

Our Contributors.

A SUPPLEMENT TO THE THANKSGIVING SERMONS

BY KNOXIAN.

"Does the world move" is the question discussed by the late Dr. Austin Phelps in a charming and instructive essay. The writer is quite satisfied not only that the world moves but that it moves with considerable rapidity in the right direction. Dr. Phelps must have been well up in years when he wrote this essay, and its cheery, hopeful tone is all the more remarkable on that account. Most old men think the world is moving but moving towards some bad place. Dr. Phelps thinks it is moving in the right way, and he gives substantial facts to support the hope that is in him. A short discussion of these facts may help to keep our Thanksgiving Day gratitude alive a few days longer.

Within the last three centuries Dr. Phelps says the world has made most satisfactory progress in these important particulars:—

The brotherhood of man, individual liberty, independence in religious belief, the elevation of women, the recognition of the freedom of the press and of public speech, of a popular literature, of the sacredness of human life, of the criminality of war, of the inferiority of a military life, of the murderous character of the duel, of the dignity of labour, of the equal claims of chastity upon the sexes, of reform in the criminal code, of the inhumanity of torture in courts of justice, of the reformatory element in punishment, of humanity in the treatment of the insane, of the rights of animals to protection from cruelty, of gentleness in family government, of the abolition of brutality from public schools and from the armies and navies, of the disgrace attached to the drinking usages of society, of the subjection of the sale of intoxicating drinks to law, of the subordination of wealth to character, and of manners to mind in estimating the worth of a man.

Now let the most chronic pessimist read carefully the foregoing list, rub up his history a little and call to mind the former condition of things in regard to the matters mentioned and say if he can *truthfully* that the world has not moved in the right direction in the last three centuries. Indeed we might say that astonishing progress in the right direction has been made in one century. Gladstone, an old man too by the way, says the last fifty years were the best fifty in many respects that the world ever saw. He declares he would rather have worked for the welfare of his fellow-men during the last fifty years than during any half-century of the world's existence. At the end of a pastorate of fifty years, Jay, of Bath, said "I have a better opinion of mankind than when I began public life. I cannot ask what is the cause that the former days were better than these. I do not believe the fact itself. God has not been throwing away duration on the human race." This last sentence should teach pessimists a lesson. Does God keep this world in existence simply that it may grow worse? Does the Gospel of His Son and the operations of spirit merely help to turn men into demons?

Instead of belittling and disparaging the efforts made by our fathers to make the world better, it would be more becoming in us to ask how many of the blessings they secured for us are we abusing. Prof. Campbell, in one of his delightful and instructive "talks" in the *Presbyterian Journal*, says: "Nature seems to have made it hard for some men to be modest." Nature seems to have made it impossible for the Adam family to use good things without abusing them. Just run your eye over Dr. Phelps' list and see how many of the greatest boons there enumerated are being abused at the present day.

BROTHERHOOD OF MAN—From this comes the bad theology that Jack is as good as his master and the bad manners that prompts Jack to slap the aforesaid master on the back and say: Halloo, old fellow.

INDIVIDUAL LIBERTY—Anarchists and a host of others not quite so far gone believe that the liberty of the subject consists in doing just what the subject pleases apart altogether from any consideration of his neighbour's rights or interests. The Chicago gentlemen who figured somewhat prominently a year or two ago frankly stated that they came to America thinking they might do as they liked. In carrying out their theory of individual liberty they indulged in the rather dangerous pastime of throwing bomb-shells among the police. The application of the theory was so hard on the police that the authorities put a somewhat sudden stop to it. Individual liberty is a precious boon, but what blessing is more abused?

THE ELEVATION OF WOMEN—Woman was once man's slave. The Gospel made her man's companion. Some modern theories have a tendency to make her man's rival, and some people of "advanced" notions seem to aim at making her man's "boss." Should the day ever come when women will be looked upon mainly as man's rival in business, in the professions, in politics, in every sphere of human activity, a good many women may come to the conclusion that they carried a good theory just a little too far.

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS—An unspeakably great blessing no doubt—but a blessing that is too often turned into an unmitigated curse.

FREEDOM OF SPEECH—From this boon comes the campaign liar and the horde of voluble leeches who make a living by wagging tongues useless or worse than useless.

But why extend the discussion? Let every reader study the list for himself and he will be struck with two things—the marvellous progress the world has made and is making in the right direction and the scandalous fact that the best things are the most abused.

Some of the best of the reforms mentioned have taken place within the memory of living men. Among the more recent might be mentioned: humanity in the treatment of the insane, humanity in the treatment of persons accused of crime, the abolition of brutality in the schools, the lessening of brutality in armies and navies, a radical change of opinion in regard to getting "gloriously drunk," and several others that have done much in lessening human suffering and human sorrow.

There is grim humour in hearing an old man declare that there has been no improvement in school discipline when you know that in his school-days he was often "elevated" on the shoulders of another boy and as the boy trotted around the school-room the old Dominie laid on the taws where it could do most good.

Various causes lead people to think the world is growing worse. Perhaps the principal is ignorance. Many who talk with amazing confidence have not the slightest idea of what even their own country was like a hundred years ago. History is a great educator but glib talkers are often innocent of as much history as might be found in a primer.

Some people who did once know a little about a century ago have forgotten. How often do you hear a man declare that this is the coldest winter or hottest summer for many years? Perhaps the summer before last was hotter and the winter before last colder.

Old men nearly always think the world is becoming worse. A delusion of that kind seems to be one of the drawbacks of old age.

LETTER FROM FORMOSA.

The following letter from Dr. McKay, dated Formosa, Tamsui, September 18, 1891, has been forwarded for publication: I forward you notes of a trip to our Southern districts, now called Sin-tiok and Bôu-lék. July 5 was spent in Bang-kak, the 6th at Sin-tung, Hong-Kin-tiam (when dinner was eaten on the roadside), and Sa-kak-ehg. The day following occupied us in Tôa-Kho-ham where twenty-four savages are imprisoned because a Chinese had been killed on the border-land whilst engaged chipping camphor stumps, etc., to extract the valuable medicinal product. A number appeared with chains around their legs, for a daily "airing" is allowed them; but all looked dejected, woe-begone and downcast. Women strolled about tattooed, unfettered and unconcerned, as if determined to make the best of every passing day. Deep down in those human hearts though, there was a longing for freedom in their own dear forest retreats.

Having passed through Leng-tham-pi and Tang-lo-Khien we halted at Kâm-chhài-ang within the Sin-tiok district. I slept on benches with weeds burning near by to keep off the blood-thirsty mosquitoes (so the landlord said). It reminded me of the North-West Territory. Going a short distance among tall grass, suddenly there arose a cloud around me with sounds as if parties were on the "war-path." It was time to decamp. There is but one great family, though with equally sharp, slender and subtle lances. Foreigners here when travelling invariably carry mosquito curtains. This I have never found necessary as their stings annoy me little and leave no marks behind. How can this be accounted for? It is like a host of other things, that up to date scientists don't know.

Along the same interesting, winding path as last year we marched through Pak-po, and on to Gôh-bài, the Hak-ka village to which a preacher was sent in April. The reception given us from these hill-men was exceedingly hearty, though not of a kind to suit my individual tastes. That is of small moment though, if only the right ring sounds forth. This and similar questions have cost me anxiety and thought unknown to outsiders. It was their way to give outward expression to inward joy and gladness. Guns were fired and fire-crackers sounded on every hand as we filed into the chapel fitted up by themselves. Fowls, ducks, etc., were killed and the rejoicings extended to more than converts. The old dwelling house but new chapel was arranged so as to reflect much credit on those hard-working labourers. It was full of well disposed people the entire day and two dialects were audible amongst the crowds. When darkness closed around, lights made bright the joyous hall. Three hours passed rapidly listening to one read or repeat a psalm, hymn or chapter in Hak-ka and followed immediately by another in Amoy vernacular. Two preachers would be more suitable than one in that region. My old friend Ng-a-lân of seventy-five summers, was more zealous (if possible) than during our previous visit. I spoke on God our Father, Father of Ethiopian, Caucasian, American, Majayan and Mongolian. Blessed thought! Creator, Father and Preserver of all. There is a light—a beacon yonder amid the Hak-ka hills and the Lord's work flourishing satisfactory. Several come to tell how God heard their petitions and answered their cries!

Thence our way led to Tiong-Kaúg. The first man to greet us was nearly blind for a number of years. He rushed up and said "God did it all, I was blind, but now I see and that without medicine. The townspeople wonder at me going about working. I tell them God did it all, etc. Truly wonderful! "Without medicine." Not so, thought I.

Opposite views are strenuously maintained regarding "Faith cure," "Prayer cure." I warn its advocates not to put this case down in their favour. Let us investigate a little. The man suffered from Anargmia and Granular Ophthalmia.

During every visit I administered a tonic and applied sulphate of copper to the eye-lids. Hygienic laws were strictly ordered and reckless living as strictly forbidden. Under the inspection of our preacher he slowly, yet surely, improved constitutionally. The small stock of medicine "gave out," but by this time his frame was so robust that it threw off his ailments and the eyes became remarkably clear. Now all this is effect following cause, and hundreds throughout this land could be cured if they only had the persistency of this man. There being no medicines to take he no doubt prayed more earnestly, lived more consistently and now it was natural enough that he a poor labourer at the very time when not taking drugs should get eyesight restored, then full of gratitude declare—"God did it all." That is quite true, I reminded him, but it is just as He gives bread to His children. There is a deal of hard work from farm to food, I know from days gone by. When He provides corn in Egypt, men must go down and get it. We cannot and dare not despise or neglect means, which are as assuredly appointed by God as prayer itself. In this wonderful and harmonious universe, His laws and means demand absolute obedience from His weak, ignorant, and erring creatures. It is not often here I have to remind converts of this truth. We believe in using every means at command for the accomplishment of desired ends. None the less; but all the more do we ascribe all the wisdom, power and glory to our Almighty Creator and Preserver. After dark, recitations continued four hours. A boy and girl displayed brilliant talents for acquiring prescribed lessons. An old man who suffered persecution from his family stood up and boldly repeated well-known Psalms, Ten Commandments, etc. He told how ashamed he was to be seen with a hymn book in the chapel, and how he carefully hid it under his clothes. One day he started from home with coat off and tied the hymn-book on the top of his head with the queue. The rest can be imagined, for he forgot where the book was when going along the street. There was no concealing after that. That incident was the cause of banishing shame and fear from his mind. He was in darkness and came into light which is now all plain to him.

By day-break we were off intending to return in the afternoon. At Ai-lang our only station in Bôu-lék (the new district made by dividing Sin-tiok) I was pressed to visit Satham-toé and consented, an instance out of thousands in which we have to decide on the spot. Recitations began at once and continued two hours. The hearers were addressed, and by 1 p.m., we set off under fierce, glaring sun. A Sedan chair was used for a couple of hours, then on foot we pressed up steep inclines, down rocky slopes, across "saddle-backs" and round winding streams. Thirty men, women and children yelled out "Peace," "Thanks to God," as we stepped into the valley. From the sea-washed beach straight inland is a field for fruitful study and reflection. Submergence of the land occurred after the carboniferous age. Elevation followed during the Cretaceous, when intense volcanic forces played along the chain from Kurile to Sunda Islands. From the lofty central ranges of igneous rocks stretched sand-stone and shale down to the heaving sea. Rain, descended, the resistless, erosive power of many waters, directed by the general slope of the softer material rushed wildly out to sea, scooped out gorge and gully, formed hill and vale of endless diversity, groved, furrowed and excavated ridges on every hand. By denudation hill tops are in every conceivable stage. Yonder several hundred feet broad, there fifty and upwards, here only three feet and still being ground down. Its physiognomy indicates exactly the geological character and *vice versa*. From a high point (2,000 ft. by my aneroid) the appearance seawards is that of countless hill ranges, packed close together like ten thousand billows on old Ocean's breast. Mighty agencies! All under the direction of one controlling, creative power. There was an assemblage that night to worship and adore Him in a house erected by man an active agent in His hands. In this very valley I had a small log church seventeen years ago. It was then full of shrubs, reeds and savages; now the whole extent is under cultivation. There was a rush for this virgin soil, and parties plotted, plundered and murdered each other until extermination seemed probable. A chief's son (who acted as guide for myself and Noble Cap-Bax) was dragged to a tree and shot when begging for his life, etc., etc. As our Master's kingdom is not of this world I purposely turned to other and more important centres. The thirty above referred to were hearers at Sin-Kang (at least the older ones) and moved into this settlement. More than once they were driven out and often thought of abandoning it altogether. I frequently met and gave them some books, etc. The bold Hak-Kas pressed in, won the day, and drove out all the non-converts who were from Sin-Kang, etc. (these were our most bitter foes), and invited our hearers to return and live amongst them. Year by year rolled rapidly away and I intentionally did not send a preacher there. It was important under the circumstances that they should be left a time to themselves, for heart-searching as to their motives, etc., etc. Now on this tour how did I find them? The head-man built a new house close beside the old chapel site which is held sacred by old and young. They neither erected dwellings on it themselves nor allowed others to do so. New homes were established, but no idols desecrated their walls. Old hymn books were thumbed till worn out and Bibles preserved with great care. According to their light, they worshipped the true God during all these years. That night several actually shed tears of joy. I claim to be acquainted with what others may know about many and wrong motives, but don't believe any