

Our Present Doctrinal Position.

Has our Doctrinal position materially changed since the days of "The Fathers." Read at the N. S. Eastern Association, July 13, 1900, at the celebration of its "Jubilee."

BY REV. R. OSGOOD MORSE.

This was the topic in full upon which I was asked to write for this occasion. The treatment of the latter part of the topic must be very fragmentary. It is simply impossible for me to determine the doctrinal position of "The Fathers." They have left no books by which to determine the things they taught. The files of the Christian Messenger of fifty or more years ago are not at my disposal. Though the assignment of this topic would imply that the writer is at least a grave and reverend D. D., LL. D., yet his memory cannot carry him back to the days of "The Fathers." Just as John Calvin is misinterpreted by Theodore Beza, so the isolated utterances of "The Fathers" have doubtless been made to say things which their authors would scout. Little attention shall therefore be given to anybody's "say so" as to what "The Fathers" taught two or three generations ago.

It was little thought that equal difficulty would confront the effort to determine our present doctrinal position. But stern facts face us disputing every inch of the way over which we have tried to pass. Our leading men do not write books, they do not discuss great doctrines in the MESSENGER AND VISITOR, our association and convention sermons no longer elaborate and apply some great doctrine, our ordination councils think their duty done in saying ditto to the action of the church. There is absolutely no definite data from which to draw conclusions. If, therefore, this paper seems written from the personal viewpoint, if it does not correctly represent you, if indeed you think it more "Morsodox" than orthodox, kindly remember that you have given the writer no means by which to judge your own position.

What then is our present doctrinal position? Have we any? Do we teach anything? Despite much uncertainty, we may affirm that we do teach some things. I purpose beginning with the fundamental article of our creed, *Obedience to Christ*. We are no less true to that position today than were "The Fathers." Indeed we claim fellowship here with the grandfathers, the apostles. We may or we may not interpret the teaching of Christ differently from what the "The Fathers" did, but what we believe Christ taught we also teach. Present day interpretation of Christ's teaching takes the form of activity rather than of doctrine. We acknowledge but the one Master and his will is our law. Dr. Wilkinson, in *The Baptist Principle* has forcibly stated and admirably applied this principle to the ordinances. But, though one may have been duly baptized, yet if he does not forgive injuries he does not obey Christ, and is not a biblical Baptist. Though one may hold rigidly to biblically restricted communion, if he does not support the cause of missions he is not a Baptist, because he does not obey Christ. One may even believe in a regenerate church-membership, but if he does not seek the regeneration of the unregenerate around him he is not a Baptist; he does not obey Christ. It is Christ first. What is his will? It is that will known, then done, that constitutes a Baptist today. Not creed, but Christ; not conscience, but Christ; not Scripture, but Christ; not first doctrine, then Christ; not first creed, then Christ; not first Scripture, then Christ! It is Christ first, then Scripture, inspiration, doctrine, creed; this is the order of logic and of experience. Only Christ in us a principle of life makes Scripture, inspiration, doctrine, creed intelligible. Only the truth within enables us to understand the truth without. To this position, I believe, all our people who think would subscribe today. Thus far our present position is positive.

Obedience to Christ is our fundamental tenet. But how find the will of Christ? It is aside from my purpose to speak of the truth taught in science, history, philosophy and life. I dismiss this with the remark that as all truth is of Christ, that truth is obligatory in its sphere.

Our attention is given to Christ's will as revealed in the Scriptures. As Christ, the person, is our ultimate authority, so the word of Christ, as revealed in the Scriptures, is our rule of faith and practice. These Scriptures we accept as the Word of God. If the Word of God, then the inspired word! But let us define our concept of inspiration. This I shall do in the words of another. "By inspiration I mean such a complete and immediate communication by the Holy Spirit to the minds of the sacred writers of those things which could not have been otherwise known, and such an effectual superintendence as to those things concerning which they might otherwise obtain information, as sufficed absolutely to preserve them from every degree of error in all things which could in the least affect the doctrines or precepts contained in their writings."

Let us get three terms clearly before us,—Revelation, Illumination, Inspiration. Most of the alarm which agitates many good people would take flight if they would but learn that Revelation is the communication of

new truth from God, "Illumination" is the quickening of man's powers, to understand truth already revealed; while "Inspiration" is simply the qualifying of men to put that truth into permanent and written form.

Now, how was this done? I probably state the position of "The Fathers" when I say that they would say, by verbal inspiration—that the Scriptures are not only the Word of God, but the very words of the Spirit. Today we give a very different answer. The majority doubtless, would say, as for the fact of inspiration, I fully accept it; as to God's method in inspiration I do not know. Indeed I am unwilling to limit God to any one method in inspiration. We believe in the inspiration of the Scriptures and in every part of the Scriptures. The Bible not only contains, it is, the Word of God. But as Christ is the truth, and his inspiring Spirit is the Spirit of Truth, the Word which he has inspired has no need of special pleading. It covets the closest examination, it fears no criticism, provided that criticism be candid. We form in advance no theory of inspiration. We are content to allow science and criticism to tell us how God inspired men to write the Scriptures, or if need be, to leave it as one of God's secret things. Here, we are content to be reverent agnostics. The supremacy of Christ and not any theory of inspiration is the citadel of our faith.

And what about the authority of Scripture? Do not confound this question with that of the inspiration of Scripture. Just how "The Fathers" viewed the authority of Scripture I do not know. Was it direct or derived authority, I do not know. Today we say by just so much as the Scripture represents Christ, reveals Christ, rather than that it is Christ, by that very fact is its authority derived from Christ. We worship Christ. We do not worship a book even though that book be the Bible.

We recognize the obligation of private judgment here. We accept the Scriptures as authoritative in matters pertaining to salvation. But that authority is from God and intended to lead us to God. He has given the Scriptures as our guide to himself. They are therefore authoritative. Their authority as a rule of faith and practice has always been our formal principle. Too many of our brethren have died for that principle for us to be willing to renounce it now. Indeed, this was the formal principle of the Protestant Reformation, but Protestants, and least of all Baptist Protestants, have not the right, nor can afford, to put the formal principle above the material principle, *justification by faith*.

The Christ in whom we believe is greater and more perfect than the Bible which only speaks of him. And the obligation of private interpretation is just as important an article of our faith, and just as essential to a complete Christian life, as is the authority of Scripture itself.

Let me say over again, the Scriptures are not the original, but the reflection; not the One revealed, but the revelation of the One; not the Christ, but the witness to the Christ. I reverence the Bible as an organic and progressive account of Christ's historical work and teaching under both Covenants. I reverence it because of him, not because of itself. When he tells me that not one jot or tittle of the law shall pass away until all be fulfilled, I believe him. When I find out what he meant when he said that Moses wrote of him I shall believe that.

The inspired Scriptures derive their authority from Christ himself; and so, in spite of the human element that mingles with them they constitute "the word of the Lord which liveth and abideth forever," and they are all "able to make us wise unto salvation."

To sum up, it is our conviction that our people generally would now subscribe to the following. The Scriptures are the inspired word of God. We do not know God's method of inspiration. The Scriptures derive their authority from Christ himself, and so in spite of the human element mingled with them, they constitute "the word of God which liveth and abideth forever," and they are "able to make us wise unto salvation."

It may seem to some that I have lingered unduly in the porch of our grand doctrinal cathedral. Not so, beloved brethren! We have been inspecting the real battle ground. It is at these points that the real battle is being fought today. Some of us have some idea of how desperate is the encounter. We are fighting every inch of our way to some certainties. We are writing our creed in our own blood as well as in the blood of Christ. You shall do well to examine this ground we have roughly sketched, you shall do better to get some stakes firmly driven, lest, in the play of forces, you forget—lest you forget.

Guyaboro, N. S.

(TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.)

Struggling and Seeking.

BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D. D.

"The young lions do lack and suffer hunger, but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good."—Psalm 34:10.

If we may trust the superscription of this Psalm, it was written by David at one of the very darkest days of his wanderings, probably in the Cave of Adullam, where he had gathered around him a band of outlaws, and was living, to all appearance, a life uncommonly like that of

a brigand chief in the hills. One might have pardoned him if, at such a moment, some cloud of doubt or despondency had crept over his soul. But instead of that his words are running over with gladness, and the Psalm begins, "I will bless the Lord at all times, and his praise shall continually be in my mouth." Similarly here he avers, even at a moment when he wanted a great deal of what the world calls "good," that "they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing." There were lions in Palestine in David's time. He had had a fight with one of them, as you may remember, and his lurking place was probably not far off the scene of Samson's exploits. Very likely they were prowling about the rocky mouth of the cave, and he weaves their howls into his Psalm: "The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger, but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good."

So, then, here are the two thoughts—the struggle that always fails and the seeking that always finds.

I.—The struggle that always fails.—"The young lions do lack and suffer hunger." They are taken as the type of violent effort and struggle, as well as of supreme strength, but for all their teeth and claws, and lithe spring, "they lack and suffer hunger." The suggestion is, that the men whose lives are one long fight to appropriate to themselves more and more of outward good, are living a kind of life that is fitter for beasts than for men. A fierce struggle for material good is the true description of the sort of life that hosts of us live. What is the meaning of all this cry that we hear about the murderous competition going on around us? What is the true character of the lives of, I am afraid, the majority of people in a city like Manchester, but a fight and a struggle, a desire to have, and a failure to obtain? Let us remember that that sort of existence is for the brutes, and that there is a better way of getting what is good; the only fit way for man. Beasts of prey, naturalists tell us, are always lean. It is the graminivorous order that meekly and peacefully crop the pastures that are well fed and in good condition—"which things are an allegory."

"The young lions do lack and suffer hunger"—and that, being interpreted, just states the fact to which every man's experience, and the observation of every man that has an eye in his head, distinctly says, "Amen, it is so." For there is no satisfaction or success ever to be won by this way of fighting, and struggling, and scheming, and springing at the prey. For if we do not utterly fail, which is the lot of so many of us, still partial success has little power of bringing perfect satisfaction to a human spirit. One loss counter-balances any number of gains. No matter how soft is the mattress, if there is one tiny thorn sticking up through it all the softness goes for nothing. There is always a Mordecai sitting at the gate when Haman goes prancing through it on his white horse; and the presence of the unsympathetic and stiff-backed Jew, sitting stolid at the gate, takes the gilt off the gingerbread, and embitters the enjoyment. So men count up their disappointments, and forget all their fulfilled hopes, count up their losses and forget their gains. They think less of the thousands that they have gained than of the half-crown that they were cheated of.

In every way it is true that the little annoyances, like a grain of dust in a sensitive eye, take all the sweetness out of mere material good. And I suppose that there are no more bitterly disappointed men in this world than the perfectly "successful man," as the world counts them. They have been disillusioned in the process of acquirement. When they were young and lusted after earthly good things, these seemed to be all that they needed. When they are old, and have them, they find that they are feeding on ashes, and the grit breaks their teeth, and irritates their tongues. The "young lions do lack" even when their roar and their spring "have secured the prey," and "they suffer hunger" even when they have fed full. Ay! for if the utmost possible measure of success were granted us, in any department in which the way of getting the thing is this fighting and effort, we should be as far away from being at rest as ever we were.

You remember the old story of the Arabian Nights, about the wonderful palace that was built by magic, and all whose windows were set in precious stones, but there was one window that remained unordained, and that spoiled all for the owner. His palace was full of treasures, but an enemy looked on all the wealth and suggested a previously unnoticed defect by saying, "You have not a roc's egg." He had never thought about getting a roc's egg, and did not know what it was. But the consciousness of something lacking had been roused, and it marred his enjoyment of what he had, and drove him to set out on his travels to secure the missing thing. There is always something lacking, for our desires grow far faster than their satisfactions, and the more we have the wider our longing reaches out, so that as the wise old Book has it, "He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver, nor he that loveth abundance with increase." You cannot fill a soul with the whole universe, if you do not put God in it. The greatest work of fiction of modern times, as I take it, ends, or all but ends, with a sentence something like this, "Ah! who of us has

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