

Correspondence.

For the Christian Messenger.

Exegesis.

"Verily, I say unto you among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding, he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." *Matth. xi. 11.*

MESSRS EDITORS,—

All that is requisite to be known in order to the salvation of the soul, and the discharge of duty, is made very plain in the Scriptures (*Isa. xxxv. 8. Heb. ii. 2.*) There are, however, portions of them on which so much obscurity rests, that the views of sincere and enlightened men may differ materially as to their import.—Of these the latter clause of the verse recited above is an instance. Though the ascertaining of its precise meaning is not indispensable, yet it is obviously desirable. I purpose, therefore, to notice the principal expositions of it that have fallen under my observation.

1. "That the least gospel preacher in the kingdom of heaven—not then commenced—will be greater in knowledge than John the Baptist." But the mention of a "prophet" in the former clause of a parallel text, (*Luke vii. 28*) does by no means warrant the restricting of the unlimited expression "he that is least" to gospel preachers. The term "prophet" is not usually employed simply in this sense. That it is ever so used requires proof. Some, therefore, entertaining the same general view, regard the term "least" as applicable to all Christians.

There are, however, insuperable objections against the whole of this exegesis. 1. It does violence to the Saviour's language, by arbitrarily changing the present tense, (*est*) into the future, *will be*. 2. It assumes that "the kingdom of heaven" was not commenced till after the close of John's ministry, which is directly opposed to the explicit testimony of Scripture. The gospel shone with greater clearness after the day of Pentecost; but the idea that all the ceremonies of the Jewish law then ceased to be observed by believers, that the gospel was first preached, and the kingdom of heaven commenced at that time, is utterly incorrect. More than a quarter of a century after this event we are informed that "many thousands of the Jews" who believed were "all zealous of the law." (*Acts xxi. 20-26.*) The commencement of John's ministry is expressly declared by an inspired writer to have been "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ." (*Mark i. 1-5*) Dr. Adam Clarke, agreeing with Burkitt and Scott, justly remarks on this text, "It is with the utmost propriety that Mark begins the gospel dispensation with the preaching of John." From the language of our Lord at the beginning of his ministry, (*Matth. iv. 17*), some infer, that "the kingdom" could not then have been commenced. But the word (*engike*) in the present tense, here rendered "is at hand," is plainly used in reference to that which has actually come. (Compare *Matth. xxi. 34*, with *Mark xii. 2*, and *Luke x. 9-11*, with *xi. 20*, in Greek.) That the kingdom of God "began with John's ministry is unequivocally affirmed by Christ himself." The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it." The fact that men press into a kingdom, undeniably demonstrates its existence at that time. The learned and accurate Dr. Prideaux, when carefully comparing the prophecies (*Daniel ii. 44, &c.*) with their fulfilment, cites this text, and remarks, "From the time of his [John's] coming on this ministry, which was the ministry of the gospel, the kingdom of the Messiah began." (*Connexion*, part i. p. 302) Christ being "demanded of the Pharisees," who could not discern spiritual things, "what time the kingdom of God should come," after telling them, "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation," that is, as in the margin, "with outward show," informed them distinctly that it had come already; "The kingdom of God is within (*entos, in the midst of*) you." (*Luke xvii. 20, 21*) How could He have charged them with "shutting up the kingdom of heaven against men," not entering themselves, nor suffering others to enter in, if there were no such kingdom to be entered? (*Matth. xxiii. 13, Luke vii. 30, Jno. ix. 22, Mark xii. 34*) Assuredly no man uninfluenced by theory can imagine, that among the multitudes of weak-minded, ignorant, and erroneous believers who have lived since the day of Pentecost, "the least," (or even the least evangelical preacher,) has been in any respect "greater than" John the Baptist, who was inferior to none of his predecessors or contemporaries, was the subject of express prophecies, was filled with the Holy Spirit from his birth, "was a burning

and a shining light," had a distinct knowledge of man's depravity and dependence upon divine grace, and of the dignity of Christ, and the efficacy of his atoning sacrifice, and preached the gospel with great plainness, saying, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. . . . This is the Son of God. . . . He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." *Isa. xl. 3-5, Mal. iv. 5, 6, Luke i. 15, 76-80, John v. 35, iii. 27, 32, i. 15-18, iii. 31, i. 29, 34, iii. 36.* An exposition, then, so directly opposed to Scripture, reason, and stubborn facts, is obviously inadmissible.

2. Some, adopting a much less exceptionable view, have thought that our Lord intended to suggest, that, though he was greater than John, as frankly acknowledged by him, (*John i. 15*), yet he had made himself the least of all:—"I am among you as he that serveth" (*Luke xxii. 27, Matth. xx. 28, John xiii. 4, 5, 14, Phil. ii. 6, 7, 8*)

3. The idea which presented itself to my mind the first time that I reflected on the meaning of this text—probably fifty years ago—was, that Christ spoke of "the least in the kingdom" of glory. As the phrase "kingdom of heaven," or "kingdom of God," which is identical, (*Matth. v. 10, vii. 21, viii. 2, Mar. ix. 47, 1 Cor. xv. 50*) there is no decisive objection against this view. Unlike first noticed, it is consonant with Scripture, reason, and unquestionable facts.

4. On attentive comparison, however, of this remark of Jesus with another that appears similar, I am led to prefer a different exegesis. When a female spoke to Christ of the blessedness of the woman who was so highly favored as to be his mother, He replied, "yea, rather blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it," (*Luke xi. 27, 28*) The only consistent sense which these words will bear, is, "That the possession of true piety is a greater blessing, and renders its possessor more richly blessed, than the privilege of simply being the Messiah's mother according to the flesh." It appears to me that under consideration is to be understood in the same way; namely, "That to be an heir of glory, and so really in the kingdom of heaven on earth, though "the least," more ennoble the individual, and renders him in reality "greater" than did the high honor conferred on John, considered only in itself, of being the harbinger of the Messiah." Our Lord was manifestly speaking of the exalted office of John, as making him greater, when He naturally added this remark in reference to the greater intrinsic value of vital godliness, (*Matth. xi. 7-11*). Undoubtedly John possessed the latter; but it is equally certain that Mary was one of those "that hear the word of God and keep it." In both these cases the comparison referred, not to the piety of either Christ's mother or his harbinger, but to the honorable position in which each of them was placed. To this genuine piety is declared to have been superior. So Peter speaks of the "outward adorning" of females, however costly, as being comparatively valueless, and says that, in contradistinction to this, "The ornament of a meek and quiet spirit is in the sight of God of great price," *1 Pet. iii. 3, 4*.

Ever yours in Christ,
CHARLES TUPPER.

Tremont, Aylesford, Nov. 1, 1866.

For the Christian Messenger.

Grand Temperance doings in the County of Pictou—Nineteen New Societies formed.

Mr. Editor and Dear Brother,—It would seem by the reports you give us from time to time that an unusual interest for Temperance has for some time past been manifest in your good City of Halifax, and while we are cheered with good reports from your side of the Province, perhaps some of your City readers will rejoice to hear what the good Lord Jesus Christ is doing for us on this side of the Province.

Pictou County has for years stood in the foreground for promoting Temperance, and through the instrumentality of their grand County Temperance League have gained many victories for morality and propriety.

The Pictou County Temperance League generally has one or more lecturers constantly in the field, and pays well all who labor as their servants. By means of lectures and Temperance literature sent forth by the League, public sentiment is kept in a healthy tone in reference to the good cause of all mankind, and more and more popular are becoming Total Abstinence principles, and more and more general total abstinence practices. In many parts of the County the liquor traffic has been entirely

vanished by means of moral and religious influences. But in the Temperance field, as in the natural field, if we cease to labor, watch and guard, we find the weeds of wickedness ever ready to burst forth again. The Appetite of the drinker, the Avarice of the dealer, and the Apathy of the many must be seen to by the wise few, the "peculiar people zealous of good work" spoken of in the Bible, and spoken to in St. Matthew. 5th Chapter, from 13th to 20th verse, else our land would soon become a waste howling wilderness, all law of God and man, all law of health and propriety, alike trampled beneath the heel of the Evil One, who reigns and rules and riots in the depraved hearts and manifests his power in the depraved lusts and passion of his duped and deluded and depraved slaves in all ranks and among all classes of graceless men and women.

It is pleasant for me to be able to say, that the Clergy, the Press, many of the Magistrates, medical men, and people of influence in our County are zealous for Temperance. Rev. James A. Davidson, the agent of the County League has organized nineteen new societies, and has been the means under God, of greatly reviving old Divisions of Sons of Temperance, &c., in this County during the last few weeks. Last week near Mount Thom five new societies were formed in localities where no Temperance Lecturer was ever before allowed a hearing! The Clergy of the Kirk of Scotland and Presbyterian Church of Lower Provinces are very friendly to the cause, and have given Mr. Davidson great assistance.

A poor woman was found drowned here this morning. She had long been a slave to the liquor seller and was seen yesterday, Sabbath, in a state of intoxication! Yea, while the rich liquor merchants of our town supplied the low groggeries with the poison, that killed this woman were reclining in their cushioned seats in the churches of Pictou town, their poor victim was going about drunk, and drunk on liquor they had supplied!

It is cowardly and it is mean to pitch into the common groggeries as many Temperance men do, and shoot entirely over the purple and fine linen men and women who are rolling in wealth and luxury made at the expence of the bodies, minds, estates, souls, of their poor victims! We hear a great deal about the black Devil in the base and poor and filthy section and street, but we hear very little in reference to the equally black and far more guilty Devil in the chief seats of the sanctuary of the Lord! And in these seats as members of the church too!!

While the children of the people who are making piles of gold in the liquor traffic are sent to Colleges and Universities, we find the children of the Rum-made-poor sent to Jails, Penitentiaries and Pauper Houses! Guilty indeed is that man who could contemplate the corpse of the poor woman as it lay exposed on our wharf this morning, and still go on in the traffic that had been the means of her temporal and eternal destruction! Strange ideas of Scripture, Brother, these churches have that allow liquor sellers, liquor makers, wholesale and retail to come to the Lord's Table, while their hands and conscience are all covered with the hearse blood of their murdered victims! Surely, as good old JOHN WESLEY said the curse of God Almighty is on the money, the furniture, the walls, the floors, the roofs, the souls of the liquor dealers, who are driving their fellow men to Hell like sheep! When, Oh! when, are we to see our Churches of other denominations following Baptist example in reference to the liquor traffic, and refusing all countenance to the iniquity? While much is being done in our county, we are not half awake yet as a people to the enormity of the guilt of the man who puts the bottle to his neighbor and helps on in his temporal and eternal death!

I hope, Mr. Editor, this letter will, with God's blessings, arouse some sleeping guilty souls to duty in the Temperance Reform.

Yours truly,

ALPHA.

Pictou, N. S., Nov. 12th, 1866.

For the Christian Messenger.

English Correspondence.

From our own Correspondent.

Manchester, Nov. 2nd, 1866.

MR. EDITOR,

THE WAR IN CHINA.

We have at last a little bit of news from our costly armament, sent to chastise the Chinese, and, as the times go, I suppose we must call it good news and at least make a semblance of rejoicing at our glorious success. Some 200 Englishmen and as many Frenchmen have lost

their precious lives but what is that when compared with the "terrible loss" inflicted on the Chinese. The celebrated Taku Forts have been taken and no less than 1000 dead bodies found in one of them. Surely that fact must intensely gratify our military, and be considered as tolerable recompense for our own loss. The northern forts capitulated, one having been taken by assault after three or five hours' fighting. The others surrendered. The Chinese troops were allowed to march out leaving the munitions of war behind, including 600 brass cannon. The Celestials have displayed considerable military skill and no little bravery, having kept our allied forces at bay for 9 days from the commencement of active hostilities. On 12th and 14th of August engagements resulted in leaving the Tartar camps in our hands, on the 17th the Pih-o was bridged and crossed under heavy fire, on the 21st the principal fort after a "vehement resistance" was carried by assault; and the others successively gave in. The terms of capitulation give the allies the whole country to Tien-tsing, where imperial commissioners will meet our ambassadors to arrange terms of settlement. The French and English ambassadors will persist in going in state to Peking escorted by their own troops. We now are anxious to know what next? Few, here, will believe this to be the end of the Chinese war. Chinese pride, Chinese duplicity and above all the disorganization of the country will prevent anything more than a hollow truce. There is one thing greatly in our favor. The English troops have again and again saved Shanghai from the rebels, who have at least retired from the vicinity of that port. This fact may weigh in our favor in the negotiations for peace. This news though so favorable seems to have had no effect in giving any buoyancy to the markets for goods for that quarter. A foreboding of more disasters or prolonged hostilities seems to prevail.

PROGRESS OF THE REVOLUTION IN ITALY.

In Italian affairs we are by no means well informed. Telegrams and correspondent's letters are plentiful, but so are contradictions and denials so that we really make very slow advances in becoming acquainted with actual events. Francis II. is safe at present at Gaeta, and his diminished army not far off. The Garibaldians have advanced northward some 20 miles further driving the royalist army as far as the river Garigliano at least. The city of Capua is invested by the popular army and will most probably be compelled to capitulate in a few days. The division of the Sardinian army under Cialdini has played an important part now at the close of the game, assisting on the East to coop up the royalists on their little corner of territory and fighting a desperate battle on the 29th of October in the neighbourhood of the Garigliano. A statement of doubtful veracity gives as the results of the encounter the Piedmontese loss to be 5 guns, 300 prisoners and 2000 killed and wounded, whilst the royalists lost one single man and 22 wounded. This proportion is so manifestly absurd that we are content to treat it as one of the big Bourbon lies, many specimens of which we had from Naples a few months ago. A day or two may show that the Royalists have been beaten. It is said that the city is being bombarded, but whether it means Capua or Gaeta is not clear, most probably the former for it is known that Garibaldi is there and that that fortress is cut off from aid from the Royal army. We have a curious tale respecting the conduct of France at Gaeta. It is reported and believed here that the French admiral has taken up his position with four ships of the line to prevent the city and fortress being attacked by the Neapolitan fleet, and has expressed his determination to attempt to sink any ships that should open fire on the city. Columns have been written on the probabilities of the truth of the report and on the discussion of the why? if it be true. The French Ruler is evidently playing fast and loose with Italy. He can effectually aid the cause of liberty by standing out of the way, and has the power most grievously to retard the success of the people's army by such an interference. There may be, indeed there must be, some contingencies between Napoleon and Victor Emmanuel more than the world knows, to explain the vacillations of the French. He may be driving a hard bargain and finds it good policy to hold on to something till he gains his ends. However he may only have his ships there for the purpose of assisting the flight of the king or even to force his flight. France knows how to cover gentle coercion by an appearance of friendship. The votes of the people of the Two Sicilies are about 1000 to 1 in favor of annexation to Sardinia. The king of Sardinia will soon be absorbed in the king of Italy.