

Messenger and Visitor

Published in the interests of the Baptist denomination of the Maritime Provinces by

The Maritime Baptist Publishing Co., Ltd.

TERMS: \$1.50 per annum in advance.

S. McC. BLACK

Editor

Address all communications and make all payments to the MESSENGER AND VISITOR. For further information see page nine.

Printed by Paterson & Co., 107 Germain Street, St. John, N. B.

The Church Conscience.

It has passed into a proverb that corporations have no souls. Perhaps it would be too much to assert that churches have no consciences; but just as men will often overlook things when acting together in a body so we have often noticed a church less scrupulous and exact, than a good many individual members of the same church. When men act together responsibility is often shifted, which is not the case when they act alone. The more sensitive conscience does not care to condemn as wrong what some less sensitive consciences regard as harmless. They do not come out strongly against what they firmly believe to be wrong, and as a consequence an average church conscience is developed which—if not so low in its standards, so futile in its restraints, as the conscience of the most worldly-minded members—falls a good way below the conscientious conviction of those members who may fairly be regarded as spiritually-minded.

The time was, and not so long since, when the Christian world was cursed with a spirit of antinomianism, that led men to regard themselves as practically free from moral restraints, because they were presumably in a state of salvation. Christian men and women have, in this generation learned that the acceptance of Christ does not free them from moral obligation, but rather broadens and intensifies the obligation which rested upon them when they were out of Christ. In a certain sense they are, having accepted Christ, no longer under the law, but every right-minded Christian feels that the law which Christ satisfied, but did not abrogate, is more binding on him than ever it was before. We have come to understand that Paul did not mean that the Christian was to be lawless when he talks about his becoming "a law unto himself." Individual antinomianism is dying out, but has there not grown up in place of it a sort of ecclesiastical antinomianism which really frees our churches from the binding force of the ten commandments? If not, why is it that individual church members are so ready to surrender or stifle their conscientious convictions, which they would not dream of doing in their individual capacity? The notion seems to be that the church is a holy body, and that its acts, whatever they may be, have an odor of sanctity about them, or at least are beyond reasonable reproach and criticism—simply because they are its acts; that its well-being is so important that any means is sanctified which tends to promote that end.

This is a notion which has been regarded as the exclusive possession of the Jesuits with whom we prefer that it should remain, and yet, we have a suspicion that this notion underlies a good deal of our vaunted church independency. In thought and act are there not some things that look very like independence of moral obligation and moral restraint? In the matter of calling and paying and dismissing a pastor, the church conscience very frequently sanctions practices which the conscience of a reasonably enlightened individual Christian would strongly condemn. In incurring obligations and meeting them, many a church manifests such a lack of moral sense that it has lost caste in the community, and as for credit, it has little or none.

Often have we heard the remark, "If any business house conducted its business as some churches do, the name of such a house would be a stench in the nostrils of the community."

These things certainly ought not so to be. A

church of Christ should be exceptionally scrupulous about meeting its financial obligations, rather than exceptionally lax. In all its relations with men it should stand four square. Many a pastor has suffered untold misery just because his church failed to meet its obligations to him promptly. The church officers who are responsible for the good name of the church should train themselves to act with a sharper, and keener moral sense than when they act in their own affairs. It should be the aim of every church member to elevate and purify, rather than debase, the church conscience. Above all a church has no more right than a man to do evil—or even to do that which is of questionable morality—that good may come.

An Organic Member.

Who is he? Where is he to be found? At a church service not long since the following announcement was made, "Brother—an organic member of this church has gone to his reward." "An organic member! What is an organic member? It occurs to the writer that he has known in his experience, not a few persons connected with our churches, who could not justly be called 'organic members.' The term in which it was used is a new one, at least its application was not at all familiar.

An organic member ought to be joined to the body of the church. He cannot be joined to the pastor and a few of the more kindred spirits in the church. He is a branch of the tree; he is one in the whole family; a unit in the number; a soldier in the army; and nothing can change these relations. If others suffer and sorrow, he must share their sufferings and sorrows. A lack of fellowship, a turning away from the church because of some disaffection must be proof that the union was not organic.

There must be life in such a member, for his union with Christ will be vital. Could it be of such a member that Luther once wrote, "By faith thou art so glued to Christ, that of thee and him, there become, as it were, one person." How can a soul that is thus joined to Christ be unsympathizing and show no signs of spiritual life? How can he fail to understand the meaning of Christ's message to his people, to go forth, to save men everywhere! There is no difficulty in deciding whether a branch of the tree has life in it. If the season has passed without bud or leaf, or flower, we know the branch is dead, and so has no vital union with the tree. Growth is the evidence of life. If, by union with Christ, life has come into the soul, death can never reign in that soul again. Faith in Christ links us to an Omnipotent power, and secures to us a grace that is infinite.

Our Lord gives the disciples a blessed assurance when he said, "Because I live, ye shall live also. It is not the disciple living in himself, but Christ living in the disciple, that is the secret of a spiritual life. The apostle seems to have had such a persuasion, for he did not fear things present nor things to come."

If one is an organic member of a church, must he not always be an instrument for the advancement of the Kingdom of Christ? Will not such a member do his part in extending the gospel of his Lord and Master on the earth? Will he stop short of his own home, or church, or parish, or country? Will not the practical part of being a real member of the church appear just here? Hand and heart will be subject to the will; and if the will has been changed and given up to Christ, then He must have power to direct it. If He have not the power where does union with Christ come in? If the member is not His instrument, can he be subject to His will in any real sense? There may be little that we can do, but we shall have hands to take the stone away while he calls the dead back to life. We cannot increase the food for the multitudes, but we can help to seat them, and then bear to them the little that we had, with the Lord's blessing and increase. If the church were made up of such members, would it not be like a system of wireless telegraphy, with messages extending all over the world? Then with unbroken connections, and receivers properly adjusted what instruments of righteousness the members of our churches might, and would, become! My brother are you an "organic member" of the church into whose fellowship you have been baptized?

Dominion Parliament.

The opening of the Dominion Parliament was a very brilliant affair. It is expected that this session will be a most important one. It will doubtless be prolonged. There will be many measures of importance introduced which will need to be carefully considered. The great prosperity of the country will be a strong temptation for the Government to further the schemes of railway promoters and others looking to the development of the great and growing West. It will be the duty of a loyal opposition to carefully scan all these enterprises so as to prevent unwise and hasty legislation. If it is true, as is hinted, that after the passage of the re-distribution bill, the Government is likely to go to the country, this fact of itself makes the present session of Parliament one of great significance. We can only hope that whatever measures are introduced they may be so improved, as to be of the greatest possible benefit to the country as a whole. It would be a good thing if an effort could be made to secure the entrance of Newfoundland into the Confederation. If the French Shore difficulty were out of the way we might hope to see legislation introduced with this end in view. Premier Laurier has a band of vigorous men about him, who are able to render him such assistance as he may need in guiding the ship of state. There will be some interest as to the course which the Hon. J. I. Tarte may pursue. He is not likely to be a silent observer of events as the session pursues its devious ways.

Editorial Notes.

—The following lines will be read with interest by our readers. They express a truth which we are very apt to overlook in the rush and whirl of everyday life:

There's a hand on the rudder that will not flinch,
There's no fear in the pilot's face
As he guides the worlds, like boats in a storm,
Through the rocking seas of space;
And whether they make the harbor at last,
Beyond the shoals and the swell,
O, sail forever a shoreless sea,
I know that all is well.

"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee."

—We are indebted to an exchange for the following: "Rev Rowland Hill prayed in this wise for some of his congregation, who were habitually unpunctual at the church services: 'O Lord, bless those who are in their places, have mercy on those who are on the road, and save those who are getting ready to come.'" Mr. Hill once said of a preacher who preached about certain doctrines in a very soft way: He preaches the truth as a donkey mumbles a thistle—very cautiously."

A prayer like the above would not be amiss in some localities unless it should be regarded as "praying at" people, which is never true prayer.

—This story is told of Lord Kelvin, the distinguished scientist, that one day a coxcomb of a fellow who wanted to be considered as possessed of some scientific attainments, but who was known to have none, asked him what he considered the most valuable of his many discoveries. The reply which was not expected was: "I think that to me the most valuable of all the discoveries I have ever made was when I discovered my Saviour in Jesus Christ." It is the discovery of the age—of all ages, to the end of time. There is none like it in importance and far-reaching influence.

—The Commonwealth gives the following summary of Baptist progress in the United States for 1902. The associations have increased by 108, the churches by 377, the ministers by 248. The number of baptisms were 25,583 more than the preceding year. The net gain in membership was 61,399 while the seating capacity of the churches increased 291,132. The value of church properties has exceeded that of the past year by \$3,000,000, and the amount of the contributions for benevolence in round numbers was over \$1,000,000. This is a good showing, but it might be multiplied five and even ten fold in many instances, if all church members had "the mind of Christ."

—The letter addressed to E. H. Eaton, Esq. the chairman of the Board of Governors of Acadia University, by the President, Dr. Trotter, which appears upon another page is definite and explicit enough, not to need any explanation. The facts of the case are before the people. If the Baptists of these Provinces will raise \$100,000 by January 1st, 1908, then they may expect a similar amount from J. D. Rockefeller, Esq. It is gratifying to know however, that from time to time there will be paid into the treasury of the University by Mr. Rockefeller as many dollars as have been contributed from other sources. We are glad to note, and this is as it should be, that no general canvass of the churches will be made for at least two years, so as to enable the 20th Century Ministry Fund Committee to complete