

Christian Messenger.

A REPOSITORY OF RELIGIOUS, POLITICAL & GENERAL INTELLIGENCE.

"Not slothful in business: fervent in spirit."

NEW SERIES.
Vol. X. No. 24.

HALIFAX, N. S., WEDNESDAY, JUNE 14, 1865.

WHOLE SERIES.
Vol. XXIX. No. 24.

Religious.

Baptist Churches, a necessity.

ADDRESS OF REV. DR. ANGUS TO THE LONDON BAPTIST UNION.

(Concluded.)

As men think of baptism, so they come to think of Christianity and of the church. Some hold that all individual Christian profession is needless or unbecoming. A man's religion, they say, is something between himself and God. He needs no profession and no rite to confirm or seal it. Others hold that God means the church and the world to be blended. The tares and the wheat are to grow together. Others still teach that the church and the world are made up of the same persons. The world is the church forgetting her privileges; the church is the world remembering them. And each party finds its defence, as it found its faith, in unscriptural views of baptism. Observe this ordinance as Scripture directs. Bid all believe and avow their faith—children and men. Baptise none but such as make a credible profession, treat every such baptized man as a Christian—and the delusions cease, the theories based upon them melt away.

"Bear with me while in closing I offer two or three remarks, essential either to guard these statements against misapprehension, or to guard ourselves against the abuse of them.

"1. Though I have stated strongly what I deem the logical and actual results of infant baptism, I do not, I would not, I dare not, charge the conscious advocacy of those results on those who have adopted that practice. They, many of them, profess to believe as firmly as we in the great Protestant principle—the Bible alone the ground of our faith. I am sure the doctrines of the common salvation—regeneration by the Spirit of God and justification by faith in Christ—are as dear to them as to us, and many of them hold the spirituality and individuality of the Christian Church as tenaciously as ourselves. These beliefs they many of them avow, and I believe their avowal. I deem it therefore, as we all deem it, an honour to work with them in maintaining the same great truths, and in serving the same Master. But I repeat none the less strongly that, side by side with the truths they hold, is an error which tends to neutralise those truths; and that sooner or later the one must destroy the other. If they take the language of Scripture on baptism and apply it to infants, that language so applied tends to Popery. If they repudiate that language in the case of infants, and on the ground that our reason and common sense show it to be inapplicable, and yet baptise infants, that repudiation on that ground tends to Rationalism. If they strive to check both tendencies, and still persist in the baptism of infants, it will be at the expense of the ordinance itself. Quakerism is one theory of infant baptism, perfected; Rationalism is another; Popery, a third. Such I believe to be their tendencies. That any of them is the conscious aim of any devout Christian man who observes this ordinance I do not, I cannot believe. Let us learn to do justice at once to our brethren and to truth.

"2. This whole subject suggests a principle in relation to Christian fellowship and to Christian churches which it may be worth while for us to consider. None have suffered more from creeds and unscriptural tests than ourselves. There are several Articles in the Church of England specially aimed at what are supposed to be the tenets of Anabaptists. I deem it honourable to our fathers that, when driven out by some of these tests, they did not in their confessions insert them all as essential to membership. Sometimes they affirmed that their views had been misunderstood; sometimes they wisely avoided, by silence, the example that had been set them; and, while claiming liberty for themselves, they left the same liberty for their brethren. Whatever changes they made in existing confessions, were generally on the side of freedom. These confessions themselves were declared to have no authority. They were drawn up only to show the world in a general way what was believed. May we not with advantage carry this principle further? What truths are es-

sential to justify the recognition of man as a Christian? and what truths and practices are essential to a Christian church? Not all I deem true, clearly; may, not all I deem important. If the former, our creed must be as comprehensive as our knowledge; if the latter, it must be as comprehensive as the New Testament,—for I hold all religious truths to be important. Is it not one thing to believe a doctrine true, and another to decline fellowship with a Christian man unless he agrees with me in holding it or in holding it just as I hold it? Is it not one thing to deem a truth important, and another thing to make it part of the constitution of the Christian church, and refuse membership to any who conscientiously differ? I may believe in the duty of total abstinence, believe in it as a Christian duty. May I therefore decline Christian fellowship with any who, though Christians, are not total abstainers? I may believe in the duty of storing for Christ, and hold that the Christian church would gain by the adoption of this primitive system; may I make it a condition of membership? I may believe in the lawfulness of infant baptism: may I say that none shall be a member of the church, with equal member's rights, unless, besides being himself baptized, he holds that doctrine? We answer all these questions in the negative. Why?—and on what principle? Is it not this—that I am to welcome as a Christian all who give evidence that they are Christians, though differing on non-essential points, and that Christian churches are to make essential to membership only what Christ Himself has made essential? I must neither add to those essential laws nor take from them. By taking from them, I alter the character of His own institution, and it ceases to be a Christian brotherhood: by adding to them, I make the way narrower than He made it: I multiply schisms in the body, I divide and weaken the church.

"If Baptists and Paedobaptists are to form one Christian church, it must be not because right views of this ordinance are unimportant, nor yet because so much is to be said on both sides that we cannot reach a clear judgment, but simply because differences on that ordinance between men all conscientious and spiritual, all, moreover, professing to take their conceptions of Christianity and of churches from the New Testament alone, were never intended by our Lord to divide the church He redeemed. If we believe baptism either of infants or of believers to be an individual duty, but no constitutional law of the Church of Christ, we must not make it one, on the plea that we deem it important. If we believe it a constitutional law, we must not set it aside on the plea that we wish to love our brethren. It must be remembered on the one side that great truths are not honoured by being used in work for which God never meant them; and on the other that Christian love does not grow by the sacrifice of truth, or by indifference to it. What Scripture tells us is essential to the constitution of the Christian church we must retain as part of the constitution; what is not essential, we must leave free, not because it is unimportant, but because real Christians and Christian churches may differ in relation to it. It is to me fearful to think what mischief has been done to the body of Christ by this tendency to multiply tests—almost as much as by the concomitant tendency to leave unrebutted an unhallowed worldly spirit. Men lengthen the creed, and then they shorten the commandments. The result is the multiplication of sects that fail to do justice either to the truth or to the holiness of the glorious Gospel. Let us who take our religion from the Bible only, and who can afford to honour freedom in our churches by the very fact that we require all who join them to be, first of all, Christian men, avoid these evils; and we shall find our reward.

"I feel sure that for our principle as Baptists—religion a personal thing, baptism the avowal of it—there is, as an eminent German has said, a glorious future; whether there is an equally glorious future for Baptist churches depends on the fidelity with which we adhere to the inspired model, combining truth with love, freedom on non-essentials with an intelligent, loving, and tenacious hold of the great doctrines of our faith.

"3. Our power depends after all under God upon the firmness and consistency with

which we hold and preach the Gospel. We have been charged with making too much of an ordinance. It might be answered that we make no more of it, than those make, who lay it down, in the form of infant baptism, as an article of faith; much less of it than the great majority of nominal Christians; it is with us, not a power, but only a sign, not even a means of grace, though often graciously blessed, but a symbol; and if we make much of it, it is in our case only because of the spiritual truths it represents. In that light it is important, but how much more important are the truths themselves! Show us a baptized church, that receives baptism from tradition, that has lost its spirituality, that has ceased to hold and to preach the Gospel of the grace of God, and it will have small claim upon our sympathy. It is not baptism in itself for which we plead; it is baptism in its spiritual significance, and in the appreciation of that spiritual significance lies our strength and the secret of our love for all Christians, whether or not they agree with us on this ordinance. In proportion as the necessity of man's renewal by the Holy Spirit, the completeness of justification by faith, the spirituality of the Church of Christ occupy a chief place in our ministry—each truth proclaimed practically and tenderly—we shall prosper; and in proportion as we are intelligent advocates of baptism, the ordinance that symbolises those truths, we shall love all who hold them, though they may have failed to understand the nature and have misused the significance of the symbol itself. The essential thing is the substance, not the sign; the grace, not the symbol. It is therefore the substance chiefly we preach, wherever we go; and it is the grace chiefly we love, wherever we find it. Signs may, however, misrepresent the substance, symbols conceal the grace; therefore we examine and adjust them, while the man of mere signs and symbols will be at once powerless and narrow-hearted. We desire to be neither. Of all parties, Baptists are most bound by their very principles to set forth spiritual truths, and to love all spiritual men. Let us be Baptists, then, and so hold that faith as to make it clear that we are therein, and thereby, the better Christians."

"This do in remembrance of me."

THE NEW COMMANDMENT.

"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. JOHN 13: 34.

The great evidence of vital religion is love, and the great command of Jesus is love. He wishes us to be like himself. He says, "Do as I have done. Do as I do. Look at my love, and imitate it." Jesus loves all his people, with a love stronger than death. He loves them not for what they are, or for what they have or for what they do, but independent of the whole. And he would have us love one another, simply because we are his, and for his sake. A Christian may be poor, illiterate, uncouth, a stranger to all the customs of the society in which I move, but I must love him for all that. He may be compassed with infirmities, and have much that is unlovely about him; but if I can discern the grace of God in him, I must love him notwithstanding that. His views of doctrine may differ from mine, his views of gospel ordinances may be opposite to mine, his experience in many points may be unlike mine; still, if there is one feature of the likeness of Jesus about him, I must not only tolerate him, or bear with him, but I must love him. Christ requires me to do so. I must distinguish between his person and imperfections, and love the one, while I protest against the other. But we do not come up to the requirement, unless we love as Jesus loved; with a love as pure, as constant, as strong. Or, until we see a living, walking exposition of the 13th chapter of Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians, Spirit of the loving Jesus! descend on us, and fill us with love to all, and every one, that loves our Saviour's name. Give me to love all that Jesus loves, and to love them as he loves them.

"This is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment."—1 JOHN 3: 23.

God's greetings.

(From the German.)

God greets many a one who never observes, and many more who never thank him for it. When, for instance, his sun wakes thee early to the enjoyment of another day of life and health, it is as if he said to thee "Good morning!" and when, at eventide, thine eye closes in peaceful slumber, it is because God hath bid thee "Good-night;" and when thou sittest down to a well-spread board with a good appetite, it is God's gift for thy good.

When, again, thou art enabled timely to discover some threatened danger, what is it but God saying to thee, "Take heed, my child, and turn back before it be too late?"

When, on some early summer morning, thou walkest about amid the blossoming flowers, and the singing birds, and thy heart feels light and joyful, is not God saying to thee, "Welcome, heartily welcome to my palace garden?"

And when, all of a sudden, perhaps, without thy knowing how or why, the heart is moved to good thoughts and thou beginnest to feel sorrow for having done wrong, and a desire to do better, is not thy heavenly Father saying to thee, "O, grieve not my Holy Spirit, which now stirs within thee?"

Or when, thou passest by a new-made grave, and a sudden shudder of anxious foreboding runs cold through thy frame, is not God greeting thee with the fatherly admonition, "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh in which thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them; for there is neither wisdom nor device in the grave, whether thou art fast hastening?"

O yes, these are God's greetings, "whether we will hear or whether we will forbear." But if we hail them not with pleasure in time, we shall remember them with vain regret in eternity.

Taking offence in the Church.

A great mistake is made by many church members. When they receive any injury from a fellow member or imagine that they are unjustly treated by them, they rashly conclude that the best remedy is to absent themselves from the public and social meetings of the church. An article in a late number of the *National Baptist* treats this subject in the following very sensible style:—

This proceeding is wrong, the most wrong you could take. Come, now, and let us reason together. Let me put together, in the fewest words possible, some of the pros and cons. By staying away—

1. You violate your duty to God, who commands you to "walk orderly" and not to forsake "assembling together" with His people. If you are sure you cannot be comfortable in that church, ask for a letter and join another, at once. But if you act as you do, you cannot have a letter granted you.

2. You break your covenant with the church. Turn to it now, read it prayerfully, and see if you are not in danger of committing a great wrong.

3. You are showing resentment against the whole church, for what a few members, or perhaps only one, has done.

4. You set at naught the great rule, Matt. 18. Unless you can freely and fully forgive those who have offended you, go and do as Christ commands, and begin a holy discipline with them, or you bring on yourself His condemnation.

5. If you refuse to do this, and still absent yourself, the church must put you under discipline. A committee will wait on you, and you must then act according to Gospel order, or you will be excluded; and most justly. Now read, on your knees, Matt. 16: 19, and 18: 18.

The persons who have offended you may be pillars in the church. You are getting up a party, to destroy their usefulness; yes, so far as your influence goes, to destroy the church; and you will be responsible before God for all the good you prevent.

7. You are keeping yourself in a miserable state of mind, and running an awful risk of apostasy.