

Messenger and Visitor

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Windsor's Calamity.

Sunday, Oct. 17, 1897, is a date that will be long and sadly remembered by the people of Windsor, N. S. On Saturday night they retired to rest in as much conscious security no doubt as the people of any other place in these provinces. A little before three o'clock, on Sunday morning, a fire broke out near the water-front, which, it is stated, had been practically subdued, when, at four o'clock, a strong breeze, quickly increasing to a full gale, sprang up from the Northwest and fanned the sinking fire into a furious conflagration, which swept resistlessly through the town devouring all before it. What was a smiling prosperous town with many fine residences, business blocks, factories, &c., is left a smoking ruin. Seven-eighths of the town, it is said, including almost the entire business portions, has been destroyed. The condition of the people, present and prospective, with their homes, their clothing, furniture, and to a great extent their means of a livelihood swept away, is one to appeal most strongly to the sympathy of all the people of these provinces. Ready hands are being extended with help. Halifax and St. John, we are glad to note, are acting promptly. These cities will doubtless give in generous measure. Other towns and smaller communities will no doubt do in like manner according to their ability. Our Baptist brethren in the town have suffered heavily. Their valuable church property and new parsonage have been swept away. Many of them have lost their homes, and their business establishments lie in ruins. Those who depended on their daily labor for daily bread are in a sad plight. The sympathy of their brethren all over these provinces will, we trust, take practical shape on their behalf. The Brussels St. church of St. John took up an impromptu collection of over \$60 on Sunday evening, which we understand has been forwarded to Pastor Shaw for the relief of sufferers in his congregation. Other churches, here and elsewhere, will doubtless do likewise, and thus the pressing needs of many will be supplied. Here and in many other places public subscriptions will of course be opened, in which all citizens, irrespective of church affiliations, may unite in raising funds to aid those who have suffered so severely in this calamity.

The F. C. Baptists of New Brunswick.

The Conference of the F. C. Baptist churches of New Brunswick last week concluded its annual session at Fredericton. The reports published indicate a fair degree of prosperity for the denomination during the past year. The number of ordained ministers reported on the conference roll is forty-three and four licentiates. Beside these there are seven district meeting licentiates and three church licentiates. From which it appears that, in the F. C. B. body either the conference, the district meeting or the local church may grant a license to preach. It is the conference only that ordains. Of the 43 ordained ministers, five are out of the province and four others, on account of age or ill-health, have not been able to engage in the work of the ministry. There has not been a death among the ministers of the conference during the year. In connection with the report of the Corresponding Secretary, Rev. Dr. McLeod, it is remarked that "the ministers of the conference are self-sacrificing men. The salaries paid the pastors do not average more than \$400 each. The largest salary does not contain four figures; the smallest is very small. The ministers rarely complain. It is impossible for them,

however, to do as efficient work as if they were better supported." Attention is called to the need of a fund from which the salaries of pastors who minister to the poorer parishes could be augmented, also to the need of some provision for aged and disabled ministers. Most of the pastors minister to from two to seven churches. Only five pastors have but one church each.

The number of churches connected with the conference is 155, of which 118 reported to their respective district meetings during the year, and 115 had pastoral care. The additions to the churches during the year were, by baptism 185, by letter 62. The net increase is 46. The present total membership is estimated to be 11,085. The amount paid in salaries with other expenditures for local work, is stated at \$24,693.39. The report of the treasurers for Home and Foreign Missions showed that for the former object \$784.94 had been raised during the year, and for the latter \$500.

The report of the corresponding secretary intimates that the comparatively small number of conversions reported for the year does not indicate such a spiritual condition of the body as could be desired, and advises enquiry into the cause of the lack of results, which, in this important particular, the F. C. Baptists have experienced as well as other denominations. During the past decade the denomination has suffered from differences of opinion on theological subjects and consequent divisions. "In 1888, twelve ministers—nine ordained and three licensed—were lost to the conference with their following, and for a considerable time there was a severe struggle caused by the influence of those who were separated from the denomination," but "it has been surprising to many and very gratifying to all, that the denomination so soon recovered from the shock and loss."

The Parable of the Tares and Church Discipline.

A correspondent asks whether the parable of the Tares and the Wheat, Matt. 13, 24-30, can be rightly used as an argument against church discipline.

Our opinion is that it cannot be so used. Some learned commentators, it is true, have interpreted the parable in a way to give support to such a conclusion. They have said that "the field," in the parable, signifies the kingdom of heaven or the church. It is perhaps quite natural that such an interpretation should find favor with those who hold strongly to the national church idea, according to which everyone is in theory embraced in the church. But the national church is no part of New Testament teaching, nor, as we read it, is it New Testament teaching that "the church" and "the kingdom of heaven" are terms of identical significance. More over, according to our Lord's own interpretation of the parable, "the field is the world," and the world does not mean either the kingdom of heaven or the church. The purpose of the parable of the tares was evidently to teach the disciples, and through them all believers, not to be dismayed at the presence of evil in the world, however mysterious its origin and continuance may seem. Evil indicates the working of an inimical power. But notwithstanding the presence of evil men and their works, it is God's world, not the devil's, and the Son of Man is carrying on here his work of redemption. That redemption means eventual triumph over the enemy of God and man. But the time of final judgment and of sifting the evil from the good is not yet. The teaching of the parable is that Christians are not to take the God's prerogative of judgment into their own hands, if they have the power. They are not to persecute. Their business is to preach the gospel, not to destroy the wicked. But there is nothing here to discourage what is properly meant by church discipline; nothing that would prevent the church using its best endeavors to reclaim a brother who had wandered; and nothing to prevent the church from withdrawing its fellowship from those who are walking disorderly and from those who show themselves to be incorrigibly evil and enemies of the cross of Christ.

Paul and His Hearers.

The address of Paul recorded in the twenty-sixth chapter of Acts may be regarded as the apostles' defence of his position as a Christian, and as a preacher of the Messiahship and the resurrection of Jesus. We note an eagerness in the current of the apostle's speech as he proceeds to unfold his argument. Glad always of an opening to speak in the name of his Master, Paul appears to have been especially hopeful of some good result in speaking before King Agrippa, who as a Jew was not ignorant of the Scriptures and the Messianic hopes of his people, and who therefore could understand the apostle's position and preaching, as a Roman, like Felix or Festus, educated in paganism or utter infidelity, of course could not. Doubtless Paul was disappointed in respect to the immediate result of his speech before the king. It did not convert Agrippa. It might seem to have effected little or nothing. But Paul could not foresee that the speech, and the incident in which he that day was a principal actor, were to live in history for thousands of years, and that the words he then uttered should embody a power to bring men from darkness to light long after the voice that uttered them should have ceased to be heard in the world. The word of the Lord does not return void. His servants do not labor in vain, nor spend their strength for naught.

How large was the audience to which Paul spoke that day we do not know. It seems probable that there was present a considerable number of persons who were in attendance upon the King and the Governor. Of two or three persons only do we know anything. Agrippa and Festus are interesting to us, not merely because of their official position and dignity, but also and especially, as representatives of certain classes of persons, who hear the message of the Christian preacher only to despise and reject it.

In the governor, Festus, we have an example of the class of men who know nothing definitely about Christianity, and who have no desire to know anything. The matters which were of so tremendous interest to the apostle were nothing to him. The resurrection of Jesus was to Festus nothing more than the subject of a squabbling controversy between Paul and certain other Jews—a matter over which a sensible man of the world could not be expected to bother his head. When Festus heard Paul speaking he perceived evidence of his great learning and ability, and was moved by the force of his oratory to something like admiration. But there was in him nothing that responded to the appeal of the gospel. The religion of Christ was in his view an infatuation, and the preacher, so full of learning, zeal and eloquence, was a victim of religious mania, whose constant study of unworldly themes had destroyed the proper balance of his mind. This is practically the attitude of many persons today toward the religion of Christ and its preachers. Their eyes are habitually downward. They value the things that feed their appetites and minister to their grosser passions. They can appreciate wealth and the luxury and reputation which wealth can purchase. But when one speaks to them of salvation from sin, of a resurrection from the dead, of holiness and eternal fellowship with God, they have no ears to hear, no hearts to understand, and they say, by actions if not by words, that the men who believe and preach the doctrines of Christianity are the victims of delusion. But Paul said "I am not mad, most excellent Festus." The Christian preacher knows whom he has believed. He speaks out of a most sane and sober consciousness. And what shall those who study this lesson in our Sunday Schools conclude concerning this matter? Is the message of Christianity sane? Is it a word of truth and soberness. Who is the sane man, Paul or Festus? What would have been the condition of the world today but for that gospel which Festus counted madness, but which Paul counted the power of God and the wisdom of God?

Agrippa represents a different class of hearers. He had much more knowledge than had Festus of the matters concerning which Paul discoursed. But the Jewish king seems to have had just as little

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