

Messenger and Visitor

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The Plebiscite and Prohibition.

The present Dominion Government has gone so far in the direction of prohibition as to intimate in the speech from the throne that a bill providing for the taking of a plebiscite on the subject will be submitted to Parliament during the present session. Nothing less than this certainly was to be anticipated, since in bringing forward such a measure the party now in power will only be fulfilling a pledge distinctly given while in opposition. It may then be considered as settled that a plebiscite on this subject is to be taken. Just when it will be taken,—whether within the next twelve months or not until the next general election is not yet, so far as we know, determined. Perhaps it is not anticipating matters at too long range to ask what will be the result? Supposing that by the plebiscite to be taken the voice of the people shall be given in favor of prohibition, what will the government then do? What will be the next step, or will there be any next step? The taking of a plebiscite in reference to such a question legitimately implies legislation, provided the result be favorable. But what, it may be asked, is to be regarded as a favorable result? Just here, as it seems to us, there is an indefiniteness which makes against a practical and valuable outcome of the agitation for a prohibitory liquor law. We are given to understand that certainly no government or political party in Canada will be prepared to take so important a step as the prohibition by-law of the liquor business except at the bidding of a considerable majority of the electors. That goes for the saying, but it is wholly negative and indefinite. What the temperance people of the country have a right to know is, what majority cast in favor of prohibition in a general plebiscite on the subject the government will consider a mandate of sufficient authority to justify or to require the enactment of a prohibitory liquor law. In reference to this point, the temperance people of New Zealand appear to be distinctly in advance of us in Canada. In that colony there is, if we are correctly informed, a law on the statute book which requires the Legislature to pass a prohibitory law as soon as the people shall have declared in favor of the same by a three-fifths majority. It is also provided that a plebiscite on the subject shall be taken at every general election until the required majority shall have been secured, or so long as this act shall remain un repealed. Such conditions afford something tangible and definite for the temperance people to work for. It is one object to secure the required popular vote in favor of prohibition and it is an additional object to send to the Legislature men who will oppose the repeal of the law requiring a plebiscite to be taken at every general election. Every election campaign thus tends to call out the temperance forces of the country and to educate the public mind in the direction of prohibition. If the Parliament of Canada will enact such provisional legislation, or if the government will give a pledge to bring in a prohibitory law as soon as three-fifths of the electorate shall have declared in favor of it, the prohibitionists of Canada will have an inspiration to put forth their best efforts, which seems to be much needed in the present indefinite condition of affairs.

Plague and Famine in India.

Recent reports from India give encouragement to the hope that, in regard to both the plague and the famine, the worst stages have been past. This is true especially in respect to the plague. The record of deaths in Bombay for the four weeks, end-

ing with March 11, shows a falling off in the death rate from the plague of about one hundred per week. At that date there were more than 500 deaths per week from that cause, and the report for the week ending March 26, shows 455 deaths. As thorough measures are being taken to eradicate the disease and to improve the sanitary condition of the city, there seems every reason to hope that the plague will gradually, if not rapidly, disappear. As respects the famine, while there has been, and for some time longer will continue to be, much suffering from that cause, the actual mortality has not probably been nearly so great as some reports sent out would lead us to believe. It is now said in some quarters that the number who have actually died because of famine has been comparatively small, and that mortality from that cause has now practically ceased. But if this is the fact, it is only because of the vigorous and effective measures of relief, undertaken by the Government, and the generous contributions which have been made for the help of the sufferers by the people of Great Britain and her Colonies and by other nations. The plan pursued by the Government has been to give employment to the people at fair wages, and to employ their labor in public works, especially works for purposes of irrigation, which will tend to prevent another famine, or at least to mitigate its severity. In the North West provinces, for instance, it is said that more than a million wells for irrigation purposes have been sunk. Vast sums also have been expended in providing a supply of wholesome drinking water for the villages, and in otherwise improving their sanitary condition. Large contributions will yet be needed to help the famine-stricken districts over until another harvest ripens. But though the famine has caused terrible destitution and suffering, the affliction is not wholly without compensation. The active sympathy of the Christian world has been strongly drawn out toward the people of India, and this cannot but awaken some feeling of gratitude in the recipients. It will tend to make the bonds which bind India to the British Empire more strong and vital, it will also probably make the people more-receptive toward Christianity. And as a result of the public works accomplished, the country will be in a better condition than it has ever been to withstand another famine when it shall come.

Peter and Cornelius.

The Sunday School lesson entitled "The Conversion of Cornelius" might perhaps with equal propriety be entitled "The Conversion of Peter," since it marks for the apostle a transition from what we may call a Christianized Judaism into the immeasurably larger faith of Christianity as a world-wide religion and a gospel for Gentile as well as Jew. It seems evident too that the reason why the incident connected with Cornelius is given so much prominence in the narrative of Luke is because it marked that most significant transition both for Peter and his fellow apostles. Peter, as well as the others, had been slow to learn this lesson. Their spiritual perceptions had indeed been greatly quickened and their sympathies for men enlarged through the teachings of their Divine Master and the influence upon them of the Holy Spirit. The middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile must have come to seem to them thinner than it had of old. But still to their apprehension that wall had remained a serious fact, and they had not thought of disregarding it. But now for Peter that wall has been miraculously broken down, a hand has reached down from heaven and swept it aside, or to speak more accurately, the hand from above has touched Peter's eyes and he has been made to see that God is no respecter of persons but that His salvation is for the Gentile also as well as for the Jew. No doubt the apostles had understood that, in some sense, the gospel was for the world; but they supposed that Gentiles could become sharers in its blessing only by becoming proselytes to Judaism and submitting to all the requirements of the Mosaic law. But here Peter finds himself preaching Jesus Christ

freely to Gentiles and the Holy Spirit coming now upon the uncircumcised even as upon the sons of Abraham on the day of Pentecost; and the apostle feels that he cannot forbid baptism—and so a recognition of Christian fellowship—to these Gentile converts on whose faith God had bestowed the seal of His approval in the gift of the Holy Spirit. This opening of the door of faith to the Gentiles is an event of immense importance of which the intelligent student of these lessons in the Acts cannot fail to take account. It made it impossible for Christianity to be, or to be regarded by the apostles as being, merely a reformed Judaism and it ensured essential harmony between the gospel preached by Peter and his brethren in Jerusalem and Judea and that proclaimed by Paul and those who labored with him in Asia Minor and Europe.

The Centurion Cornelius was a man of earnest and devout spirit. Like many other men of his day he had turned away in hunger and disgust from the emptiness and absurdities of the ancestral paganism to feed his soul on the truths revealed in the Jewish Scriptures. Without becoming outwardly a Jew, he had come, it would seem, intellectually and spiritually to the standpoint of a believer in the Old Testament. "He was a devout man and one that feared God, with all his house." He was also generous toward those in need, and day by day he prayed to God. And he had received assurance from heaven that the service he rendered was acceptable, that his prayers had been heard and that greater light and larger blessings were to come to him.

Both Peter and Cornelius are examples of men who were blessed in their obedience. They made good use of the light they had, and, in accordance with the divine promise and the eternal law, they received more. It is always of less importance whether a man have much light or little than that he make good use of that which he has. Cornelius saw the light and followed it, and it led him first to the God of Israel and then to Christ. He sought and found. He received an injunction and obeyed, and the result was the coming of Peter and the Holy Ghost, with the gospel of Christ in all its fulness for him and for all his house. And Peter also was blessed in following the light. He had left his fishing boat that he might follow Jesus, and though he stumbled sometimes he had kept on following the Light, and now it has led him into an exceeding broad place, and his heart feels the impulse of larger fellowship than he had known before. If Peter had not remembered the lessons about ceremonial uncleanness learned from his Master, he would not likely have gone to be the guest of Simon, a tanner. Was this subject in Peter's mind when on the house top the vision came to him conveying the lesson that God could make men clean, and apart from any ceremonies connected with the law of Moses? At all events Peter was ready to receive this new lesson and take this grand new step in advance, so that when the men from Caesarea came he was prepared not only to go with them but to enter into the house of Cornelius and preach the gospel of Christ to the Gentiles.

It was not only Peter and Cornelius who were blessed in their obedience and their faithfulness to the light they received. They both were blessed immeasurably; Cornelius in receiving an answer to his prayer, larger, richer than anything he had conceived possible,—Peter in the honor conferred upon him of being the minister chosen of Christ to open this door of faith to the Gentiles and in entering himself into the blessing and joy of this larger fellowship. But how far and how abundantly the blessing extended! Not merely to the household of Cornelius, but, in that direction, to all the elect of the Gentiles; and, on the other hand, to all the apostles and the Jewish Christians as a body, enlarging their ideas concerning the Messiah's mission and kingdom and delivering them from a narrow and dwarfing conception of Christianity. So it is always. Blessing for the individual, the household and the world come as the reward of the faithfulness of individual men and women. No one can tell how large a blessing lies at the end of the way along which the finger of duty is pointing. No one can tell how much depends for the world as well as for himself on his following faithfully the light.

—It is stated that the State of Illinois has made its capital of the State Lincoln. It will church and will memorial window and two smaller Douglas respectively of the church will to be kept all sorts traits of the most auction-block, the rope which was used

—Rev. Geo. Ch. goorda, India, under gratifying news in work among certain laboring. Bro. C among the hills at live who came to B ber 1st. Eight men and a boy— Praise the Lord! Pray earnestly for are all around them but God can cause that God may fill us glory."

—As intimated by gives us this week a certainly very remarkable climate is to the pre or distinction. The experience. He ven enter Colorado, Illi benignly upon us as had we crossed Miss began to grow hys furiously, and, though we met with a most all agreed that it w and we could not help matter. After a litt tantrums, and put bound to confess tha curl on her forehead really quite exemplar

—It has been arranged 27th and 28th, a Mission each of the churches of is invited to send its At the last meeting Rev. O. N. Chipman, Associational Secretary the Conference will in operation with Pasto visional programme h promise of an able dis the highly important the conference to pro seventeen addresses brethren, both within association. The disc ful and inspiring in a tist church of Truro w is expected that by ne can be published, givi address the meetings they will speak.

—There appears to Hinduism. It will be of the Chicago World Religions, the Swami in evidence. If his ow presentation of Hindu sulted in the convers American "Christians now we are told that, done, or rather because devoted and distinguish disgraced in the sight religionists. He has co in crossing the sea, who