

Messenger and Visitor

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Membership in the Church.

A Young Pastor asks the following questions:—

Young people join our churches, often they are *coaxed* in, and afterwards find they are not converted. Shall the church exclude them for living godless lives?
One such member wishes to resign his membership in our church. We informed him that it was not according to Baptist practice to do so. What shall we do, exclude him or accept his resignation?

These questions suggest some reflections which it may be profitable to note here. First, as to the need of carefulness in the reception of members into the church. It is certainly in the highest degree desirable that our young people should be definitely committed to a religious life, and should make public profession of their faith in Christ, but their connection with the church ought never to be sought or desired apart from genuine repentance and faith. If regeneration as a necessary condition of church-membership is not clearly preached and if young people are encouraged and urged to enter the church on the mere strength of a benevolent impulse or out of sympathy with their companions, without any real spiritual experience, then a great wrong is done both to the church and to those who are thus led to take upon themselves vows of the profoundest significance, to which their hearts and consciences have never really consented. That people, young and old, make the great decision and surrender themselves to the service of Christ, is the all-important matter, and to this they cannot be too earnestly and lovingly persuaded. When that self-surrender has been truly made they are not likely to require much persuasion to enter the fellowship of the church. But to "coax" young persons into the church without clear evidence that they have laid hold on Christ by repentance and faith is but to help them upon a course of self-deception which is likely to result in a last condition worse than the first. Therefore, let evangelists, pastors and church membership committees be careful that no desire to make a large showing in respect to the number added to the church, or any other unworthy motive, lead them to encourage young persons to make a profession of religion which is not based upon a genuine religious experience issuing in an intelligent acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

Secondly, those who, having united with the church, are led afterwards to believe that they were self-deceived, that their profession is a sham, and that they ought not to be in the church, should be dealt with in all kindness and wisdom. The fact that a young person takes such a view of his or her case is not necessarily a proof that there has been no work of grace in the heart. Sometimes a very good Christian falls into the "Slough of Despond," and is ready to believe the worst possible things about himself. But there ought not to be much difficulty in distinguishing between a "Christian" and a "Pliable." Then, even if there is reason to believe that one has entered the church without repentance or faith, it is not necessary to conclude that such an one is a consummate hypocrite and a hopeless son of perdition, for, as we have seen, he may have been aided in his self-deception by those who should have been able to give wise counsel. Even now he may be led to repentance and saved to Christ and to the church. But if this cannot be—if he must withdraw from the fellowship of the church, it cannot be on the part of the church with any feeling of bitterness or indifference, but with sorrow mingled with desire and hope for his salvation. We cannot see how a church can adopt the suggestion contained in our correspondent's ques-

tion and simply accept the resignation of a member who has come to believe that he entered the church upon a misapprehension. The church of course is not a club with which men may connect and disconnect themselves at will. It is in its ideal composed of regenerate souls whose place is in the church and nowhere else. It is composed of soldiers of the King, who have enlisted for life,—for the world which now is and for that which is to come. If one is united to Christ in faith and love his place is in the church, if he is destitute of faith and love he has no part in the holy fellowship. It does not matter so much perhaps by what phraseology the church distinguishes between that fellowship and those who either by their own confession of otherwise have unworthily connected themselves with her membership. What is of greatest importance is that the church shall seek to add to its members only such as are truly of its spiritual fellowship and that its attitude toward all within and all without its communion shall be ruled by love and by loyal devotion to its Lord.

Do not Moan and Sigh.

A correspondent asks:—

"Is it in accordance with the teachings of Jesus for a member of the church to arise in prayer meeting and moan and sigh over the sins and shortcomings of other members of the church, who may or may not be present?"

No, we do not think so. But perhaps we ought to make some allowance for the Christian who moans and sighs over the delinquencies of his brethren. It would be doubtless much better that the mourning should be done in secret, and that in the prayer-meeting there should be strong, cheerful words, inspired by faith and hope as well as love. But if only the moaning and the sighing are the expression of a genuine and earnest desire for the welfare of the church, it is far better that there should be lamentation than indifference, and the conditions in some churches may be so discouraging that it is almost too much to expect that the pastor and his few faithful helpers shall maintain always that strong and hopeful spirit which reflects its cheerfulness and gladness upon all who come within its influence. But this is no excuse for the chronic scolder who habitually uses his opportunities in the meetings of the church to reprove his fellow-Christians for their shortcomings and sins. The scolding exhorter may be well-meaning and zealous, but his success is not likely to be large. For people are not to be scolded into the kingdom of Heaven, neither are professing Christians likely to be scolded out of worldliness into spirituality. And it makes little difference we fear, so far as the results are concerned, whether the scolding takes the form of moaning and sighing or of harshly condemnatory reproof. The dominant note in the gospel is one of freedom. The work of grace proceeds along the line of the free response of the soul to the light of truth and the drawings of love. If we would cause men to tread the upward way we must draw by the cords of love rather than drive with whips of denunciation. To cast a gloom over a prayer-meeting by querulous laments over the sins and deficiencies of those who are not there is surely a poor reward for those faithful ones who are present and who need the word of good cheer and encouragement. No doubt but that earnest Christians at the present day have to meet much that is discouraging, but so also did the apostle Paul. And there were times when he felt it necessary to reprove and rebuke. But it is remarkable how much he found in the churches to cause him to rejoice, and how many admonitions and encouragements his epistles contain to thanksgiving, hope and gladness of heart. A Christian of a strong, hopeful, gladsome faith is worth many times his weight in gold to any church.

Editorial Notes.

—The testimony of Dr. Herbert Fiske of the Northwestern University in reference to the effect of the tobacco habit upon the work of students should be regarded as important. Dr. Fiske asserts that tobacco in any form has a tendency to dull the mind of the student, and the cigarette he considers the most objectionable and injurious. These opinions he supports by statistics taken from the University records during the last nine years, showing that students addicted to the use of tobacco made a much lower average in their classes than those who abstained. Not a single student, he says, using tobacco has stood in the first rank this year, and, with one exception, the same has been the case during nine years.

—According to such meagre accounts as are permitted to reach the western world concerning events transpiring in the interior of Russia, there is evidently great suffering and mortality in those parts of the country in which there has been a general failure of the crops. There appears to be in Russia a lamentable lack of those spontaneous and readily organized systems of relief with which the English-speaking people are familiar. The Russian Government is endeavoring to do something, but relief is slow and ineffective. Meanwhile, it is said, scurvy and typhoid are devastating the peasantry throughout the whole of the Altai region, formerly the chief granary of Siberia. The starving people have eaten up the grain that should have been for seed, and in some places the houses have been unthatched to provide fodder for the starving cattle.

—What is known as the "Away from Rome" movement in the German Provinces of Austria appears to be gathering strength rather than diminishing. It is stated on the authority of the *Evangelische Kirchenzeitung*, the official organ of the Protestant church in Austria, that in the year 1901 thirty-six new Protestant preaching places were added to the scores which had been already established. Special Church Building Societies in the interests of the Protestant cause have been newly organized in ten places and an Old Catholic Society in one place. During the year new Protestant churches were opened in seven large towns, chapels were opened in eight other places and the laying of eleven corner-stones was reported. To the new places thus opened the Protestants of Germany are sending ministers, and the opposition of the Austrian Government to the new movement is said to have been in a measure withdrawn. Evangelical associations of many kinds have been established to co-operate with the purely church work. The number of converts to Protestantism during 1901 is said to have been 6,000 as compared with 4,516 the year before. The total number of converts from Roman Catholicism since the beginning of the agitation is nearly 19,000, and this does not include those who go to the Old Catholics.

—The Toronto Globe of Saturday, April 19th, prints the pictures of thirty-seven young ladies who lately left their Canadian homes for South Africa to teach in the schools which the Government is establishing in the Transvaal and Orange River Colonies. It will be generally admitted that in point of good looks and intelligence this Canadian contingent is entitled to a first place among those which Canada has sent to South Africa. Its work, it may be hoped, will be of a less sanguinary character than that of the khaki clad contingents, but perhaps the ferrule in the hands of a sweet Canadian girl may prove a no less effective weapon to compel the surrender of the Boers than the rifle in the hands of the Canadian soldier. The school-room may not attract as much attention as the battlefield, but it is certainly not less important in the work of empire-building.

—On the same page of the *Globe* appears a fine photograph of the young soldier, Charles Napier Evans, who was killed in the battle of Harts River, March 31st, and who, with a small band of Canadian comrades, displayed such heroic and indomitable courage in the face of an overwhelming force of the enemy. Standing alone in the face of the on-rushing Boers, every comrade dead or disabled and himself wounded to the death, Evans fired his last cartridge and then broke his rifle over a boulder. He was a son of Mr. James Evans of Port Hope, Ont. The picture is that of a noble looking youth on whose face purity, intelligence and high purpose seem to be written. The last letter which his father had received from him before the news of his death came indicated that he apprehended that his life might be demanded as a sacrifice for the cause of the Empire. "Many a good man," he wrote, "has died for the old flag and why should not I?" If parents had not given their sons, and sons had not given themselves, for the British Empire it would not today be the proud dicta of the world." It is added concerning Charlie Evans that he had for years been a devoted Christian and for him death had no sting. Such an example ought to help our young men to equally heroic living in the cause of the nation and of all that makes for true national honor and strength.

Letter from Rev. Isaiah Wallace.

DEAR EDITOR.—I have recently made a ten days' visit to Mahone Bay, in compliance with the request of Pastor W. B. Bezanson and his people. Having always admired Mahone as one of our prettiest towns, and having during two previous visits enjoyed glorious revivals there, it was especially congenial to me to revisit these familiar scenes. I missed, however, many of the friends of former years, notably, Deacons Andrews and Hamm, who have been called to their heavenly home. It was a pleasure to me to find the son of the latter, Mr. Obed Hamm, active in Sunday School and church work, and leading in the material activities of the town. He has a special genius for drafting and building vessels that have become famous for their beauty and speed. Several bankers are now being built, which will make a grand