

ONTARIO EVANGELIST.

T. H. E.

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"Go speak to the people ALL the words of this Life."

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CORRESPONDENCE.

LETTER FROM CHINA.

Please excuse my not writing for so long, as I have had other business to attend to. Do you suppose that our people in Canada are going to wake up to their responsibilities? The church of Christ should not be on the defensive and merely keeping up an existence at home, but should be on the aggressive reaching out to all the nations of the earth and fighting darkness and sin. With faith in our brethren at home we have opened work in one of the largest centres of China, the seat of government of three provinces, nearly one hundred millions of people. Nankin itself has about one-half million. It would surprise one of our brethren at home to see how thickly settled this part of China is, and how numerous are the large towns and villages. Millions of these people have never heard the gospel, and those who have heard but partially understand. The laborers are too few. Our missionaries are as yet only preparing for work, and can only speak imperfectly the language. God has blessed us richly so far, two have been baptized and others are learning the way. When God has encouraged us so, are we going to falter? We are praying and working for ten more young, well educated men for China at once. We must have more men to do good work in this large place. We should have at least one other medical man. Many Chinese hear the gospel to scoff and ridicule, but there are those of good and honest hearts. They are so sunken in sin that they will not come to us for the truth. We must "go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in." Spiritual, unlike material things, do not diminish by giving to others. The man of the church that distributes spiritual blessings to others will have the most spiritual life. What will become of a church that can only expend money occasionally for a preacher to edify itself, and does not consider the world's needs? I think it must be a failure because it disobeys Christ's commission, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." All cannot go, but they can encourage by their prayers, and contribute of their means for this great work. True it is easier to give the dollars than to go out to the field, but God will bless the giver. Cannot the Canadian churches send out another man? The Canadian Methodists have some of the best missionaries in Japan. Cannot the Canadian Disciples send some first-class men to China?

Yours in Christ,
W. E. MACKLIN.

Shanghai, Sept. 5, '88.

MEAFORD LETTER.

Knowing that the brethren throughout the Province are always desirous of hearing of the success of the gospel, and not having seen much church news from this section of the Lord's vineyard lately, I have concluded to send the following, trusting that space will be found in your esteemed paper for the same.

During the month of August Bro. Daniel Sommer, of the *Otago Review*, held a meeting in our new meeting house here which lasted over four Lord's Days and which was attended with success, 30 being added. Bro. Sommer is a large, well built and manly man, in the prime of life, possessed of a powerful voice, and on the platform presents a commanding appearance and proclaims the truth as he sees it in a clear, emphatic and convincing manner. He is a diligent student of God's word and in his preaching aims to inspire confidence in that word as man's only rule of faith and practice.

For the encouragement of those who are interested and engaged in Sunday-school work, I might say that of the 30 baptized during this meeting about 20 are scholars who regularly attend the Sunday-school. May God bless them and keep their young hearts pure and true to the cause which they have espoused.

For some unexplained or unexplainable cause a successful meeting is sure to arouse the ire of one or all of the sectarian preachers in the place. No exception to that rule was made in this case.

Soon after Bro. Sommer's departure mutterings of disapprobation began to be heard from several quarters. A young Presbyterian minister, who, I dare venture to say, never read two of our publications or heard as many of our sermons, publicly warned the congregation he was invited to address, not to hear our preaching, while the Baptist preacher, Rev. Mr. Guy courageously announced through the town papers that on the 2nd September he would preach in the morning on "The Church of Christ defined and intolerant sectarian bigotry condemned" and in the evening on "The gospel of the devil, or Satan as an angel of light exposed."

I did not hear the discourse in the morning but being curious to know something about the "Gospel of the devil" I made it a point to hear what the Reverend gentleman had to say as to what the gospel of the devil was, and who was preaching that gospel. Consequently, supplied with pencil and paper I hied away in the evening to hear and record the words of this newly fledged "Campbellite slayer." After reading a portion of the eleventh chapter of second Cor. and 14 verses of 2 Tim. 3 chapter, he began a discourse which for misrepresentation and manifestations of ignorance and vindictiveness has not been surpassed this side of the dark ages. He boldly declared that the Disciples did not believe in "repentance" as a condition of salvation, that they denounce and consign to hell all denominations except themselves, that they believe all that is necessary in order to salvation is baptism, &c., &c. While listening to this, baroque the words of our Saviour came into my mind, "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake" for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for great is your reward in heaven; for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."

It appears to me, that as the nineteenth-century draws towards its close, and light and liberty are supposed to abound, Baptist preachers as well as ministers of other sectarian denominations should know better and act better than did the persecutors who lived during the earlier years of previous reformations. But when preachers are frequently found warning people against even attending our meetings, denouncing our teaching as dangerous, declaring that we ignore "repentance" as a condition of salvation, that we teach and believe that water washes away sin, that we consign to perdition such heroes as Luther, Calvin, Wesley, Knox and all unimmersed persons and that we deny the existence and operation of the Holy Spirit, &c., &c., it seems to me that such preachers possess characteristics which became the dark ages more than this age of light and liberty.

I cannot understand how it is that men who claim to be called of God to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ, peace and good will to men, and that charity which thinketh no evil, will so persistently misrepresent our teaching. The word *misrepresent* too feebly expresses my meaning inasmuch as it is a fact well known to all honest readers that not one single *writer, preacher or public teacher* of note or standing in our ranks has ever taught that it is not necessary for men to "repent" in order to salvation or that *water* washes away sin &c.

The Campbells, Scotts, Stones, Milligans, Lards, Franklins, Erretts, Allans, McGarveys and a host of others—grand and valiant men, taught and are still teaching that faith, repentance, confession and obedience are essential to salvation or pardon from past sins, that without these prerequisites all the waters in the world cannot wash away sin. They also taught and teach that the Holy Spirit dwells in all God's children, that the body of Christ or his church is permeated by that Spirit and that "If any man have not the spirit of Christ he is none of his." Yet notwithstanding these facts men who want to be considered honest, who would be horrified were we to characterize them as slanderers will continue to reiterate statements, with reference to our faith and practice, which have been denied and disproved times without number.

May God hasten the day when sectarian bigotry will give place to the glorious liberty

which belongs to his children and when preachers and teachers will not shun to declare the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, then, and not till then can we expect to see the authority of Jesus Christ universally admitted and respected and the Bible exalted to that position which every truly loyal citizen of His Kingdom desires it to occupy.

Meaford, Oct. 1st, 1888. H. T. L.

P. S.—Since Bro. Sommer's meeting closed two more have put on Christ in his own appointed way; they came out at our regular Sunday evening meetings under the preaching of our beloved brother Stirling, and thus the good work moves on. H. T. L.

DANGERS OF CONSCIENTIOUSNESS.

Everything good has dangers connected with it; and the Letter it is, the greater the peril of its perversion and misuse. Religion embraces the highest interests of man, and yet it is in this very sphere that we find the most revolting fanaticism and the most degrading superstitions. It is just because religion is so high and sacred a thing, that gross and low conceptions, entertained as religious, seem so repulsive to noble minds. The fact that a mother throws her infant into the river as a *religious* act lends new horror to the deed. Where any shocking act is committed under a fanatical, religious enthusiasm, it seems doubly horrible for that very reason. Hence men shudder most at the crimes which were committed under the name of religion. The sacred name of religion has been made to cover the most dangerous and deceptive acts and plans of men. These facts illustrate a general principle. Every good quality has peculiar dangers connected with it, in the sense that it may, if exercised more or less directly. Conscientiousness is an excellent quality, but as it is exercised by imperfect human nature, it is attended with peculiar dangers. This results partly from the feeling that a man's conscience is sacred and inviolable. Our doctrines of religious and intellectual liberty have made much of this idea. We respect men's conscientious convictions. This is a noble and generous attitude of mind, but it involves us often in the necessity of trying to respect a conscientiousness which scarcely deserves respect. It tempts and encourages men to parade under the name of conscience much that is not fairly entitled to be dignified by that honorable name.

What are some of the dangers here alluded to? One is the tendency to enlarge the sphere of conscience so as to make it embrace more than matters of moral import. Some religious people suddenly display a marvelously quickened conscientiousness about the way in which the church work shall be done, or the business managed, or the expenses raised. Really the questions involved are only questions of expediency, probably; but an advantage is gained by the man who has a particular view or plan if he can create the impression that he has conscientious scruples in the matter,—that the question whether the salary shall be raised by pew-rents, subscription or voluntary contributions, is with him a matter of conscience. If he can make himself and others believe that it is so, he gains added respect and consideration for his view or theory by taking it out of the sphere of mere practicability and policy, and dignifying it with peculiar and moral significance.

This method of elevating questions of taste and judgment into questions of conscience is, probably, honestly pursued as a general rule; but it is not, for that reason, less specious and dangerous. Persons have been known who have had conscientious scruples against standing during the invocation at church, and how many devout persons have been known to decline, for conscience' sake, to join in the Lord's prayer or the reading of a portion of Scripture. These are questions of propriety, no doubt; but they should be treated as such, and not as if one course were inherently right, and the other inherently wrong.

A confusing of moral and non-moral questions is one of the dangers that most frequently appears under the guise of conscientiousness. This results from an unwarranted extension of the sphere of conscience, which properly embraces only

questions of right and wrong. It is unfair and unjust, in matters of mere expediency and judgment, for a man to seek to invest his opinion with the sanctions of right, and to brand the opposite opinion as wrong. It is precisely in this way that personal wishes, prejudices, and even crochets, are often paraded as matters of conscience, in order to win for them the consideration which is generally felt to be due to real conscientious convictions.

There are special difficulties and dangers arising from the fact that the consciences of many men are narrow and unintelligent. By many it is felt to be quite enough to justify, or at least to excuse, any act, that it is conscientiously done. In fact, this circumstance alone does not necessarily speak strongly in its favor. The important question is by what sort of a conscience the act is supported. It may be a conscience "scared as with a hot iron," dulled to the finer perception of right and wrong, or a conscience so permeated with pride and selfishness, that it justifies its possessor in whatever he may do. The fact that an act is conscientious does not make it right. Men need to be more than conscientious; they need to be intelligent, keenly sensitive to truth and goodness, and quick to discern the distinction between ethical questions and those which belong to other spheres.

There is a type of conscientiousness which, though not of the highest order, is still deserving of most careful and considerate treatment. It is that over-sensitive and timid conscientiousness which is so anxious to avoid evil that it finds evil, or fears it may find it, in matters having no moral character in themselves. Such was the conscientiousness of the "weak brethren" whom St. Paul treated so wisely and generously in the early churches. They had been converted from heathenism, and in their honor at the cross, idols of their heathen gods were set up, and they were so afraid to eat of the meat of animals which had been slain, that they refused to do so. It was a most natural and pardonable, though not a highly intelligent, scruple. It showed a defective idea of Christianity which makes defilement moral, and not physical. It showed a lingering belief or assumption that an idol was "something in the world" which was contrary to fact. St. Paul freely characterized it as a groundless prejudice, but he was so wise as to understand its sources and the best mode of treating it. Its worst feature was simply that it was weak. It did not involve any fundamental moral perversion. Hence he did not attack it. It would remedy itself as the work of Christian instruction proceeded. When these converts grew out of their heathen conceptions of external defilement into the ethical ideas which Christianity teaches, their scruples would fall away of themselves.

It is clear, then, that there is a wide difference among those forms of conscientiousness which deal with non-moral questions. Some are bold and pretentious, others are timid and humble. These qualities mark two classes of men who are conscientious in by no means the best way. One is loud and confident. They know they are right, and that those of different views and practices are wrong. The man of this type is no "weak brother"; he is nothing if not "strong" in his own opinions, and confident of his correctness. The man of the other class is not so sure he is right; in fact, he is so uncertain that he is often morbidly anxious lest he go wrong. St. Paul met both classes of men, and dealt very differently with them. The Pharisee is a type of one class, the "weak brother" of the other. We all know both classes of men. The first class is conscientious, but often stubbornly and selfishly so; the other is conscientious, but generally weakly and unintelligently so. Both need instruction, but in different ways. The man of "strong" conscience, who has convictions so confident and numerous that he has a pronounced judgment on all questions, needs to learn that conscience may become so comprehensive as to lose all its quality; and the man of "weak" conscience, who finds moral questions where there are none, needs to be kindly taught that there are quite enough real moral questions to keep a man's conscience busy, without forcing it to labor in spheres where plain common sense is wholly competent to act.

A splendid quality is conscientiousness; but it needs to be enlightened, unselfish, just, sensitive and wise.—*Sunday School Times.*