

Messenger and Visitor

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B. MCC. BLACK

Editor

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THE PROPOSED SUNDAY RESTAURANT IN THE PARK.

It is known to the readers of the MESSENGER AND VISITOR that a few weeks ago the Board of Directors of the Horticultural Society of St. John decided by a majority vote to open the restaurant in Rockwood Park on Sunday afternoons. It is known to many also that the action taken by the directors has called forth vigorous protests in various quarters. At a meeting of the board of directors held last Tuesday afternoon the subject came up again for consideration. A delegation from the Evangelical Alliance of the city, consisting of Rev. C. T. Phillips, Dr. Fotheringham, Dr. Gates and Dr. Sprague, was heard in opposition to the proposal to open the Park restaurant on Sundays, and after a somewhat ardent discussion of the subject among the directors, it was decided by a vote of 12 to 11 that the question of Sunday opening be referred to the full board of management. It may be worth while to say in this connection that this action was taken in accordance with a suggestion from Mr. Joseph Allison to whom more than to anyone else, we believe the people of St. John are indebted for Rockwood Park and the improvements which from year to year are making it more and more attractive and valuable as a place of public resort.

The opening of a restaurant in the Park on Sunday afternoons where a few strictly temperance drinks and other harmless refreshments may be procured may seem a small thing and hardly worth while raising a contention about, but the principle involved in the endorsement of Sunday business is not a small thing, nor is it one of merely local significance. It strikes us as a question of very considerable importance whether or not that very respectable and influential body of citizens comprised in the directorship of the St. John Horticultural Society shall endorse a proposition to open a restaurant in the Park, and as still more important whether the full board of management shall support such a movement. There is of course always in a community like St. John a considerable minority which is eager for the sake of gain or pleasure, to break down the observance of the Lord's Day as a day of rest and freedom from business, this is to be expected. But if our leading citizens are to take the initiative in disregarding an observance of the day, which has hitherto been generally regarded as sacred and sanctioned by law, what may we expect in the way of general results? Can these gentlemen show us any good reason why, if a restaurant business is to be established in the Park on Sunday afternoons, a general grocer's business should not be permitted on any street of the city on Sunday mornings? The gravity of this matter, as it seems to us, lies not so much in the immediate significance of the thing proposed as in the endorsement of a principle which, under such auspices, may be expected to work effectually against the preservation of a Christian institution which is of incalculable value to the moral and material as well as the religious interests of the community.

In view of the action which a considerable number, if not the majority, of the directors of the Horticultural Society appear to be so anxious to take, it seems worth while to mention a few rather patent facts. In the first place there is no evidence of any strong desire on the part of the public for the opening of a Sunday restaurant in the Park. So far as we have heard, there has been no formal petition from any quarter in favor of the action proposed. The Chairman of the Board is reported as saying that there was "a deep-seated feeling" in its favor. The feeling is perhaps so deeply seated that it has not yet been able to work its way to the surface. One of the members of the board at the Tuesday meeting remarked that the only movement in favor of the Sunday opening, outside the board of directors, had apparently come from the keeper of the restaurant. On the other hand there have been in various quarters, besides the Evangelical Alliance, strong expressions of opinion against the proposed innovation, and a petition against it with more than 1,200 signatures has been presented to the board of directors.

Another fact which deserves attention is that the opening of a Sunday restaurant in the Park, if we are correctly informed, would be in direct violation of legislation on the Statute Books of the Province. Admitting that there is a question as to the validity of this legislation, or even admitting that it certainly is *ultra vires* of the Provincial Legislature, the fact remains that the law was enacted in good faith, it embodied the will of the people of this province as expressed through the action of their legislators, and it is a peculiar commentary on these facts and upon the general principle of popular government that a number of St. John's leading citizens including some of its legislators and its Police Magistrate, should, in their capacity of directors of the Horticultural Society unite to treat this legislation with contempt.

It is further to be remarked that there appeared to be on the part of the directors who advocate the opening of the Sunday restaurant a disposition to pay very little attention to any public expression of opinion in opposition to their project and a great unwillingness even to submit the matter to the full board of management. There was even a somewhat strenuous effort on the part of certain directors to prevent Mr. A. H. Hanington taking any part in the discussion of Tuesday, although his resignation had not been accepted and he had an undoubted right to exercise his privileges as a director if he chose and although he has, as is well known, given constant and valuable service to the interests of the Society. If the feeling in favor of a Sunday restaurant in the Park is so deep-seated and the proposition to establish it so reasonable and commendable as is contended, surely the gentlemen who favor the innovation might be able to possess their souls in patience for a little in the assurance that their views must soon prevail. But the course pursued by some of them on Tuesday seemed to imply that they regarded it as a question of now or never.

THE PRODIGAL AND HIS FATHER.

BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D. D.

Take the plain prose of the story. Is it not still the history of many a young man's fall? He goes drawn by business, to a great city, and there, out of reach of a mother's eye or a father's care, he plunges into animal vices which drain purse and strength of body and mind. It is our misery, as well as our sin, that we try to hustle God out of our thoughts, and vainly imagine that by putting him out of our minds we put him out of our lives. We may and do, go far away from him, but he does not go away from us. Jonah flees to sea, but God's tempests follow him. The prodigal goes to the far country, but the father's love holds him in its grasp.

After riotous profusion comes hunger. That is pitifully exemplified in the slums of every great city, and in the experience of many a young man. It is true in regard to every godless life,—for to every such life a time comes when its delights die, and only a fierce hunger after what can no more be enjoyed remains. "He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver," and appetites indulged grow ravenous. So that the end of every life which has not found its wealth and food in God is an aching sense of emptiness. Cravings abide, satisfactions pass. Deeper degradation follows. The son who resented his father's authority becomes a servant to an alien, and is set to disgusting tasks. The fool who has flung away a fortune in feasting is driven to wish that he could grub in the swine's trough for food, and cannot even "fill his belly"—for pleasing his palate has long ceased to be possible—with their husks. But the far-off land is a cruel land, and though plenty of people were ready to help him to spend his money, none of them will help him to a meal now. The inevitable deterioration of a godless life, the being brought so low as to herd with those whom the man would once have despised, the certainty that chains of bondage will grow heavier, and that the joys of sin will diminish as its tyranny increases, the cruel heartlessness of men, the awful isolation in which companions in evil live,—all these and many other thoughts are included here.

To go away from God and seek satisfaction in material good is a kind of insanity. Such a life is fed on delusions and is essentially irrational. But we often need sharp sorrow to restore our sanity, and the experience of the profitlessness of sin is like the bleeding and shaving of the head and blistering and cold-water douches which madmen used to have administered. The foolish lad "came to himself," and his hunger set him thinking about the lavish housekeeping at home. The aching emptiness led to longing for bread enough, and then came the conviction that it could be had there, and there only. After that and not till after, came the deeper conviction that he had sinned as well as been a fool. Out of the fluctuation of his soul, like the moon out of a stormy sea, rose the resolve: "I will arise and go to my father."

And these three movements of heart and will are Christ's analysis of repentance,—the sense of hunger quickened by the thought of how little our sin has given us, and of how fully God can satisfy us, the deeper recognition of the sinfulness of our profitless life, and the resolve to go back to

*On the Sunday School lesson for May 15 in the *Sunday School Times*.

God. This youth did not let the grass grow under his feet but set out at once. Many of us have said to ourselves all that he said to himself when he came again to his senses, but have put off the decisive act. It is vain to say, "I will arise" unless we do, and if it is not done at the moment it is terribly probable that it will never be done, and that the prodigal, for all his moments of sanity and resolutions, will stay among the swine and meet the fate he vainly foresaw.

The exquisite beauty and deep truth of the picture of the prodigal has tempted us to linger over it, but it is the Father's love that is the real centre of the parable, which should rather be named after him than the son. The shepherd sought the lost sheep, and the woman the lost coin. Why is the Father not represented as seeking the prodigal son? He was seeking him by all the miseries of his hunger and degradation; and it was needful that, in completion of the teaching of the preceding parables, the other side of the truth should be given, and the deliberate, self-conscious action of the penitent should be made prominent. Men are not merely found and brought back, but they must come back. The father must often have sat at his door and looked eagerly over the plain for his poor boy, and his eye must have been made keen-sighted by love or he would not have noticed or recognized the distant figure trailing wearily along. And is it not blessedly true that our Father, who seeks his prodigals, and "waits to be gracious," sees the first faint beginning of desire to be back at home, and comes to meet us at the first tremulous step of return? Are there not gleams of light and sweetnesses like a father's kisses, granted at the very beginning of the way?

The Father's kiss and the son's confession are for themselves alone, and restore the relation between them in all its blessedness. But that is not all. The sheep was simply brought back to the flock as before, and the coin strung again on the thread. But the son has had experiences that affect character and position. His travel-stained rags have to be taken off, a robe of honor and feasting is put on, a ring, the emblem of delegated authority, is on his finger and sandals on his feet. It may be fanciful to give meaning to these three gifts, but we may hint that they express the garment of a holy life, the exercise of authority from the Father, the "alacrity" for the road which comes from "the gospel of peace." At all events, we learn that even repentance and confession of sin turn to our good. To the Father the returned wanderer is tenfold more a son because "he was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found." The shepherd and the woman were glad to recover their property, but God is more than the owner of men, and men are more than his chattels. We are his children, and it is a Father's love, and not a proprietor's sense of possession, that is glad when we come back.

Editorial Notes

—The parable says that when the prodigal had spent all "there arose a mighty famine in that land." That is an experience which the man who tries to get away from God is sure to meet with. That "far country" is a place where a man may waste his substance in riotous living. He may find there some transitory pleasures, something to intoxicate, but nothing to feed his soul, and when he has spent all the substance which he carried with him into that Godless land, he is sure to find himself in bitter want, and strive as he may to appease his hunger on swine's food, he will starve until he return to his Father's house. Man has been created in the Divine likeness for fellowship with God, and he seeks satisfaction elsewhere in vain.

—The anniversary exercises in connection with the completion of the College year at McMaster University, Toronto, were held last week. The University has graduated this year a class of twenty-two in the Arts course, with the degree of B. A. Of these four are ladies. In theology five young men were graduated with the degree of B. Th. Eight graduates received the M. A. degree, and four students completed the three years English course. The preacher of the Baccalaureate sermon was Rev. Dr. Perry of Jarvis Street Church, Toronto. The convocation oration was delivered by Professor Wilson Smith. McMaster is evidently pursuing its way in the line of Christian education with growing strength and usefulness.

—The membership of the Religious Education Association whose Executive office is located at 153 La Salle St., Chicago, is steadily growing and the Gen. Sec., Dr. Ira Landrith, confidently expects to report on an increase of 100 per cent. by the opening of the next Convention, February, 1905. Both individuals and institutions are joining. Colleges, universities, libraries, churches, Sunday Schools and other institutions are uniting as institutional members, while the individual memberships represent the faculty of almost every leading educational institution in the land, besides pretty nearly every strong church, reform movement and the interdenominational organization. The Canadian membership has nearly doubled since the March Convention. The cost of membership is \$3.00 for the first year, \$2.00 annually thereafter. Full information will be furnished upon application to the General Secretary.