

For the Christian Messenger.

Catechisms.

Mr. Editor.—

I am glad that you have called attention to our want, as a religious body, of a denominational catechism, and that the Rev. Dr. Tupper has expressed himself in favour of your suggestion. It is true there are objections to the use of a catechism in the religious instruction of children. On sound principles of didactics, all catechisms are to be condemned, if implicitly followed, because the answer-giver, to one question by a pupil, should determine the nature of the next enquiry put by the teacher. The use of a catechism of religious knowledge is open to the special and far more serious objection, that from the power of early impressions it is liable to usurp that authority over the conscience which belongs only to the word of God. But while its careful and intelligent use may greatly obviate both these objections, the form of question and answer so helps to keep alive the attention of the learner and so facilitates the operation of committing to memory that catechisms find special favor not only with children, but also parents and teachers. A good denominational catechism would probably receive among us a wider circulation and more extensive use than any other compendium of scriptural truth that could be introduced, and would therefore be a valuable auxiliary in diffusing religious knowledge. There are undoubtedly hundreds of Baptist parents in this Province in whose families there is no direct religious instruction. Thousands of children are growing up in these families with scarcely any knowledge of Baptist principles. A great deal of what is termed Sabbath School teaching is merely bearing children read the Scriptures. Would not the general use of a good denominational catechism remedy much of this? I think it would; and that conclusion more than counterbalances in my mind any evil that I perceive is likely to arise from the introduction of such a work.

The second step has already been taken towards the attainment of this object, by the expression of a strong opinion in favor of Keach's Catechism. The Rev. Dr. Tupper, in consequence of his learning, long experience, and piety, has an influence among us that must give weight to the fact that that opinion is his. But in making it known, he has hinted that others might have objections to that work which he does not himself entertain. I am sure that any such states by his brethren will receive from him all the consideration they may merit.

I think Keach's Catechism is amenable to criticism and an undesirable work to introduce among our churches, on several grounds.

1. It partakes too much of the narrow, fierce, polemic spirit of the period at which it first saw the light. It has been said that every man is what the age in which he lives makes him. Much more true is this of books. They always bear the impress of the age to which they belong, not only in style, but in sentiment and spirit. Keach's Catechism was evidently written to guard against a certain class of errors then prevailing, and it therefore gives an undue prominence to some subjects and totally omits others of equal if not greater importance. For instance a child might learn the whole catechism and not know that "God is love,"—that "God so loved the world as to give his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life,"—and that the Redeemer commanded this gospel to be preached in all the world to every creature. I do not think the word love is to be found in the work, or anything that breathes a missionary spirit or inculcates christian philanthropy.

2. I object to its theology. Divine truth is above human reason, but always in harmony with it. The Bible never asks us to believe anything that our common sense tells us could not be. But Keach's Catechism does. I remember the late Rev. R. Cunningham telling me once, with inimitable gusto, an anecdote of a minister who, in examining a young convert that wished to unite with the church, solemnly asked her if she had repented of Adam's sin. The story would be without point to one who drew his theology from Keach's Catechism, for it tells us that all men are guilty of Adam's first transgression. Guilty means having violated a law, knowing it to be such. Now it is not a perversion of language to say that any human being is guilty of an act which was performed six thousand years before he had existence? I know men have taught this, and made it the very shibboleth of their divinity. But any man who believes it is not to be reasoned with, for he is denying the very first principles of all reasoning—the relation between cause and effect. Keach calls it the doctrine of "Original

sin." But that doctrine, as I find it in the word of God, is, that in consequence of Adam's transgression, we are all born in sin, love sin, and can be saved from it only by the grace of God. Perhaps it may be said, Keach uses the word guilty in a theological sense. If so, then he was giving children stones instead of God's bread. It is dangerous and wrong to use words in any other than their legitimate sense and ordinary meaning, and most dangerous, most wrong to do so in teaching children.

3. It is not suitable for children. Keach's Catechism was written at a time when the principles of teaching were not known; when the art of teaching had no existence. No one who has mastered even the theory of teaching and understands the laws of mind upon which it is based, would think of adopting the plan and style of Keach's Catechism in communicating religious knowledge to children. In answer to the question, "How may we know there is a God," the answer is "The light of nature in man and the works of God plainly declare there is a God, but his word and spirit only do it effectually for the salvation of sinners." That is a fair specimen of Keach's Catechism. Those who read attentively Mr. Hutton's letter published in the Christian Messenger a few weeks since, will remember that he stated that all deaf mutes are natural atheists, and have no knowledge of the existence of God till it is made known to them by some one who has learned to converse with them. The young man whom I baptized a few weeks since had never dreamed of the existence of Deity till informed of it by Mr. Hutton. Missionaries have found tribes with no Deity, no worship. The reiterated denial of this cannot destroy the effect of the assertion of such a man as Moffat, the father-in-law of Dr. Livingston. It only proves that some people are fonder of their own notions than of the truth. It is not true then that "the light of nature in man plainly declares there is a God." If it were true, who that knows anything about teaching would think of using such an expression in speaking to children. It reminds me of "the learned professor" who being asked to address the little children of an infant school he was visiting, complied by placing his hands beneath his coat tails, clearing his throat, and commencing thus: "Beloved Youth, Is it not an incontrovertible axiom that all sublunary objects are preordained to dissolution?" The children were no doubt struck dumb with his eloquence. How many of the parents whom we would wish to use our denominational Catechism are able to explain to their children what is meant by the light of nature in man? Why put them to the test? Why furnish religious instruction to children in such a crude, repulsive form. Very different was the teaching of Christ. The children loved to listen to him, and the common people heard him gladly. They could understand his simple language.

4. Its explanation of the Lord's prayer is singularly narrow and meagre. Take as an example these two questions and answers:

"Q. 109. What do we pray for in the third petition.

A. In the third petition, which is, 'Thy will be done on earth as in heaven,' we pray that God by his grace would make us willing to know, obey and submit to his will in all things, as the angels do in heaven."

That is to say, God's will being done on earth only refers to us, by which pronoun many a child will understand you who teach and I who learn are here spoken of, not the people throughout the wide world. Why not tell it that there is a good time promised when the will of God, and no wickedness, shall be done on earth, and we are to pray for it, and do all we can to hasten it!

"Q. 110. What do we pray for in the fourth petition?

A. In the fourth petition, which is, 'Give us this day our daily bread,' we pray that of God's free gift we may receive a competent portion of good things in this life and enjoy his blessing with them."

When a child, a pious mother taught me that the prayer, 'Give us this day our daily bread,' instructs us to ask God to take care of our minds and bodies, and give us all we need for both; and that we should seek this of him daily, and not be anxious for the future. I have since found that some profounder theologians than Keach have given a very similar explanation.

I do not for a moment suppose that the Rev. Dr. Tupper has not seen all these and other defects in Keach's Catechism, or that his recommendation of the work implies his entire approval of it. This is evidently not the case, as he speaks of revision. But it appears to me that whoever is competent to revise Keach's work, would be able to write a much better one.

I am yours respectfully,
A. H. MUNRO.
Halifax, May 7, 1863.

For the Christian Messenger.

To the Churches composing the Eastern Baptist Association.

DEAR BRETHREN,

I take the liberty of calling your attention to a subject which has for several years been much neglected, namely the "Infirm Ministers' Fund." That there should be a fund from which those ministers can receive aid, who become superannuated, and have no means of their own from which to derive support, will, I think, be readily admitted by every christian who has given the subject proper consideration. Ministers of the gospel seldom accumulate much property. The compensation which the majority receive for their labours, is barely sufficient to support their families comfortably, and some, who spend a portion of their time among the poor, do not receive enough for that. Preaching the Gospel, and winning souls to Christ, is the business of their lives, and a number of our small Churches, in the poor districts, owe their existence, by God's blessing, to the self-sacrificing efforts of Ministers of the Gospel, who have laboured for their salvation, not expecting to receive any remuneration from them—such is the case with some Ministers now. While they are thus engaged, the majority of christians, by steadily pursuing their secular occupations, so increase their wealth, that when they become sick, or infirm; they have a sufficiency to support them comfortably, which is probably the case with the majority whom I now address. Taking this view of the subject, it must appear both reasonable and just, as well as Scriptural, when we ask you to contribute, annually, a small sum, to raise a fund from which those who have spent their lives in ministering to you in spiritual things, may draw some support when they become superannuated.

There is now in our Association, one Minister of the Gospel, wholly dependent upon the christian sympathy and liberality of his brethren for support. While there was money in the hands of the Treasurer of the Infirm Ministers' Fund, he drew from it, but the Treasury is now empty, and we have no "Infirm Ministers' Fund." According to the Minutes of our Associations, there have been only \$2, contributed to this fund, in the last three years. While other objects have been pressing their claims upon our attention, this being considered of minor importance, has been neglected. In about two months our Association will meet again at Bedeque, P. E. I. when you will send, by your Delegates, your annual contributions to Benevolent Objects, and I would earnestly, but respectfully, request you Dear Brethren, not to neglect, as heretofore, the Infirm Ministers' Fund." It should be replenished. That it may be, and other objects which claim our benevolence not suffer by it, I would suggest to each contributing member, to add 12 1/2 cents, extra, for this object. It is a small sum, and will neither impoverish any one by giving it, nor enrich them by withholding it, but when all are put together, the sum total will be very respectable. There are now about 3500 members in our Association, if one half of them will contribute the sum named, there will be a fund raised amounting to, \$218 75. Try it brethren.

I remain, dear Brethren,
Yours in the Gospel
Great Village, May 6th. J. E. BALCOM.

Religious Intelligence.

For the Christian Messenger.

The Revival at Westport.

WESTPORT, April 27th, 1863.

Mr. Editor.—

You are aware that a Revival of religion has been in progress here for some time. It is now nearly seven weeks since it began, and it still goes on. We have baptized every Sabbath for the last 6 weeks, making altogether fifty one.

A number of our people thought before the revival began, that there was a movement on the minds of many, and that something of the kind was about to take place. On Tuesday evening, we met for our ordinary prayer meeting. A greater number than usual assembled, a more than common interest was manifested, and all without any cause that could be assigned. We agreed to meet several evenings in succession. On the following week, we proposed to have our meetings every alternate evening. In the mean time, several of our young people had gone over to Long Island, where the revival had begun. They came back on Wednesday evening, just about meeting time, rejoicing in the Saviour. Our revival began at once. Sinners were converted, many who had backslidden far, were brought back, and a number of our people were exercised in the most remarkable manner. One Sabbath evening when the revival was at its height, we had the most extraordinary meeting I ever witnessed. It commenced with an appropriate sermon. After that several persons spoke with great fervour. Then a young man, walked to the front of the pulpit, and requested prayer for himself. About the same time, another individual arose from his seat, and knelt down in the aisle before a brother and request-

ed him to pray for him. Afterwards he walked along the aisle shouting, Glory to God! His sister and brother, who had previously made a profession, here manifested their warm attachment and sympathy for their brother; persons in different parts of the house, exhorted their fellow sinners with great earnestness to come to Jesus; others were to be heard rejoicing in the Saviour, and many requesting the prayers of Christians, which continued till a late hour. Our meetings were held for a time twice a day, and were always full of interest. Besides our public meetings, the young converts have frequently had meetings for prayer and exhortation in their houses, shops and barns.

Our revival has been distinguished by a great amount of prayer in public and private; the young converts have abounded in prayer at home, and sometimes the young converts have been overheard in the fields.

The gifts of the young converts, of both sexes, in prayer and exhortation, are very remarkable, and have called forth expressions of surprise from those who have heard them.

We think the most sceptical would be constrained to admit that their exercises are the result of Divine influence. No ministerial aid was needed throughout the revival; the young converts were the most efficient preachers. The revival influence was not confined to our public meetings, individuals confined at home by sickness, felt it, and broke out in rejoicing in the Saviour.

Some families have shared largely in the revival. In one, the mother, a son, and two daughters have been baptized; in another the father and three daughters; in another six have experienced a change of heart, while the parents and two of the eldest of the family were professors before; in a fourth case, three brothers have been converted and two of their wives. An individual came here after our revival began, to remain for a little to prosecute his business, and he now rejoices in the hope of glory. A vessel belonging to the place, came in a few days since, and now the mate and two of the crew have found peace in believing.

One peculiarity in our revival, has been the strong desire evinced by the converts to be quite sure that they had experienced a change. Several delayed their baptism for a little in order to test themselves. Another peculiarity is the great confidence, expressed by many of the converts, that their sins are forgiven, and that they shall dwell with God in glory. The joy of some of them, at times is also beyond expression.

Another noticeable feature in our revival, is its effect on the young. One little group was in the practice of meeting for prayer three times a day. We have baptized one of eleven years, and have received another of the same age for baptism. Several about 8 or 9 years of age, have stood up in our meetings, and expressed a wish to own the Saviour and shew themselves on the Lord's side. There can be no doubt that Divine grace has descended on them. May they be kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation.

The effects of our revival are manifest in our streets. Formerly oaths and profane language were frequently heard, but now not a word of the kind. Glory be to God for his renewing and sanctifying grace.

May 4th. We baptized four more yesterday. There is a great movement among the young yet.

I am yours, &c.
JOHN MILLER.

P. S.—May 5th, we baptized another to-day, making the number 56. He is the 4th of a ship's crew we have baptized, a native of the West Indies, another of them belongs to England, and another to Newfoundland. Thus they shall come from the East and the West, the South and the North, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God. J. M.

WOLFVILLE.—We have just heard that sixteen persons were baptized by Rev. S. W. deBlois on Lord's Day, the 3rd inst. These converts, together with two received by letter from other churches, were afterwards received into the church. They presented to the assembled congregation a scene of no ordinary interest. We trust they may become devoted followers of Jesus—epistles of Christ, written, not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tables of stone, but in the fleshly tables of the heart.

PARKER'S COVE AND ROUND HILL, ANAPOLIS COUNTY.—Rev. George Armstrong writes from Parker's Cove, April 30th:—"We have had a good meeting of the Ministerial Conference here. Public meetings are continued with considerable encouragement and success. We had an enquiry meeting this morning, and were convinced that the Spirit of God is working in the hearts of those present, convincing of sin and drawing them to Christ. The pastor, Bro. Achilles, is much encouraged in the Lord.

Since I last wrote you, the work at Round Hill has been progressing and I trust deepening. On Sabbath, the 19th of this month, I baptized seven happy converts, and two more have since been received as candidates for that sacred ordinance. Some who had years ago made a profession of faith in and subjection to Christ, and had departed from his ways and been living in disobedience and neglect of their duty, have returned to the Lord, and his people are now happy and useful in his service. Truly God is good; He restoreth our souls and healeth the broken in heart. Pray for us.