

Christian Messenger.

A REPOSITORY OF RELIGIOUS, POLITICAL AND GENERAL INTELLIGENCE.

"Not slothful in business: fervent in spirit."

NEW SERIES.
Vol. VIII. No. 44.

HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA, WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 1863.

WHOLE SERIES.
Vol. XXVII. No. 44.

Sabbath School Essay.

For the Christian Messenger.

The Relation of the Church to the Sabbath School.

BY REV. JOSEPH H. SAUNDERS.

In attempting to define this relation, we shall perhaps best succeed by considering consecutively the design or mission of both these institutions. By the term church we mean a visible society of christians organized after the New Testament model. The object contemplated in its organization appears to be twofold:—1st The spiritual improvement of believers, and 2nd the enlargement of Christ's kingdom upon the earth. Or perhaps the whole may be included in the one object:—The enlargement of Christ's kingdom in the hearts of his people and in the world. These objects in their success or failure are reciprocal. If the mustard seed germinates and grows it will cast its shadow and afford an Asylum. The leaven in the meal while it affects surrounding particles gathers to itself force and strength; nor does it cease its work till the whole mass is leavened. The success of the church abroad depends upon her vitality at home, and her strength at home depends, as a means, upon her exertions for enlargement. This is her commission:—Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you," to this was added, "beginning at Jerusalem."

In the History of the Apostolic Churches we see how this work was done. The church at Jerusalem appears to have had plain indications by the Holy Ghost on this point; and in obedience thereto, as plainly to have indicated to the world that this was her work. She waited on her Lord and gathered strength. She then plied that strength successfully against the powers of darkness. She labored, "and the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." When the church at Antioch had enjoyed a precious revival, "the Holy Ghost said separated me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands upon them, they sent them away" to the regions beyond with the message of life and salvation. These two instances may serve as practical illustrations of the churches' work. By the one we are taught how to operate at home, by the other respecting foreign operations.

Christ evidently intended his churches to be missionary organizations. He first gave the command to preach the gospel to every creature to individuals, and laid the obligation to perform it on individual consciences. Then by gathering them into associations he clearly expressed his will that they should affectionately co-operate in the execution of his command. By acting in concert they could act with greater efficiency; as the small streams of the mountain best succeed in finding their way to the sea by uniting and forming the river.

The church has a spiritual kingdom to extend, and she can only accomplish this by spiritual means. "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal." All people are to be taught, and gathered in as they are taught—convinced and persuaded. She is "the salt of the earth" and as such it is necessary for her to come in direct contact with the sinful everywhere, that she may save them from putrefaction. It is for her, then, by the best means at her command, to do what she can for the salvation of a lost world, by extending her Saviour's reign. Her field is the world, and her work is not done, till the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ. She has to do with every nation, with every community, with every household, with every individual both old and young in her locality, or within the reach of her influence. "The fathers to the children shall make known thy truth," is an injunction of holy writ that the Church of Christ may very appropriately act upon. She can well serve her Lord, and disappoint Satan, by instilling into young hearts the leaven of the Gospel. Here she finds the most congenial soil in which to deposit the seeds of truth. While it is not her

province to supersede parental responsibilities, she is bound to supply the needed spiritual good to the children of the unregenerate, as well as to assist christian parents to do, what they singly cannot do, for the salvation of their children.

For this great work the church is pre-eminently fitted. Her capabilities are seen, in the qualifications of her members; as they are described in the New Testament. According to its teachings, no hereditary claims whatever, no possessions the world can confer, be they what they may, no work of man, no ceremonies which he can perform can fit us for membership in the church of Christ. It is a spiritual kingdom, and applicants for membership must be spiritually qualified, before they can be admitted. A change wrought in the soul by the indwelling of the Holy Ghost alone prepares us. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." This birth involves an entire change in our moral affections. By it we are assimilated to the Saviour. We love what he loves—we hate what is offensive to him. Our highest ambition is to imitate him, and our utmost desire is to please him, and to be like him.

All this we must experience, before we can enjoy the privileges or perform the duties of Christ's church. Possessing these we are prepared, and if I am not mistaken, we are compelled to go forth in the great work subduing the world to Christ. Christ dwells in our hearts by faith, a soul within a soul, inciting us to copy the example he set us, when he was manifested in the flesh.

If these are the qualifications of every member individually, the whole church must be as well qualified.

The church-structure is well adapted as a means to the end contemplated. Composed as it is of a converted membership—dependent in its action, and democratic (we use this term in a restricted sense) in its form of Government, the machinery is at once simple and complete, well fitted to perform the work assigned her. In her working nothing is complicated or bewildering; all is plain and intelligible because of its simplicity. The most illiterate as well as the most learned of her members may understand, participate in, and enjoy her doings. With a membership rightly disposed, and prompted by one spirit, mutual and free in their endeavours, all equally responsible, the church becomes exceedingly efficient. Having their senses exercised to discern good and evil, they will naturally look for evangelical truth in those whom they choose to be their instructors. Having felt the power of religion themselves, they know something of its value and preciousness. They are concerned for it as the life of religion; and an obligation rests on them to do all they can for their mutual edification. They teach and admonish one another—they exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day lest any should be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. They consider one another and provoke to love and good works. Thus the kingdom of God is enlarged within them.

The most sacred duties of the church are incumbent on its members *individually*; and this individual responsibility has a power, a tendency to promote holiness in the members. This individual responsibility to glorify Christ, is not merged into that of the church; but each member is a part of the church and to him belongs the obligation of honoring the divine Master.

Maintaining these doctrines and pursuing these practices, the church draws largely on the affections of her Lord. To her pertains the promises of enlargement and complete success. Endowed with wisdom from on high, and able to judge by a spiritual perception of spiritual things; she alone is fully competent to take cognizance of doctrinal matters. She knows well the danger of error in faith, connected as it always is with error in practice; and hence she values every means by which her members may attain greater purity and steadfastness, and is thus well adapted to preserve and defend the truth, and solicitous to diffuse it, that others may be brought under its benign influence. Holding fast it is best prepared to hold forth the word of life,—at once the pillar to uphold, and the lamp to diffuse the truth as it is in Jesus. The church is a centre whence the tidings of salvation are to sound forth in every direction.

Moreover in contending with the powers of darkness, whether acting on the defensive or aggressive, the church affords her members an excellent opportunity of practically testing the great truths of the gospel; and thus materially increasing their knowledge of them, and their own spiritual strength. "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine" said the Saviour. The church supplies the opportunity to do, and hence the promised attainments—they are more than conquerors.

The mission of the church is clearly seen in her adaptedness to the work. It is also very apparent that she possesses capabilities for that work, which no other organization can command.

The Mission of the Sabbath School next claims our attention. And what is it? It is not simply a literary society. Its object is not simply the increase of religious knowledge, nor merely to impart a knowledge of the scriptures. It is not an institution into which the young may be gathered on the sabbath for the purpose of being entertained or amused, so that parents may send their children there to keep them from idleness and mischief. But while it is well calculate to do all this, its primary object must be the salvation of immortal souls—the conversion of the young, whose interests we especially seek to promote by bringing them to the feet of the Saviour.

If this is not the object of the sabbath school, the church, as such, can properly sustain no relation to it. And if this is its mission, where are to be found the necessary means and motives for promoting it, but in the church? It may be asked by some, if good intellectual and moral young people, assisted by good christian people outside the church, cannot do this work in the sabbath school. Our reply is that mere intellectual and moral people are not competent to this work. For christians to be thus engaged, they step aside from the heaven-appointed plan. While it is the right and duty of individual disciples to labor for the conversion of others, it is as clearly their right and duty to be members of the church, and as such, and under the sanction of the church, to do this very work.

Various Societies or agencies under the control of the church, are resorted to, not because suppose we the bible directly provides for them; but because their organization under these circumstances is no infringement of the Saviour's laws, and they are found to be successful methods of performing the churches' work. If however, such societies are esteemed above the church, and are in their actions independent of it, they will hinder rather than advance the divine glory. Every effort of the christian in his spiritual warfare must be strictly conformed to the Master's directions, in order to be successful.

"It is the right and duty of the church alone to extend the reign of Christ."

On this subject Dr. Wayland very justly remarks:—(see "Principles and Practices of the Baptists" page 252.) "The church itself should earnestly inquire for places in the city where the destitution is the sorest, and where those are to be found in the greatest numbers, who, in their homely garb, would be ashamed to appear in the temples commonly erected for the worship of Jesus of Nazareth. These places the church should supply with sabbath schools and religious services, not by employing here and there a city missionary, but from its own members. It should be the primary object of every church to cultivate all the talent for this service which it possesses, and employ it systematically in the work of evangelization."

The sabbath school then is just an agency of the church—this is the true relation. Out of this relation important duties arise, to some of these we may be allowed to refer, as we conclude these remarks.

The sabbath school should hold itself amenable to the church in all its acts. The duty of the church is, first: *To provide suitable accommodations for the sabbath school.* This with us is usually found in our Meeting houses. Difficulties may arise and some inconveniences be experienced by this practice, but we think these had far better be endured than for a church in this day to forgo the sabbath school. And if she be in earnest in her work she will cheerfully make the little sacrifice thus called for. But, where a church can afford it, a

school room properly fitted up is the most desirable for many reasons.

Secondly, *to provide and appoint suitable officers.* The success of any organization must depend largely upon the ability of its officers. The sabbath school is not an exception. Not every good man or woman is qualified for an office in the sabbath school. The successful teacher will leave the impress of his own sentiments upon his class. The successful superintendent will so impress the whole school. The scholars will largely partake of their views, be they what they may.

Harmony in the operations of all the agencies of the church should be carefully preserved. The teachings of our sabbath schools should not contradict the teachings of our pulpits. They ought rather to clearly, and truthfully illustrate and enforce them. Is the sabbath school a nursery of the church? Here then is the scion engrafted which will give the quality of the future fruit. How much prudence and wisdom should be exercised in their selection—such prudence and wisdom of which the church is the appointed depository.

Third, *To provide suitable books.* What tools are to the mechanic and his apprentices, books are to the sabbath school teacher and his scholars. In our Libraries should be found books to aid the teachers, as well as to amuse and instruct the scholars.

In the prosecution of her mission the sabbath school can only succeed by the use of the heaven-appointed means—the *Truth* and the *Spirit*. It is hers to diffuse the one, and look to God for the other, she cannot in confidence do the one if she is remiss in the other. In our sabbath schools thorough instructions in all the doctrines of the gospel should be aimed at. Our churches are receiving most of their accessions from her classes. How important then is it that the training of our schools be of such a character as shall fit its members to enter upon the duties of church membership understandingly; that they become members of our churches, not by tradition, prejudice, or policy, but because they have been taught by the word of God so to do. That they be able to "give to every man that asketh them; a reason of the hope that in them with meekness and fear." That our young members in the Sabbath School receive the sincere milk of the word that they may grow thereby. All this the best of our teachers cannot accomplish without proper books. Let the churches see to it that these are forthcoming.

Fourth, *To pray for the Sabbath School.* Christian effort and prayer are so intimately connected that we cannot separate them. In order then that the church labor efficiently by the Sabbath School, she must make it the subject of her prayers. And in order that her prayers be prevalent, she must do what she can for its success. "If ye abide in me and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will and I shall be done unto you."

In our Conventions the question is often asked, How shall we make our sabbath schools more efficient and interesting? Have we not here an answer? Let our churches have clear views of their relation to the sabbath school, and let them heartily accept the duties in connection therewith. Let them take enlarged views of the work, and in the proper way seek divine influence thereon. Let us be humble in view of the mightiness of this work, and our own weakness. Let us know that all plans, however wisely matured and nobly executed, must ever fail, in this work, without the approving smile of heaven; that in order that the foolish understand, the deaf hear, the blind see and the dead live, God must speak in his omnipotence.

Instead of the church attempting to transfer her work to other hands, let her prayerfully and promptly take the position assigned her. Instead of one-tenth of our membership being found in sabbath schools, as the last Returns shew, let a much larger proportion be found there. Instead of coming up for a few weeks or months in the year, let us come up year after year, nor think of suspending our efforts till our Saviour calls us from earth, till all the benighted of our race in the light of the glorious gospel shall see the Light and rejoice together.

Praying thus and laboring, our church life will be more fully developed. Our churches blessed with a more numerous and healthy membership, and they will stand forth promi-