

Messenger and Visitor

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How Shall the Church be Purified?

How to deal with evil men within the church is a problem of great difficulty, and one which is constantly presenting itself to those who love the church and seek its well-being. There are not many, we suppose, who enter the church with the definite and conscious purpose of appearing to be what they are not and of making their profession of religion a cloak for sin. But, sad to say, there are many who, having entered the church with some purpose more or less real to live for Christ, have fallen into sin and so become a grief to their brethren and stumbling-blocks to those who are without. Their lives dishonor their own profession and disgrace the church, yet, in some cases, they wish to retain their membership in the church as a badge of respectability, and the church, because of the feebleness of its own spiritual life, retains them in its fellowship.

Nowhere, we think, is there to be found so much light on this problem as in the early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, where is recorded the beginning of the church's history and where we see it in its first contact with an evil world. The Christian community is filled and energized with that Spirit which came upon it at Pentecost. It is a pure church, a holy fellowship, a religious community full of unselfish, generous life. Hypocrisy cannot breathe its atmosphere. The man who attempts to enter into its assembly with a lie in his heart falls dead on its threshold. That power of the Holy Spirit in the church, attracting, energizing and purifying every honest soul, revealed and repelled that which was false and iniquitous. There was there a judgment in which the wicked could not stand, a congregation in which sinners could have no place. That same divine presence the church needs for its cleansing still. Church discipline may be, and too often, it is to be feared, it has been, little better than an attempt of satan to cast out satan. When men of disreputable life are excluded from the church by the action of men whose own lives are better only in the sense of being less disreputable, there is small gain in it to the cause of pure religion. Purity in the church's life must result from the presence of the Holy Spirit. Where the Spirit is there is purity; sin is rebuked, the evil man is made ashamed. Where the Spirit is there will be discipline. It may not always be formal, but it will be always real and effective. Wickedness will flee away, as the darkness vanishes from the presence of the light. The wicked will either be convicted and renounce their wickedness or they will depart to their own company. The occasional intrusion of unholy men into the fellowship of the church is to be expected. There was a Judas among the twelve, as Ananias and Sapphira in the Jerusalem church, but the fate which befell these indicates a divine power in the church, which works for purity and which is not to be overcome of evil.

—The New York Examiner published last week what appears to be an excellent portrait of Rev. F. B. Meyer, pastor of Christ church, London. Mr. Meyer has come to America at the solicitation of Mr. Moody, to lead a ten days' series of meetings in Boston and New York on "The deepening of the Spiritual life." The series began in Boston on February 3. After speaking twice a day for three days in Tremont Temple, Mr. Meyer goes to New York and speaks in Carnegie hall, Feb. 8 to 12. An effort is being made to raise \$25,000 for a chapel for Northfield Seminary, in honor of Mr. Moody's sixtieth birthday. It is expected that one-half the amount will be raised in England. The chapel is said to be much needed.

The Nay of the Sadducees and the Yea of Christ.

In the Bible lesson for next Sunday we find the apostles again in prison, and this time it appears to be not Peter and John only, but the whole body of the apostles, or at least as many of them as the Jewish authorities were able to apprehend. The first attempt of the Sanhedrin to silence Peter and John having come to nought, the High Priest and his party, the Sadducees, are resolved on sterner measures. How hateful to their hearts, how antagonistic to all their beliefs and their prejudices was the preaching of Jesus and the resurrection, one can well conceive. Their poor, narrow, earth-bound creed, with its negation of immortality or any high spiritual destiny for mankind, had no room for the gospel of Jesus and its glorious doctrines of the divine Fatherhood and eternal life for God's children. Between the two there could be no fellowship, but must be perpetual conflict. And just as little fellowship can there be between the Christianity which the apostles preached and that modern Sadduceeism—whether it utters itself in the name of religion or the name of science—which denies the Divinity of Jesus Christ and the reality of His resurrection.

We find the apostles in prison, but not for long. The jealous rulers, filled with bigotry and anxious chiefly to make their own position and authority secure, have been forced to take note of the marvellous results of the preaching of these despised Galileans and have resolved on a determined effort to stamp out this blaze of heresy before it should become a conflagration, filling the land. Having succeeded in putting the apostles into prison, they doubtless congratulate themselves that much has been accomplished toward the desired end. They have silenced the voice of those who were bearing witness to the resurrection. "But," says Luke, "but an angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors and brought them out and said, Go ye and stand and speak in the temple all the words of this life." This is one of the cardinal "BUTS" in the history of Christ's people; and there are many of them. "L'homme propose" but power belongeth unto God. Man proposes, but God interposes on behalf of His people and disposes all things according to the counsels of His will. This coming of God's angel to open the prison doors and bid the apostles go on with the work which their Lord had appointed them was not to them an intimation that they should never suffer at the hands of their enemies, but it was an assurance to them that God was with them and that the cause which they served must triumph. It gave them the divine courage they needed for a day that seemed fraught with tremendous peril to the church, and nerved them to speak with all boldness the words of "Life," against the death-bound creed of the Sadducees and in the presence of the powerful Sanhedrin. From this instance of Divine interposition and from similar instances both in the apostolic days and in the latter history of Christ's people, the assurance should come to every Christian worker that the cause in which he is engaged is God's and that, however securely the enemies of Christ may seem to have barred doors against truth and whatever barriers they have erected against the onward march of the Redeemer's Kingdom, doors will be unlocked and every barrier broken down until all hostile powers shall submit to Christ and every word of promise be fulfilled.

Once more there is a meeting of the Sanhedrin, and the apostles are set before the council. The high priest speaks and charges them with filling Jerusalem with their teaching and intending "to bring this man's blood upon us." It is a trying moment for those men of Galilee. They need now the courage which the coming of the angel had ministered. The issue must be squarely faced; and they are not afraid. Like Abraham and all men of overcoming faith, they were going forth, not knowing whither, except that God was guiding. They were Jews, loving their people, fondly attached to the traditions of the nation, and to the worship of the temple. They wished to do nothing against the counsel of the Sanhedrin. But God was God to them, and truth was truth. When God said "yea,"

they would preach that word though all the power and prestige of Sadduceeism united in crying "nay." "We must obey God," they said, "rather than men." God had shown them that the nay of Sadduceeism was a lie. The Sadducees had denied that Christ was the Son of God, that He had risen from the dead, that He had ascended to the right hand of God and that it was His power now manifest in Jerusalem to heal the bodies and the souls of men. All this the apostles had affirmed to be the truth of God. Here was the YEA of Christ opposed to the NAY of the Sadducees, and Peter and his brethren were in no doubt as to which they should believe and preach. Peter declared to them that "this man" whom they had slain, hanging him on a tree, this man whom the high priest had scorned to mention by name, even Jesus, God had raised up and exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and remission of sins. These were hard words for Sadducee ears to listen to. No wonder these rulers of Israel were cut to the heart and desired to slay these bold ministers of the truth.

The same conflict with Sadduceeism, under other names and forms, is in the world today. There are those who preach Jesus as the risen Christ, "A Prince and a Saviour," and there are those who evil and deny. The denials of skepticism and the affirmations of faith, the "nay" of the Sadducees, the "yea" of Christ are forever opposed to each other. The grand question for each individual soul is—on which side of that conflict am I?

Editorial Notes.

—Hon. Edward Blake, who was counsel for the Catholic minority in the last Manitoba School Case argued before the Imperial Privy Council is reported to have expressed to Mr. Charles Fitzpatrick, Solicitor-General of Canada, the opinion that it is a complete misapprehension to think that the Privy Council ordered the discontinued schools to be restored and is further of the opinion that the Federal Government have no power whatever to deal with the taxes of Manitoba or to allocate any money to Catholic or separate schools. An amicable arrangement on the lines of the proposal of the Manitoba government, he thinks, would be much more advantageous from every point of view to the Catholic minority than any remedial bill could possibly be.

—The State of Nevada has won the distinction of having become the one piece of territory in North America in which a prize fight can be legally held. It looks like a very "bad eminence" that Nevada has attained. Still it does not seem as if the rest of the continent can consistently glory over much in its superior morality, since to judge from the space allotted to the subject in the average newspaper, prize-fighting must be everywhere regarded as a matter of most lively interest to the reading public. One would think that the settling of the pugilistic superiority of two ruffians was of more moment than the fate of a kingdom. This large demand for the literature of the prize-ring is a significant commentary upon our modern civilization and culture, and it is not a pleasant thing to consider the influence which this kind of daily mental pabulum is having upon the boys in our homes, as well as their brothers of larger growth.

—In addition to the congratulatory words from our friends, published in these columns a few weeks ago, we have received a great number of a similar character from others all over the country. We desire very heartily to thank these friends for their kind words. Their expressions of appreciation and of kindly, hearty sympathy for us in our work are highly valued. They help us greatly, and so help on the causes which the MESSENGER AND VISITOR is endeavoring to serve. Perhaps we shall not work any more industriously or conscientiously, but we shall at least work more cheerfully and hopefully for the kind and appreciative expressions of our friends. Brother Hinson was right: a good hearty cheer for a man who is trying honestly and with more or less success to do his duty in the face of difficulties, heartens the man and sometimes helps on a brave endeavor to success. And this truth is capable of