Messenger and Visitor

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About Non-resident Members.

A glance at the statistical tables published in connection with the minutes of the meetings of our Associations shows that a very considerable percentage of the total membership of our churches is reported as non-resident. The statistics in this matter, as in most others, can only be considered approximately correct, and perhaps less nearly correct on this point than on most others. What the number of non-residents really is cannot therefore be definitely determined. It is pretty certain, however, that it largely exceeds that indicated by the statistical statements, since the returns are incomplete. Certainly not less than one-quarter, and perhaps nearer one-third, of the total membership reported is to be classed as non-resident. This means that from 12,000 to 16,000 of the 50,821 members which the Year Book for 1901 gives as indicating the strength of the denomination in these Provinces are not now in connection with the churches on whose books their names are found and further that they have not transferred their membership to any other Baptist churches. This signifies a condition of things that demands improvement. The question of what can and should be done to effect such improvement has indeed engaged the attention more or less of our Associations. No doubt some useful efforts have been put forth, and yet the evil complained of continues and the percentage of non-residents does not appear to be sensibly diminished.

Where are these hosts of non-resident members which our churches are reporting to the Associations from year to year, and what are they doing? Not a few of them, we may be sure, have finished their earthly course, and have entered, let us trust, into the joy of their Lord. But the churches to which they belonged, having received no intelligence of their death, keep on reporting them as non-resident members. But a very large number,—the great majority doubtless—are still living, very many in the United States, others in the Northwest or scattered through the different Provinces of the Dominion. There are a large number too—how many it is impossible to say—who are still within the bounds of one or another of our Associations, and accordingly in situations where they should be in full and active membership in some one or other of our churches. A pastor once complained to us—"There are thirty-five Baptist non-resident members of other churches within our church bounds, who are practically no good to any church." That certainly indicated a lamentable condition of things—thirty-five persons who had trusted in Christ and had made a solemn public profession of love and loyalty to Him as their Saviour and Lord, and whose names were still on Baptist church books, but yet so indifferent to the cause of Christ in the community in which they were residing that they refused to connect themselves with the church there, and living in such a way that the pastor felt moved to say of them that they were no good to any church! No doubt there are non-resident members of a different kind from these. There are those who, while they hold aloof from membership in the church where they are living, yet show their interest in it by a regular attendance upon its services and by contributing toward its support. One would not wish to say that there are never cases in which persons may be justifiable in retaining membership in the church with which they first united, while for a time living in another locality and taking an active interest in the church life and work there. Such cases must, however, be rather exceptional, and when one's lot has been definitely cast in a particular community, it would seem to be a plain duty to enter into the fullest fellowship with the church life there. Too frequently, however, it would seem, merely sentimental or even less worthy motives are allowed to prevail to prevent the severing of the tie of membership with the old church home. One cannot but respect and sympathize with the affection for the old home, but that affection should not be permitted to keep one from identifying himself in the fullest and most unreserved way with the church where his lot is cast, nor can it justify one in setting an example which obviously cannot be commended to others.

How is this non-resident church-membership evil to be dealt with? The problem is not an easy one. Shall our churches be advised to excise from their books the names of those who have removed and who have, not after a reasonable time of say three months or six months failed to indicate their intention to unite with another church. This would be a radical and rather severe remedy. If generally applied it would doubtless diminish the number of non-residents very effectually, but our churches would hardly be persuaded to take so extreme measures, and the results might on the whole be more undesirable than the evils which we would correct. Along other lines we may not indeed expect a complete removal of the trouble, but we may hope for abatement. Much may be done by the clerks of the churches, by keeping a sharp watch in respect to removals and reporting them to the church, also by keeping in touch with absentees through correspondence and thus keeping them within the church's knowledge and sympathy. An occasional report from the clerk as to absentee members would be an interesting and valuable feature of a conference meeting. Pastors also may do very much, and we should not wish to believe that any are indifferent or unwilling to do what they can in this connection. It is a matter too in connection with which the deacons may do excellent service. Whenever Baptist church-members move in from another community they should be assisted and welcomed. They should be made to feel that the church is a home for them and a sphere for Christian influence, and that their sympathy and co-operation in all the life and work of the church will be welcomed and warmly appreciated. It should be considered that if one moves from his old church home within the bounds of another and receives no welcome, but finds the church cold and unsympathetic, he will need to be a person of somewhat heroic faith and denominational loyalty in order to push his way into the membership of such a church. It will be an immense step toward the solution of this problem if each of our churches will make its fellowship so warm and loving, and its welcome so hearty, that no Christian man or woman who comes within the circle of its influence can fail to feel its strong attraction.

Then, again, when a brother or sister or a family moves away, let them not go unnoticed. Let them carry with them the benediction of the church and its commendation to some other church whither they are going, with kindly admonition to seek, as soon as practicable, a new church home in their new place of residence. A few lines from the pastor to some brother pastor in the place where those removing are to make their home will be likely to insure them a prompt welcome. Some of our churches are, we think, endeavoring, and with some success to do the things here suggested, while others, we fear, are making small effort in that direction. We would commend them to all as worthy of consideration.

Editorial Notes.

—The Mount Allison Institutions have completed another prosperous year. The closing exercises in connection with the several departments were held last week. Principal Borden of the Ladies' College, regards the past year as having been perhaps the most successful of the seventeen years during which he has been connected with the school, and, all things considered, one of the most satisfactory in its history. Principal Palmer of the Academy and Commercial College, also reports a successful year. The attendance at the school was the same as last year. In the College fourteen were graduated B. A. and the M. A. degree was conferred upon two graduates.

—The General Assembly of the Presbyterian church of the United States at its recent meeting in New York City accepted by a practically unanimous vote the recommendations of its committee on the Revision of the Creed. As these recommendations involved important modifications the unanimity of the Committee in advising them and of the Assembly in their acceptance is remarkable. The changes adopted, although important, are not of a radical character. They consist partly in amendments to articles of the Confession and the Declaratory Statements and partly in a "Brief Statement," or short creed of 16 articles, intended to embody in a briefer form the faith of the church, so expressed as to avoid certain extreme statements in reference to the doctrine of election and certain other points of belief and so as to be as far as possible generally acceptable to Presbyterians of the present generation. The amendments to the Confession and the Declaratory Statements will have to be sent down to the Presbyteries for approval, but the "Brief Statement" does not require to be submitted, but stands as adopted by the vote of the Assembly.

—Two subscribers to the MESSENGER AND VISITOR have sent us their remittances for the year, but have forgotten to send their names, so that it is impossible for us to know to whom the money should be credited. In each case the remittance was by postal note purchased in Charlottetown, the amount being in each case $1 50. One note bore date of Feb. 7th, and the envelope bore a Charlottetown postmark, the other was dated May 9th, and the postmark was that of Pownal, P. E. I. We hope that this may meet the eyes of those who sent the remittances and that they will communicate with this office in order that they may receive the proper credit on our books. Perhaps we ought affectionately to caution our friends against the indulgence of absentmindedness, for in some cases the trouble tends to assume a more serious form, so that a subscriber will not only forget to send his name and address with his remittance, but will even forget to send the remittance. When this trouble becomes chronic—as it tends to do—it is indeed a sad affliction. We believe that absentmindedness in regard to newspaper subscriptions, if taken in hand in its early stages will yield to treatment, but when it becomes thoroughly seated it would seem that nothing short of a surgical operation could effect a cure.

—Alluding to the great Sunday School Convention soon to be held in Denver, Col., *The Sunday School Times* says: "No political convention ever held exerts such an influence upon the deepest life of this and other nations as the International Sunday School Convention. It is the central human power-house for the supreme agency of the church,—for the saving and the training of character. Few previous Conventions of the series have had more serious questions to face and to solve than this Tenth Convention. Perhaps none since that of 1872, when the International Lessons were inaugurated has been a more critical and epoch-making Convention than this is likely to be The leaders and the delegates need insight, wisdom and divine guidance. For this may the prayers of all Sunday Schools go up between now and the time of meeting."

—Among the questions which will demand consideration at the Denver Convention may be mentioned that of Incorporation. In the judgment of some at least of the leaders in the work, the time has arrived when the Convention should be an incorporated body, with the sphere of its operations and the duties of its officers clearly defined, and also clothed with legal authority to hold and administer the funds necessary for the prosecution of its work. An increased income is also felt to be necessary in order to an extension of the work, and it is believed that men of large means would be more inclined to contribute generously to the work of the Convention if it were an incorporated body with its officers legally bound to a faithful administration of the funds intrusted to them. Then there is the important question of the make-up of the Lesson Committee, and the choice of a chairman of its executive, upon which not a little depends. And most important of all, perhaps, is the question as to the continuance of the present uniform lesson system or the introduction of a graded system. The Uniform system has obvious advantages in respect to simplicity of management and in respect to providing lesson helps, but it certainly has disadvantages which are at least equally obvious and which are so serious that it would seem reasonable to expect that some modification of the present plan of having the same series of lessons for little children and persons of mature years will be attempted.

Acadia Anniversary.

Anniversary week at Wolfville appears to become increasingly attractive to our people. The number of visitors in attendance this year from different parts of the country is unusually large. St. John, Fredericton and other parts of New Brunswick are well represented. Those who have come find that Wolfville and its surroundings have lost none of their attractiveness. It is the season of blossoms and the bloom of the orchards is remarkably abundant. So far the weather has been all that could be desired and there has been nothing to interfere with the comfort and pleasure of those who have come up to the annual celebration.