knows that it is not safe to rely upon the statements of a common church letter in estimating the worthiness of the person who presents it. We receive him for what he may prove to be worth. Sometimes it is a bad bargain. Unless churches were more strict in discipline, and more candid, their letters of dismission ought not to contain anything that commends the Christian character of the person to whom they are granted. Then no other church need be deceived.

Nor should any custom exist by which one or two members might, and without just cause, prevent the granting of a letter, when all the other members are in favor of it. Why

should a member be forced to continue his connection with a church just because another member is angry with him.

It was more my intention to approve the article of Bro. Roby than to write one myself; but as the ink is on my pen, I will add a few more words.

Referring to a part of the subject already alluded to, let me say further, that the reasons that may have been sufficient in times past, for regarding a letter of dismission as not a dismissal in fact until the person receiving it had united with another church of the same faith and order, do not appear to me now to exist. If they do, they are not applicable to the altered condition of the country, and to the change in the number and convenience of churches, and in their customs and sentiments. It is necessary, or prudent, to assume the watch-care, and responsibility for, the conduct of a member from the time he leaves its vicinity until he unites with another church. The idea may be, that it is not right to cut a member entirely off until he has committed some offense. But why not cut him off, in a friendly way, and at his own request, when as a matter of fact in these days a member who receives a letter of dismission seldom regards himself as in any way amenable to the church that gave it? Oftener than otherwise the action of the church toward the member, indicates an entire separation between them. I have known a member to take his letter "because the church did something which he did not approve and thereafter there was, as a matter of fact, no churchly relation recognized as subsisting between the two." I know it may be said that these and similar instances are merely abuses of a good custom. But why should an unnecessary custom be continued, when it is capable of such abuses? I think I feel the full force of the sentimental proposition that a Baptist Christian should always be a member of a Baptist church—that there should be no lapse or gap in his church connection. But that is only sentiment. "Loose him and let him go." No matter what may be thought of the binding force of a letter, he will go right or wrong, according to the condition of his mind and heart.

In addition to the reasons given above by those who have already spoken, I would add this: that now and then a person joins a church of a different faith and order from us, on a letter from a Baptist church which claims him as still a member, and vouches for his Christian character; and the church that granted the letter must observe the curious formality of withdrawing its fellowship from that person!

As to members who are absent without letters, my churches have, for several years past, at my suggestion, adopted the rule of placing the names on a separate list from the members present; this is called the "silent roll," and the names are not counted or reported in giving the numerical strength of the church. If one returns, his name is restored to the active roll. If he writes for a letter and was entitled to it when he went away, a certificate is given that when he left our vicinity he was in good standing in the church. No complaint has been made against this custom. E. F. BARN.

For the Alabama Baptist.

Data from Kentucky General Association.

The General Association met at Glasgow and organized by re-electing Green Clay Smith, moderator, and B. W. D. Seeley and J. N. Prestidge, secretaries.

Next session to be held at Mayfield, on Wednesday before the fourth Sunday in June.

Drs. Tichenor and Nunnally are here to represent the Home Board and Building Department. Dr. Tichenor's description of a Kentucky sun rise was the most eloquent effort of the meeting.

The Sunday-school Board reported 223 baptisms, and 238 other professions in connection with their co-workers' labors. Cash raised, \$5,769.45, and under supervision of the Board, \$1,800; total, \$7,569.45. Net assets in books and cash, \$915.75.

State Mission Board reported raised by district boards, secretary, &c., \$11,007.34. Cash and subscriptions for church building about \$12,000. Nineteen houses in course of erection in mission fields. Eight churches organized. Two hundred and ninety-three baptisms.

Foreign Board raised during the year, \$10,600.

Orphan's Home received forty-two children and found homes for fifty-six.

Dr. Dickerson, of the Herald, dropped in on us for a day and left the association laughing.

An effort was made to put the State Board in the control of all works, boards, &c., in the State, and failed.

Report on schools and colleges shows great progress. Bethel college reports \$173,000 endowment. Georgetown has \$12,000 on the new effort on endowment. The Seminary reports the purchase of the most elegant large vacant lot in Louisville, Broadway, near Fourth. J. N. P.

Woman was made out of the rib taken from the side of a man; not out of his head to rule over him, but out of his side to be equal, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be loved.—[Matthew Henry.]

sense, and can not leave my family
I did last year, and receive su-
pitiful sum. I will preach all I
and expect, by the help of God
visit all the points where I preached
last year in the month of July.
W. F. MARTIN
Andalusia, Ala., May 15, 1884.

Baptist church for many years before death, having been baptized into the fellowship of the Baptist church at Rehoboth Montgomery county, Ala., by Eld. A. T. Handy, when a young man. His end peace. He leaves a widow and children to mourn his loss, but they have reason to hope he has entered upon the saints' everlasting rest in Heaven.

H. W. W.

and niece. It was her sister, Eliza M. inferro, who directed these beautiful to be inscribed upon her tomb:

'There is no death, the stars go down
To rise upon a brighter shore,
And in heaven's jewelled crown
To shine forever more.'

P. T. HENDERSON

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Consecrated Monday.
Look at this little heap of coin.
Dimmed by the rust of years:
Marred by the ceaseless dropping
Of a stricken mother's tears.
Lighly you turn them over,
O, the sweet dreams of the future,
Do you think that the hopes of a lifetime
Lie crushed before you there?

Years, years ago, when this gray hair,
Was soft, and sunny, and brown,
Into my care, for a little while,
God sent an angel down.
O, the bright visions that came to me,
O, the sweet dreams of the future,
Fair, very fair, should the pride be,
For the dear child of my side.

She should have riches, love, and delight,
Her path should be decked with flowers,
My head should plan, and my hand should toil,
That her's might be sunny hours,
All that my childhood's years had missed,
Should be her happy lot.
The treasures for which I had vainly longed,
Should be hers, without pain, or thought,
Each week I would carefully hoard away
A sum, that would ever increase,
My darling should never know lack of gold,
Nor poverty mar her peace.
Child of my heart, thou hast left me now,
Yet mine is the answered prayer.
Thou hast the brightness and joys of heaven,
Unclouded by want or care!
What my best wisdom could ask win,
Father, to her thou hast given,
Beautiful robes, and raiment white,
The untold glories of heaven.

To me, there are left the empty arms,
The sorrow that the lonely nights,
The weary days, and the lonely nights,
And this little golden nest,
Take it, dear Father, it is thine;
Too long has it smoldered in vain,
Let it bear the tidings of Love Divine,
Let it soothe some sad heart's pain.
It is consecrated to holy use,
Hallowed by prayer and tears,
Hopes of a lifetime, crushed and torn,
Dreams of my summer-years,
It was saved for my child, and perhaps, who
knows?
If it bear the message of love,
And win some soul from the path of sin,
She may know it even above;
I know that her mother loves her yet;
It would add to her bliss, even here;
Then go, little sacred golden heap
Of Consecrated Care!

A Touching Incident.

The quiet influence of a child has been the means of saving the parent. I remember a little history related to me many years ago by a Christian abster. He said he would give me the facts that led to his reform, and the circumstance that arrested him in his career of sin.

Two maiden ladies who lived in the village often noticed a scantily clad girl passing their house with a tin pail. On one occasion one of these ladies accosted her.

"Little girl, what have you got in that pail?"
"Whisky, ma'am."

"Where do you live?"
"Down in the hollow."

"I'll go home with you."
They soon came to a wretched hovel in the hollow, outside the village. A pale, jaded, worn out woman met them at the door. Inside was a man, dirty, maudlin and offensive. The lady addressing the woman, said:

"Is this your little girl?"
"Yes."
"Does she go to school?"
"No; she has no other clothes than what you see."

"Does she go to Sabbath-school?"
"Sabbath-school—in these rags! Oh, no!"

"If I furnish her with suitable clothes, can she go?"
"It's of no use giving her clothes. He would steal them, and sell them for whisky. Better let the girl alone; there is no hope for her or for us."

"But she ought to go to school."
An arrangement was entered into whereby the child should call at the lady's house on Sabbath morning, be clothed for the school, and after the school was dismissed, call again and change her garments for home.

The little creature was very teachable, and soon became a favorite with her teacher, who gave her a little Testament, probably the first gift the child had ever received. She was very proud of her Testament, exhibiting it on all occasions with the delighted exclamation:

"That's my little Testament—my own."
She would take it with her at night, clasping it in her hands till she fell asleep on the wretched rags called a bed. The child was taken ill. The doctors provided by her benefactors declared she would die. Her friends furnished her with what comforts they could, and watched the father lest he should steal them and sell them for whisky.

The gentleman then continued the narrative:
"One day I went to her bedside. I was mad for drink. I had taken everything I could lay my hands on. I looked around the room. There was nothing left, nothing I could dispose of. Yet I must have drink. I could have sold my child; I could have sold myself, for whisky. The creature lay on the bed, with her Testament clasped in her hand, partly dozing. As I sat there she fell asleep and the book slipped from her fingers, and lay on the coverlid of the bed. Stealthily looking round the room, I stretched out my shaking hand, seized the Testament, and hastily thrust it into my bosom. I soon sneaked out like a guilty thief, to the grog shop. All I could get for it was half a pint of whisky. It was a poor little book. I drank the devil's drink almost at a draught, and soon felt relieved from the burning thirst. The stagnant blood in the diseased vessels of my stomach was purified by the fiery liquid, and I felt better. What took me back to my child I cannot tell, but I sat again by her side. She seemed to be sleeping, and I sat there with the horrible craving stayed for the time by the whisky. I had drunk, when she opened her eyes slowly and saw me. Reaching out her hand to touch mine she said, 'What's there?' I am going to die, when I die I shall go to Jesus; but I shall go to heaven; for

he said that little children were of the kingdom of heaven. I learned that out of my Testament. Papa, suppose when I go to heaven Jesus should ask me what you did with my little Testament. Oh, papa, oh, papa! what shall I tell him?" It struck me like lightning. I sat a few moments, and then fell down on my knees by the bedside of my child, crying, 'God be merciful to me a sinner.' That half pint of whisky was the last drop of intoxicating liquor that has passed my lips. She died in a few days, with her hand in mine, and her last words to me were, 'Papa, we shall both go to Jesus now.'—*Christian Statesman.*

A Story for Mothers.

The Fullers—we do not give the real name—were an influential family. They were wealthy, cultured people, and among the most prominent members of the principal church in the Western town in which they lived. Every Sunday they filled their pew, gave liberally to church and other charities, and the minister was always welcomed to their table.

Mrs. Fuller was a sincere Christian woman. No one acquainted with her daily life could question her sincerity. But she was peculiarly reserved and sensitive, with an extreme dislike of obtruding on the reserve of other people. Her son was her constant companion as he grew to early manhood—a clever, spirited boy; keen of apprehension and eager for knowledge.

His mother discussed every subject but that of religion freely with him. He had been sent constantly to Sunday-school, and had been taught the chief facts in Jewish history, and those which relate to the life and mission of Christ. But she had never asked him to consider the relation in which he himself stood to God, or urged him to take Christ as the guide and model of his life—his Friend and Master.

There had been times when she had felt almost driven to do this, but when the lad was at her side, and they were surrounded by the atmosphere of every-day life, her courage had failed her and the subject had been deferred.

He was a handsome, perfectly healthy young man, a noted athlete, with a life full of plans and hopes before him; there was plenty of time, she felt, for such counsel and entreaties.

Last October the boy was stricken down by diphtheria. On the second day the physician told him he had an hour to live. While he lay stunned and silent, some one spoke to him of Christ as a Savior.

"Savior? Why, I never thought about him," he cried. "He is no Savior of mine! Mother, why didn't you talk to me of him?"

These were his last words. In a few moments his senses were clouded, and before the hour was over he was dead.

Every mother will understand the intolerable legacy of remorse that was left by these words. Yet how many mothers, although religious women in their profession and habits of life, never break the silence between themselves and their sons on this subject? They defer it to a more convenient season, and soon the tender boy is a hardened man, and has left home and passed from under their influence.

If a man's mother has not cared for his soul, who will?—*Youth's Companion.*

Simple Faith.

The indications of strong and unwavering faith in the efficacy of prayer are so frequently manifested in the lives of little children, that we cannot but feel at times the peculiar force of the Savior's words: "In heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father."

An instance, recently related to me, is worthy of record. In a clergyman's family at the South, the youngest child was seized with severe illness. The mother sat at the bedside, watching anxiously over the little sufferer, while at her knee stood the oldest child, a boy of four years. He had always manifested a spirit of trust and faith, especially in the efficacy of prayer. Now he stood silent and thoughtfully gazing upon his younger brother—his little playmate and companion. Then looking earnestly into his mother's face, he said:

"Mamma, if I pray for him, don't you think he will get well?"
"Perhaps so, my boy."

The child left the room and was absent for some time. When he returned, he said:

"Now, mamma, don't you think he is better?" The little brother finally recovered, and, of course, the faith of the boy was strengthened.

Could we all attain this simple faith in the Father's love; could we "become as little children," might we not—even here on earth—"enter into the kingdom of heaven," which is within us?

The perfect peace of God cannot exist without a full belief in the words: "He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when he shall hear it, he will answer thee."—*E. W. B., in New York Observer.*

The Fire that Old Nick Built.

Intemperance. This is the fire that Old Nick built. Moderate drinking. This is the fuel that feeds the fire that Old Nick built.

Rum-selling. This is the axe that cuts the wood that feeds the fire that Old Nick built. Love of money. This is the stone that grinds the axe that cuts the wood that feeds the fire that Old Nick built.

the blow that we quietly deal to fashion the sledge with its face of steel that batters the stone that grinds the axe that cuts the wood that feeds the fire that Old Nick built.

Eternal truth. This is the Spirit, so gentle and still, that nerves the Smith to work with a will to give force to the blows which we quietly deal to fashion the sledge with its face of steel that batters the stone that grinds the axe that cuts the wood that feeds the fire that Old Nick built.—*Selected.*

FARM AND HOUSEHOLD.

The Profitable Age of Swine.

I say that no man can afford to keep a hog over winter unless he keeps it for breeding purposes; and I firmly believe just what I say. No man can afford to do that which brings him less money than something else which he can do; for his neighbor will do that other thing and then he cannot compete with his neighbor. No man can afford to presently lose money when so doing can give no future return. Therefore no man can afford to winter swine for other than breeding purposes.

Whether a hog is kept one year or ten years, it is most profitable to have it farrowed in the early spring. The pig littered in the spring requires very little food other than its mother's milk till grass comes. After that it will grow fast and keep fat on good pasture alone, if it has a little of the skimmed milk and slops from the house for a month after it goes to grass. I have tried this so often, and I have so frequently seen others do it, that I know positively that it can be done. The past year my swine were in extra good condition for market at any time after the first of June, and all the food they got was an abundance of blue grass, timothy and clover pasture.

Pasture usually begins to fail about the middle of September. By that time the hog will weigh not far from 225 pounds. I know this, for I have tried it too often with the same result, to be mistaken. This pork has cost me 2 1/2 cents per pound. I say it has cost this per pound because I believe a spring pig has cost nearly \$6 by the time it is turned upon the grass. If a good pig, it is worth \$3 when farrowed, and the subsequent cost is about \$3. The grass I count as nothing. Land here rents for \$4 per acre. The fertility added to the soil by pasturing, including the manure, solid and liquid, of the swine, plus that which would be extracted by a grain crop, is worth \$4 per acre. It will make that much difference in the succeeding crop of corn or wheat alone. But for the sake of argument, I will say that this fertility is as nothing, and charge the hogs with the full rent of the land for one year, though they do not occupy it half that time. An acre of pasture, such as it should be, will keep two hogs during the summer; that is, keep them fat. Then the grass each eats has cost \$2, and the 225 pounds of pork has cost less than \$3—decidedly cheap pork!

So far, the man who winters hogs and the man who does not are together. Each has a thrifty, healthy hog, as hogs summered on good pasture usually are, weighing 250 pounds and costing only \$7. The latter commences to feed corn as soon as the pasture begins to fail. He feeds it largely for two months. He provides a variety of food, but other articles are exceptions on the bill of fare, and the hog gets all the corn he will eat. He has a vigorous appetite and a vigorous digestion, for he has been on grass all summer. In two or three months of such feeding he weighs 350 pounds. Just what this additional 100 pounds of pork will cost depends upon the price of corn. Hogs kept on grass during the summer have such healthy digestive and assimilative organs that they will make twelve pounds of pork from a bushel of corn. If pork made by feeding corn is ever cheap, it certainly is when made by feeding corn to such hogs.

I know that by this time many readers are smiling at the idea of the common farmer making his nine or ten months old hogs (or pigs, if it pleases you better) weigh 350 pounds. Let me tell you again, it can be done, and easily. It has been done, and can be done again. You cannot do it with scrubs; you must have good hogs. You cannot do it with good hogs if you neglect them; they must be well cared for. However, it is not my purpose to show how much a hog may be made to weigh, but that it is best not to winter it.

But suppose the farmer, instead of marketing his hogs in the fall, concludes to keep them over winter. He feeds them just enough corn "to keep them growing." They get no green food and for a time lose flesh instead of gaining it. That this is so, I can easily appeal to the experience and observation of my readers. By Christmas the hogs are poor compared with their condition in September. A pound once lost to the hog is twice lost to the farmer. In the spring the hogs will not weigh 300 pounds more than they did in the fall. That 50 pounds is very expensive pork. In food, in shelter, in care, it has cost more than the 225 pounds previously made. The latter was profitable; the former was not.

The market now demands a hog weighing from 250 to 350 pounds. Some years ago the popular market demand was for a heavier hog. But the consumers have found that a pig weighs about 300 pounds makes the best meat and packers have found that its pieces are the most easily cured. A spring pig, fed and treated as I have indicated, is what the market wants, and it will therefore bring the highest price. If wintered over it may weigh more, but will bring less per pound. Hence the pork most cheaply made brings the highest price, and I have another argument in favor of not wintering hogs.

It is true that the longer the hog is kept the greater the likelihood of loss from disease or accident, but so is as loss from disease is concerned, the

risk is rendered more than proportionately greater by wintering. Change from green to dry, hard food is favorable to the development of disease. The severities of the weather are also apt to induce disease. Hogs on good pasture rarely die of cholera. Swine plague nearly always attacks those kept on dry food (principally corn), on which hogs must be kept in winter. The greater likelihood of loss from disease is another argument in opposition to wintering.

Last, but by no means least, the time has passed in this country for raising a hog and fattening it afterwards. All the time the hog is living a certain portion of the matter obtained by the digestion and assimilation of the food is used to support life. It is only the surplus over this which increases the mass of the body—which is gain. The earlier a certain amount of this gain is made the more profitable, on account of the less amount required to support life. Hence the hog should be fattened at the same time it is raised. This surplus should constantly exist. If it does the hog will have attained a marketable age at nine months. If kept over winter it must, to a greater or less extent, be raised and fattened afterward. The period of fattening should equal the life of the hog; but if kept over winter this cannot be the case.

From all this it clearly appears that the most profitable age to butcher a hog is at about nine months; that is, an early spring pig kept growing and fattening on good pasture during the summer and early fall, then fed all the corn it will eat for three months, and then marketed, is the most profitable hog, and has attained the most profitable age, neither more nor less.—*John M. Stahl.*

Cinders in the Eye.

A very simple and effective cure for cinders in the eye is within the reach of every one, and would prevent much suffering and expense were it generally known.

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