

Messenger and Visitor

The Maritime Baptist Publishing Company, Ltd

Publishers and Proprietors
TERMS } \$2.00 PER ANNUM.
\$1.50 IF PAID IN ADVANCE.

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85 Germain Street, St. John, N. B.

Printed by PATERSON & CO., 105 and 107 Germain St.

The Great Distinction.

The distinction which the Bible everywhere makes emphatic between moral good and evil, between wisdom and folly, uprightness and wickedness is as real and vital as the distinction between light and darkness, death and disease, life and death. There was never greater need than there is today that this distinction be clearly recognized and emphasized. The influence of the world, the flesh and the devil is always tending to obliterate these distinctions, putting darkness for light and light for darkness. The subtle serpent power that has been in the world from the beginning still insinuates its doubts and falsehoods into every ear that will listen. This fruit so pleasant to sight and taste, it says, was it not surely meant for man's use? This way so beautiful, so inviting, cannot surely lead to death! Still the tempter cunningly suggests that it is man's natural right to eat of every tree of the garden and that the fruit of transgression is not death but god-like knowledge. And today, as of old, men listen to the suggestions of the tempter until the poison of a practical atheism is insinuated into their hearts, conscience suffers a partial paralysis and the power of keen discrimination between good and evil is lost. It would be well if the preaching and the religious teaching of this age could be made such as to cause the eaters of forbidden fruit to feel that no thicket of moral sophistries can hide from the All-seeing Eye that searches out the sinner or from the Almighty Voice that calls him to account.

Very urgent is the admonition of the wise man in the Book of Proverbs to the youth whom he addressed, to be loyal to truth. "Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go: keep her: for she is thy life." Truth is not merely to be discerned or to be admired, but to be loved and obeyed. The right way is not merely to be seen and remarked upon and pointed out to others, it is to be walked in. This loyalty to truth and practical acceptance of wisdom involves equally prompt turning away from evil as from a thing to be abhorred. "Enter not into the path of the wicked. . . . Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it and pass on." There must be no dallying with sinful pleasures, no experimenting with wickedness, no sowing of wild oats or playing with fire. If any young man wants to know what the fruits of licentiousness are like, there is plenty of evidence ready to his hand. No sane man thinks it necessary to thrust his hand into the fire in order to be assured that fire will burn. But too often the words of the wise and the results of human experience are disregarded. Men seem able to persuade themselves that the fire which has burned others will not burn them, that the slough in which others have sunk to perdition will afford them a safe footing and that what has proved poison to others will be to them a delicious and exhilarating draught. No man is so strong that he can afford to play with the Maelstroms and Niagaras of sin, and it is no mark of wisdom or of courage to venture within the circle of their influence. Regard for others as well as for himself should keep a man to the ways in which it is safe for men to go. Suppose that a man can occasionally go to the theatre without injury to his own moral character, is he not bound to consider what the theatre is as a whole as to its character and influence, before, by giving it countenance and patronage, he commends it to others who will not as he does discriminate between its worse and its better elements. Suppose that one is able to drink wine or strong drink upon occasion without losing self-control or becoming dominated by the habit, is he not bound by considerations which no true man can disregard to consider the results of the drink traffic as a whole and the effect of his own example upon the great numbers of men who are so easily led away and destroyed by strong drink?

The teaching of the Bible is positive as well as negative on this subject. It is not only that the

evil way is to be shunned because it is evil and its end disastrous. But there is a good way, a high way of holiness in which men may walk with God, a path of wisdom and of truth in which men shall walk if they will with a sense of security and light and liberty. "When thou goest thy steps shall not be straitened; and if thou runnest thou shalt not stumble." The man who steadfastly follows the truth is like one who walks by the light of the rising sun. The pathway at first may not be very clearly discernible, but every minute the light is growing and all things are coming to appear in their true outlines and relations, the traveller's horizon is constantly enlarging, any fears that he had missed the way are dissipated like the mists of morning as he proceeds, and he rejoices in the light that shines more and more unto the perfect day. How forceful and how true in contrast is the description of that other way and its travellers,—the wicked plunging on in the growing darkness, stumbling and knowing not at what they stumble.

Divine Blessing and Human Ingratitude.

There seem to be at least two great lessons to be drawn from the passage in Luke's gospel which becomes the subject of our study this week in connection with the International Series of Sunday School lessons.

The first is a lesson of sympathy for men in their physical and social ills and necessities. As we saw in our last lesson, Jesus made it very plain in his teaching that conditions of comfort in this life are of little account as compared with the soul's eternal welfare. The beggar in all the wretchedness of his poverty and disease, may be in reality immeasurably better off than the man who is living amid all the luxuries and superfluities, that wealth can supply. But this did not cause our Lord to turn away from human suffering as if it were a matter of indifference. On the contrary his sympathy went out strongly toward the afflicted, and his hand was constantly being stretched out for their help. It was to this end that his miraculous power was chiefly exerted, that the hungry might be fed, that the sick might be healed, that the deaf might hear, the blind see, the lepers be cleansed, the demons cast out and the hearts of mourners be comforted by the restoration of their dead to life again. This sympathy with men in their present physical ills and social necessities is of the spirit and heart of Christianity. Christians are in the world, as their Master was, to sympathize with poverty, disease and pain, and to stretch forth their hands for the alleviation or the banishment of these ills. If Christianity cannot today work miracles to help men, it can, in the exercise of sympathy and through the service which is always possible for those who love, do much to alleviate the ills of men and to promote the health and happiness of human life in this world. And it certainly has done much to this end. Its ear has not been deaf to the cry of the afflicted. The hospitals and asylums which are found everywhere in Christian lands, the many philanthropic institutions established and benevolent purposes realized, bear evidence to the fact that the sympathy of Christ still finds expression in the works of those whose lives have been more or less fully influenced by his example and his spirit. A famine in India or any terrible disaster anywhere, calls forth a response from millions of sympathetic hearts in all parts of the world. We may well rejoice in all this. And yet how poor and shallow a thing is the sympathy of what we call the Christian world, as compared with that which dwelt in the heart and found expression in the life of him who "himself took our infirmities and bare our diseases." If all who are called Christian were in the truest and largest sense Christ-like in their sympathies, how the world would be transformed!

The second lesson which we have here is a lesson concerning gratitude. There are few men so degraded as not to recognize gratitude as a feeling altogether becoming in one who has received valuable benefits through the good-will and beneficent action of another. To say of any man that there is no gratitude in his nature, is to assign him a very low place in the scale of moral being. There are few epithets which even an unchristian man will more strongly resent than that of "ingrate." If it is true that mercy is twice blessed, it is equally true that ingratitude is a double curse. It wounds the heart of the giver and it withers the heart of him

who withholds the loving homage that is due. No one has such claims on human gratitude as has Jesus Christ. And no one has ever so widely and profoundly stirred the springs of gratitude in human hearts as he. It is a gratitude like Paul's which registers the recognition of the fact that "he loved me and gave himself for me." And yet has any heart ever been so wounded with ingratitude as that of the Christ who gave himself for men? This picture of the nine who returned not to give glory to God for the blessing received, has its long counterpart in human life and history. "Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness and for his wonderful works to the children of men," is the sadly earnest refrain of a Hebrew psalmist's song. And still there is great reason to lament the lack of earnest, praiseful recognition of the divine goodness. Men who live in a Christian land, whose lives and homes are blessed in a thousand ways by streams of Christian influence, do not recognize nor understand that these blessings come from him who gave himself for the world. And many whose hearts have been consciously touched by the cleansing hand of Christ, and who feel that grace has reached them through his cross, are not so moved by a sense of grateful love as to stand forth before the world and declare what great things God has done for them. And saddest of all, there are many who having confessed their love and grateful duty to Christ as their Saviour, evince but little sense of gratitude for the unspeakable blessings received. It would be a great thing both for themselves and for the world in which they live, if all those who are called Christians today, did but feel and manifest that gratitude which, according to their own profession, is due to him who has loved them, and saved them by the shedding of his own blood. There seems to be nothing which the church and the world more needs today than such a sense on the part of men and women of their relationship to Christ as their personal Saviour, as shall beget a gratitude which shall have so earnest and practical a manifestation as to make the world feel that these men and women really regard Jesus Christ as their Saviour.

Editorial Notes.

—General Sir Redvers Buller has returned to England from South Africa and has been given a grand reception by the people. A still greater welcome will doubtless be accorded Lord Roberts on his return, now shortly expected to take place. Deep and widespread sympathy is felt for the brave general on account of his daughter who is critically ill with enteric fever. South Africa has already cost Lord and Lady Roberts their only son; there will be many to pray that the blow that now seems to be impending may be averted.

—The Baptist Congress will be held this year in Richmond, Va., Nov. 30-32. According to the published programme a number of subjects of more or less practical interest will be discussed, including "The Ritschlian Theology—its Meaning and Value," "Is the Trust Beneficial or Injurious to Society," "Wherein lies the Efficacy of Jesus' Work in the Reconciliation?" "Romanism Survivals in Protestantism," "Weak Points in the Baptist Position," and "Child Nurture in Baptist Polity."

—The Acadian Athenaeum for November, pays a fitting tribute to the memory of the late Dr. Theodore Harding Rand in a number of articles by men who, in one way or another, had been associated with Dr. Rand in his life-time and who have given grateful and graceful expression to the profound appreciation which they feel for their departed comrade and for his work. Dr. Steele and Dr. Saunders have written in a somewhat general way. President Trotter has written of Dr. Rand's "Early Years in Ontario," Professor J. H. Farmer, of "The Last Five Years," Mr. Eldon Mullin, of him as "The Man of Thought and the Man of Action in Education," and Mr. John V. Pazzant, who was a classmate of Dr. Rand at Acadia, writes of the old "College Days." For the many friends and admirers of Dr. Rand these articles will give the current issue of the Athenaeum a special value.

—A work entitled "Messiah's Second Advent: A study in Eschatology," by the Rev. Calvin Goodspeed, D. D., Professor of Systematic Theology in McMaster University, is in course of issue by William Briggs, Toronto. There is a wide-spread interest in the question of the true interpretation of the teaching of the Bible about the Second Coming of our Lord. Great conventions are held to discuss the subject, and abundant literature has grown up around it. But the discussions and the literature are almost exclusively from the standpoint of Premillennialism. The candid enquirer who wishes to consider the question in all its bearings can find little to help him understand the alternative view. This work is a thorough inductive study of the Scriptures covering the broad area of the issues between the two positions, by one who has reached conclusions unfavorable to Pre-millennialism. The discussion is timely and will meet a long-felt need.

—Justin McCarthy in his "Reminiscences," tells some good stories respecting the celebrated men whom he has known. One having reference to Carlyle and his overbearing manner in conversation seems worth reproducing

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