

Messenger and Visitor

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A Parable of the Pine Tree and the Lichen.

We remember to have read some time ago an article by Emily Tolman in the form of a parable of the Pine Tree and the Lichen. It is told how upon a barren rock, quite destitute of anything that could nourish the life of a tree or even afford the conditions necessary for the germination of a seed, a pine tree came to grow. The story is beautifully told and the lessons which it teaches are true and important. First a tiny, humble lichen found a place on the rock. "It seemed scarcely more than a stain upon surface of the stone, yet it drank the rain and dew of heaven and absorbed nourishment from the surrounding atmosphere. Occasionally dust, borne on the wings of the wind, settled upon the rock and was held by the rough surface of the lichen. Nor did it live upon these alone, for the acid with which nature provides the lichen dissolved a portion of the very stone itself. So the tiny plant grew and spread until it had prepared soil enough for a bit of moss." The moss helped the lichen by keeping the rock where it grew damp, so that the stone yielded more readily to the acid of the lichen, and thus, by and by there was earth enough to support the life of a rock fern. Then the fern came and "spread its bright green fronds over the surface of the rock and stretched its roots down into a tiny crack, and the frost came and widened it still more." So, many summers and winters came and went, The ferns grew and spread and, dying, made more soil upon the rock, until there was enough for a small shrub to grow in. The shrub in its turn carried forward the work begun by the lichen and the fern. And other plants also found place, which in their living and dying added to the soil and prepared the conditions necessary for something greater than themselves. Then, in the course of time, "there chanced to fall into that spot a seed from a pine cone. Many years before the same thing had happened but there was not soil enough to sustain even a small tree. Now it was very different. The lichen, the moss, the fern, the shrub had all done their work. At last the day of the Pine had come. Year after year it grew and flourished, till in the course of time it became a mighty tree. Birds built their nests and sang their songs in the pine, men and women rested under its cool shade, breathing its health giving fragrance and listening to its plaintive music of its wind-swept boughs." Everybody observed the Pine-tree, praised its goodly stature and enjoyed its pleasant shade, while the little lichens still working on the rocks most persons passed by unnoticed, "not knowing that but for the humble lichen which grew there years and years before the pine tree never could have lived upon the rock."

This parable of the Pine and the Lichen is capable of manifold application. Constantly, in human life and history, the story is repeated. The day of small beginnings is the necessary precedent of the day of great results. The early period of British history, fitly described as "the making of England," was a time marked by dissensions between comparatively weak factions and by fierce and formidable invasions from abroad, but it was a period when the conditions were being prepared out of which should arise that Britannia which now rules the waves. The glory of the British Empire in the past century has far exceeded that of all that preceded, but the other centuries, however obscure and barren some of them

may seem to have been, were a part of the preparation for the matured result. And this, more or less exactly, is the story of the building of all great nations.

The heights reached by men in the various departments of human learning and endeavor were not for the most part attained by sudden flight, but those whose names stand forever associated with the great epochs of human progress, however great they may have been in themselves, could not have achieved the results which made their names immortal but for the persistent thinking and patient plodding of the men who, in the pathway of development, were to them what the lichen, the moss, the fern and the shrub were to the pine tree.

The glory of the Christian dispensation far excels all that preceded it, yet in the development of grace, the fathers and the prophets had their place, and it was necessary that there should be a forerunner who should serve his day and then decrease in order that the Christ might forever increase. And in the person and work of the Redeemer, the humblest place, the utmost degree of service and sacrifice were conditions necessary to the final victory over sin and death and the attainment of the name which is above every name.

In every individual human life the parable finds application. The boy is in a real sense father to the man, childhood is busy laying the foundations for the maturer life. The ceaseless activity and noise of the child are not purposeless and irrational, for in the exuberant exercise of limb and lung are found essential conditions of vigorous manhood. The child toiling over the alphabet or the rudiments of arithmetic is in the lichen stage of scholarship, but these humble beginnings indicate the path which leads to the attainment of the highest culture. All our life in this present world is indeed part of a creation which "groaneth and travaileth in pain," and even the Christian groans in sympathy with the travelling creation, waiting for his complete redemption. Yet the present is necessary to that which is to be, even as that which is sown is necessary to that which is to arise therefrom.

There are lessons of humility and contentment in this parable of the Pine Tree and the Lichen. If there are those who stand to others as pine trees, tall and strong and beautiful, giving shelter and shade to many, let them look, not with contempt, but with respect and gratitude, upon those more obscure lives whose long humility and faithfulness made a larger and more fruitful life possible for others. And if there are others who occupy the place of the lichen, the moss and the fern, let them not despise their opportunities for service, nor envy those who tower above them, since, in the providence of God, all are working together with the Author and the Lord of life, to make the full and finished results of life possible. God has a care for little things, for little deeds, for little persons. The Father in Heaven does not forget the sparrow that falls. He does not forget even the shrubs, the ferns, the mosses and the lichens.

Says Dr. J. B. Gambull.

"We Baptists greatly need to make a courageous application of the fundamental Baptist principle of obedience to the great mission question. Much has been written and spoken on the duty of every person to be a missionary. What does Christ say, that will settle the whole matter? His churches are instituted in the world to execute his divine will. To them is committed the solemn duty, the sublime privilege, of carrying out the commission. When you come down to the real point, there is nothing in human language clearer than the command to go, teach, baptize, etc. Missions do not stand in the catalogue of things optional. Missions are mandatory. Every church member must be a missionary or else put the command of Jesus Christ under his feet. Really we take on ourselves too much thinking, planning, reasoning, arguing. Christ has done the thinking for us, putting his own thoughts in human words, and called us to obey. Obedience is better than sacrifice. We might disperse with a vast amount of thinking, if we might have a great deal more of simple obedience."

"The true battle line for Baptists is along the line of obedience. Here we are strong, or may be, if we do not dissipate our strength on matters quite

secondary and remote. Holding unflinchingly to the Bible as the Word of God, recognizing no human authority in religion, we may with tremendous force concentrate on the fundamental Baptist doctrine of obedience to Christ. This is the strong inner line of our world-wide battle for the supremacy of Jesus Christ. Nothing is settled until it is settled at this point. The supremacy of this principle will minimize the importance of a thousand other things, such as history, "the authorities" so-called, the deliverance of councils, and the like. We have always been strong in proportion as we have dignified related matters. The Baptist position is strong in its simplicity and simple in its strength. Christ is divine. The Scriptures are his Word. Obedience is our duty. With the New Testament, Baptists could go out and conquer the world on this principle.

To a large extent, it is already conquered. Thousands who believe with us, because of weakness at the main point, have not come into our ranks. If every Christian in the world, next Sunday, were to get out of bed on the right side and do what he believes the Word of God commands with respect to baptism, there would be such a baptizing as has never been recorded in the annals of time. St. Patrick's ten thousand in a day would not be a circumstance. Why are all these good people not baptized? Because they do not feel that they are absolutely bound to do what Christ says. To re-establish this fundamental principle in the mind of Christendom is to win the day for good and all."

This is greatly to the point. It lays the stress where it rightly belongs. If our people could be led by this thinking to take the Master at his Word, there would soon be great and mighty changes in all our methods and work.

Editorial Notes.

—Dr. George A. Gordon of Boston is of the opinion that the congregational system of church government does not stand at a disadvantage when compared with other ecclesiastical forms, and that this is especially true in view of the progressive character of modern life and the democratic of American institutions. In the course of an address delivered the other day before the American Congregational Association and the Boston Congregational Club in Tremont Temple, Dr. Gordon said: "For the admission of new light and for closeness to the order of our national existence, Congregationalism has an immense advantage. The local church is independent. It chooses its own minister, its own officers, it determines what its covenant or creed shall be. It may open its gates to the east and to the west, to the north and to the south. It is shackled by no man, it is hampered by none. Our denominational societies are the eyes that search the land, that search the world for the needs of men and the opportunities of the gospel, the eyes to discover human want and the arms to bring together the hunger of the soul and the bread of life."

—The streams of immigration flowing into the United States this year from European countries is of unprecedented volume. The immigration for the month of April was 126,286, and for the current fiscal year it is expected that the figure will exceed 800,000. These people come largely from the eastern countries of Europe. They are of course ignorant of the English language, and their social and moral condition is not generally of a character to make them a highly desirable class of immigrants. Their coming in so great numbers involves religious, as well as social and political problems. They need the gospel, and the work of giving the truth in their own tongues is one to tax the resources of all the Home Missionary Societies of the land. Our own country too has an increasing influx of settlers from the old countries, and though the volume of immigration here is small in comparison with that flowing into the United States, yet there are enough of the class above described coming to Canada to enlist our sympathies and to afford abundant opportunity for the work of evangelization. As most of our immigrants go immediately to the northwest, it is there especially that the need of missionary effort of this character is felt. Motives of patriotism and of Christian charity unite to urge upon us the duty of giving the gospel to these people who for good or ill are to wield an important influence in the making of Canada.

—The Methodists of the world have just been celebrating the second centenary in the birth of John Wesley, the founder of that great denomination which now numbers its communicants by millions and which during the past few years has raised, in addition to its ordinary contributions, many millions of dollars to promote the cause of Christ in the world. In the days of John Wesley his name was one much spoken against even by many who assumed to speak on behalf of Christ and of his church.