

Messenger and Visitor

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S. McC. BLACK EDITOR.
85, Germain Street, St. John, N. B.

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The Authority of the Gospel.

The Bible lesson in the International series for next Sunday contains certain words of our Lord recorded by Matthew as spoken to his disciples after his resurrection and shortly before his ascension to the Father—words which we are accustomed to speak of as the great commission of Jesus to his disciples. Our Lord declares to his apostles that all authority has been given to him in heaven and on earth, and bids them therefore go and disciple all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to keep all his commandments,—accompanying this commission with the assurance that he himself was with them always, even unto the consummation of the age.

It is surely important for all who essay to preach or to teach the gospel to lay hold upon the fact that they go forth to their gracious task in a name and an authority no less regal and commanding than that of the Son of God. The Jews were not wrong in expecting that the Messiah would come in the power and the authority of the Highest, but they were fatally in error in respect to the expression and demonstration of that authority and power. They searched the physical and political horizons for signs that should attest the Messiahship of Jesus, and found none to satisfy them. But those whose eyes and ears were open and alert to the truths of the spiritual world, beheld, and believed, and bare record that Jesus was the Christ the Son of God.

May we distinguish some of the elements of that authority in which Jesus commands the service of his apostles and the homage of mankind?

1. It is certainly an authority of love. And base indeed is that soul which does not bow before love as a word of authority. The name and the word of Jesus must ever command our homage because he loves, and loves as none other does or can, loves before he is loved, loves the hates of men into answering love, loves unto the end, unto death, unto that infinite measure of surrender and self-sacrifice which are registered in Gethsemane and Calvary. In love he became the Lamb of God, and in the Apocalyptic vision it is the Lamb that is seen in the midst of the heavenly throne. This surely means the authority of self-sacrificing love.

2. It is an authority of truth. When men beheld the word of God made flesh, they beheld the supreme revelation of truth in human form. Truth as well as grace came by Jesus Christ. He was in the world to do the Father's will, to bear testimony to the truth and to set up the kingdom of truth among men. No power or persuasion, human or satanic, could cause him to swerve by a hair's breadth to the right or to the left from that path which indicated the will of God. We say that it was by the pathway of love that he reached the Cross, but it was no less the pathway of truth. For the Son of man, if he would be true to God and to his fellowmen, there could be no other issue. In God love and truth are eternally joined together, it is only in sinful humanity that they are put asunder, and when the divorce takes place, love loses its divine grace of purity, and by so much its place of authority; it grows weak and selfish and becomes an untrustworthy counsellor and guide. In Jesus Christ truth and love, long separated on the earth, are joined together again in an eternal wedlock, and the union is cemented with his blood. The Cross of Jesus stands therefore as the symbol of perpetual authority for men not only in the name of love but in the name of truth.

3. It is the authority of power. Where truth and love are united, there also is power. It is so in heaven, it is being made manifest on the earth. The divorce of these principles which are eternally united in God means the impotence of division. Here, in the supreme sense, union is strength. When the wedlock of Truth and Love had been ac-

complished on the cross, then came Power to crown the Son of Man with glory. Truth and Love pointed to Calvary, and unflinchingly the feet of Jesus pursued the way of pain. Death claimed his Royal Victim, but, in the moment of his supreme triumph, that Grisly Terror whose fear had ever held men in bondage, received his mortal wound, for it was impossible that the Son of God should be holden of death. He rose, and by his resurrection from the dead was declared forever to be the Son of God with power.

When therefore Christ commissions his disciples to go forth to all nations in his name, it is in the authority not only of love and of truth but of power that he sends them forth. It is authority the highest, the most regal and unquestionable with which men can be clothed. It is recognized in heaven, it must be recognized on the earth. Love and truth had been as exiles and wanderers upon the earth. Here and there they had found resting places where they might tabernacle for a night—human lives in which they might come within speaking distance of each other, but in the life of Jesus they have found a ground for closest union, a home to dwell in, a fortress where their banners shall float forever, and from which the soldiers of Jesus shall go forth under his perpetual and personal leadership to bring the world into the obedience of its rightful Lord and into the knowledge of its only Saviour. To be soldiers of the Cross—ambassadors for Christ—is the highest and noblest service possible to men, and we who go forth to this service will do well to remember the saying of Milton, that he who would be a true poet must make his life a poem. The full power of our commission will be proved only when it is seen that that truth and love and power which we proclaim in Jesus are obtaining in our own lives a growing realization.

Birds and Men.

There appeared on the Story Page of the MESSENGER AND VISITOR last week a piece entitled "A True Story of a Bird." It was a pathetic little bit of bird history, telling how a canary, seeing its own reflection in a mirror, had the mating and nesting instinct awakened within it, and how it wrought zealously but fruitlessly to build a nest for the mate that could never come. It seemed cruel, did it not, that the bird's strongest instinct should be thus thwarted and all its hopes and effort come to naught. But if so, the cruelty was not nature's. The hand of man had intervened to place the bird under abnormal conditions, and therefore came the thwarting of its instincts, the blighting of its hopes. If the bird might have lived at liberty in its native habitat, it would have found, not its own reflection in a mirror, but its living mate, and all the instincts of its bird soul would have obtained their true expression and satisfaction. Nature makes faculty and opportunity to answer to each other. If it gives a wing or a fin it supplies an appropriate element for its exercise. The mating instinct and the nest-building faculty are not mere futilities, but answer to the thought of the Author of nature who has provided for the bird life of the world, as for all other life. And when we rise upward from the plane of the bird life to that incomparably higher plane in which the life of man finds exercise in reason and love and hope, can we doubt that the nobler and diviner instincts of the human soul shall find their satisfaction and fulfilment? If God is faithful to the birds, will He fail or forsake the creatures whom he has made in his own image and into whose heart he has put the longing for immortality and holy fellowship with himself? The heart of man has cried out for God with an aspiration which in its intensity as well as its intelligence is infinitely above the blind instincts of the brute creation, and shall there be an answer to every inarticulate prayer of dumb creatures, and only against the strong crying and tears of the souls that intelligently cry out after God shall there be neither voice, nor any that answer or regard? If the universe contains an answer to the highest aspiration of the bird, can we doubt that it also contains the answer to man's highest aspiration?

What is true honor? Not riches, not rank, not beauty, not learning, not courage. No; but virtue. Whether it be clad in the garb of poverty, or the robe of affluence; whether it hold the plough or grasp the sceptre; whether it be seated at the table, or stand behind the chair—Virtue is honor.—F. A. James.

Editorial Notes.

—Among the many eminent names which, during the past half century, Scotland has added to the ranks of her Biblical scholars and theologians, that of Dr. Marcus Dods of Edinburgh has a deservedly prominent place. His great ability as an exegete is widely known and recognized through his volumes in the "Expositor's Bible," and by other contributions to the Biblical literature of the times. He was the pastor and friend of the late Henry Drummond, and to that rare spirit his personality seemed profoundly attractive and inspiring. Dr. Dods is now in the United States, and during the present week begins a course of ten lectures before the Bible College at Montclair, N. J., on the Gospel of John—this course to be followed later in the month by a similar course on the Epistle to the Hebrews.

—President Tucker of Dartmouth College was reported by a leading New York paper as saying in an address delivered recently in Boston: "The Christian church has been set back nobody knows how far by the behaviour of missionaries in China." What President Tucker really said, as appears from the passage of his address in question printed verbatim in last week's issue of the New York Outlook, was—"The church has been set back nobody knows how long by the behaviour of Christian nations in China," which of course is very different. While it is possible that President Tucker's address implied his unwillingness to endorse from a moral standpoint all the doings of all the missionaries, it is evident that what he chiefly meant was that the church or Christianity had been discredited before the Chinese by the lamentable failure of Christian nations in China to exemplify the principles which the missionaries had so long taught and with such heroic devotion to the cause of Christ and humanity. The greed for territory, the lust for loot and the shameful barbarities of some of the European nations and their soldiers in China constitute a sad commentary on the work of the Christian missionaries. One cannot wonder if the Chinese say, If this is the practical outcome of Christian teaching, then the less we have of that teaching the better.

—An address by Dr. Joseph Parker, delivered before a joint assembly of the Baptist and Congregational Unions which lately met in London, is attracting much attention. Dr. Parker's address was a powerful plea for a union of the two bodies—a proposal which before the meeting of the Unions had been quite freely discussed. Just what Dr. Parker's scheme—if it may be called such—would embrace, it would be unsafe to say in the absence of a full report of his address. It would perhaps be more correctly named a federation than a union, but at all events it would involve co-operation in theological education, thus lessening the number and increasing the efficiency of theological seminaries; the establishment of an adequate sustentation fund for the ministry and the establishment of some generally recognized conditions of entrance into the ministry, which would prevent the sustentation funds becoming the prey of men whose fitness for the ministry was not generally recognized. Other advantages anticipated are the avoidance of duplicating work unnecessarily in the building of chapels and the sustaining of ministers, besides the union of forces and constituencies in denominational papers, etc. It would appear also that Dr. Parker's idea includes the constitution of a church court of final appeal. The scheme would seem to be in fact a kind of modified Presbyterianism, and if it is acceptable to the Congregationalists and Baptists, it should be no less so to the Presbyterians of England. Such a scheme would at the present time have small prospect of success on this side the Atlantic, but in England denominational differences are less strongly emphasized and in the presence of the State church, with its strongly ritualistic tendency, the need of a fuller co-operation of the evangelical forces is more powerfully felt.

—Prof. George D. Herron, formerly of Iowa College, has attracted much attention by his writings and other public utterances. There has been no little conflict of opinion as to the value of Prof. Herron's interpretation of Christianity and his doctrine upon socialistic subjects. At present, however, Mr. Herron's way of living is quite as much a subject of public discussion as his ideas, and whatever may be thought of the latter, there seems to be little room for difference of opinion in regard to the former. Prof. Herron's wife has sought and obtained a divorce from her husband, and the custody of their four children, on the charge of desertion and cruelty, and in the association with which Prof. Herron is connected charges have been preferred, accusing him of conduct unworthy of a Christian minister. Not long since Dr. Josiah Strong, Dr. Hillis of Brooklyn, N. Y., and other gentlemen of note declined to give to Prof. Herron even such a qualified endorsement as the appearing on the same platform with him would imply. Dr. Hillis in explaining the cause of his action has publicly stated that his objection to Prof. Herron was not based upon what he regards as the vagaries of that gentleman's intellect and the crudeness of his thinking, but upon his deeds,