

So far as we are aware, there is no uniformity of principle or practice as regards these matters, in the sessions and congregations of Canadian Presbyterians. In some places almost all the adults are not only members but actual communicants—a small fringe of ‘occasional hearers’ round about being termed adherents. In other congregations, where the state of religion is quite as high, scarcely two-thirds of the number of adults in regular connection with the Church are on the roll of communicants. They alone are recognised as members, the remaining third, with all occasional hearers and supporters of the Church, being known as the adherents. In congregations of a “Highland caste,” the proportion of communicants is small, and the kirk-sessions maintain the custom of inquiring into the spiritual experience, as well as the Biblical knowledge and moral character of candidates for admission to the Lord’s Supper. But these sessions have in this country taken a step in advance of the old Highland custom, for, with more or less strictness, they confine to the communicants the privileges of recognition as Church members, and of receiving Christian baptism for their children.

One fact is abundantly plain;—that the tendency of Canadian as of American Presbyterianism is to conform to the Congregationalist view of Church membership. Persons who have grown up within the Christian pale are yet held to ‘join the Church,’ when they make a certain ‘public profession’ and take their seats at the Lord’s Table. The communion roll is regarded as the roll of the Church. All whose names are not therein are no more than ‘hearers,’ ‘sitters,’ or ‘adherents.’ To this we must demur. We deny that only actual communicants are members of the Church.

Possibly it may be said in reply, that this usage of language, if not technically accurate, is at least useful in elevating the standard of Church membership and distinguishing the Church from the world, while practically it involves no injurious effects. To this, however, we must rejoin, that it is a great mistake to elevate membership by degrading communicantship; and that the injurious consequences in practice of confounding these are more grave than is generally supposed. Let us fully explain our meaning.

The present system among us sets multitudes loose from the feeling of religious responsibility. It may be argued and demonstrated that it ought not to have that effect; but as a matter of fact it has the effect. Young baptized persons grow up unrecognized on the roll of the Church, wander from preacher to preacher according to their fancy, and justify their inattention to religious truths and responsibilities on the ground that they are ‘not members yet of any Church.’ Evidently they suppose that ‘to join the Church’ is as optional a thing as to join a mechanics’ institute or any other association, and that till they have ‘joined’ and ‘professed religion,’ the truth of God has no claim upon them. From this results injury to the Church as well as to the individual. She is unduly restricted as regards the numbers of those who are under her care, government, and discipline. Individuals may cast off all restraint and pour contempt on their early religious principles, but it is not for the Church herself lightly to cast off any of her children, or be the first to disown their baptismal connec-