Messenger and Visitor

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Some Conditions of Reform.

Up at the head of our Bay of Fundy, famed for its fogs and turbulent tides, there are wide areas of marsh lands which, continuing from year to year, without artificial fertilizing, to produce large crops of hay, are a great source of wealth to the country. In the more or less recent past much of this now very valuable land was in the condition of shaking bog or lake-bottom. The story of the transformation of these lands from a waste and almost worthless condition to that in which they are seen at present is interesting and instructive in itself, and is illustrative of matters of still greater importance than the reclaiming of marsh lands. In the conversion of the bog or the lake-bottom into solid productive marsh two processes have been at work under the control of human intelligence.—There has been a draining process and a building up and fertilizing process. It was necessary that the water that saturated the bog or covered the lake bottom should be carried off, and it was equally necessary, in order to the full result, that the waters of the Bay, with their rich freightage of mud, should be brought in, to deposit their wealth upon the land that needed to be built up and fertilized. In the case of lake bottoms it might be necessary that this double process should go on for many years before the final result was achieved. Conditions would not admit of the lakes being completely drained, and a continual conflict would go on between the waters, those of the lake resisting the invasion from the sea, and the latter constantly returning to the attack. But with every full tide old Fundy would score a victory against the lake, leaving her mud entrenchments behind her when she retired, and thus gradually but surely encroaching upon the lake's domain. With every summer the waters of the lake would fall lower, and with every great tide the sea would assert itself with larger results and leave a thicker deposit on the lake bottom, until the time finally would come when the work of reclamation was accomplished. Then the waters of the Bay would be shut out by dyke or aboideau and the reclaimers of the land would reap the rich reward of toil and patience.

In all this there is, as it seems to us, a valuable suggestion in reference to the work of moral and spiritual reform in individual lives and in communities. Reform to be effective must have a positive as well as a negative character. It is not enough to get rid of the stagnant waters and the miasmatic vapors of the moral bogs and lake bottoms. There must be inflowing tides of wholesome influence for the building up of character and the preparation of a seed-bed for the truth. There must be positive convictions possessing the soul and giving it direction. The character of the man who is not positively, but only negatively, good, has its illustration in the marshy bog from which the fresh water has been drained, but which has never received the baptism of the fertilizing tides. If the conversion of Saul of Tarsus had amounted only to a conviction that he ought not to persecute the followers of Jesus, we should have heard little of him in connection with Christian history. It was the inflowing tide of the truth as it is in Jesus for which a channel was opened into his soul by the compelling conviction that the crucified Nazarene was the risen Son of God that transformed the persecutor into the great apostle of the faith and made his name and his work immortal. What should be sought in every conversion is not merely a disposition to forsake sin and shut the door of the heart against Satan, but, with repentance, such an adjustment of the life Christward that the Spirit of Christ shall inspire it, and the floods of divine life shall flow in with all their enriching and edifying power.

This principle has its application also in reference to moral reforms in communities. It is not enough to build a prohibitive wall around men and make it impossible for them to indulge in some particular form of evil, if withal their minds are not instructed and their tastes elevated to the appreciation of the things that are good and wholesome. While the prevailing desires and tastes remain base and sensual, the life product will be evil in one form or another. The "empty, swept and garnished" condition, whether of the individual or of a community, does but invite an invasion of demons. The life that is not positively good will soon become positively evil. Unless we are much mistaken there has been of late too much of a disposition to ignore the importance of this filling up process in our efforts at reform. We have said—Get the miasmatic waters out of these old stagnant lake bottoms and give us a wholesome atmosphere, ignoring too much the fact that it is impossible to drain off lake bottoms apart from some process that shall fill them up to a drainable level. The prohibitive principle in respect to moral reform has its place, and its importance is not to be ignored. When legal prohibition is supported by a sufficiently strong and positive public sentiment it becomes effective not only for prohibition but for education. It is like the canal that connects the lake to be drained with the Bay, it drains away the waters of the lake and at the same time forms a channel for the inflow of the soil-bearing tides by which the lake bottom is to be filled up and fertilized. But if we permit ourselves to think, or to act as if we thought, that prohibition will itself accomplish the work of reform we are doomed to be greatly disappointed. The Old Testament Scriptures and the history of the Hebrew people have their lessons for us in this connection. The law had its prohibitions and its stern penalties for transgression. But hand in hand with prohibitory enactments went positive instruction in respect to the counsels of God. It was no less the duty of the Hebrew to instruct his children in all the word of the Lord than to obey and enforce the law. And the reform of the Jew from all idol worship was effected not merely, or so much, because the law had said—"Thou shalt have no gods beside me," as because the Jew had come through the teachings of the prophets and the lessons of history to believe, past all doubt that Jehovah was God alone and that beside Him there was no other.

Not Satisfied.

Our valued contemporary, the *Casket*, is still, we regret to see, disturbed over the attitude of Baptists toward Roman Catholics as supposed to be indicated by certain expressions in an article which appeared a few weeks ago in our columns in reference to the work of the Grande Ligne Mission. It complains that the writer of that article employed words which "implied as plainly as words could imply anything "that Catholics, by the fact of their being Catho-"lics, are without Christ in the world and out of "the path of salvation . . . that Catholics are as "bereft of Gospel light as the heathen that perish." Now with all respect for the *Casket's* powers of discernment, we fail to see that this statement is justified by the facts of the case. The *Casket* has particularly found fault with the words of our correspondent when he wrote in reference to the work of the Grande Ligne Institute—"Roman Catholics, children of Protestants and Priests of the Roman church have been won to Christ through this great mission and sent forth as flaming torches to light the feet of others into the path of salvation." Does this language imply that Roman Catholics are necessarily destitute of all saving truth or that by the mere fact of their being Roman Catholics they are without Christ? We do not think it does, and we do not think that the writer of the article in question holds such a belief in reference to the possibility of salvation within the Roman Catholic church. To declare that some Priests and some lay members of the Roman church had been brought to Christ through the influence of the Grande Ligne mission does not imply that all Priests and all members of that church are necessarily, and by the fact of their being such, wholly without Christ, or that they are "as bereft of Gospel as the heathen that perish." It must be confessed, however, that the words to which our contemporary has objected do quite unmistakably imply the belief that none are saved simply by the fact of their being members of the Roman Catholic communion. It is, we think, the belief of all intelligent Baptists that whoever repents of his sins and truly believes in the Lord Jesus Christ is saved, by whatever name the believer may be called and whether he belong to the Roman Catholic Church or to no church at all. This we think all intelligent Baptists rejoice to believe. But they also believe, as we have before pointed out, that in the teaching of Roman Catholicism the simplicity of the gospel is greatly obscured, and the truth in part perverted. The question here is not, of course, whether or not Baptists are right in this belief; but, being firmly convinced that Roman Catholicism does obscure and pervert the truth, thus making the pathway to assured salvation difficult, and in so far withholding from men and women their birthright in the gospel, what farther justification is needed for declaring to Catholics a gospel of liberty and power which their teachers are not able to give them? The fact that the Grande Ligne Mission aims to proclaim the gospel to the Roman Catholic as well as to the Protestant French of Quebec indicates, in the *Casket's* opinion, a belief on the part of Baptists, that the gospel "is needed more in Catholic Quebec than it is in China or Siberia or Central Africa." This opinion does not strike us as indicating a luminous mental condition. Are we to understand that a man must feel himself restrained from giving a loaf of bread to a hungry neighbor because he has reason to believe that in some distant quarter of the world there are people in a condition of actual starvation? And if the Grande Ligne mission indicates on the part of Baptists such a belief in regard to Roman Catholics as the *Casket* intimates, what about those Catholic "missions" for Protestants which of late years have become a feature of the R. C. Church's work in Montreal and probably in other cities—what do they indicate in respect to Roman Catholic belief in the condition of Protestants?

Editorial Notes.

—Phillips Brooks gave noble expression to a great truth when he said: Lesser things will drop out as the hand closes upon the larger duty or the greater blessing, just as the hand that reaches out to clasp the great strong oak lets go its hold on the blade of grass it had gathered.

—A remark of suggestive value for the pulpit is that of the plain old man who, having gone to hear a preacher of great reputation for his knowledge of the Bible, said that he had hoped to learn something about the way to heaven but had only learned about the way from Jerusalem to Jericho.

—It seems necessary to repeat very frequently the statement that in order to secure the publication of marriage, obituary notices, etc., in the MESSENGER AND VISITOR, it is necessary that such communications be accompanied by the name of the sender—"not necessarily for publication but as a pledge of good faith." A newspaper is hardly justifiable in publishing such items without any knowledge of the source from which they come, although there may be no reason to suspect fraud in the matter. It is also very important that such notices be sent in as soon as practicable after the occurrence of the events which they record. No newspaper of any standing wishes to publish notices of deaths or marriages that occurred months before, when the notices might just as well have been sent within a week of the time at which the events recorded took place.

—Readers of our "News from the Churches" will have noted with satisfaction and gratitude that many of our churches have of late experienced a quickening of spiritual life, and that pastors in many instances have been gladdened and encouraged by being permitted to welcome to the church those who have confessed their Lord in baptism. There seems reason to hope that the results of the year in additions to the membership of our churches will be larger than for some years past. But there are still many churches which are not reporting baptisms. It would be wrong certainly to conclude that because additions are not reported, no blessing is being enjoyed and no advance made. Still, is it not in the highest degree important that pastor and people should ask themselves—Are we doing all that by God's help might be done to promote the spiritual interests of the church and secure the salvation of the impenitent?

—The Bowery Branch of the Young Men's Christian Association of New York City has secured a farm at