

Christian Messenger.

A RELIGIOUS AND GENERAL FAMILY NEWSPAPER.

"Not slothful in business: fervent in spirit."

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Religious.

For the Christian Messenger.

BIBLE TIMES.

We often make use of this expression. What do we mean by it? Some persons may be ready to say that we mean the times in which the Bible was written. But a moment's thought will show that the term, as commonly employed, has a more extensive application, including also the long period of two or three thousand years (according to the received chronology), before the scripture record was commenced. The meaning usually attached to the phrase is, the times spoken of in the Bible,—those ages during which the events narrated in Scripture occurred, extending from the creation and fall of our first parents to the close of the New Testament history. And so, when one speaks of incidents, or customs, or the condition of the people in Bible times, we think of ancient times in Eastern countries. Now is this idea in accordance with truth?

If predictions, promises and precepts relating to ages more recent than the Christian era, or still future, are a part of the Bible; and if they claim our faith and obedience as much as any other portion of the sacred Book; and if they are as important to us as similar utterances were to people living at or before the apostolic age; then surely we are living in Bible times.

Some say, "The days of special interposition of God have gone by." When the volume of revelation was completed, the Almighty ceased to manifest His presence and power in the world as He had done formerly,—and having given to men all they needed "for doctrine, for reproof, for instruction in righteousness," He thenceforward allowed the course of events to proceed according to established laws controlling the conditions and actions of mind and matter. Inspiration, angels' visits, prophet visions, miraculous works are things of the past. These are matter of fact times. Many would even have us believe that the religion which was suitable for the world twelve centuries ago, will not do now-a-days. But all this is false. Miracles and wonders are occurring continually, and the direct influence of the divine Spirit is experienced now as of old. The propagation of the Christian religion is the work of God going on still. Whenever a sinner is converted, it is a manifestation of the same supernatural power that cast out demons and raised the dead.

It might with equal truth have been said during the four centuries before Christ's advent, that "Bible Times" were ended. True, there was the expectation of the Messiah. Many, doubtless, like the devout Simeon and Anna the prophetess, were eagerly looking for the promised deliverer. But now, in like manner, the faithful "look for His appearing," when he shall "come the second time, without sin, unto salvation. God has a people on earth now as from the beginning. He is still graciously guiding and strengthening and trying and comforting His people; so that the language of the psalmists and others whose experience is told in the inspired volume is found adapted to the wants of Christians now. Prophecies are in course of fulfilment and are yet to be fulfilled. The record of their fulfilment, and the whole history of the Christian Church are a part of the history of God's dealings with men, as truly as the narratives in the "Chronicles" and the "Acts." This is the time in which the disciples of Christ were to "go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." The present is a portion of the time meant when Jesus said, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." This is the time when "whosoever believeth and is baptized shall be saved," and when "the earnest prayer of a righteous man avails much."

If the days of special interference of the Almighty in the concerns of human life

have passed away, when did they terminate? When did it cease to be true that "men ought always to pray?" And since what date has it been presumptuous and wrong for any one to pray, as the apostle Paul did, "that utterance might be given" him, or that events might be so ordered as that he might "be delivered from wicked men," or that he might "see the face" of his brethren?

There were stupendous miracles wrought on the earth before the religion of Christ was established; but the events of the future will be as wonderful and extraordinary as any of those in the past. Pharaoh and his host when pursuing the Israelites, Nebuchadnezzar and his army when besieging Jerusalem, Augustus Caesar and the distinguished men who adorned his court,—were quite unconscious that they were living in Bible Times. They knew not that Jehovah was the King of kings, over-ruling all the affairs of their realms, and of the world. Let us, having been taught the truth, humbly acknowledge that now, just as truly and in the same manner as ever, "the Lord reigns." It is always "Bible times."

Mr. Editor,—

The thoughts which I have attempted to express have been in my mind for some years and were roughly jotted down more than a year ago. The interesting discussion on "Special Providences" has led me to arrange them for publication. Since composing the above I have read brother Rand's letter in your last issue, and find many thoughts brought out by him similar to what I have written.

Yours sincerely,

LUKE.

Jan. 22nd, 1870.

For the Christian Messenger.

NOTES ON CHURCH HISTORY.

No. II.

Dear Brother,—

It was to be expected that many tales and traditions would be found floating about in society after the deaths of the Apostles. Their position as founders of the Church, under Christ, and their extended journeyings in almost every part of the Roman Empire, rendered it probable that many reports would get into circulation respecting them. But it was hardly to be supposed that such reports would always be well-founded. A tendency to exaggerate, and even to invent, early appeared among professors of Christianity, and proved very mischievous, as the Tracts contained in what is called the "Apocrypha" of the New Testament clearly show. Now and then, however, an anecdote turns up which has a semblance of reality.

ANECDOTES OF PETER AND JOHN.

Ambrose (who lived in the fourth century) says that when the persecution under Nero broke out, Peter, who was then in Rome, determined to leave the city. He had not gone far, when he met the Saviour, walking towards the city "*Domine, quo vadis?*" said the apostle; that is, "Lord, whither art thou going?" "I am coming to Rome," was the reply, "to be crucified again." Peter felt the reproof, retraced his steps, and was soon afterwards crowned with martyrdom. In after ages a church was built on the spot, which remains to this day. They called it the church of *Domine quo vadis*. "On the floor of the church is a marble slab, with a facsimile of the footmarks of our Saviour, which are said to have been left upon the block of the road pavement on which he stood; the original, in black lava, is preserved among the most precious relics of the neighbouring basilica of San Sebastiano." (Murray's Hand-Book of Rome, p. 319).

Peter was a married man, and had a family. His wife sometimes accompanied him on his missionary excursions. She preceded him in martyrdom. Clement of Alexandria (died about A. D. 220) relates that when Peter saw her led to execution he addressed her by name, and said, "O

remember the Lord." A touching and appropriate exhortation.

The Apostle John lived to extreme old age. We are indebted to Jerome (died A. D. 420) for the mention of an incident which may be regarded as truly characteristic of the beloved disciple. When he "could no longer walk to the meetings of the church, but was borne thither by his disciples, he always uttered the same address to the church; he reminded them of that one commandment which he had received from Christ himself as comprising all the rest, and forming the distinction of the new covenant, '*My children love one another.*' And when asked why he always repeated the same thing, he replied, 'That if this one thing were attained, it would be enough. (Neander's "Planting and Training of the Christian Church." Book v. Ch. 2.).

SINGING HYMNS TO CHRIST.

The correspondence between Pliny the Younger and the emperor Trajan (A. D. 110) respecting the Christians of the province of Bithynia, which was under his government, is remarkably interesting. He tells the emperor of the wonderful progress of the new sect, and how pagan worship had been almost discontinued among the people, but had begun to revive since the adoption of repressive measures. He asks advice as to the right course of procedure, for he was evidently baffled and perplexed. He bears testimony to the pure morality practised by the Christians. In speaking of their worship he says that they were accustomed to meet on a stated day (which was Sunday), very early in the morning, and to sing hymns to Christ, as their God.

The inference is, that those early Christians were not Unitarians, as the deniers of our Lord's divinity are now called. They worshipped Christ. Singing, with them, was an act of praise, as it ought always to be. Whatever causes for complaint, or humiliation, or sorrow might exist, they did not sing about them. They sang "with a gladsome mind."

THE BUDDINGS OF PRIESTCRAFT.

A desire for pre-eminence early showed itself among the disciples. James and John asked to sit, one on the Lord's right hand, and the other on his left, in his kingdom, and were sharply rebuked by him for their ambition. On the very last night of his public life on earth, "there was a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest," and in that "strife" all the apostles took part. When Peter admonished the elders not to act as "Lords over God's heritage," the style of his admonition implies that some were disposed to do so.

The Apostle John had not been in his grave twenty years when the spirit of priestcraft blazed up all of a sudden at Antioch. If the Epistles now ascribed to Ignatius are genuine (which, I must confess there is great reason to doubt), priestly notions had made rapid strides in a short time. We find the following sentences in his letters:—"Let us be careful not to resist the bishop in order that we may be subject to God." "It is plain, therefore, that we must regard the bishop as the Lord himself."—"Ye are subject to the bishop as to Jesus Christ;" "He who does anything without the bishop, and the presbytery, and the deacon, is not clear in his conscience;"—"It is not lawful either to baptize or to celebrate a love-feast without the bishop, and whatever he approves is well-pleasing to God;"—"Have regard to the bishop, that God may have regard to you;"—"My soul for theirs who are subject to the bishops, the presbyters, the deacons may I have part with them in God!" Many other passages might be adduced.

Now, we meet with nothing like this in the New Testament. Here was the beginning of the apostasy, the departure from the faith which had been foretold by the Apostle Paul. It grew afterwards amazingly. At length, it overshadowed everything else. Romanism is priest—priest—priest; nothing can be done without the priest. Ritualism proudly follows. And men who ought to "stand fast in the liberty

whence with Christ hath made us free" are content to be slaves. The priest is between them and the Lord. They kneel in confession. They thankfully receive absolution. But their peace is not the peace of God. Faith is "made void." They "cry, peace, peace, when there is no peace." Many of them, it is to be feared, will "lie down in sorrow."

UNAUTHORISED ADDITIONS.

Christ's ordinances are few and simple. They are—the ordinance of baptism—the ordinance of the supper—the ordinance of the Lord's day.

Justin Martyr (died A. D., 165) describes Christian worship in his celebrated "Apology," addressed to the Emperor Antoninus Pius. In speaking of the Lord's supper he says that wine mixed with water was brought to the "president," and by him given to the deacons, after thanksgiving for distribution; and that after the service portions of the elements were taken to absent members.

Here are two innovations—the mixing of water with the wine, and the sending of portions to the absent. It is not necessary to inquire into the origin of these customs, for the opinions of antiquarians, and of the Fathers, differ exceedingly. Suffice it to observe, that they are innovations, inasmuch as they do not appear in the New Testament. If some think that it is useless to trouble ourselves about such trifles let it be borne in mind that the accumulation of these "trifles" has become a complicated system of service—that the whole is regarded as religious and divine—and that men are taught to look upon it as a part of Christianity, which is thus identified with "weak and beggarly elements," and ceremonial niceties, as far removed as possible from the sublime simplicity of the original. Hence, superstition on the one hand, and infidelity on the other. We shall not get rid of them till we return to the unadulterated laws of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The work of addition went on, Pagan and Jewish usages were adopted in Christian services, and still remain there, in some communities. Romanists are fond of tracing their ceremonies to the decrees of the bishops of Rome, the supposed successors of Peter. In endeavouring to substantiate their claims they have rested on the authority of forged documents. That iniquity will be exposed in my next.

Yours truly,

MENNO.

Feb. 1, 1870.

EPISCOPAL.—Another prosecution for an infringement of the Privy Council judgment prohibiting the use of altar lights and incense, is now pending in the Court of Arches. The suit was commenced by Dr. Sumner, before he resigned the bishopric of Winchester, and the defendant is the incumbent of St. Michael and All Angels, Isle of Wight.

Father O'Neil who attracted some attention by a service at which he officiated in London a short time since during the twelve days' mission when a large number of candles were solemnly blessed and afterwards carried in procession by penitents, has recently been preaching at Oxford, and on St. Stephen's Day preached a sermon in the new church of St. Barnabas, in that city, in which he warmly advocated the Romish doctrine of the invocation and intercession of saints. After quoting and detailing several miracles worked by the body of St. Stephen about 450 A. D., he begged the congregation to pray to the saints, and they would pray to God for them for, said the rev. father, "the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much," and finally concluded by lamenting the loss of the shrines and relics of saints which once existed in England, but which were swept away at the Reformation. In the middle of his discourse the preacher clasped his hands together, and raising his eyes to heaven invoked St. Paul, calling on him to intercede for him if he said any thing amiss, and to give him power to express himself with readiness and fervour.