

The Canadian Independent

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THEY SEE WHAT THEY LOOK FOR

Dr. Horatius Bonar has been giving much of his strength of late to prove the near advent of Jesus Christ. He has just been pointing out eleven infallible signs of the imminence of this event. With his pre-millennial opinions we have nothing to do at present. But with some of his signs we have to do, for they are a striking example of this fact, that a man is liable to see just what he is looking for; and what he does not wish to see, he is not at all likely to see.

His ninth sign of the near advent is "the diffusion of infidelity." And in support of this he says: "This at least is new. Our fathers knew comparatively little of this, and our fathers' fathers almost nothing. An infidel was rare indeed in their day—a man wondered at and shunned." Our fathers' fathers day—we presume—would bring us back to the time of Wesley and Whitfield. And unless all the histories of that age are valueless and false, not only France but England also was honey-combed with infidelity. An infidel was by no means the *rara avis* which Dr. Bonar would have us believe.

His tenth sign is "the increase of immorality." "Like a flood it is swelling and widening in its course." "Crimes that our fathers knew not of are common among the nations." And then he proceeds to speak of "drunkenness" and "murder broken loose." Was there no drunkenness in our "fathers' day"? Read Dean Ramsay's reminiscences, and see if their day was not one in which men were most sottish in their nature, a day when men drank until they fell down under the table. And as to murder, our fathers did not have newspaper correspondents in every hole and corner of every land to write up every crime. May it not be that there is less crime now; but what there is, is better known?

His eleventh sign is "the prevalence of superficiality in religion." "The show of piety is widespread, but the thing itself occupies a narrow circle," he says: "It is a worldly, self-pleasing religion, adopted for fashion's sake, and used according to convenience, &c., &c." And pray, was there no religious veneering in our fathers' days? Was there no worldliness? No fashions? And is it true that Christian integrity and Christian enthusiasm and Christian benevolence are all things of the past, sacred relics but not living entities in the present?

Has not Dr. Bonar been out searching for the very things he has found, and has he not found them just because he went out to find them? The theory he sets out with was, that things in this world were growing worse and worse, and he found them worse than in the halcyon days of the fathers. The grand growth of temperance sentiment, the marvellous missionary ventures and triumphs of the church

of Christ, the multiplication of institutions for the infirm, prison reform, and a host of other pleasant signs of progress, Dr. Bonar did not see, simply because he did not want to see them. They would so moderate his theory as to leave him almost no theory at all. So he would not see them, they did not come into his perspective.

Pre-conceived notions are always dangerous. For they almost invariably warp facts to fit the notions. The Baptist warps the facts in the Bible to fit his dogma of immersion. The Plymouth brother sees nothing in the New Testament that does not fit in with Plymouthism, all the rest conveniently becomes a dissolving view. And, as Beecher said recently of Ingersoll, he is like a buzzard looking for what the buzzard likes, and he finds it. If there is one thing on which men need light, an electric light, thrown, it is on the formation of their judgments. But that electric light has been flung upon this matter by Christ Himself when He said, "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment." And it would do men good to pay more heed to the Christ!

THE SILENT WORLD.

We publish in another column the conclusion of a letter that has deeply interested us, and will, we are sure, in like manner interest many of our readers. We must confess that we were until lately in ignorance as to the numbers, the condition, mental and moral, and other facts in connection with the deaf-mutes of the City of Toronto and elsewhere. The labours of the gentleman to whom our correspondent alludes, and the facts he has mentioned to us in connection with this class, have made us tolerably familiar with the great disadvantages and deprivation under which they labour and constrain us very warmly to commend the appeal of our correspondent for practical sympathy, not the sympathy that centres in giving money, but the sympathy of the hand, the heart, and the lip. Let any who are able make this their work. There is a wide field for Christian labour, for self-denying work, a field that lies close beside us. It is not the Macedonian cry, "Come over and help us!" rather, "We are here with you, help us." Our correspondent's statements as to the mental position of the large majority of the deaf-mutes, the non-development of thought and reason amongst them, and their ignorance of the elements of religious truth, will surprise some, as they surprised us when we first heard them, but we are satisfied that they are true.

That these friends appreciate interest in themselves, and can reciprocate warmly the kindness shown to them, is evident by the address to Mr. J. D. Nasmith which we published last week. We shall be glad to find that the letter of Semimute awakens an interest in those members of the "Silent World" who cross our path continually, and in whose well-being we should surely have great concern.

THE CONGREGATIONAL RIGHT OF REPROOF.

It is well known that Congregationalism in England has ever been placed in relation, for the most part ad-

verse, to a dominant State Church; its attitude therefore has necessarily been one of defence and struggle. Independency inevitably would come to the front, its very surroundings of a common misery, would bind together. In this great land of the west, still under the old flag and political allegiance, but free from the rigid caste lines of the old land, our New England churches had freedom to develop Congregationalism as a truly national religion, hence the interest we have in the history and the precedents of those churches, specially before the revolution which parted the Colonies from the mother country. We purpose to give an incident, not a solitary but a typical one, illustrating the right ever held by writers on our church polity which one church or many may possess of entering reproof against some erring church, and of withdrawing fellowship.

A. D. 1733, an "unhappy controversy" obtained in the First Church of Salem, Mass., so bitter that all efforts made even for a Council proved utterly vain. Ten members withdrew, and, following the advice of the Boston pastor, called an *exparte* Council. Ten churches took part therein, and, in spite of the protest of the pastor of the Salem Church, proceeded to deliberate. After three days' session they ended by "imploping the church to retrace its steps and end the scandal." The Salem Church remained immovable, when other members, some six months after, appealed to the Second Church at Boston for relief. That church appointed delegates "to dispense an admonition, in their name, if the case should appear to call for it." The Salem Church refused to receive the deputation, whereupon other four churches were called in, and still the offending church held out. A Council again was called sixteen months after the meeting of the first, finding all efforts for reconciliation vain. After three days' sitting that Council came unanimously to a finding, in which we read as follows:—

"In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, we protest, declare, and publish, that this church is become obstinate and impenitent in scandal, and has justly exposed itself to a sentence of non-communication from our several churches.

"Having made which declaration, we further proceed to declare to all the churches of our Lord Jesus through this province, that the First Church in Salem has justly forfeited the privilege of communion with these churches, and deserves to be deprived of that privilege.

"However, the Council, conformably to the pattern of our Great Saviour, who has compassion on the ignorant, and on such as are out of the way, think and make known that the churches to which we respectively belong, may out of tenderness and compassion, delay to pronounce the sentence of non-communication for the space of three months from the date of this our declaration."

The council also advised all churches, "out of a religious care to keep their own communion pure, to pronounce the same sentence of non-communication concerning that obstinate and unpenitent church."

Ten years after, two members "in the name and at the desire of the First Church" addressed the sister churches "confessing our fault to our fellow

professors, as it may appear to us to be our duty. We would now in this explicit manner freely acknowledge that we were greatly wanting in love to and concern for those once called the aggrieved brethren of our church.—We entreat that all our sister churches and Christian Brethren would forgive, overlook, and pray for us, their brethren in the faith of the Gospel."

And thus ended a long controversy with the happiest results to all. Any one who may desire to pursue this subject further can do so by reading the chapter on "Ecclesiastical Councils" in Dr. Dexter's last work on Congregationalism, lately reviewed in our paper.

Many will, no doubt, view such proceedings as antiquated. And yet, under similar circumstances, some such course seemed called for under the principles of church order and discipline, then granted by our British Brethren.—"It is the duty of Christian Churches to hold communion with each other,—that no church or union of churches has any right or power to interfere with the faith or discipline of any other church further than to separate from such as in faith or practice depart from the Gospel of Christ." For communion implies a common ground of comity, and "the faith and patience of the Gospel of Christ" is not an airy nothing; and when that comity is violated, or that faith and practice departed from, some other voice must be heard than theirs who have prejudged the case by violating that comity and departing from that faith. "Presbyterianism, some will say. Why not, if good? At any rate Congregationalism is elastic enough to embrace what is good from any quarter. In truth, however, there is not even incipient Presbyterianism in these actions of the old New England churches, seeing that a Presbytery or Synod is a *permanent* court for *all* appeals; the Council is but for the special circumstances which convened the same, is a council of churches, and leaves in its integrity the thorough autonomy of each individual church. We, however, are not dogmatizing, but presenting, as in our former articles upon Robert Browne and the Brownists, historical mementoes of the Congregationalism of history. Have we anything to learn therefrom?

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

The great need of the individual Christian, and of the Church and the world in this age, is not a louder profession of godliness, but a clearer development of Christian principle in daily practice, private conversations, business transactions, and in public life. As Christians we are converted to God, not merely that we may be ready to die, but that we may be able to live. We have no sympathy with those sentimentalists who, when a man seeks pardon on his death-bed, after he has been a champion for the devil all his life, send him up to the highest seat in glory, or the softest place in Abraham's bosom. In saying this, we do not limit the power of Divine grace. It is full, it is free to all: but it does seem almost blasphemy, and quite spiritual lunacy, for a man to serve the devil all his life with time, with talent, with love, with money, and then expect an abundant entrance in Heaven. Tell me not how a man dies so much as how he lives. No rapturous ecstasy of ten minutes at death will make up for a life time of sin and folly. Mo-