

## Messenger and Visitor

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S. MCC. BLACK EDITOR.  
A. H. CHIPMAN BUSINESS MANAGER.  
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### Speak Charitably.

There is scarcely any form of injustice more hateful than that which consists in bringing a false accusation against another. The man or woman who knowingly and wilfully sets about falsely to malign the character and destroy the good name of another is guilty of wickedness which it is no exaggeration to describe as diabolical. Such malignity we may well hope is rarely exhibited, at least outside the arena of politics. And it is perhaps the severest indictment that can be brought against the practical politics and the practical Christianity of our times, to say that defamation of character which would on all sides be condemned as atrocious in any other connection, seems to be regarded by honorable and Christian men as almost commendable when put forth in the interests of their political party.

But "evil is wrought through want of thought as well as through want of heart." A falsehood uttered concerning another is no less a falsehood, and is perhaps no less injurious to the person concerned, because it is spoken carelessly and without malignant purpose. Many persons who would never be guilty of originating a false and slanderous statement are ready enough to repeat such statements without taking any trouble to ascertain whether they are true or false. Sometimes, too, one who would not deliberately publish a slander against another will, under the pressure of strong annoyance, give utterance to a mere suspicion as if it were indubitable fact. The tongue is still an unruly member, and Christian people need to exercise watchfulness in its control today not less perhaps than when St. James so wisely admonished his brethren in reference thereto.

The good name of a man or woman is above price, and in the eyes of every Christian it should surely be esteemed a sacred thing. It were less criminal to burn a man's house or to rob him of his property than to cast a stain upon his honor. A man's reputation is his capital. This is true in some measure of every man, and it is important in proportion as the position which he holds is one of trust and influence. The Christian minister does well to be jealous of his reputation and carefully to avoid everything that would give the slightest excuse for slanderous tongues to wag, or which would in any way have the effect of placing him in a compromising position. And, moreover, a minister's reputation should surely be a sacred thing in the eyes of all Christian people. Words can hardly be found too strongly condemnatory of the act of one who wilfully, or even thoughtlessly and carelessly, originates or gives currency to a report which falsely defames the name of a minister of Christ or creates distrust concerning him in the public mind. There is so much at stake here, both in regard to the minister's personal interests and the cause which he represents, that only on the most assured grounds can any statement derogatory to his character or injurious to his influence be justified.

Even in cases in which there may seem to be grounds for reasonable suspicion, charity will certainly demand that there shall be great caution and careful consideration of all the circumstances before bringing an accusation the effect of which will be seriously to injure the reputation of a Christian man or woman. The Golden Rule is as applicable to our words concerning others as our actions toward them. It is well that in all our relations with others that charity which "thinketh no evil" shall control our speech and conduct.

### The Circular Letter.

A correspondent asks why the circular letter of his association was not last year published in this paper. In reply to this question (which might be asked with equal propriety on behalf of other associations) we desire to say that, having come to the conclusion that the publishing by the MESSENGER AND VISITOR of the seven circular letters which our seven associations in these provinces annually produce, was not in the interests of its readers generally, we have for the past few years discontinued the time-honored custom of giving them a place in our columns. It is true that some of these so-called circular letters are productions of very considerable merit and value, and we are quite ready to accept our correspondent's assurance that the one of which he writes was of that character. That, however, would be quite too much to say of them all. For one reason or another, these letters too frequently bear evidence that they cost the writer no very serious thought. Sometimes they are prepared on the spur of the occasion and after the association is assembled. In view therefore of the fact that there is always within reach plenty of excellent material for our columns from the pens of able Christian writers, it has not seemed to us wise to publish the seven circular letters of our associations, simply because they have been read before and endorsed by those bodies. It must be considered too, that the reports of the proceedings of the associations occupy a very large amount of space in our columns during several months of the summer, and while we desire to publish as much concerning the associations as is of general interest to the readers of the MESSENGER AND VISITOR, we think we should be careful not to go beyond those limits.

To pursue the subject a little further, we are inclined to think that our associations might do well to consider whether or not the addressing of a circular letter annually to the churches, is a custom which under present conditions it is worth while to perpetuate. The origin of the circular letter belongs to a period when there were no denominational journals, and when the means of communication between the churches and those whose special gifts and position made them leaders in the denomination were very much more limited than they are at present. In those times, we can easily understand, the circular letter would be prepared with careful reference to the circumstances and needs of the churches, and it would be received and read with profound interest. The pastor, where there was a pastor, and the deacons where there was none, would carefully peruse the epistle and then read it, with suitable comment, to the assembled church. The writing, the reading and the reception of the circular letter were then full of significance. The epistle from the association addressed itself to real needs and ministered real strength to the churches. It is hardly necessary to point out how different the conditions are now, when within the reach of every Baptist family there is the denominational paper which, either editorially or through its contributors, discusses from week to week the matters which pertain to the welfare of the churches, and which affords a constant means of communication between the men of light and leading in the denomination and its general membership. If however an association believes that there is sufficient reason for continuing the time-honored practice of sending a circular letter to the churches connected with it, then it seems to us that the proper course to pursue is, as some of our associations are now doing, to make the letter really a circular letter and send a number of printed copies to each church, with the request that the pastor will read the letter to his people and particularly call their attention to its contents. This can be done at a very trifling expense and would insure the letter being brought to the attention of a large proportion of the membership of the churches. It would probably also have the effect indirectly of improving the average quality of the circular letter, for an association is hardly likely to go to the trouble and expense involved in this course if the epistle is not of some special value, though in such case, as a matter of courtesy to the writer, it might readily endorse a request for its publication in the denominational paper.

### The Centurion's Faith.

The centurion who comes into view for a moment in our Bible lesson for the week seems, from the glance we are permitted to have of him, a man of most interesting and attractive character. He was humane, open-minded, generous, reverent, and susceptible to impressions from the spiritual world. He was strongly attached to his servant—slave though

he was—and earnestly sought to have him healed. Though probably a Roman, he had none of the Roman scorn for the Jew. He felt a deep interest in the people among whom his lot was cast—especially in their religious life, and being as it would appear a man of some wealth, had generously built them a synagogue. Evidently this nameless man was one of those rare souls who always see the best rather than the worst side of their fellow men, and who form their opinions of them accordingly. As he could see good in everybody so everybody could see good in him. The elders of the Jews commended the centurion because of his goodwill toward their nation and because he had built them a synagogue. The thing which Jesus marked and marvelled at in the man, was his rare readiness to accept the evidences of God's gracious power manifest toward mankind.

Everyone who reads attentively the gospel narratives, must perceive how much emphasis Jesus laid upon the possession of faith. It is frequently made a condition of healing or of the reception of other blessing at his hand. "If thou canst believe—all things are possible to them that believe." He rejoices over its manifestation wherever it appears, chides his disciples for their lack of it and marvels at the unbelief of the Jews. Now that "faith" which our Lord so earnestly desired to find in men is not to be confounded with mere credulity—a disposition of mind that is ready to accept anything, however marvellous, and to give an unreasoning acquiescence to any claims, however absurd. What he sought in men was that open-mindedness which is the opposite of bigotry—a disposition which is without prejudice toward manifestations from the spiritual world. He held that men should be ready and glad to believe in God, to expect messages and blessings from him, to walk in the light so far as the light is revealed to them, to accept truth so far as the truth is intelligible to them, and to employ what has been revealed to them as a means of attaining unto a fuller understanding of God. He taught that men should be willing to regard God as their Father in Heaven, act the part of dutiful children toward him, and trust in his fatherly love. When men came to Jesus with an honest, earnest purpose to know who he was and what he was able to do for them, he did not stand apart and say, "I am the Son of God, and you must now and forever believe in me and acknowledge me as such or be condemned." But he said, "Come and see," and led them on step by step until they were fully convinced of his divinity, and ready to declare—"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." This simple-minded belief in God and in his willingness to manifest himself to men and to bless them, Jesus found in this Gentile centurion in such degree that he marvelled at the contrast which his faith presented to the bigoted unbelief of many of the Jews who blindly refused to recognize the manifestation of God in the flesh, because that manifestation was not according to their preconceived ideas and their personal ambitions. The centurion was perhaps not much of a theologian. He may have had no definite idea as to the personality of Jesus and his purpose in the world. But it is fair to presume that he knew something of the ministry of Jesus in Capernaum and elsewhere in Galilee, and, like Nicodemus, he had come to the conclusion that Jesus was from God. The evidence of superhuman power was too plain to be mistaken, and that the power was from God, and not from any malevolent source, was just as evident. It is divine power, he concluded, that is manifest in this man, and if God's power is in him, he does not need to come to my house to heal my servant, let him speak the word only and it shall be done.

What Christianity asks of men today is that same simplicity of mind, that readiness to believe in the Fatherhood of God—in his righteousness, holiness and love—to submit to him as repentant and dutiful children and to trust in his infinite goodness. It asks that men shall put God to the test in the spiritual realm, just as they are putting what they call nature to the test in the material realm. It asks men to study the record of the life of Jesus of Nazareth, with an earnest, honest desire to know and obey the truth, and see whether any other conclusion is possible than that he was from God. It asks men to put God to the proof through a life consecrated to his service—through repentance and faith and prayer—and see whether it is not true that God answers as a Father, assuring the soul that so comes to him of forgiveness and love and redemption.

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