

Messenger and Visitor

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THANKSGIVING.

The Government of Canada has appointed Thursday, the 15th instant, as a day of public thanksgiving to Almighty God in recognition of the blessings of the year. This appointment should command general approval. Most of the people of this country recognize the existence of a Supreme Being, and when a census is taken there are comparatively few who care to be described as being without any religious faith or affiliation. There are indeed among us many distinctions of name and creed. There are Christians and Jews, Protestants and Catholics, Ritualists and Evangelicals, and their differences of belief cannot be regarded as unimportant. But all these profess belief in a Supreme Being, the source of man's being and of all that enriches and enables his life. It is fitting, then, in view of our common heritage in this goodly land and all the blessings which the year has brought, that all should unite in devout thanksgiving to Him from whom all blessings flow. If there are many things in which the various religious bodies cannot agree, they can at least all unite in ascribing thanks and praise to the Creator and Preserver of all for the blessings which He bestows on all. And surely it would be good and comely thing to see the people of each community throughout this broad land of ours, without distinction of religious name or creed, coming together on the day appointed for national thanksgiving and uniting their voices in prayers of thanksgiving and songs of praise. On such an occasion why should not all the worshippers of God unite, so far as they can, in humbly voicing the thanks due unto His name and imploring the divine goodness for days to come? But if the sincere worshippers cannot all forget their differences sufficiently to unite even for one day in the year in a thanksgiving service, then it is surely well that the congregations should assemble each in their own place to recognize devoutly the blessings which Heaven has bestowed upon us as a people. There is certainly much to inspire the devout heart with gratitude in view of the blessings received. Canadians must be ungrateful indeed if they do not thank God for the country he has given them, for its healthful climate, for its beauty and fertility, for its wealth of seas and rivers, forests and prairies,—a broad land fair to see, and almost boundlessly rich in the resources that go to make a nation. Canadians may well be thankful for the liberties they enjoy, for stable government well administered and responsive to the will of the people. No man leaves Canada to escape civil oppression or to find a larger measure of freedom than he here enjoys. It is a land of religious liberty and privilege where every man worships God according to the tradition which he accepts or to the dictates of his conscience, with no arbitrary power of an established church to make the way of the dissenter hard.

If it is asked what blessings the year has brought, it is evident that the grounds for thanksgiving in this respect are many. There has been a bountiful harvest, trade has been active, the leading industries of the land have been generally prosperous. There has been a constant demand for labor, and few who were able and willing to work have lacked employment. The land has been mercifully preserved from flood or famine, plague or earthquake, and the people have dwelt in peace and prosperity. The country is progressing. Its resources are becoming known to the world, many from foreign lands are coming to make their home within its borders. Canada is becoming known among the nations, and year by year it becomes evident that, with prudent government and sturdy citizenship, our country is destined to play an important part in the world's development. Let us be devoutly thankful for all this material good and the promise of blessing to come. But let us not forget that the noblest destiny of our country is not to be attained apart from a wholesome moral and religious life. If the fear of God is in the hearts of the people, if they are actuated by faith in the reality of things unseen, if truth, righteousness and purity are the controlling principles of our civil and national life, then indeed it shall be well with us, and this Canada of ours shall be for praise among the nations.

THE FREE BAPTIST CONFERENCE.

The Free Baptist Conference of New Brunswick met this year in its annual session at Lower Millstream, King's county. There was a good attendance of ministers and delegates, and the meetings appear to have been marked by at least the usual interest. The annual report on the State of the Denomination was presented by the Corresponding Secretary, Rev. Dr. McLeod. From this report we gather the following facts: The territory occupied by the Free Baptists in the Province is divided into seven districts. The number of churches is 158, of which 112, with a membership of 9,113, reported to Conference. The 46 churches which did not report have an estimated membership of 3,000. Twenty-eight churches report revivals; the number of baptisms for the year was 236 and the net gain in membership 113. Two new churches have been organized during the year and two houses of worship dedicated. Thirty-four churches report gain in spiritual life and ten report loss; the rest make no report as to this. Twenty of the reported churches had no regular pastoral care during the year, but some of them had for a time the services of missionaries, and some had occasional visits from neighboring pastors. The total amount raised for all purposes, including pastors' salaries and other local expenses, by the 112 churches reporting is, as given in a tabulated statement, \$29,725.24. A full statement of the amount raised by the W. M. Society would, as we understand from the report, increase this amount by about \$1300.00. Sixty churches with 4,160 resident members contributed to Home Missions and fifty-six churches with 3,677 resident members contributed to Foreign Missions. The amounts raised for Home and for Foreign Missions— independent of the contributions of the Women's Society—were respectively \$325.30 and \$314.86. The treasurer of the W. M. Society reports receipts, including the contribution of Mission Bands, amounting to \$2,153, an increase of \$300 over last year. At the beginning of the conference year there were on the roll forty-six ordained ministers. Two of these now rest from their labors—Revs. C. F. Rideout and G. A. Hartley, D. D. Of the ordained ministers twenty-seven have been engaged in regular pastoral work; six have labored almost constantly but without definite engagements; one has been editor of the denominational paper, four have been unable to preach owing to age and ill health and five have been absent from the province. The average salary of pastors in the denomination is \$405.00.

The Corresponding Secretary's report also refers to the evident errors in the returns of the last Census by which the Free Baptists of New Brunswick are represented as having decreased by over 10,000. Representations in respect to the matter have been made by Dr. McLeod to the Census Commissioner and the Minister of Agriculture (in whose department the census bureau is located) but without any satisfactory result. It seems impossible to suppose that there has been any intention on the part of those in charge of the census bureau to do injustice to the Free Baptist population of the Dominion or of New Brunswick. But if, as seems probable, the errors which have been pointed out arose through misunderstanding or carelessness on the part of those who gathered the data for the census returns, it may of course be impossible to make the required corrections except by taking a new census of the districts in which it is charged the errors have occurred. But certainly the evidence in the case should convince the Census Commissioner that very serious errors have been made, whether they are remediable or not.

The question of union with the Baptist body of the Maritime Provinces, was before the Conference. We have no definite information as to the course of discussion on this subject, but understand that the basis of union adopted some sixteen years ago at the Baptist Convention at Charlottetown, was considered by the Conference and was adopted with some slight amendment which it is not thought will prove an obstacle to the consummation of the union. In this connection a committee, consisting of Revs. Dr. McLeod, B. H. Nobles, A. Perry, D. Long and F. C. Hartley, was appointed to meet a committee from the Baptist Convention for further conference upon the matter. As it may be taken for granted that the Baptists are not less inclined to union now than they were sixteen years ago, it will be seen that the prospect of affiliation between the two bodies, is now very encouraging.

THE GOSPEL OF REPENTANCE.

There are differences of opinion among learned and devout scholars as to the authorship of the fifty-first psalm, some accepting as correct the title or superscription which ascribes it to David, and others believing that it is a product of a somewhat later period in the history of Israel. But the practical value of the psalm to us is but little, if at all, affected by the question as to its authorship. It needs no credentials to support its right to be regarded as a part of the Sacred Word. There is perhaps no Scripture in the Old Testament which brings the devout reader more directly face to face with his God, and there is certainly none which with such fulness and depth of meaning expresses the burden of the penitent heart, its longing for purity and holiness of life and its joyful devotion to the service of God. It is the voice of the true worshipper that is heard here. He comes as a sinner, it is true, with noth-

ing in the way of sacrifices or of works of righteousness to merit the favor of his God, but he comes in an attitude of heart and mind such as God will not despise.

It is the voice of the broken and contrite heart, confessing its sins and imploring the divine mercy: "Have mercy upon me, O God, blot out my transgressions, wash me clean from mine iniquity and cleanse me from my sin." One marks here the utter absence, not only of any mention of self-righteousness, but of anything in the way of excuse or of palliation of sin. The psalmist does not say, "I am a transgressor, but circumstances were against me, the temptation was strong and I was unable to resist." Nor does he compare himself with his fellowmen, to say that he is at least as good as others and in some respects better than many. This man of the broken spirit and contrite heart has had a vision of God, which causes him for the time to lose sight of all else. He forgets his fellow men and how deeply his wrong-doing has injured them, he stands uncovered in his guilt before the holy judgment-seat of the Most High, he comprehends that it is the existence of a holy God and his relations to Him which makes the terrible fact of his sin possible and actual, and in view of that supreme fact he is smitten down and humbled in the dust. It is not for him to answer at that awful judgment-seat, or to lift his voice in any plea in extenuation of his sin. He feels himself a sinner and a child of sin, conceived in sin and brought forth in iniquity, and therefore his mouth is in the dust before God.

But though the Psalm voices the sinner's profound repentance and utter self-abasement, it is not the language of despair. The cry of the broken and the contrite heart is a cry of hope. It is to such a man that God looks, to such he extends the sceptre of grace. It is even to such an one that He will show His loving-kindness and His tender mercies and will blot out his transgression. Therefore, the penitent worshipper is emboldened to hope for mercy and for blessing. He dares to believe that in his deepest soul, by the grace of God, he shall be made clean from sin's defilement and wise to resist its enticements. He dares to hope even for joy and gladness, because of the healing mercy of the divine hand. He can pray for a clean heart and a right spirit and for the abiding presence of God's Holy Spirit in his life.

The sequel to genuine repentance and the experience of free forgiveness is joyful service. He who has known the bitterness of repentance and the joy of pardoned sin is the man to teach transgressors and to lead them back to the good ways of the Lord. "A man who has passed through such experiences," says Dr. Alexander MacLaren, "cannot be silent. Hearts gladdened by God's mercies instinctively desire to speak of them, and no man who can say 'I will tell what he has done for my soul,' lacks the most persuasive of all arguments. The impulse and the capacity to preach salvation to others are given in the experience of sin and forgiveness."

The essential theology of the psalm is summed up in the seventeenth verse. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart; O God, thou wilt not despise." This is the gospel of the grace of God, written here and elsewhere in the Old Testament and confirmed in Jesus Christ. It is the gospel which declares that salvation is not through sacrifices and good works, but through genuine repentance and self-surrender to the will of God; not by works of the law but through faith in Christ. The man who finds acceptance with God is not the man who can stand before Heaven and boast of his moralities and his scrupulous performance of religious rites, but the man who, with the sense of guilt heavy on his soul, cries from a broken spirit and a contrite heart, "God be merciful to me a sinner."

Editorial Notes.

—It is a strange and significant commentary on American Unitarianism that, according to the statement of President Southworth of the Meadville Theological Seminary made before the recent Maritime National Conference, of twenty-five men studying in that institution during the past two years not one had come from a Unitarian home.

—The American Board of Foreign Missions (Congregational) has closed its financial year without debt. It is said that the contributions of the churches to the work of the Board in August were perhaps the largest on record, and that the gain in regular contributions for the year amounted to fifty thousand dollars.

—Copies of the Rev. Isaiah Wallace's recently published book—"Autobiographical Sketch and Reminiscences of Revival Work," may be obtained at this office. These books have been placed on sale here for the convenience of persons living in St. John and vicinity who can call at this office for them. Every Baptist should have and read this very interesting record of a busy and devoted life.

—The Congregationalist says that two tendencies evident in the Unitarian denomination for some time were noticeably prominent in the National Conference at Atlantic City last week, which was attended by a thousand delegates from all parts of the country. One of these tendencies is the disposition to do constructive rather than critical work and to aim at a deepening of the spiritual life. The other is toward greater centralization and solidification of denominational interests.