

Messenger and Visitor

Published in the interests of the Baptist denomination of the Maritime Provinces by

The Maritime Baptist Publishing Co., Ltd.

TERMS: \$1.50 per annum in advance.

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Address all communications and make all payments to the MESSENGER AND VISITOR.
For further information see page nine.

Printed by Paterson & Co., 107 Germain Street, St. John, N. B.

Our Lord's Teaching Concerning Prayer.

The teaching of Jesus concerning prayer is remarkable not only for the substance of the teaching, but also for what is assumed as fundamental and axiomatic. Our Lord did not spend any time in demonstrating by argument to his disciples that prayer is consistent with the constitution of the Universe and that it is reasonable and logical to pray. He seems to take it as a fact that needs no proof that men may speak to God and be heard of him, and that it is as natural and as necessary for men to pray as for little children to tell their wants to their parents. Prayer was to him as vital breath, and it no more required to be proved that man's life is nourished by communion with God through prayer, than that their physical life is nourished by pure air and wholesome food. The one grand argument for the value of prayer is prayer itself. Christians may be content to leave the argument for prayer where Jesus left it. Prayer is its own justification. It would seem impossible that any sane and thoughtful man can believe that prayer is not an essential factor in the highest human development, that this world is not today a vastly better world than it could have been if the voice of prayer had never been heard in it, that every nation and community are not the better for the praying men and women who have been and are now in them; but if anyone can so believe he will hardly be convinced to the contrary by any formal arguments, however weighty, which may be presented in support of the reasonableness and efficacy of prayer. To hear Jesus speak with the Father was doubtless to the disciples a far more convincing demonstration of the reality and the value of prayer than volumes filled with arguments could have been; and in the case of many a man today, there is no influence so strong to keep him from utter unbelief, as the memory of his father's or his mother's pleading at a throne of grace.

In nothing perhaps did Jesus more convincingly demonstrate his right to be regarded as the supreme teacher in the sphere of religion than in that short prayer which he taught his disciples. The more one contemplates it, the more one endeavors to enter into its spirit and make it his own, the more he feels how wonderful it is,—how satisfactory in its implied answer to the human spirit's profoundest questionings, and how comprehensive and full in its expression of the spirit's deepest needs and highest aspirations. We ask concerning God—"Where is He, is He accessible to the human suppliant? May I come to God, may I speak to Him, or is he forever so withdrawn into the infinite silence and seclusion that no human petition can ever reach His ear?" And the answer is—"You may come to God. He is not far away but near to every humble soul, and not only on sacred mountains and in consecrated temples, but in every place, the real worshipper may draw near to God." Again the soul asks—"How shall I come to God—how shall I address Him—What is He to me and what am I to Him?" And the answer is—"God is Father, and when you pray say 'Our Father,' and you, if you truly pray, you are his child."—"But I am a sinner, I am not worthy to be called a child of God for I am greatly defiled. May a sinner come—is there forgiveness with Him?" And the answer is—"There is indeed forgiveness for the penitent and humble, and if you are able from your heart to forgive those who have trespassed against you, you also shall find forgiveness with God."—"But this world that seems

so full of evil—to whom does it belong? Is it given over to Satan?"—"No, the world is not Satan's but God's. His kingdom is advancing. Pray that it may come in all its fullness and beneficence and that the Father's will may be done in earth even as it is done in heaven." What boundless room then for aspiration and hope in the assurance of the divine fatherhood and the human sonship and in the coming kingdom." There is the guarantee not only of daily bread but of all good that can come to those who are heirs of God. It is surely a great thing to have our needs so met our questions so answered and our highest aspirations so expressed as they are in this short prayer which Jesus taught his disciples.

A Noble Achievement.

As noted in these columns last week, the Twentieth Century Fund of the British Baptists still lacked £9,000 of the £250,000 aimed at when the Union assembled at its meeting in Bloomsbury Chapel on April 28th. But before the close of the meetings the Secretary of the Fund was able to announce that the last shilling had been subscribed. It was a triumphal occasion when this announcement was made by Mr. Shakespeare who had worked so long and so indefatigably for this consummation. The whole audience rose to its feet with enthusiastic cheers and united in singing the doxology. The Secretary was able to assure the Union that his report as to the success of the undertaking was not based upon conjecture or estimate, but upon money actually paid in to the amount of £183,720 and definite pledges for the sum of £66,280, making up a grand total of £250,000. Nor is there any account made of the additional subscriptions yet to be secured by the Baptists in Wales, who have not yet completed their campaign on behalf of the Fund. Mr. Shakespeare went on to say that when the enterprise was launched three years ago two principal purposes were had in view. First, it was hoped that the movement would promote Baptist unity, intensify Baptist sentiment and enthusiasm, bring the leading laymen of the denomination into closer touch with the Union and better equip the Baptists of Great Britain to take their part in the work of God in the twentieth century. This purpose had been realized beyond all their expectations, and, as a consequence, he believed that the future of the denomination was never so bright with hope as to-day. The other purpose was the raising of a sum of money which should be unselfishly devoted to the good of the Baptist Commonwealth, a clear addition to all purely local schemes, and larger in itself than anything before attempted by the denomination. They had had many things against them in the undertaking,—the declaration and prolongation of the war, and the consequent disturbance of trade, increase of taxation and distraction of the public mind. There had been other incidental difficulties, too, and heart-breaking losses by death. But on the other hand they had proved the nobility of their churches, the generosity of the people, the extraordinary courage and self-denial of many of their ministers, and the almost infinite wealth and resource of manhood and womanhood that were scattered throughout the whole denomination.

The *British Weekly*, congratulating the Baptists on the triumphant completion of their Fund, calls it a magnificent achievement. "The Baptists," it says, "have to bear the great stress of maintaining their ministerial and mission work. In many places their congregations are and have always been poor and struggling. There are certain divisions of opinion among them which operate injuriously to conjoint action. Nevertheless, the task they set themselves has been accomplished. Many a beautiful story could be told of the love and devotion and self-sacrifice that have gone to the gifts." When so many deserve praise, the *Weekly* says, it might seem almost invidious to select names, but considers that the Baptists owe very much in this connection to Dr. Maclaren and Mr. Shakespeare. "Dr. Maclaren is the chief of their living glories, and Mr. Shakespeare has guided the whole movement with unsparing toil and with consummate tact and wisdom. But they could not have accomplished anything if they had not been able to appeal to a strong and deep-seated loyalty." The example of what our brothers across the sea have done should be an inspiration to our people, and should encourage

us to expect confidently a successful issue in the undertaking in which we are now engaged, to raise a far smaller sum not only actually but also in proportion to our numbers and our resources. If we could have the enthusiasm about this undertaking which has characterized British Baptists in the raising of their Twentieth Century Fund, the Fifty Thousand Dollars we are aiming at would be subscribed in short order.

Editorial Notes.

—Mrs. C. H. Spurgeon has recently received from the King the present of a swan for the lake in the grounds connected with her home at Westwood. Mrs. Spurgeon had desired to obtain a swan to replace one which had been lost, and having read in the papers that the King was about reducing his stock of birds, wrote asking if she would be permitted to purchase one. After inquiring as to whether the lady making the request was the widow of the great preacher, the King indicated his pleasure to present Mrs. Spurgeon with a swan, if she would accept one, and accordingly one of the royal birds, which has been named 'His Majesty,' graces the grounds of Westwood.

—The fact that three of our seven associations are announced this year to meet at the same time would seem to be a sufficient indication of the desirability of making some change in the date of one or more of them. It is true that each association is in a way independent of the other, but they are all concerned in the promotion of the same general interests, and when several associations meet at the same time it makes it difficult to have our mission and other denominational interests represented at them as it is desirable they should be. Besides it is expected that the proceedings of the Associations shall be reported at some length in the MESSENGER AND VISITOR, and it is rather embarrassing to have to handle the reports of three Associations in the same week.

—There are a few Baptists in Paris. They are very few indeed compared with the total population of the great capital—a mere drop in the bucket. But there are in the city at least two Baptist churches which are active centres of religious life. One of these churches is in the Rue Meslay. Its pastor, the Rev. M. R. Sallens, is a man of ability—being something of a poet as well as a preacher. This church numbers 300, the principal service is held on Sunday afternoon, and the congregation comes from all parts of the city. It is a living and growing church and conversions of a remarkable character are reported. There is another Baptist church situated in the Rue de Lille on the south side of the Seine. Its pastor is M. Revell, and the relations between it and the church in the Rue Meslay are entirely harmonious. An English Baptist missionary who recently visited Paris writes: "Altogether the work of our churches in Paris is most encouraging. Our brethren are alive to the needs of that great city, and are seeking to meet those needs first and foremost by presenting to the people the gospel of Jesus Christ."

—The statement is made on the authority of the Rev. Dr. Hykes, agent of the American Bible Society in Shanghai, China, that as the result of an edict directing that the sons of Manchus and Mongols shall be chosen to go abroad and study, there has been an unprecedented demand in China for foreign books, including the Sacred Scriptures, one government college having applied for a grant of fifty Bibles for the use of its students. There is also, according to Dr. Hykes, a remarkable movement on the part of some of the highest officials in the land, to make a retranslation or revision of the Bible, with a view to putting it into what they consider a more worthy literary form. This work is said to have the Imperial sanction. The hope is that the official class will thus become acquainted with the contents of the Bible, with the result that their prejudices against it and against Christianity will be removed. "We issued more Mandarin Bibles in the last three months," says Dr. Hykes, "than would have been considered ample stock for eight years a decade ago."

—The editor of this paper had the pleasure of spending Saturday and Sunday last with his old friend, Rev. W. Camp, and of enjoying the hospitality of the Sussex parsonage. The pastor of the Sussex church is as vigorous as ever in body and in mind, and as indefatigable in labors. He is covering a wide field in his ministrations and rendering most valuable service. His work for Sunday included a funeral in the morning, involving about twelve miles travel, a drive to Penobscia—ten or eleven miles away—for a service at 2.30, and back again to lead a B. Y. P. U. service in the Sussex church at 6.15, and then preaching again at 7. It was an excellent sermon too, dealing with the profoundest interests of life in a vigorous and impressive way. This was in some respects a variation from the Sussex pastor's ordinary Sunday programme, but it was probably not more laborious than usual. Lest it should be supposed that the writer simply sat by and rested while all this work was being done, he may be permitted to mention that he