

Christian Messenger.

A REPOSITORY OF RELIGIOUS, POLITICAL AND GENERAL INTELLIGENCE.

"Not slothful in business: fervent in spirit."

NEW SERIES.
Vol. VIII.—No. 40.

HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA, WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 7, 1863.

WHOLE SERIES.
Vol. XXVII.—No. 40.

Religious.

The Baptist Denomination in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, and P. E. Island.

The following is the Report of the Committee on the State of the Denomination, appointed at the late Convention held at Amherst:—

The Committee on the State of the Denomination reported as follows:—

The returns furnished by the Associations present the following results:—

NOVA SCOTIA:—

Western Association,	52 Churches.	529 Baptized.	7473 Members.
Central " "	39 " "	281 " "	4936 " "
Eastern " "	64 " "	136 " "	3450 " "
Total	155 " "	946 " "	15859 " "

NEW BRUNSWICK:—

Eastern Association,	64 " "	583 " "	4800 " "
Western " "	52 " "	130 " "	3846 " "
Total	116 " "	713 " "	8746 " "

The increase of the year, according to those statements, is 3½ per cent.

Five new Churches have been formed: viz., at Pictou, N. S.; Wickham, Centreville, and Cocaine, N. B.; and Belfast, P. E. I.

Seven brethren have been ordained, viz:—

Sept. 5, 1862.	William H. Porter, Pine Grove, Wilket N. S.
" 16, "	Isaac Lawrence, Upper Kingsclear, N. B.
Nov. 6, "	Alfred Chipman, River Philip, N. S.
Jan. 15, 1863.	W. W. Corey, 2nd, Keswick, N. B.
April 5, "	John F. Tooker, North Sydney, C. B.
June 3, "	James Palmer, Advocate Harbour, N. S.
July 5, "	Maynard P. Freeman, A. B., Bedeque, P. E. I.

Five new meeting houses have been opened:—in Nova Scotia, at Amherst—Greenfield, Queens Co.;—Kempt, Hants Co.;—and Poplar Grove, Newport; in New Brunswick, at Bulyea's Cove, Wickham.

Your Committee beg to append to this Report the following observations:—

1. The number baptized considerably exceeds the number reported last year. The brethren now assembled will, doubtless, regard this increase with gratitude, viewing it as an indication of the Lord's presence in the Churches, and as affording encouragement and stimulus to our endeavours.

2. The history of denominational benevolence during the year is far from satisfactory. Were the obligation to give as God has prospered more generally and deeply felt, and were our arrangements more systematic, and perseveringly maintained, none of our Institutions would languish for want of adequate support. A contribution of half a dollar per annum from each member of our Churches would produce 12297½ dollars, with which sum our educational and missionary efforts and other benevolent operations, would be carried on with vigour and growing efficiency.

3. It is much to be regretted that the number of candidates for the ministry seems to be on the decrease. And this is the more distressing, because there are many vacant Churches in all the three Provinces, and large districts in which itinerant labour is urgently required.

4. The extensive and increasing prevalence of sceptical sentiments in almost every part of Christendom, this northern hemisphere not excepted, renders it imperative on the ministers of the gospel, and on all others who have the means of prosecuting such inquiries, to study closely the evidences of the truth and inspiration of the Scriptures, and to adopt measures for the protection of the young from the insidious attacks of the infidel.

5. Believing that vital godliness is the grand preservative from the evils that have been alluded to, and the only effectual source of excitement to love and good works, the Committee renew the suggestion of former years, and recommend that the Churches composing this Convention be requested to set apart a day for united supplication to the Most High for an abundant outpouring of his Holy Spirit, in order to the strengthening of "the things which remain, that are ready to die," and the quickening of God's people to new life and activity.

J. M. CRAMP, Chairman.

A Sermon

BY JOSEPH PARKER, D. D.,

Of Cavendish Chapel, Manchester.

(Concluded.)

"And when He saw a fig-tree in the way, He came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig-tree withered away."—Matt. xxi. 19.

2. This story gives us not only Christ's view of uselessness in the abstract, but of uselessness under the most aggravated circumstances. You do not denounce a Hottentot for his barbarism. He has never heard the voice of civilisation, has had no opportunity of ameliorating his condition; he answers faithfully to all the influences which have operated upon him. So

far all is right. The response has been correct. God will judge him on his own ground. You would not be disappointed with a fig-tree that did not bear fruit in the open climate of England. You would feel a kind of pity for the expatriated plant. Even a leaf would be a joy to you; you would say, "The tree has done its best; a leaf is enough in this ungenial climate." But would you judge a Hottentot and an Englishman by the same standard? Would you be content that a fig-plant on the slopes of Bethany or Bethphage should thrive no better than on the banks of an English river or on the sunniest side of an English hill? No, truly. Your standard of judgment changes with changing circumstances. You have one rule in barbarism and another in civilisation. What would delight in England would disappoint on Olivet. Heighten the application of this principle, and you encompass the judicial government of God. In summing up the history of nations, God deals with them differently. There is one law of rectitude, but not one law of measurement, for all. "It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment" than for those who trifled with a fuller civilisation or shut their eyes to the noon-blaze of Gospel light.

Recur to the case in hand. This fig-tree had everything in its favour—it was at home, it was in the very land of figs, the sunshine and the air were exactly adapted to their growth; yet the tree failed. It might, so far as fruit was concerned, as well have been standing amid Siberian ice. Is not this vividly symbolical of many a nation, and many a family, and many a man? Look at the Jews. They lived in close proximity to Heaven. They were like high mountains which receive the first light of the sun and his last baptism of fire. They were God's peculiar people. Around them were the impregnable walls of Divine defence; upon them were shed the splendours of special dignity; among them lived the prophets who cleft the ages, and the singers of hope that charmed the world out of its deepening despair; higher still, in their midst the redeeming God became incarnate. Yet that fig-tree bore no fruit. Jerusalem was a city of plagues; her princes within her were roaring lions; her judges were ravening wolves; her prophets were light and treacherous persons; her priests polluted the sanctuary and did violence to the law. Here, then, is not mere uselessness, but uselessness under the most aggravated circumstances. The richest influences of Heaven were thrown away upon the treacherous multitude, and they who should have borne the most abundant fruit were barren as the grave.

The field of practical application is immeasurable. The penetrating appeal comes swiftly and irresistibly to every one of us. Take a man who has had every advantage from his youth up. His infant hands were clasped in prayer by the fondest of mothers. Chief among the names he was taught to love was the name of Jesus. His every step in life has been watched and blessed by a yearning solicitude he can little comprehend. In his widest wandering the influences of parental intercession were round about him as golden bands. The warmest of summers has brooded over him; the gentlest and purest of breezes have breathed around him; the dew of the morning and the evening has lain thickly upon him;—yet, fruit there is none; leaves, plenty. He can never satisfy a hungry traveller; he never elicits the blessing of gratitude, but continually provokes the malediction of disappointment. He ought to have been a tree of blessing in his family. Hunger should have fed upon his abundant fruit; but the tree is a withered and blackened thing in the midst of a royal and golden summer.

So much have circumstances to do with the formation and employment of character, that I cannot but revert to the caution that we should not dogmatically pronounce upon one another's usefulness. Judging some of you from an external angle, I might conclude that your lives are useless, yet in methods unknown to me you may be most useful. A man is not to be deemed useless simply because we do not see how he works or at what he aims. I have heard godly and earnest men denigrate everybody useless who is not in the Sunday school; and others, intoxicated with the congenial of an annual tea-drinking, describe their brethren as indolent because they do not trifle away their time on half a dozen committees. Let me protest against this groundless and thoughtless crimination of one another. There are many shining Christians who are no more qualified to teach in the school than to navigate a squadron or command an army. There are men born to be public teachers; they carry their certificate with them; they are unsealed epistles, known and read of all men. Others are intended to do a work not so demonstrative, but not less profound or essential. Some work best under the stimulus of applauding throngs, and others best in the deep shade of secrecy. Honour to all! Christ knows what He made us for, and, according to His own idea, He will conduct the final adjudication.

3. I say that He will conduct the final adjudication, and that leads me to the solemn yet animating fact that the examination and destiny of mankind are in the hands of Christ. It is better to fall in the hands of God than into the hands of men. This principle holds good throughout our entire social life. In proportion to the wisdom, the integrity, the exaltation of the Judge, is the certainty of being treated magnanimously, and pronounced upon with tender justice and just tenderness. Were my life dependent upon the judgment of an assembly upon any single sermon, I should beg to be heard by the princes in Israel, by the ripest sages, the profoundest thinkers, the mightiest orators. I should receive more merciful consideration from them than from unthriving sucklings and beardless tyroes. Carrying this principle

forward to its highest development, I call it an animating and consoling fact that our final judgment is with the Almighty. Jesus knows what human life is. "We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." He knows the power of the arch-enemy, the subtlety of his heart, the range of his arm, and the precision of his stroke! "He knoweth our frame. He remembereth that we are but dust." With thrilling tenderness are God's dealings with the Jews set forth—"but He being full of compassion forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not: yea, many a time turned He His anger away, and did not stir up all His wrath, for He remembered that they were but flesh, a wind that passeth away and cometh not again." I dare not be judged by man. He would be too hard upon me. He would be too eager to show his righteousness. I know, indeed, that Jesus is a lion as well as a lamb. I know that long ere time pealed its hours upon the human world, His frown fell upon the apostate angels, and ever since they have been withered trees in the garden of the universe. Yet I know the gentleness and patience and tenderness of His deep, deep heart! Did not that heart love me unto death? Was not its blood poured out as an atonement for my sin? Did it not yearn over me as mother never yearned over her firstborn? Then, too, I remember how He Himself lived on his fallen globe. He knows how cold it is, how many demons prowl over it, how tempestuous are the storms that beat upon it, how man is the worst enemy of man, how we fight and devour one another! All this He knows; and when He comes to make judgment, it shall not be forgotten.

Am I making all this a ground of presumption? Truly not! I would make the very tenderness of Jesus my most powerful appeal to your fear! Will you grieve one who has done so much for you? Will you smite the heart that emptied itself in sacrifice that you might be saved? Speak! Say, will you? By so much as He loved us, by so much will He avenge our disregarded of His mercy. What can the impenitent sinner do when the cross itself is turned into a seat of judgment?

4. In view of all these considerations, you can understand the urgency with which I call for usefulness of life. You can also understand why I plead for caution in denouncing this tree or that. Only yesterday I noticed an instance singularly bearing upon this part of the subject. Dr. Guthrie, most genial and eloquent of men, has actually gone up to a tree and cursed it, and, lo! the tree has not withered away! That great preacher, on the occasion referred to, actually cursed the tobacco-plant! Yet, what think you? I should like to tell this in a whisper, but a whisper is impossible in this prodigious edifice,—in the very next sentence he can't help confessed that he himself took snuff. You see what he did? He cursed the tobacco side of the plant, but not the snuff-side, and for that reason the plant did not shrivel into a cinder! You see how easy it is to go up and down the world attempting to wither trees that we really do not like, and how easy, as in case of the illustrious preacher, to interpose between the axe and our favourite tree, exclaiming in piteous tones, "Let it alone this year also!" No, Sirs! We must be honest all round. The Church must not be partial in its verdict upon bad things.

We must have honesty; and when the church purges herself from iniquity and inconsistency—when she really means what she says—she will with lightning-eye and thunder-breath pronounce upon the world's upas, and the upas of the world will wither away! Let us brand all bad trees. Then we shall be truly useful. Can there be a more melancholy object than a useless man—a man of barren intellect, pined heart, fruitless life? Men are so multitudinous now that the very vastness of the number misleads us as to the value of the individual. Reduce the appalling number—reduce it to the least possible degree; and with a solitary man on the face of the globe, what are the high intelligences to deem of him if no aspiration stir his heart, no impulse excite his hand to labour? It is a fool's plea that there are so many workers that others may well afford to be idle. A philanthropist ever finds a sphere of usefulness in the necessities of the man who stands next to him. In order to be useful, we need not cross perilous seas or encounter the dangers of foreign climes. Begin just where you are. Lift up your home as far towards heaven as far as mortals are permitted to ascend. Throw around the dulness of business the halo of faith in higher transactions. Turn the eye of the orphan towards the great Father, and lay the widow's weak hand on the arm of the all-supporting God. There is sphere enough for the exhaustion of all your energies. So long as iniquity abounds and sorrow weeps, not a man amongst us need stand in the world's "ket-place," saying, "No man hath hired me." Christ hires us all, demands us all, and will help us all! He Himself was the greatest worker. Not an idle moment interrupted the urgency of His life; the daybreak found Him at labour, the stars beheld Him at prayer! "Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus." And what is the spring of our usefulness—what is its motive, and what its sustentation? The answer is at hand: "The love of Christ constraineth us." But for this ever-nervous love, our work would degenerate into toil. This love makes us joyous long as the day lasts, and until sleep seals our eyelids it sings to us of more work and more recompense. Vital and enduring philanthropy apart from this constraining love is an impossibility. There may without it be a philanthropy of many leaves but little fruit. There is a leaf-philanthropy; there is also a fruit-philanthropy. Christ's life, considered throughout as a mediation, shows us the exact line on