

Christian Messenger.

A REPOSITORY OF RELIGIOUS, POLITICAL, AND GENERAL INTELLIGENCE.

"NOT SLOTHFUL IN BUSINESS: FERVENT IN SPIRIT."

NEW SERIES,
Vol. IV. No. 2.

HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA, WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 12, 1859.

WHOLE SERIES,
Vol. XXIII. No. 2.

Poetry.

Night showeth Knowledge.

This fine composition is by William Habington, and bears date 1605. It is a perfect little gem in conception and execution.

When I survey the bright
Celestial sphere,
So rich with jewels hung, that night,
Doth like an Ethiop bride appear.

My soul her wings doth spread,
And heavenward flies,
The Almighty mysteries to read
In the large volumes of the skies.

For the bright firmament
Shoots forth no flame
So silent, but is eloquent
In speaking the Creator's name.

No unregarded star
Contracts its light
Into so small a character,
Remov'd far from our human sight.

But if we steadfast look
We shall discern
In it, as in some holy book,
How man may heavenly knowledge learn.

It tells the conqueror,
That far-stretched power,
Which his proud dangers traffic for,
Is but the triumph of an hour;

That, from the farthest north,
Some nation may
Yet undiscover'd issue forth,
And o'er his new-got conquest sway;

Some nation, yet shut in
With hills of ice,
May be let out to scourge his sin,
Till they shall equal him in vice.

And then they likewise shall
Their ruin have;
For as yourselves your empires fall,
And every kingdom hath a grave.

Thus those celestial fires,
Though seeming mute,
The fallacy of our desires,
And all the pride of life confute.

For they have watch'd since first
The world had birth;
And found sin in itself accurst,
And nothing permanent on earth.

Miscellaneous.

Pray on.

It is easy to know the knock of a beggar at one's door. Low, timid, hesitating, it seems to say, "I have no claim on the kindness of this house; I may be told I come too often; I may be treated as a troublesome and unworthy mendicant; the door may be flung in my face by some surly servant." How different on his return from school, the loud knocking, the bounding step, the joyous rush of the child into his father's presence, and, as he climbs his knee, and flings his arms around his neck, the bold face and ready tongue with which he reminds his father of some promised favor? Now, why are God's people bold? Glory to God in the highest! To a father in God, to an elder brother in Christ, faith conducts our steps in prayer; therefore in an hour of need, faith, bold of spirit, raises her suppliant hands, and cries up to God, "O! that thou wouldst rend the heavens, and come down."

I think that I see the sneer curling on the skeptic's lips as he says: "How absurd! What presumption! as if it were not below the dignity of Divinity to come at king's or peasant's, prince's or pauper's call. Should the purpose of the Eternal be shaped by your petitions? Creature of a day and of the dust! what are you, that the universe should be steered—its helm moved this or that way for your sake?" Well, no doubt the language is bold; yet with God, a Father, our Father, my Father in Christ, I feel I can be bold and confident in prayer. I know a father's heart. Have I not seen the quiver of a father's lip, the tear start in his eye, and felt his heart in the grasp of his hand, when I have expressed some good hope of a fallen child? Have I not seen a mother, when her infant was tottering in the path of mettled coursers, with foam spotting their necks, and

fire flying from their feet, dash like a hawk across the path, and pluck him from instant death? Have I not seen a mother, who sat at the coffin head, pale, dumb, tearless, rigid, terrible in grief, spring from her chair, seize the coffin which we were carrying away, and with shrieks fit to pierce a heart of stone, struggle to retain her dead?

If we, that are but worms of the earth, will peril life for our children, and, when they are mouldering into dust, cannot think of our dead, nor visit their cold and lonesome grave, but our breasts are wrung, and wounds bleed afresh, can we adequately conceive our measure, far less exaggerate, even with our fancy at its highest strain, the paternal love of God? Talk not of what you suppose to be the dignity of Divinity. Talk of the calm, lofty, dignified demeanor which becomes a king, who sees his child borne off on the stream that sweeps his palace wall. The king is at once sunk in the father. Divesting himself of his trappings—casting sceptre, robe of gold, and jeweled crown aside—he at once rushes forth to leap into the boiling flood.

Child of God! pray on. God's people are more dear to him than our children can be to us. He regards them with more complacency than all the shining orbs of that starry firmament. They were bought at a price higher than would purchase the dead matter of ten thousand worlds. He cares more for his humblest, weakest child, than for all the crowned heads and great ones of earth, and takes a deeper interest in the daily fortunes of a pious cottage than in the fall and rise of kingdoms.

Child of God! pray on. By prayer thy hand can touch the stars, thy arm stretch up to heaven. Nor let thy holy boldness be dashed by the thought that prayer has no power to bend these skies, and bring down thy God. When I pull on the rope which fastens my frail and little boat to a distant and mighty ship, if my strength cannot draw its vast bulk to me, I draw myself to it—to ride in safety under the protection of its guns, to enjoy in want the fulness of its stores. And it equally serves my purpose, and supplies my needs, that prayer, although it were powerless to move God to me, moves me to God. If he does not descend to earth, I—as it were—ascend to heaven.

Child of God! pray on. Were it indispensable for thy safety that God should rend these heavens; it should be done. I dare believe that; and, "I am not mad, most noble Festus." Have not these heavens been already rent? Eighteen hundred years ago, robed in humanity, God himself came down. These blue skies, where larks sing and eagles sail, were cleft with the wings, and filled with the songs of his angel train. Among the ancient orbs of that ancient firmament, a stranger star appeared travelling the heavens, and, blazing on the banner borne before the King, as he descended on this dark and distant world. On Canaan's dewy ground—the lowly bed he had left, the eye of morning shone on the shape and form of the Son of God; and dusty roads, and winter snows, and desert sands, and the shores and the very waves of Galilee, were impressed with the footprints of the Creator. By this manger, where the babe was cradled—beside the cross, upon whose ignominious arms the glory of the universe is hung—by this silent sepulchre, where wrapped in bloody shroud, the body is stretched out on its bed of spices, while Roman sentinels walk their moonlit round, and Death, a bound captive, sits within, so soon as the sleeper wakes, to be disarmed, uncrowned, and in himself have death put to death—faith can believe all that God has revealed, and hope for all that God has promised. She reads on that manger, on that cross, deeply lettered, and that rocky sepulchre, these glorious words, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" And there, lifting an eagle eye to heaven, she rises to the boldest flights, aloft on the broad wings of prayer.

"Faith, bold faith, the promise sees,
And trusts to that alone,
Laughs at impossibilities,
And says, it shall be done."

Catechumens teaching their Teachers.

The unsettled views of some Pedobaptist ministers, on the subject of baptism, are very properly reproved in the following well written article, from the *New York Chronicle*:—

It was customary in the first days of Christianity to put catechumens, as the candidates for baptism were then called, under a course of instruction to fit them to receive that ordinance. The minister taught them the mode, the design and the obligation of baptism that they might submit to it in an intelligent manner, and with a full view to the duties to which it would pledge them before the church and the world. He instructed them in so much of the doctrines of our religion as that ordinance more immediately involves, our death to sin and resurrection to a new life in Christ, our being planted in the likeness of his death that we may be also in the likeness of his resurrection. Indeed, the minister had something positive and definite to present to the candidate at that early period, and the candidate occupied the place of a disciple or a learner. It was thus with Philip before baptizing the Eunuch. He preached unto him Jesus, in doing which he gave such specific instruction in reference to baptism, that the Eunuch said, "See here is water, what doth hinder me to be baptized?" And Philip said, "If thou believest with all thy heart thou mayest."

But how changed is this practice in our days! Now, the minister asks the catechumen how he shall proceed in his baptism. "Will you teach me, young disciple, what baptism means?" In answer to this, one candidate answers: "Baptism, Sir, is a sign of purification, and a little water shows this as much as a great deal, my instruction therefore is that you sprinkle me." "Very well," replies the minister, "if that is the law of Christ I will sprinkle you." Another candidate answers: "I have no lesson to give you Mr. Minister, but that which I have received from the gospel, which is that baptism is a symbol of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and my direction is that you forthwith pour water on my head in imitation of this divine effusion." "Very well," says the minister, "if you so direct, I must submit and will pour a bowl of water on your head." To another candidate, the minister says, "my young brother, please teach me how to proceed in your baptism." "Baptism, Sir, is being buried with Christ unto death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." So says Paul, and as he says so, my decision is that you immerse me into the likeness of Christ's death." "I am at your service, my brother," replies the minister, "to do as you direct, and will therefore immerse you."

These are literal matters of fact in the practice of those who leave it to the candidate to direct as to the mode of administering the ordinance. The catechumen is the teacher and guide in the case, and the administrator takes his lessons and proceeds accordingly. In some cases, of which we have been a witness, the administrator labors beforehand to prove that sprinkling is the only baptism, and that immersion is not to be found in the Bible, and then after doing so, he suffers himself to be overruled by candidates and immerses them against his own convictions of what is true and apostolical. He administers an ordinance that he cannot find in the word of God, an ordinance against which he had been exerting the full force of his ministerial authority and his powers of argumentation, to carry out this modern theory of making catechumens teachers and ministers catechumens.

Would it not be far more consistent if each denomination were to have a fixed and determinate mode of baptism to which it required all candidates to submit? Why thus leave everything to the candidate? He is at best but a babe in Christ and needs to be taught rather than to act as a teacher. The truth is, this perverted order

of things is a virtual concession that the modes of baptism now so generally practiced cannot be sustained by the Bible, and that the evidences in favor of immersion are so decided that unless it is administered to those who demand it there is no such thing as holding them. Those who profess to believe in sprinkling and pouring consent to immerse rather than lose their flock.

Preaching in the Academy of Music at New York.

The services at the Academy of Music were conducted last Sabbath evening by Rev. J. P. Thompson, D. D., of the Congregational church. The attendance was not so great as on some former occasions when hundreds have seen turned from the door for though a late comer, we succeeded in obtaining a seat by mounting to the fifth circle close under the roof. From such an elevation, full sixty feet above the speaker's stand, we had a fine view of the audience, who surrounded him on every side and rose far above his head, circle after circle, high up to the roof. How different from the one which assembles here six nights in the week, and even seven, when advertisements of a "sacred concert" are scattered through the city. The opera cloaks and the gay vestments have given place to the soberer hues of the sanctuary, and the glaring gaslight is toned down to a point just sufficient for illumination. The pages and the libretto-boys have disappeared, and grave divines and staid matrons occupy the stage, smoothed and polished for the light-footed dancers, and the gaily-dressed cantatrice who turns the head of the Young New York six days in the week. The pulpit covers the prompter's box and the orchestra has entirely disappeared; in its stead we have the swelling sound of 3,000 human voices joining in hymns of praise "to Him that loved us and gave himself for us!"

Yet some things remain quite in keeping with the place. Each listener holds a printed programme so like a play-bill that we turned from it at first as some 'advertising dodge' of the Opera manager. Back of the speaker hangs the immense curtain—shutting from view all but a segment of the spacious stage, in itself larger than many churches—ornamented with a fresco of some grand old castle with its statues and its images, and its broad marble steps leading into inviting court-yards and spacious halls beyond. Above this is a medallion head of Washington surrounded by angelic trumpeters of his fame, and over all, in a halo of glory, is seen Mount Vernon between blue curtains, ornamented with stars, which hang on either side. Under this is the inscription, "Woman gives Mount Vernon to the Nation." Tokens of this festal season also adorn the building; the little cupid images on the edge of the gallery are covered with garlands, and festoons of evergreen hang from gaslight to gaslight.

In the lobby are gathered groups of gay young bucks, who think the opera uncommonly dull to-night, and have withdrawn to the outskirts to discuss their week-day plans and purposes heedless of the policeman's warning that it is Sabbath evening. We were glad of this evidence that we have some true-hearted Christian men in our police force; men who fear God and keep His commandments.

How great the contrast between this scene at the Academy and the one we witnessed at the National theatre a short time since! all is order and attention, and ladies and gentlemen listen in respectful silence to the message the rough newsboys had received with disorderly applause and unseemly exclamations. This clearly shows the necessity of having these different services to reach those who are separated by the adamant barriers of the social feelings and sympathies which so unexorably classify men. We need and should always have in this city Sabbath services which all can attend without the unpleasant feelings growing out of our system of taxation by pew representation. We must reach all classes, and, if need be, go out into the high-ways and haunts of fashion, and the by-ways and lurking-places of misery and want, and crime, and compel men to listen