

Messenger and Visitor

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Wanted—Convictions.

The age of bigotry is gone. Of charity and good feeling there is to-day among the various religious bodies much that is commendable. There is no special reason for any religious body to go out of its way to preach up fellowship and unity. Essential unity is largely an accomplished fact. Here and there it is true some of the ignoble jealousies and antipathies which once separated Christians, may linger and manifest themselves in unseemly ways. In the Roman Catholic church, in particular, we read sometimes of the old spirit of persecution breaking out here and there. But this bitterness is confined to the ignorant, and is in the system rather than in the hearts of the people. Once Roman Catholics really believed that there was no salvation beyond the pale of their church, and in burning heretics they thought they were doing service to both God and man by deterring others from straying beyond the sacred enclosure. This is not the case to any great extent, now. And so the narrowness of the High Church Episcopalian is greatly toned down. As for the other denominations whether termed orthodox or liberal, their temper is one of kindly and hopeful tolerance, and we do not hear so much of men being turned over to "uncovenanted mercies."

Indeed our present danger is not at all in the line of believing too much, and insisting with bigoted confidence on what we believe. It is quite the contrary. The tendency, or we are greatly mistaken, is to depreciate doctrine and creeds, and of making it of little or no consequence what a man believes. It has come to pass with not a few so-called religious people that Buddhism, Mohammedanism, and Christianity are of about equal truth and worth—some would put it, are equally false and useless. To the student of Comparative Religions, creeds and dogmas are simply matters of curious inquiry. One is constantly hearing the affirmation that "his creed cannot be wrong whose life is right." And those who do not go so far as this, but mean to be loyal to the Scriptures, evince a good deal of this lax, easy, go-as-you-please spirit, with reference to the opposing opinions held by different schools of thought. They are too ready to accept the "literary" and "fluid" theory respecting the language of the Bible, and to minimize the plain declarations of the Word.

Now much as we dislike bigotry and rejoice in the evidences of its disappearance, we like clear and positive convictions of truth and right. These will never cease to be in order. The time will never come when there are not doctrines to be sacredly held and inviolably maintained. The widest and tenderest charity is entirely consistent with loyal devotion to a sharply defined creed. An age without faith in the fundamental and eternal verities of God's Word must be a weak and corrupt age. Strong and definite convictions of the right and the true are essential to the making of a man who is to leave his impress upon the world. If one is to stand "four-square to all the winds that blow," and be recognized as a beneficent power he must be supported and energized by principles clearly apprehended and steadfastly held. Mere negations never did anything, but they have undone a good deal. We hear too much in praise of "honest doubt," and that wide hospitality that bids any number of unsettling opinions "to come in." What backbone is to the body conviction is to the soul.

Without it too many are limp, like the Bibles which they carry so ostentatiously to church. Paul was not afraid, to say—"I believe," "I am persuaded," "I know" and here, in large part, was the secret of his tremendous energy, and amazing success. The transcendent superiority of Jesus as a teacher lay in the fact that he spoke with authority, and not in the halting, hesitating style of the Scribes and Pharisees. Let the people become convinced that the man who stands in the pulpit is not sure of his ground and he might just as well send in his resignation. His ability to influence his people is at an end.

Spurgeon was mighty and his influence far-reaching because he had something to say, in which he had the most implicit confidence, and said it. Henry Ward Beecher was great, brilliant, and generous, but as a minister of the gospel he was a failure, because he seems to have had no strong and deep convictions. We do not affirm that creeds and doctrines should be held and preached when one cannot honestly accept them. Not that. But should a man be in the pulpit at all, if he is not sure of what and whom he believes? We would insist therefore, with all our might, that every man—especially every man in the place of a religious teacher,—should have a well defined system of opinions firmly held and proclaimed with bold confidence. As we view it, the old system of evangelical theology is precisely that which commends itself to an honest mind as everlastingly true, trustworthy, and fit to be settled with the unmistakable tone of downright conviction. These are the men we insist should be in all our pulpits and Sunday Schools.

Some Fundamentals.

In these times of theological unrest, of cyclones and floods and earthquakes and landslides, (religious) is there anything that has rock-bottom upon which we can plant our feet with the assurance of good standing-ground? What are some of the fundamentals of our faith and hope as we see them?

1. That the Christian Scriptures are an absolutely divinely inspired revelation.
2. That there is one eternal, all perfect God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
3. That man was originally created upright and was put upon probation.
4. That the whole family of mankind is fallen and lost by sin.
5. That Jesus Christ is the only Redeemer of mankind.
6. That Jesus Christ died a sacrificial death on the cross, that all who do not reject him should be saved.
7. That God will finally judge all mankind according to the light of truth that he gives to each one.
8. That Jesus Christ will come again, personally, at the last day to raise the dead and judge the world as appointed by the Father.
9. That then he will glorify his people in the "new heaven and the new earth."
10. That then he will sentence impenitent sinners to everlasting punishment.

We do not know that all our readers will agree with us in the enunciation of the above points. To us they seem clearly taught in the Word of God, and might be termed "landmarks of our faith and hope." They are in striking contrast with what is heard (not in whispers) but in ministerial conferences,—in public and in private, such for example as the following:

1. Inspiration is a vague term. It may mean much or little, just as a man may happen to think.
2. The doctrine of Jesus' sacrificial death and atonement is rejected or so whittled down as to rob it of all substitutionary value.
3. Reformation takes the place of vital regeneration.
4. The personal second coming of Jesus is rejected—as also the doctrine of the resurrection of the body at the last day.
5. There is no everlasting punishment. The word "everlasting" does not mean endless.

Are we right or are we wrong? Have we outgrown the faith of our fathers? Are the "old paths" overgrown? And is there a new and a better way? For ourselves there is not much in the new theories. We have no desire to dictate to any

man what he shall believe and teach. The pastors of our churches, as a rule, are loyal to Jesus Christ. The Word of God is their "rule of faith and practice." But the literature of the day is so saturated with the so-called liberal views of some religious teachers, that we feel there is danger of even good men being led astray by the subtle sophisms, with which this literature is permeated. The present seems to be an age of drift. There ought to be good anchorage somewhere. All of us should be able to say with Paul—"I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep, that which I have committed unto Him against that day."

Christian Homes Training Gamblers

Some months ago, at a mass-meeting in a Presbyterian church in Ohio, U. S., on a Sunday afternoon, in the presence of two hundred men, a converted gambler and ex-saloon keeper made a statement which created a profound impression at the time, and which appeared in print in different parts of the country. The following is in substance what he said, and which is vouched for by a trustworthy authority:

"I have been in the saloon business, with a gambling room attached, for the last four years, and claim to know something about what I am now going to tell you. I do not believe that the gambling den is near so dangerous, nor does it do anything like the same amount of harm as the social card party in the home. I give this as my reason: In the gambling room the windows are closed tight, the curtains are pulled down, everything is conducted secretly for fear of detection, and none but gamblers, as a rule enter them. While in the parlor all have access to the game, children are permitted to watch it, young people are invited to partake in it. It is made attractive and alluring by giving prizes, serving refreshments, and adding high social enjoyments. For my part I never could see the difference between playing for a piece of silver moulded in the shape of money and silver moulded in the shape of a cup or a thimble. The principle is the same, and whenever property changes hands over the luck of the cards, no matter how small is the value of the prize, I believe it is gambling.

Perhaps you have never thought of it, but where do all the gamblers come from? They are not taught in the gambling dens. A "greener," unless he is a fool, never enters a gambling hall, because he knows that he will be fleeced out of everything he possesses in less than fifteen minutes. He has learned somewhere else before he sets foot inside of such a place. When he has played in the parlor, in the social game of the home, and has become proficient enough to win prizes among his friends the next step with him is to seek out the gambling room, for he has learned, and now counts upon his efficiency to hold his own. The saloon men and gamblers chuckle and smile when they read in the papers of the parlor games given by the ladies for they know that after a while those same men will become patrons of their business. I say then the parlor game is the college where gamblers are made and educated.

In the name of God, men, stop this business in your homes. Burn up your decks and wash your hands. The other day I overheard two ladies talking on the street. One said, "I am going to have a card party, and I'm going to the store to buy a pack of cards. Which are the best kind to get?" The other replied, "Get the Angel Card, it has an angel on the back."

Think of dragging the pure angels of heaven into this infernal business."

After he had taken his seat another converted gambler arose and said: "I endorse every word which the brother before me has just uttered. I was a gambler. I learned to play cards, not in the saloon, not in my own home, but in the homes of my young friends, who invited me to play with them and taught me how."

These testimonies may not teach us anything. We may not be in a teachable frame of mind. But we earnestly ask our readers who have card parties in their homes to stop and ask themselves what is the tendency of it all? There is danger ahead. Will you be guiltless if your boy is caught in the whirling rapids? Pause a moment, and think a little, it can do no harm, it may do some good.