

Correspondence.

For the Christian Messenger.

To the Baptists of Nova Scotia.

LETTER 5.

Dear Brethren,—

I was sanguine enough to hope, when I commenced these letters, that they might be blessed of our Heavenly Father in leading the brethren of the Granville Street Church to reflect on the past, and to re-examine, under other aspects, what they have done.

This hope is almost, if not quite, extinguished by the haste with which they have plunged into an answer to my letters immediately on the publication of my first letter, without waiting to see or weigh the rest!

Are they not aware that when a man thus hastily answers, he is too apt to feel himself pledged to his own words, and to become thus confirmed in prejudice?

It is with real pain that I give up, at least in degree, the hope I cherished, and find myself turned in great measure from the plan I had laid down, and limited as I much fear, I shall now be to the single object of endeavouring, so far as in me lies, to protect our churches in general from the distortions which such haste naturally breeds.

If these brethren have done wrong, they have necessarily but two courses to take, if they say any thing. They must either confess the wrong, or misrepresent the facts.

In the first letter of the Granville Street Church, occur some very serious mis-statements.

Such is the assertion that I prejudged the case in question. On my first visit to Halifax, after the church had set Dr. Pryor aside, I lodged with Dr. Parker, a deacon of the church, with whom I had always been on terms of intimate confidence, and heard from him, before I had seen Dr. Pryor, a full detail of all which was considered evidence in the case.

As Dr. Parker entertained a very strong opinion against the accused, of course the facts were not palliated or weakened in his lips. I did not then see the writings, though I sought them. I have since seen and carefully perused them, as well as heard all that was given in oral testimony before the Council, and have never heard any fact of importance that was not then stated to me by Dr. Parker, or any aspect of any fact stronger than he then presented.

Late into the night this earnest conversation extended. Dr. Pryor I did not see till the afternoon of the following day. I saw certainly that nothing named as a suspicious fact was conclusive; and I saw that the weight of character against these suspicions was great. Still, I came to no fixed conclusion. I waited. I had no feeling in my mind other than a wish to judge according to the truth,—no shade of desire to protect a guilty man. I say this solemnly before God.

Dr. Parker himself told me that evening that those who saw and conversed with Dr. Pryor came away convinced of his innocence! This struck me as strange. I could hardly then understand it. I afterwards perceived it was owing to his manifest and transparent truthfulness.

That transparent truthfulness is, of course, an important item. With long preceding excellence of character it was entitled to weigh strongly against circumstances of mere suspicion. The two together,—the long tried character and manifest truthfulness on one side; and the suspicious circumstances on the other, comprised all the evidence existing in the case. These all were placed before me, and on these I formed my opinion.

This you see, was no pre-judgement. Theirs, I should think, was the pre-judgement, who against suspicious circumstances, allowed character and transparent truthfulness no weight.

Another very serious misrepresentation respects the letter I sought at Cambridge, Mass., and I must say, it is a misrepresentation, especially censurable, inasmuch as the leading brethren of the church well know the facts to be as I shall now explain.

“So determined was I,” it is asserted in the first letter of the church “that my opinion should become that of the church and of the denomination,” that I procured, (on this account) from Cambridge the letter testifying to Dr. Pryor's good character while there.

Now the fact was, as is well known to the leading members of the Church, that

that letter was procured by me to show the inaccuracy and cruel falsehood of a report, which one of the brethren asserted to me to be a positive truth, that Dr. Pryor had been obliged to leave Cambridge for bad conduct, similar to that charged against him in Halifax, and that the previous testimonials he brought were not the general action of the Cambridge church, but were got up by a few persons in a corner.

Thus it is that these brethren allow themselves to be warped and prejudiced, even against, and in the very face, of the most evident and positive facts; until one is compelled to see, as its only possible explanation, the sad and inexpressible degree of bad feeling with which they have become possessed, until it seems wholly to triumph over them.

I do not wonder that the strong expressions in Judge Johnston's letter so calm, nevertheless, so clear and conclusive, expressions most unfairly strung together in the first letter of the Church away from their context, should deeply wound these brethren; but before they justly complain of these expressions, I suggest that it is necessary to disprove their truth.

If the facts occurred to which the Judge refers, and which by these expressions he designates, ought they not to accept the language which only can appropriately describe the facts.

A word as to the obscure character of the accusation.

I judge it to be so from the inconclusive nature of the evidence, and the questionable character of the principal witnesses.

A minister is entitled to demand strong and clear evidence before any accusation is admitted against him. Any thing short of this is an obscure accusation.

On many accounts a minister's office is specially exposed to the danger of suspicion.

In a city, with a mixed and crowded population, he is called, in the varied character of his labors, to visit all sorts of persons, in places, and under circumstances, that “an evil eye” might often misinterpret.

If he feels the worth of souls, he will scorn the selfish policy that might incline those who possess less zeal and christian love, to shrink from personal exposure.

The church ought not to open this case anew, for they themselves declared, that they saw in relation to it no conclusive evidence of guilt. Still they return to it again and again!

I believe that Dr. Pryor was moved, as every minister in similar circumstance ought to be moved, with a sincere desire for the salvation of the soul of a young woman, whose situation in a strange country, far from her relatives and particular friends; and whose previous profession of religion in a Baptist church, made her an object of peculiar interest.

I believe that he hoped his conversations had at times an effect on her conscience, and was induced, by this, by Mrs. Pryor's interest in her, and by her husband having requested that he would take her and her family under his especial care in his absence, to follow her as the Pastor of a flock might well follow a wandering sheep, but with perfect confidence in her purity of life.

I believe that the lateness of the hour of the particular visit referred to, was an oversight arising partly from the protection which his advanced age and christian character seemed to give against evil surmises, and partly from constitutional carelessness of outward appearances.

And I believe that the sneers and jibes of certain “young men in Halifax” is easily interpreted by that readiness to believe evil that is common to those who are conscious of a readiness to do it.

Now all this is possible; and all may consist with a pure, earnest desire in Dr. Pryor to save souls and thereby glorify his Divine Redeemer.

Why shall any one prefer to believe the contrary, against all the evidence of pure and earnest christian character for many years?

The council you see,—six of them chosen by the church, and carefully separated from any intercourse with Dr. Pryor and his friends,—could not believe the contrary.

Do this Church prefer to believe it? Do they prefer to interpret circumstances unfavorably that might nevertheless be consistently interpreted favorably?

What shall we say of this, except that it is wholly inexplicable on the supposition that there is no feeling in their bosoms to warp their judgments and blind their consciences.

I should add that I believe on my conscience before God that Miss Vass can be shewn to have lost nothing by Dr. Pryor;—to have gained much by his activity and

zeal on her behalf despite his inaccuracy in accounts, and that there is not a shade of just ground for suspecting him of fraud.

The Council you know have also declared they saw no evidence of fraud.

The Granville Street Church tenaciously cling to the accusation!

Alas for them! where is the love that “thinketh all things; believeth all things?” Yours in Christian affection,

E. A. CRAWLEY.

For the Christian Messenger.

Letters from Granville St. Church to the Baptists of Nova Scotia.

No. 5.

DEAR BRETHREN,—

In Dr. Crawley's first letter he told you among other things, that “an old minister whom he had long intimately known, of the highest usefulness and public estimation, had been suddenly struck down in Halifax by an obscure accusation, the truth of which appeared in the strongest degree improbable, and was contradicted by many years of a holy, active and useful life as well as by the absence of any direct or conclusive evidence of guilt.” The heavy charge these words contain was directed against us. We were they who, he affirms, had thus without evidence and in the face of good character, “struck down” one of your ministers of the “highest usefulness and public estimation.” When this charge was made, before you all, we ask you if it was not our duty at once to confess our grievous error, if Dr. Crawley's statement were correct, or at once to show you that the statement was not correct? What did we do? Knowing, as we did, that the statement was at total variance with the facts, we at once decided to put the matter before you in its true light; and also to correct any other wrong statements concerning ourselves, which Dr. C. might make. Dr. Crawley appears to be astonished that we did not rest under his first charge and all the others he has since made against us until he had finished his whole series of letters! (How many that may be we cannot tell.) No, we could not see it proper to do that. In our opinion it was not a time to be silent. Our “haste” may have turned Dr. Crawley in great part away from the “task” to which he had “bowed” himself, but we tell you that we have no apology to make for refuting at the first opportunity grave misrepresentation thus publicly made against us.

But we must not give too much attention to matters of minor importance. We will endeavor, therefore, after noticing Dr. C's charge of misrepresentation, to direct our remarks to the principal topics to be discussed in this letter, viz. the Vass case.

Dr. Crawley says, “If these brethren have done wrong they have necessarily but two courses to take, if they say anything. They must either confess the wrong or misrepresent the facts.” Dr. C. then points out two “serious misrepresentations,” and leaves you to conclude that we have adopted the latter alternative. Let us point out Dr. C's fallacy. His reasoning is really this. If these brethren have done wrong (to Dr. Pryor) they have but two courses to take,—confess the wrong, or misrepresent the facts, (of Dr. Pryor's case.) They have misrepresented the facts touching myself; therefore they have done wrong to Dr. Pryor. Is this sound reasoning? But let us examine these two “serious misrepresentations.” In Dr. C's first letter he sought to censure us because, as he stated, we judged that he, being a connection of Dr. Pryor's, would forego truth and justice for the sake of a friend. We clearly showed in reply, that we acted on a principle universally acknowledged as wise and judicious, which we had adopted, in the selection of Councillors, and that he had no cause of complaint when no exception in the application of that principle was made in his behalf. And, further, there existed good reasons why no such exception should be made in his favor, since he had early in the case stated that he could “stake his existence” on Dr. Pryor's innocence. What does Dr. C. now say? He says: He came to Halifax and lodged with one of our members, and heard from him an account of the evidence against Dr. Pryor; he did not see the written evidence; he did not read the reports of the committees appointed to investigate the matter. But he heard what one member of the church who had not been connected with either of the Committees of investigation was able from his memory to tell him. And upon this evidence and Dr. Pryor's own statements, and character, and trans-

parent truthfulness, he says, “I formed my opinion.” Now in as far as we stated that Dr. C. formed his opinion without hearing any evidence, we acknowledge we may have done him some injustice; but that Dr. Crawley had, previous to the date of our meeting to select Councillors, made up his mind on the whole matter; and had expressed his willingness to accept annihilation if Dr. P. were guilty, is beyond all question. If Dr. C. had not prejudged the case in the sense of forming an opinion before seeing any evidence, he had certainly prejudged the case in the sense of having made, up his mind previous to the date of our meeting for the purpose of choosing Councillors. When Dr. C. was offended at us for not making him a Councillor, he should have recognised in himself the likelihood that he might feel “pledged to his own words.”

How far we have done injustice to Dr. Crawley in the Cambridge matter we leave you to judge. Our statement of the purpose for which Dr. C. procured a letter from Cambridge, was grounded on the use he made of that letter. If, as he says, he procured it to show the falsehood of a report which a private individual had borne to him as a fact, why did he not rest content with placing the refutation before that individual? Dr. C. well knew that Granville St. Church had never entertained the report at any of its meetings, nor had ever in any way professed to have regard to it in their action. But, when the Council was convened, Dr. C. persisted, in the face of this knowledge, in pressing the matter upon the attention of the Council as an important part of Dr. Pryor's defence. Surely this was setting up a man of straw for the sake of demolition, unless the object was in this extraordinary manner, to force upon the church and the denomination his belief in Dr. P's innocence of the charges under investigation.

In regard to Dr. P's past character we refer you to our Reply to Judge Johnston's letter.

A few words as to character of the witnesses who testified against Dr. Pryor. These persons hesitated to give evidence at all. They had no interest one way or the other and did not wish to be mixed up in the matter in any way. We do not see that they could have had any object in coloring facts to Dr. Pryor's prejudice. Whilst making the statements they did, it was apparent that they were reluctant to state all they knew. And as to Dr. C's statement that they seriously damaged their own testimony in their cross-examination, we believe such was not the fact. We know that the evidence of those who appeared before the Committee is almost identical in every particular with that given by them before the Council, four months afterwards; and without, we believe, in a single instance having their memories refreshed by a perusal of their former testimony. This agreement between testimony given at an interval of four months, and when on the second examination they were cross-questioned by the ablest legal minds, goes to establish two important facts. It shows the truthfulness of those witnesses, and it entirely corroborates what the committee have again and again told us; namely that in examining these witnesses they most thoroughly canvassed every statement made by them, and endeavoured to elicit facts in their Pastor's favor.

With Dr. Crawley's beliefs we have little to do. We have no wish to destroy the good opinion he entertains in regard to his friend. Dr. Crawley may believe that Dr. Pryor visited Mrs. McMillan because he was moved with a sincere desire for the salvation of her soul. Dr. Crawley may believe “on his conscience before God” that Miss Vass can be shown to have lost nothing, but gained much by Dr. Pryor, and “that there is not a shade of just ground for suspecting him of fraud.”—And had Dr. Crawley stopped here we should have said nothing. But when he tells you that “Granville Street Church tenaciously cling to the (false) accusation” of fraud we can be no longer silent. We must give the facts; or so many of them as may be crowded into the small space we may venture to ask.

The question is not, Whether Miss Vass lost or gained through Dr. Pryor. It is possible she may have gained. His legal adviser said before the Council that “he was sure that, assuming Dr. Pryor did the business uprightly, his management of the affairs was a great benefit to Miss Vass.” It is possible we say that Miss Vass may have gained by Dr. Pryor's activity, though when we remember that the balance of known inaccuracies against Dr. Pryor, amounts to nearly five thousand dollars, we have very great doubts on the point.