

PASTOR AND PEOPLE.

A FRIENDLY LETTER ADDRESSED TO MERCHANTS.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—There is great truth in the assertion that we are "a nation of shopkeepers." London especially is a city of merchants. We are not ashamed of it. Commerce is a blessing to mankind, and our British merchants are among the most honourable, industrious, and charitable men in all the world.

But you have dangers peculiar to your calling, as every class has. Will you forgive a friendly voice which, for the love of Christ our Saviour, speaks of three verses of Holy Scripture, which should not be forgotten by you?

I.—"A false balance is abomination to the Lord, but a just weight is His delight." (Proverbs xi. 1.) On this verse I will not remark much. I would rather God's Word should speak than that I should seem to bring an offensive imputation. I would not accuse, but only warn. It is no secret that there are tricks in trade; nor that many things which are dishonest are done because every one does them. Moreover, if it were not too painful to remember, names would soon occur of men once highly respected who fell most deeply under the temptation to be quickly rich by means which would not bear the daylight. It is hard, no doubt, to go against the stream. In the tremendous race for a living now-a-days, short bye-paths must be very inviting. But, if you stand fast in Christ's strength, you will have an approving conscience and the blessing of the Lord, which maketh truly rich. May He Help you!

II.—"And man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." (St. Luke xii. 15.) No! Abundance does not make life. The millionaire may be dead while he liveth. This verse was spoken in connection with the parable of the rich fool, who laid up treasure for himself and was not rich toward God. If we have not a good hope for the life which is to come through Christ, we shall be like Dives—have our good things (such as they are) in this life. Our Saviour entreats you to lay up treasure in heaven, where neither moth nor rust corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal. Perhaps in a great commercial nation like ours there are as many hearers "among thorns" as of any of the four classes. The Word of God often brings no fruit to perfection because men are so engrossed and absorbed in the riches, cares, and pleasures of this life. The dregs only of thought and time and strength are left for it. May I suggest three remedies for this dangerous state of things? (1) Liberal giving. We cannot cherish the false idea that money is our life, if we do holy violence to it by imparting to those who have not. The only "bags which wax not old" are the pockets of the poor. What a wonderful character is that at which we should aim! "ready to distribute, glad to communicate!" (2) Resolute observance of your habits of devotion and of the Lord's day. What an unspeakably sad state of things is it when the Lord's day is an interruption to business! Never may you come to that! Steadfastly guard the holy hours from the intrusion of business in any shape—deed, talk or thought. And on week-days form your plans of devotion, and keep to them. Then all your day will be sanctified by the Word of God and prayer. (3) Think often of the end. If you live the longest life of prosperity, yet it will end. And then? Often ask yourself that. Please God it will lead you to ask of Him, through His dear Son, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not. In these days we hurry on so fast that we persuade ourselves we have no time to think. But if we have no time to think, there is something wrong. God meant none of us to live such a life as that.

III.—"He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much." (St. Luke xvi. 10.) True, the Lord calls riches "that which is least," but He plainly teaches that they bring responsibility though they be "least." Indeed, they bring it (1) for all who are below us in the social scale. They give position, and we are answerable for a faithful use of that. If ample means are yours, my dear friend, you cannot fail to influence for good or ill. But riches bring responsibility, especially (2) for those in our employ. A Christian man ought never to think his responsi-

bility ends with giving a fair wage for a fair work. My neighbour, the Saviour taught, is every one with whom I am brought in contact; I owe him the debt of Christian love. Some regard for the souls of your employed you should surely show. And if they sleep under your roof, they are your household. Forgive my saying that a religious man should be in charge at the head, and careful provision made for quiet Sundays and attendance at a place of worship; that good libraries are most helpful; that young men's Christian societies should be encouraged; and that it has been found possible to have family prayers in such houses. When we meet our employed at the judgment seat of Christ, let us not have to feel that they were never anything to us but those by whose services in part we made our money. And, once more, riches bring responsibility (3) for the kingdom of God. He is not a well-instructed Christian who does not recognize this. And he is surely not a Christian who, when the claims of that kingdom are put before him, refuses to recognize them. Christ laid it on His Church to preach the Gospel to every creature. We ourselves should not have heard it but for the obedience rendered by others to the command. If His command, if the blessings of the Gospel are anything to us, how can we be indifferent to the increase of His kingdom, and leave all effort in that direction to others? Yet how many wealthy Christians think it quite enough if they are what is called "charitable," and give nothing toward evangelizing either the ignorant at home or the heathen abroad? It is so easy to sneer at the workers among the heathen, as though they sought their own advantage in some way by engaging in the work; and so easy to harp on "charity begins at home." But the command puts the matter in a nutshell. Pray, then, do consider whether you should not at once devote some of your income to that glorious end—the spread of the Gospel; and, if you have begun doing so, whether the proportion you give is the right proportion. The proportion should increase as riches increase. God measures our gifts not by what we give, but by what is left after giving. Too many rich offer what cost them nothing. God will abundantly reward the sacrifices of love. He will give the true riches, and they shall be our own.

Forgive the plain-speaking of one who desires to be only
Your sincere friend,
V. M. S.

MONTMORENCI.

O, loud and loitering veil of amber snow!
Come hither, says I and from the fleecy mists
Cut aprons for yourselves; and for your wrists
Snatch bracelets from this palpitating bow,
And in the chanting air flit to and fro.
Among the greens and greys and amethysts
Find starry robes; and then into the lists
Of contest for the prize of bawdy go;
And with the large, low moon sing to the pines;
And with the star-light shoot in spangled lines
Through Winter's pomp and all the seasons four;
Walk here upon the brink whence cataracts pour.
The King of fays hath clothed the black cliffs so—
Sing to the sun, the storm, the hail and snow.

—Joseph Cook.

SAW-MILL CRITICISM.

"PROBATION AFTER DEATH."

Last night, after the usual gossip of the evening was over, that unfinished dispute between Manly and the Deacon about a "probation after death" was resumed.

"Yes there is the syllogism. Every man must have at least one probation. If he does not have it in this life, he must have it in the next. So you affirm, and you think your syllogism is sound. But to me it seems otherwise. It has a weakness in the back-bone. You say, every man must have a probation. Well; I don't like the word must in speaking of what God does. But we will leave that. You imply that all men do not have a fair probation here. You interpose your own opinion as to what constitutes a fair probation. You make rulings for the Judge of all the earth. You expound the law for Him. But your ruling may not be accepted by the court. You are not supreme judge of what is necessary to constitute a procedure right or wrong.

"Let us take some examples. The old world had a probation, and yet that probation included but one preacher for a whole world full of people. They were condemned. There were Sodom and Gomorrah. Their probation included but one preacher, Lot; for

five cities of the plain. They were condemned. There was Nineveh. It had but one preacher, Jonah, who went there on a flying visit, as Moody and Sankey go about. They listened and were pardoned. There was the Queen of Sheba. Her probation included, at first, but a rumour that came to her in what was then the ends of the earth. She was expected to act upon a rumour. She did act and was commended for it. Rahab acted on a rumour and was justified by it.

"All these cases are specially cited in the New Testament. You learn from them what is the divine idea of a probation. Surely the old world and Sodom are to be regarded as having had a fair chance. Take now the heathen nations to-day—the enormous masses of China and India and Japan. There is scarcely a valley into which more of a rumour has not penetrated than ever went to the ears of the Queen of Sheba. Moreover, those heathen have had it for ages. The gospel was preached in India in the days of the apostles. The same thereof went to China. 'Their line went forth into all the earth.' But, according to your view, the heathen have not had a fair chance; neither did Nineveh have; neither did Sodom have; neither did the old world have. You are at issue with the plain teaching of the Word of God. You see that your whole syllogism depends for its force upon a definition of what constitutes a fair probation.

"But I see other difficulties in your scheme. If there be a probation for the heathen after death, it must be a probation of Works or of Faith. But it cannot be of Works, for that is declared now to be impossible. We cannot expect a probation there which God repudiates here, and the Holy Spirit declares impossible. Nor do I see how it can be of Faith, for there is no room for faith in testimony over there. Men will then see and know for themselves that there is another life. They will know that there is a state of rewards and punishments. But that won't be taking things on the Word of Christ; therefore, there is no faith about it. What is of sight is not of faith. If there be a probation, it must be something entirely different from anything we know of here. We are in great darkness about it. You who teach it ought to be able to tell us something about it—where it will be and when it will be, and how long it will last; what its conditions will be, and whether there will ever be a third probation or a fourth probation for some who have not had a fair chance under the first and second.

"Oh," you say, 'we don't know anything about these things.' Ah—well—no doubt that's true. I don't profess to know; nor am I teaching anything that implies I ought to know. But you are so teaching. It is hardly proper for a teacher to put forward his ignorance as a large part of his qualifications for filling a teacher's chair. Here we are: I am confessing my ignorance and you are telling your knowledge—it turns out that they amount to exactly the same thing.

"If we come now to a practical question, let us seek to do our duty in our day and generation. The future of the heathen is something terrible, but the 'Judge of all the earth will do right.' On that let us rest. Our responsibilities are weighty. Let us meet them with all our might and main. Let us not forget that Christ rebuked an ill-timed curiosity as to whether there be few or many saved. Peter's first attempt in eschatology was an impertinence: 'Master, and what shall this man do?' Christ replied to him: 'What is that to thee? Follow thou me.' We are concerned to know what shall become of this man and that man in the next world. 'What is that to thee? Go thou and preach the gospel.'

"There was no one in heaven nor in earth found worthy to open the seven seals of God's futurity, or even to look on the Book. Only the Lamb that was slain was found able to do it. He broke the seals; He unrolled the scroll. There is no glimmer of another probation. A last sentence that followed the broken seals is, 'Behold I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to render to each man according as his work is.' Beyond that sentence I know nothing.

"What God will do or what Christ will do in the unrevealed eternity that lies beyond that 'great day of God Almighty,' I do not know. You do not know. Newman Smyth does not know."—National Baptist.

LABOUR not to be rich; cease from thine own wisdom.