

AMERICAN MESSENGER.

BEHOLD, I BRING YOU GOOD TIDINGS OF GREAT JOY, WHICH SHALL BE TO ALL PEOPLE.—LUKE 2:10.

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For the American Messenger.

The Confession of a Deist.

In 1848, I became acquainted with an intelligent deist, by visiting him in affliction. From several conversations, I learned somewhat of his history. His father lived and died a deist; and the son, from his youth up, had read all he could to fortify his mind in deism. He was conversant with the greatest infidel authors; he had been a diligent attendant on lectures by celebrated advocates of deism, and thus had become a proficient in deistical views and arguments. In addition to this, he was a clear-headed man with a metaphysical cast of mind. He knew well how to argue on the subject of infidelity. No man could converse with him without being convinced of this. He could easily detect and point out the weak side of an argument brought against his views. He was cool in reasoning, and considerate in his replies.

One day I found him at his work, but in a thoughtful mood of mind. After the usual salutations, he commenced the conversation thus: I give it as nearly as possible in his own words.

"Mr. F——, I have been thinking of you, and of myself. I consider you must be a happy man: your religion must make you happy. I have buried two dear children, and I have buried them *as worms*. I believe I shall never see them again, for *they will rot and perish as worms*: there is something very gloomy in this. But you believe in a resurrection—that you will see your children in another world. This must make you happy. I wish I could believe the Bible as you do."

To this I replied, that I had enjoyed the soul-inspiring thought, under the loss of one dear child I had been called to lay in the cold tomb, whose image frequently rose up before me, that I had buried her in sure and certain hope of a joyful resurrection, and through grace I expected again to meet her in heaven.

He also informed me that he was reading and laboring and praying to God to convince him of the divine inspiration of the Bible. He was very much concerned about the education of his children who were then living, and was sending them to Christian schools. Such was the man, such his circumstances, and such his confession.

To the thoughtful mind this *honest and unmasked* confession will suggest serious reflections. We invite attention to five.

1. *What a difference between the tendency of deism and Christianity.* The one debases the mind, the other ennoble it. If I look upon my children "as worms" and nothing more, which are to live a short time, and in the grave perish for ever, will not the tendency in my mind be to treat them as such? But if I regard my children as immortal beings, living that they may be prepared to die, dying that they may live for ever, in happiness or woe, will not the thought of such an existence ennoble my mind; and shall not I train them accordingly? Does not the one view assimilate them to the beast? Does not the other, to angels? The one to earth, the other to heaven?

2. *There is no sure foundation for the faith of man to rest upon apart from a divine revelation.* The man who throws this overboard, has no anchor. His mind, however intelligent, then becomes the sport of every wind, subject to doubts and difficulties on every hand. Such was the case of the deist whose confession we have given. This thought has frequently occurred to the writer while in conversation with infidels and in reading their productions. They unsettle every thing, but settle nothing. To them mystery and doubt surround every thing. The state of their minds is epitomized in these grand questions: "But who knows?" "How do I know?" It is all uncertain. The work of demolition is theirs: to pull down, not to build up; to uproot Christianity, and establish nothing in its stead. Some of the purest minds the world ever saw have felt this, and acknowledged the necessity of a divine revelation.

3. *The danger of moral poison.* The effects of poison on the mind are as fatal as on the body, and more lasting. This man felt the truth of this, and labored to extricate himself from the moral poison which he had imbibed, but alas, he could not. Let young and old avoid moral poison as they would opium; what the one is to the body, the other is to the soul. It may please, but in the end it will destroy. Not that error is more powerful than truth; but many, especially of the young, read a work or two on the side of infidelity, find it congenial to their own feelings, and then never consider the Bible and its own internal testimony, or the other evidences that it is from God. An acquaintance of mine visited six infidels, and when they began to accuse and misquote the Scriptures, he asked them to point out the passages, but not one of them had a Bible to refer to. If the facts could be gathered, no doubt we should find this to be the general rule—what deists know of the Bible is through the works of its bitterest enemies.

If authors, editors, and publishers would vend less of this moral poison, and say less about their patriotism, they would be more truly patriotic. These infidel sentiments in their various forms and channels are the great danger of the age. Oh, do not tamper with this poison; you may get it into your soul, but never get it out again.

4. *How cruel is infidelity.* Here is a kind father burying two dear children. How painful the parting. How sad the bereavement. But Christianity, like an angel of mercy from the world of bliss, steps forward and tenderly whispers, "Weep not." "They sleep in Jesus." "Not dead, but gone before." "Through grace you shall meet them in glory, and never part again." Oh, what a cup of consolation this to the bereaved parent, as he casts the last sad glance at his dear ones in the cold grave. But infidelity with a hand hard, cold, and cruel as death, steps up and dashes this cup of consolation from his lips: says it is all fabrication—a lie. They shall never rise again, but shall sink into annihilation, and "rot as worms." Oh, infidelity, how cruel art thou to the bereaved parent; dashing the last drop of consolation from his bereaved and sorrowing heart.

5. *What a boon to man is the gospel of Christ*—its enemies being judges. "It makes you happy," says this honest-hearted deist. Yes, the gospel of Christ lays a glorious foundation for the happiness of man in time and through eternity. A foundation firm as the "everlasting hills," yea, as the throne of God itself—a foundation built upon the principles of eternal right, fixed by the immutable counsel and purpose of God, cemented by the blood of his Son, revealed to us in the Bible, imparted to us by the Holy Spirit in conversion, and in heaven we shall enjoy its full fruition.

Are you an infidel? Read the other side of the question, and pray God to guide you. For what will infidelity profit in the day of affliction, and in the hour of death?

Are you unconverted, yet a believer in the Bible? Let me entreat you at once to seek salvation through the blood of Christ, and "flee from the wrath to come."

Are you a Christian? Be grateful unto Him who called you out of darkness into the marvellous light of the gospel. "How much owest thou unto thy Lord?" R. F.

For the American Messenger.

Christ the Forerunner.

The word which we translate forerunner, occurs once in the Greek Testament, and once in the Septuagint. It seems to have a variety of specific significations, but its general import is the same, uniformly implying precedence. In Heb. 6:20, it is applied to Christ, and well does he deserve the name in all its fulness.

1. He was before all worlds, before all ages, before Abraham, before John the Baptist, though not born till after him. So speaks John, "He that cometh after me is preferred before me; for he was before me." See also Prov. 8:22-31. As it was designed that he should be over all, it was fit that he should be before all.

2. A forerunner was a herald who proclaimed that some one was to come after him. Now, though Jesus shall have no successor in office, and shall never be superseded, yet the train of his followers shall come after him. "I go to prepare a place for you; and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am there ye may be also." "Our God is gone up with a shout." He has announced in heaven that all his redeemed will follow him, and finally be with him.

3. At the ancient races the forerunner was the one who, in sight of all who entered the lists, ran around the course, and thus marked out the way. So Jesus has set us an example in all things, that we should follow his steps. In childhood and in manhood, in joy and in sorrow, when lauded and when derided, in life and in death, the pattern which he set was perfect. We must walk as he walked. All his disciples "follow him."

4. Sometimes the vanguard of an army is called its forerunner. They go before to spy out the dangers, to remove obstacles, and especially to put to flight all hostile persons lying in ambush or appearing openly. So Jesus Christ has gone up before his people. Christ as the Captain of our salvation went before us, met our enemies, vanquished them, led captivity captive, and now bids all soldiers of the cross come on and be of good courage. He has conquered death and hell.

5. In the Septuagint, the word forerunner seems to be the same as first-fruits. In Num. 13:20, we render it "first ripe grapes." So Christ is the first-begotten from the dead, the first-born among many brethren, the first-fruits of them that slept, that in all things he might have the preeminence.

6. But the word forerunner, in Hebrews 6:20, seems to have a sense different from all these. Christ has entered within the veil, that is, the veil of the heavenly temple. He bore the curse, he shed his blood, he made an end of transgression, he put away iniquity, he bore the sin of many, he finished his work, he exhausted the penalty of the law, he drank the cup of wrath to the dregs, and then the heavens received him: he went to his Father; having overcome, he sat down on his throne; he received honor and glory from God the Father; he showed us the way to God, which was by his own blood. He entered "for us," he died for our sins; he rose for our justification; he lives for our triumph. W. S. P.

Selected for the American Messenger.

The Gospel Precious.

Oh, precious gospel! Will any merciless hand endeavor to tear away from our hearts this best, this last, and sweetest consolation? Would you darken the only avenue through which one ray of hope can enter? Would you tear from the aged and infirm poor the only prop on which their souls can repose in peace? Would you deprive the dying of their only source of consolation? Would you rob the world of its richest treasure? Would you let loose the flood-gates of every vice, and bring back upon the earth the horrors of superstition or the atrocities of atheism? Then endeavor to subvert the gospel; throw around you the fire-brands of infidelity; laugh at religion, and make a mock of futurity; but be assured, that for all these things God will bring you into judgment. I will persuade myself that a regard for the welfare of their country, if no higher motive, will induce men to respect the Christian religion. And every pious heart will say, rather let the light of the sun be extinguished than the precious light of the gospel. Dr. Archibald Alexander.

LORD BYRON'S CONFESSION.—Indisputably the firm believers in the gospel have a great advantage over all others, for this simple reason, that, if true, they will have their reward hereafter; and if there be no hereafter, they can be but with the infidel in his eternal sleep, having had the assistance of an exalted hope through life, without subsequent disappointment, since, at the worst for them, "out of nothing, nothing can rise," not even sorrow.

As a conspicuous memorandum in his pocket-book, the Rev. Charles Simson wrote in large characters, twice over, on separate pages,

"Talk not about myself." "Speak evil of no man."

For the American Messenger.

Prayer Heard.

On Thursday, the 22d of January, I attended the funeral of De Witt Hunt of the New York University, "the only son of his mother, and she a widow." The stricken mother, who, the preceding week, had buried her other son, "and much people of the city with her," entered the place where she and her children had been accustomed to worship, and there Jesus met her, and said to her, "Weep not;" and in the sweet persuasion that her children *lived*, her bleeding heart was stanch, and her tears dried.

De Witt Hunt was a son of the late Rev. Christopher Hunt, pastor of the Reformed Dutch church in Franklin-st., of pleasant memory. His mother is a sister of the veteran missionary, the Rev. Dr. Scudder, now of Madras. During the funeral services, the officiating pastor held in his hand and read from a letter written by Dr. Scudder, November 12, 1851, in which he says:

"MY DEAR NEPHEW—Harriet received your letter by the last steamer. I have not the least evidence from that letter that you love the Saviour, for you do not even refer to him. On this account, I may perhaps be warranted in coming to the conclusion that He is not much in your thoughts. Be this, however, as it may, I have become so much alarmed about your spiritual condition as to make you a special subject of prayer—as to set you apart for this purpose; and I design, God willing, to pray for you in a special manner, until about the time when this letter should reach you, that is, about two months. After that, I can make you no promise that I shall pray for you, any further than I may pray for my friends in general. I have now set apart a little season to pray for you, and to write to you."

"Do you wonder at this? Has it never occurred to you as a very strange thing, that others should be so much concerned for you, while you are unconcerned for yourself? I can explain the mystery. It is this. Your pious friends have seen you, and your uncle, among the rest, has seen you walking over the pit of destruction on a rotten covering as it were, liable at every moment to fall through it and drop into everlasting burnings. This you have not seen, and therefore you have remained so careless and indifferent. Whether this carelessness and indifference will continue, of course I know not. All that I can say is, that I am greatly alarmed about you. It is no small thing for you to trample under foot the blood of Christ for *eighteen* years. It is no small thing to spend eighteen years in rebellion against God. Justly might the Saviour say of you, as he said of the people of old, 'Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone.' Your treatment of the blessed Saviour is what grieves me to the heart. What has he not done to save you? Were you to fall into a well, and a stranger should run to your help and take you out, that stranger would for ever afterwards be esteemed as your chief friend. Nothing could be too much for you to do for him. Of nothing would you be more cautious than of grieving him. And has Christ come down from heaven to save you? Has he died for you? Has he shed his very blood for you, in order that you might be delivered from the worm that dieth not, and from the fire which is never quenched? And can you be so ungrateful, so wicked, as not to love him? My dear nephew, this will not do, it must not do. You must alter your course. But I will stop writing for a moment, and kneel down and entreat God's mercy for you. I will endeavor to present the sacrifice of my Redeemer at the throne of grace, and see if I cannot, for this sacrifice's sake, call down the blessing of the Holy Spirit of God upon you."

"This youth, always of correct deportment, studious habits, dutiful, and affectionate," added the pastor, "on the 27th of November, called on me under concern of mind, and opened up the feelings of his heart. Gradually, and after no small conflict, he found peace, professed the Saviour's name, and before his departure, in the house of God took his place at the table of his Lord, and over the emblems of his love commemorated his death."

The last days of his life were perfect peace. He sleeps in Jesus. Thus, while the man of God wrote and prayed in Madras, the Spirit descended upon this dear youth in New York, and at the end of the two months of special prayer, he needed prayer no longer. Can unbelief explain this? "It is not a vain thing to call upon God." K.

For the American Messenger.

My First Inquiry-Meeting.

One man sowed, and another reaped. The town in which it was my privilege to commence my ministerial labors, had enjoyed much valuable preaching. The people regularly attended public worship, but no additions had for a long time been made to the church, which now consisted of only about twenty-five members. In some families, as many as five or six sons and daughters from 16 to 26 were living at home, all in an unconverted state, and the father and mother, in several cases, were in the same condition.

I had held the usual meetings on the Sabbath, and on Thursday evening what was called a conference-meeting was held in one part of the town, at the house of Dr. M——. The parable of the prodigal son was read, and remarks and prayers offered by myself and others. In the course of the meeting, several appeared considerably affected.

"I perceive," said I, "that a number present are awakened to a view of their condition as unpardoned sinners. I am well aware, that persons who are inquiring what they shall do to be saved, may be greatly benefited by personal conversation with Christians. For such a purpose, it is proposed that such persons remain on their seats when the meeting shall be closed, and interviews will be had with them."

Eight staid where they were. They were respectfully approached and conversed with, to their benefit, and to that of those who undertook to direct their inquiring minds. The results were so profitable that the practice continued through the winter, and the next summer that church consisted of about four times as many members as when the work began. Several of the young men who then made a profession, became useful ministers in different states of the Union. We had then never heard of such meetings; but the voice of Providence seemed to direct us to a course which, with various modifications, has been blessed in other places. W. D.

PROFESSOR STUART'S TESTIMONY.—"When I behold the glory of the Saviour, as revealed in the gospel, I am constrained to cry out with the believing apostle, 'My Lord and my God.' And when my departing spirit shall quit these mortal scenes and wing its way to the world unknown, with my latest breath I desire to pray, as the expiring martyr did, 'Lord Jesus Christ, receive my spirit.' I ask for no other privilege on earth, but to make known the efficacy of his death; and none in heaven, but to be associated with those who ascribe salvation to his blood."

For the American Messenger.

Duty.

"No matter where," if duty calls thee, go!
Amid contagion, poverty, and death,
Bend o'er the sufferer in his hour of woe,
Nor fear the blast of pestilential breath.

Go o'er the wintry ocean! tremble not
When night, and storm, and darkness, round, above,
Hover like ravens—self-approving thought
In thy soul nestles, like the soft-winged dove.

Go to the desert! burning heats by day,
Nor foes by night, disturb thy sweet repose;
Up-springing flowers adorn thy lonely way;
To slake thy thirst, the sudden fountain flows.

Speak thou, as duty bids thee, truthful words;
If danger threatens, still be bravely true.
Trust thou in Him who rules the raging floods,
And thou shalt triumph o'er the billows too!

Speak thou for the oppressed! Be thou his friend.
"Mercy," the poet saith, like heaven's own rain,
"Is doubly blessed," which upward doth ascend
To gather might, then break on earth again.

Tell in thy Master's vineyard! Watch and pray!
Toil for thy race, for whom the Saviour bled:
Let his example cheer thee on thy way;
And if he bids thee, toil for daily bread.

Do, suffer, die, at duty's call divine,
Nor rest from battle till the victory's won;
Then, soldier of the Cross, a crown is thine—
Then, faithful servant, hear thy glad "Well done!"

M. A. H.

For the American Messenger.

Trust in Man.

The late Rev. Dr. Nettleton, whose labors were blessed in the salvation of multitudes, was often inexpressibly pained to find anxious inquirers depending on him, instead of trusting in Christ who alone can save.

Just before the great revival of religion in Nassau, N. Y., Mrs. V—— was serious, and hearing of Mr. Nettleton's labors in Malta, went there and spent the Sabbath, hoping his preaching would be blessed to her; but returned thinking she had received no benefit.

Mr. Nettleton, however, in fulfilment of a previous engagement, came to Nassau, and preached to an immense congregation; but Mrs. V—— still remained unrelieved and unenlightened. Mr. Nettleton met about one hundred inquirers at sunrise, and suddenly returned to Malta.

Mrs. V—— bitterly censured him as negligent of the welfare of souls, when she was led to see that she had been wickedly trusting in man for what God alone could give; and almost in horror lest she had committed the sin against the Holy Ghost, she rushed to her closet, bowed herself before the all-seeing God, and in brokenness of spirit sought his mercy, and found peace and joy in believing in Jesus Christ. S.

THE PILGRIMS' FIRST SABBATH.—"If you stood on Plymouth rock to-day, and followed the horizon with your eye towards the north-west where the land breaks the sea view, you would discern a small island, and that island will stand on the geography of the millennium haloed with glory, as the spot where the old pilgrims spent their first Sabbath. Yes, fatigued, worn, and well-nigh dead with their long sea-voyage, in full view of the land of their adoption, yea, within half an hour's sail of the welcome coast, the Sabbath dawned on them right abreast of that island; there they moored their bark, and on that desolate island, frost-bound and homeless, under a snowy sky and freezing sleet, they remembered the Sabbath-day and kept it holy. And think you, their children have outmarched them in progressive morality? Ah, let the rush of ten thousand iron wheels over God's murdered Sabbaths and bleeding laws be the answer."

Rev. C. Wadsworth.

For the American Messenger.

"Rise and Progress" at a Quilting.

My labors as a minister commenced thirty-six years ago, upon an upper branch of the Merrimac river. The people originated from Newburyport, in the days of the elder Dr. Spring. They were a reading people, had a town library of good books, and on Sabbath-evening would meet for divine service, when some valuable tract, sermon, or interesting document would be read, connected with singing, prayers, and remarks and exhortations.

One afternoon Mrs. B——, with whom I boarded, said she had laid out a little work for me that evening. "I wish you to go with my son David to Lieut. M——'s, where our daughters have gone to attend a quilting. On the way there, you can talk with him about the concerns of his soul; and on the way back, you may converse with one or more of the daughters." At the proper time we were on our way, talking on the great theme in which all should feel a deep interest. When we entered the parlor, the work had been finished and put aside, and the young ladies were sitting in a semicircle before a comfortable fire, listening to one of their number who was reading from Doddridge's *Rise and Progress*. I do not recollect that any of them were members of the church; but all of them appeared impressed with a sense of divine things. I had conversation with the sisters on our return, and from their remarks, and what I afterwards heard of the good effects produced by that reading, I judge that seldom has a gathering of that sort been followed with greater good than this among the mountains of New Hampshire. A revival of religion had already commenced, was even in progress; and before it closed, some seventy or eighty were hopeful converts, among whom were four in the family where I boarded, and I believe seven in the family of Lieut. M——, one of whom afterwards became a useful minister of the gospel. W. D.

For the American Messenger.

DEATH IN THE MIDST OF LIFE.—A pastor in Maryland writes, January 28, "Last night I was to marry Mr. — to an estimable young lady—day before yesterday I officiated at his funeral. He had enjoyed his wonted health, and on Friday, the 23d, was active in preparations for the reception of his bride at his father's house, but just at night was found lying senseless. The family were instantly called, but he was dead, without a moment's warning to himself or others, or any knowledge of the immediate occasion of the event. Never have I known a calamity of this kind so sudden and so afflictive. It is the voice of God to all, saying, 'Be ye also ready; for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of man cometh.' Be ready for the utter disappointment of your highest earthly hopes—for a call from God to stand before him in judgment. Be ready by repenting of sin, by trusting in Christ, by obeying the gospel, and by a life of holy activity in his service." A. S. C.

THE MESSENGER.—A literary and pious lady says, "The Messenger comes up to my idea of what a religious paper should be; there is never any thing in it which would make me unwilling to place it in the hands of an impenitent friend. The Messenger is a treat to us all, warmly welcomed and thoroughly read."