

# MONTHLY RECORD



## Church of Scotland in Nova Scotia and the adjoining Provinces.

"IF I FORGET THEE, O JERUSALEM! LET MY RIGHT HAND FORGET HER CUNNING."—PSALM 137, v. 5.

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### RELIGIOUS INTELLIGENCE.

#### What is the Duty of the Congregation towards its Sabbath Schools?\*

The Christian Church has acknowledged that she has a duty to discharge towards Sabbath Schools. Every section of the Protestant Church in Scotland has in a more or less formal manner made this acknowledgment. Our own Church has done so by the appointment of a special committee of the General Assembly to watch over the progress and interest of these schools within the Church of Scotland. Every Synod and Presbytery in the Church is now periodically called upon to give these schools their serious attention.

But we are not at present to consider the duty of the Church as a whole. We would limit our attention to congregations or "Churches," and ask of these, What is its duty to Sabbath schools?

That it has a deep interest in these schools must be admitted, on the slightest consideration of what these schools are, and what the functions of the congregation ought to be. The Sabbath schools are institutions for supplementing the religious tuition and Christian training which the scholars may elsewhere be receiving; and, in the case of very many of the scholars, for giving them that knowledge of Christian truth which their natural guardians altogether fail to impart. In a greater or less degree, the religious instruction of the children, and the impressions on children's hearts as to religion, depend upon these schools. The parents of the scholars, also, are affected by the schools. If they give their children religious instruction at home, they may be greatly quickened and assisted in doing so by the Sabbath school teacher's co-operation. Their own knowledge of the truth may be materially increased through the teaching which their children receive from others. The moral effect of the inter-

est shewn by others in the spiritual welfare of their children may be to confirm and stimulate their own spiritual concern for them. And in the case of parents who neglect the Christian parent's duty, the Sabbath school is fitted to prove of similar service. The school reminds them of the duty they are neglecting. It may be the means of sending home to them a Christianizing influence, through their own children.

And what is all this to the congregation? Why, is not this the very work for which the congregation, as a component portion of the Church, is preserved? Is not the mission of the Church in the world to testify of Christ to young and old—to seek to win men to the knowledge and obedience of the Gospel?

And then, let us think of the Sabbath school teachers. No work can be more calculated to prove a blessing to their own spirits than that which they are engaged in. Every earnest teacher soon becomes convinced of this. The intimate dealing with the meaning and lessons of Scripture—his difficulties with his scholars—his difficulties with himself—all these combine to make his Sabbath work a school of precious experience and instruction to himself, if only he assume and bear the burden of its duties as a servant of Christ. And what can be more important to the Church than that its younger members engage in a work so beneficial to them? In the Sabbath schools, the Church sees them engaged in a work fitted at once to enlarge their acquaintance with Christian truth, to make them feel the need for the Holy Spirit's teaching to impress that truth upon the heart, to awaken their sensibilities to the varied wants of their fellow-creatures, and to lead them to an earnest consideration of their own responsibility for their Christian privileges. And in all this, ought the Church not to recognize a training school for the teachers, for the highest blessings and the noblest work of the Christian life? How better than through the duties and varied experience

of the Sabbath school teacher can the Church hope to bring her younger members to that realisation of the Christian life which the apostle desired for the Colossians, when his unceasing prayer for them was, that they might be filled with the knowledge of the will of the Lord in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, and that they might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God?

It is very obvious, then, that the Sabbath school, in all its aspects, ought to be an object of profound interest to the Christian congregation. The congregation ought to feel the Sabbath school to be its own effort. It ought to identify itself thoroughly with the teachers in their work of love. They are the representatives of the Church towards the Sabbath scholars. The Church ought to give them such countenance as to prove both to the teachers and scholars that the work of the teachers is felt to be the work of the Church.

Now, we humbly think that congregations have failed, to a great extent, to shew this interest in Sabbath schools. That they feel a deep interest in them we thankfully admit. Few objects that are pressed upon the attention of congregations are received with more general favour than Sabbath schools. The requisite funds for their expenses are cheerfully contributed; and there is manifested universally, and in various ways, a high respect for the office of Sabbath school teacher, and an appreciation of his labours. But with all this, we think the Church has failed to identify itself sufficiently with the Sabbath school teacher in his work. It has somehow adopted the idea that the school is altogether an affair of the teacher's. The congregation approves of the school, and is willing, nay, is happy to support the school—but there it stops. It regards the school as something with which it has, as a congregation, no duty to acquaint itself very narrowly. It feels sure the teachers are doing good to

\* Paper read at one of the monthly meetings of the Glasgow Branch of the Church Union.