

Messenger and Visitor

The Maritime Baptist Publishing Company, Ltd.

Publishers and Proprietors
TERMS } \$2.00 PER ANNUM.
\$0.50 IF PAID IN ADVANCE

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Printed by PATERSON & CO., 195 and 107 Germain St.

The Home Mission Work.

Many of our Baptist people in these Provinces live in cities, towns or large villages where religious privileges abound. Every Sunday morning and evening, by walking a short distance from their own comfortable homes to a comfortable church, they can have the privilege of listening to the voice of the living preacher and of uniting with their fellow Christians in worship. Then, during the week, with little sacrifice on their own part, they are able to meet once or more times in religious fellowship and worship with their brethren. The minister lives near by, and if they are ill or otherwise in need of his pastoral care, he is at hand to advise and to minister to their spiritual needs.

But there are others very differently situated in regard to religious privileges. They live in the more sparsely settled districts of country where, to gather even a small congregation, most of the people must come a considerable distance. The place of meeting is perhaps a church building, perhaps a school house not over comfortable or inviting. There is a service once a fortnight, perhaps only once a month, with long intervals, it may be, when there are no meetings at all, because there are no funds in the Home Mission treasury to support a minister on the field. Then when the missionary comes to hold a service, he preaches and moves on with haste to another part of his wide field. His visits to the homes of his people are necessarily few and far apart.

For Christian people who have lived so long in the midst of great religious privileges that they have in great part lost the ability to estimate their value, it should be a wholesome thing to reflect upon the circumstances of those who are so differently situated. Let the town Christian who can find in a slight unpleasantness of the weather a sufficient excuse for remaining at home on a Sunday morning, with a comfortable church and all the privileges of worship a few minutes walk away, try to put himself, or herself, in the place of the many who would gladly go miles on such a morning to enjoy like privileges if only they were within reach. Let us think, too, of the missionary pastors who, in summer's heat and winter's cold, have to travel long distances in order to fill their appointments, and who, at this season of the year especially, when the roads are bad and the weather often cold and stormy, have to suffer much discomfort. Nor can it be said that these men are compensated in any worldly sense for their toil and discomforts, for in no case is the salary more than sufficient to meet in a very moderate way the needs of their families, and in many cases it is to be feared it is far less than that. These men, toiling on quietly, uncomplainingly from month to month, sometimes amid heart-breaking discouragements and again with great joy as they reap the harvest of the seed which they or their predecessors in the work had sown in tears, are surely entitled to a warm place in our sympathies and to what material help we can contribute to make their work effective and fruitful.

A great deal of faithful work has been done in the Home Mission fields of these provinces and much is being done in the present. As a denomination we have great reason for thankfulness for this work and equally great reason for giving it a liberal support. There are none of our strong churches in the cities, towns and villages that have not been blessed by its influences. Some of these churches were themselves Home Mission interests in the beginning. All of them will find, probably among their best members, those who came to them from country mission churches, and not a few perhaps will find that to such churches they are indebted for their pastors.

The opportunities of our Home Mission work are large, much larger than our Boards with the means now placed at their disposal can undertake. Doors to promising fields of effort are open here and there which cannot be entered because the means to support missionary effort are not available. It is a hard trial to the members of these Boards to be obliged to say "No" to the earnest appeals for help which come from destitute sections of country, and especially from those where, from the sowing of the seeds of truth at present, there is prospect of abundant returns by and by. It is often urged—and with much truth—by those who plead for the home cause that our Home Mission work lies at the foundation of all our denominational interests. Wise planting and liberal fostering of our Home Mission work will result in a larger ability to promote every other department of Christian effort in which we are engaged.

Editorial Notes

—In a recent sermon Dr. Parker of London strongly denounced the tendency of some "delightful English people" to let the heathen alone. Such people forget, he said, that they come from heathen, dom. Their ancestors painted themselves blue, and were not averse from making meals of each other. People who say, "let the heathen alone" never saw Christ never felt the power of his love.

—There are said to be some twelve hundred Chinese in San Francisco who are members of Christian churches. The Chinese are receiving more consideration than formerly from the white people of the State. This is due in part to the fact that a Christian spirit is making itself felt more effectively in the treatment of the Orientals, and in part doubtless to the fact that there is now coming to be a considerable number of American born Chinese whose votes at least are bound to be treated with some measure of consideration by the politicians.

—The people of the latitude of New York are not supposed to be an easier prey for sharpers than people elsewhere. Significant proof is therefore afforded of the general gullibility of human nature in the fact that a certain bogus New York concern, calling itself the "Franklin Syndicate," and promising to pay ten per cent weekly on investments, was able to find many patrons and to gather in money to the amount of hundreds of thousands, if not millions of dollars. The authorities at length interfered with the "syndicate's" fine scheme and broke up the business, but not until many a poor fool had been duped, and the head of the concern has managed to get away with well-lined pockets.

—A good deal is heard these days respecting the relation of God to mankind. Is it a relationship of fatherhood or of moral government? Is God Master or is He Father? The question is not altogether a modern one. How ought we to think of God? Is a very old question indeed, and one sees it reflected in the words of Malachi in the opening verses of his prophecy. The prophet does not consider it in any philosophical or theoretical sense. He does not indeed discuss the question at all. But what he says implies that, whether a man regards God as father or his master, the relationship is one that involves a divine authority on the part of God and a dutiful service on the part of man. If God is our Father we are bound to honor him, and if he is our Master we are equally bound to show him reverence. It is well for us to look at this question not merely in respect to what the relationship involves on God's part, but also in regard to what it involves on our part. If God is our Father let us endeavor to act toward him as children should act toward a Heavenly Father. Dr. Maclaren well says: Modern ideas of God as father and of us as sons would be all the better for a pretty large infusion of Malachi's conception of authority on the one side and of honor on the other as essential to the relationship.

—A good deal of Protestant Mission work has been done in France in recent years, and while the results have not been so large as could be desired, the sowing of good seed has not been in vain. Some fruit has been gathered and there are hopeful indications of greater results to come. The village of Montiel is situated in the midst of a district where for a long time—perhaps for centuries—there had not been one Protestant Christian and where a hundred monasteries and convents are to be found, and a statue of Mary sixty feet high stands on a hill overlooking the town of LePuy. To this supposed stronghold of Roman Catholicism an evangelist was sent a year ago, and as a result of his preaching a congregation of 150 persons has been gathered. Besides being asked to remain among the people as their pastor, he has been besought by the people of twenty-two neighboring villages to come and tell them the story of the gospel. In the manufacturing town, Langeac, near by the same evangelist has built up a church of 200 members, many of whom were formerly atheistic socialists. These facts, which are gathered from an article in

the New York Outlook, afford gratifying evidence that there are parts of France at least in which there is an open door for evangelical preaching, and this is still further supported by the fact that the Reformed churches of France are quite unable to supply all the demands now being made for pastors.

Honor God.*

"A son honoreth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honor? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the Lord of hosts unto you, O priests that despise my name," (v. 6). Surely men should treat God as well as they treat each other,—to say nothing of the better and more reverent treatment God's character demands. But how many there are who are truer to their relations to their fellows than to their relations to God. I have heard men utterly prayerless, whose lips were foul with profanity, declare themselves not specially sinful because they had never cheated anybody, had been good sons, neighbors, and all that. Once a man, who had made the solemnest of promises to God because he had made them to God's church, turned the whole treason of his life and heart cavalierly off by telling me, "Oh! we are not expected to keep our promises to the church." Yet that man would esteem it a dire affront to be charged with failure to keep his business promises. That is a so frequent trouble,—the feeling that the range of our obligations rises no higher, and takes in no more, than our duties to our fellows. But, notwithstanding, there remains the whole grand and solemn realm of our duties Godward. And faithfulness to the lower cannot excuse unfaithfulness in the higher. Here is a searching question for us,—have we really treated God as well as we have our fellows? How many a business man is prompt to use his obligations to his business associates, who goes on, and as though it were of no moment, serenely unmindful of his obligations to his God! And let us heed the warning in that address to the priests. They were the leaders, the teachers. Of all people, they should be carefullest toward God. We who teach should teach ourselves; we who are set at guiding others should be specially anxious that none of the ditch-mud of faithlessness and inconsistency spatter and smutch our garments.

"Oh that there were one among you that would shut the doors, that ye might not kindle fire on mine altar in vain!" (v. 10). "Better a temple closed than a temple profaned." When, though we externally worship and do what God commands, we do not inwardly do it; when, instead of pure intent and holy feeling, and sweet, deep longing for God, we bring "the blind, the lame, the sick," sacrifices of mere routine, of wandering thoughts, of insincerity,—the fire we kindle on God's altar is a vain fire. Once, in one of the chapels of St. Peter's in Rome, I saw a lot of priests racing through a ritual, and meanwhile lounging and taking snuff, and it seemed to me that such worship was decidedly vain fire. But it is quite possible for us Protestants, when we let the real heart drop out of our worship, while we may not do that thing, to do a spiritually similar thing. "Lord, I have laid mine heart upon thine altar," sings George Macdonald. When we do that, we do not kindle vain fire.

"Will a man rob God? yet ye rob me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings," (3:8). There was a widow of small means, yet of noble liberality. But, unexpectedly, a legacy was left her, and she was wealthy. But to a cause to which, in her comparative poverty, she had delighted to give five dollars, she now proffered twenty-five cents. When asked why such strange change, and in her present circumstances, at last she candidly replied, "Ah! when, day by day, I looked to God for my bread, I had enough and to spare. Now I have to look to my ample income, and I am all the time haunted with the fear of losing it and coming to want. I had the guinea heart when I had the shilling means; now I have the guinea means and the shilling heart." But does not the "shilling heart" literally and really rob God? If Christians gave as God had prospered them, how affluently full would be God's treasures. Is there not a good deal of robbing God, and even by those of most scrupulous honesty as toward their fellowmen?

"Bring ye the whole tithe into the storehouse . . . and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it (v. 10)." "O God, our hearts are whole toward thee," I heard Mr. Spurgeon pray. And is not this a plain reason of the marvelous blessing God poured on him, this,—that all the time, both as to glad giving and as to everything else, Mr. Spurgeon kept his heart whole toward God? And there is divine sanction for the experiment.

*From Illustrative Applications on Malachi 1:6-11, by Dr. Waviland H. . . . in Sunday School Times.