

Messenger and Visitor

The Maritime Baptist Publishing Company, Ltd.
Publishers and Proprietors
TERMS: \$2.00 PER ANNUM.
\$1.50 IF PAID IN ADVANCE.

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85 Germain Street, St. John, N. B.

Address all communications and make all payments to the MESSENGER AND VISITOR.

Printed by PATERSON & CO., 105 and 107 Germain St

The Gentle and Tolerant Christ.

Certain producers of current literature, who evidently never permit themselves to entertain a doubt of their ability to deal instructively and exhaustively with the subjects which most profoundly concern human life and destiny, are fond of lecturing the churches, and especially the ministers of them, upon their alleged failure to realize in life and doctrine the true spirit of Christianity. They are charged with obscuring the truth, of misapprehending Christ and his mission, and so of being, in a negative if not in a positive sense, responsible for the failure of so great a number of people, in lands which are called Christian, to accept the gospel. In the quarters indicated much is said about the lowliness, the gentleness, the sympathy, the tolerance of Jesus. Attention is called to him as the friend of publicans and sinners; and as the expositor and denouncer of the formalism and hypocrisies of the Scribes and Pharisees. The subject is so presented that the uninstructed or unthinking reader is apt to conclude that about all that our Lord found worthy of condemnation in human society was among those people who professed to be especially religious, and that if only one is not a Pharisee, he may expect that his shortcomings will receive very gentle treatment at the hands of the tolerant Jesus.

The attentive student of the New Testament must know of course that such a conception of Jesus and his attitude toward men is wholly a misconception. That our Lord denounced the bigotries and hypocrisies of the religious leaders of his day is true enough, and it is equally true that pharisaism is forever opposed to the spirit of the gospel. There is plenty of pharisaism in the world today,—some of it within the churches, much more outside the churches, and there is now, as there was nineteen hundred years ago, much besides pharisaism which is utterly opposed to the spirit and the word of Christ. When we are asked to behold the gentle and tolerant Christ, it is well for us to ask and consider carefully toward what and whom Christ was gentle and tolerant. Everyone is ready to admit that he was not tolerant of the bigotry and hypocrisy of which the Pharisee is regarded as the personal embodiment. Was he any more tolerant of the avarice and extortion of the publican? Will anyone who has read and remembered his New Testament say that Jesus was tolerant of sin in any form, or of the sins of any particular class of men or women? As we read the gospel narratives, we gather that the attitude of Jesus, as that of his forerunner, the Baptist, was alike to all classes in this most important respect, that it demanded from one and all repentance for their sins and a thorough amendment of their lives. Apart from unrepented and unabandoned sin, Jesus was certainly gentle and tolerant towards all. For the Pharisee Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, the publican Zaccheus, and the woman of abandoned life, he had one and the same gospel, and it was the gospel of divine favor and salvation on condition of repentance and the abandonment of sin. We know of no utterance of Jesus which indicates that he esteemed a publican per se a better man than a Pharisee per se, but there are certainly recorded words of his which plainly indicate that a truly repentant publican stood much higher in the estimation of God than a self-righteous Pharisee, having no conception of his need of repentance. The Pharisee merited and received special condemnation, because, being no better than other men, he yet claimed a right to the special favor of heaven, and utterly despised his fellow-sinners.

It is well for us to think much of the gentleness and sympathy of Jesus, but we ought not to permit ourselves to forget that in him the sternness as well as the gentleness of love found expression. He came not only as the supreme revelation of love but as the supreme witness to the truth, and he could

not be the former without being the latter also. He is the Light of the world, and the light is a great revealer of those things which the sinful hearts of men would keep hidden from the Judge's eyes. Let no man think that he is safe from judgment because, as he thinks, he is not a Pharisee. He may be mistaken about that, and if not, he is by no means justified on the ground of not being a Pharisee. It is well to remember that an impenitent publican or other sinner is just as truly under the condemnation of God as the impenitent Pharisee.

If Christ came into the world today and spoke to men out of human lips, he would doubtless utter words to make the ears of Pharisees, both in the churches and out of the churches, to tingle. But we may be sure also that he would speak in the sternness of faithful love to every class of people who are sinning against light. All the sins to which the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life lead men find their merited condemnation at his lips, and he would tell men today in Canada as he told men nineteen centuries ago in Palestine, that unless they repented they must perish. To the repentant sinner Christ is indeed the gentle, loving and tolerant Saviour. The bruised reed he will not break nor will he quench the smoking flax. The penitent, however weak or ignorant or stained with sin, will find him tolerant, merciful and gracious, but let no one presume upon the idea that Jesus Christ is tolerant of sin, or that one can escape the condemnation of truth because his sin is not in its manifestation quite like that of some other man. That was in effect the Pharisee's mistake. He valued himself before Heaven on the consideration that he was not as certain other men.

Editorial Notes.

—It is stated that the annual drink bill of Great Britain amounts to £162,000,000, more than enough to cover the whole expenditure on account of the Boer war. Of this vast sum it is estimated that £108,000,000 is spent by the working classes, which would mean that the artisans of the country are spending about one-fifth of their wages on intoxicating drink.

—Referring to "the simultaneous mission" of the Free Churches in England, the London Baptist Times says: "The Free Church Council is reverting to the methods of Whitefield and Wesley, and is about to organize a vast system of open-air missions during the summer. It suggests that these services shall be conducted by ministers and leading laymen of the local councils, and that a prominent feature shall be the assistance of organized and trained choirs."

—Dr. Maclaren, of Manchester, has been recently resting at Niton in the Isle of Wight. It is understood that he has been engaged in the preparation of his presidential address for the approaching May meeting of the Baptist Union. Dr. Maclaren's friends, says the Baptist Times, have been surprised and delighted at the wonderful vigor and health he has maintained this year, in spite of the strain of a great number of special engagements.

—That veteran missionary of the A. B. M. Union to China, Dr. Ashmore, now in his eightieth year, sailed recently with Mrs. Ashmore from San Francisco for Japan and China. The executive of the Union has requested Dr. and Mrs. Ashmore after having adjusted their affairs in China to return to the United States, where it is hoped that Dr. Ashmore may continue to render very important service to the cause of Foreign Missions by his voice and pen.

—Among the stories about Daniel Webster, it is told that, after considerable provocation, he once wrote to the editor of a newspaper who had referred to Mr. Webster's private affairs and especially to his not paying his debts, saying: "It is true that I have not always paid my debts punctually, and that I owe money. One cause of this is that I have not pressed those who owe me for payment. As an instance of this I enclose your father's note made to me more than thirty years ago for money lent him to educate his boys."

—Somebody makes the statement that George J. Gould of New York, son of the late Jay Gould, has earned \$35,000,000 since last November, or at the rate of \$50,000 every hour the stock-market was open. The maker of the statement does not appear to have intended anything in the way of satire, but if any such sum has been added to the Gould fortune in the course of five months it would seem difficult to find in the English language a word less correctly descriptive of the operation than the verb to earn.

—Mr. Marcus Miller, a man of some note who died last week at Binghamton, N. Y., had embraced the views of Robert G. Ingersoll when a young man and for

twenty-five years lived the life of an infidel. But in the presence of death Mr. Miller did not find in Ingersollism the support he needed. Before he died he sent for a Christian minister, acknowledged his faith in God, and, as a token of his repudiation of the teachings of Ingersoll, gave directions that over his grave the words of the noted agnostic should be burned.

—The Watchman declares sound Baptist doctrine when it says: It is a grave mistake to argue that the law of the State as to marriage and divorce should conform to the law of the Church, because the latter is in accord with the requirements of the Scripture, or upon ecclesiastical authority. The State has nothing to do with the interpretation of the Scripture or with church authority. The laws of the State are based simply on the broad consideration of public policy and morality. There are a good many phases of the doctrine of the separation of Church and State that have hardly dawned upon the public consciousness.

—A man had a plant which he valued because of its handsome foliage. The plant sought to put forth blossoms, but the man pinched off the buds, thinking that the blossoms would rob the handsome leaves of a part of their vitality and beauty. But for once the plant was permitted to have its way and then it was seen that its blossoms were beautiful, and the room was filled with their fragrance. So, too often, is it that men despise and repress that in their natures which under holy and divine influences would burst forth into flowers of faith and love, making their own lives beautiful and shedding forth gracious influences upon others.

—It seems to us that our friend, Mr. Adams, in his criticism of Dr. Abbott's words as quoted by him in another column—"If we live as Christ lived and die as Christ died, we shall rise as Christ rose"—is hardly justified either by the quoted words or by Dr. Abbott's well known views as to the way of salvation. Is not the believer, through faith and love, a sharer in Christ's victory over sin and death, and thus, living and dying in faith, and in fellowship with Christ, does he not in a very true and real sense live and die as Christ did? Did Dr. Abbott mean more than that? Dr. Abbott's view of the atonement may be different from Mr. Adams' or from our own, but we have never understood him as ignoring the doctrine of an atonement or teaching that men are able to work out their own salvation apart from Christ.

—We need to be constantly on our guard lest we grow forgetful of our responsibilities and our promises. It is so easy to be enthusiastic about a new enterprise in which many are interested and from which great results are expected. But after the enthusiastic beginning comes the long endeavor, the fight with difficulties, the occasional mistake, the partial failure, the hope deferred, and the unbelieving and the faint-hearted fall out of the race long before the final goal is reached. A year ago when the war fever was at its height, society ladies in London fought keenly for the honor of being allowed to provide comforts and even luxuries for the soldiers of the Empire in South Africa. The British soldier still bravely trying to do his duty in fighting the war out to a finish, needs encouragement now and protection against the approaching South African winter, as much as he did a year ago, but the society butterflies have fluttered on to other flowers now, and if Tommy Atkins is adequately provided for during the Transvaal winter of 1901, it will be because the authorities of the War Office are not forgetful of his wants.

—Dr. J. M. Buckley, the able editor of the Methodist "Christian Advocate" of New York, opposes the introduction of the individual communion cups on the ground that the innovation involves a change in the form of the ordinance as established by Christ and "takes from it much of its holy and most needful influence." The "Advocate," as quoted by the "Examiner," says: "Let the holy communion be administered as it was received from the fathers who received it in succession from those who receive it from Christ, and it will minister to every grace; but to mutilate it to please a few whose fears or fancies have agitated them is evil in itself and will surely bring other evils in its train." To this the Examiner replies that, "whatever change in the Lord's Supper may be thought to be effected by the use of two or more cups there can be no doubt at all that in the case of baptism the substitution of sprinkling or pouring for immersion does absolutely change the symbolism of the ordinance. Burial cannot, by the utmost stretch of the imagination, be symbolized by the sprinkling of a few drops of water upon the forehead. . . . What Christ ordained and what the Methodist discipline ordains are not in harmony. Christ said, 'Be immersed'; the Discipline says, 'Be immersed or sprinkled or poured upon.' The latitude permitted by the Discipline is unrecognized by Scripture, and hence is unworthy of the acceptance of Christian men. It is a strange inconsistency therefore," the Examiner concludes, "that sticks to the precise mode in the case of one ordinance and is utterly indifferent to it in the other." It will be contended perhaps on the other hand that Baptists who accept the innovation of the individual communion cups are open to a like charge of inconsistency, but in order to establish this it would be necessary to show that something "essential to the true symbolism of the ordinance is sacrificed in the change."