

Messenger and Visitor

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S. McC. BLACK Editor

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THE BASIS OF MEMBERSHIP.

Objections are occasionally heard to what is considered a money basis in the membership of our Convention. A few years ago, if our memory serves, notice was given of a proposed amendment to the constitution in view to making the number of delegates which each church might send to the Convention conditional on the church's membership and not upon the amount of its contributions to the objects of the Convention. Notice however was never acted upon.

We observe that the Southern Baptists are discussing similar questions in reference to their General Convention. A number of the denominational journals have taken ground against the financial basis which is a feature of the constitution of the Southern Convention. The *Standard* of Louisville, Ky., which is an influential paper, takes this position, and mentions *Southern Baptists* and *The Baptist and Reflector* as endorsing this view. The *Reflector* says: "We respectfully on those who favor such a basis [that is a financial basis] to name a reason for it that does not apply equally to the church. The one stock reason that those who favor the money should direct the expenditure applies much for a church as to a convention."

The *Baptist Standard* of Dallas, Texas, takes up the challenge of *The Reflector* and says that it has pleasure in giving more than one reason. *The Standard's* remarks on the subject are in part as follows:

Conventions and associations are not equal to Testaments churches, are not under New Testament law nor have they New Testament authority. They are extra scriptural, and are never to be compared, nor discussed, on the same plan with churches. Co-operative bodies are purely of human origin and authority. Churches are of divine origin and authority. The functions of the two are totally different. Clearness here will clear up this whole question.

The funds placed in the hands of co-operative bodies, and their boards, are trust-funds, and of right ought to be safeguarded in every possible way. It is very probable that those who contribute to these trust-funds, are more concerned about the wise use of them than those who give nothing to them. The Baptist Book Concern is an extra scriptural body, doing religious work. Would the *Western Recorder* be willing for those who put no money into its great work to help control its policies and direct the expenditure of its funds? Unless the money put into "The Baptist Book Concern" be not regarded as a trust fund, so cases, as to scriptural authority, are exactly analogous, as it appears to *The Standard*. Co-operative bodies such as Conventions and Associations have of them the same scriptural authority that is back of the Baptist Book Concern, and no more.

The opposition to the financial basis of representation in our co-operative bodies rests upon one of two assumptions: (1) That there are New Testament churches that are unable financially to contribute anything to the mission funds of these bodies. This is untrue, in the light of the scriptures. Or (2) that churches financially able to obey the Word of God, there are New Testament churches that do nothing for the spread of the gospel, whose messengers make wise use of the funds contributed by other churches. A co-operative body that projects its work on either of these assumptions, or both of them, would be doing an ignominious failure. Every one ought to see this. We are inclined to think that *The Standard's* position on this matter is the more reasonable one and that its argument in the main is sound. So far as our own Convention is concerned we have never been able to see where there was anything unreasonably or unscriptural in the financial conditions attached to membership therein. In our view it would be unwise to abandon the principle. In the Convention the denomination in the Maritime Provinces is united for the purpose of promoting and sustaining great Christian enterprises—chiefly missions

and education. No church is too poor to contribute at least some small sum to the purposes of the the Convention, and every church can thus be represented in its counsels by one of its members. Then there are comparatively few churches which do not have it in their power to contribute fifty dollars to missions or education and thus secure the right to send a second member to the Convention. Further, it is to be considered that every ordained minister connected with one of our churches, is a member in his own right. So that it will be seen that almost every church which is sufficiently alive to take a vital interest in the Convention and its work may be represented in the counsels of that body by its pastor and two other delegates. This being the case, there seems small ground for fear that the more wealthy churches will exert too large influence in the Convention, and surely it is not an unreasonable proposition that the churches which contribute most of the funds should have the largest voice in directing their expenditure. But any church which contributes to the objects of the Convention a total amount of \$250 (which should be easily within the ability of a large number of the churches) is entitled under the constitution to send five of its members as delegates to the Convention. And this is the maximum delegation no church, however much it may contribute, being entitled to send any larger number.

WHAT IS SEEN AT THE THEATRE.

There has been a good deal of comment both public and private concerning a play which has been on exhibition in a St. John theatre during the past week. The daily newspapers of St. John have never been accused, we believe, of ultra fastidiousness in the matter of the bills of fare presented at the playhouses, but in this particular instance some of them evidently have thought that a play had been produced sufficiently abominable to demand a protest. In characterizing this specimen of dramatic art one of the city dailies said in part:

"For the next two acts we see nothing but a series of blood curdling and revolting crimes, beginning with the murder of a little child by the human monster, who strangles his victim and afterwards sucks the blood from its body. This was a sickening sight, but when it came to the killing of his fiancée, who still loved him, the scene was a horrible one. The curtain rose showing the girl in bed, presently through the window of the darkened room came the horrible monster and in full view of the audience slit his victim's throat with such realism that, with her head hanging out of the bed, the blood was seen gushing out of the wound in her throat and from her nose, mouth and ears. The sight was so ghastly and revolting that many of the ladies in the audience must have wished themselves safe home."

The question has been raised whether the Mayor of the city has not the power and the duty to prohibit a play of such a character and certain clergymen of the city are reported to have brought this question to his notice. His worship has sought the advice of the Recorder in the matter, and has been assured that if there is evidence that the play is blasphemous or immoral the Mayor has power to prevent it; otherwise he should not interfere. In Recorder Skinner's view, the fact that the play has been declared by those who have witnessed it to be disgusting, nauseating, blood curdling, horrible, etc., does not warrant the Mayor's interposition, since in regard to such characteristics the public has a right to judge for itself. *The Telegraph*, however, calls the attention of Mayor White to a section of a city by-law concerning theatre licenses, which reads as follows:

"Any person or persons who may obtain any such license as aforesaid, shall conform to such directions and regulations for preserving order and decorum thereat and preventing any interruption of the public peace, as the Mayor for the time being may from time to time deem necessary; and in case such directions are not fully complied with, or if for any other cause it may be deemed expedient so to do, it shall and may be lawful for the said Mayor to revoke any such license at his pleasure."

It would certainly seem that the latter part of this clause places at the discretion of the Mayor power quite sufficient to prohibit such an exhibition as the one which has elicited so much unfavorable criticism, and if the play is such as has been described it is difficult to see how the Mayor could doubt that its prohibition would be in the public interest.

It will perhaps be said that this play which has been denounced so strongly, disgusting and horrible as it is, is not so bad or so morally degrading as many others which are presented from time to time in the city, and in reference to which no protest is heard. This is very likely to be true. It would be gratifying if those who have authority in the matter could assure us that everything "immoral or blasphemous" is strictly excluded from the performances to which theatrical companies are accustomed to invite St. John audiences. It is perhaps not worth while for those who are accustomed to swallow camels to strain at a goat as particularly disgusting. However a bad thing is not made good by showing that there are worse. "The Great Medical Mystery" play may not, as one of our highly esteemed contemporaries intimates, be as horrible as the war in Manchuria. And it may be, as is further alleged, that the churches do not do their whole duty in the way of impressing upon the people the wrongfulness of war. But it

seems absurd to charge the churches with indirectly cultivating the perverted appetite which delights in shows of a blood-curdling and horrible character. It would surely be more reasonable to say that the churches which are constantly endeavoring to inculcate the doctrines of peace and righteousness, with whatever makes for true Christian manhood and womanhood, have a right to protest strongly against there being presented under civic sanction performances which by their gruesome and horrible character tend to degrade and brutalize the youth of the city, rendering them less susceptible to Christian teaching and more susceptible to influences which are vicious and degrading.

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ONTARIO BAPTISTS.

It has already been stated in our columns that Dr. Goodspeed has resigned his professorship at McMaster. He has now retired from the University. Thus the most important teaching office in the Theological work of McMaster is made vacant. It is further announced that Dr. O. C. S. Wallace has resigned the chancellorship, and has accepted the pastorate of a church in Lowell, Mass.

What the immediate causes of these resignations are we cannot say. But evidently our brethren in Ontario have some problems to solve.

In 1890 Dr. Goodspeed left St. John for the work he has just relinquished. He has rendered conspicuous service to McMaster and the denomination in Ontario. The brethren there have recognized his strength and will be grateful for his help.

Dr. Wallace, on the retirement of Dr. Raud from the Chancellorship in 1895, was called from the pastorate of Bloor St. church, Toronto, to preside over the University and to labor for its advancement. For ten years he has held this prominent place with credit to himself and those whom he served. He will give to the pastorate to which he returns the strength of added experience in speaking and his fine gifts of administration. These brethren will retain the esteem and good wishes of their brethren in Canada. We can only wish for McMaster the best guidance in seeking leaders for the educational trust so vitally related to the welfare of Canadian Baptists.

For some months a discussion of the desirableness of the federation of McMaster with Toronto University has been going on in the Canadian Baptist. A number of brethren, including Dr. Tracy, Rev. P. K. Dayfoot, Dr. Goodspeed, D. E. Thomson, and others have been arguing the question. The views that determined the action when the University undertook its separate work have been restated with clearness.

The need of further endowment to meet the decrease of income due to the falling rate of interest and the need of enlargement in different departments would seem to have been the occasion for the present agitation for a change of base. Federation would certainly offer advantages in the way of economy, and if McMaster is to be maintained as an independent school in a manner to answer the demands of the time a good deal of money must be found for its support and enlargement. However, the Ontario Baptists are able, no doubt, to put a good deal of money into McMaster if they are so disposed, and at present, though there are some eager for federation, we judge that the bulk of opinion is in favor of retaining the independent basis. But whatever the issue of the present agitation may be, it is admitted on all hands that McMaster is doing work of the highest character and that its influence for the upbuilding of the denomination is very great.

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RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN RUSSIA.

Czar Nicholas celebrated the Russian Easter Sunday, April 30th, by issuing a decree abolishing the restrictions on the freedom of worship in his dominions. This decree applies to the Old Believers, the Roman Catholics, the various sects of Dissenters from the State Religion, also to Mohammedans and other non-Christian bodies, with the exception of the Jews, who, it appears, are not reckoned worthy of a place within the pale of religious toleration. If however the Imperial decree means in reality all that it seems to mean, it embodies concessions of no small value to several millions of the Czar's subjects. According to the provisions of the decree, secession from the Orthodox Greek Church will no longer involve persecution or surrender of civil rights. Dissenters, besides being guaranteed freedom of worship, will be admitted to cadet and military schools and may be promoted to be officers. They will no longer be excluded from receiving official rewards, such as medals of bravery. Mohammedans and other non-Christian subjects (except Jews) will have equal rights with Christians and will no longer be styled pagans. The body known as Old Believers, who apparently are the chief beneficiaries under the decree, are a people who refuse to consent to reforms in the State Church, such as the modernization of the liturgy introduced by Peter the Great, they also make the sign of the cross with three instead of two fingers, and have maintained their primitive faith unchanged in spite of much persecution. They are an eminently temperate people, so far at least as eating and drinking go, refusing to use intoxicating liquor, tobacco, tea, coffee and sugar. Their temperate and economical habits have been a means