

Contributors and Correspondents.

DR. CAIRD AND HIS OPINIONS.

BY CANADENSIS.

I have the sincerest respect for the earnestness and vigilance for truth, which, I am sure, prompt some of the strictures on Dr. Caird's remarks on unbelief. I can also sympathise strongly with the feeling which leads good men to repudiate, with even passionate energy, any statement which might seem to treat unbelief as a light evil, or to encourage doubters to continue in their scepticism.

But it seems to me, from the extracts from Dr. Caird's sermon which I have seen, that he had no intention of doing either of these things, and I think that harm may be done by exaggerated and over-strained statements on this point. It is always easier sweepingly to denounce, or to caricature an argument to which we may be opposed, than to weigh it carefully and sift it faithfully, with the strict fairness which Christian controversialists, above all others, should be careful to observe; though, in their abounding zeal, they sometimes forget to do so. From Dr. Caird's own words, I certainly should not suppose that he meant to palliate the evil consequences of unbelief, or to say that it matters little to a man if only he be sincere, whether he believes or not! He speaks himself of "discordant opinions some of which must be fatal." He only refers to "the injustice of confounding in one indiscriminate sentence of condemnation, the self-condemned sinner, and the victim of helpless ignorance or bewildered and easions seekers after truth." Is he not warranted in saying this, by our Lord's own declaration that the servant who knew not his Lord's will and did it not shall be beaten with few stripes, while he who knew it and did it not shall be beaten with many stripes? Do these words of Dr. Caird's look as if he considered either unbelief or ignorance a small evil? Could we imagine the speaker of these words telling a sceptic who should come to him for advice, that his unbelief did not matter, so long as he was sincere? might we not rather be sure that he would earnestly point out to such an one the sad consequences of rejecting the only true light we have to guide us through the wilderness of this world, and while he tried to discover the source of his difficulties, and correct his mis-conceptions, would faithfully direct him to that light, "which lighteth every man that cometh into the world?"

It appears to me that Dr. Caird only meant to remind us,—of what I think we must all be forced to admit, that there is such a thing as "honest doubt," which simply because it is honest, cannot surely be classed by the God of Truth with wilful perversity, and the deliberate choice of evil as evil. He seems to me to speak very much in the same strain with Professor Christlieb in his celebrated address in which while he fully admits that the causes of unbelief in general really lie in the heart and will,—he also speaks of the need of "true humility and hearty sympathy with the inward misery of those who are far from God,—feelings without which we shall never be able to gain their confidence, nor to lead them to see the innermost causes of their unbelief, in certain moral feelings. And I think Dr. Caird wishes merely to discriminate that "honest doubt" which will not, on the ground of mere authority, accept statements which seem to it dishonouring to God,—the doubt which made Luther a Reformer, and brought Nicodemus by night to the humble teacher, despised by the Jewish Sanhedrim, from the perverse and wicked spirit of those who love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil."

It is possible that some who sweepingly condemn Dr. Caird, may never have come in contact with the case of earnest, thoughtful, deeply conscientious men and women, who, whether from early implanted prejudices, or of a twist received from some caricatured misrepresentation of orthodox Christianity early impressed on their minds, or from the powerful influence of sceptical writers, or from some strange cloud befalling their spiritual vision,—seem, so far as we can judge of their mental constitution,—really unable to yield their sincere assent to what we believe to be the great truths of revealed religion. There have been cases,—some of them known to the writer, in which such have sought with much inward travail of mind,—with tears and prayers,—to see these truths in the same light in which they are seen by others, to whom they seem to give so much peace and comfort. So deeply sincere have been in their doubt, that they would

rather have resigned every pleasant thing that life can afford, may have even gone to the stake, with Socrates of old,—than profess, even to please their nearest and dearest,—a faith which they cannot feel. How painful and mysterious as such cases are and sad as it is,—to use Dr. Caird's own words, "that those truths which are dearer to us than life, should be unknown to them;—they do exist, and we have no right to ignore them. Nay, have we the right to condemn such suffering doubters, who, it may be are acting more truly up to the light they profess,—are more consistent in their lives and more faithful to their principles than many who make much profession of orthodox Christianity, but who, too often, let expediency and inclination triumph over principle? If we dare to do so, should we not hear a solemn voice saying to us,—"let him that is without sin among you cast the first stone!"

Our Lord, while He warns us to "judge not, that we be not judged," gives us but one test, by which we may judge the hearts of others. It is, "By their fruits ye shall know them." Now, if in such cases as these just alluded to, we see what we cannot but call "good fruits," if we see truth, justice benevolence,—"love of right, and hate of ill, strict integrity, "though to his hurt he swear," the marks given by the Psalmist of the character of "the man who shall ascend into the hill of God;—unselfish, self-sacrificing love, devotion to truth and zeal for it, so far as it is seen,—intense love for all that is good and right and true, and abhorrence of all evil, wrong and falsehood;—What are we to conclude? "Do men gather grapes off thorns, or figs of thistles?" "Can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit?" Can such men and women, however defective and astray in their theoretical belief, be really living without God in the world? Be really followers of the Father of lies? Do we not often see in them far more faithfulness and consistency of life than in many who bring dishonour on the very name of Christian, and it may be, throw a fresh stumbling-block in the way of those whom they denounce as "unbelievers?"

I certainly see no escape from the "words of our Lord: "Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." But the mysteries of that Divine birth are far too deep for human men. How can we weigh the extent to which the Father of our spirits may be dealing with the souls He has made, unknown to us; or the ways He may have of introducing His own light, even in apparent darkness? Our Lord tells us that "he that will do, (i.e. wishes to do) His will, shall know of the doctrine," enough at least surely, to lead him into the way of eternal life. May it not be, I merely suggest it as a possible solution of perplexing phenomena, that since the soul or heart are longer and deeper than the mind, "the heart may sometimes find and grasp the great realities even while the mind inconsistently rejects the forms which contain them? It is at least, remarkable that both in the parable of the sheep and the goats, and of the good Samaritan, our Lord seems to make the life of the heart, as manifested in practical love to man, and not mere theoretical "belief," the test of His true sheep! We must indeed believe that this process of the new birth may have taken place in many who have never heard of Christianity or when its light had been sadly darkened by the errors of superstition. Otherwise, how could we account for such phenomena as that, for instance, of Socrates, who, unenlightened by an outward revelation, anticipated so many of the truths and precepts of Christianity, or for the eminent Christians who have from time to time shone forth in the Church of Rome, even in its darkest days? But, it may be said, these did not turn away from the light of pure Christianity. Yet in the case of so many sceptics, how do we know that they have ever had a fair presentation of what we mean by pure Christianity? Even in their reading of the Word of God may not their hearts often have been so darkened by previously implanted mis-conceptions that the very words of Scripture may have been a saviour of death instead of a saviour of life? Take such a case as that of the late J. S. Mill, trained by a father who "believed the creed of Christianity to be the *me plus ultra* of wickedness in its conception of God," and brought up his son in that belief, and who so educated him as to trample out every religious emotion and susceptibility and reduce him to a bare "reasoning machine,"—must not such a training have given a fearful, an almost irresistible bias towards scepticism? And are not such elements to be taken into account, in considering the moral culpability of unbelief? The Jews of our Saviour's time in His wise and gracious words, such as man "never yet spake," and in His

equally gracious and loving life, had evidence for the truth, such as, it would seem, only the most perverse and sin-hardened hearts could refuse. But can we equally blame the Jews of the present day, in Roman Catholic countries especially, who, out of a deep loyalty to the one God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, turn away with abhorrence from what seems to them, not naturally, a species of the very same idolatry for which their fathers were so often and so sorely punished?

And as we know that spiritual truth must necessarily be so far beyond the power of our finite faculties to grasp in its fulness and completeness, that even the most clear-sighted Christians dare not venture to say that their conception of it is free from a certain admixture of one-sidedness and error, can we venture to estimate the precise quantity of theoretical errors which must be fatal to the life of God in the soul? We only know that Christ has said that "He that is not against me is for me," and that "the Lord is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." And He alone knows who are they that sincerely seek Him, even as He alone "knoweth them that are His!"

Since then we can so imperfectly "scan our brother man," or appreciate his mental difficulties, perplexities, mis-conceptions, hereditary or educational bias—'defects of doubt or taints of will,' since we may often do injustice to those, who, doubting where they would fain believe, sometimes

"Pray for throbs of sharpest pain,
To ease them of doubt's galling chain."

Let us be glad that we are not called to judge our brother! Let us remember the practical words with which our Lord replied to His disciples when, impelled by curiosity, they enquired whether there were few who should be saved: "Strive to enter in at the straight gate." If we have entered that gate ourselves, let us do all that in us lies to lead others within it too. Let us cling with all tenacity to what we hold to be truth,—to the teaching of our Lord and His Apostles,—to the grand doctrine of Justification by Faith,—to the Gospel of Love, the power of God unto salvation. Let us try to lead those wandering in the mazes of scepticism to see the light that streams from the Cross of Christ upon a darkened and suffering world. Let us seek to lift those struggling with the billows, whether of unbelief or prevailing sin, to our own secure resting place on the Rock of Ages! Let us endeavour to win doubters rather by love than terror of the future, which, while unbelief prevails, will be found an almost inoperative motive, by showing them what Christ could be to them, even now:—

"For warm, sweet, tender, even yet,
A present help is He,
And love hath still its Olivet,
And faith its Galilee!"

Let us, above all, seek by the faithfulness and consistency of our lives,—without spot and blameless,—to show our doubting brother what are the blessed fruits of Christianity, and lead him to "take knowledge of us, that we have been with Jesus." But, oh, let us be thankful that it is not for us, with our superficial knowledge and partial views and shallow thoughts, to judge his spiritual condition or decide his future; that these are in the unerring hands of the God who knows him as he is, who is perfect love as well as perfect justice, who "will not quench the smoking flax nor break the bruised reed!" And in the face of the awful mysteries of life, the inequality and diversity of circumstances, of training, of education—the neglect or worse than neglect of parents—the mischief caused by the inconsistencies of Christian professors, and the other dark problems that will sometimes haunt our thoughts; let us rejoice that we may rest our troubled hearts on the one secure stay and abiding foundation: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

On the evening of Monday the 2nd inst., the manse of St. Helens was taken possession of by a number of the young people of the congregation, who invited their pastor, the Rev. R. Leask and his wife into the parlour, when Miss Tina McCoastie and Miss C. C. Mullan in the name of the young ladies of the Bible class, presented Mrs. Leask with an address accompanied with a beautiful silver teapot and gold pencil case. Mr. John Rutherford then stepped forward and in the name of the young men read an address to Mr. Leask, expressive of their respect and esteem for him and his partner in life and hoping that they might be long spared to labour among them, and in token of their sincerity begged leave to present him with the accompanying purse (£60). After partaking of an excellent tea provided by the ladies, and spending a very pleasant evening the company dispersed at a very reasonable hour. Sometime ago, Mr. G. McKay, in the name of the East Kilbride congregation, presented Mr. Leask with a purse of \$51.—Com.

THE NEW SCHOOL BILL.

Editor BRITISH AMERICAN PRESBYTERIAN.

SIR,—I am happy to see a movement begun by Attorney-General Mowat in the direction of improving our High and Public Schools. It is not going too far to say that dissatisfaction is all but universal. Every year puts another patch on what has been factiously, no doubt, called our system of Education. It is no system, but to use the venerable chief's own illustration, it is the result of adding a new room from time to time to the original humble log-cabin, which thirty years ago Upper Canada began to build. Some additions are frame buildings, some brick, some concrete, some rough cast, some solid stone masonry. It does seem nearly time for Ontario to say, "The fine old building has served its time; I want something more suited to my increased family, wealth and prospects; I must call in an architect and get a plan for a suitable building which will have every modern convenience and appliance, and at the same time be a unity and not a miserable piece of patch-work. The undesignated product of the poor backwoodsman must give place to the skilled and comfortably designed edifice of the trained architect." This time surely is at hand. I do not know who may be called in by the Provincial authorities, but I am sure there are several gentlemen among us possessed of the necessary acquaintance with educational matters and gifted with the power of organizing all the advantages of our present method, imparting to them a living unity, instead of a dead uniformity, and providing for the fullest play of individuality consistently with oneness of aim and of results on the whole; also allowing a greater adaptation to circumstances, and conceding to parents, teachers, trustees and inspectors the privilege of thinking for themselves, and acting on their own responsibility, not degrading them into mere thinking or feeling machines, moving in such a manner, and at such times on every respect as one or two men of authority think best. When the discussion comes in, I shall be happy to take a part in asserting British liberty in education as against a Prussian centralisation; the rights of parents to educate their children as against the right of the State to do so; the necessity of some practical recognition of morality and religion in education as against the practical neglect of this highest part of education, and the propriety of allowing for idiosyncrasies in pupils and teachers as against a cast-iron process that destroys all individuality and makes every man as far as possible the counterpart of his neighbour. At the same time I would insist on the right of every child to be educated, and on the duty of the State to see that every child is educated, and where necessary to provide for that education. Meanwhile I say no more, but wish the Attorney-General and those who labour with him God speed in the great work to which he has put his hand.

Tetotalism and the Church.

Editor BRITISH AMERICAN PRESBYTERIAN.

DEAR SIR,—I notice a letter signed "Bluenose" in your last issue, and from its style, I would judge that whatever Bluenose may be in reference to liquor, he is very intemperate in his language. I have no intention to reply in the same style, although he offers a target that might tempt one into firing a stray shot. I follow this course not only on account of a habit that has become second nature with me, but because I desire to obey the wise man's instructions in reference to answering.

My main reason for replying to, at all, is just to contradict some statements "Bluenose" has made, and which seems to occupy the greater part of the letter, although I fail to see how they affect the subject he wishes to write about, and first I would say I am not "afraid that the C. P. Church will make tetotalism a term of communion," nor am I "trembling at a shadow." I do not "claim to have the sympathies and opinion of Prof. McLaren," and the "Official of the U. P. Church" referred to is not "a wine drinker himself," nor does "Philos visit him and take a glass or more," so if Bluenose intended to build anything on these statements the superstructure will be mious a foundation. He evidently mistakes abuse for argument, and no doubt your readers can appreciate this at its true value.

His two quotations from Scripture to set the tetotal question at rest remind me of a man who affirmed he could prove suicide to be right from the Bible, and when asked to do so he said "Judas went and hanged himself," "Go and do likewise." The quotations in both cases will be equally satisfactory to your intelligent readers.

I have no wish to enter on a wide question like tetotalism, but I would tell "Bluenose," in conclusion, that I could point to many a family where his extreme views have had their legitimate fruit in the ruin by drink and otherwise of several of the members!

Yours faithfully,
PULLOS.

Causes of Vacancies.

Editor BRITISH AMERICAN PRESBYTERIAN.

SIR,—Some time ago I was fortunate enough to see a copy or two of your paper down here in the "Lower Regions," and I saw that there was quite a discussion carried out between a couple of correspondents as to vacancies and their causes. Now, Sir, you know, and were I to give my name to the public, thousands would know that such is my knowledge of matters in the C. P. Church, that what I say on this subject is worthy of thoughtful consideration. Vacancies have many causes,—let me specify two. (1.) The *Noble Six Hundred*—'Able men, first class preachers, may travel Ontario, risk Ontario from center to circumference, and, as a rule, the best offer made to them is the overruling *Six Hundred*, with or without a marriage. No minister can live on that now, and therefore ministers are leaving Ontario and getting comfortably settled in other places where they are eagerly snatched at, and where they are just as usefully employed in the service of God and His Church. I can give you the names of excellent men in Gath! I could not get more than the "noble Six Hundred," without who in Ontario, risk Ontario, tell it not a cause, and who are now comfortably settled in Nova Scotia with \$800 and a manse. Who could blame them for leaving? The hearts of many of them are still in Ontario, they look upon it as their native home, but then they have been starved out of it; they gain from \$200 to \$300 a year by labouring elsewhere; and thus by leaving Ontario, they are more likely to be set free to the Church, certainly more comfortable so far as they themselves are concerned.

(2.) One main cause of vacancies of which your worthy correspondents appeared to be in blissful ignorance, is—patronage and clerical, especially the latter. This will astonish you. It will also call down the fire of Heaven on my devoted head; but like Galileo before the "Holy Inquisition," all I can say is that it is so. I am prepared to give names and edifying facts on this provoking subject. In the C. P. Church, the Patronizer who expects to get above the "noble Six Hundred," must not rely so much on hard study as on his obsequious flattery before the Sacred Sanhedrim. Smiles, nods and winks, are sometimes very potent. I have known Patronizers who, like Homer's Bellerophon, carried in their pockets their own condemnation. I can tell you what is much worse, if worse can be. Certain congregations were raised from the dead and fully organized by laborious and self-denying ministers. These congregations were promised \$100 each from the Central Fund; and the ministers remained there for a while till every thing was placed in a first class style, thus creating and securing new congregations to the Church. But when these ministers applied for the promised aid or grant, they were refused it to a cent on the technical ground that they had not been inducted! The work of the Church had been done to the great satisfaction of all parties concerned, but the formality of induction had been neglected; and therefore the poor ministers must be refused every cent of the grant! The consequence was that one of the ministers left both the Church and the Province, and is now much more comfortably settled elsewhere. But the congregation which he very reluctantly left is now one of our vacancies, and is in danger of dying again. That these things are just as I have stated them I am prepared to testify on oath and bring other ministers who will do the same. I make this strong statement, because I know that these exposures will bring out explanations, denials, and so forth. This may be denied, but facts are stubborn things.

Yours &c.,
NOVA SCOTIA.

Feb. 6, 1874.

Tetotalism and the Church.

Editor BRITISH AMERICAN PRESBYTERIAN.

DEAR MR. EDITOR,—As a subscriber and well wisher for the prosperity of your paper, and also to the cause of temperance, I am constrained to call your attention to an article contained in your issue of the 30th ult., over the signature "Philos." Aside from the question ought total abstinence to be made a term of communion, his remarks are calculated to injure both the cause of religion and of temperance. If this be so is it not your duty to be very guarded what correspondence you allow to appear in your paper. I need not repeat any of the expressions used as I am persuaded you can easily detect those referred to.

I am, yours very truly,
T. B. FRASER.

Limehouse, 7th Feb., 1874.

[We are always careful in our admission of correspondence, but we cannot hold by the plan to admit only what we approve of. We believe Philos is mistaken; but, at the same time, know that he is as anxious as any one can be to promote according to his light the cause of truth and righteousness. —ED. B. A. P.]

The *Scottish Guardian*, the organ of the Scottish Episcopal Church, states that it has been resolved to hold a Church Congress, on the plan of the English congresses, at Edinburgh in May next.