

Christian Messenger.

A REPOSITORY OF RELIGIOUS, POLITICAL AND GENERAL INTELLIGENCE.

"Not slothful in business: fervent in spirit."

NEW SERIES.
VOL. VII. No. 36.

HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA, WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 3, 1862.

{ WHOLE SERIES.
Vol. XXVI. No. 36.

Poetry.

From the New York Examiner.

The hand upon the sky.

We feasted in a fairer hall
Than did that Eastern sire,
Who saw upon the plastered wall
Writ 'vengeing words of fire.

Our feast was Nature's beauties spread
Where her rare palace lifted
Its spanless dome, from whence was shed
The light that round us drifted.

Its pillars were the stately trees,
With leaf-wrought curtains swinging,
Where echoed soft the midnight breeze
Like far-off voices singing.

In that same hour a Hand came forth,
As in the sacred story,
And traced upon the starry walls
Strange, mystic lines of glory.

From north to south, from east to west,
The fingers flame-like fluttered,
As writing out some high behest—
We wot not what they uttered.

O Thou, whose handiwork we are,
And whose the heavens' adorning:
We cannot spell a single star,
How then this wondrous warning?

O, may the omen be of peace,
And not of dread destruction;
Not *Mene, Mene*, though the land
Deserve swift retribution.

If *Tekel*, O, supply our need,
New weight in pity sending;
Let not *Upharsin* toll the meed
Of direful, hopeless rending.

Teach us to read Thy signs aright,
Scorn not our weak endeavor;
Let Northern Dawn save Southern Night
From shrouding us forever.

Religious.

The Church Government of the New Testament.

BY THE REV. DR. ANGUS.

The following is from "Christian Churches: the noblest form of Social Life," by Joseph Angus, D. D., London. This essay received the first of three prizes offered by the congregational Union of Great Britain held at Birmingham in 1861, for essays on the Nature and Constitution of the Christian Church. Dr. Angus is the President of the Regent's Park Baptist College, London.

The government of the churches of Christ bears but a faint resemblance to any organisation of civil society. Churches have been called democracies—oligarchies—and sometimes it has been said that the autocratic element prevails in them. None of these terms, however, fairly represents the case. Christian churches are really theocracies, and are ruled by the will of God. They form the kingdom of Christ. Their constitution is simply the supremacy of divine law, applied and enforced by Christian men, and in Christian love. The meaning of the law is substantially agreed upon when the church is formed; and if a diversity of judgment arise on the interpretation of the law, or on questions of fact, the decision is with the pastor, or with the deacons, if the matter is within their provinces, respectively, and with the church if it is beyond it. In every such case it is a question of interpretation or of fact—not of legislation or of authority.

Need it be added how completely this idea of government—the supremacy of law, and that law the law of love—meets the aspirations of some of the noblest and clearest thinkers of our race? It is the perfection of government. Nor need any fear its working or its efficiency, provided only care be taken to admit and to keep in the church godly men. If, through carelessness or apostasy, the church cease to be a community of such, the community will itself dissolve; for it is part of the excellence of this system, that *without life* there is neither cohesion nor strength. Other ecclesiastical systems retain part of their aggressiveness after the life has died out, and seem even to gain power from their corruption. Christian churches, when once the spirit is gone, crumble in decay. It is the law of nature and of Scripture that *then* they be buried out of our sight. Their vitality is their spirituality; when that ceases, they

themselves disappear. The "salt has lost its savour, and is forthwith good for nothing but to be trodden under foot of men." Herein is one proof of their divine origin, and of the superhuman sagacity that created and that rules them.

A few words on the advantages of this system, and on some abuses to which it is liable, may fittingly close this discussion.

The Christian church is a theocracy, administered through the consciences and hearts of Christians. This peculiarity is an advantage in an age of democratic tendencies, when men are qualifying to exercise their rights, and are preparing to claim them. Communism and democracy the Gospel repudiates, and yet it recognises the brotherhood of the entire body.

The Christian church is based on the consecrated activity of all its members. The scope it gives to individual development, and the power for good it brings into play, fit it for the great work to which the church is called. It is the business of each generation to give the Gospel to the world—man to man—and in no other way can that business be fulfilled but by the personal devotedness of every member.

The Christian church is formed on the double principle, that all true religion is a personal thing, and that churches of Christ are associations of religious men—of all such; and of none besides. This principle is taught by the very genius of our dispensation, and is the only one that harmonises the doctrine of evangelical truth. Our church polity is the Gospel, in palpable form, and in actual life. The members of such communities are prepared to honour piety wherever they find it. Nor do they require for fellowship anything that Christ does not require for salvation, "Alliances," Evangelical or otherwise, are at best faint copies of this holy brotherhood.

Even the *negations* of this system are advantages, if we rightly understand and apply them. In our country and age, Christian churches are largely *Nonconformist*. They hold that forms should be simple and spontaneous, unless Scripture has made them obligatory; that they should grow out of the inner life, and should be moulded by it. Above all, they hold that no forms should be made terms of communion, and that none should claim authority to create and enforce them. This struggle for negations, as it seems, is really a conflict for *liberty*.

Christian churches are in our country largely *Dissenting*. They object to some of the articles of the Established Church; and especially to the practice of making agreement in all these articles ("assent and consent") essential to full Christian fellowship. Such restrictions make the way narrower than Christ made it, are a snare to men's consciences, and divide the church. Dissent, therefore, is a plea for *charity* and for *truth*.

Christian churches are largely *voluntary*. They condemn compulsory service and compulsory gifts, not holding, as some think, that men are free to do as they please in Christ's church, but only that every religious act, to be acceptable, must be the willing offering of the heart. Christ's law is our guide, and our love to Him the motive and the measure of our obedience. Herein Christian churches are not so much a protest against necessity and compulsion, as a plea for *willingness* and *love*.

Once admit these views, and mould ecclesiastical systems according to them, and we get rid of most of the scandals that have for ages disgraced and impeded the progress of religious truth. If compulsion is allowed in enforcing religious duty; if truths on which, as Scripture teaches, really Christian men may differ, are made essential to fellowship; if forms are made binding upon the conscience—a great wrong is inflicted on Christian men, and on the Christian church. The wrong done to Christian men may be lessened, as it is their own faith, and the forms which seem to them the most becoming, that are enforced; but the wrong to Christian truth and love remains. Church history is largely the record of struggles to shift the former of these wrongs from one to another—to ease one man's conscience at the expense of his neighbour's. The thing for which we plead is to ease them all, and to end the struggle, by maintaining the *freedom*, and *charity*, and *willingness* which the Master enjoined.

These are among the advantages of the Scriptural system.

But, on the other side, the system is liable to abuse; not, indeed, from any inherent tendency of its own, but from the misconceptions and the weaknesses of the *human nature* that works it. The wisest plans are often impaired by human infirmity; and the divine theory of the Christian church is no exception to this rule.

Christian churches are in danger from minute and fierce divisions. This is the bane of all governments that are partly democratical. With spirituality, the discussions and votes of Christian men will never be widely discordant or much embittered. Till this grace is more largely gained, let there be forbearance, and candour, and self-control.

Christian churches, based on equality, are in danger from jealousy. They are apt to look

with envy on all who have been greatly blessed, and who are, therefore, largely influential. All such feeling is a loss to the community, a wrong to our brother, and a grief and dishonour to our Lord.

Christian churches based on spiritual truth, and avowedly independent of one another, are in *special danger* of isolation and exclusiveness. All religious truth is important, and all error really mischievous. Men of clear insight and of earnest nature are apt to feel so strongly, that they cannot cordially act with brethren who deny anything they hold. To stand aloof seems often a protest for truth and conscience. Men and churches, moreover, bring into their fellowship tempers neither "lovely" nor of "good report"—tempers that do not make them more welcome. They have grace; but it is grace grafted on the crab, and the fruit tastes too much of the double parentage. Both causes combine with natural disposition, and the dread that some have of all ecclesiastical organisation, to discourage Christian communion. Christian men, therefore, seem too often as "one of a family" and as "two of a city," while Christian churches stand each "alone among the nations."

To meet these feelings, and to correct the isolation they foster, let the following facts be kept in mind. Among *true Christians* the things wherein they differ are small compared with those wherein they agree. Co-operation in the Gospel is not compromise of differences: it is homage to essential truth, as isolation because of differences is preference of what is subordinate to what is essential. Forbearance and brotherly love are sometimes difficult; and *therefore* we must exercise them. Nor is "a fugitive," "cloistered" virtue, that shuns the struggle, of much worth. Ecclesiastical organisation *have* ended in dominion over men's faith; but the "idols of the den," the tyrannies of isolated fancy and temper, are as numerous, probably, as the "idols of the tribe." And, in truth, our strength rests as much on our *unity* as on our *independency*. Our divisions tend to perpetuate less Scriptural but more compact bodies, and we give to them the honour of presenting to the nations that visible unity which belongs properly to the church. Nor must we forget that, as the world sees and feels that we are one is not this the import of our Lord's intercessory prayer?—*the world will believe*.

Christian churches are in danger from indifference to truth. For purposes of fellowship, they destroy or ignore the distinctions that divide Christians; and they sometimes go further, and are tempted to ignore the *truths themselves*. The tendency of the age is to hold that whoever believes anything has faith, and that whoever feels anything has the Spirit. A Christian church, as opposed to a narrow, sectarian church, *seems* to sanction this tendency, or may be supposed to sanction it. Let it be made clear, therefore, that we plead for liberty in non-essentials, not because all beliefs in relation to them are alike harmless, but because, if men are *Christians*, they are to be welcomed in spite of their mistakes. The *mistakes* themselves we must disown.

Christian churches, whose strength is in their purity and in their tenderness, are apt to forget their spirit, and to copy the world in its maxims and temper. Occasionally this tendency shows itself in the form of persecution; oftener of angry strife, or of ferocious vituperation. Christian men forget that railing, as certainly as the sword, is forbidden even to archangels, and that "the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle to all men." Christ's kingdom is *not* of this world, in its agency or instruments, *nor yet in its spirit*.

And finally, Christian churches are in special danger of forgetting the secret of their strength. Other associations have elements of power of their own—wealth, social position, organisation, respectability, and learning. *These* Christian churches may have, and yet, for all saving purposes, be powerless. For their successful working they need piety, spirituality, holiness, the special presence, the recognised and incessant presidency, of their Lord. *Without him*, the freedom of Christian churches is anarchy; their independency, isolation and weakness; their power, "the shadow of a name;" their union, tyranny or strife; and their usefulness, a delusion and a snare. *With Him*, they are the noblest forms of social life, His loving representatives on earth, and the dwelling-place of the Holy Ghost.

The Cotton Famine.

Nearly one-tenth of the population of England and Wales is now brought to the verge of starvation by the paralysis which the war in America has caused throughout the dominions of King Cotton. The subjects of this potent monarch have been for many years a thriving race. Aided by cunning appliances of mechanical skill and scientific invention, they have filled the earth with their wares, and have lived delicately on the fruits of their toil. But now the huge walls of their mills cease to vibrate

with machinery, the spindle rusts, and the click of the travelling jenny is hushed. The denizens of those crowded cities, whose normal condition it is to be canopied with smoke, are breathing a purer air, but paying a frightful price for their acquaintance with the sun. Thousands who have been used to a bill of fare such as the labourers in the southern counties never dream of, are now reduced to the meagre pittance of relief which the Poor-Law prescribes as sufficient to stave off actual starvation.

Themes for an epic might be found in the careful expedients and the pinching economy which a high-spirited race has adopted, rather than fall on the hated resources of parochial supply. The slow wastings of long-treasured savings,—the heroic self-denial of the able-bodied in favour of the aged, the crippled, and the infantile,—the forced sale of the Lares and Penates,—the fainting of heart, and the failing of courage under hope deferred, who could depict? And yet the tidings grow worse.

In twenty-five Unions (combinations of parishes for the relief of the poor) there are, or were at the last return, more than 140,000 'paupers,' of whom at least 70,000 are persons to whom it is quite a new thing to find themselves in that miserable case, who managed to get through the bad time of 1858 clear of that stigma, and as late as last year could hardly imagine that they would one day be driven by fell necessity to join the wretched crowd of applicants gathered at the door of the workhouse, and marshalled by rough officials to take their turn before the Board.

There is one fact which intensifies the feelings of sympathy awakened by this commercial convulsion, and which shines in bright relief on the dark picture of distress: it is the silent, unrumored submission of the sufferers. We hear of no violent combinations, no advocacy of physical force, no bread riots. The testimony of all who are familiar with the localities in question is uniformly in commendation of the peace and order which prevail. The vice-chairman of the Preston Board of Guardians writes, in a letter printed in the parliamentary correspondence on the subject, "I have been acquainted with the recurring seasons of depression, the panics and turn-outs, and all the public subscriptions of relief on such occasions in our borough for upwards of forty years, and I can say that I never remember so much resignation, so little desire to blame the employers, or so few symptoms of disaffection to Government. Indeed, there is not the slightest symptom of cherishing any hope of relief from agitation or violence." All due honour to courage and valour wherever they are found; but greater honour none can deserve than those who are "patient in tribulation." It will be in the recollection of many of our readers that a few years since a troop-ship was lost on the coast of Africa, and when all hope of rescue was abandoned, instead of the riotous frenzy of despair usual to such scenes, a British regiment stood to their arms, and, headed by their captain, went down to the depths, every man true to the instinct of discipline in which he had been trained. Battle-field never out-distanced such an exploit as that; and it seems to us to be reproduced in the valorous stillness with which our mill hands have watched the surging waves of misery rising all about them. We glory more in the name of Englishman as we contemplate their patient calmness, than we did when the victory was gained on the well-fought heights of Alma.

The attention of the Legislature has been directed to the necessity of making special provision for an emergency so extensive and so exceptional as the present. We believe that our rulers have it in their hearts to adopt such expedients as the Constitution will permit. We shall entertain no fear if their judgments move as truly as their sympathies, but that they will do their part to mitigate the calamity by legal enactments. The Lord Mayor of London, who has of recent years added the new and amiable functions of public almoner to the various occupations of his civic rule, is generously inviting and judiciously distributing the contributions entrusted to his care. The noblemen and gentry who represent the ancient families of the counties Palatine, have promised their princely gifts. We shall have amateur performances, benefit balls, and all the eccentric meanderings of the great waters of British benevolence, which, albeit slow in rising, run freely when their springs are once unsealed.

With all these various sources of supply, there will be yet abundant need for everything that can be accomplished by congregational exertion. The members of our churches in the afflicted districts ought to be the first objects of our solicitude; and we sincerely hope that their pastors will be put in possession of funds for the assistance of their necessitous flocks. The thought occurs to us that in some instances the pastors themselves may be suffering from the diminution of their incomes.

Whether it will be felt to be a fitting occasion for denominational action we cannot determine; but in any case our readers should remember the old adage, "He doubles the gift who gives quickly."