

Messenger and Visitor

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SYMBOL AND SUBSTANCE.

The symbol is related to the thing symbolized, as the shadow is related to substance. Its value is in the fact that it points to something beyond itself. We must not say then that because a symbol is not a reality it is, therefore of no value at all. We cannot say that the shadow, because it is not substance, is without any significance whatever. The shadow may be of great significance because it indicates substance, and indicates, too, in a more or less definite way, the character of the substance and the direction in which it is to be found. If one is in great need of human help it will gladden him to see the shadow of an approaching friend, though the friendly form itself he may not yet be able to see, for the shadow indicates that help is at hand. The symbol as a shadowing forth of spiritual realities may, in like manner be of great significance. The symbol may be beautiful, impressive, educative and greatly helpful, if only we understand and interpret it as a symbol and do not attempt to transfer it to the sphere of reality and so make it an idol to corrupt our minds.

In spite of all the light which the New Testament and the progress of Christian knowledge have brought to bear upon this subject, it seems that a large part of what is called the Christian world is unable to draw a clear line of distinction between shadow and substance, symbol and reality, and many are missing the substance in the attempt to grasp the shadow. We have all heard of the dog which lost his piece of meat in the vain attempt to seize the reflection of it which he saw in the water. This is told of a dog in a fable. Real dogs have probably too much brute sense to do that sort of thing. Such foolishness is reserved for men, and for men especially in the sphere of the religious life, for in material things men are generally able to distinguish between shadow and substance. Sometimes, towing along close to a river's bank, one may see fruit laden boughs reflected in the water, but if one wishes to taste the fruit he does not reach downward for it but upward. It is said that in Switzerland there is a lake in the clear calm depths of which travellers may see the reflection of snowy mountain peaks not directly visible from their point of view, but no traveller, we may be sure, has ever sought to reach the mountain top by going to the bottom of the lake. If one went about in the physical world, unable to discover, or paying no heed to, the difference between substance and its shadow or reflection, he would find himself in constant difficulty, and he might be expected speedily to reach the end of his career. The shadow as we have seen, is not without its significance, for good, but it may mean death to him who regards it as substance.

It is the putting of shadow for substance in the sphere of religion that has worked confusion and corruption in the life of the heathen world, and it is sad to think that the same mistake has worked and still works for confusion and corruption in what is called Christianity. But surely if men do not distinguish in religion between shadow and substance, symbol and reality, their failure is not to be charged to the lack of Scriptural light upon the subject.

The tendency indicated is seen especially in the misuse of the Christian ordinances. The two ordinances of Christianity taken in their true symbolic significance, are beautiful, impressive and profoundly educative. There is the ordinance of baptism which, understood in its New Testament sense, is expressive of the disciple's repentance and his faith in Christ, signifying his surrender to Jesus as his Saviour and Lord, his burial with the crucified Christ in order to a resurrection in him unto newness of life. And thus understood, the symbol is a thing of impressive significance and healthful grace. But when men interpret the symbol as a reality, and regard baptism as being endowed with miraculous or magical power to regenerate the human soul, so that by the act of baptism a sinful being, even though unconscious of what is being done for it, is thereby transformed into a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven,—that is to destroy the true and wholesome symbolism of the ordinance, and so to misuse it as to delude the minds of men and corrupt the church.

Then again in the Lord's Supper we have a simple ordinance, an impressive symbol of realities profoundly significant, speaking to us as it does of Christ's sacrificial death, the fellowship of believers with their Lord and with one another and the anticipation of union with him by and by. The symbol is eloquent, full of sane meaning and comforting grace. But sacerdotalism, ignoring and denying the symbolic character of the Supper, perverts the simple ordinance into a real sacrifice, so that the simple and natural bread and wine of the communion tables are by priestly assumption transformed into the veritable flesh and blood of Jesus Christ, and men and women are taught to bow down to these symbols as their God and to believe that their spiritual life can be built up by their eating and drinking, under the appearance of bread and wine, the veritable physical body and blood of their Lord. This is surely the supreme illustration of the proneness and ability of human nature to pervert the meaning and the use of a symbol.

THE LAST SUPPER.

In our Bible Lesson for the current week there are two things which stand in strange contrast with each other. There is first the revealed treachery of Judas and his defection from the company of the apostles, and secondly the institution by Jesus of the Lord's Supper, the symbol of perfect and vital union between the Lord and his disciples.

The glimpse which the gospel narratives give us of Judas suggests a life story deeply and terribly pathetic. What an awful and tragic story it would be if it could be set forth in full by the pen of a master! There must have been elements of goodness in the man,—how else can an account for his being attracted to the company of the disciples and of coming into so intimate relations with Jesus as to be chosen as one of the twelve apostles? We cannot doubt but that Judas had been strongly attracted to Jesus, that he had felt—perhaps had very strongly felt—the influence of the Master's personality upon his own life, and that his nature had in some measure responded to that holy influence. We find it difficult to believe that it was merely the grovelling spirit of petty avarice that led this man to betray his Lord. It has been suggested that Judas was a man in whom faith and ambition were struggling for the mastery, that recognizing the unique personality and miraculous power of Jesus, he had refused to believe in the possibility of his being put to death, and persuaded himself that when the Jewish leaders came to measure their strength against Jesus they would be confounded and his Messianic character would then be made manifest to the nation. However these things may be, it is surely a terribly pathetic thing to see this man who had come so near to the kingdom and who had walked in intimate association with the Saviour of the world, cutting himself off from the fellowship of Jesus to go down to his dark and awful doom. The possibility of such a life experience is a serious consideration for us all. Jesus had loved this man and had longed for him that he might choose the upward way. We see how gently he deals with him even to the last. If there was anything that could reach the heart of Judas and save him from his own perverse spirit, it surely must have been the atmosphere of that last meeting with the Master and his disciples, when the Lord in heaviness of spirit declared to them that one of them should betray him. How tremendous are the issues which hang upon the exercise of the human will when a man can resist such influences and go down to his guilty doom from such a scene as that of the last supper!

In remarkable contrast with the dismissal of the traitor, Judas, is the institution of that ordinance which, as we have said, symbolizes the perpetual and vital union between Jesus and those who truly believe on him. The Lord's Supper is a memorial ordinance. It is to the Christian what the passover was to the Jews, a memorial of deliverance through divine grace. It speaks to us, not of the lamb slain in Egypt nor of those offered on Jewish altars, but of "the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world." The bread and the wine of the Supper, of which all partake, signifying fellowship in and with Jesus Christ. But it is fellowship in his sufferings and death. The broken bread is his body broken for us. The wine is his blood of the new covenant poured out for many unto remission of sins. This memorial ordinance sets forth the divine method of redemption. To fail to discern the broken body and the poured out blood of Jesus is to fail to discern God's remedy for sin. The redemption of the world demanded a costly sacrifice. The Son of God must put into this work the fullness of his being, and pour out his soul unto death, that with his blood he might redeem mankind. And if Jesus Christ has put himself so unreservedly into this work of redeeming men, need we be surprised if he demands that men shall be in earnest about their own salvation and the salvation of their fellowmen? There can be no true fellowship with Jesus which takes no account of his broken body and his shed blood.

That the bread and the wine in the Lord's Supper have a purely symbolic meaning would seem so plain that no one could be in danger of understanding them in any other sense, and it seems strange indeed that good and learned men could ever have found it possible to interpret them in

any other way. And yet a large part of the Christian world is being taught today that the words "my body" and "my blood" are to be understood not symbolically but literally. To receive this doctrine we should be obliged to believe that the disciples, while their master was visibly present with them and talking with them, were at the same time literally eating his body and drinking his blood, under the appearance of bread and wine.

Editorial Notes.

—Rev. William Howe, D. D., of Cambridge, Mass., completes his 98th year on May 25. He is still able to go about and visits Boston quite frequently. The Union Baptist church of Boston, now Tremont Temple, was founded under Dr. Howe's ministry.

—The Rev. S. Weston Jones who lately presented the claims of King's College, Windsor, to a St. John audience, said that \$100,000 was needed for the College. This cannot be considered an extravagant demand considered in connection either with the needs of the College or the ability of the Episcopalians of the Maritime Provinces. If our Anglican friends are at all earnest and unanimous in their effort to maintain their College they will not let the matter of \$100,000 stand between them and success.

—The announcements found in our columns in reference to the Acadia anniversaries indicate that, during the coming week, there will be much of interest for the visitor to see and to hear and to participate in. As usual no doubt, many Baptists from various sections of these Provinces will seize the opportunity to make a trip which offers so many attractive features. Those who visit Wolfville at an anniversary occasion for the first time are apt to meet with agreeable surprises and to get an enlarged idea of the educational work of the denomination.

—Rev. W. H. Robinson, M. A. has kindly consented to visit Cape Breton in the interest of the MESSENGER AND VISITOR, and it will be very much appreciated if subscribers whose subscriptions are over due will pay the same to him, and if pastors and others interested in the denominational organ and the dissemination of Christian literature will aid him in his efforts to make additions to our subscription list. There must be many new comers in many localities whose homes would be the better for the weekly visits of the MESSENGER AND VISITOR and we hope that our brother will receive the encouragement he deserves as a successful and beloved pastor and a representative of the paper.

—For some years past there has been much bad feeling between different members of the Baptist denomination in Texas. This unseemly feud appears to have its chief representatives in Dr. J. B. Cranfill, editor of the Baptist Standard, and Rev. S. A. Hayden of the Baptist Herald. It is reported that in a sleeping car going to the Southern Baptist Convention at Nashville, a quarrel occurred between Dr. Cranfill and Mr. Hayden, which grew so hot that a pistol was drawn by Dr. Cranfill and two shots fired. "Without regard to the merits of either side," says the Watchman, "we say that this quarrel is a disgrace to religion and ought not to have gone to such lengths among Christian men. Somebody ought to have been willing to suffer wrong rather than bring such reproach on the cause of Christ." This is a sound principle which might apply to many another quarrel.

—The Southern Baptist Convention assembled at Nashville, Tenn., May 13. A writer in The Examiner says of this Convention that in the territory covered by it there are 779 Associations, 20,431 churches, with a total white membership of 1,805,889. The number of baptisms reported in the Association minutes of 1903 was 103,241. These churches have a church property valued at \$22,828,672. There are 11,409 Sunday Schools, with an enrolment of 761,059. Then in this same territory the National Baptist Convention of colored brethren report a membership of 1,909,139. These latter figures may be somewhat exaggerated, but it may be safely said that within this territory there are three and a half million of Baptists.

—In connection with the Southern Convention there are three Boards,—a Foreign Mission Board, located at Richmond, Va., a Home Mission Board, located at Atlanta, Ga., and a Sunday School Board at Nashville. The Foreign Board has missions located in China, Japan, Africa, Italy, Mexico, Brazil and Argentina. On these fields there are 180 churches and 294 outstations. The report shows that on these fields there were last year 2,076 baptisms. In all the Board has 63 male and 75 female missionaries, 68 ordained and 115 unordained male and 32 unordained female native helpers. The total membership of the mission churches reaches 9,969.—The Home Mission Board has 626 missionaries at work who have performed during the year 20,815 weeks of service. They have baptized 7,526 persons and received 9,271 by letter. The Sunday School Board is doing an important publishing business.