

tural pattern here indicated are faithfully fulfilling the obligations imposed upon them by their glorious Founder. And we have reason to be profoundly grateful to God that there are not wanting worthy examples of this kind. But how few, alas! can claim to have attained to this exalted position! A much larger proportion have abundant cause for lamentation over their leanness, their lack of success and their alarming retrogression. The care of these churches demands our careful study and our earnest prayers.

In explaining the inactivity and spiritual darkness which unhappily prevail in too many christian communities, it has been heretofore the almost invariable custom among us to sum up all our ecclesiastical failures under the heading of "unsuccessful ministers." There have been doubtless just grounds in too many instances for adopting this method of explanation. It may, nevertheless, be both wise and profitable to consider whether an equally satisfactory and reasonable solution of the problem may not possibly be found under the heading of *Unsuccessful Churches*. The suggestion is perfectly orthodox. In turning over the pages of the New Testament we are not a little surprised to observe that whilst bishops and elders are seldom or never reproved for unfaithfulness, the churches are often brought to task on account of their lack of zeal, declension from "first love," worldliness, etc. This is noticeable chiefly from the fact that it stands out in such striking contrast with the modern custom of loading our ministers with blame and sending scores of them adrift annually on account of failures for which the churches themselves are largely if not wholly responsible. We shall not claim either that ministers are now as faithful as they were in apostolic times, or that the churches of the nineteenth century are as prone to apostasy as were their primitive predecessors; but it is quite evident that there is enough similarity between the former and the latter days to give appropriateness and value to our present meditations.

#### THE FACT STATED.

That a large proportion of our churches are comparatively unsuccessful in accomplishing the work or exerting the salutary influence for which they were designed is painfully apparent. Viewed either in reference to the spirituality of their members, the efforts put forth by them in their respective localities, or the degree of aid they have rendered in the support of our denominational interests, it is obvious that success is oftener the exception than the rule. From the statistical returns which are forwarded annually to our Associations it appears that many of our churches have for a long time had no increase in their numbers. From the same source we find that many are giving either very little or absolutely nothing in the way of assisting the great enterprises for evangelizing and educating the world. Who among us was not surprised, astounded and humiliated when the statement appeared in the public prints over the signature of our Home Secretary of Foreign Missions that *one hundred and sixty Baptist Churches in the Maritime Provinces*