

Christian Messenger.

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Premature Church Membership.*

This subject is undoubtedly one of the very first importance. There may be differences of opinion amongst the various denominations of christians, and even amongst members of the same body as to what constitutes premature church membership, but none will deny that it is a matter which deeply concerns every member of the christian church. The condition of the church and the result of its existence in the world, will be materially affected by the character of its membership. The future prospects of the world must also depend greatly upon whether its church members have assumed that position prematurely or no.

The author of the work just published with the above title, and which has suggested this article, commences by laying down the principle that "By premature church membership is meant a connection with the church, previous to a change of heart."

This we presume will be accepted by the majority of our readers as a satisfactory basis, whilst many probably, will be surprised that any other view should be taken in relation to the matter. A Christian Church surely should be a church composed of christians, and were it not that in the corruption of past ages, Infant Baptism had introduced multitudes to the church who have been anything else but christians, the objection to an amalgamation of the world and the church, in all probability would be universal. It is not so much the introduction of non-professors however, as of receiving persons as members who have not given sufficient evidence of christian character, which is referred to by the above term.

The Introduction to this volume by the Rev. Baron Stow, D. D., gives an excellent synopsis as well as a brief but sensible discussion of the subject. We may probably give our readers a more satisfactory view by extracting a few passages, than we could by any further remarks of our own. The work itself may be read with profit by all church members.

The subject he says;—"Has an importance which cannot easily be over-stated. Its relations are multifarious and far-reaching. Its bearings are direct upon great interests, individual and social, temporal and eternal. No finite being can comprehend more than fractional parts of the consequences that are involved. If, in its immediate pertinency, it belongs to the ecclesiastical, it is not circumscribed by any such limits, but spreads out widely, indefinitely, into the non-ecclesiastical, and touches at every point the broad area of humanity." "If the declaration of Jesus to the group which he had chosen out of the world—"Ye are the salt of the earth"—has any significance, then, surely, it has a momentous import, and cannot be too solemnly or earnestly pondered. Nothing can be trivial that affects the well-being of one immortal soul. Who, then, can measure the importance of an agency whose relations are co-extensive with the earth, and whose influence, conservative or destructive, must modify the character and the destiny of countless millions? Which ever be true—The World for the Church, or The Church for the World—it is undeniable that the great problem of the world's destiny depends for its solution upon the antecedent problem of what are to be the character and the activities of the church. Hence, nothing can be unimportant that affects the fitness of the church for her extended mission."

"The New Testament idea of a Christian church is one of unsurpassed simplicity, and, in outline, of remarkable definitiveness. The first exhibition of that idea, in germinal form, presents the single fact that a church consists of the disciples of Christ; those who deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow him; those who recognize him in his true character, love him as supremely excellent, depend upon him as their Saviour from sin and its consequences, accept him as their teacher, exemplar, and commander, and are ready, in the spirit of entire subjection, to execute his will in all that he requires of them."

"There is no departure from the fundamental idea of a spiritual society, all of whose members are united to Christ, and to one another, assimilated and rendered harmonious by one spirit, having 'one Lord, one faith, and one baptism.' All the ends at which it aimed, all the service in which it engaged, presupposed that such was the character of its constituent parts. All the subsequent developments, giving it greater fulness of form and a more systematic organization, were but

the outgrowth of that one ever present, ever recognized principle—the life of God in every individual soul."

"Since then, no church has been properly formed that did not commence with this primary idea, that its membership was to include, so far as itself could judge, none but the regenerated—new creatures in Christ Jesus; and any church in which this primary idea is practically ignored, is by so much lacking in validity as a church of Christ?"

"The whole manifestations of church life and enterprise, as we find them in the apostolic age, may be generalized under two heads—the structural and the functional. First, a Gospel church properly consists of those only who have been regenerated and baptized, and, as individual christians, are walking in all godliness and honesty. Second, the ends of their combination into a society are the advancement, by social influences, of their own spiritual culture, the exhibition to the world of an example of brotherly love, the maintenance of the worship of God and other ordinances of religion, and the diffusion of Christianity among the many outside of their circle."

"It will at once be apparent, that the introduction of an unregenerate member is a violation of the organic law of the body, and secures the presence of an element unfavorable to the accomplishment of its objects. He is unprepared to receive good from the association; he can do no good to his associates, or in company with them. He is no part of the spiritual mechanism; he is a foreign substance, causing only friction and obstruction. The result, so far from any thing like utility, must be only damage to himself and to others. Just in proportion to his strength, he will contribute to the weakness of the body. Whatever his station, his wealth, his gifts, he never truly helps—he always hurts."

"It inevitably follows that a grave responsibility rests upon all who are concerned in the examination and reception of candidates for membership. The possibility of error attends every case that may come before them, and they should be held responsible for no more than the faithful use of such means as may enable them to form the best judgment that the case will admit. In the amount of evidence which they furnish of new hearts, they may differ; but the quality in all cases is essentially the same. The evidence, be it much or little, must be unequivocal and decisive. It exists in the case of every one who has been spiritually renewed; and, existing, it may be collected. Its existence should never be matter of supposition or of hope but always of actual discovery. The whole question is one of fact, and the proof offered should be carefully sifted, taking forth the precious from the vile. Is there valid evidence that the individual 'has passed from death unto life?' If a doubt exist, the cause of Christ, as paramount in importance, should have the benefit of that doubt. The law of the Master must not, for any reason, be disregarded; the welfare of the church must not, on any account, be jeopardized. Nothing can justify a pastor, or a committee, or a whole church, in favoring the introduction of a member whose evidences of christian character are not, after careful investigation, satisfactory. It is often said of quite young persons who profess to have become religious, that 'the fold of the flock is the place for the lambs.' True, indeed; but the main question is, Are they lambs? must not be begged. Hardly can a greater wrong be done to them, or to the church, or to the christian cause, than by receiving them before that question is affirmatively answered upon a Scriptural basis. No tenderness towards the candidates, no deference to the wishes of interested friends, no ambition to multiply reported accessions, should be allowed to interpose the slightest influence towards what, by a real misnomer, is called 'charitable judgment.' Charity may work effectively in many directions, without the objectionable perversion that involves a practical falsehood, and tends to results which every friend of humanity should deprecate.

The motives which prompt to superficiality in this department of ecclesiastical service, are so numerous, and so insidious, and so coincident with the designs of Christ's chief Enemy, as that no one should enter upon the work but with extreme caution, and with prayer for Divine guidance. The question to be decided is one of infinite moment. It is one of loss or gain on an extended scale. It is more; it involves fealty to a great Principle, and to the One Lawgiver."

Horton Academy.

THE EXHIBITION, at the close of the Term of this institution, took place on Tuesday last.

In the morning the Greek and Latin Classes were examined, and exhibited an amount of proficiency which reflected credit on both

students and Teachers, and shewed that they had been using great diligence, and were unwilling that the institution or themselves should take any stand, below that of first-rate excellence. Natural Philosophy, Geography, and English Grammar, were also subjects of the morning's attention.

In the afternoon a large assemblage of the parents of the students and friends of the institution, assembled in the Academy Hall, and witnessed with much satisfaction further examinations in English Grammar, and Virgil; The proficiency of the pupils in Algebra and Arithmetic, was demonstrated by numerous illustrations on the black board.

Then came the exercises of several classes in Composition, on subjects suited to the capacities of each. The evidences of genuineness which each paper shewed, together with the correct and well suited language to express the ideas of the writers of the essays, was one of the most pleasing features of these productions. The Elocutionary exhibitions were of a very superior character. The rendering of the several pieces, whether consisting of harangue, dialogue, or more highly wrought dramatic production, shewed that nice appreciation of the characters represented, which is the result of careful cultivation and correct judgment. It would be invidious to mention the names, where all so well performed the part assigned them.

When it was announced that the examination of classes had been completed, it was evident that some unusual proceeding was about to follow in which the pupils were much concerned. This was soon explained by one of the students coming forward with an address, a copy of which is given in another column, and on behalf of the pupils, presenting to Mr. Hart a handsome writing-desk, as a token of their esteem and affection on his leaving the Institution.

Mr. Hart with much emotion replied, and manifested the tender solicitude he had felt for his pupils, and the difficulty he experienced in breaking the tie by which he had for so many years been bound to the Academy.

Rev. Mr. Hunt, the Secretary of the Baptist Education Society, addressed the company present, and alluded to the high satisfaction it must have afforded all, to witness the results of the course of instruction supplied in this Academy.

The fact, that for nine years this Institution under the direction of Mr. Hart, had continued to flourish, and was now in a more efficient condition than when he first took charge of it, was sufficient to shew that as an instructor of youth and a christian gentleman, he, Mr. Hart, stands deservedly high in the estimation of the community. Mr. Hunt was glad however to be able to inform the students and friends, that the committee had secured the services of the Rev. Thomas H. Higgins of Liverpool, to succeed Mr. Hart as Principal of the Academy. Mr. Higgins is well and favourably known to many friends of the Institution, as a highly competent and thorough teacher, and he had no doubt it would gratify the denomination to find, that one so well qualified, would at the close of the vacation be ready to enter again on the work of carrying forward and extending the advanced course of education, furnished in the Horton Academy.

Dr. Cramp then arose and briefly addressed the audience, adverting to the harmony which had existed between the much respected Principal of the Academy, and the Faculty of the College. They had ever found Mr. H. prepared to co-operate with them in whatever would be calculated to benefit the Students, and advance the interests of the Institution. In leaving, he would take with him their christian esteem, and most sincere respect and sympathy.

After singing the Doxology, the Rev. Mr. Hunt pronounced the benediction, and the young gentlemen were at liberty to return to their homes in the various parts of the province, from Canso to Yarmouth, and from New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Cape Breton.

Associated Alumni of Acadia College.

The Public Meeting appointed to inaugurate this Society, was held at Wolfville on Tuesday evening, 5th inst. The large room in the basement of the new meeting-house, was quite filled by a highly respectable and intelligent audience. J. W. Johnston, Junr., Esq., was called to the chair, and commenced the proceedings by explaining the objects of the Association. He regretted to have to inform the audience, that the committee had been disappointed in their expectations with regard to Dr. Pryor's appearance amongst them to deliver an Oration. A letter from Dr. P. was read, giving reasons for his unavoidable absence, and expressing his deep interest in the objects of the Society and sympathy with the Alumni in their efforts.

The following resolution was moved and

ably spoken to by Avar Longley, Esq., and seconded by the Rev. David Freeman,

Resolved, That we hail with pleasure the formation of the "Associated Alumni," as indicating an increased interest in, and the hope of enlarged prosperity for Acadia College.

The second resolution, moved by the Rev. D. M. Welton, of Windsor, and introduced by a speech of much animation and ability, was seconded by Mr. S. Selden.

Resolved, That we regard the Associated Alumni of Acadia College, organized this day, as one of the best measures for promoting the efficiency of that Institution.

John King, Esq., of Onslow then addressed the meeting with much acceptance and good effect, on the inestimable value of education to the individual and the community.

Rev. Mr. Hunt contrasted the present state of education in Nova Scotia, with what was seen at the time antecedent to the efforts of the Baptists, and rejoiced in the progress of all denominations in this noble and benevolent enterprise. He anticipated much from this Society, and hoped it would be a nucleus around which the increasing number of friends of the College would rally, and thus become a permanent and efficient organization to aid it, and benefit all concerned.

Acadia College Anniversary Exercises.

On Wednesday last, according to public announcement, these yearly exercises in connection with Acadia College took place in the new Baptist Meeting-house at Wolfville. The large number of Graduating Students rendered it an occasion which had been anticipated by many, with more than ordinary interest. The lowering skies of the morning threatened some interference with the full realization of the wishes of those at a distance. Many, however, unwilling to be disappointed in participating in the mental festival, were early at the centre of attraction, and escaped the drenching rain which came down upon the more tardy. Notwithstanding the unfavorable weather, a large assembly gathered at an early hour in the handsome place of worship, to hear the Orations of those who had now completed their course of study at the College. At about ½ past ten, President Cramp, Professor Sawyer, the Tutor—Mr. Alfred Chipman,—the Governors of the College, and the Students in their College costume, entered and took possession of the ample and convenient platform erected for the occasion.

By request of the President of the College, the Rev. W. H. Humphrey implored the Divine blessing. The choir performed an introductory Anthem, and eleven Orations on the following subjects were delivered by the Under-Graduates:

- LIFE A BATTLE-FIELD, Mr. Silas Allward, of New Canaan, N. B.
- THE LAST OF THE STUARTS, Mr. William Chase, of Wolfville.
- ITALIAN FREEDOM, Mr. Andrew P. Jones, of Moncton, N. B.
- NATIONAL SONG, Mr. Charles F. Hart, of Wolfville.
- MONASTICISM, Mr. Edward Hickson, of Bathurst, N. B.
- THE TRUE MEASURE OF MAN, Mr. William Wickwire, of Cornwallis.
- EARNST LIFE, Mr. Robert Jones, of Lot 49, P. E. I.
- THE TEACHINGS OF NATURE, Mr. Alfred DeMill, of St. John, N. B.
- LORD MACAULAY, Mr. John Y. Payzant, of Falmouth.
- EDUCATION AND FAITH, Mr. Theodore H. Rand, of Cornwallis.
- THE FUTURE IN THE PAST, (Valedictory), Mr. James E. Wells, Harvey, N. B.

The music performed by the choir at intervals, under the direction of Mr. Newcomb, of Cornwallis was highly appropriate to the occasion and executed in a very superior style.

The Conferring of Degrees upon the gentlemen above named, was quite an imposing part of the ceremonies. The long array of those receiving their diplomas (eleven) was nearly double the number who have attained that distinction on any previous Anniversary.

The Degrees having been conferred, the newly made Bachelors of Arts retired, and after a few moments re-entered with their Bachelor's hoods, to receive an address from the President. He (Dr. C.) spoke of the different fields of conflict they were now about to enter. They had been furnished with their weapons and prepared by wholesome discipline, but now they must enter on the real battle of life, and would find the actual value of what they had acquired. He gave them his paternal blessing, and wishes for all temporal and spiritual good through life, and an entrance afterwards to everlasting rest.

After the National Anthem, the benediction was pronounced. The audience who had listened with unflinching interest for nearly four hours appeared no less attentive at the close than at the commencement. They expressed their high admiration of the orations. These were as may be supposed from the list of subjects, such as did honor to the College and its

*PREMATURE CHURCH-MEMBERSHIP: by Rev. M. R. FORTY, A. M. with an introduction, by Rev. BARON STOW, D. D. New York, Anson D. F. Randolph.