

Circular Letter.

THE DUTIES AND CLAIMS OF OUR DESTITUTE AND WEAK CHURCHES.

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

Dear Brethren,—

We propose to address you upon the subject of the duties and claims of our destitute and weak churches. Our object in presenting you with a few thoughts relative thereto is that we may give serious attention to some of the lamentable evils which tend to cause weakness where there should be strength, and division where union is essential to prosperity, and devise such remedies as we may recommend to the prayerful and serious consideration of all who desire the prosperity of the churches and the consequent advancement of the cause of God.

Prompted by this feeling, we shall attempt to define what we mean by a strong church and what by a weak one. By a strong church, we mean one that is able and willing to meet its local financial liabilities, sustain its local religious interests, give a competent salary to its pastor, and contribute liberally to the benevolent objects of the denomination. But of those who do this, we can find, according to the Minutes of the last Association, but three churches within its bounds, viz., Amherst, Truro, and North Sydney. Thus, out of sixty-four churches, which comprise this Association, there are but three strong churches. We shall therefore find it necessary to bring under this head those that agree to unite together for the purpose of supporting a pastor, and are thus enabled to enjoy regularly the preaching of the Word and the ordinances of the Gospel.

If there are but a few Baptists in any community, let them make themselves known to each other, and to the world, meet together for mutual comfort and edification. If they have no meeting-house, let them meet together from house to house on the Sabbath, and as frequently during the week as circumstances will permit. Let them encourage visits from ministers of the denomination to which they belong, and even though they may not be able to give full pecuniary remuneration for such services they will nevertheless be cheerfully rendered to those who show that they love the truth and are prepared to defend it.

The weak and destitute churches have an important relationship to each other. Hence their second duty is as plain as the first. They should help each other. In order to do this they should associate with one or more, that they may be able to sustain the preaching of the Word and the ordinances of the Gospel, and by all means, as far as practicable, let this union be composed of churches contiguous to each other. Very much is lost to us as a denomination for the want of proper grouping of our smaller and feeble churches. From the conduct of some it would appear as though in this matter, "Distance lends enchantment to the view," and seems to furnish an argument of affiliation, as they stretch out their arms over the nearest in order to grasp those that are more remote. Is this right? Would it be regarded as a wise policy for farmers or business men to pursue? Shall man regard his fellow, who is far removed from him, to the detriment or neglect of his nearest neighbour? Shall Amherst and Onslow, or Advocate and Wallace unite to form an Agricultural Society as though there were no farming districts

intervening? No one ever heard of such a thing. Truly, in these matters, "The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light." We fear that our churches are drifting into a policy of separation and isolation. There is an evident want of order and harmony. Churches that should be one in their work for God become separated; the stronger provide for themselves, the weaker are unable to do so, and hence, according to the law of nature, but in contradiction to the law of grace, go to the wall. They yield to discouragement, cease effort, and die. "Brethren these things ought not so to be." For such a state of things ministers may be to blame; but then again they may not; who shall judge? They are often put to their wits end to know how to provide for their families. Churches that employ a pastor disagree, one wishes for a change, the other is satisfied, and retains his services; and the poor man goes elsewhere to seek a field in the place of the one he has lost. And what is the result to the church which thus, by its own act, becomes pastorless? If there is no other church in the neighbourhood that is able and willing to unite therewith, it will probably be some time without an under-shepherd, the sheep will be scattered, the lambs left to wander, the general interests of the church will be neglected, its aggressive work will cease, and happy will it be for it if the evil of frequent change of pastor does not become chronic, until pastors whose reputations are already made will pass it by for a field of greater probable permanency, while the younger brethren, whose reputations have yet to be established, will hesitate before accepting the call, lest the pastorate should be of short duration, and thus their future usefulness should be affected. To rectify this state of things rests largely with the ministers, but more with the churches themselves. We are painfully impressed with the fact that some of the churches are lamentably deficient in the fulfilment of their obligations to those who labor with them in the Lord. "It is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn." "Doth God take care of oxen? or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt." "Do ye not know that they who minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? And they who wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live by the gospel." But until they take a more scriptural view of their duty to their pastors, and their personal responsibility in this matter to Him who has said, "Touch not mine anointed and do my prophets no harm," we fear there is not much hope for a decrease of the evil complained of.

We suggest a tender, loving sympathy on the part of the churches towards their pastors, with a due regard to the words of our Lord, "One is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren." In order to remedy the difficulty just pointed out, we suggest that churches and pastors contemplating engagement become well acquainted with each other. Make it the subject of earnest prayer. Watch the movings of Providence before making their final arrangements, and, if there appears to be a mutual adaptation to each other, let the union be one of relationship that may not be severed without much prayer for divine guidance, then if it appears to be in accordance with the will of God, it will take place amid expressions and manifestations of mutual good will and sympathy that will not soon be forgotten by either party, and, if we all do this, we may expect that short pastorates will, in most instances at least, soon become a thing of the past. "I speak unto wise men, judge ye what I say." Another cause for the weakness and destitution of some of our churches to which we wish to direct your attention is to be found in their undue haste to ordain young men to the gospel ministry without sufficient evidence of their fitness for that responsible position. Do not let us be misunderstood in regard to so important and delicate a subject. We earnestly pray and hope that we may never attempt to hinder any whom God has evidently called to the work of the Christian ministry; at the same time, we cannot help expressing a fear that sufficient care is not exercised in regard thereto as the importance of the case demands. Let the feeble churches encourage any who are able to lead intelligently in the exercises of the sanctuary and they will soon find that the brother's exhortations are none the less acceptable because they were thought out while following the plough, measuring goods, or because the hands of the Presbytery had not been laid upon his head. Some, whose ministry has been a comparative failure, and who in consequence thereof have been stranded upon a pastorless shore, might have been eminently successful as leaders in the Sabbath School and as local evangelists, had they, after the manner of the great apostle to the Gentiles, been content to labor with their hands for the bread that perishes.

By all means, let us encourage our brethren to use the gifts and talents which God has given them, but do not let us ask, expect, or attempt to aid, a creature to fly before God has given it wings. To any who ask for our advice relative to their call to the ministry, let us reply in the words of the Rev. C. H. Spurgeon, "Brother, do not be a minister if you feel you could better be something else," or unless you and your brethren are convinced that God has called you to the work. It would be well for those who contemplate the ministry to labour for a season with some destitute church or churches, and if the brethren are men of the right stamp they will be sure to make strenuous efforts to supply his temporal necessities, and if he attends well to his Master's business, his Master will be sure to supply his needs, even though neither Missionary Board nor Society shall have sent him out. And while thus labouring for Jesus let the brother seek by reading and study, especially of the Word of God, to improve his talents and advantages to the glory of his Lord, and in order that he may be the better fitted for his future ministry.

We thus recommend to our feeble and destitute churches a policy of self-help, but while we do this, we urge the stronger to remember, that the weak have claims upon them, claims upon their practical sympathy and benevolence. Then let it be shown in a practical manner, even though it necessitate some self-denial and sacrifice. We strongly urge the churches that are favoured with the regular preaching of the Word of God to give their pastors an occasional Sabbath in order that they may spend it with some needy church, and they will find themselves well repaid by the increased missionary spirit which their pastors will manifest in connection with their regular ministry,—and better still, they will be rewarded by Him who shall say at last, "Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these, ye did it unto me."

The history of the Baptists in these Maritime Provinces is continually exhorting us not to "despise the day of small things." During the last fifty years God has done great things for us as a denomination. Then there were but six churches within the present limits of this Association, and they were composed of but few members each; now we have sixty-four churches with about four thousand six hundred members, and some of them, viz., those who have been most energetic and consistent, although very feeble in their commencement, are now becoming towers of strength. From some of them have come forth brethren who occupy important positions in the ministry, and on the foreign mission field. Thus shall it ever be, "Truth is like a torch." "The more 'tis shook it shines." It must prevail while human systems decay and dwindle

away like snow before the noonday sun. "The church of God, the pillar and ground of the truth," shall stand firm and immutable as long as time shall endure; and that body of Christians which strives most earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints, and by constant and aggressive work for Christ seeks to execute the Divine Commission, "Go teach all nations," &c., shall be abundantly honored of God to the ingathering of many trophies of sovereign grace and mercy. Let us then go forward "strong in the strength which God supplies through his eternal Son," attempting great things for God, expecting great things from God, encouraged amid our feebleness by the apostolic precept and assurance, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

We have much pleasure in complying with the request of the brethren in Association assembled at Amherst, and giving insertion in our columns to the following

REPORT ON TEMPERANCE.

Your Committee on Temperance, while deploring the wide-spread evils which result from the use and sale of intoxicating liquors, are yet pleased to be able to report a marked improvement in the tone of temperance sentiment and the issue of temperance effort during the year. The Reform Club movement, which, like the fertilizing waters of the Nile, has rolled over this Province, carrying with it the blessings of sobriety and prosperity, has, we believe, with the blessing of God, been eminently successful in staying the tide of ruin and rescuing the sufferer. We have reason to hope, also, that our churches are obtaining clearer views of Christian duty in respect to this matter, and some of our brethren who have hitherto refused to lend the influence of their example, to complete an entire abstinence from wine, are beginning to appreciate the Christ-like devotion of the apostle when he said, "If meat make my brother to offend I will eat no more meat while the world stands." A large number of our churches have discontinued the use of fermented wines at the communion table, and we would earnestly urge upon the attention of those who still continue to use that article, the dangerous tendency of the practice, and with an eye single to the glory of our Master, would urgently request them to follow the example of our Saviour and ask God's blessing only on the pure juice of the vine.

Our hearts are yet saddened, however, by occasional exhibitions of the devastating power of the drink demon, leaving the foul impress of its presence even on the pages of our church history, and we must believe that some of these, our brethren, who have seen no iniquity in an "occasional glass" will not be held guiltless for the shipwreck of souls and the dishonour of God's church.

We commend this matter to your attention, brethren, in a spirit of Christian love, and would ask you in the name of Him "who died that we might live," that every stumbling-block may be removed from the way of those who are weak and liable to fall.

J. B. WOODLAND, Chairman.
T. B. LAYTON,
WILLIAM BENTLEY,
E. HOWARD,
JOHN BIGELOW.

REPORT ON DENOMINATIONAL LITERATURE.

Your Committee beg leave to report that in their opinion this is one of the most important subjects connected with our interests as a denomination.

With reference to the literature introduced into our Sabbath Schools we are painfully convinced that generally speaking it is not of a nature calculated to establish the true principles of Christianity in the minds of our children, and eventually lead them to Jesus, but consists chiefly of stories and adventures, sometimes founded upon fact, but oftener fabulous or fictitious, attended with a moral it is true, but generally too moral and tame after an exciting narrative.

We would suggest that instead of such literature, something be selected which is calculated to promote the moral culture of our children and develop the finer feelings of our children's intellect, adapted to their years and attainments. Books sufficiently interesting to call forth attention and enlist sympathy, but interwoven also with the great endearing principles of Christianity as derived from God's pure word and held by us as a denomination.

The great difficulty in obtaining such books is that no general Depository of them has existed in our Province. In view of this we would urge that the efforts of the Home Mission Union and brethren in New Brunswick in this direction be encouraged.

In reference to our denominational paper, the Christian Messenger, we would say that its determined exposure of error and advocacy of truth cannot but receive the admiration and support of all true Baptists.

D. W. CRANDALL, Chairman.

For the Christian Messenger.

Letter from Paris.

(Correspondence of the Christian Messenger.)

No. 17.

THE PHOTOGRAPHIC DISPLAY AT THE EXPOSITION—MR. SHAH'S BOARD-BILL—IN THE BOWELS OF THE EARTH—THE CATACOMBS—THE BONES OF THREE MILLION BODIES.

HOTEL DU LOUVRE, PARIS, July 26th, 1878.

The United States make a very creditable display of the products of photographic art. There are ten exhibits of photographs and accessories of such uniform excellence that it is hard to choose between them. James Landy, of Cincinnati, shows very fine portraits. The remarkable feature of his exhibit is a series of large photographs illustrating Shakspeare's seven ages of man. The artistic grouping is only equalled by the wonderful execution. Besides a good show of photographs, Sarony, of New York, exhibits some capital specimens of charcoal drawings. The Centennial Photograph Company exhibit some very large and excellent photographs of Philadelphia and of the Centennial Exhibition. In short, whether in portraiture, composed subjects, or landscapes, the American photographers have, I think, shown themselves, as a rule, far ahead of their European competitors. The American photographs are far superior to the general run of European portraits in pose and expression, a point which depends entirely on the artistic skill of the operator.

The Shah of Persia, who has just left Paris, recently went to Fontainebleau, and his little bill has been published in the papers. It amounted to only 14,200 fr., but after some expostulation in Persia it was reduced to 10,000 fr., or \$2,000. In this bill the item "Flowers" figures at \$300, twenty fowls at \$40, a cigar at one dollar, four bed-rooms at \$45, two boxes of cigarettes at \$10,