

Messenger and Visitor

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The Christian View of Calamities.

There are some good people who are disposed to regard every great affliction or calamity which may come upon individuals or communities as a special manifestation of the Divine displeasure, or as they would say "a judgment" upon those whom the disaster particularly affects. But the facts connected with events of that kind by no means justify such a conclusion, while the teaching of our Lord expressly condemns it. Two terrible disasters, accompanied with appalling suffering and loss of life, have been reported from the State of Michigan within the past few days. One of these was a boiler explosion in a factory in Detroit, by which more than a score of persons was killed and many others more or less severely injured. A day or two later a western bound immigrant train and an eastern bound express collided with terrific force on the Wabash railroad, with the result that some eighty persons were hurled to a terrible death and a large number of others maimed for life or otherwise injured. Such disasters are happily of comparatively rare occurrence, but it certainly would be most unwarrantable to conclude that the people who worked in the factory in which the explosion occurred in Detroit and the people sacrificed in the terrible railway disaster were sinners above all the people who are daily working in factories or travelling on railways in the State of Michigan or elsewhere. It may be said that these disasters had a human origin and that they were the result of somebody's blundering or criminal carelessness. Granting this, we do not know that it materially alters the question. But what shall we say of those great catastrophes which arise out of natural conditions. Were the people of Galveston or of the Johnstown Valley sinners above all those who dwell in the United States. The noble ships that from time to time founder at sea or are flung upon the rocks, are their passengers objects of the divine displeasure more than all other people who sail the seas? Are the people of St. John in 1877 or the people of Windsor in 1899 to be accounted transgressors above all the people who dwell in these Provinces, because those places were swept by great conflagrations? Probably there are not many persons who would answer these questions in the affirmative.

The teaching of our Lord, in regard to such events and the problems to which they give rise, is of the greatest importance. When some of the people around him were disposed to interpret such occurrence as the falling of a tower upon certain men, and the slaying of others as they were offering their sacrifices, as special indications of the divine displeasure, he assured them that their inference was quite unwarranted. There was, however, a lesson of immense importance and personal concern to be drawn from such events. "Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish." When one sees his fellow man stricken down by an unexpected blow, let him ask—How if the stroke had fallen on me; what if I were suddenly called into judgment, am I prepared? If fire or tempest should sweep away my property, if the pestilence should smite my home, if my heart should be robbed of its dearest earthly treasures, is my life so fortified in God and so fed by his love that no calamity which may befall can overwhelm me? It is wise for us to accept such events, so far as we are concerned, as merciful monitions from above. We need to be shaken out of our fancied security, and to be made to see how poor and uncertain are the things in which our happiness here is so largely invested. "I said in

my prosperity I shall never be moved," wrote the Hebrew psalmist, and that is just what we are too apt to think about ourselves, or at least to live as if we thought so. It may be an altogether wholesome thing for us to be awakened, even by a very rude shock, to perceive that the houses which we have erected for ourselves are not so firmly founded and strongly built as we had allowed ourselves to fancy, but only the flimsiest of structures which the first rude blast that blows will lay in ruins.

The other thing which Jesus taught about calamities which have befallen others, is that their significance will be best understood by us when we interpret them as an opportunity for magnifying the grace of God. When the disciples enquired concerning the man born blind, Jesus assured them that the fact was not to be interpreted as a punishment for some particular sin on the part of the man or his parents, "but that the works of God may be made manifest in him." And accordingly he gave the blind man sight. We may not be able to give sight to the blind, or hearing to the deaf, or strength and health to the paralytic and the leprosy, but by giving such as we have we can do much to alleviate want and suffering, to heal disease, to drive away despair and to inspire hope and courage and faith. Those who engage in such ministry do truly make manifest the works of God, and for themselves gather fruit unto life eternal.

This, then, seems to us to be our Lord's teaching in regard to the calamities which fall upon men or communities, these are the lessons he would have us learn from them—First, that they should be a warning to us to examine ourselves in relation to the certainties of judgment and the contingencies of life, and to see to it that we are not placing all our treasure and our hope where some sudden shock of disaster may dash them to eternal ruin. Secondly, that every special misfortune or disaster which befalls our fellow men is to us an opportunity to enter into fuller fellowship with our Lord in his divine ministry of sympathy and self-sacrifice on behalf of those who have been overtaken by affliction and disaster.

Editorial Notes.

—The Dean of Hereford lately told at a public meeting in England a story which he had heard from C. H. Spurgeon, and which the great preacher had used in his lecture-room in warning his students against ambition. He told them of a mother who had said to her child that if she was good she would go to heaven. "And how shall I go?" the child asked, "shall I go in a chariot?" "Ye-s," said the mother. "And will there be horses in the chariot?" The mother assented. "And will they let me hold the reins?" asked the child. A good many people probably would rather like to go to heaven if they might go in a chariot and hold the reins, but who have no great desire to make the journey, if they must make it after the fashion of John Bunyan's pilgrim.

—There had been during the past week a more hopeful feeling in respect to the small-pox situation in St. John. Until Monday no new cases had been reported for several days, most of the sick have been progressing favorably, and some of those who were first attacked were able to be released from quarantine. On Monday, however, suspected cases were reported in new localities. These cases have been pronounced small-pox, and the prospect is therefore rendered less encouraging for a speedy stamping out of the disease. It is expected that the new premises secured outside the city for an epidemic hospital will soon be in condition to receive patients, so that those suffering from the disease can be isolated. Rev. Mr. Roach continues to minister to the sick and is enjoying good health.

—A sad story comes by way of Ottawa from the Gatineau lumber woods, where a young man named Edward Connors, has been killed and devoured by wolves. He had left the camp near Bark Lake in the evening and gone back for his axe to have it ground for the next day's work. A party started to look for the missing man, and they had not gone far before it became evident that their worst fears had been realized. The hungry animals had overpowered the poor fellow and literally torn him to pieces; his boots and clothing, torn to shreds and soaked with blood, alone being found. Connors' home is in St. Malachi, a few miles from Buckingham, and he was the sole support of five young brothers and sisters, their parents having been dead for some time.

—In reference to the gambling evil, the Presbyterian Witness quotes words, well worth quoting, of Rev. Dr. Mitchell, Moderator of the Church of Scotland, as follows: "He had declined going to any bazaars in which there was gambling in any form—for he had seen the ruin gambling had caused. It was in some places worse than drink. In a jail which he knew well 92 of the 100

prisoners were there because of drink but 57 of the 92 had taken to drink through gambling! Gambling on the race course is very bad; gambling in any form spells danger and shame. He said that men pleaded for the race course because the breed of horses is improved thereby; but certainly the breed of men is not improved. Besides we have improved the breed of cows and no one has heard of racing and gambling to improve the breed of cows."

—A book called "Roads to Rome," which contains the reasons given by a number of persons for the conversion to Rome and which has been prepared and issued with the sanction of Cardinal Vaughn who is the chief dignitary of the Roman Catholic system in England, would seem to indicate that there is a tolerably direct and well travelled highway from the higher altitudes of Anglicanism to the city of the Popes. In noticing the book the London Times says: "One point, we are sorry to say, comes out with more clearness than we had expected—the influence of Anglican Ritualism as a decoy duck to Rome. It is a point which we may be sure has not escaped the notice of Cardinal Vaughn in giving his imprimatur to the volume. A good many of the contributors speak of the impulse given to their wavering minds by the Ritualistic movement in general."

—Dr. Joseph Parker of the City Temple, London, was a short time ago advised by his physicians that, owing to a serious weakness of the heart, it was necessary to exercise great caution and that it was imperative that he should not extend his public labors beyond his own pulpit. Concerning this Dr. Parker wrote at the time: "The verdict is positive, and I accept it with surprise and regret. I retire to think, to serve quietly and soon to go up." It is to be earnestly hoped however that many years of distinguished service will yet be added to those which the great preacher has been permitted to give in the ministry of the truth. Alluding to a recent service conducted by Dr. Parker at the Temple, the British Weekly says: "It was an excellent congregation, and all were glad to see Dr. Parker so evidently improved in health. He was well heard and appeared to find his old enjoyment in preaching. There were no personal allusions, but the freedom of his gestures and the ringing tones of his voice were accepted as signs that he was feeling strong and free from pain."

—A minister may grandly serve the people to whom he preaches by the presentation of sound gospel truth in vigorous and inspiring speech, and it should be the aim of every minister to do this to the full extent of his ability. If he fails to do this he fails lamentably. But the minister does well to consider too that there is much that counts toward the full result at which he aims, besides the substance and the form of his preaching. The character of the preacher counts immensely, and so does his feeling for and his whole attitude toward his people. The personal factor is always so strong that we are apt to underrate its influence. When what the minister is strongly supports what he says his deliverance will not lack power, even though his speech in itself be weak and uninspiring. Sympathy and appreciation count. For people are helped not less by these than by instruction, and generally much more than by denunciation, however eloquent. The minister who seems always to say to his people, when he meets them in the public congregation or as individuals: "I am glad to see you; I sympathize with you in your weal and your woe, and I desire to help you in the fullest measure possible," that minister is sure to possess a drawing power which those who measure him simply by his ability as a preacher may find it difficult to account for.

—In accordance with time-honored custom the Baptist churches of St. John united in a thanksgiving service on Thursday last which was held in the Main St. church. The congregation was smaller than is usual on such occasions, probably because of the sickness prevailing in some parts of the city. The service was however a very interesting one, participated in by the Pastor, Rev. A. White and Revs. H. F. Waring, J. B. Appell and David Long. The annual Thanksgiving sermon was preached by the Rev. J. D. Freeman. It was founded on 1 Chron. xvi: 7-10, the thanksgiving proclamation and psalm of King David on the occasion of the bringing up of the Ark of the Covenant from Obed-Edom to Jerusalem. The discourse was an eloquent and uplifting presentation of the fact of the presence of God with His people, as the supreme and perpetual ground for thanksgiving. The following sentences may indicate the character of the sermon's thought and spirit: "What this world needs is not simply a God sacrament, but a God immanent. 'Ere she reach her earthly best a God must mingle in the gain.' And he has mingled in it after the most effective fashion. The true Ark of the Covenant is Jesus Christ. In Him the Word which was God became flesh and tabernacled among us. He is Immanuel—God with us. An ancient religious writer used to urge what he called 'The Practice of the Presence,' meaning thereby the exercise of the mind upon the great fact of the divine propinquity. The practice needs to be revived. It is a great thing for a man to lift his eyes to heaven and cry