

The Christian.

ST. JOHN, N. B., . . . JUNE, 1896

EDITORIAL.

THE THORN IN THE FLESH.

Although our desire to know what *was* Paul's thorn in the flesh may be as great as his was for its removal, we must, like him, remain ungratified. No man on earth can tell what that thorn was, and the different opinions men hold about it are better kept to themselves than told, for no matter how carefully such things are expressed as only *opinions* which are always liable to be wrong, others will catch them up and defend them as *facts*, thus causing useless debate and strife.

But although the thorn itself must remain a secret, the whole subject affords useful instruction. It was something sent to the apostle so necessary for his good and for the glory of God, that it could not be taken from him though he earnestly prayed that it might. When a new system, good or bad, is presented to men, in proportion to the favorable interest they feel in it will be their admiration of the author or the one from whom they receive it. This admiration often rises to an idolatrous regard.

When God was opening to a lost world his system of salvation, and Jesus was entering upon his public work, he spoke from heaven and said, "Thou art my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." It is when lost sinners believe with all their heart and confess with their mouth what God announced on that occasion, they enter into that system and are saved, and what would be idolatrous offering to others God expects men to render to his beloved Son, the author and finisher of the system.

In the first part of his letter to the Corinthians, we see what trouble the apostle had with them on this matter. One had received the gospel from Paul, another had received it from Apollos. There was something in Peter's manner and address which sent the gospel home to the heart of another. So far this was right, and will be right to the end of time. But their mistake was glorying in men. One said, I am of Paul. He is the man for me. Another would contend as earnestly for Apollos, and so on. Paul wanted them to see the carnality of all such divisions, and that these different men who had power to reach different minds with the same gospel, had these gifts from Christ and were only his servants. Christ and not Paul was crucified for them and they were baptized in his name, not in Paul's.

By the time Paul wrote his second letter, the Corinthians had fallen into still greater error. It was in good men they had gloried at first, but now it was in false teachers who sought to corrupt their minds from the simplicity that is in Christ, and of course to turn them against the apostle. So that the man who ought to be commended by them

as their spiritual father was by them driven to the painful task of defending his apostleship and even his Christian character.

In his defence he showed them that he stood the superior of his accusers in every respect—that he was not even a whit behind the chief apostle. They could not deny that they had seen in him all the signs, both moral and miraculous, of an apostle except that he had not taken of them a just support but had burdened other churches to serve them. His opponents, who took their money, had to admit that Paul took nothing from them, but they charged him with deceit intending after he had gotten them under control to fleeco them well, to which he ironically refers in chap. xii. 16 and goes on to prove it false.

They next accuse the apostle of glorying in himself, which charge he most emphatically denied. If he gloried in anything in himself it was in his infirmities, in his weakness, in reproaches for Christ, because in these Christ was magnified.

This led him to speak of visions and revelations of the Lord. He said he knew a man in Christ fourteen years before, but whether this man was in or out of the body God only knew. Such a man was caught up into the third heaven and heard words which a man was not allowed to utter. He thus speaks of himself and of the abundant revelations he had received in Paradise, giving him more knowledge than other men so that if disposed to glory somewhat it would not appear irrational boasting. But he was prevented from glorying or being exalted above measure through this abundant revelation by a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him.

We here learn that the best of men are liable to be exalted above measure by abundant favor, and also that Satan is always watching at such times to precipitate their disagreeable fall. To prevent these in his noble servant the Lord permitted this thorn and allowed the arch-enemy to grievously insult the man he could not destroy.

The apostle neither feared nor shunned the bitterest persecution, but was ready to die for the name of the Lord Jesus. But if this thorn was some infirmity which he thought would obstruct his labors for Christ, we can see why he so earnestly prayed for its removal.

But was the apostle's prayer answered according to the many great and precious promises of the Word of God? It certainly was. The very thing asked for was withheld but more than he could ask or think was granted. Often we know not what we should pray for as we ought, but God is wiser and better to us than we can think, and gives us better than we ask. A father refuses a beloved child a sword to play with, but gives him a cane instead. This may not please the child at the time, but when he has put away childish thoughts he admires the wisdom of his loving father.

God's children may anxiously pray for things they are not sure it is his will to

grant. In these things their prayers should be hypothetical. In things they know to be his will they should be earnest and confident. "And this is the confidence that we have in him that if we ask anything according to his will he heareth us: and if we know that he hears us whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him." (1 John v. 14, 15). When the great Redeemer prayed that the cup might pass from him, he added, "if it be possible." When he prayed for the pardon of his murderers, this was not necessary. He knew that his Father would spare them though he spared not his own Son.

God will grant the petitions of those who earnestly pray for more of his Holy Spirit; and those who sow unto the Spirit, though the season may appear long and unfavorable, shall most surely reap the promised harvest, and no faithful laborer in the Lord's field need be discouraged. His prayer may not be answered in his way or at his time, but in due season he will reap if he faint not.

To show the superiority of Christ's answer to Paul's petition we will consider both. Paul pleads to get clear of this enemy; Christ answers, I can strengthen you to endure and overcome it, and I will give you the satisfaction of a victor instead of the feelings and reputation of a coward. I will not take from you the thing which was sent in mercy to prevent your exaltation and fall, but want you to be in sympathy with the wise and kind arrangement of your Saviour. In order that you may advance my cause, you want to have all your old strength back again and stand exactly where you stood before you felt the thorn. But I want you to feel your own weakness so that you may receive my all-sufficient grace and stand far higher than you have ever done, endued with my strength which is made perfect in weakness.

Paul had fourteen years to consider the matter, and now instead of one regret that the thorn had not been removed, he glories in that weakness. He might at first have chafed over it or resolved in stolid determination to endure it alone; but he took it to the Lord in prayer who explained it to him with a sympathy and encouragement which turned what he had thought a curse into one of his sweetest blessings.

Original Contributions.

THE UNIQUENESS OF JESUS.

M. B. RYAN.

Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him.—Mark iv. 41.

The question was asked with reference to a single event in the life of Jesus; but it can be legitimately asked with a wider sphere in view. If to quell the storm with a word, so that the wind subsided and the waves were still, was a unique thing to do, it was but characteristic of all that pertains to Jesus. While it is easy to number him among men as to his earthly sojourn and experiences, it is impossible to classify him with them as