

life and vigour into our torpid minds, so that we may have "fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life." And as the plant grows upwards, and expands to the beams of the natural sun, so surely does the believer turn to the "Sun of Righteousness" for the supply of all spiritual needs, that he also may "grow in grace" and be a living branch of the "true vine," waiting in patient hope for the time when he may be transplanted to the "better land," under the more immediate care of the great "husbandman."—John xv. 1, 5.

Christian Messenger.

HALIFAX, JULY 6, 1864.

THE PAST YEAR'S PROGRESS.

No Christian with right feelings towards Christ and his church, and a proper consideration of the best interests of his fellowmen, can be indifferent about the progress of the Redeemer's Kingdom in the world. The advancement of truth and righteousness among the nations of the earth generally, and in the different religious denominations, demands a place in the prayer and sympathies of all good men. Our own home being nearer and dearer to us than what is more distantly connected, we naturally feel a deeper concern in what relates to our own country, and especially in regard to the religious body with which we are immediately connected. The encroachments made on the territory of sin and Satan, must ever have special interest for the faithful soldier of the cross.

Many of our readers, animated with feelings such as these, look forward to the annual gatherings of our Associations to ascertain what progress has been made by the churches united in them.

The statistical information given in the Letters from the churches may, to some minds, present but few attractions, but to those who look at them as the results of a year's labor and prayer, and of the Divine operation on the hearts of men, they possess an interest far beyond the mere figures by which such facts are indicated.

On listening to the story told by the letters at the two Associations already held, one could but compare it with that of some former years when large gatherings have been made. With few exceptions the additions to the churches during the year were comparatively small. This seems to have been the experience of the churches in other places no less than in this Province; an excellent article in the *London Freeman* intimates that similar results appear in the County Baptist Associations in Great Britain. The facts and spirit of the article are so well adapted to our own circumstances, that we need make no apology for copying a portion of it into our columns. It will supply very appropriate reflections and form a very suitable conclusion to these brief remarks:—

STATISTICS AND PROSPERITY.—"The annual meetings of many at least of our County Associations have just been held, and the churches have been called upon, according to custom, to render a report of their progress during the year, so far as that progress can be judged of from outward signs, or summed up in statistical tables. The results, of course, are not yet published, and we are therefore in no position to say whether the unfavourable report we hear from some quarters is only exceptional, or is to be regarded as a specimen of the general condition of things. Whichever may be the true view of the matter, the recurrence of this yearly season of spiritual or ecclesiastical stock-taking may render not altogether inappropriate a few words on the connection between statistics and prosperity—the degree in which returns, given chiefly through the medium of figures, can accurately or adequately represent the real condition or progress of a Christian church. The acceptance of right principles on this subject would go far, we think, to prevent undue depression where the statistical results are unfavourable, and, on the other hand, would restrain that impatience for mere numerical increase, which may lead to the hasty admission into the church, of persons whose fitness to be there is more or less questionable.

Let us not be misunderstood. We are not counselling indifference to numerical increase as one element of prosperity in a church; nor are we denying the value of statistical returns of such increase as helping us to form a judgment of the church's condition and progress. The grand object of the preaching of the Gospel and the maintenance of the ordinances of religion is the conversion of sinners. The customary indication amongst evangelical Dissenters that this object has been attained (customary, because in our belief Scriptural), is the public identification with the church of those who believe themselves to have become the subjects of the regenerating work of God's Spirit. The number of additions to the church thus becomes at least an approximate measure of the number of conversions which take place. When the prosperity of the first Christian church is described, the description is summed up in the words, "And the Lord added to the church

daily such as "should be saved." Indifference to increase, on the part of minister or people, would betoken a sad lack of sympathy with the great object for which minister and people are alike bound to strive and pray. Nevertheless there are certain limitations to the value we ought to set upon increase as a test, and statistics as an expression, of prosperity, which, inasmuch as they are too frequently lost sight of, it may not be amiss that we should endeavour to point out.

For there are many excellent folk with whom the sole and summary test of the state of a Christian society is the number added to that society during some given year. Let the returns presented to the church at its new year's meeting, or rendered to the annual assembly of the County Association, be favourable, and their hopes are high, and their hearts and lips are filled with praise. But let those returns show a number of additions below the average, and at once their harps are hung upon the willows, they pour out their souls in lamentations over the declining estate of Zion, and it is well if they do not suspect and insinuate unsoundness or unfaithfulness on the part of the preacher. Now we would fain comfort such friends by showing them how partial and one-sided such a judgment is. We would have the members of our churches take a broader and deeper view of the meaning and the measures of spiritual prosperity, and to this end desire to prove that statistics of numerical increase furnish at best but a rough and imperfect test of that prosperity.

To begin, then, with the simplest considerations. Tables of additions to a church do but inadequately express the progress of that church in the single matter of conversion. For, first of all, such tables are frequently used and construed in a manner which leaves a delusive impression on the mind. A debtor and creditor account is kept, and a balance struck at the year's end. On the one side are reckoned additions by baptism, by dismission from other churches, by restoration, and so on; and on the other losses by death, dismissals, exclusions, or withdrawals: the difference between the two amounts is taken to represent the progress or retrogression of the church during the year. Now here are gains rejoiced in, which in the truest sense are no gains at all, and losses mourned over which are no real losses. It is no gain to the Church of Christ, no sign of spiritual progress, that a Christian man removes from one circle of Christian friends, and identifies himself with another. It may be an addition to the effective strength of one particular church, but it is in about the same proportion a subtraction from the effective strength of another. And the death of a Christian is not, in the deepest sense, a loss to the Church of Christ. We ought to reckon such events among our highest, our most glorious successes. For him who passes away in the hope of the Gospel, the Church of Christ has accomplished its work as a training-school for heaven. The true gains are admissions into the church from the world; the true losses the relapses of professors from the church into the world. Let these be reckoned against each other, if we would form a comparative estimate of the progress of a church. And let us recollect, in forming such an estimate, that no number even of such losses really affects the value of our positive gains; and that our gratitude and joy are due, not only for the number by which our gains are in excess of our losses, but for the whole number turned "from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God."

Nothing, again, can be more delusive than the common habit of resting broad and general conclusions as to the progress of a church upon the statistics of a single year. We cannot hem in spiritual processes by our artificial boundaries and divisions of time. The time for "closing the account" may fall just at some transitional time in the history of a church, when processes are ripening, but have not yet ripened, into results. If year after year goes by, and few or no conversions are effected, that church has reason, unless some very decisive and exceptional cause can be assigned for such a state of things, to look to the state of its spiritual health, for there cannot be health without growth. But it is utterly fallacious to reason from the results of one year's life and work.

We must be careful, however, how we apply even this principle, in comparing the state of one church with another. Where the number of conversions in two churches is equal, the number of additions may differ; nay, it is even possible that where the additions are most numerous, the cases of genuine conversion may be fewest. After all, success in the work of conversion is only one element in the spiritual prosperity of the church,—a most important and essential element indeed, but only one amongst the many, although the only one which statistics can be made to represent. Where a church is in full health and vigour, there we may expect, by the blessing of God, that sinners will be turned to Him. But while it is possible that a church may increase in numbers while some important elements of prosperity are wanting, so, on the other hand, if we confine our calculations to any particular year in the history of a church, there may be much prosperity with but little visible increase. Many a faithful minister can testify of times in his experience when he had to wait for converts coming "to declare in the gates of Zion what God had done for their souls," and yet dare not, could not, doubt the signs and symptoms of healthy, stirring life which he saw all around him amongst his people. And in due time his faith and patience have had their reward. But in statistical reports those times of waiting appeared as times of spiritual drought, and death, while he knows them to have been times of real, though as yet undeveloped life.

Let us gather from the experience of the

past motives for new faithfulness, zeal, and courage in the time to come, and by our consistent lives and persevering prayers, respond to the gracious challenge of our God, "Prove me now herewith, and see whether I will open the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room to contain it."

THE EASTERN BAPTIST ASSOCIATION.

The places at which the Baptist Associations of this province have held their annual sessions this year, have each had a feature characteristic of itself, not belonging to the others, which rendered it peculiarly interesting. The Western was at *Paradise*, where one of the earliest of the Baptist Pioneers formerly preached, and where, in the district around, there were then, and have at times since, been extensive religious revivals, such as have been equalled only by those of more recent days in Ireland, Scotland, &c which have commanded the world's attention. These reminiscences were brought up, on our recent visit by one and another in public and in private, so as to make the session one of such interest as will not soon be forgotten.

The Central Association at Chester was held in the same place where, just fifty years before, a similar gathering had been held when the Baptists of the three provinces were but one body. Now they have become *free bands*, each of which is larger than that from which they have descended. There, too, our missionary operations, in any regular form, were first initiated. These were facts not to be forgotten.

The Eastern Association, on the other hand, had never held a session at Truro till this year, Onslow having been the head-quarters of former gatherings of the Baptists in this part of the country. And here we may remark again, the changes wrought by the hand of Time on the face of society, while the great features of nature remain undisturbed, century after century. In former years, Onslow was the great centre of population and business, but, in these respects, it has had a successful rival in Truro, which has not only gone far ahead of it, but has become unquestionably one of the prettiest towns of Nova Scotia, if not the prettiest. Formerly the Bay came up several miles nearer to Truro, and afforded commercial facilities which are now entirely gone, leaving it and the surrounding country almost entirely dependant on the railroad for its supplies. The taste displayed in the building of Truro, and the intelligence and enterprise of its people are certainly second to none. Whilst Kings county holds the first place in the last census, as respects Education, if we may judge from appearances, we doubt if any separate locality in it could bear comparison with this village. More attention has of course been given here, and larger expenditures made, to provide educational facilities than in any other place. Windsor and Horton have doubtless supplied more men of higher educational qualifications for the province, but for the general diffusion of knowledge amongst the people of the district, we presume Truro is in advance of them. Having ample space for the enlargement of the town, the inhabitants have placed their residences in such positions along the streets, as make them appear to the best advantage, varying them in architectural design, sufficient to show that they have more than one idea amongst them on this subject. The Normal and Model Schools are plain, unpretending, economical structures, scarcely of so much solidity or ornament as might be expected of buildings for provincial use.

The Presbyterian Academy—a handsome edifice in a commanding position—stands, with its other buildings, having a deserted appearance, as if making its silent protest against the removal of its professors to Dalhousie College at Halifax. Objection is taken, we are told, to its being appropriated to any other purpose, it being expected that the former occupants will ere long have wisdom enough to retrace their steps, and re-occupy this most eligible station for such an institution. It is certainly one of which any religious body might well be proud.

On Saturday last, the Delegates of the Baptist Churches in the Eastern portion of Nova Scotia and P. E. Island, assembled with the church at Truro. The Rev. J. Davis, the Moderator of the past year, called the meeting to order, by singing and prayer. The election of Moderator resulted in the choice of Rev. J. E. Balcom. Rev. T. H. Porter, Jun., and Bro. Wm. Boggs were appointed Secretaries.

The letters were read by brethren S. Selden, T. A. Higgins and W. H. Porter. These indicated a similar experience to the churches in other parts of the province, noticed in another column, and expressed generally an appreciation of their need of the Holy Spirit's power to render the word preached effectual,

and to bring any really improved condition upon the community generally.

On Lord's Day, sermons were preached at Truro—in the morning, by Rev. Wm. Chipman, of Cornwallis; in the afternoon, by Rev. Dr. Tupper, and in the evening by Rev. John Davis.

The appearance of our venerable friend, Mr. Chipman,—for the first time to preach before an Association as he informed us,—about 83 years of age, and in such vigor to present the great truths of the gospel, caused tears of gratitude to flow from many eyes. He discoursed with great clearness on Ephesians v. 25-27. After referring to the foundation on which the Church of Christ rested, he showed in what it consists, 1st. The internal glory of the church; 2nd. The external glory; and 3rdly, the eternal glory.

Dr. Tupper referred to his visit to this place 25 years ago, when there was but one pastor, and but two small churches in all the district occupied by this Association. He showed from Hebrews xiii. 1,—first, what brotherly love is; 2ndly, why it should be continued; and 3rdly, how it should be manifested.

Rev. J. Davis treated "On Christian enlargement," from 2 Corinthians vi. 10, "Ye also are enlarged." Quite a number of other ministers were preaching in the neighbouring churches.

On Monday morning the Introductory Sermon should have been preached by Rev. G. F. Miles, but as he was prevented from attending by severe illness in his family, his alternate, Rev. Maynard P. Freeman preached from 1 Corinthians iii. 9, "Ye are God's building." He showed the materials of which the structure spoken of is composed, and how they are brought into the places for which they are designed. He also referred to the great and glorious objects to be secured by its erection.

We must defer the remainder of our notice of this Association till our next.

THE EDUCATION ACT AND APPOINTMENTS.

It will be seen by our news columns of the present and past weeks, that the Council of Public Instruction, are carrying out the provision of the New School law.

We intended to have given this subject some consideration before this, but as there were some points in the Act which required explanation, we deemed it advisable to wait for some authoritative decision to be given, as to what construction should be put upon its provisions by the people, before we pronounced upon it. For instance, we understood that it would come into operation from the 1st of May, 1864; but the Act itself might be interpreted so that it should not be brought into full operation till May 1st, 1865. We learn, however now, that after the Act had passed, provision was made, that, without interfering with existing arrangements, it should commence its operation on the 10th of May, 1864. Nothing could be done till the Inspectors were appointed, and received their instructions from head quarters. The revision or re-appointment of the Boards of Commissioners must also precede any other action.

The Inspectors of Schools for fifteen Counties, it will be perceived, are now appointed. This list will doubtless be carefully scanned by the friends of the Government as well as by its foes. Exception may be taken, by certain parties, to some of these gentlemen, but we presume, that, on the whole, the selection is as free from objection as could be expected, to meet the requirements of the inhabitants of these Counties respectively. The selection of these officers has been perhaps one of the most difficult tasks of the Superintendent and Council, and one may congratulate them, that, as far as we are acquainted with the gentlemen, they have succeeded in placing in those important positions men of ability, well adapted to the situation, and such as, we believe, augurs well for the wise administration of the law. Much will be required of them and the Commissioners during the present summer, in re-arranging the Sections, and preparing for the application of the law to meet the circumstances of their several localities.

The Assessment principle will we presume be adopted in many of the Sections, as the one which will bear most fairly on the whole population, and enable all to contribute a fair proportion towards the support of education—the prime necessity in every place where the people and their children are found.—Those who have no children to provide for at home may, by this means, we confidently believe add to the value of their property by making use of a part of it, in keeping up a good school in their neighborhood, and, at the same time, benefit others who have the responsibility of feeding and clothing, as well