

For the Christian Messenger.

The Catechism Question.

DEAR BROTHER,

Before this comes to hand you will have given your readers an account of the meeting of our Eastern Nova Scotia Association, lately held in this Island. One matter was considered there, however, which, as action was not taken upon it, you may have passed over in your notice. I refer to what may be called the Catechism Question. This question, it seems, had come before the Western and Central Associations, and had been favourably entertained by them. Not so with our Association. I think it important that our brethren of the other Associations should understand how this came about.

The following considerations occur then, in regard to the preparation of the proposed Catechism. In such a work every thing of an authoritative cast should be avoided; since neither creed, nor confession, nor catechism should in any way be placed in competition with the Word of God. In such a work, again, every thing of a divisive tendency should be avoided; since a catechism would accomplish little good among us unless it commanded the general assent of the denomination. Such a work, furthermore, should represent the theology of our own times, since the young need rather to learn Bible truth in the forms in which it is now held than in the forms into which it was cast by our fathers. Lastly, such a work should be free from all technicalities, and all obscurities; since otherwise our young people would be taught words rather than things; while the things which they might learn would be imperfectly apprehended, and therefore but little fitted to minister to the salvation of their souls. It was in view of such considerations that our Association hesitated about committing itself to the Catechism movement, and declined to take the action which appears to have been expected from them.

Our objection lay largely, you will observe, against the preparation of a denominational catechism, or any thing which might be regarded as such. If brethren, in their private capacity, choose to put forth reprints of older catechisms, or to prepare new ones, of course they are at liberty to do so. Such works would rest solely upon their own merits. The denomination would not in any way be responsible for them. They might thus do all the good they were fitted to accomplish; while the evils which might be apprehended from their having any thing like a denominational sanction would be wholly escaped.

Something was said, too, at our Association, about preparing a Manual of Theology for the use of young persons. The same objections should not seem to apply to such a work as to one in the catechetical form. It would serve to stimulate thought rather than to supersede it.—It would be prepared for youth rather than childhood, for those who have begun to exercise their own thoughts, and so would be the less likely to exert a stereotyping influence upon their minds. It would aim at presenting things rather than words—the spirit of the Word of God more than mere human forms. It would thus be fitted to awaken thought instead of laying it asleep—to multiply and invigorate thoughts, instead of making them both poor and few. And although, again, as in the case of a Catechism, it would not be well to give such a work anything like a denominational sanction, yet there might be no impropriety in giving it a public commendation; thus aiding its circulation, and widening its sphere of usefulness.

I do not want to burden your columns with a controversy on this Catechism question. I add, therefore, that should any see fit to comment on this letter, I shall not think of replying; unless it should happen that I be seriously misunderstood or misrepresented.

Your fellow-labourer,

J. DAVIS.

Charlottetown, P. E. I., July 16th, 1863.

For the Christian Messenger.

Nova Scotia Eastern Association.

Rev. Geo. Armstrong has kindly sent us a report of the late session of the Eastern Association at Bedeque. After the account given in our last which, of course, he had not seen when he wrote, it will not be necessary to repeat the information there given respecting the proceedings. But our worthy brother's letter contains some reflections which we think should not be lost, we therefore commend the following extracts from it to our readers.

After noticing the contents of the Letters

from the Churches, and the additions to their membership, he says:—

"This is encouraging, but it seems evident much must be done ere the Churches shall attain depth of spirituality, and exhibit in corresponding activity, toil, self-denial and sufferings for the Lord's sake,—the power which results from a deep and thorough experience and realization of Gospel truth in the soul. When Christ is fully and strongly apprehended by faith, feebleness, will and must give place to power, indolence to industry, and despondence to success.—It is much feared that Spirituality is not as characteristic of our churches as a whole as New Testament doctrine and precedent demand. We must wake up in this respect and seek earnestly to work out our principles more faithfully and thoroughly, or we shall suffer loss.

The materials that compose churches must be good, and properly laid and worked on the solid foundation supplied in the Word of God, in order to secure such an organization as will carry out the divine purpose in forming a church on earth—the glory of God—the manifestation of truth, the growth and exhibition of godliness, and the salvation of sinners through Christ. To accomplish these ends a church must be spiritual, and become increasingly so."

"The Island may be considered as missionary ground, and it ought to have much more attention and labour from our Domestic Missionary organizations than have yet been given to it.—As a denomination our efforts, in Home Missions, should be, at least threefold, greater than they now are. When will we awake and work with Christ, Judgment and Eternity in view?"

"It was a privilege to see and hear former friends and brethren, who are labouring to extend and build up the Kingdom of Christ in the Island and elsewhere. The Island is rich in agricultural resources, and promises at no distant day to have a dense population. Now is the time to sow the seed of truth as it is in Jesus, among the people, plentifully as possible. There is a willingness to hear the Gospel from missionaries sent from Nova Scotia. Cape Breton calls aloud for similar labour.

But few of our people in Western Nova Scotia are aware of the wide spread spiritual destitution which exists on our Eastern shores, and in the islands and provinces adjacent, or can be prevailed on to believe it. Did they but believe the fact they must, we think, be constrained, out of love to Christ and the souls of sinners, to make all proper effort and sacrifice to send the word of life to the perishing; or aid and encourage them in providing themselves with the ministrations of the Gospel to as great an extent as possible. May we in these provinces awake to our duty, and labour in the strength of God to bring sinners to Christ and eternal life! I had much pleasure in meeting with the St. John and other New Brunswick brethren whom I saw, and have to thank them for their kindness, and especially the Rev. I. E. Bill, Editor of the Christian Visitor, for the part he took in obtaining reduction of fare for us on the Railroad, and regret that the arrangements did not include passage by the Emperor across the Bay. My colleague, Rev. N. Vidito, and self arrived safely at home on the 9th, and found our families and friends alive through mercy, though some of our people are suffering from sickness.

Yours truly,

GEORGE ARMSTRONG."

Christian Messenger.

HALIFAX, JULY 22, 1863.

The Religious Press.

THE different denominational bodies are becoming more and more awake to the importance of sustaining the religious press as an instrumentality in the extension of the kingdom of Christ. Its power is each year being more fully developed. It requires to be more carefully preserved, than the secular press, from becoming an instrument of political power, or its usefulness will not only be diminished but it will actually become pernicious. The secular papers are expected to maintain their own party aspects. Often, for the price of an advertisement, they will give their commendation to what should be denounced as opposed to good morals and the welfare of the community. When the religious press descends to the same level, it becomes but an appendage to the secular, instead of a standard of right principles.

The mission of the Christian church is of far too high a nature to be trifled with by selfish or dishonest politicians. Its press is near akin to that of the Christian Ministry, and yet it reaches far beyond the living preacher, and becomes the voice of the community of preachers in moulding public sentiment and in influencing the benevolent enterprises of the day.

The Canada Christian Advocate has some excellent remarks on the Church and Press, which we take the liberty of copying, as follows:—

"How many presses are every day vomiting forth their trashy sensation novels, vitriating the taste, sapping the foundations of moral principle, fostering the worst passions in the human mind, and rendering those who read them unfit to engage in many of life's most sacred duties. To wage a successful war against the principles disseminated in these and similar publications, the

Church must employ the same agency—the press. In fact, we conceive it to be utterly impossible for the Church, in the present age, to meet her responsibilities without giving a cordial support to religious periodicals, and consecrating a portion of her surplus wealth to aid in the circulation of religious books. Some who cannot be reached by the pulpit may be influenced by the press, and ultimately brought to Christ.

To the religious press we attribute, in a great measure, the change that has taken place during a few years past, in the tone of very many secular periodicals. A few years ago, many of those papers scarcely deigned to notice a revival of religion, or if they did it was only to hold it up to ridicule. But now it is altogether different; a large portion of them are ready to publish the proceedings of Conference or Synod, and chronicle the leading particulars of religious revivals in our midst. Formerly the prayer-meeting was passed by unnoticed, but now a notice of it is inserted in a conspicuous place in the editorial column. We rejoice to know that a great change has taken place, and we attribute it, to a very great extent, to the influence which the religious press has had, and is still having upon the public mind. Let the Church be careful, then, to give a liberal support to those periodicals that are disseminating the principles of truth, justice, and morality among the people.—Let every lover of his race contribute liberally to support the Bible, Tract, Missionary, Sabbath School, and Temperance causes, for in so doing he will aid materially in lessening the amount of crime in our midst and promote the best interests of the community."

We should be unjust to our brethren were we to allow our feelings of modesty to prevent their expressions on this subject from appearing in our columns. It may not be inappropriate them to append to these remarks.

At the Western Association they were pleased to give the following regarding our labours:

Your Committee would express their confidence in the Christian Messenger, as a faithful exponent of the principles of the Denomination, and their increased satisfaction with the matter with which its columns are enriched.

It affords your Committee much satisfaction to express their unqualified approbation of the decided yet calm and dignified spirit exhibited by its respected Editor on all matters of a controversial nature with other bodies of Christians, and the improvement which is so perceptible in its management is worthy of all praise.

They would express their sympathy for the brother engaged in conducting it in his arduous labors, and would recommend to the ministering brethren, and all interested, to assist in increasing its circulation and affording ready pecuniary returns for its support.

The Central Association also state,—

The Committee believe the support of a weekly paper, devoted to the interest of the Denomination, indispensable. As a medium for conveying to our Churches, information relative to our various departments of labor, it has a place, not otherwise to be filled. The Committee believe that the paper has been well conducted, and approve of the course pursued by the Editor. They would recommend it to the continued support of the Denomination, and trust that every family will realize the importance of taking it. Especially is it desirable that the young should be encouraged to interest themselves in its support; as the habit of reading and gaining knowledge relative to the various questions of the day, religious, or otherwise, is of great moment, and intimately connected with the future position and influence of the young.

The Eastern Association, in reference to the Messenger remarks:

They regard with much satisfaction the manner in which the Christian Messenger is conducted, and have pleasure in recommending the continued support of that periodical, which, in their opinion, deserves a place in every Baptist family.

We hope these highly commendatory and flattering notices may not act injuriously on our sentiments of self-respect. The weight of responsibility we feel, both pecuniary and moral, which responsibility is greatly increased by these high testimonials, will, we trust, act as ballast to prevent the favoring gale from capsizeing our barque. Allowing both of these influences to have their due effect, we hope to advance over the ocean of life, freighted with precious things in the accomplishment of our work, somewhat more in accordance with our wishes than hitherto. With the divine blessing in answer to the prayers of our brethren, we hope to be the humble instrument of doing some good, to each family into which we may have the honor of a place, as part of its institutions.

NOVA SCOTIANS ABROAD.—In looking over our latest New Zealand exchanges (March) we find the following passage under the head "A visit to Wangarei."

"A few miles further on, inside the Heads, stands the Custom House of Wangarei, under the charge of Mr. Aubrey. This gentleman is also the Resident Magistrate for the district, as well as Postmaster. The banks of the river for several miles around the Heads are in the possession of Nova Scotians, a hardy and industrious class of settlers, who have been very successful because they have been hard workers."

New Brunswick Eastern Baptist Association.

WHEN at Bedeque, P. E. I., our friend, Rev. G. F. Miles, very kindly invited us to a seat in his carriage to attend the annual session of this body at Sackville, on Thursday, the 10th inst., and two following days, and he would afterwards forward us to Amherst. Feeling it most important that a fraternal spirit should be cherished between the churches of the two provinces, we much regretted that our arrangements would not permit our acceptance of the favor.

We find in the CA Visitor an account of the proceedings of the Association, from which we learn that the Rev. W. Coleman was chosen Moderator. We wish that our brother had given some intimation of what the letters made known respecting the state of the Churches, and their increase during the past year.

The Introductory Sermon was preached by Rev. J. Rowe.

In the matter of Education we are informed that

"Many addresses of a highly interesting nature were delivered; but the topic which especially occupied the attention of the brethren was the best means by which the debt could be cancelled and never heard of more. It was universally agreed that all sums raised for this purpose ought to be reserved until the whole was obtained. There were, it was supposed, many men in the denomination to whom the whole debt would be a trifle, but it would be more desirable that many should contribute, and so become more interested in the object. As the quarter of a dollar from each member had failed, it could not be made the basis of the present effort, which aimed to raise not half the debt, but the whole. It was thought by some that the Principal would be well employed for three months in visiting the churches and advocating the claims of the Institution, whereas others feared the effect of such a measure, just as the term is commencing, would be injurious. It was finally agreed to recommend to the committee the employment of a suitable agent, and to leave to them the selection of the person."

The Union Society plan seems to have been pretty fully discussed:

"Elder T. Todd advocated the employment of an agent, for although the churches ought to sustain the society without extraneous aid, yet they will not do so. Elder I. E. Bill fully agreed with that part of the report which characterized the Union as a most efficient means for sustaining not one only but all the benevolent objects of the denomination, and thought it best at present to have an agent in the field at least for a part of the time. Elder Rowe referred to the success which had attended the visit of Elder Cady in his church, and therefore coincided in opinion with the previous speakers. Elder Cady did not think the scale of the union a righteous one, when the rich contented themselves with paying only one dollar for six important objects. Enlarged liberality was demanded of those who enjoyed so many blessings—no war, no pestilence, no famine caused unusual distress. There are few who could not spare twenty-five cents a month, but it must be laid by every month. A system of monthly contributions, faithfully carried out, would be the most effectual mode of sustaining the Union. Elder Bill explained that it was not intended in the formation of the Society that rich men should confine themselves to one dollar—let every one give as God has prospered him." "Brother Masters showed that the report of the committee did not interfere with the action of the Board, and that the cessation of grants was occasioned by the large debts to Missionaries, which required to be paid first."

"In relation to the Christian Visitor, Elder Bill wished all the brethren to regard the paper as their own. He loved the work because it brought him into sympathizing contact with the objects of the denomination and with all the brethren, whom he loved. The paper must be put upon a paying basis, and to do this every effort must be made, and a paper ought to be placed in every family. Elder Cady stated that the circulation of the Visitor compared very favourably with that of all the other religious papers in the Province, but as Brother Bill is entirely devoted to this work, more labour must be taken to increase the circulation of the Visitor."

Sabbath-Schools were reported in twenty-five out of the seventy churches comprised in the Association. Elder Cady recommended that Sabbath School Concerts and Conventions be held frequently so as to interest young and old in these institutions.

The Home Missionary Society meeting was held on Saturday afternoon.

The Society, it appears, "is free of debt, and has a balance in hand sufficient to meet engagements. But free of debt, because for the last few years comparatively little has been done. We hope, however, a brighter day in respect to this work is opening upon our Church. A resolution was adopted, recommending the division of the Eastern Association into districts, to be canvassed by the ministers for the Union Society; and the brethren present volunteered their services to embark heartily in this matter."

WHY IS IT?—We commonly receive our exchanges from New York, and Boston, and Liverpool, N. S., of the same date, by the same day's mail. Where is the detention in the case of the last mentioned?