

Nothing is

Without a Voice

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A VOICE

By W. G. TURNER

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(1 Cor. xiv. 10. R.V. margin)

SCRIPTURE speaks of "a tree that will not rot," such as impoverished idolaters used in the making of idols in Isaiah's day; of "autumnal trees without fruit" typical of fruitless religionists in Christendom; of "good trees" and "worthless trees" (Isa. xi 20; Jude 12; St. Matthew vii. 17). Habakkuk also in his short prophecy refers to the beam out of the timber *as having a voice*. "And the beam out of the timber shall witness against it," the evils then current amongst the professed people of GOD (Hab. ii. 11. R.V.) The Apostle Paul, too, in writing to the church of GOD at Corinth, and to all that in every place call upon the Name of JESUS CHRIST our LORD reminds them

that, "There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and *nothing is without voice*" (1 Cor. xiv. 10 R.V. margin). Nothing is without voice to us if we have ears to hear. "Doth not even nature itself teach you," he also remarks in another connection to the same persons (1 Cor. xi. 14) showing that "nothing is without voice" is a fact to be taken into account by Christian people.

There is a *voice* in the following taken from a trade journal. "The tongue of the situation," to use an Arab expression, speaks in the story of these two old vessels and the secret of their long usefulness to their owners.

"The 120 years' old ketch, 'The Three Sisters,' of Cowes, recalls the 'Old Trulove,' of Hull, whose longevity was attributed to its participation in the northern whaling trade, by which its timbers were so saturated with oil that decay and shipworm failed to find a lodgment there."

"Those agents, animal or vegetable, were warned off; theirs was not to take on with the

odour or flavour of that vessel ; it was one from which they could neither drink nor sup, and so the ship went on to a wonderful old age."

It is a point worth making first, that the odour and flavour of the "*Old Trulove*," being such that neither decay nor shipworm could find lodgment in her timbers, her owners would find unusual value in her, This raises the query in a thoughtful believer's mind, as to whether the Divine Owner of so many *vessels of mercy* finds surprising usefulness in them because they are filled with the SPIRIT ; or as to whether He is disappointed in them, because decay and the worm of worldliness have found lodgment instead. "Let a man (or woman) examine himself (or herself)" is a New Testament injunction.

A careful study of one O.T. Scripture may throw much light upon the mind of any who seriously propose to look into this important matter.

The prophecy of Hosea, for example, contains a very significant passage, which, apart

from its personal, prophetic and dispensational meanings, holds a practical principle for the people of GOD in any age. "Ephraim, he hath mixed himself among the people; Ephraim is a cake not turned. Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not; gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not. And the pride of Israel testifieth to his face: and they do not return to the LORD their GOD, nor seek Him for all this. Ephraim also is like a silly dove without heart; they call to Egypt, they go to Assyria." Hosea vii. 8-11. Examine *carefully* this Old Testament Scripture, for it is one of very many dealing with what may aptly be described as "spiritual dry-rot." We notice first, *"*Ephraim, he mixeth himself with the peoples,*" that is to plainly say he allows himself to be mixed up with foreigners who are aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise; to whom the true GOD is unknown, and for whom the hope of Israel is a myth or

*N. Trans. J.N.D.

an absurdity. "He mixeth himself among the peoples." It is *his own choice of company* for ends, that to him appear sound and sufficient. But it is a *grave dishonour* to the God of Israel Who had specially separated this people to Himself by blood and power that they might be holy unto the LORD. Ephraim by this wilful course of action in mixing himself among the nations is practically cancelling GOD'S plan so far as he is able to do so. The result for himself is not happy : "Ephraim is a cake not turned" ; so burnt as to be good for nothing, an uneatable mess, a sheer waste of good material. Intended for the spiritual blessing of all nations as an object lesson to them of the abundant goodness and truth of the merciful, gracious, long-suffering JEHOVAH GOD, they have now become like "a cake not turned," through mixing themselves in spirit, aim and practice with the peoples. Other gods had taken the place of the LIVING GOD, the secret of Whose worship was known only to Israel. "In Judah is GOD known ; His name is great in

Israel." "God is known in her palaces for a refuge." Psalm lxxvi. 1 ; xlviii. 3. Strangers have devoured his strength unknown to him. The true spiritual joy and energy of Israel's *distinctive testimony* is steadily eaten away by the very foreigners whose company Ephraim so eagerly seeks. His ignorance of a condition that is obvious to others is tragic, for "gray hairs are here and there upon him *and he knoweth it not.*"

TRAGIC IGNORANCE

Signs of spiritual weakness and decrepitude mark the outward man of Ephraim as he drifts farther and farther from his MAKER. "With Thee is the fountain of life," sang the Psalmist. "Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the LORD. For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that hold no water." So mourned the priestly prophet

in the word of the LORD (Jer. ii. 12, 13). To this Hosea adds in this striking verse, the twice repeated "*he knoweth it not.*" As though to say, unknown to himself the "spiritual dry-rot" has set in, conduct, character and conversation becoming infected and infectious.

"And the pride of Israel testifieth to his face : and they do not return to JEHOVAH their GOD, nor seek Him for all this. And Ephraim is become like a silly dove without understanding (or heart) : they call to Egypt, they go to Assyria."

Wandering from the position in which God had placed them ; worthless (because of their waywardness) for the purposes for which God had chosen them from the nations ; weakened inwardly and outwardly by their associations with the ungodly, idolatrous peoples who surrounded them, they now exhibit their *heartlessness* as well as their folly. To Egypt they will cry for help, to Assyria they will fly for refuge ; how surely

has their *heart* turned from GOD, Who alone is the Helper and Refuge of His chosen people.

“Yet I am JEHOVAH thy GOD from the land of Egypt, and thou hast known no GOD but me, and there is no SAVIOUR besides me. I knew thee in the wilderness, in the land of drought” (Hosea xiii. 4-5). The REDEEMER GOD, the sustaining SAVIOUR GOD was He who had borne them on heart and hands from the day of their bitter bondage in the land of Egypt. How heartless their treatment of Him; how foolish their attitude towards Him. “They vexed His holy SPIRIT.” Spiritual dry-rot has set in badly, yet GOD, when dealing with His people, always has the last word, and the last word is love, for GOD is love. So the book of Hosea ends gloriously: “Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? Prudent, and he shall know them? For the ways of the LORD are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein.” (Hosea xiv. 9).

The question emerges, too, as to why so many *assemblies* of believers appear to wield so little influence for CHRIST in the places where they are situated. *Has decay set in?* Is there a worm at the root, which *hinders* the testimony? The Apostle Paul, in a famous passage with the Corinthians, says, "Doth not even nature itself teach you . . . ?" thereby establishing as a general principle that we may learn from Nature *if* we are teachable. In the matter of spiritual "dry-rot" the analogy from Nature is very instructive, and may serve by way of illustration.

"Dry-rot," according to the dictionary definition is :-

"A rapid decay of timber, due to the presence of fungi, by which it is converted into a dry powder."

In short, such deterioration takes place as renders the material utterly worthless, not only for the *special reason of its existence, but for any purpose of value at all.*

The words of the LORD to the angel of the church in Sardis seem to fit such a case spiritually: "I know thy works, that thou hast a name, that thou livest and art dead . . . I have not found thy works perfect before GOD." Spiritual dry-rot had set in; and we must beware of explaining this message away under the specious plea that *some company of persons is meant other than ourselves, if these conditions prevail in our midst*. Whatever other legitimate application of Scripture may be made, "they that fear the LORD and tremble at His word" always make the first application to *themselves*, if it may be properly so used. Thus, indeed, are we exercised to have a good conscience before GOD and man.

IN INDIVIDUALS TO-DAY

In addition to the dictionary definition of "dry-rot," the findings of experts as the result of observation and careful study add a fascinating interest to the subject of "spiritual

dry-rot," as the analogies are so many and varied. Take first the case of standing timber—trees growing—which may well serve as illustrations of *individuals*, not companies of believers; then, glance at "felled timbers," used in houses, where the idea of *assemblies* may, without undue straining, be exhibited.

"As regards standing trees a kind of 'dry-rot' has been observed in Britain. It occurs on Douglas fir trees of all ages, from saplings to trees of fifty years of age. It is pretty widespread and results in young plantations in a weakening of vigour and distortion of needles. This is caused by an insect (Chermes Cooleyi) which is very active in the late spring and summer, when the wool secretion of the Fir is most abundant, as this serves to hide the larvae."

Careful inspection and drastic treatment are the only ways of saving the trees from these pests.

We note that neither youth nor age is any

guarantee of immunity from this kind of "dry-rot." So neither eager, zealous youth, nor *long standing on the ground* is any safeguard from the ravages of "spiritual dry-rot." When the activity of the nature of the tree is more abundant "this serves to hide the larvae." Careful inspection and drastic treatment are the only ways of saving the trees from pests.

Not "I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing"; for then "thou knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." Rev. iii. 17.

But self-judgment, confession, restitution; for "if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged." 1 Cor. xi. 31.

This is the careful inspection and drastic treatment we *need* to save ourselves from "spiritual dry-rot."

"Another kind of 'dry-rot' is the 'blister rust,' which kills young pine trees and seriously damages old trees, ultimately causing

their death. Currant and gooseberry bushes harbour this disease, and are now considered to be the means of spreading it to any in their vicinity. Many trees may be seriously affected before the disease is noticed, as its effect on large trees is not very apparent until long after infection takes place. The only effective treatment is to cut out the infected parts and eradicate currant and gooseberry bushes within 200 to 300 yards of the pine trees."

Here we are presented with an entirely different, but equally useful, analogy in dealing with our subject. The evil is communicated by the medium of pleasant and apparently innocent things. Currants and gooseberries are wholesome and toothsome in season, but in the case of the pine trees they are the means of spreading the "blister rust," which dwarfs, damages and destroys. *May not much spiritual "blister-rot" be traced to what in Nature is pleasant and useful, being allowed to become the vehicle of self-indulgence, self-esteem, self-satisfaction and*

self-complacency ? The tree of the LORD may still be standing on the old ground, but the fruit of the SPIRIT is not visible, because the "blister rot" of selfishness has blighted it.

"Many trees," the experts say, *"may be seriously affected before the disease is noticed, as its effect on large trees is not very apparent until long after infection takes place."* Yes, the honey of friendship, the native courtesy, the generous disposition, may carry one along for some time after the infection of the spiritual "blister rot" has taken firm hold on the tree of Christian profession.

"The only effective treatment is to cut out the infected parts." "If thy hand offend thee, cut it off : if thy foot offend thee, cut it off : if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out." Mark ix. 43-47.

"And eradicate the currant and gooseberry bushes within 200 to 300 yards," says the timber scientific expert ; which is equivalent to saying in spiritual husbandry, *avoid all*

occasions and places of sin. Where you failed before, never fail there again. May the LORD grant us grace that this may be practically so, and thus shall we be saved from the "blister rot," which dwarfs, damages and destroys the testimony we should be rendering to Him in the world.

IN ASSEMBLIES

As to "dry-rot" in felled timbers, where we may consider the analogy of "spiritual dry-rot" in assemblies of believers without any undue straining of the idea, a few words should suffice.

"Dry-rot is decay caused by wood-attacking fungi. It is responsible in the timber world for great wastage of material, and entails heavy losses. It often reveals its presence in houses long after they are built. Some fungi remain hidden until they fruit, and begin to cover the timber with unsightly, unwholesome growths. Other fungi causes rapid decay, but all produce countless infectious

spores ; even though the conditions of infection and growth are not the same in all cases. Dry-rot in houses is often the result of neglect of adequate seasoning of timber used.

Fungi causing grave dry-rot in houses are different from those attacking standing trees. So dangerous is it considered that slightly infected, even though sterilised, wood, is avoided by decent building contractors for use in construction work.

As a result of exhaustive experiments it is now claimed that an ideal wood preservative has been discovered. It is of a penetrating nature and goes deep into the pores, rendering sappy wood hard, and baffling white ants, which refuse to face it. Even if the timber is already affected, it will arrest dry-rot, as well as protect from vermin and fungus."

In dealing with this part of "spiritual dry-rot," we must keep in mind that the House of God, which is the Church of the LIVING GOD, the habitation of GOD through

the SPIRIT, and the House of Christian profession, are not one and the same. If none but real believers in the LORD JESUS CHRIST made the Christian profession then the House of GOD and Christendom would be the same. Alas ! they are not ; for into the great House of Christendom (which, of course, *includes* every true believer) false professors have entered and assumed authority, introducing teachings and practices contrary to the revealed will of the LORD, and from this those who desire to please Him must resolutely turn away.

Hence it comes that outside *the camp of organised Christianity*, with its denominational banners and differences of faith and practice from Roman Catholic to Quaker there are found Christians *who refuse to own any Name but His*, to submit to any other Headship than His, to recognize any other authority than His, by the SPIRIT, through the written word of GOD.

It is such companies we have in mind when

thinking now of "spiritual dry-rot" in *assemblies* of believers.

Where children of that GOD, Who is not willing that any should perish, *sit down with folded hands to count their own blessings*, utterly oblivious of, or indifferent to, the urge of that love which sent the SON to be the SAVIOUR of the world, there, great wastage of material and heavy losses to the Gospel testimony are entailed by this species of "spiritual dry-rot."

It often reveals itself in houses long after they are built. So, in many an assembly there are *treasured memories and almost boastings of what wonderful days we used to have long ago, in this place*. But now!—"spiritual dry-rot" covers the timber with unsightly, unwholesome growths of views, and *prejudices* which in healthier times were hidden. Is it not so? What is the cause?

"Spiritual dry-rot," too, shows itself when saints *inactive and complacent*, talk unctuously of "going on with the LORD," as though it

were possible that He would go on with those who are indifferent to everything save their own spiritual interests.

“Whosoever will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for My sake and the Gospel’s, the same shall save it.” Mark viii. 34, 35. Do these words mean anything? Do they mean anything to me? They mean everything to all who are awake to the *interests* of the LORD JESUS CHRIST in this present day.

Not pious platitudes, but persistent practice of His precept is the mark of one who loves Him.

THE REMEDY

But has “spiritual dry-rot” begun to affect my life and witness. Then, thank God, just as “an ideal wood preservative has been discovered, of a penetrating nature, going deep into the pores, rendering sappy wood hard

and fit again for service" ; so the love of the LORD JESUS CHRIST, and His unceasing ministry on behalf of His own is the ideal restorative to love and loyalty.

"Whosoever will (or wills) to come after Me." What other person or object has such a drawing power for hearts ? "The SON of GOD, Who loved me and gave Himself for me."

"Let him deny himself"—say no to self in deep, constant reality.

"And take up his cross daily"—manifest the spirit and self-sacrifice in all his ways.

"And follow Me"—follow His steps, Who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth. Dead to sins, living unto righteousness of life.

"My sake and the Gospel's"—seeing the multitudes as He saw them ; seeing the Church as He saw it ; seeing the brother as "the brother for whom CHRIST died."

Love to CHRIST and occupation *with* Himself and His practical present *interests* in the world, is the real preservative against "spiritual dry-rot," and restorative from it, if unhappily contracted.

There is nothing so *easy* as criticism of others ; nothing so *healthful* as self-judgment, confession and amendment of life.

But it is true, as one has well said : "When we are at the end of our resources we are only at the beginning of our resources in Him, Who was raised from the dead, and exalted to become a PRINCE, literally a Leader, and a SAVIOUR."

For the honour of our LORD it behoves us individually and collectively *to face the exact conditions prevailing amongst us*. Then as we approach the matter free from the prejudice which blinds and distorts our judgment, let us waste no more time over time wasters and mere talkers, but remember how to His ancient people God gave the gracious

assurance that when backsliding, "If from thence thou shalt seek the LORD thy GOD, *thou shalt find Him*, if thou seek after Him with all thy heart and with all thy soul" (Deut. iv. 29).

We do not plead for Pentecostal visions and powers in this day of the Church's so manifest departure from His word and ways, but feeling it all, we remember His word to the remnant in the days of their uttermost weakness, "My Spirit remaineth among you ; fear ye not." "From this day will I bless you," (Hag. ii. 5, 19).

"Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure" (2 Peter i. 10).

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