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THE WESLEYAN.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 12, 1878.

OUR YOUNG MEN.

NO. II.

(THE FORMATION OF CHARACTER)

"Life," says the sainted Bishop Heber, in one of his beautiful sermons: "Life bears us on like the streams of a mighty river. Our boat at first glides down the narrow channel—through the playful murmuring of the little brook and the winding of its grassy borders. The trees shed their blossoms over our young heads, the flowers of the brink seem to offer themselves to our young hands; we are happy in hope, and we grasp eagerly at the beauties around us, and still our hands are empty. Our course in youth and manhood is along a wider and deeper flood, amid objects more striking and magnificent. We are animated by the moving picture of enjoyment and industry passing us; we are excited by some short-lived disappointment. The stream bears us on and our joys and griefs are alike left behind us. We may be shipwrecked, but we cannot be delayed—whether rough or smooth, the river hastens towards its home, till the roar of the ocean in our ears, and the tossing of the waves beneath our feet, and the land lessens from our eyes, and the floods are lifted up around us, and we take our leave of earth and its inhabitants until of our further voyage there is no witness save the Infinite and Eternal." Such and so is life. Still its panoramic images even when they pass, are but so many ideals of the possible, after which we do well to aim. Meantime the current of our thoughts and activities run on, not like the Jordan which pursues its way to end in a dead and stagnant sea, but like the Niagara which gathers its mighty waters to spend them in a volume of rolling forces, arched with rainbows of promise, and empties itself at last in an ocean covered with the commerce of a world.

It will thus be seen how very important is the character that is formed in youth. The aspect of early morning indicates what the day shall be. The influences of youth run down through the after years of life tinged and colored by the moral qualities which they then assumed, just as the Nile reaches the Delta red with Ethiopian soil. The heart therefore becomes the chief centre of interest, and its careful cultivation is found to be our first and main concern. Virtue is a jewel of which the heart is the setting. A toad has been known to carry a jewel in its head, but it is its proud prerogative to carry a jewel impaled in its heart. Virtue is the crown of his manhood, the insignia of his royalty, and the attestation of his sonship. "No radiant pearl which crested fortune wears; No gem that, twinkling, hangs from beauty's ears; Not the bright stars which Night's blue arch adorn; Nor rising sun that glides the vernal morn Shines with such lustre" as the collective virtue of a noble character. All that is winsome in self-denial; all that is heroic in endurance; and all that is laudable in effort, have their spring and fountain in a consecrated virtuous heart. Within its silent and sacred inclosure dominant thoughts and passions sleep quiescent like music in a quiet harp. If, as Dryden says, "Music is articulated poetry," not less truly is a virtuous life the eloquence of a holy character. A single thought conceived by the mind and smitten with an impulse, soon quivers with the nerves of purpose, and throbs with the pulsations of life, and thus becomes a power radiating into vital forces and circling

into a sphere of influence either for good or evil. A thought is a deed in embryo—a seed germ from which may spring a teeming harvest, and within its folds there lies the promise of the coming deed just as in every dew-drop, however tiny, is contained a latent rainbow. Hence the wise man's admonition: "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life."

Now the formation of character is more than a birth; it is more even than a growth; it is a work. Virtue is a jewel to be won as well as worn, and won before it can be worn. In its pursuit our young men have to contend against "defects of will and taints of blood"—against a nature "averse from good and prone to ill." But the man who succeeds in the effort gains a sovereignty over himself and a freedom from outward dominations like the slave who, when he finds a jewel, wins his liberty. What work is more noble in its recompense than the building up of a virtuous character? It was said of Rome adorned by Augustus: "He found it brick and he left it marble." But more than this can be said of the man who rears a holy character, for he finds it "wood, hay, stubble," and he leaves it "gold, silver, precious stones." He finds it a loathsome "sepulchre, full of rottenness and dead men's bones," and he leaves it "the temple of the Holy Ghost" lit up with truth, beautified with graces and resonant with the melody of the skies. The harvest is worth the toil of spring-time, and the patience of summer, for years well spent yellow the experience with the hue of gold, and mellow the spirit into the saintly mind.

In view of such grand results will not our young men make the formation of a virtuous character the chief mission of their life? Aristotle, in his definition of man's chief good, sets before them a noble ideal: "A perfect activity in a perfect life." With this end before them, let our young men so live as to "Leave behind A voice that in the distance far away Wakens the slumbering ages."

THE LIBERAL SENTIMENT IN THE CHURCHES.

There is a hopeful view to be taken of the desire for reconstruction which appears to prevail in many of the churches at this time. Dead trees need no pruning; living ones may grow fairer and stronger by that process. Only the really progressive churches show any disposition to make changes. We confess that our own branch of Christ's true vine would seem less comely to us, were there no enquiry among its members as to whether fruit is being borne to the utmost extent possible, and whether, if there be any hinderance, that hinderance does not result from constitutional causes which might be remedied. We are only moved by the enquiring religious spirit of the times. Episcopalian are comparing their Prayer Book with the New Testament, and, in the light of a newly developed reformation, asking whether certain passages in that grand Ritual do not retain the coloring of monkish teachings. Presbyterians are hesitating in regard to extreme expressions in their Confession of Faith. What wonder that the Wesleyan Hymn Book should be brought to the crucible? In every instance the books referred to are of human origin, and all things human must, sooner or later, submit to change. God gave a book to the world which outlives the ages and defies criticism; which anticipates every change of proper sentiment, outstrips science, and furnishes suitable precepts for people of every possible condition and degree. No mere man, or body of men, can do this. John Wesley, in hymn-making and hymn-compiling, as in some other things, was a hundred years ahead of his time. But the hundred years have passed. A new condition of religious society has come to the world—a condition of Temperance, of Union, and of Sabbath School excellence, such as prophets saw only in visions. Is all this to have no effect upon books of prayer and sacred song? Must Christians of this day give expression to their devotions, to their hopes and fears, their confidence and ambitions, in the language only of the dead? John Wesley was an age in advance of Luther; is no one ever to be an age in

advance of John Wesley? In his doctrines, no one;—because they are New Testament doctrines; but as a compiler of Hymns—well, the Church thinks his work in this way open to improvement, and even our founder himself would have conceded the Church's right to judge, gifted as it is with much of the piety, and more than the learning, which characterized the church of his own day.

Then as to the Class-meeting. We do not see the subject in the same light as others. As a means of grace no one can have a higher appreciation of this distinctive part of our economy; but that it ought to be continued in law as a test of membership in a country and at a time when that test is not and cannot be sustained, is to our mind scarcely consistent. That there is a brave effort to adjust this difficulty, is, so far from being an evil, but an honest purpose, that what is not true in theory should be expunged from the Discipline.

Of the itinerancy we have no misgivings. It has built up Methodism; it is a perfect means both for ministers and people to use in redressing certain wrongs, which seem to be inseparable from pastoral relations; it is so precious an heirloom that the Church may safely be entrusted with the guardianship of all its interests. But that even the itinerancy is being approached with a view to change, is only an additional evidence that nothing is considered infallible in the Methodist Church, save the sure Word of the Lord Jehovah.

WHAT AN OUTSIDER THINKS OF THIS LIBERAL SENTIMENT IN THE METHODIST CHURCH.

A curious comment upon the discussion in General Conference, bearing upon the Class-meeting test, appears in a recent issue of the St. John "Globe." The writer of that remarkable article intimates that—

In some degree there is now a departure from that close attendance upon "class-meetings" which formerly characterized members of the Wesleyan denomination, and for some time there has been an agitation in the Church as to whether members who do not attend these meetings should not be lopped off as decayed or at least decaying members, as useless limbs no longer bearing precious fruit. The matter was sent to a Committee of Conference, and the debate arose upon their report.

So much for a clear perception of our Church's aims, and the purpose of the very wise Committee entrusted with this subject! Of course, all inferences from such just and intelligent premises must be accurate and philosophical. After quoting from the Report and an amendment which followed it, we are treated to a strained and illiberal exposition of what was said by several speakers who addressed themselves to the subject. Then comes the oracular conclusion.

It appears to us that this debate affords ample evidence of the proof that there is a great change going on in the Methodist Church, which all the time becoming a church of the people—and perhaps rapidly advancing towards the destiny which Goldwin Smith predicted for it, of becoming the church of America. There is no doubt a great relaxation of the old practices. The severity—if we may use the term—of the church is disappearing.

Thus far the writer's compliments are at least innocent; he conceals admirably the whip, under a cloak of fair phraseology. But the lash at length comes to the light with a vengeance. Still alluding to the Methodist Church we are told—

Its influence is no longer felt against fine dress, lively music, and many other pleasant things of life. It does not yet openly tolerate dancing, but the younger portion of the denomination are not averse to it, and there is a gradual tendency towards tolerating it. Its "public entertainments" are of a joyous and essentially worldly character, and altogether there are many evidences of the change through which the denomination is passing. It is no longer the humble Christian which a few spiritual intellects controlled; but it is a vast organization, growing in power, in social strength, in intellectual force, and showing a wonderful power of adapting itself to the demands of its adherents, whilst exerting over them a good influence.

Without attempting to solve the riddle of the closing sentence, we may be permitted to interpret what goes before. Methodism is gradually stepping down. It has no voice against vanity, extravagance and worldly pleasure. It will soon stand on a level with the least faithful and most popular of the religious bodies. Its young people will have no boundary between them and discipleship, even when they take this

world as their inheritance. And with all this relinquishment of authority and influence, this apostate church is to become the church of the people. May God preserve the people long days to come from such a supremacy, and the church from such a fatality!

May we ask our cotemporary, who we are quite sure means us no harm, whatever may be the defects of Methodism under his own observation, to spare at least the faithful ministers of our Church whose lives and labours are a perpetual protest against the fearful worldly conformity described in his picture. They may not be saints, but at least they are not reprobates to their very solemn and scriptural ordination vows.

No! we rejoice in the liberal sentiment of Methodism for a very different reason. Not because it indicates a decline in the church's strength and fidelity, but as an evidence that its wisdom and power are the outgrowth of genuine religious life and freedom. If the body were dead it could stretch out no strong right arm of entreaty, or expostulation; if it were under despotic mastery, the strong right arm would be hopelessly beaten back. We hold the truth, and the truth hath made us free!

READJUSTMENT OF HALIFAX SCHOOL DIFFICULTY.

We are exceedingly pleased with the summary method adopted by the School-board of Halifax as to the case which was complained of in our columns last week. At a meeting of the Commissioners held just after that issue went to the public, a spirited discussion upon a vote of reconsideration ended in a decision to dismiss Mr. Jack and restore Miss MacCullough immediately. It would have been a troublesome termination had any other purpose been reached. It would doubtless have precipitated a complete overthrow of the abnormal, double-headed system which now controls the public schools of Halifax. With this system all seem disposed to rest just now, though it recognizes sectarianism in its essence, giving Roman Catholics the double advantage of managing their own schools in so far as the selection of teachers is concerned, while the population, without regard to religion, have to support these denominational arrangements. It was with some degree of pride we observed in the discussion referred to, that the very able and prudent members of the Board who represent the Methodist body are not parties to the sectional principle, any farther than in the interests of peace. The Roman Catholic members themselves manifested an excellent spirit by hastening to repair at this meeting the error of their former one. They intimated their desire to be left neutral in the controversy and in the judgment. This allowed the sober second thought of the other members to work to a right conclusion, without the excitement of having both to combat a Roman Catholic usurpation of privilege and to weigh the issues of a very grave question of morality. A fact came out, however, which threw much discredit on a member of the Board to whom Protestants might reasonably look for some prudence and fidelity. That they have but a frail support in that quarter may be gathered from what we are about to state.

One member—a gentleman whose Scottish accent predisposed us to expect from him at least a degree of logical consistency—was accused of accepting without dissent, if not actually encouraging, in the instance of Mr. Jack's restoration, the votes of Roman Catholic members, while upon two occasions previously he had opposed with some warmth their interference under almost similar circumstances. This accusation he did not disprove. His defence of Mr. Jack, moreover, was a clumsy piece of special pleading. He had what seemed to be some lawyer's notes before him, written in the traditional illegible style of certain very learned members of that profession, and that with a slight native hesitancy, made the special defence tiresome to a degree. This, however, might have been forgiven if he had not exceeded the lawyer's counsel, for, whatever license gentlemen of the law allow

themselves in abusing the plaintiff's attorney, they are careful to avoid suits for defamation by stigmatizing the plaintiff himself. This member had used expressions which could mean only that Mr. Jack had never been drunk; that Miss MacCullough had not only never been assailed, but that she and a principal witness were conspiring to ruin his honourable and learned client. His laboured arguments on this point were exceedingly humiliating to those who were well aware that of Mr. Jack's real habits no one had better knowledge, and of Miss MacCullough's character no one less, than this very special pleader.

In behalf of the entire population, especially the Methodists of Halifax, we tender sincere thanks to those members of the Board who gave their opinions and votes with so much decision on this case last week. It would be lamentable, indeed, if the mere qualifications of scholarship and ability to instruct were allowed to outweigh considerations of character and example in our school teachers. The world has reached this period, that, to attain and hold an exalted position in society, men must be pure, and not even the member referred to can turn this hand back upon the dial. Once more, too, we feel that woman, so long held back in a competition for place in the arena of letters, is not only to be respected in her ambition, but also to be shielded from the assaults of passion in private and the insinuations of special pleadings in public.

EDITORIAL NOTES.

Montreal left both sunshine and shadows on our memories. Its genuine hospitality, its rare architecture, its glorious mountain view, its busy, commercial wharves and thoroughfares, were well adapted to leave abiding impressions on the stranger's mind. On the other hand, its Sabbath desecration was something frightful to a staid Protestant. We walked up through streets on a Sabbath evening, whose dense population was chiefly in-doors, playing cards, dominoes, checkers, and other games, with their family occupation thus fully exposed to every passer by. In the suburbs on Sabbath afternoon were ball playing, racing, and a full-blown circus—music, horses, dogs, and all else. One resort sustained by the Roman Catholic Church for the preservation of the morals of its young men—save the mark!—was lighted up gaily on Sunday night and occupied by a score of young men driving at several billiard-tables. Reader, read Montreal in the light of a religion which thus educates its people, and certain inferences as to its history are apparent enough. We found persons there sadly chafing under civic regulations which are maintained by strength of Romanism against Protestant liberty and peace. All this bodes no good for the future, unless Christianity shall make great conquests there.

Certain papers are exercised over the letters which have passed between Messrs. Currie and Brown, the rival champions of baptism. Especially one Baptist paper in Toronto, and one in St. John, continue to charge Mr. Currie, in unqualified language, with falsehood. They aver he has made statements as to the lexicons which he has been challenged to prove and for which no proof can be furnished. We have been asked, by correspondence, to state whether the harsh terms in which Mr. Currie is publicly assailed, have any justification in fact, as, from the letters and replies which have appeared in the premises, many are unable to judge for themselves. We can only reply that, were the charges alluded to made against ourselves we would meet them definitely and decisively, nor have we any reason to believe that it is not Mr. Currie's intention to do so. That he once intimated his purpose of replying, we have already stated. Beyond this we have no further knowledge. As to the editor of this paper attempting to shield or assist Mr. Currie, in making false expressions, those who have thrown out the insinuation and continue to reiterate it, are themselves guilty of perpetrating, what we shall call, in the mildest phrase, a little piece of rigmarole. And it all comes of the notion that straightforwardness is confined to men of a single creed.

DEATH OF REV. JAMES ENGLAND.—This true, faithful minister passed to his rest and reward on Thursday, 3d inst., in the sixty-third year of his age. Few men in the ranks of our itinerancy have left a more stainless record, or impressed more fully upon the rising ministry the value of inflexible conscientiousness, than our departed brother. His name has been quoted in our hearing as a synonym for truth and honesty, ever since, twenty years ago, we followed him over remote districts of Newfoundland. There he was very useful, teaching quite as much by his character as by his expositions. Once, when urged to take a younger minister's appointment on an important circuit, he repeated Nelson's memorable charge to his fleet—"England expects every man to do his duty." The words well became a man who never shrank himself from meeting obligations. But we are anticipating a tribute which will doubtless be paid to his memory by some one who knew him better and loved him not less.

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