

Messenger and Visitor

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Wealth and Worship.

In an article last week we called attention to the fact that the period of the year most favorable to successful effort in religious work was beginning, and we endeavored to emphasize the importance of each church so making use of its opportunities as to secure the largest spiritual blessings. There is a phase of church life to which we then made no particular reference, but to which we now wish to allude, that is, the contributing of money for religious purposes. This is a necessary part of every church's work, and it is not the part of wisdom to minimize its importance. The contribution of funds which are to be devoted to promoting the glory of God is a vital part of Christian life and duty, not less acceptable to God, we may believe, when performed in the right spirit, than praise or prayer or any Christian service we can render. But we fear the disposition is much too common to regard the raising of money for religious purposes, whether for the necessary expenses of the local church or for the support of Christian work outside the church, as a less religious and a less important exercise of Christian activity than that which expends itself in the singing of hymns, the offering of prayers and preaching or listening to sermons. This we believe to be a quite erroneous view of the subject. Distinctions between temporalities and spiritualities should find no place in a Christian church. The contributions which Christians make of their substance to promote the work of the church are vitally and necessarily connected with the spiritual interests of the church. If the church is to engage in seasons of worship, then houses of worship must be built, and these houses must be warmed, lighted and kept in repair. If the welfare of the church demands that there be ministers who shall devote themselves to the study of the Word, to preaching and teaching and other work looking directly to the spiritual welfare of the people, then the temporal needs of these ministers must be provided for. Accordingly, he who contributes of his means to the necessary expenses of a house of worship or who contributes to the minister's salary may justly feel that he is engaged in religious work just as acceptably to his Master and just as important as if he was taking an active part in a revival meeting. The same principle applies to contributions made to Christian work outside one's own local church. If one gives his money to help a needy sister church or to enable a missionary to carry the Gospel to the heathen he is worshipping God as acceptably as he could by any other exercise of his faculties. Of course everything depends on the spirit in which one makes his contributions to the cause which the church is called to serve. If one gives grudgingly, or as of necessity, or merely to win the praise of men, there is no worship in it, and little blessing. And if one sings psalms or prays or preaches in such a spirit there is just as little worship and just as little blessing. But there is no reason why a Christian should give in a niggardly spirit any more than that he should pray in a spirit of gloom and unbelief. It is the cheerful spirit, giving gladly, rejoicing in the opportunity of contributing something toward the enlargement of Christ's kingdom in the world, which is blessed in its giving. No one, we suppose, will dispute that what we have been saying indicates, however inadequately, the Christian ideal of giving.

But does this ideal obtain generally among the membership of our churches? We fear that an affirmative answer is impossible. There are indeed many of our people who recognize this ideal, who have their faces set toward it and who, more or less, are realizing it in their lives, and with large joy and blessing to themselves. But how many there are who have never thought of their temporal possessions as a means of worship, that is as a means of drawing near and nearer to God, a means of entering more fully and fruitfully into fellowship with Jesus Christ in His work of human redemption, and thus of turning the perishing goods of earth to everlasting spiritual account! It would surely be well if Christian people generally could be led to take this larger view of their relationship toward the material possessions with which God has entrusted them. It would mean large blessing to themselves and large help for the work which the Lord through His servants is carrying forward in the world.

Public Prayer.

In another column a correspondent writes concerning the subject of Pulpit Prayers. The subject is one which, we believe, deserves a larger measure of attention than is given to it by the average minister. Many of our ministers probably will sympathize with our brother in his feeling that this part of public worship is in practice more or less unsatisfactory. To unite spontaneity and fervor with a proper sequence of thought and propriety of expression in extempore prayer is difficult. And yet it is of so much importance as to be worth striving after. The prayer before the sermon ought to be, and sometimes is, not less helpful to the worshipper than the sermon itself. It is a great thing indeed if the minister can pray so that every devout soul present shall feel itself drawn near to the throne of grace and helped to worship God in spirit and in truth. One has heard prayers from the pulpit which in some measure have done this, and one has heard prayers which had no such power in them. It is to be recognized that the power that gives fervor and effect to prayer is that of the Holy Spirit. The most discreet arrangement of thought and the choicest selection of words will fail of the desired end if the minister's mind and heart be not aglow with the fire of the Spirit. One hesitates indeed to try to say, except in the most general terms, what pulpit prayer should be. It should seek to lift the would-be worshipper into communion with God, to help every believer to come into conscious, vital touch with his Creator and Saviour, to bring every sin-stained soul to the fountain of cleansing and every hungry heart to the banquet of Divine love. The minister who would intelligently and effectively voice the thanksgiving, the confessions and the petitions of his congregation will need, not only to have his thoughts arranged in proper order, but to know his people intimately and to sympathize with them in their various experiences. He will need to be able to voice their needs in simple and expressive language. But above all he will need the spirit of prayer and of supplication. He must be able himself to draw near to God, else how shall he help others to approach a throne of grace? Is it to be advised then that a minister should study his prayers? Yes, we think so, so far as the framework or the general sequence of thought is concerned. He should know in reference to what subjects he intends to pray and in what order and what particular subject or subjects he will make prominent in his prayer. But we should not advise that the minister should write out his prayer and commit it to memory. With such mental preparation as we have indicated, the particular phraseology may be better left to the inspiration of the moment. Only he should endeavor to use simple thought expressed in simple forms of speech, easily followed and understood by the least educated of those whom he leads in worship. And here the Spirit is the true guide and inspirer. The simplest and sublimest thoughts, the simplest words, the freshest and most fervid utterances are those which come from previous communion with the Spirit and from His inspiring presence in the hour of worship. We think then in regard to public prayer that the aim of the minister should first of all be to pray, and not to offer, either to the Lord or to the people, some remarks of more or less importance under the name of prayer. We think that it will rightly be his aim to present the needs

of his people in an ordered sequence of thought, in simple speech and in fervency of spirit. And in seeking this end, while wisely using his intellectual gifts and attainments for what they are worth, he must not forget that the great Source of help for him and for his people is the Divine Spirit whose grace can make the feeblest utterance of a child of God a prayer of faith and victory and without whose aid every form of prayer is vain.

The Free Baptist Conference.

As we write the Free Baptist Conference of New Brunswick is in session for the last time before the union of the two Baptist bodies shall take place. While the union appears to be looked forward to with larger hopefulness as a realization of the Christian ideal and as affording promise of larger good, the fact that it is the last meeting of the Conference and that the history of the denomination as a separate organization is being concluded, naturally lends something of the pathetic to the meeting. The oldest minister in the body, the venerable Joseph Nobles, was present when the Free Baptist Conference was organized at Wakefield seventy-two years ago, and with one exception he has attended every yearly meeting since. To this venerable brother and to many others the present meeting recalls memories that are full of pathos.

The results reported for the past year appear to be at least up to the average of preceding years. The Corresponding Secretary's report shows that the whole number of churches embraced in the Conference is 145. Of these 108 had reported to the District Meetings. There are in connection with the denomination 46 ordained ministers, six Conference licentiates and three District Meeting licentiates. Those in the active pastorate number 32.

The additions to the churches during the year were three hundred and fifty-three, being an increase of one hundred and sixteen over those of last year. The additions were to thirty-five churches, leaving seventy-one churches with membership unchanged by accessions. The reports as to the spiritual condition of the churches are encouraging, more so than for several years. The interest of the churches in home and foreign missions has not found the practical expression which is desirable. There has been but a slight difference in the contributions for these departments for several years. Other matters seem to have engaged the attention of the churches to the hurt of these branches of the work.

The report concludes as follows:

"During the year the churches were asked to pass upon the action of the conference of 1904, as to Baptist union. Their approval of the proposed union was with gratifying unanimity. Because of this action, and its ratification by the churches, we are now at a most momentous stage in our history as a religious body. With the close of this session of conference our separate denominational existence will cease. We will thenceforth be part of the united Baptist body. Though ceasing to be a separate body, the work entrusted to us, and which we have carried on through three-quarters of a century, remains in our hands to be done in co-operation with our brethren of the other Baptist body, under more favorable conditions, with wiser economy of methods and resources, and with greatly enlarged territory and opportunities. The Lord has been with us and blessed us. He has guided us thus far. That He will guide us in all the future we have no reason to doubt. The seal of His approval on the new departure which is made in His name and for His kingdom's sake, let us humbly and earnestly seek. Amen!"

Heredity and Environment.

Those who have given attention to the problems which are presented by the condition of that portion of society which is sometimes spoken of as the "submerged tenth," have generally attributed much to the power of heredity. It has been held that children who have an evil inheritance extending back for two or three generations are, by what that fact itself and apart altogether from any question of environment, heavily handicapped in any efforts they may put forth to conform their lives to the moral standards of respectable society. There can be no doubt, we suppose, that heredity has considerable influence in determining moral as well as intellectual character, and it is to be expected that the

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