

Ecclesiastical.

THE CIRCULAR LETTER.

TO THE CHURCHES, COMPOSING THE NOVA SCOTIA WESTERN BAPTIST ASSOCIATION.

Beloved Brethren,—

Such is the religious excitement and speculation of the present age, and such the conflict of circumstances and opinions, that we may probably profit by occasionally meditating upon the questions—What are we? Where are we? and, Why are we thus?

An intelligent knowledge of the position God has assigned us, and of the causes that have produced, and the circumstances that have moulded our denominational existence, is essential to both our growth and our usefulness. And while it is presumed that as a body, our convictions are clear, and our consciousness strong on these questions, yet the accessions that we are constantly acquiring, largely from the youthful class, are not intuitively permeated with the true tenets of the gospel in all their length, breadth, height and depth. Nor will an occasional refreshing of our more matured minds be amiss, surrounded as we are, with the pressure of compromise.

By such review we may strengthen our individual faith, and be the more invigorated for the stern labors of christian life, and the more earnest defence of the christian faith. To this end we propose as the subject of our present address:

OUR POSITION, AS A DENOMINATION.

We will note its peculiarities; its responsibilities; and its advantages.

OUR PECULIARITIES.

1. The first peculiarity, that we will mention as found pertaining to us is, Our religious isolation.

We stand alone. None sympathise in full with our work. None are prepared to pray that our doctrines and practices may become universal. That the world may be filled with Baptists. Some of the denominations believe in some of the Bible truths that we hold; but notwithstanding the commonality of those points of our respective creeds, such is the repugnance to other sentiments of our faith, that the preference is usually given, even by those termed orthodox, to those who differ with us on the question of baptism, however dissimilar in other sentiments the two may be. We have no good grounds to expect from these sources favors beyond the ordinary courtesies of religious society. If we secure these in the steadfast maintainance of Bible truth we may rest satisfied. In this we have not always succeeded. We have been pressed to found institutions of learning, to form Bible, and Mission Societies, and churches too, more from necessity, than from choice. We sought not separation. We would that all men were with us. But we could not sacrifice the convictions the word of God had wrought in us.

2. A second peculiarity is our recognition of the exclusive and supreme authority of the Bible in all matters of christian faith and practice. On this point we are not so singular in our theory, as in our practice. Most other denominations enunciate this sentiment abstractly, both in their pulpits and their creeds, and still all, more or less, supplement it in their practice.

The following are some of the authorities, found in this supplement—tradition, human reason, convenience, conscience, &c. These in their practical application seem to supersede in some connections the commands of God. The absurdity of this supplementing the Bible, God's book, the journals of his legislation, is apparent. On this question the Baptists, as a body, have stood firmly in both theory and practice from Apostolic times, and have outlived much of the abuse that has been heaped upon them because of it, and have withstood all the temptations presented to move them from their position. The attacks upon us have changed with the changing circumstances of society. But the gravest charge that has been, and that still is maintained against us, is, not, that we are unscriptural, but that we are too scriptural, too tenacious of the full authority of the Bible. This we can afford to bear. We shall not be damaged by it. Some religious bodies go farther with us than others, in the practical recognition of Bible authority. This supplementing and superseding work, has very extensively pervaded christendom. Our position, in this respect, is peculiar, but not perverse.

3. A third and last peculiarity that we will notice, consists in the construction of a visible church. We require according to the inspired teachings, and the Apostolic usage, our members to be persons renewed in the spirit of their minds; in other words regenerated to God. And we refuse to admit to membership any considered to be destitute of this qualification. Further, we admit none to any of the privileges of the church, who are not members of it, or members of a kindred church. Our Freewill and Free christian Baptist brethren are the most like us of any denominations in the matter of church construction. Still they fail on this point. They professedly receive to the external privileges of their church, those whom they would not receive to membership, without greater qualifications. They thus require less qualification for admission to church privileges, than they do to church membership.

The peculiarities already named are the most striking, and the most important that distinguish us from other religious bodies. We disclaim ignorance, obstinacy, and misanthropy, in our adherence to the sentiments propounded, and that place us in this position. As our only apology, we urge an enlightened conviction of the truth and a supreme love to the God of all truth. "Buy the truth and sell it not" is a motto that with all our hearts we endorse. Nor are we to be moved from it, either by frowns or flatteries. We pass on to notice, in the second place,

OUR RESPONSIBILITIES.

Every position has its responsibilities. This is true of individuals and societies. They grow largely out of the

position occupied. Ours began with our beginning. They have increased with our growth. They relate to God, to ourselves, and to the world.

1. Towards God, it is our duty to act as the rescued towards the rescuer, with gratitude and love.

2. Towards ourselves, it is our duty to keep up in our souls and in our public worship a spirit of living piety. It is our duty to keep ourselves unspotted from the world, and to maintain our profession with such integrity that no occasion will be afforded to any to speak evil of our good. It is our duty to support earnestly the faith we have espoused. Our integrity then cannot be questioned nor our sincerity doubted. It is our duty to increase in holiness and knowledge. By this we are prepared for an increased enjoyment of the love of God, and for increased usefulness in his service.

If our individual professions and our denominational distinctions are worth nothing to ourselves nor to the world, and are not required of God, then may we without loss or guilt abandon them. If there is nothing in our peculiarities beyond a name, insignificant and unimportant, then have the Baptists' endurance of sufferings and reproach been a weakness, rather than a virtue. But the conviction strongly presses on us that our position in the world is the ordering of the Almighty One, a provision for his own glory. And our professions of faith and hope are the exponents of solemn responsibilities, that dictate to us a line of action that we cannot honourably resist. Our name is significant; our profession is serious. In honour to ourselves we must maintain them.

3. Towards the world, it is our duty to act as those entrusted with a message upon which depends its life and its peace. Nor can we be indifferent to this claim of humanity. Nor will a comparison of ourselves with any other portion of the professing christian world, however favorable to us the comparison, justify in us a diminished light, a limited piety, a contracted or distorted effort to save the world from sin, by bringing it to Christ. In writing thus we are not underrating other bodies of religious professors. We are not addressing them, but ourselves. We are not attempting to compute the amount of truth they hold. We heartily credit them for all the truth they teach, for all the light they show, for all the good they do, while we argue that our mission is a distinct and peculiar one, for the prosecution of which God holds us responsible. The apostle Paul expresses this truth when he says, "I am debtor both to the Greeks and to the barbarian, both to the wise and to the unwise."—Rom. i. 14. If we are in any sense the salt of the earth, we are to preserve the savor thereof. And if we are at all the light of the world we are to let that light shine. For the welfare of mankind it is our duty to maintain and promulgate all the doctrines, practices and ordinances embraced in the christian religion. Amongst these doctrines are human depravity, divine sovereignty, human accountability, the atonement of Christ, regeneration by the Spirit, justification by faith, and final perseverance. Amongst the practices are the maintenance of an orderly life, christian fellowship, and the support of public religious worship. The ordinances are Baptism and the Lord's supper in the order and manner, and for the end enjoined. By thus observing the christianity of the Bible we have grown to what we now are, numbering as we do in New Brunswick, Prince Edward's Island, and Nova Scotia, over twenty-five thousand church members, and probably a still larger number of supporters of our sentiments, which gives a denomination of over fifty thousand. We have not been fostered by government patronage, and government favors. We have not largely been aided by men of influence in the world, nor by men of riches. But God has blessed and enlarged us while we have served him. And now we say, "Whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing," Phil. i. 16. Once we were deemed unfit for religious society, now we are upbraided, by the same parties, because we do not offer them certain privileges with our churches. Once the reproaches heaped upon us were in wrath: now they are showered upon us in love. Surely a brighter day is dawning. Let us turn to proper account every opportunity it affords. Let us not be insensible to kindnesses from whatever source they emanate. But let not our affections be improperly hampered; our tongues improperly silenced, nor our efforts for the promotion of truth be circumscribed thereby. Such is a rapid sketch of our responsibilities. We pass to notice in the third and last place

OUR ADVANTAGES.

1. We have the advantage of understanding our position. This knowledge it is our individual duty to possess. Its possession is a great advantage in order to the work we are called to do, and the successes we are allowed to anticipate.

2. We have advantages afforded by the assurance that if, in maintaining the truth, our numbers are not so rapidly nor so largely increased we will not suffer so much loss in that day when our work will be inspected by the great Architect of the universe, 1 Cor. iii. 15, as though we had built largely upon error.

3. We have the advantage afforded by the promise of Christ in John xii. 26: "If any man serve me, him will my Father honor;" and by all kindred promises.

4. We have the advantage too, afforded by the success that has already attended our labors as a denomination of christians. By those labors many have been converted to God. We have thus largely increased in numbers; grown in intelligence; multiplied places of public worship; augmented the ministerial staff; and we would hope, withal maintained the standard of true piety.

5. We have the advantage afforded by trusting God for all desired results and successes. Duty is ours, results are His. We rest not upon ourselves for the accomplishment of what we desire, but confide in Almighty wisdom, love and power.

6. We have the advantage of the promise that our work shall not be in vain in the Lord.

In conclusion, our advantages are unspeakably great and precious. We cannot too highly appreciate them. No

discouragement need be allowed to lurk about us. If our position is one of labor and trial, our advantages prepare us for it. If it is one that exposes us to calumny and reproach, our advantages enable us to bear them. If in our work we stand alone, we are not alone, for God is with us. If but little human sympathy attends us in our endeavours, we have the sympathy of the Divine One, whose heart is full of love. Who chides our despondency and encourages our hope, "Be not dismayed, I am thy God."

Let us then brethren in the Lord, not be weary in well doing; we shall reap if we faint not.

Report of the French Mission Board.

The French Mission Board in presenting their fifteenth annual report, have to record the goodness and grace of our God and Saviour during another year. While the churches have been experiencing refreshing from the presence of the Lord, the field of the French Mission has enjoyed the outpourings of his grace.

During the past year the Board has held occasional meetings, and endeavored to discharge the duties devolved upon them in watching over and providing for the Mission. The missionary has devoted himself as formerly to visiting among the French people, preaching to them where companies of them could be assembled for the purpose, and distributing religious tracts and copies of the scriptures. And while he has been thus engaged, his heart and ours have been cheered from time to time by learning that results appeared which showed that labor was not spent in vain, nor strength for nought.

During the year the Missionary has travelled 2335 miles, visited 196 families, preached 46 sermons, and delivered 13 lectures in behalf of the Mission. Two of the Acadian French have professed faith in the Lord Jesus Christ in baptism; one of these, in whose heart the ends of truth were first implanted about four years ago in her native place in Clare, uniting with bro. Vidito's Church in Wilmot, the other with the church at Hebron, while one English person has been baptized by bro. Normanday himself, in connection with the little company of believers at the North Ridge, at St. Mary's Bay. Altogether, seven of the French have given satisfactory evidence of having passed from death to life, and eleven have renounced the Church of Rome and are with lively interest, searching the word of life to find the way of salvation, while the Sabbath School at the North Ridge, is still sustained and numbers about 50 persons.

Notwithstanding the Association has authorized the Board to dispose of the premises at Tuskent, and an enactment has been obtained from the legislature empowering them to do so, the Mission still retains possession of them, but only because they have not found an opportunity to make sale of them. The Board is still of the conviction that Saunierville is the most desirable location for the mission premises, and hope that the day will not be far distant when they may make a removal. The finishing of the house at S., has been carried forward to a considerable extent during the year, and was arrested only for want of funds, those that have been expended having been supplied by bro. Joseph Shaw alone. The mission have in possession, consequently, two premises while only one is paid for.

It has, however, strongly impressed the minds of some of the brethren, for a length of time, that more ought to be attempted for the perishing French of our province, and within the limits of this Western Association. More labourers are needed. What is one man among so many? Another missionary is required, a school is an absolute necessity to large success; and a colporteur is requisite to break the ground as yet inaccessible and pave the way for the more regular evangelistic efforts of the missionary. We have been experimenting sufficiently long. The results abundantly declare that labor expended is not in vain in the Lord. The Lord calls us by past success; by present promise, and by direct command, to go forward, and we dare not disobey. In consideration of the extent of this missionary field, the numbers of the French in perishing need of the bread of life, the degree of interest manifested by our denomination in the Mission and their readiness to support it, your Board have felt warranted in opening correspondence with a view to discovering whether they might not secure an additional labourer in the field. The Board addressed their enquiries to the Rev. N. Cyr, of Philadelphia, formerly of the Grand Ligne Mission, and learning from him that he himself was not so engaged but that he could visit our province, they extended to him an invitation to explore the field and labor in the Mission for two months, with a view to more extended labors among us himself, or to recommending some person adapted to our wants, who might co-operate with bro. Normanday. Bro. Cyr arrived among us about the first of the present month and is with us on this occasion.

Viewed in this aspect, or from this stand-point, it may yet appear that our possession of two premises is altogether providential, and appointed by God for the ultimate success of the mission and the salvation of the French. If another missionary should be employed, the Mission will need the second premises and for the enlarged efforts they will both be found to be well located. This will involve an outlay of about \$1500, which it is believed our denomination will cheerfully contribute when it shall appear to them to be requisite, in order to the success of the Mission. We should attempt greater things for God in this department and expect greater things from him.

Respectfully submitted,

R. D. PORTER, Secretary.

The Committee on the Christian Messenger report that they are gratified in knowing that this periodical enjoys a large and extending circulation, and would earnestly recommend that efforts be employed to further enrich its pages, and make it a constant and increasingly useful messenger in every Baptist family.

Respectfully submitted,

R. D. PORTER, Chairman.