

Brethren and Gospel Preaching.

Testimony of various Brethren as to the 'Work of the Gospel'.

Mr Andrew Miller says:— "An accusation often brought against Brethren is their want of zeal for the conversion of sinners. But we cannot admit that they are at all behind other Christians in this blessed work. They have been spoken of from an early period as open-air preachers, when that practice was more rare than now. We have heard of their preaching on the race-course, and near the grand-stand, and in fairs & markets, in streets and lanes, and courtyards, or wherever they could reach the people. But the charge has generally been made by those who know nothing of the operations of Brethren, except that some of their members had left and united with them. The early Brethren were most zealous in preaching the gospel to sinners; and from their increased knowledge of the finished work of Christ, and the riches of divine grace, they were able to do so clearly and fully, and many in different places were brought to know the Lord. So zealous were they in spreading the glad tidings, that in some places almost every brother became a preacher. ... The important distinction between preaching the gospel to the unconverted & teaching Christians as thus enforced and illustrated by the Brethren, was altogether new. The gift and work of the evangelist are perfectly distinct from those of the teacher; but the distinction has, always excepting the apostolic age, never been acted upon in the church generally until very lately. ... It might be well for Brethren, however, to accept the above-mentioned reproof, and seek to be still more zealous for the salvation of precious souls. For several years after the division, the Brethren seem to have been more occupied with practical truth for Christians than with the gospel for lost souls outside. This we believe was of God. Like the apostle who went over all the country of Galatia & Phrygia, in order, strengthening all the disciples; they believed it was their bounden duty to strengthen the souls after the shaking and unsettling through which they had passed. Still the gospel was preached, souls were blessed, & the open-air work went on as well. Mr Darby still speaks (1878) with pleasure of his preaching in the open air, in barns, & in any available space, until he was pressed with the care & instruction of the saints. Mr Kelly, whom we know chiefly as a teacher, used to preach in the open air in Guernsey, where a large meeting was gathered; & Mr Stanley in the north & west of England. With the Brethren, as with all others, the work of the gospel was greatly revived in 1859, and from that day to this, the number of evangelists has steadily & greatly increased. We pity the heart that does not rejoice with great joy in seeing the number of young evangelists who now occupy town-halls & public rooms of every description throughout this country, as in Canada, the States, and other places. In no nomination that we know is there anything like the proportion of preachers to be found as among the Brethren. ... We must now leave the reader to judge whether a want of zeal for the conversion of sinners is a true or a false accusation, which some have brought against the Brethren."

Brethren & Gospel Preaching, contd.

the earliest days of Brethren to the converted (none so distinctly recalling souls to Christ & the Church, in the confession of the present ruin of Christendom) activities in the gospel also "characterised" them from the first as the late Mr. J. N. Darby used to say; & none had a larger or more correct means of knowing its truth. To what then must be attributed such impressions as those of Mrs. Teulon & many more? To two causes particularly: the narrowness of those outside, who, because of the earnest pressure of the divine word as a whole on all saints, inferred indifference to perishing sinners; and again the still more culpable onesidedness of individuals within, who really were & are under the error of slighting evangelistic zeal, and of restricting themselves, and all subject to their influence, to the testimony of Christian and ecclesiastical truth. Now it is not and never was possible to hinder such aberrations; and wise men in our midst have not only reprov'd shallow and mischievous pettiness of this kind; but felt, spoken, written & laboured with all largeness of heart in the gospel as in the church. ... Many years ago I remember hearing of a little meeting in a small town in Wilts, where were about a dozen brothers, all of whom used, after the Lord's Supper on each Lord's day, to disperse themselves over the neighbouring villages, freely and earnestly preaching the glad tidings; yet even there and then people used to say, Brethren never preach the gospel to the unconverted! Could infatuation be more complete?"

Mr. Macintosh says:- "The Brethren gave themselves devotedly & energetically to the blessed work of evangelization and teaching. Books & tracts were written & circulated. The gospel was preached with a fulness, clearness, depth & power, unknown since the apostolic times. The important distinction between preaching the gospel and teaching the Lord's people - so little understood or acted upon even now - began to be forcibly illustrated, and with the most blessed results. The evangelist & the teacher waited, each upon his own proper work - souls were converted, and believers were built up on their most holy faith."

Mr. Stanley says:-

S. T. seems to think that Brethren never attempt to win lost souls to Christ, by going into the regions beyond; he will rejoice to hear he is greatly mistaken. They do not blow trumpets on missionary platforms. I was labouring with a beloved servant of Christ for a month lately, and in talking together of the great mission field, and of his journeyings round and round the world, time after time, preaching the gospel of God, I said, "How many miles do you think you have travelled?" He replied, "From about 600,000 to 700,000 miles." Little did I think that was my last walk with my dear friend and fellow-labourer. He preached Christ for the last time a week ago, and now he has entered into his rest. Dear Dr. —, one of the sweetest preachers of Christ that ever left the shores of Ireland. The day will declare whether Brethren have or have not sounded the word in the regions beyond.

* If any one wants proof of the schismatic misuso of truth at work, he can see it in the "Voice" for August, 1832, where the writer is so betrayed by his anti-evangelistic zeal as to say that "a company of saints gathered by an evangelist seldom is sound in principle!" (p. 247.) This crying up of one's own line is as unsound in heart as it is in principle; an offence alike against grace and truth. Every right-minded evangelist hails with joy the service of pastors and teachers, that they may perfect the work begun by the Lord through himself. But if these ἀλλοτριεπισκοποι were not blinded by self-occupation they would rejoice in the blessing (or what they call "the suc-

cess") of the evangelist, as alone furnishing them a sphere for their own ministry: for how in general are saints to be called and gathered if not by the evangelist? And think of the confusion in what follows, where brethren from whom these men differ are contrasted with "a member (however unintelligent) of the body of Christ" (p. 248)! Is the evangelist then not a member of that body? The apostle (Eph. iv. 11, 12) ruled differently his place, relation, and function; but this pretentious school not unfrequently show the worth of their intelligence by independence of Scripture. If this be the sort of thing the sheep now get, they are truly to be pitied. W. K.