

## Correspondence.

For the Christian Messenger.

## THE CONTROVERSY ON BAPTISM, &amp;c.

Mr. Editor,

In part II. of Mr. Davis' letter, he objects to the view I gave of "the gift of the Holy Spirit" in Act, ii. 38, and affirms that the apostle promised these convicted and enquiring Jews the power to work miracles if they repented and were baptized in the name of Jesus for the remission of sins. Mr. Davis gives no offense when he thus states his views on the matter, but I claim the liberty to differ from him, for the following reasons:

1st. These Jews ask for *pardon* and not for *power to work miracles*. Like the jailor they felt condemned and sought salvation, I cannot think that Peter instead of telling them how to be saved told them how to work miracles. This would be poor consolation to lost sinners. Bad men such as Balaam, Saul, Calpurnius, and Judas Iscariot had miraculous power.

2nd. Jesus did not send his apostles to tell lost sinners how to work miracles, but how to be saved. Peter on this occasion carried out the Lord's commission and told them how they would receive the Spirit to bear witness with their spirit that they were saved.

3rd. The gift of miracles did not come upon the people by repenting and being baptized, but, by the laying on of the apostles' hands, Acts viii. 17, 18; xix. 6. In no case did this gift immediately follow repentance and baptism. The miraculous gift came upon the apostles, Acts ii. 4 and upon the first Gentile converts (Acts x. 44) direct from heaven, but in other cases it came by the laying on of the apostles' hands. The Saviour did not promise in Mark xvi. 17, 18, that miraculous signs should follow. HIM that believeth and is baptized, but THEM that preached the Gospel, or the apostles. This power was promised to the latter but not to the former.

4th. The promise, "the gift of the Holy Spirit" was to these converted Jews—to their children and to all that were afar off, even to every one that the Lord would call (by his gospel.) Will Mr. Davis affirm that all these have the promise of a miraculous power if they are pierced to the heart and repent and are baptized in the name of Jesus for remission of sins? I have recently met a man who so affirms, but I do not think that Mr. Davis will, and still all whom the Lord calls have the same promise that they had.

5th. I see no reason to conclude that these 3000 had a miraculous power, but the very best reasons to believe they were saved, and also that all who do as they were told to do, will be saved; that they will have the spirit of God bearing witness to their salvation.

This Mr. Davis partly admits, and partly denies. He gives as the reason of his denial that it would make, "the gift of the Holy Spirit... something contingent on baptism." He cannot see how this could be without ascribing "an efficacy to baptism which does not really belong to it." Here then is his trouble, Baptism meets him in the commission going before the promise of salvation. This he thinks will never do. It here meets him going before the promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit, and that gift must be explained away by some means. It must mean a miraculous gift, and he will not deny that it means the ordinary gift too, but then it is dangerous to believe the latter, lest too much efficacy is ascribed to baptism. Thus it would puzzle any one to know what his belief in the matter is. Is it not strange that he cannot see that a *positive institution* has in itself no power nor efficacy whatever, *only what it receives from the will of him who appointed it*. Baptism of itself can have no efficacy. But if Jesus has placed it in his arrangement to save, and as one of the conditions to receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, what can a man gain by so determinately opposing it? Here I may be again charged with "resting on the terms of the commission and on expressions in the book of Acts." But I will say with Dr. Carson, "Here then I stand entrenched, and defy the ingenuity of earth and hell to drive me from my position."

I am next charged with a departure from the example of Richard Watson, and Paul and even of our Lord Jesus for treating mysteries with levity; and Mr. Davis, seems even sarcastic when speaking of my extraordinary perspicacity in seeing clearly through "all mysteries." It is my desire always to approach the mysteries of the Bible "with reverence and godly fear." But when men gather mists and contradictions around God's clearly revealed will, and succeed in keeping men in the dark where God has given light, whatever respect I may have for the men themselves, I have no reverence for their theory; but must expose both it and its evil tendency. I have said that the word *beginning* although it is the puzzle and the boast of mystics, indicates a point in time as all who reason may see, and that said point can be ascertained by the passage or its context. When the matter is spread out Mr. Davis does not deny the fact. But still some how or other I am greatly astray for denying that eternity has a beginning, or that the word *beginning* refers to eternity. He acknowledges that *beginning* in the first of John means the time God began to create, but because I said this, and that the Word was with God when he began to create the universe, and that the Word created all things, I am charged with dishonoring Christ, and finally with dishonoring both the Father and the Son, that I "dare to tamper with the vital truth that Jesus of Nazareth is verily 'the Son of the living God.'" These charges are far more serious than any previous ones. The divinity of Jesus is evidently the

rock on which he has built his church against which the gates of hades will not prevail. To deny that Jesus is the Son of the living God is to reject the only hope of a lost world. God himself at the Jordan declared this great truth. Jesus confessed it and laid down his life for it. The Holy Spirit proved it in the resurrection of Jesus. It was the grand theme of apostolic preaching, and I trust will be my hope living and dying. All who apply to me for baptism, are asked, not what emotions they have had at one time, or how much they have wept and felt at another, but they are asked if they now *believe with all their heart* on Jesus as the Christ the Son of the living God. On this confession they are baptized. Every Lord's day I meet with the Lord's people to worship Jesus as the Son of God, and to remember his death in the breaking of bread. Thus holding the divinity and work of Jesus to be the Alpha and Omega of Christianity, I hence hold it to be a most grievous and unjust charge that I dishonor Christ or tamper with the vital truth that he is the Son of the living God. But why make such a charge? I ask not for the motive that prefers it but only for the ground on which it rests. This I cannot see unless he argues that because the Word was with God when he began to create all things that his existence must begin then. If this is the conclusion, Mr. Davis is for me it is a most unreasonable one. To say that the Word was with God in the beginning of creation, does not say the Word began to exist at that beginning.—The existence of the Word like the existence of God has no beginning. Hence the word beginning is entirely excluded from such existence. This I have shown in a former letter. If I am guilty of tampering with this vital truth so is John, and so is Paul in that passage of unparalleled sublimity in the first of Colossians from the 15 to 18 verses. Will Mr. Davis withdraw a charge so criminal and so unjust? Time will tell.

Before Mr. Davis lays down his pen he represents me to be as guilty as Romanists and Puseyites, in my determination to supplant the inward and spiritual and vital religion of the New Testament, the only religion that can save souls, and substitute an outside and empty ritualistic form; and far more guilty for doing this insidiously, while they do it openly. He further states that he is under the necessity of exploring and denouncing my errors; and winds up by saying that I have used him courteously and lauds his lamblike desire still to reciprocate courtesies with me. He gives the above then as a specimen of his courteous treatment. I shall not complain of his treatment of me. If it were possible to say still harder things of me as an individual, I think I could endure it while I think of Him who bore so much for me. But it grieves me to the heart to hear the gospel of Christ so treated. It is painful to believe that many as honest souls as live on earth, who sincerely desire to be saved, are kept in the dark and taught to believe it dangerous ritualism to trust in the word of Jesus and do what he tells them. Thus looking for some great thing in themselves instead of trusting to what Jesus has done for them in his death and committing themselves with childlike confidence to his blessed hands. Why will ministers keep sinners in the dark and persuade them that it is unsafe to do what Jesus has commanded them to do. Why will they, in the face of the Lord's commission and the Holy Spirit's testimony through the apostles, insist upon their feeling that they are saved from their sins before they give themselves to Christ in his appointed way? thus keeping them in their sins and teaching them to rely on something they feel as proof of their pardon instead of the sure word of Christ that can never pass away.

But here comes up the objection of many an honest heart. "I believe that my sins were pardoned before I was baptized." Well—let us reason together on the matter. You felt happy before you were baptized no doubt. But did Jesus in his word tell you that he would save you before you were baptized. Pause and ask in what chapter or verse did Jesus say since he rose from the dead that he would save any one before he was baptized. Pardon is something that God does for the sinner through the death of his Son, when Jesus or the Holy Spirit or the apostles tell us we are saved we have divine testimony of the fact. But our feeling happy or being persuaded that we are saved is not God's testimony that it is so. On the day of Pentecost, when those who were pierced to the heart heard the apostle telling them how they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit they were glad; not because they were saved, but because they saw and believed that they could come to the name of Jesus Christ so easily and be saved, and were determined to come. They immediately did what they were told, came to the name of the Lord and enjoyed pardon. When they heard and believed they had the joy of anticipation; when they complied with all the terms they had the joy of possession—the gift of the Holy Spirit. So it is with many anxious sinners. They are troubled for their sins and perplexed because they cannot see how to be saved. But when they see that Jesus died for them and is willing to save them, and how they can come to him, and when they make up their mind to give themselves to him, the decision is made, the perplexity is gone in a great measure, and the mind has a rest which it has not before. Many are brought to regard this as God's testimony that they are saved! and it seems very hard to them that any doubt should be expressed as to their being saved before baptism. They obey the Saviour in baptism and are happy. Their mistake is locating baptism where Christ has not located it, and making their happy feelings instead of the words of Jesus the testimony of their pardon. They felt happy and were baptized. Jesus said, He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved. He puts baptism before salvation, they put it after. Those who thus make their happy feelings the

testimony of their pardon often say they are afraid they never were saved at all. Again they feel pretty sure they have been saved, that is when they are in a good frame of mind they have little doubt that they have been saved. But when gloom envelopes the mind they are afraid they have not been saved at all. Thus though no one else doubts their christianity, and they truly love God, yet through not understanding clearly the matter, they are deprived of much of that constant peace and assurance which flow to the christian from an intelligent conformity to the will of God.

The sinner who is convinced of his sins and believes and understands the apostles' doctrine looks to Jesus for every thing. He sees that Jesus is the Son of the living God, that he died for his sins, and he hears him say in his word that he came to call sinners to repentance. He reads his last commission, in which Jesus tells him how he will save every sinner that comes to him. He believes what Jesus says and does it. His own spirit tells him he does this as a lost sinner having no merit in himself, but humbly trusting all on the merits of Jesus, and the Holy Spirit of God bears witness along with his spirit that this is right and that he is born of God. This man feels his short comings and daily prays and strives for more conformity to the divine mind. But he never doubts that he was saved. He has the word of the Lord Jesus always telling him that he was saved and he can turn and read that word not only to himself but can give it to every one that asks him as a reason of the hope that is in him with meekness and fear. While therefore, he can with humble confidence, rejoice at all times that God has for Christ forgiven him his past sins, he can feel encouraged to come daily to the throne of grace to obtain mercy for his daily short comings and find grace to help in time of need.

My heart's desire and prayer to God is that the people may candidly and prayerfully examine these things by the word of God, and act according to that word which shall judge us all in the last day.

Fraternally yours,

D. CRAWFORD,

New Glasgow P. E. I. August 27th 1869.

For the Christian Messenger.

## ITEMS FROM MAINE, U.S.

Mr. Editor,—

Since I last penned a few items of news from this region down East, I have been busy in attending public meetings, besides performing pastoral labour.

About three weeks ago, exercises of Colby University took place before an unusually large audience. There were two attractions this season, besides the ordinary ones, one was the orator—W. R. Alger of Boston. The choice of this gentleman of the Unitarian Church had excited some controversy in the public journals. It was regarded as a departure from Baptist usages. But he gave satisfaction as to the theme he presented—viz. Patriotism; which he treated in a very graceful manner. The Poem on Shoddy was by Rev. T. Brown, of Mass, there were some hits which some did not relish. The other attraction was the dedication of the beautiful Memorial Hall—erected to the memory of the Students who headed the nation's call for soldiers and who fell in battle. Rev. Dr. Bosworth, formerly of this state but now of Mass, delivered an able oration on the War and Education. The Prayer of Dedication was offered by Rev. A. K. P. Small, of Portland. This Hall contains a Chapel and memorial Hall. In a fine tower there is room for 30,000 volumes for the Library. There are other rooms, the whole structure elicited great praise from competent judges. The entire cost of the Building had been raised being \$39,000. Gardner Colby Esq., the munificent patron of the university gives \$500 a year for ten years to be devoted to the purchase of books for the Library, eleven Students graduated; some of whom will enter upon a course of study for the ministry. Quite a large number of ministers and friends were present.

Also the 1st Baptist Church has dedicated its beautiful house of worship costing \$75,000. The indefatigable pastor preached a very appropriate sermon on the occasion. Your correspondent had the pleasure of preaching in the building and found it excellently adapted for the voice, a magnificent organ in the rear of the minister sends out its full tone of melody. The Free Street Church, Portland, have made very desirable alterations in their Church and have entered it for worship.

The Cumberland Association held its 58th Anniversary at Harpswell on Aug. 24—26. This church is on a neck of land that runs about 15 miles out into the sea. It is a charming spot—a goodly member of delegates assembled and the writer preached the Associational sermon on The Importance of faith in professing the religion of Jesus. The Doctrinal Sermon was preached by Rev. A. K. P. Small, on The soul's urgency in its own conversion. It was much like I. Other sermons were preached by Rev. Dr. Mason of Mass., J. Leland of Topsham, and Dr. Ricker,

Speeches were made on different subjects. The state of religion in the Churches, has not been very flourishing during the year—only about 30 baptisms reported. Ministers have migrated and an unusual number of deaths of much respected members have occurred. Seasons of refreshing were enjoyed at the early morning prayer meetings, and during the devotional exercises of the Association.

In Company with a Ministerial brother I travelled by cars to a place called Readfield, near by is the Ladies Seminary under the auspices of the Methodist Episcopal Church—it is a fine large brick building and is well patronised. We rode by stage through some pleasant scenery, and found ourselves deposited at the head of a fine sheet of water called a pond but large enough to be called a lake. The Union Meeting house stands on the upland from which one can have an excellent view of the surrounding country—We met with a warm welcome found that they organized the Association and had an excellent sermon preached by Rev. W. T. Sargent on the Prodigals return. At the earnest request of friends, your correspondent preached the Associational sermon to a church well filled—subject "Earnest work for the cause of Christ."

Next day Wednesday, two sermons were preached, very good and appropriate. Speeches were made in behalf of the Home Missions—Baptist Education Society and Foreign Missions. In the evening a very interesting meeting was held, when the Sabbath School children favoured us with some sweet songs that stirred our souls. The following subjects elicited some stirring addresses: The need of preparation on the part of teachers for their work; The encouraging aspects of the little churches in the Association; Personal responsibility; What can be done to devote the standard of piety among us? On Thursday morning closed the fourteenth anniversary of this venerable Association. This Association is greatly in need of several able pastors as we have important churches now without them, several pastors having been called to larger churches in Mass., and one to Rhode Island. The pastor of the church at Mount Vernon is doing a good work and is very much beloved. He went from Colby University to teach during a vacation and occasionally preached, and God blessed his labour which resulted in a call to the pastorate.

A MINISTER.

For the Christian Messenger.

## IN MEMORIAM.

WALTER THOMAS,

of Clementsport, Annapolis Co., died at his residence on the 23rd inst., in the 74th year of his age.

In the early part of his life he united with the Wesleyan Methodist society, of which he remained an active and worthy member till his removal by death. In the community where he resided as well as in other places where he occasionally travelled, he was known as a pious, active, and warm-hearted man. In the prayer meeting, in the social circle, and wherever he might be, his theme was the wonders of redemption through Jesus Christ.

His christian sympathies and labours were by no means confined to the denomination to which he belonged. To the humble christian of whatever name he was ready to extend the hand of fellowship, and to throw the weight of his influence into the scale of religion.

In the providence of God it was my painful privilege to witness my father's last hours on earth, and aside from those feelings of filial affection entertained for him, I may be permitted to say that during the last few days of his life, although his sufferings were very severe, his faith was unwavering, and his joy was the joy of triumph. He could say in the language of the apostle, "O death where is thy sting? O grave where is thy victory?" His departure though at an advanced age, is lamented by the community where he lived, and by a large circle of relatives and friends. May his exemplary life and happy death be the means of leading many to embrace the Saviour, and devote themselves to his service, is my humble prayer.

JOSEPH THOMAS.

MRS. HELEN STONACH,

Wife of Mr. Major Stonach, of Melvern Square Wilmot, professed faith in Christ and united with a Baptist Church many years ago. She was enabled by grace divine to adorn her profession to the close of life. Her uniform deportment was that of a quiet, prudent, and amiable woman.

Sister S. was called to suffer distressing illness, especially by dropsy, about four years. During nearly the whole of the last year her sight entirely failed. Her accumulated afflictions were endured with Christian fortitude and exemplary patience. The visits of her pastor were constantly received with pleasure and gratitude. Steadfast reliance on her beloved Saviour, with a cheering hope of dwelling with Him, sustained her.