

## THE BAPTIST CHURCH IN CANADA AND ITS CREED.

It is almost impossible to venture upon a true description of the present creed of the Baptist Church in Canada without becoming conscious of a rather startling phenomenon. While other sects, as regards their adherents, if not their leaders, feel inclined more or less to blush for the exactitude and arrogance of their creed, and even the leaders endeavour to tone down its harsher features, we find here, in the Baptist Church, quite a contrast. In it many of the leading minds are trying painfully to prove that their church too possesses a hard and fast formulated creed, second to none in exactitude, and rigid as Calvinism itself. Others oppose themselves strongly to this view, and are certainly supported by a large and increasing number of adherents.

In these days, when creeds constitute the chief stumbling blocks to any sincere profession of religion, it is certainly remarkable that men should be found rash enough to covet their possession. Yet it is so. The spirit of martyrdom, or the love of notoriety, which ever it may be, is evidently still alive in this age.

Fortunately, or unfortunately, the organization of the Baptist Church is so free and independent that the voice of ecclesiastical authority holds but little power. Its form of government is an intelligent democracy, with particularly exclusive state rights, which no convention can infringe upon or alter. Each church governs itself. So long as pastor and people are mutually pleased with each other, there is no authority in that church which can actively interfere with their freedom to cast creed to the winds. Ecclesiastical machinery to prevent it is wanting.

And yet so remarkable has been the unanimity of creed evolved by this freedom, that only one church in this broad Dominion of ours, has failed to follow the profession and practice of "close communion." Every Baptist Church in Canada is of the type nick-named by the irreverent "hard-shell."

To readers who are unacquainted with the exact intent of either of these terms the following quotation from the most generally received "manual of the Baptist Church" will explain. "We believe the Scriptures teach that Christian Baptism is the *immersion* in water of a believer into the name of the Father, and Son, and Holy Ghost; to show forth in a *solemn* and *beautiful* emblem, our faith in the crucified, buried, and risen Saviour, with its effect, in our death to sin, and resurrection to a new life; that it is *pre-requisite* to the privileges of a church relation; and to the *Lord's supper*, in which the members of the church, by the sacred use of bread and wine, are to commemorate together the dying love of Christ; preceded always by solemn self-examination." The italics will perhaps be excused as bringing out in clearness the central idea of the "close communion" Baptists, that only those who have been baptized by *immersion* are really fit for church membership or for admission to what they, and the other orthodox sects, denominate "the Lord's table."

This is the distinctive peculiarity of the Baptist churches in Canada—to which there is but the one exception, needed to prove the rule.

To quote copiously from the remainder of their authenticated creed, which however is not authoritative, would be time wasted; for the Baptist Church creed is based on Presbyterian Calvinism. It is however Calvinism freed from ecclesiastical tyranny, and rendered thoroughly democratic.

Under this Republican form of government it has grown and expanded into more expansive views every where else where it has taken root, except in Canada. The real original "hard shell" or "close communion Baptist" has become almost a thing of the past in England, Scotland, and the United States; and there would seem to have been an emigration of its pilgrim fathers to this favoured land, so powerful is the grip with which this antiquated creed giant has laid hold upon the Baptist Church of Canada. Probably some readers may accuse us of exaggeration when we add that so strong is this sectarianism in the Canadian Baptist churches, that no member can partake of the holy sacrament of the Lord's supper along with members of any orthodox sect, nor can any Baptist minister dispense the elements to a congregation of *unimmersed* believers without trespassing upon the written and unwritten code of his church and throwing himself open to severe censure or even probable excommunication.

These are the hard facts of the position occupied by a so-called Evangelical Church in this 19th century in this enlightened Dominion. The present writer has no desire to hurt the feelings, or even injure the prejudices, of the many sincere and earnest thoughtful men who are to be found in membership with the Baptist Church in Canada; but surely it were a brotherly act, and a kindly, for each and all of us as opportunity offers, to point out to them the inevitable effect such narrowness of creed must have upon their power for usefulness in the world. Surely it is making too much of the letter which killeth and ignoring entirely the spirit which giveth life, to insist upon the observance to the letter of that which they admit is but a symbol, as the essential part of qualification for partaking of that which is not *their* ordinance, but their Lord's. The ordinance itself all Christians—all Protestants at least—know, is but a symbol, conveying to us thus the real existence of a spiritual law of our being, teaching us that the love and wisdom of Our Lord, corresponding to the bread and wine of which we partake, are as essential to our spiritual sustenance as material food is to the physical. Baptism naturally precedes this knowledge, because

water is the symbol of natural truth, and teaches that until some purification of the natural man has been effected in us by the application of natural laws to the guidance of our life, that Baptism of fire, the cleansing of the inmost thoughts of our hearts by Divine wisdom and the reception of the Divine love, is hardly possible. Both are effected by the Divine providence of Our Lord and Saviour, and are neither conveyed by, nor contained in the mere outward symbol. And for the reception of the former as well as the latter, all that is needed is that man should desire to shun evils and avoid them in his own life lest he should injure others. Church members and church ordinances in so far as they are helpful to this may be valuable, but they are *not* essential. The Christian world is waking up—nay is almost fully awake to this fact. It ought to bestir itself to free the Baptist Church of Canada from the yoke of formalism which presses so heavily upon it and seriously hinders its progress.

*Spero.*

## RELIGIOUS THOUGHT IN SCOTLAND.

V.—THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND: "SCOTCH SERMONS, 1880."—(Continued.)

The points already noticed serve to place the teaching of these sermons in hopeless antagonism with the old doctrine as to the mode and sphere of divine inspiration. A much more comprehensive view is adopted. For we are told "between our purely animal (!) ancestors and the savage who was first subdued by the glory of the sky and the mystery of life, there was an interval as great as that which separates the latter from ourselves. In the whole process there has been revelation, the unveiling of secret things to hearts that were open and recipient. In all there has been inspiration, at sundry times and in diverse manners, continuous, incessant, universal. There was a spiritual significance in the earliest gropings of the world's remotest childhood, as well as in those of the matured worshippers of Christendom." To the same effect is the assertion that the author of the book of *Job*, with all the glow of his genius and the fervour of his emotion, "in insight and inspiration fell much short of that to which Buddha attained." The same view underlies a curious and novel collocation of authorities regarding the question of moral discipline in a future state, where the author cites "St. Paul himself, and Luther in his usual frank and outspoken manner, *besides many others best qualified to give an opinion on the subject.*"

"The Law of Moral Continuity," a sermon from the text "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap," indicates the line of thought adopted by the writer in his discussion of the nature of human responsibility and the mode of divine judgment. Every action, good or bad, confirms and propagates the disposition from which it springs; reward or punishment is simply the natural and necessary result of well or ill-doing; the future grows directly out of the present, as the plant does from the seed: this, shortly, is his exposition of the doctrine. The nature of the Eternal Order of the universe, he says, is such that good action leads to greater good, and evil action to greater evil, making, however, the important distinction that the fruit to be reaped is the same in kind as what was sown. "It is not by connecting physical and social evil with that which is moral, that God can be said to decree righteous judgment, inasmuch as there is no exact correspondence between those two forms of evil; that which is physical being in no way commensurable with that which is moral." By sowing *moral* good, men do not therefore of necessity reap *physical* good, or even inward happiness, as the old Hebrews thought. Good or evil deeds grow into habits which tend to develop the higher capabilities of human nature, or to wither up and destroy them. "The real punishment of sin is the degradation which it stamps upon the soul." This doctrine of the spiritual harvest reveals the nature of divine judgment. The consequences of men's actions are only the fruit or natural development of the good or evil they have done, and are "neither extrinsically superadded nor arbitrarily imposed." It is inconsistent, therefore, we are told, with the popular belief of Christendom "concerning a day of final judgment to decide irrevocably the doctrines both of the good and of the bad." Such a conception is "the substitution of an artificial for a natural conception of Divine judgment; of a human and imperfect for a Divine procedure." Divine judgment, it is maintained, is *immanent* in every act itself. It is only another name for the natural and inevitable consequences of our lives. "That judgment will be executed, not once for all, as we have been taught to believe, by a separate Divine decree or verdict in each individual case, but by the operation of a universal law established from the first by the Governor of all."

Under this law of recompense or moral continuity, however, where is the room for conversion and amendment? How can good spring out of evil, if a corrupt tree can only bring forth corrupt fruit? The writer's solution of this problem is substantially that advanced by Emerson in his postulate of Good as positive, and Evil as negative, as the great Night or shade, on which, as on a background, Good is painted. He seeks his explanation of the difficulty in "the latent capacities of human nature; in the balance of good and evil within us; in the vitality and spontaneousness of a spiritual force, of a higher nature within us, to which the gospel appeals; and in the action of the Divine idea, as the gospel presents it upon the reason of man:" the better principle within