

Messenger and Visitor

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Some New Year Thoughts.

With the date of this issue of the MESSENGER AND VISITOR, Christendom enters upon a new year. The first year of the twentieth century is now of the past, as completely and irrevocably of the past as are the years and centuries before the flood. And still time flows on, as we say, unceasingly, and new days and months and years are continually being added to the eternal past. Doubtless we are apt to practise a kind of self-deception when we speak of time. We speak of time as flowing like some swift river, or as flying like an angel of doom, or as wielding a remorseless scythe. But this is to employ language in a purely fanciful as well as figurative sense. For time never flows, or flies. It has no scythe, or sickle, or tooth; it never mows, or reaps or gnaws. Time is no agent; it never does or did or can do anything, but it is, or at least so it seems to us mortals, an essential condition of things being done. Time does nothing, but we apprehend all events as taking place in time. To our apprehension time is eternal, for we cannot even imagine a condition of things in which time should be no more. When therefore we speak of time flying, of the onward march of days and years, we mean that events and processes are occurring simultaneously or successively as they have done from of old. The forces of the world and the universe continue to operate. The heavenly bodies move in accordance with the forces and laws which determine their courses. Upon our planet day and night succeed each other. Men wake and sleep, they are wrought upon by their appetites and emotions, they think and will and act, they see visions and dream dreams. They act alone or together, as individuals, as families, clans, communities, nations,—sometimes uniting in the friendly co-operations and rivalries of industry and social life, sometimes in the holy fellowships of religion and philanthropy, and sometimes contending in the pitiless competitions of trade and ambition, or in the fierce strife and carnage of warfare. And so, by the operation of human minds in their environment, the potentialities of the world are constantly being woven into history, and time is as the invisible loom in which the life forces are constantly operating, or it is the impalpable canvass upon which the great drama of history is being painted. Time is not the weaver nor the forces which operate nor yet the stuff that is being woven into the web of history. Yet doubtless there is an infinite Weaver and Designer, and though the thought and the purpose which He embodies in His work be far beyond human comprehension, yet surely it is only the fool who will say in his heart—“There is no weaver, there is no design.” And when men shall be permitted to behold God’s completed work with that vision which shall see as they are seen and that understanding which shall know as they are known, they will then perceive that the design embodied in the great historic tapestry which is being woven, through the years and the centuries, is not unworthy of its Author.

When we turn from the contemplation of the great time-loom and the totality of history to consider the individual life and its interests, how tremendous the contrast, how microscopic seems this individual life of yours or mine. There will be glorious lights, there will be terrible shadows in the perfected picture. How little difference it can seem to make to the full and ultimate result whether this particular speck of a life is in the light or in the shadow. But let us not forget that each individual speck of humanity is a microsm,—a universe in miniature—

a being created in the divine image and dear to God. And to each individual life it is the matter of supreme concern whether its portion be in the light or in the shadow, whether it reflect the grace and glory of the divine love or the terror of the divine judgment, whether it walk in the light of truth with God or abide with Satan in the darkness.

And if there is one Supreme Architect who designs the universal structure, one infinite Weaver who weaves our individual lives, with all that touches them—or is touched by them, into His work, according to His infinite design, let us consider that it is given unto us also, each in his place and generation, to be architects of our own fortunes and weavers of our own destinies. And as we weave the web of our life, so it stands, a part of the greater web of human history. This process goes on constantly—the weaving of thoughts and desires, volitions and acts, into habits and character and destiny. The pattern upon which we work may stand out before us tolerably clear and well defined, or it may be all jumbled and confused, so that we know not what we are making or trying to make; but clear or confused, with design or without design, the weaving must go on. Our days and their deeds are being woven swiftly, irrevocably into history, and whether they are bright and beautiful with faith and love and hope and helpful deeds, or whether they are dark with hatred, unbelief and iniquity, the work, so far as we are actors in it, will soon be done, the pattern which we have wrought will shortly be finished and the web cut off.

Life, like the weaver’s web, is continuous. What one does today or this year connects itself with, and is more or less determined by, what he did yesterday or last year. The boy is father to the man, and every year of one’s life is in a sense parent to the succeeding year. Tell us perfectly what a man’s life was last year, and you have gone far to tell us what kind of a life he will lead this year. “To him that hath shall be given,” for as a rule a man obtains that which he seeks after. He who has sought and found the things that minister to his highest nature has thereby made it possible for him to receive good things in larger measure, and he who has pandered to the things which minister to his lusts and baser ambitions, thereby increases his inclination for evil things and deadens his desire for the good.

But let us remember too with great thankfulness that the present and the future are not under absolute bondage to the past. If the weaver has been until to-day weaving dark threads and terrible pictures into the web of his life, he may begin to-day to weave bright threads and beautiful pictures, if he will. The man who hitherto has been building on sand may begin to-day to dig deep and lay a secure foundation. This is the Gospel of the Grace of God, that there is deliverance from the tyranny of the past, that there is emancipation for hearts and wills which have been held in the thralldom of Satan. For He has come into the world who saith, “Behold, I make all things new.” Through repentance and faith men may break with their sinful past. For such there is a new heaven and a new earth. This then is the joy and the blessed significance of this New Year’s day, and of every new day, that in the grace and authority of Christ’s gospel, it brings the opportunity and the summons to every soul held in the bondage of its sinful past, to fling away its fetters and accept the liberty of the children of God.

Editorial Notes.

—According to an Ottawa despatch a census of Manitoba shows the following facts in regard to the religious affiliations of the people of the Province. The Presbyterians number 65,322; the Methodists 49,909; the Episcopalians, 44,874; the Roman Catholics, 35,620; the Lutherans, 16,477; the Mennonites, 15,222; and the Baptists 9,118. There are 1232 persons classed as Pagans, most of them presumably Indians. As the total population of the Province is 254,945, this classification appears to leave some 17,000 of the population unaccounted for religiously.

—The Independent is gratified at the prospect of a new career of success for Johns Hopkins University. Some months ago three gentlemen offered a fine site and 153 acres of land on condition that \$1,000,000 be raised for endowment. Three quarters of this sum has been subscribed and the remainder is likely to be raised. In this connection the Independent remarks: “When a man gives his name to an institution it acts for a generation as a notice for other people to keep their hands off and

give nothing. Johns Hopkins University has suffered in this way up to the present time, and the University of Chicago would have suffered quite as much if Mr. Rockefeller’s name had been saddled on it.”

—The class of 1902 in Harvard University has chosen as its class orator a man who has negro blood in his veins, a man who in the South would be classed as a negro, and would accordingly be ostracised from respectable circles of society among white people. The question naturally occurs in connection with such cases as this,—if the mingling of the Caucasian and negro blood produces men who are able to take a foremost place in the most famous universities of the Continent, if it produces such men as Frederick Douglas and Booker T. Washington, is the mingling of the white and the black races a thing so much to be deprecated as it has generally been felt to be?

—We are informed by Rev. H. R. Hatch, Secretary of the Twentieth Century Fund Committee, that Rev. H. F. Adams has been engaged as its agent, to visit the churches in the interest of the Fund, and that he enters upon his work with the beginning of the Year. We think that the Committee is to be congratulated upon securing Mr. Adams for this important work. The deep interest which he feels in the success of our mission work will cause him to put his whole heart into this undertaking, and his earnestness and ability, with the hearty co-operation of his brother ministers, should insure success. We heartily commend Bro. Adams and the work upon which he is entering to the fullest sympathy and co-operation of our churches.

—A remarkable instance of the simplicity and brevity with which the New Testament writers are wont to chronicle wonderful events is found in connection with the Bible lessons for next Sunday. The writer of the Book of Acts describes the stupendous event of the Ascension in these words: “And when he had said these things, as they were looking, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.” An angel appears to the upward gazing disciples to turn their minds from the fact that the Lord’s visible presence is for a time lost to them, to the certainty of His return, and they proceed at once to make ready for His coming. In this we seem to have the keynote of the music to which the Apostolic church marches. The picture set before us is not that of men gazing into heaven after a departed Saviour, but of men who, filled with the Divine Spirit, set themselves most earnestly to work and wait for the fuller and more glorious manifestation of their Lord. The golden age for them is not of the past but of the future. Their eyes turn not backward but forward. Memory holds for them much that is precious, but hope lays hold upon the eternal glory. Their Christ was not only of the past, the Christ of the Manger and the Cross, but the Christ of the present in the power of His resurrection, and the Christ of the future in the fuller glory of His final manifestation.

A New Year’s Motto.

PHIL. 3:13-14.

I. “Reaching forth.” Paul, to use a 20th century phrase, was a hustler. The first glimpse we get of him is at the stoning of Stephen, where he is not merely an idle spectator but takes charge of the clothes of the witnesses. Next he is a deputy sheriff on the way to Damascus, hunting out heretics. There were doubtless many in Jerusalem that hated the followers of Jesus as intensely as Paul did, but they preferred to stay in their comfortable quarters and grumble about the spread of the new faith. Not so with Paul. When he thought a thing should be done, he got about and did it, which is the one rule for successful work.

The vision of the road rid Paul of his false ideas but not of his zeal. He had now new reasons for hustling. One was that he was sure of his ground, for he had the heavenly light and the Divine commission, and another that he wished as far as possible to atone for the past,—two things which should keep us all busy for God. But Paul was not giddy and unbalanced as hustlers are apt to be. He was not one of those uncertain spirits who are no honor to God and no particular use to the devil, but who industriously divide their energies between both parties. He had definite plans of work.

Notice first the bent of Paul’s life. It is “onward.” God takes no pleasure in backsliders. His word is: “Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward.”

1. There should be progress in the truth. Many of us are afraid to entertain any new revelation lest it should turn out heterodox. We refuse to entertain these spiritual strangers lest we should be entertaining tramps unaware. We need to be careful, for there is much of harmful religious speculation abroad today which we should fear and avoid, but there is a vast difference between speculation and self-evident truth. Truth itself never advances because it is infinite, and thus was perfect from the start, but our conceptions of truth are at best imperfect, and we need to advance in our knowledge of Divine things. We must if we are growing. When a Christian gets so full of spiritual knowledge that he can hold no more, it is high time for him to die and go to heaven, for earth has already too many fossilized saints.