

Messenger and Visitor

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THE PROBLEM OF PROVIDENCE.

A pastor who ran in to see us not long ago, propounded the question, Can you explain to me why it is that it so frequently occurs that a good and useful man is laid aside by sickness or cut off by death, while the wicked man is prospered in his wickedness? And then our friend went on to give instances in point which had lately come under his own observation. Every observing and thoughtful person, we may be sure, witnesses facts which suggest to him such questions, and every pastor, doubtless, is frequently called upon to resolve the riddle. It is an old, old problem, as old as Hebrew psalmody at least, and we know not how much older. The prosperity so frequently enjoyed by the wicked, and the affliction so frequently suffered by the righteous constituted a most perplexing problem for the psalmists and sages of ancient Israel. Some of them, we know, found it difficult to reconcile the experiences of life with the Divine goodness. The writer of the seventy-third psalm confesses that he had been sorely tempted to doubt the goodness of God. His feet were almost gone, his steps had well nigh slipped, for he was envious at the foolish, when he saw the prosperity of the wicked. The gospel of Christ with its assurance of immortality, has certainly given the Christian much light on this problem, of which the ancient Hebrews were not in possession. But the ways of Providence have not yet been made so luminous to our eyes but that much obscurity remains, and those of the clearest vision have to confess that they can but know in part and prophesy in part.

It may perhaps help us somewhat in our wrestling with this problem of Providence to consider that some measure at least of difficulty and trial was necessary to the best development of human life on the earth. It was that he might achieve the highest end possible, that man was placed under conditions which should call forth his best of body, mind and spirit. He was intended to rule the world, but before he could rule he must conquer. It is by solving problems that mankind has grown in power and lordship. Man who faces no difficulties, endures no hardships, wrestles with no problems, is man at his lowest. We may be inclined to think that some of the difficulties are too great, some of the trials too severe, some of the problems too dark for us. We may be tempted at times to think that Infinite Power and Goodness could have produced a world better adapted to the needs of God's children. But would it be the part of human modesty or wisdom to affirm any such thing? And if we admit that some measure of difficulty and consequent discipline is necessary to the highest human development and happiness, where shall we draw the line? Someone will perhaps say that such difficulties as impel men to labor and invention, and so make for a larger use of their powers, are good and wholesome, but that such as distress and cripple them are rather of the nature of a calamity and a curse. But may it not be that these experiences which we are apt to regard as calamities are really the condition and the occasion of the greater blessings. If only we have the wisdom and the faith to take advantage of them. Many a boy has suffered an accident which has crippled him physically for life, but the loss of physical power has resulted in his acquiring an education, and what seemed a sad calamity brought blessing to himself and to the world. But it will be said that there are afflictions which are not like this. There are experiences which seem not merely to lop off a hand or maim a limb, but to strike at a vital part. One is cut down in the midst of his years and the midst of his work, and left to suffer through long and helpless years. Another through bereavement suffers the loss of all that made the world bright to him and life enjoyable. What compensation is there for losses such as these? We must indeed walk softly on such ground as this. This is no place for pious dippyancy. Let not the men who have not felt the stroke of the Almighty presume to counsel Job. But must we conclude that even in such loss as this there can be no compensation? If in the smaller experiences of loss there is compensation, may we not confidently expect that in those awful experiences which sometimes overwhelm the souls of men there is also

a vaster gain to match the deeper loss? This surely has been the experience of many who have passed through the dark waters. Many since the psalmist's day have found that affliction did not kill but heal. "There are no times in life," says Phillips Brooks, "when opportunity, the chance to be and do, gathers so richly about the soul as when it has to suffer. Then everything depends on whether the man turns to the lower or the higher help. If he resorts to mere expedients and tricks, the opportunity is lost. He comes out no richer or greater, nay, he comes out harder, poorer, and smaller for his pain. But if he turns to God, the hour of suffering is the turning point of his life." "If he turns to God"—that is indeed the pivotal fact for human welfare and destiny. If a man finds rest and fellowship in God, there is compensation in that for all suffering and loss. If a man turns away from God and loses forever the light of his countenance, that is calamity indeed for which all the wisdom of the ages knows no remedy. But the gospel of Christ brings to men the message that nothing but their own sinful wills shall banish their souls from God.

There are some further remarks which we had intended to make in this connection on the ways of Providence, but not to lengthen this article unduly, we will reserve what we have to say on this point to another occasion.

BAPTISTS IN SWEDEN.

A correspondent of the *Baptist Argus* of Louisville, Ky., Rev. C. E. Benander, writing from Stockholm, regards the outlook for the Baptist churches in Sweden as most encouraging. From what he has himself seen on the field and from what he has heard from others, there is evident among the people, Mr. Benander thinks, an unusually earnest longing for a powerful spiritual awakening. There has been much earnest, agonizing prayer for an overwhelming manifestation of the Holy Spirit, and these prayers have received at least a partial answer. There are from different parts of the country reports of numerous conversions and baptisms, and from many quarters the cry is heard, "Send us messengers of the Lord, who will preach to us the word of salvation." But though the harvest is great the laborers are few. "There is no difficulty," Mr. Benander writes, "in gathering people to our meetings, for in most places the Baptists have the good will of the populace." In the Baptist Theological Seminary at Stockholm there are thirty-nine students. During a six weeks vacation at Christmas these students were preaching—some assisting pastors of large churches and others giving their service to pastorless fields. The demand for preachers was however about twice as great as the Seminary could supply. The students on their return gave an encouraging report of their work, many of them being able to tell with joy that "the Lord had blessed their efforts and made them instrumental in bringing many souls to Christ."

Something in the way of an Evangelical Union has lately been formed in Sweden. During the second week in February the Congregationalists, Baptists and Methodists of the country met for the first time in a concerted assembly to discuss questions of common and vital interest. The meeting was held in Stockholm. More than five hundred delegates attended, and this conference, Mr. Benander says, will probably mark a new era in the history of the Free Church movement in Sweden. Some of the resolutions adopted by the conference indicate some of the disabilities under which Baptists and other Nonconformists labor in Sweden. One of the resolutions was to the effect that it be pronounced an injustice that dissenters without exception are compelled to pay annual taxes for the support of the State Church and its clergymen, and it was voted to send in an appeal to the proper authorities for the removal of this injustice. Another resolution was adopted petitioning the authorities that it be made lawful for any person in Sweden who is above eighteen years of age to leave the State Church, so as not to be counted as a member of the same, even without the stated intention of joining any legally recognized Christian organization. The conference also pronounced with emphasis for a strict observance of the Sabbath, and also for total abstinence from intoxicating drinks as the only thing worthy of a Christian in respect to the temperance question.

RUMORS OF PEACE.

During the past week or two there have been very persistent rumors of approaching peace, though on what these rumors are based does not clearly appear. It is understood that France is very desirous of putting an end to the war, and has been endeavoring to bring about negotiations to that end. This is probably enough, and it is also very credible that Russia in spite of her declared determination to carry on hostilities, would be glad to bring the war to an end if that could be done without too great humbling of her pride. It is reported that Count Lamsdorf, the Russian Minister of War, has communicated to the French Government, as a negative basis for negotiations, that Russia declines to consider any cession of territory or the payment of any indemnity, leaving Japan to determine whether peace could be arranged in harmony with such a proposition. That Japan will consider any peace on such terms seems most unlikely, and Baron Hayashi, Japanese Minister in

London, is quoted in an Associated Press despatch as saying: "A cession of Territory and indemnity are the only points negotiable, as Japan's ante-bellum demands have already been secured by Japan." M. Takahashi, Japan's special financial commissioner in London, also said that the war had cost Japan from \$250,000,000 to \$300,000,000 the first year and would probably cost \$350,000,000 this year. What indemnity would be demanded he could not say, but beyond it would be at least sufficient to cover the expenses of the war. In the face of these and similar statements, doubt however, the St. Petersburg correspondent of the *London Times* strongly reaffirms his declaration as to the proximity of peace, and says that information from unimpeachable sources shows that Russia and Japan have selected President Roosevelt as a mediator, that negotiations are in progress, and that the suspension of hostilities may be shortly expected.

Editorial Notes.

—Since undergoing the operation for cancer, some weeks ago, President Harper has been resting at Lakewood, New Jersey, and taking the Roentgen rays treatment. A New York despatch of April 1 says that Dr. Harper has arrived in that city from Lakewood, accompanied by his son, and is greatly improved in health by his rest and the treatment.

—Rev. R. J. Campbell, minister at the City Temple, London, though not a Baptist, has no doubt that immersion was the primitive Christian mode of Baptism. To a correspondent who asks whether the rite was so administered Mr. Campbell in the *British Weekly* replies "Unquestionably so. The very word baptize means immersion." He adds, "As far as evangelical Christians are concerned the only difference of opinion on the subject would be whether baptism by immersion is necessary, so long as the definite stand is made which willingness to be baptized signifies."

—An article appears in another column—at least we hope it appears there—entitled "Neglectful Pastors." This article was given to the printer last week along with an editorial article having some reference to it. It was of course our intention that both articles should appear in last week's issue. But this was a case in which the editor proposed and the printer disposed. Accordingly, the contributed article was omitted. Under the circumstances we can only offer our sincere regrets to our correspondent and ask our readers to read the article "Neglectful Pastors" in connection with the editorial "According to That Which a Church Hath," of last week.

—Replying some days ago to questions in the British House of Commons, Mr. Broderick, Secretary of State for India, said the latest figures on the plague in India, showed that for the four weeks ending Feb. 18, in the Bombay Presidency, there were 13,475 deaths, and for the four weeks ending March 18 in the rest of India, there were 125,550 deaths. The total number of deaths from the plague in the Bombay Presidency from Jan. 1 to Feb. 28, was 28,721, and in the rest of India, from Jan. 1 to Mar. 11, 318,178. Mr. Broderick said he communicated with the Viceroy of India looking to a remedy for this deplorable loss of life, and that it had been decided to send out a scientific expedition to investigate the cause. The expedition will start immediately.

—Alluding to the results of the great revival for the Baptists of Monmouthshire, the *British Weekly* says:—"At the quarterly meeting at Blaenau, on Wednesday of last week, the secretary, (the Rev. John Williams) said that sixty-six churches of their association had sent in returns which showed that there was a total of 5,668 revival converts. 'Marvelous work' was his comment, and the members broke out into a revival hymn of thanksgiving. The Rev. J. A. Evans, of Ebbw Vale said the question of additional accommodation had become serious. There had been an addition of 130 members to this church within the last few months. It was almost incredible. God had blessed them far beyond their anticipation. They had twice as many members as they could accommodate."

—Arrangements have been made for a two weeks series of meetings under the auspices of the Brussels St. and the Tabernacle Baptist churches, St. John, opening with a meeting in the Tabernacle Monday evening April 3, to be addressed by Pastor Cohoe. The next evening the meeting is in Brussels St. with an address by Pastor Stackhouse, and so on alternately, except that on Friday evenings each congregation meets in its own church and the meeting is led by the pastor. Some of the subjects announced for the meetings are as follows: "The Vision of the Kingdom of God;" "The Forgiveness of Sins;" "Entering the Kingdom;" "Prejudice and its Remedy;" "Christianity and Creeds;" "The Magnetic Christ;" "Profit and Loss in Religion." We trust that these services may result in much good to all who shall come within the range of their influence.

—The Anglican Bishop of Dorking, who until recently was vicar of St. George's, Barrow, and Archdeacon of Furness, writing to his parishioners in reference to the Revival in Wales, says: "Having three days to spare, I spent them incognito in the heart of a revival district. I have seen a mining village a month after the revival had passed, with four chapels all lighted up and full, not just on Sunday,