

# The Christian Messenger.

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## Circular Letter.

### STRIVING TOGETHER FOR THE FAITH.

THE CIRCULAR LETTER OF THE NOVA SCOTIA CENTRAL BAPTIST ASSOCIATION TO THE MEMBERS OF THE CHURCHES OF WHICH IT IS COMPOSED.

Published by request of the Association.

Beloved Brethren,—

After much anxiety and prayerful consideration, coupled with a strong desire to serve you in the spirit of christian meekness, we present for your consideration a few thoughts upon the important duty of *striving together for the faith of the Gospel*. As the old serpent entered the sacred enclosure where God placed the happy couple he had made in his own image, and drew them into the snare of disobedience, bringing down upon them the rod of God's displeasure, under which all their posterity have been called to pass, so does he still go about seeking whom he may devour, boldly practising his enchantments even in the House of God. If it be not so, what is the meaning of all the ritualistic display of the present time? the outward trappings and adornings substituted for the lowly and spiritual worship of God, who is a Spirit, and seeketh such to worship him as worship him in spirit and in truth? Let us not be deceived, saith the Apostle Paul, "God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth that shall also reap, for he that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."

The tempter bred discontent in the mind of the woman by saying unto her concerning the forbidden fruit, "God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof then your eyes shall be opened and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." It we mistake not the signs of the times he is still playing at his old game, striving hard to turn away the servants of Christ from the path of obedience by the promise of exaltation. In too many cases succeeding in his work of destruction; drawing men away from the feet of Christ to walk in a vain show. Alas, alas, for poor weak man, what a mighty current of evil influences is continually coming down upon him, threatening to overwhelm and destroy him soul and body.

Infidelity is stalking through the earth, trampling beneath its feet the precious name of Jesus. Romanism, with its pomp and show, its boast of infallibility, is stoutly contending for the ascendancy. Spiritualism is pouring its contempt upon all who abide by the lively oracles of God. Universalism comes shutting down the gates of perdition, and opening the portals of Heaven alike to the servants of God and the servants of Satan. While worldly conformity is everywhere exerting its influence among christians aiming at the destruction of all vital godliness. If these statements are truthful, and we feel assured that they are, ought not the friends of humanity to be on the alert, *striving together for the faith of the Gospel?*

If we turn our eyes to the word of God it speaks to us in plain and positive language, it lays upon us its holy commandments, leaving no hope of salvation, for ourselves or others, but in obedience to the Divine Will, by the full and faithful presentation of the Gospel to our fellow men.

Faithfulness to God, in this respect, involves the necessity of a clear understanding of the plan of salvation laid down in the Bible. It is useless for us to attempt to teach others until we have been taught ourselves, therefore a careful and prayerful study of God's word is the indispensable duty of all who would be lights in the world, to aid their fellow men in finding the way to happiness. From this divine armory Paul selected weapons of his warfare, which he found to be mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds. It was Martin Luther's skill in the use of the sword of the Spirit that gave him such power against Popery, and success in serving the cause of truth. Let us therefore, brethren, seek to have the words of Bible-truth deeply graven on the tablets of our memory, that when or wherever called upon to act in its defence, we may be found ready to go forth with bow in hand and our arrows hanging at the girdle of truth.

It is also important, in laboring for the advancement of truth, that we should have our minds deeply impressed with a sense of its value. It is the only thing upon which the soul of man can lean for support in its longing for immortality.

"E'en here, we taste the bliss  
Of an eternal home."

Nor is this all. When we contemplate the change wrought in the moral condition of mankind wherever the gospel has been heartily received and obeyed, we are astonished that it should have one enemy in the civilized world. The wilderness and the solitary place have been made glad by it, and the desert to bud and blossom as the rose. Its attendants praise it; it makes the poor man rich in faith pouring in a flood of light upon the midnight darkness of the human understanding, chasing away the night of ignorance and superstition, and elevating man to the worship of the living God. What shall we say, brethren, of the men who, if they had the power, would banish this Gospel from the earth: That they are the friends of their fellow men? We dare not, for they stand opposed to the foundation of all true happiness. Nor do we think those less censurable who give to the world a mutilated Gospel cumbered with the inventions of men. The early Church was composed of baptized believers. Against all others the doors of the Church were carefully guarded.

When the Eunuch asked for baptism, Philip demanded faith of him as a pre-requisite. Nor can it be shown that the New Testament admits of any departure from this example. From whence then comes the practice of infant baptism? Have we, in the Gospel, a set of rules to be modified at our convenience to suit the various tastes and conditions of mankind? If so, the Pope is the right man in the right place. If not, the practice of administering Church ordinances to persons without their own consent, stands opposed to the Gospel.

The fear of offending those who favor the practice we refer to, or any other not having the sanction of the Bible, should not be allowed to hinder us from a faithful declaration of God's truth.

While we esteem it no part of our duty to offend our neighbors, we must be careful not to offend God by keeping back his word to please men.

When an ambassador is sent from one court to another, is the delivery of the message given him left to his own option? Does he not hold himself accountable to the power by which he has been appointed to act? Will not that power punish any delinquency on the part of its servant? If therefore the safety of a State ambassador depends upon due attention to the restrictions laid upon him by an earthly power, may we not justly conclude that there is no safety for us outside the path of obedience to the will of him whose power sustains the vast universe, and before whose judgment seat all men must stand and give an account of their stewardship. If as yet we have not attained to a clear understanding of the Will of God concerning us here as christians, let us at once, by the study of the Bible and prayer, labor to get our minds right in this matter that we may not run as uncertainly or fight as those who beat the air.

If in the discharge of our duty in the sight of God men are displeased with us, let us not be cast down. The world hated our Master, and the more closely we resemble him the more determined will be its opposition to us. The approving smile of our Saviour leaves no room in our hearts to covet the friendship of the world, a friendship as fickle as the shifting wind.—To-day it will heap its honors upon us, and to-morrow trample us under its feet in its rush to place the crown upon some new favorite. Not so the friendship of heaven. That is as lasting as eternity. Its value remains to be known fully by the enjoyment of those pleasures which are at the right hand of God for evermore by all the faithful in Christ Jesus, when they enter the place prepared for them by their exalted Head. Like faithful Abraham, who was called the friend of God, let us hold ourselves in readiness to obey the voice of the Almighty, speaking to us in his word that we may secure for ourselves the rich rewards of grace to be bestowed at the coming of Christ.

Let us therefore, as the Lord directs, have our loins girded about, and our lights burning, and be in waiting for our Lord, that when he comes we may be ready to meet him with joy.

For the Christian Messenger.

### HOME MISSIONS.

Dear Editor,—

I was very much surprised to see in the last *Christian Messenger* a letter on Home Missions, from the pen of Mr. Barss, which was copied from the *Christian Visitor*. Why he inserted that letter in the *Visitor* is quite evident. But why it should appear in the *Messenger* is not so apparent, unless he wished to stir up strife and prevent the progress of our work. But as his letter has appeared you will be kind enough to insert the reply to it which I have sent to the *Christian Visitor*. That reply is as follows:—

For the Christian Visitor.

### HOME MISSIONS.

Dear Editor,—

In the *Visitor* of July 21st, I noticed a very remarkable production on Home Missions, from the pen of J. W. Barss, Esq., of Wolfville. The statements made in that letter are so much at variance with the facts in the case that I feel it my duty to offer a few words in reply. The letter, when analyzed, will be found to contain *opinions, statements and questions*. The *opinions* are in the following order:—

1. "My own opinion is that the Home Mission work, being a local one, can be better carried forward by local agencies." The opinions of Mr. Barss, or of any other man, if opposed by all the facts in the case, are as worthless as the bubble on the breaker. The facts are these:—Until within a few years there were three Home Missions Societies in Nova Scotia. One Society had charge of the ground occupied by the Central and Eastern Association. Another directed the English Missionary operations of the Western Association. The third had charge of the French Mission. The plan of the two former organizations was to send students or others to destitute churches and mission stations for a few weeks. The remainder of the year they would be left unsupplied. No important points were seized and held by those societies, and there was consequently but little permanent gain to the Denomination. As for the French Mission, it was invariably in debt. The missionary was discouraged. When the mission needed his services he was compelled by force of circumstances to leave his field to collect his own salary among the churches. This state of things was considered unendurable. The brethren throughout the Province desired something better. And in June, 1872, the N. S. Baptist Home Missionary Union was formed. This society embraced the other three.

2. "In my opinion, before many years, the churches will, in Nova Scotia, desire a change, and instead of one Board in a distant locality, will seek for four or five divisions." When the churches in Nova Scotia become dead, and fossilized all through, such a change may be expected. If there is anything in the past history of the three Home Mission organizations that would make four or five desirable, I should like to be pointed to it. Or if there is anything connected with our Board, except its too great success for some persons, that would make such a change sought for, I should be pleased to know what it is.

3. "In my opinion," the union of P. E. Island with us in Home Mission, "was a step backward." This opinion is opposed by facts, and is therefore worthless. There is nothing but some preconceived notion to support it. Its erroneousness will be seen before I have finished this letter.

4. "A few churches in any locality can better perform missionary work with simplicity, economy, and greater efficiency, in my humble opinion, than can be done by large organizations."

This opinion bears so much absurdity on its face that it needs no refutation. One illustration, however, may be used; the Island of Cape Breton has 13 Baptist Churches, only one of those churches is able to support a pastor. And yet we are told that "a few churches in any locality" can do missionary work better than large organizations. Can anything be more absurd?

### STATEMENTS.

1. "One Board can best direct the operations of the Foreign Mission, but 'not so the domestic Missionary work.'" And wherefore? "The Foreign Mission work is a distant one," says Mr. Barss. But this same writer tells us that because P. E. Island has now to appeal to a "Board 300 miles distant, she has taken a step backward" in not keeping her own local board. Thus, in Mr. Barss's view, distance in one case makes one Board desirable. Distance in the other cases renders necessary four or five Boards. It seems to me there is lameness about such logic as this. And so in regard to "magnitude." The Foreign Missionary work is one of "great magnitude," therefore one Board is best to direct its operations. The Home Missionary work of less "magnitude" requires four or five divisions. Such logic as this I fail to appreciate.

2. "We avoid the risk of handing over the responsibility devolving on the Churches to a small body in a great measure beyond control or responsibility."

3. "Baptist Churches are constituted to do their own work, as much as possible, locally, and have a jealous care of handing over to Committees, Councils, or Boards, what they can do better without their aid."

If in these two statements Mr. Barss refers to our Board, his language is unaccountable. He knows, or ought to know, that the Nova Scotia Home Missionary Union is composed of three delegates from each Baptist Church, the President of Acadia College, the Principal of the Theological Department, the Principal of Horton Academy, and all the ordained ministers in the Province. A meeting of this society is held every year. To it our Board is responsible, and by it we are controlled. This society appoints and locates its Executive Board annually. How then are we beyond responsibility or control? With reference to Baptist Churches being constituted to do their own work and able to do it better than others, one remark must suffice. There are dozens, if not scores, of Baptist Churches in Nova Scotia that are not able to support the cause of God among them. One grand object of the Union is to assist those feeble Churches. And yet we are told that they can do their own work better than others can for them.

4. "That the old Board were rather conservative is a fact that is about as evident as that the new one is diffusive in its operations." The records of the old Board show conclusively enough that they were rather conservative. Does the history of the new Board show that our operations have been too diffusive? We aim to supply feeble Churches with ministers, to assist other Churches to obtain suitable pastors, to seize important missionary stations and hold them, and to place before our denomination in Nova Scotia, P. E. Island, and Newfoundland, a pure Baptist literature. If this is being too diffusive we glory in our diffusiveness. Our success in the past three years encourages us to extend our operations still more. "But," says Mr. Barss, "some of us fail to see anything done that could not have been done by the old Boards." What could have been done and what was done are different things. I wonder if "some of us fail to see" a vast amount of work done by the new Board that was not done by the old one.

5. The old Board, "after 23 years labor, left a respectable sum in their treasuries." The Board, of which Mr. Barss was a member, had not a dollar in their treasury when we took charge of their work. There were two debenture bonds bearing interest, but of available funds there was not one cent. And further, our Board had to pay \$156.25 debts contracted by the Board to which Mr. Barss belonged.

6. The new Board, "after two years' work, is already deeply in debt with an exhausted exchequer." On the 26th of June last, Mr. Barss, as Chairman of a Committee appointed to examine our Treasurer's report, writes as follows:—"They"—that is, the committee of which Mr. Barss was chairman,—"regret that they had no method of arriving at the true state of the Board's financial standing." But a few days after this he writes to the *Visitor* that the Board is deeply in debt. I should like to know where he got his new revelation. The fact is this: When the anniversary of the Union was held at Halifax, there were only two comparatively small bills lying unpaid, and we had nearly \$500 in the treasury. But even if we had been deeply in debt we should not have cause to blush. Had our Board, or any Board, appointed for a similar purpose, allowed a large sum to remain in hand after the year's expenditure, we should consider it a sin. With feeble Churches and destitute fields calling for aid, we feel it our duty to expend every dollar that we receive. We intend to get all we can, spend all we get, and trust the Lord for more. We greatly prefer to point to work done and souls saved, than to a large sum of money in our treasury.

7. "At Yarmouth our Board is located, and the work of 185 Churches thrown upon it, and its members scattered miles apart, commit the work to its Secretary, and he, with a large Church to preside over and medical duties to perform, still has mainly to work out the whole scheme and direct its scattered operations." Such language is almost inexcusable. The members of our Board are 13 in number, seven of whom form a quorum. No less than eight of the whole number live in town and can be called together at an hour's notice. Our Board meetings are held once, twice, or three times a month. Each meeting usually occupies a whole day. The Secretary has indeed enough work to do, but he repudiates the idea that he does all the work of the Board. His medical duties are confined to his own family and a few intimate friends and therefore need not be taken into account. "The work of a distant Board" does not fall "into the hands of one man." The members of the Board are invariably called together when any important business is to be transacted.

### QUESTIONS.

1. Why was the Nova Scotia Association divided into four parts? Mr. Barss says it was that Home Mission work "might be better carried forward." Was it not because the Association had become so large as to be a burden in each community in which it was held? Was it not because many of the ministers and delegates found it inconvenient and expensive to travel so far, especially as they had also to attend the Convention?

2. "Has the cause suffered by the division?" In answer to this