

For the Christian Messenger.

LETTER 3.

## To the Baptists of Nova Scotia.

Dear Brethren,—

When any private christian commits an offense against propriety or good morals, we all know the injury that falls on the cause of Christ; but if a church commits such offense, especially a prominent church like that in Granville Street, and persistently refuses to acknowledge or amend the wrong, the example now assumes a character and magnitude, that give it an alarming bearing on the well being of all our churches, unless, by some general and strong expression of rebuke, the evil, if not repressed, be at least, to some extent, deprived of its poison.

If our ministers shall be subject to be tried by churches inflamed by passion and prejudice and be allowed no appeal; and if a church having agreed to refer inquiries to a more suitable tribunal, shall arbitrarily reject the decision when unfavorable to their wishes; and it should come to be understood that such act, on their part, meets with no censure, no stern rebuke; then the independence of the churches may become a monstrous tyranny, the independence of ministers a sham.

On these subjects I hope to treat more at large hereafter; I now briefly refer to them, to justify my calling your special attention to the nature of the heavy charge lying against Granville Street Church, and demanding from our whole community its deep and prayerful attention, its strong, unequivocal condemnation.

If a Council were called in, merely to give advice which it was understood and agreed a church might use or not use; or, merely to sit, together with a church, in judgment on some pending question, now first brought up, which is perhaps sometimes done, under such circumstances, possibly, there might arise cases in which the church could not acquiesce in the advice offered.

It is impossible to regard this as a case of that kind. The church had already examined and passed judgment on the whole case. The reference, therefore, was necessarily a question of reversing their judgment. There were two points of charge, impurity and fraud, on both of which their Pastor had most solemnly declared his innocence. On the first they had themselves acquitted him, tho' they most cruelly and contrary to the acknowledged birthright of Englishmen demanded, that he should be tried over again on that point before the Council, and refused to consent to the reference, unless Dr. Pryor would agree to this most hard and unjust condition. They knew that he consented to this, only because he thereby secured an appeal from prejudiced and unjust judges to twelve men who were free from the agitations that disturbed the church.

Here, then, was an agreement, as the lawyers in the church, of which the clerk, an active prosecutor, is one, must know, having in it all the elements of a mutual contract. On condition of Dr. Pryor consenting to be tried over again, *his vezari*, and submitting to the decision of the Council as final between him and the church, they, on their part, consented to waive their right of trial, and the judgment they had passed, and to abide by the judgment the Council should pass; there can be no other intelligible interpretation put on the transaction.

Every thing tends to shew this. Why else, the reluctance the church had manifested to the calling of a council. Was it not plainly because they were afraid the decree might be against them?—a groundless fear if they were at liberty to reject it. I venture to assert, that every man and woman among them, that thought about it at all, knew very well that when Dr. Pryor demanded this reference, and the church consented to it, he had no other understanding and could have no other, than that he was to receive a final trial by the Council, and that the Church as well as himself would submit to their arbitration.

The Church could not be deceived in this matter. Their silence shewed they were not deceived; otherwise they would have modified their acceptance of the Council by saying, we accept your judgment so far as we are pleased with it and no further. But they knew they could not do this, because the right of a third party was now involved in the matter. They perfectly knew too, that if they had done this, every one concerned would have exclaimed at their bad faith; the Council would have refused to act, as five of them had refused before, when the church wanted them to act as an *ex parte* Council; they knew that twelve men would never have left their homes for so long a time, and bestowed such unwearied pains to arrive at a just judgment, if the litigant parties might or might not accept it. The reference to the

Council was well understood to be in fact an arbitration.

If there was no writing, no bond, there was the implied contract, and the supposed honor of a christian church, which would naturally be considered stronger than any bond.

I have been thus minute in going into these particulars, because, on account of these facts, the church must stand the grave charge, of plainly violating their engagement.

It is a heavy charge against a christian church; but it is manifestly true. Some among them must plainly see it is so. I do not suppose they all look on it in that way. Men easily find excuses for the indulgence of their willfulness, and when a number unite in wrong-doing, a gloss is much more readily thrown over the truth.

But however they look at it, the facts speak for themselves; and the ill example steams up in our community with its demoralizing influence. Strange that they are so zealous to condemn their Pastor on evidence that carries no conclusive weight, and cannot see, if indeed they do not see, that they are really doing the very things for which they wrongfully excommunicate him. They have violated their engagement. Do not fraud and falsehood necessarily belong to every violation of a solemn engagement? But fraud and falsehood are the crimes they charged on their Pastor, without evidence; and they are those, we see, which they themselves commit, in the view of the whole world. Their conduct can be truly regarded in no other light than a glaring and cruel breach of good faith, and for all we can see, they wipe their mouth like the woman in the Proverbs, and say "We have done no wickedness."

Not to weary you by too long a letter, I must continue this in my next and remain, Affectionately, yours in Christ,

E. A. CRAWLEY.

For the Christian Messenger.

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

No. 2.

Dear Brethren,—

In further noticing Dr. Crawley's letters, we ask your attention first to the charge, almost made, that we set our late Pastor aside from the pulpit—"as if guilty, before proofs." This charge, if made, could not have been sustained. We had the proofs of guilt. Not of immorality or fraud certainly, otherwise it would have been useless to appoint committees to, investigate those charges. But of indiscretion such as in our opinion made it inexpedient, to say the least, for Dr. P. to occupy his pulpit, we had the amplest proofs. On the Friday evening, April 27th, when we first met to learn from Dr. Pryor himself the truth or falsehood of the scandal with which the whole city was excited, we had an account from his own lips, which convinced us that he himself would not, or should not, wish to occupy his pulpit on the coming sabbath, and that it would not be for the interests of religion for him to do so. He denied then as he has ever done since, that he was guilty of uncleanness or fraud, but he admitted that he had gone to Mrs. McMillan's house about midnight, had tapped at her window, and was admitted to her room, had spent two hours with her alone, that he knew that bad stories had been circulating about her character previously, that she was not a church member, and scarcely an attendant on his ministry (under his own hand he subsequently said "I am strongly under the impression that she has attended sometimes during the last 12 months") that she had been excluded from a Baptist church for reasons which he was not at liberty to divulge, that on taking leave of her that night he was caught by one of the tenants of the same house, who had been watching for some person he believed to have been within, for an improper purpose. On Dr. Pryor coming out of the door this person together with a policeman—a member of our congregation—who happened to be near, and was called by him, were both astonished to find it was Dr. Pryor.

These things Dr. Pryor admitted and he saw plainly the great impropriety of his conduct, and exerted himself to the very utmost to prevent the knowledge of that midnight visit coming to the public. Had Dr. Pryor been able to say "I was not there that night, I challenge proof," the case would have been far different. He admitted the truth of the facts which had startled the whole community, denying only the guilt to which these facts pointed.

Does a Government which lays its strong hand upon an individual, as is often the case, upon mere suspicion, and takes away his liberty, assume that person to be guilty? During the long months that a prisoner awaits

his trial, 'debarred from attending to his usual business, does a Government suppose him to be guilty? When an official in a public department is charged with a grave offence and is suspended from performing his usual duties, does any one feel himself justified in assuming his guilt? and do those who thus suspend him violate the rule which holds a man innocent until he is proved guilty? If in secular departments it is found necessary to suspend from his duties one whose alleged bad conduct is under investigation, how much more reason exists for the application of such a rule in the church. With a rigor that makes itself felt, the interests of religion demand that the character of those who stand up to teach the way of life shall be free even from suspicion.

We appeal to you, did we make a "false step" in this matter? The Council, whose decision Dr. C. has pronounced "righteous," did not pronounce this step a "false" one. The church had consulted with Dr. Pryor by letter. The Council say that "it might have been better" if a "personal interview" had been sought. We freely admit that, but the Council do not say that Dr. Pryor's occupation of the pulpit ought not to have been interfered with. The phrase used by Dr. Crawley, "setting their Pastor aside," is too strong—we can hardly be said to have done that. What was done was with his concurrence; and our invitation to another preacher was withheld till that concurrence was expressed. Let the correspondence speak for itself:

Saturday Morning.

REV. DR. PRYOR:

My Dear Sir,—After you left the room last evening, the brethren came to the conclusion, that, in the present state of affairs, it would not be right to tax you to fill the pulpit to-morrow. With your concurrence, therefore, we propose to get Mr. Welton. Have the goodness to reply per bearer.

Yours very truly,

S. SELDEN.

REPLY.

Dear Br.—Whatever the brethren decided upon, I of course consent to. It seems, however, not exactly in accordance with usual custom.—Will it not look as if my brethren thought me guilty?

Yours truly,

JOHN PRYOR.

In regard to the unworthy motives, prejudice, passion, wounded pride, ill-will, and so forth, which "may have" preceded or been caused by that first supposed "false step," we may point Dr. C. to the decision which he has called "righteous," and which expressly says that "whatever mistakes" our Deacons may have committed, they "ought not be charged with want of affection on account of such mistakes." But apart from that decision we say that we are not conscious that our action was prompted by such evil motives and passions, and we hold most firmly that the existence of such motives cannot be rightly inferred from the nature of the action itself.

You will scarcely pardon us if we stay long to meet the charge that we being "destitute of a head" were in no "Scriptural condition" to pass our judgment upon Dr. Pryor. The first meeting we held had not yet been organized when Dr. Pryor went to one of the Deacons and asked him to take the chair. And are you to be seriously told that we should have waited till we could get another pastor before we proceeded to deal with Dr. Pryor. Had we done so the strong probabilities are that we should have been still without a Pastor, and in communion with a member charged with some of the gravest offences that a man can commit.

In regard to calling a Council in the first instance, we have to say, that we believe it might have been expedient; to have done so and not inconsistent with the practice and independence of Baptist Churches. In view of the suddenness with which this affair came upon us, it will not appear to you wonderful that in matters of expediency we should have erred, but under the peculiar and very trying circumstances in which we were placed, we are thankful to God for enabling us to act upon and honor the principles of Church government laid down in the New Testament, and adopted by Baptists.

We will add a few words relative to the "digest" of the decision to which Dr. C. has referred, and which he seems to endorse as being correct. We cannot allow Dr. C.'s remark to pass without briefly comparing the decision with the *Visitor's* version, and asking you whether the incorrectness of the digest ought not to meet with universal reprobation. "Great want of discretion in the character of his visits to Mrs. McMillan." "Great want of discretion in his manner regarding a single case of pastoral visitation." You must acknowledge that is not a "close technical adherence." The Council said "great want of discretion in the character of visits." They were too late at night, were

too long, the door was too often locked, the blinds were too often down. The character of the visits was not good. The object did not seem to be a legitimate one. The Council said nothing of the "manner" of the visitor. They might well have made a remark upon that point but they did not. The Council spoke of visits. The "digest" speaks of a "single case." One of Dr. Pryor's own witnesses testified that he visited the woman in question "once or twice a week" for sixteen months. The council it is clear did not confine their decision to one visit. And this one visit was a "pastoral" one! As we have shown before, the woman visited could scarcely be said to be a member of Dr. Pryor's congregation. He could hardly therefore be said to be her Pastor. Dr. Pryor said that he went to see her because she was sick and had had a doctor that day. The doctor however positively denies having attended her while she was living in that house; and an occupant of the same house testified that she was well that day and about her ordinary duties and out in town in the afternoon. As to the nature of Dr. Pryor's interview he says, he talked on religious subjects, but she says they were discussing the stories that were abroad concerning her character. The last point of divergence we notice is this: The digest gives you no hint as to whom this single visit, in which Dr. Pryor's "manner" was greatly indiscreet, was paid.

The decision on the other hand mentions the name of "Mrs. McMillan"—a woman, (to give you but one item) for whose character or the truthfulness of whose statements, Judge Johnston told the Council, when he asked her to take the witness-stand, that those placing her there would not be responsible, and he made this statement after having, in company with Dr. Crawley visited her at her boarding-house.

Yours in Christian fellowship,  
By order, and in behalf of the Church,  
B. H. EATON, Clerk.

No. 3.

DEAR BRETHREN,—

Having obtained permission from the Editor of the *Messenger* to read Dr. Crawley's letters before they appear in print, we propose hereafter to place our answer to each of his letters along side of the letters themselves.

In Dr. Crawley's 3rd Letter he speaks of the independence of the churches becoming "a monstrous tyranny." The absurdity of this can be made apparent. But he also speaks of the independence of "the ministers" becoming "a sham."—What does Dr. C. mean by "the independence of ministers?" We are at a loss to know. Are they independent of the world—the churches—one another, or what? It is too dark for us to deal with in connection with the subject of Church discipline. We could understand that they are independent of all earthly control, in declaring the truth which they are commanded to preach, but what that independence is to which Dr. C. refers we are not able to divine.

Dr. C. says that on the charge of "impurity" the Church had cleared Dr. Pryor, or to use his own words, "acquitted him." Dr. C. sadly misunderstands the Church. The Church in their resolution which expresses their decision on this case, speaks thus:

*Resolved*, That the Church are unwilling to believe, and have no positive proof of criminality in the cases mentioned in the evidence given, [and as opposed to suspicions, we have the tried character of our pastor, as a minister of the Gospel, through a long series of years, and his faithful and affectionate services among ourselves, as well as his solemn denial of the present charges.] The Church, however, are compelled to express their conviction that Dr. Pryor's indiscretion has been so great, as appears by the evidence, and by his own statement, that we regard it as having destroyed all hope of his further usefulness as a pastor in connection with this Church.

The passage within brackets was an amendment, introduced by Judge Johnston, and adopted May 17th. The resolution, unmodified by this passage, had been passed by the church May 10th. On May 17, at the urgent request of Judge Johnston, the Church reconsidered, and allowed the passage in brackets to be added. Does this appear like "pride," "passion," and "vindictiveness," such as has been charged upon us? We yielded to an extent that caused misgiving, for the sake of peace and harmony.

The church excluded Dr. Pryor from the pulpit. Is this too strong an expression? Take one from Dr. Pryor's advocate—Judge Johnston. In his pamphlet he says, "I agreed to the resolution excluding Dr. Pryor from the Pastorate." Does Dr. C. call this an acquittal? We cannot regard it a light or unmeaning