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Circular Letter.

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OUR CHILDREN FOR CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH.

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

Dear Brethren,—

It is with feelings of devout gratitude to our Heavenly Father that we address you on the present occasion. Notwithstanding the imperfections of our services, we have been spared another year to assemble at our Associational Meeting.

Relying upon your candour and good will, we offer a word of exhortation touching the training of the rising generation, in the anticipation that, by the blessing of God, they may become members of our churches. With some of us it seems but a short time since, with child-like curiosity, we heard our parents and their friends discussing the affairs of the church with which they were connected. Now, by the grace of God, we ourselves have been called to enjoy the privilege of church membership; but time will soon transfer us to the church triumphant, and our places here on earth will be occupied by the children of the present day. It is the devout wish of every christian parent to remain this side the river of death until he has welcomed every member of his family to the fellowship of the church; and we all most earnestly pray that when we rest from our labours we may leave behind us those who will walk more closely to Jesus, and bring more honour to his name than we have done.

It has often been said that "the Sabbath School is a nursery to the church," and teachers cannot too earnestly ponder the truth contained in the illustration. Many zealous christians owe much of their power of usefulness to the training of the Sunday School; but the advantages of the christian parent far transcend those of the Sabbath School teacher. This will appear if we consider the adaptation of domestic discipline to serve the interests of the Church of God.

As Baptists we cannot believe that the circumstance of a child's birth into a christian family at all entitles him to church membership; but we may hope that, by a proper use of the means of instruction which God has placed in our hands, in dependence upon the work of the Holy Spirit, our children, even in early life, may become in the true sense of the words members of Christ, children of God, and inheritors of the Kingdom of Heaven. It will, therefore, be our wisdom to train them so that they may become honourable and useful christians, as well as valuable members of society.

The early buds of the infant mind, under the influence of the smiles of the parent, soon unfold into the sweet blossom of love. Love in every child, if it were not blighted by evil influences, would lead to a fruitful life; and, by the generating power of the Spirit of God, enable him to enjoy companionship with Christ in the service and interests of His church. Let us bear in mind that the Divine Spirit works by instrumentality. While pious parents are developing the affection of their children, and directing it to proper objects of esteem, they may be training those young hearts for the exercise of that love which is so indispensable in the christian character. Love is the sum of the divine attributes, for "God is love," and perfect love lifts man into companionship with his Maker. Love is the substance of the joys of heaven; and all the heaven experienced here on earth may be expressed in this one word, love; but, when love is absent, there can be nothing but unhappiness, especially among professors of religion. It is to be feared that our churches are more deficient in this matter than in any other. The adversary has not altogether quenched the sparks; and in some hearts the sacred flame burns purely; but, after all, there is a sad lack of the disposition to love one another fervently and constantly. A happier state of things will hereafter be enjoyed if those who have the care of the rising generation, in dependence upon the Holy Spirit, do all they can to cultivate a disposition of heart necessary to exert this heavenly influence. If you would have your children useful and happy, O think much of the power that throbs in their young hearts. Help them to control it and direct it, first to every member of the family, then, expanding according to its nature, let their love embrace your relatives, your country, and mankind of every clime. In dependence upon the promises of God's Word, the help of His Spirit, and His converting grace, bring up your children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Sow the seeds of Divine Truth in their hearts, then train their minds in the love of the Bible, the Sabbath, the sanctuary, God's servants, and all his people.

Many other of the qualifications of christian fellowship may be impressed upon the minds of children. We have given more prominence to love, because it actuates all the rest.

When Jesus gave the invitation to sinners to come to him for rest he said, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me." This implies that christianity consists very much in subjection to Christ. The prophet Jeremiah began his religious career when very young, and, after a long life of hard service amid much suffering, he leaves us the testimony that it "is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth." Christian parents have great power to bring their children under subjection; and this work is as necessary as it is difficult. Ever since Adam broke loose from the easy restraint of the first command, man has inherited the disposition to do as he likes at all consequences, and in spite of every law, human or divine. This disposition, growing up with an individual, will disturb the peace of all by whom he is surrounded; and it will be most destructive to his own happiness and comfort, inasmuch as there are a thousand influences at work, many of which will crush the spirit which has not learned submission. All parents are responsible for the exercise of the power which God has given them to control their children; and while they are faithfully discharging this obligation in the fear of God, and in hope of His mercy, they may be forming an inclination of mind which will render it delightful to submit to the ordinances and requirements of the church of Christ.

Submission to proper authority may go hand in hand with true manliness, in the family, in the church, and in the world at large.

Here we come to another essential of the christian character, manliness; reminding us of the admonition of the great Apostle, "Stand fast in the faith; quit ye like men, be strong." We are all acquainted with the interest the parent takes in the infant, when, for the first time, it is able to stand alone. There is a far more important period than this. It is when the young man can stand alone in his own moral strength, through the training he has received and the grace of God. We can conceive no higher ambition in a parent than to send young men and women into the world who can thus stand alone. The future prosperity of our Baptist churches will depend instrumentally upon our having men and women who can stand firmly in the faith and order of our common cause. Where all alike have a voice and a vote in all matters of decision we must have men who can do right and fear not, and who value their conscience above rubies. Where so much depends on individual effort we need men who can labour, though none applaud, and proceed in their christian course, though all the world oppose. Thank God, we have many such in our churches to-day; and by their example and efforts to train the young to exercise the same noble qualities our churches will grow stronger and stronger.

The limits of this letter will permit us to direct attention only to one other matter in connection with our subject. Let this be christian service. We cannot begin too soon to impress upon the minds of the young that it is their duty to do something for God. Under the direction of the christian parent a child soon catches the idea that he can do something, he soon finds something to do, and takes great pleasure in doing it. It is true that this activity has sometimes disappointed the highest expectation; but, frequently, as in the case of Samuel, it has led to a useful life. In the various engagements and enterprises of religion there will be found much to be done suiting the capacity of children. Both their activity and their benevolence may be kept in exercise until the Holy Spirit supplies the motive and the power of a useful christian life.

In conclusion, we do not lose sight of the fact that our children must be converted by Divine grace before they can serve God aright, or become members of our churches. On the other hand we must be careful that we do not abuse this truth by neglecting our duty as though God wrought without instrumentality. Habits may be formed, principles may be implanted, and seeds of truth sown in the minds of children before they experience a change of heart. We cannot tell how soon God may own and bless our efforts by the work of conversion; but, if the change does not take place until adult age, the convert who has received a christian training becomes a tower of strength to the church with which he becomes connected.

Regarding the principles which underlie our system we cannot but think that the denomination to which we belong should exert an immense influence against error, infidelity, and all the evil which surrounds us on every side. Doubtless our power is great, but let us not be satisfied. There is a loud call for renewed and strenuous efforts on the part of every one of us to do all we can for the present and future welfare of our churches, that like an army compact and well disciplined, and moving at the command of the Captain of our Salvation, we may become mighty through God to the pulling down the strongholds of sin.

FOREIGN MISSIONS.

For the Christian Messenger.

To the Women's Missionary Aid Societies.

My Dear Sisters,—

Do you ever think that I have no especial interest in you or your home work? I have sometimes feared you might, or that I desired you to have none in me, as I have never written directly to you since leaving home, except with my sisters here, in that joint letter some time since; but I can assure you such is not the case.

I do feel a deep interest in your meetings and plans, in your encouragements and discouragements, and pray that in all things you may be guided by Infinite Wisdom; and I do want you to feel that I desire and need your sympathy and prayers in what I may undertake here for the Master.

The past year has been to me, one of trial and anxiety, but also one of special mercies from my Heavenly Parent, and often when the darkness seemed the thickest around me, I have seen his hand so plainly, stretched out to help me, that I could not doubt his love, or that this was one of the "all things" that was working for my good. And now that it is past, and we are again united as a family, with good prospects of remaining here years, and working for Him who died for us, I feel that I cannot praise His name sufficiently, or devote too much of my time to His service.

As you are perhaps aware, we have not yet been able to secure land, so as to build in the town, to which our hearts have turned for some time past, and so we are still in Bimil, waiting till the hot season is over, then if God will, we hope to go to our own field of labour, as soon as we can get up a temporary house, in which we can live, while commencing our permanent work and building more suitable mission premises. We have had need of great patience while waiting thus, and still will need it; but we are getting the language and this must be mastered before much efficient missionary work can be done.

I have felt grieved ever since returning to Bimil that I could not see any work which it seemed worth while to commence, for the short time we would be here, and often have I asked the Lord if there was anything I could do, besides continuing my Eurasian Bible class, that He would shew it to me; and I believe He did at last. Though we are too far from town to go there to do work, there are many small villages around us within a radius of half a mile, and to these my thoughts were directed and for the last few weeks I have been visiting these, when the sun gets low enough in the afternoons not to threaten sunstroke.

I have been reading the precious Word of Life, to as many women and children as I could collect, having taken along with me a christian young woman of my Bible class to be mouth for me in

explaining it, and then left the result with Him who has said "My Word shall not return unto me void."

I had thought it would be of little use to get up a school while here, especially as I was anxious to spend all the time possible in study, but since visiting these villages I have seen so many children growing up with no one to care for their souls, that I have determined to gather all I can on our verandah, and make it my special business to implant in their minds some knowledge of the God who made them, and of His Son who died for them. In the short time I shall have them I will also try to give them a start in reading &c. but cannot hope to do much. I have only succeeded in getting twelve yet, but this is a beginning and I hope for more. Perhaps it would not be uninteresting to my sisters to mention a few things I have heard and seen and experienced, in these visits to the villages.

I will be glad to do so, though there is much to discourage and little to encourage, if in this way I can make you realize as I have done, that nothing but the Spirit's power can reach these perishing sisters of yours and mine in the East; and stir up your hearts to pray more earnestly for that power to accompany our weak efforts (O how weak they do seem to us) to teach them the only way of salvation.

In these villages are 10, 20, 40 or 50 mud huts with leaf roofs, huddled together without any order, the backs of some being towards the fronts of others, &c., with no streets, but room left to walk around among them. Some are caste villages, others pariah, for these latter are not allowed to live in the same village with the others.

We are never asked to go into a house, and, indeed, we do not wish to unless we might do good; for the roofs come so low down you have to stoop to look in, and they are so badly ventilated that the air is very impure, so we walk around among the houses and talk to such women as are outside, and most of them are, tell them our errand, and ask them to come with us till we find the largest open space; there we sit down on our chair in the shade of some hut, and, if we have forgotten to take one, an old cot is brought out for our seat, as they have no chairs in the villages. If we can induce the women to sit down on the ground around us we may keep them till we get through, but sometimes they have so much talking of their own to do, or the many babies are particularly ill-natured, and every person must do her share of the scolding, so we and our message of eternal life receive but little attention.

We have seldom had fewer than 20 and sometimes over 30 to commence with, but sometimes the women are having a quarrel when we go, and the finishing up of that is much more interesting to them than anything we have to say. Most always some of the men are at home, and these sometimes ask foolish questions and oppose everything we say, which rather pleases the women than otherwise, and sometimes one of their own number will commence to oppose and scoff at us and our teachings, and thus the time passes, and when we come away it is with sad, sad hearts.

When we are telling them of the love of God they will say, "Yes, he loves you and gives you everything you want, but he don't love us, or he would not let us starve as we are doing. We keep crying to him Davoordoo, Davoordoo, (God), but he won't give us any rice. You have plenty of time to worship him, but we have to work so hard that we have no time, and we are so ignorant we cannot understand about him." Then as a finale one will say, "We don't know where we are going when we die, and so it is no use to read or talk to us."

Then, in trying to induce them to send their children to school they will say, "The children have to dig grass to sell, or gather greens for curry, or wash clothes, or watch the herds, and what is the use of their learning to read?" and the caste people will object, for fear they will do something to break caste, or that you will have a pariah in school. A Pariah! you feel like exclaiming, who can be lower than you are yourselves? For the children of these low caste people as well as the pariahs, are naked, filthy, ignorant, often covered with vermin and itch or other sores and to distinguish between them is an impossibility; but such is their prejudice and slavery, that in one village, they refused the last time I went to see them, after promising the previous time to send their children, because we had no caste servant on the place and the children might drink water that a pariah might have brought, and so break their caste.

Another village refused saying, "You will teach the children to be christians and that would break caste." I induced those to come that I have now, by promising that they should eat or drink nothing, while at school, that I would only keep them two hours a day, so they could do all the work that was required of them the rest of the day, and that I would give them a cloth (their dress) or some raw rice to carry home as soon as they learned their letters.

But I must not make it all dark, for sometimes we return home quite encouraged in our work, for the women or men who were present have listened well, have answered our questions well, and seemed to understand the Scripture lesson for the day, and we hope good seed has been sown in good ground. One day a poor old grey-headed man sat near us, and we tried to get him to understand the way to be saved, as the time was evidently short for him. He listened attentively, and then sat thinking while we talked to the others, and just before coming away he asked, "Believe on Jesus, did you say?"

Another sick man seemed to receive our message well, saying he thought a great deal of God when he was left alone, the others having gone out to work; and one day we found a fine-looking old lady, who treated us so well, and answered our questions so intelligently, that we hoped she was not far from the kingdom, but we have to leave them all with the Lord. Some who seem very attentive one day, are the most careless and indifferent the next, so it is not wise to be much elated, and it is not trusting in the Lord enough to be much cast down.

One day two men followed us most of the way home, asking a question now and again. At last one of them said, "Ummah, how much pay do you get for visiting our villages, and teaching our children?" I replied that I received just the same pay in money as if I went to bed and slept, (a favorite pastime of theirs); but I presume he did not believe me, for they cannot understand an unselfish motive in working for others.

These poor people are so ignorant of everything spiritual, and so