

Correspondence.

For the Christian Messenger.

THOUGHTS ON THE DAY OF HUMILIATION AND PRAYER, SUGGESTED TO ONE WHO OBSERVED IT.

The great mission of the Church of Christ, is the conversion of the world.

1. The nature of the church suggests this. She is made up of the professedly regenerate, who are styled in Scripture "the salt of the earth," and especially, "the light of the world," while the kingdom of heaven is compared to a net and to heaven. Her members are bound together by a solemn covenant to be the Lord's, and to devote all that they have and are to His service. Their object is the glory of God and the promotion of His cause, together with their own spiritual advancement. And they are required to live holy lives, and in all things do the will of their Father in Heaven. Just in proportion as they do so, will they, even without directly intending it, be instrumental in saving souls; and in just so far as they are successful in this, will they effect their high object.

2. Their commission proves it, "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature;" "and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." Thus it was when the disciples were called and sent out:—"I will make you fishers of men;" "He brought him to Jesus;" "As ye go, preach;" "And they went out and preached that men should repent." And thus especially was it after the outpouring of the Spirit. See Acts viii. 1, 4. Indeed, to such an extent was the early church engaged in this work, and such success was granted her, that in a very short time after the establishment of Christianity, the then known world had heard the Gospel, and a large portion embraced it.

3. This, in her best state, the church has always regarded as her chief work. It has been strikingly characteristic of every great and genuine revival from Pentecost downwards. Wherever the church is founded coming nearest to the requirements of the Bible in other respects, there does she labor most earnestly and successfully for the salvation of men. It is also one of the earliest and strongest promptings and manifestations of "first love," and of a restoration to the joy of salvation.

But the church has not fully realized her responsibility in this matter.

1. Her past history proves this. How little comparatively has she yet accomplished. This can best be seen by reflecting upon the length of time she has been employed, and the vast amount of work which yet remains to be done; especially in contrast with the success often granted. This may also be applied to particular denominations, churches, and individual Christians.

2. Her present position confirms it. A glance at the great body of professed Christians is sufficient to establish this. Notwithstanding all the earnestness, activity and success existing, in what are the great mass of so-called Christians engaged, and by what spirit are they actuated? How many are asleep, how many had better be. How little is being done, and how poorly, compared with what might be. How small a measure of the spirit of Christ is manifest, how slight the difference between the church and world.

It is well and needful to inquire into the reason of such apathy, in order to its removal. There are doubtless many causes, but I shall confine myself to two which I think lie near the root of the matter.

1. And the first is the want of a realization that this is the church's great work. The impression has gone abroad and affects even those who admit our position, that she has been established for some less important purpose. With many she is to a great extent a worldly organization means to employ in their accomplishment. Such ideas must be abandoned, and the church unitedly and individually come to feel that she is called of God to save the world, and that all she does must aim at this, and everything be made to bend to it.

2. The other is, want of a deep and abiding sense of personal responsibility in this matter. We may heartily admit all that has been said, but we require to feel intensely that we are Divinely commissioned to "win souls," "pulling them out of the fire;" that whatever talents we may possess are to be employed, constantly, earnestly and entirely in this blessed work; and that whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, this should be our continual aim. If we have talents to preach the Gospel, let us preach it; if only to exhort, or speak to individuals privately, let us do that. Some have a special

gift in prayer, are so situated that they can do little else, and it would seem as though this were designed of God to be their peculiar vocation; others seem to have been endowed with the faculty of "making money," and why should they not lay their "gift" on the altar? All is needed in this great work, and all is demanded, See Ephs. iv. 11, 12. Rom. xii. 4, 8, and 1 Cor. 12.

Nor are we merely to engage in service. If we would occupy our true position and do our allotted work, we must confidently expect results. The promise is not to those who honestly try, but to those who, being wise, turn many to righteousness. And wherever the true spirit has actuated men what wonderful and blessed fruits have resulted. Love to Christ and to the souls of men, united to strong faith and a willingness to do personal duty, have given Germany and Sweden to the Baptists, and are now winning the Telugus and others to Christ and His Church. Deeply felt and thoroughly acted upon the world would soon be won to the truth—the truth as it is in Jesus.

And now, what has the want of this spirit effected? I think we need look no farther to account for the divisions and discord with which the church has been so often distracted; as well as for the want of activity, earnestness and vital piety so prevalent. Rely upon it, this great work constantly before us would leave little time or disposition for bickering, worldliness, supineness or open sin. May the Spirit lead to careful and earnest self-examination, and deep repentance, constraining us, to "bring no more vain oblations" but the offering with which our God will be well pleased:—

"Then shall our prayers to Thee ascend
A grateful sacrifice;
Our mourning voice Thou wilt attend,
And grant us full supplies."
Dec 2nd, 1869.

For the Christian Messenger.

FREE SEATS AND SYSTEMATIC BENEFICENCE.

No. III.

"An improved system for raising benevolent funds—a desideratum." Circular Letter of Western N. S. Association.

"On the first day of the week the members of the churches of Galatia and of the church in Corinth, and, by implication, all that in every place call on the name of the Lord, were ordered by the apostle Paul to lay aside their charitable contributions." A. A. Arnold, D. D. in Baptist Quarterly.

"The weekly offering is better for many reasons than the monthly system. It has the advantage of being more scriptural, and, thoroughly worked, will raise more money than any other plan." Exchange paper.

"Many who would not, it may be hoped, think of selling a church edifice and pocketing the proceeds, act in other ways as if they regarded their investment in it as made entirely on their own account, and for their own advantage. The building is held to belong to their proprietors in such a sense that a person not a member of the Society might naturally hesitate to enter it at hours of worship, instead of opening the doors to invite within its walls those who need to hear the gospel, as many as can be induced to come, the stranger is admitted, hardly welcomed. We are confident that this matter, together with the expense lavished on music and other outward appliances or appendages of divine service, have no slight bearing on the question now so much discussed, of the 'un-church'd masses.'"

"There—at the Tremont Temple, the gospel has been preached to great congregations, for the poor and the stranger are welcomed without money and without price." Baptist Quarterly.

An exchange paper says: "The question presented in the following, is being extensively and earnestly agitated, and it is most deserving of consideration:—The churches in Boston are endeavoring to do away with pew rents and reserved seats, and find that the experiment, as far as it has gone, pays well. A church in Cambridge, which last year obtained \$1,400 from rented pews, this year receives \$3,000 from voluntary contributions of those who occupy its now free seats; and as new church, which is free in all its parts, finds that it raises more money in this way, than it could by renting the pews. In Liverpool a clergyman announces his intention of throwing his church open to all, having the offertory at each service, and expresses his hope that the time is not distant when the unscriptural practice of receiving pew rents will be done away with forever, and the offertory, for which we have apostolic sanction, be everywhere substituted." He thinks that "until this is done, we must look in vain for full churches."

"The Episcopalian, makes the following objections to 'the Pew renting system,' 1. We find no warrant for it in the Word of God. 2. It makes improper distinctions in the House of God. 3. It distributes the burdens of Church support very unequally. 4. It exerts a very injurious influence upon the pulpit. 5. It carries into the Church the idea of barter and sale. 6. It encourages the building of expensive Churches by speculators. 7. It is fast

separating the rich from the poor in churches. 8. It has failed to support the Church."

The Christian Banner says: "The cause of free seats is marching on. Rev. Edward Abbott, in writing for the Congregationalist, gives the following testimony of the pastors of five churches, which, under different modifications, have tried the plan:—1. It satisfies our consciences. We believe that it is the right method of holding our churches, and meeting the expenses of public worship. 2. We find that it stimulates an increased liberality on the part of the wealthier members of our congregations, who will give more in such a way for the support of the Gospel than they will in the payment of rents or taxes. 3. It opens a way for the poorer portion of the congregation to do their little part, which the system of rented or owned and taxed pews efficiently prevents. Every one is thus afforded an opportunity of contributing according to ability, which is the only true measure of duty. 4. It secures increased attendance. The pastors of these churches are not troubled with empty pews; but, as a general thing preach to full congregations. The people will attend free churches as they will out others. 5. It does away with moneyed distinctions in the house of God. They have no place there. The amount of a man's subscription is not known, nor does it determine the location of his seat." But the most striking evidence of progress that we have observed of late is the following resolution, passed by that wise, careful, and influential body: The General Association of the Congregational Churches of Massachusetts: Resolved, That we recommend that our churches take into consideration the question, whether the system of pew-ownership is not one of the great causes of the alienation of portions of the population from the churches; and whether the free church, supported by contributions freely made, is not the system demanded by the spirit of Christ, as well as by the necessities of the times."

The following are from the Christian at Work. The Pastor's Salary in the Presbyterian church, Ottawa, Iowa, is raised by the free-will offerings of the congregation, for which a collection is taken up immediately before the eleven o'clock service. The incidental expenses are met by a collection, taken up immediately before the evening service. The pews are all free. The Congregational church is also sustained on the Free Gospel plan.

"Bishop George once observed, as he surveyed a splendid church edifice in Baltimore: 'The poor have the Gospel preached to them—but not here.' Is not this true of pewed churches generally, as well as costly ones? So it seems to me, visiting a dying man, a few years since, I asked him what church he had attended. He replied, 'I have not been to meeting at all since I came here from Canada, three years ago. Perhaps I have done wrong, I went to the church of my choice; but the slips rented at so high a price I saw I could not get one and support my family, so we have staid at home.' As he said this he cried aloud. In our cities and towns there are thousands following this man's example. What shall be done?"

"Let all concerned in the education of children and youth see to it, that they lay, in the foundation of the good character they are seeking to build up, the principles of systematic beneficence. Then will the men and women of the future recognize their obligations of stewardship for Jesus; and so wise the unrighteous mammon committee to them as to make to themselves friends in the everlasting habitations."

For the Christian Messenger.

DEAR BROTHER,—

If it be true—which I very much doubt that my "first quotation would seem to apply as much to the building in which they met, as to the church proper who assembled within its walls," this is but an additional argument in favor of the idea that different terms should be used to designate things so dissimilar.

Yours very truly,

OLD FOXY.

For the Christian Messenger.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF SPECIAL PROVIDENCES.

Mr. Editor,—

I have perused again the article on "The Late Storm and Special Providences." I consider the theory there attempted to be maintained as gross infidelity, and utterly at variance with the teachings of Divine Revelation. I can see nothing in the matter or the manner of the writer, to justify the idea that "Thinker" is an earnest enquirer after truth." He writes like one who has already carefully considered his subject, and is firmly "persuaded in his own mind."

To his facts I have no objection. I care nothing for his "Philosophy of Special Providence." I am quite free to admit that a "high tide" and a "heavy wind" do not in themselves indicate any special depravity. I admit also that there is no evidence that the late storm was a "miraculous interposition." Such an idea is so supremely ridiculous, that, having no proof that any sane man has so considered it, "Thinker" will excuse me I trust, for looking upon that aspect of the affair as "a man of straw" the creature of his own imagination,

which he has certainly successfully torn to pieces. But his article not only combats that man of straw, but the "Philosophy of Special Providences," and he also opposes the Theology of "Special Providences." "Divine Revelation" he tells us very properly, does not teach Philosophy. Very well then "let Philosophy mind her own business," and let Theology mind hers. The facts taught by the one, can never clash with those taught by the other; but the unfounded inferences drawn from the one may, and often do clash both with the unfounded and the well founded inferences, drawn from the other, as well as with the facts themselves.

Now the Bible is preeminently a book of facts. Its beginning and middle and ending, are facts, not theories, not inferences. It teaches the fact of creation, the fact of the Divine Government, the fact of the fall of man, the fact of Redemption, the fact of the final judgement, the fact of a heaven, and the fact of a hell. God has not left these great truths to be inferred by the fallible human intellect. He has declared the facts and the same wonderful Book teaches not the 'Philosophy' of Special Providences, not the Theory of special Providences, but it distinctly teaches the fact of special Providences. It gives us history, not romance. It tells us what God has done, what he is doing, what he will do. It specifies the cases. It warns us that God deals not only with man in general but also with men particularly; that he not only sends storms, tides, floods, tempests, fire and brimstone, and other calamities in accordance with the general laws of the universe, but also that he often controls these very plagues in such a manner as to prove that he himself "rides on the tempest and directs the storms" making special examples of notorious sinners, and other special examples of noted saints.

The five Books of Moses, are not Books of fiction, nor of theoretical, philosophical reasonings, but they are books of history—books of facts and they are one continuous detail of special Providences of God's dealings with individuals and particular nations, and showing his hand in all the most minute details. Here are recorded the facts, and no historical document, no facts of ancient times—to say the least—are established as to their authenticity on a firmer basis. Nothing can disprove a fact.

I might go on through the Old Testament, and show how even the devotional portions of it and the dogmatical are continually announcing facts. But what shall we say of the Prophets? Because Science can predict an eclipse, a high tide, and a wind. "Thinker" infers, and very legitimately that there was no special Providence in that high tide, eclipse or wind. But "Thinker" boldly pushes a step further in the argument—and seems to reason thus: "Because there was no special Providence in the 'Saxby Storm,' ergo, there is no such thing as a special Providence." Now admitting that there is no special providence in what science can predict, does it follow that there is none in what prophecy can predict. Where was the "Science" that wrote the books of Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Daniel? Upon what theory of astronomy, or Philosophy was the rise and fall of the four monarchies predicted. What "Saxby" foretold the destruction of the old world by a flood, and the "cities of the plain" by fire and brimstone, so as that there should be nothing "special" in the deliverance of Noah and Lot! And how does it follow that in the desolations that came upon Jerusalem, Babylon, Edom, and Nineveh, for their sins, there was nothing special, because these events were predicted!

The fact is that the inspired prophets just like the inspired historians, dealt not in theories, or arguments, or logic or philosophy, but in facts. The sacred historians just related what God had done; the prophets stated what he would do and in both cases they went into minute details, and dealt not with "General Laws," but with "Special Providences," or particular facts.

All this is also preeminently true of the New Testament. For the absurd reasonings, false inferences, and perversion of facts, to which the Blessed Book has been and is still subjected, they alone who perpetrated them and defend them are responsible. The Book gives us facts not speculations;—not uncertain inferences.

It is the province of reason—according to the principles of "inductive philosophy," to ascertain whether the books are authentic—and what the facts are which they teach, and then true reason teaches that these being ascertained, our judgements, our wills, our consciences, in short, all we have and are to be brought into subjection to their facts, facts to us each and to us all of infinite moment!

"Thinker" speaks sneeringly, as it seems to me, of "Special Providences." "Special Providences" he deems inconsistent with his theory