

Christian Messenger.

A RELIGIOUS AND GENERAL FAMILY NEWSPAPER.

"Not slothful in business: fervent in spirit."

NEW SERIES. }
Vol. XIII. No. 7. }

HALIFAX, N. S., WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 1868.

WHOLE SERIES. }
Vol. XXXII. No. 7. }

Poetry.

The True Shepherd.

"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them and they follow me."—John 10: 27.

I was wandering and weary
When my Saviour came unto me;
For the ways of sin grew dreary,
And the world has ceased to woo me:
And I thought I heard him say,
As he came along his way:
"O weary souls! come near me;
My sheep should never fear me;
I am the shepherd true!"

At first I would not hearken,
And put off till the morrow;
But life began to darken,
And I was sick with sorrow;
And I thought I heard him say,
As he came &c., &c.

At last I stopped to listen;
His voice could not deceive me;
I saw his kind eyes glisten,
So anxious to relieve me;
And I thought I heard him say,
As he came &c., &c.

He took me on his shoulder,
And tenderly he kissed me;
He bade my love be bolder,
And said how he had missed me.
And I'm sure I heard him say,
As he went along his way:
"O weary souls! &c., &c."

Strange gladness seemed to move him,
Whenever I did better;
And he coaxed me so to love him,
As if he was my debtor;
And I always heard him say,
As he went along his way:
"O weary souls! &c., &c."

I thought his love would weaken,
As more and more he knew me;
But it burneth like a beacon,
And its light and heat go through me;
And I ever hear him say,
As he goes along his way:
"O weary souls! &c., &c."

Let us do, then, dearest brothers,
What will best and longest please us—
Follow not the ways of others,
But trust ourselves to Jesus;
We shall ever hear him say,
As he goes along his way:
"O weary souls! come near me;
My sheep should never fear me;
I am the shepherd true!"

Frederick Faber.

Religious.

For the Christian Messenger.

Thoughts on Theology.

No. IV.

THE PATRIARCHAL DISPENSATION.

Principles.

My Dear Sir,—

The question before us now is, what did the men who lived under the patriarchal dispensation know of God, and of his government? In other words, what were the truths—doctrines as we now call them—religious facts, which constituted their theology?

There are two sources from which our knowledge may be derived. One is, the Pentateuch, the only authentic history of those times. About that there can be no doubt. The other is, the Book of Job, which has been commonly regarded as written, if not by Moses, by some person who lived in that age. But by a large number of modern critics the authorship of that book is referred to a much later period, at least as late as the age of Solomon, perhaps some centuries later. I shall not trouble you with the arguments for or against the earlier assignment of date, but will only remark that even if the book as such, could be proved to be comparatively modern (having been floating about in traditional fragments, and ultimately gathered together and arranged), the object of the compiler was to make use of his materials so as to describe the manners and opinions of a

remote period, and of a country into which the Israelites had not penetrated. And as there are no allusions, on the one hand, to any Jewish rites or customs, or to the great events of the Israelitish history—nor, on the other, to the "abominable idolatries" of the heathen, it seems to be fair to conclude that Job lived before Moses had promulgated his laws, and in a land which had not yet been contaminated by the superstitions and vices of heathenism. We may therefore take the testimony of the book, in a religious point of view, as concurrent with that of the Pentateuch. The religion of Abraham and his family and that of Job may be considered as substantially the same. It may not be easy to fix the precise date of the Book which bears the patriarch's name, but there are in its style and manner such marks of hoary antiquity that the theory of those who plead for lateness of composition may be safely rejected. (See Smith's Dictionary of the Bible. Article "Job.")

The good men of those early times were not versed in the metaphysics of theology.—They did not perplex themselves with hard questions respecting the Divine essence or mode of existence. It was enough for them to know that the great God was eternal and uncreated, the infinite "I AM." Genesis xxi. 33. Exod. iii. 14: vi. 3. They loved to think of him as the "Almighty," for whom nothing was too hard—and they exhausted their powers of imagination and the stores of their eloquence in describing, often in the sublimest strains of poetry, his might, his majesty, and his glory. It was not sentimentalism;—neither was it dry, husky notion. God's power was a presence. They saw him in his works. They felt him near. They were conscious of his upholding hand.

They thought of God as a holy God. Sin was "very grievous" to him, and the sinner wallowing in the filth of his iniquity, was "abominable" in his sight. Gen. vi. 5, 6. xvii. 20. Job ix. 30, 31: xv. 15, 16.

They said, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Whatever oppressions they might witness or endure among their fellow-men, they knew that God would not "pervert judgment." Man might substitute wrong for right, or refuse to visit his misdeeds upon the wicked; but they were assured that in God's court, though there might be seeming delay, there would in the issue be "plenty of justice." Gen. xviii. 25. Job x. 3, 14: xxxiv. 10–12. xxxviii. 23.

Their minds were deeply affected by the goodness of God, in the abundant bestowment of blessings, in his condescending regard to prayer, and in his compassionate care for the afflicted. And they rejoiced in the assurance that penitent sinners would find mercy, if they sought it with sincerity and earnestness.—Gen. xxiv. 27: xxxii. 10. Job. xii. 4: xxxiii. 18–30: xxxiv. 28.

That the truth and faithfulness of the Most High would be unchangeably maintained, they had no doubt. Would he not keep his promises? Would he not abide by his covenant? Disastrous events threatened to shake the steadfastness of their faith—and in Egypt the family were well nigh driven to despair. But God himself had compassion on their weakness, and when he was about to interpose on their behalf he sent a gracious message, whereby they were confirmed in faith, strengthened and consoled. Exod. iii. 7–9: vi. 4–8. Job xxiii. 13.

There was an abiding conviction that the eyes of God "are upon the ways of man and he seeth all his goings." They regarded him as a being of infinite knowledge and wisdom, from whom nothing can be concealed and who can never be deceived or baffled. Job. xii. 13, 16; xxiii. 8–10: xxxi. 4: xxxiv. 21, 22: xlii. 2.

Their contemplations of God were characterized by profoundest veneration and awe.—They thought of him as inconceivably glorious. One, whom no created being can comprehend, and whose ways are past finding out. Their views and feelings were fitly expressed by Zophar the Naamathite:—"Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is high as heaven; what canst thou do? It is deeper than hell; what canst thou know?—The measure thereof is longer than the earth and broader than the sea. Job xi. 7–9: xxxvi. 26: xxxvii. 5, 23.

When Abram refused to take any part of the spoils as a reward for his rescue of the captives from Chedorlaomer and his marauding hosts, he said, "I have lift up mine hand unto the Lord, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth"—Gen. xiv. 19, 22. The patriarchs were accustomed to think of God as the Creator and Preserver of all things. They did not conceive of him as bound by inexorable laws, but as the source of all law, and they took delight in meditating on the power by which the worlds are framed and the skill with which they are governed. They saw the hand of Jehovah, and heard his voice—"Which alone spreadeth out the heavens and treadeth upon the waves of the sea. Which maketh Arcturus, Orion and Pleiades, and the chambers of the south."—"In whose hand is the soul of every living and the breath of all mankind." "He stretcheth out the north over the empty place and hangeth the earth upon nothing—the pillars of earth tremble and are astonished at his reproof. Job ix. 8, 9: xii. 10: xxvi. 7–11: xxxvi. 27–33: xxxvii. 1–12: xxxviii. 4–38.

Their views of the providential government of God were eminently conducive to personal piety. In every action of their lives there was a devout acknowledgment of the divine presence and interposition. When Abraham's servant went to procure a wife for Isaac, the patriarch said, "The Lord God of heaven, which took me from my father's house, and from the land of my kindred, and which spake unto me, and that sware unto me saying, Unto thy seed will I give this land; he shall send his angel before thee." Gen. xxiv. 7;—and in every step of the proceeding God was sought and his goodness confessed.—When Isaac "smelled the smell" of Esau's raiment which Jacob had put on, he said, "See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the Lord hath blessed" (Gen. xxvii. 27.) When Jacob's flocks were fruitful, it was because "the God of his father" blessed him; and Laban was compelled to say, "I have learned by experience that the Lord hath blessed me for thy sake." (Gen. xxx. 27.)—When Jacob introduced his family to Esau, they were "the children which God had graciously given his servant" (Gen. xxxiii. 5.) Joseph's success in Egypt was accounted for, "because the Lord was with him and that which he did the Lord made it to prosper" (Gen. xxxix. 23. With his last breath Jacob acknowledged "God, before whom his fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God that fed him all his life long, the Angel which redeemed him from all evil" (Gen. xlviii. 15, 16.

These servants of God had learned that Jehovah favours and blesses the righteous and punishes the wicked: Gen. xviii. 25.—Job x. 3: xxi. 17–20: xxvii. 13–23: xxxiv. 23–30: xxxvi. 7. When they saw that good men were often sorely tried, while evil men prospered, such events seemed to them to be exceptions to the general rule, and bore a mysterious aspect. There were not wanting instances, however, of a manifestly gracious, wise, and holy purpose, intertwined with heavy afflictions, so that what men meant for evil was overruled by God for good (Gen. xl 5–8: i. 20.) These considerations soothed and satisfied them. They were willing to wait for God.

Such was patriarchal theology—plain, pure and practical. The days of doubt and daring speculation had not come.

There are some other points yet to be considered.

Yours truly,

J. M. CRAMP

Acadia College, Feb. 5th, 1868.

For the Christian Messenger.

Union in Bible work.

At the recent anniversary of "The Baptist General Association of Illinois," that large and influential body passed the following resolution, which is worthy the consideration of all Baptists:

Resolved, "That, in the opinion of this Association, the division of our denomination in the great work of supplying the word of God to the world is both unnecessary and injurious. Whatever opinions may have existed as to the early plans of the American Bible Union, which placed it and the American and Foreign Bible Society in unfriendly relations, it is still obvious that the Baptist denomination, as a

whole have a common property in the labors of its own eminent scholars; Conant, Hackett, and Kendrick, men recognized as the representatives of the highest biblical scholarship, not only of our own denomination, but of the age.

"On the other hand, the American and Foreign Bible Society standing up, as it has, from its origin, as the advocate of the principle of faithful translations of the word of God in all languages, against the purpose of the American Bible Society to prostitute its resources to sectarian translations, can not afford now to stand opposed to any well-directed effort toward a better understanding of the word of God by means of translations.

"This Association therefore recommends and urges upon these Societies that they immediately find, as it is believed they may, some common basis on which they can unite, and thus secure the undivided support of the denomination.

There are strong reasons why Baptists should all work together in giving the word to the world. We are a Bible people, professing to love it, not because it corresponds with certain doctrines and practices of our own, but because it is the word and will of our God, rightly demanding our affectionate allegiance. When the American Bible Society resolution, set up an imperfect translation for the model of all renderings into heathen languages, our precedents, our principles, our consciences, required us to act apart from them. They virtually cut us off by their action. The principle upon which the American and Foreign Bible Society was formed enabled us to work conscientiously in giving the Bible to the heathen; but the time came when the logic of our course presented a conclusion affecting our own version. Here divergent views, not about the justness, but the expediency of holding this advanced position, resulted in the formation of the American Bible Union; and for the seventeen years the two organizations have presented to the churches their claims for co-operation.

All truth lovers ought to rejoice in a consolidation of these interests, made upon a just basis. Is not the utterance of the resolution above quoted the exponent of a desire widely prevalent among our people?

Is not such a Union feasible? If it fails to occur, is it not just to charge the failure to personal prejudices, old disagreements that ought to be buried, a misunderstanding of of the position, or a lack of interest in the subject, not at all creditable to our large membership and well-informed ministry? It is difficult, upon close investigation, to see any obstacle which may not be easily removed if approached under the influence of the divine Spirit; and the advantages of co-operation are so patent, that immediate attention should be given to the clearing away of all obstructions.

In reading the recommendation of the closing sentence in the resolution, we must remember that the last five years' history of the Societies shows that efforts have been made to find "the common basis upon which they can unite." A brother who "speaks by the book" says: "The Bible Union has, unanimously, at its annual meetings, adopted resolutions in favor of union, and has offered propositions of an impartial character to the American and Foreign Bible Society, and the latter has rejected every overture, and has passed resolutions against uniting with the Bible Union. * * * * *

The American and Foreign Bible Society still stands alone, enjoying but little, if any, advantage from the influence and help of the men who led in the rejection measures.

Evidence is not lacking that some who are intimately and influentially concerned in the Society have regretted the action taken at Boston. The Bible Union, which, I believe, in good faith sought the consummation that then was not reached, was, and is now steadily prospering, with a prospect this year of exceeding in income and practical results any similar past period. The way is still open to "find and unite upon the common basis," so emphatically urged by the General Association of Illinois. The abstract principles of the two organizations are the same; the old feeling borne about the time when the Bible Union came into existence has greatly subsided; fraternal courtesies are frequent between the brethren of the two Boards; the Revised Testament is found on the shelves of the American and Foreign Bible Society, and if a general expression from the multitudes desire it can be obtained, we may hope, notwithstanding the failure of past efforts, to see the good work done. Let the friends of both Societies, in the spirit of the Bible which we love, talk about and pray over this proposed