

Christian Messenger

EXTRA, June 3rd, 1868.

Christian Messenger.

HALIFAX, JUNE 3, 1868.

We do not think it comports with the proper dignity of the religious press for its regular issues to be made the vehicle of continuously attacking a christian church, much less do we think that a religious newspaper should under the guise of teaching Church Polity be ever throwing envenomed shafts at a body of christians who in the fear of God have sought to carry out the principles of the New Testament in reference to its membership, and guard the good name of its ministers.

We have been unwilling to follow an example set us in this respect by a contemporary, and have suffered many misrepresentations of what has appeared in our pages to pass unnoticed, and have witnessed facts distorted, and expressions of opinion such as we believe are subversive of the best interests of truth and righteousness, but have abstained from a word of remonstrance, lest we should by that means prolong a matter which has already obtained an unwonted amount of notoriety.

Some time since, whilst our pages were being largely occupied with letters from the Rev. Dr. Crawley on the case of Dr. Pryor, and the Replies of Granville Street Church thereto, we received two letters from the Rev. George Armstrong of Bridgetown of a similar character to those we were publishing from Dr. Crawley. But we considered that it would be inflicting too much of that style of writing on our readers at one time to publish them just then; and as Mr. Armstrong's statement, in conjunction with other members of Granville Street Church Council, on what they severally remembered respecting what was said or not said at the first session, had appeared in our pages, we held said letters in reserve, as we did some others, of quite a contrary character—commendatory of the action taken by Granville Street Church.

On the 6th of March Bro. Armstrong sent us a peremptory note requesting to have his two articles sent back by return mail. With this demand we complied and wrote an accompanying note as follows:—

REV. GEORGE ARMSTRONG:

My Dear Brother—I am glad to comply with your request, I had merely reserved, not rejected your articles. Having our pages so much occupied by Dr. Crawley's letters and the Granville Street Church's replies, I could not well give our readers larger doses on that subject, without doing what one or more of the *Visitor's* correspondents sought to charge upon us. I had not therefore, positively declined to publish yours, as you appear to suppose &c.

Yours, very truly, S. SELDEN.

On the 16th, brother Armstrong wrote in reply to the above:

DEAR BROTHER—I thank you for returning my articles as requested. I inferred from what you said in the *Christian Messenger*, that you intended to exclude all discussion on the subject referred to in my communications; hence I asked to have them returned.

I had another reason—even if they had appeared in the *Christian Messenger*. I wished to make some alterations, &c. Yours, &c., GEORGE ARMSTRONG.

These letters, with large additions, to the number of five, have consequently been appearing in the *Christian Visitor*. The last of them was published on the 17th of April.

It has since then been suggested by some of our brethren that the statements of Bro. Armstrong were such as should not be made by a minister of this province respecting one of the churches and brethren in fraternal relationship, and left unrefuted, and the principles enunciated by him remain unchallenged.

The following resolution of Granville Street Church will further explain this matter:

Resolved, 1. That replies to the Rev. George Armstrong's letters, published in the *Christian Visitor*, be prepared, and that the Editor of the *Visitor* be requested to publish them in that paper. 2. That the Editor of the *Christian Messenger* be requested to publish Mr. Armstrong's letters and the Church's replies thereto.

But as we are not desirous of having our columns opened to a general discussion of this matter, we have concluded that it would be better to issue a *Messenger Extra*, in which Mr. Armstrong's letters and the replies thereto from Granville Street

Church might appear, together with other matter on the subject, which we have been requested to publish. This we think will be a sufficient explanation of the appearance of the present sheet.

We have never yet sought to vindicate ourselves from the aspersions Judge Johnston endeavoured to cast upon us, in his Letter addressed to Granville St. Church. We had asserted that after the Council had closed their labors, the action of the church was what was fully anticipated by several members of the council, and in harmony with their recommendation. For this Judge Johnston deliberately wrote as follows:—

Either Mr. Selden and his associate Editors have been guilty of perverting the truth, or men of your Denomination selected for a sacred trust have manifested a miserable want of common sense or common principle. I can believe the former, for I have had occasion before to remark on Mr. Selden's want of candor—I cannot believe the latter. When I see it under their own hands, and not before, I will believe that several members of the Council have so be-fooled or be-knaved themselves, as Mr. Selden and his associates have asserted.

Such a charge, although hypothetical, under other circumstances, might possibly have been regarded by the public as having some weight, and might have demanded a public vindication. But we found that in the estimation of right-thinking impartial persons, in every walk of life, the charge was perfectly harmless, as far as it concerned ourselves. Indeed we have been assured by the expressed opinion of gentlemen of the first respectability—by judges and others learned-in-the-law, by ministers of all denominations, as well as by our brethren generally, that such an expression could injure no one so much as him who made it.

The following letter, it will be perceived, was written some time since. We should have given it insertion at the time it was received, in the regular issue of the *Messenger*, but from our unwillingness to have the matter, *pro* or *con*, opened up again we held it back.

As we are now publishing this "Extra" and the Rev. Mr. Davis has again requested publication of his letter, we have thought that it might, now, very properly be published.

Judge Johnston will perceive by this letter that our statement was not made without foundation. The letters we had received before making the statement were not prepared for publication. We did not doubt that the time would come when justice would be done us—possibly by the author of that Letter himself.

Our object has been to serve the cause of Christ, and until compelled by inaccurate or unfair statements, we have avoided giving publicity to any matters that would be painful to any parties. How far we have succeeded in such service we leave to our readers and friends to decide.

For the Christian Messenger.

Letter from Rev. John Davis.

DEAR BROTHER,—

I presume that the Pryor controversy, so far as your columns are concerned, is now terminated. I would by no means re-open it. Permit me, nevertheless, a few sentences in regard to it. And the rather, as I have no intention to reply to any attack that might be made upon my poor utterances, either in your columns, or in those of any other paper.

I do not want to re-argue any of the points involved in the above controversy. But, as a member of the Council of last fall, I wish to explain my own intentions in regard to certain particulars included in the final deliverance of that body. I would also say a word in regard to the course taken by the Granville Street Church subsequent upon the action of the Council—a word in vindication of the rights of our churches, on the one hand, and, on the other, in support of a just and impartial discipline within our churches, everywhere.

1. I see it constantly taken for granted, in some quarters, that the Council wholly acquitted Dr. Pryor of the charges which had been brought against him. I would therefore, just state, that certainly such was not my design. My more private opinion would have led me to the employ-

ment of stronger terms than those which appear in the decision of the Council. I consented to the use of more mitigated terms, in order to secure that unanimous expression on the part of the Council which, at the time, appeared to me to be above all things Desirable. And any one who thoughtfully weighs the terms actually chosen by the Council may observe these two things. First, that the most that they say by way of exculpation amounts to the Scottish law phrase, "Not proven." And then, that what is left by way of inculpation involves the idea of great blameworthiness on the part of Dr. Pryor. So much so, that a highly esteemed ministering brother, on a visit among us when the decision of the Council appeared in your columns, remarked to me, with great significance, on reading it,—“Well, I really should not like to have such things said about me.” And I am sure that I might safely ask, Would any of those gentlemen who talk with so much apparent satisfaction about the acquittal accorded by the Council, be content with such an acquittal in any case in which they were personally interested? Or, sustained by an inward consciousness of right, would they not have deeply resented such an acquittal; counting it, and not unreasonably, more of a condemnation than an acquittal?

2. Much stress is laid, I perceive, upon the word "reconsider," as employed by the Council; as though it necessarily and exclusively involved a recommendation that the church should rescind the resolution by which they had suspended Dr. Pryor from their communion. Permit me to say, however, that I, for one, did not intend to limit the word to this precise interpretation. I knew, of course, that it was liable to such an interpretation. I knew also, that it was possible that the church might so "reconsider" their action in regard to Dr. Pryor as to restore him to their communion. But I also knew,—nor does my confession of such a knowledge entitle any man to "befool" or "beknave" me,—that the church might so "reconsider" their deed of suspension as to confirm it, or even intensify it into an act of exclusion. This was what, at the time I really expected that they would do. Nor do I conceive that, in fulfilling my expectation, they have violated either the letter or the spirit of the recommendation of the Council to "reconsider" their action.

Lastly, let me say, that, in the course taken by the church in regard to Dr. Pryor since the meeting of the Council, they have done no more than they had a perfect—that is, a constitutional right to do. The Council was not a judiciary body. In its own nature it was not such. By no possible conventional understanding could it have been made such, without an entire subversion of the laws of church order and government contained in the New Testament, and acted upon in the constitution of our Baptist churches. The opinion, the advice of the Council was asked from the beginning; its judgment, in the judicial sense, never. Thus, on no ground, and in no way, as it seems to me, is the church censurable for acting finally upon their own convictions of right in the case Dr. Pryor; any thing apparently contained in the decision of the Council to the contrary notwithstanding. I think, indeed, that the church might have spoken more respectfully than they did in regard to that decision. As they have chosen to appeal to it in argument, perhaps they might have gone farther, and adopted it as their point of departure, from which they might have moved forward to their own ultimate action. Still there is nothing here, nor any where else, which can militate against the constitutional right of the church to act as they chose to act both towards the Council, and towards Dr. Pryor.

Nor is it for me, nor any one else, outside the church, to call in question the fitness of the act by which they excluded Dr. P. from their communion. They must have been acquainted with the whole of the case with which they had to deal as none else could be, or could be made to be. And if they saw fit to assume the solemn responsibility of placing their former pastor beyond the pale of church-fellowship, "to

their own Master they stand or fall." None but He can here call them to account. Nor may it be said, that, in the absence of direct evidence of immoral or dishonest conduct, they could have no ground on which to proceed to extreme measures. A Christian church is a congregation, not merely of persons of good moral character, but of Christians, that is of *Christianized* persons. If, therefore, a man, by any course of behaviour, forfeits his *Christian* character, even though his moral character remain intact, he may fitly be placed beyond the pale of a Christian church. And if so it seemed to be to the Granville Street Church in the case of Dr. Pryor, who is it that is entitled to impeach their procedure against him? If the church have really erred in their course here, the Head of all our churches will not fail, in due time and way, to reverse their sentence, and to chastise them. But if otherwise, the future will but confirm their judgment, while the painful discipline through which, during the past year, they have been conducted, shall minister to their good, and to the honour of their exalted Lord.

Your fellow-labourer,

J. DAVIS.

Charlottetown, P. E. I., April 8, 1868.

From the Christian Visitor, March 19th.

Granville Street Church and the Council.

DEAR EDITOR,—

As I cannot get my views on the above subject published in the *Christian Messenger*, though so lavish in its criticism of the decision, and ready to condemn the council, I am compelled to resort to the *Christian Visitor* in order to reach my Baptist brethren in Nova Scotia. As one of the Council I had surely a claim to be heard; but I will say nothing now of the hardship and injustice of being driven to the course I now take. The fact speaks for itself. I will furnish for your pages the substance of what I had prepared for the *Messenger*, so that as many, at least in Nova Scotia, as take the *Visitor* may know my views and position on the above subject.

I have no wish to mingle in the unhappy controversy that has for months been agitating the Baptist Denomination in this Province. I have hitherto abstained from publishing anything touching it, and had it not been for the publication of what I regard an entirely incorrect statement by Granville Street Church in justification of its treatment of Dr. Pryor and the Council, I would have remained silent longer. However unpleasant what I shall write may be to some whom I highly esteem, I can neither consistently nor rightfully, as it seems to me, continue silent. Far be it from me to impugn the veracity of the friends who have made the statement referred to; but I do impugn its correctness. This is the statement:—"Dr. Crawley interprets the silence of the Church upon the question of the Council's decision being final, as an admission on their part that they regarded it in that light. We tell Dr. Crawley that we were not silent. Had Dr. Crawley been present at the first session of the Council, he would not now assert that the Church agreed to abide by the decision. At that session of the Council the representatives of the Church were asked whether they would agree to accept the decision as final, and they most distinctly answered in the negative."—[Letter 3 from the Church.] My recollection of what occurred differs essentially from this representation. The question said to have been put by the Council I never heard, either at its first session or afterwards.

As I deemed preliminary action important in the present case, as to its bearing on the work before us, and therefore on all concerned—the Church, Dr. Pryor, and the Council—if that work had weight commensurate with the occasion, I took especial notice as to the organization of the Council, and its acceptance by the parties participating in its selection. When the Council was organized, these parties were asked if they accepted said Council to deal with the matters they had agreed to refer to it? The Church, through its representatives, answered in the affirmative, and so did Dr. Pryor. There was no qualification or reserve expressed on either side.

Now the alleged question was asked either before or after the acceptance of the Council. If before, I do not see how the Council could enter on their work; for the answer alleged would have been on the part of the church, under the circumstances, a virtual rejection of the Council, and must, of course, have stopped all further proceedings on the part of the Council; unless indeed the subsequent acceptance was regarded as a withdrawal of the previous answer. Under the circumstances of this case, I am strongly of opinion, both answers could not stand as valid. If the question alleged was asked after the acceptance of the Council, it would seem, in this case, wholly out of place and unnecessary; for the previous acceptance of the Council did, in effect, under the circumstances, [I now allude especially to what is laid down in the "Basis of Council" formed by the Church and agreed to by Dr. Pryor, and of which basis I will speak particularly hereafter,] strongly bind both the Church and Dr. Pryor to accept the decision on the case. Whatever right either