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Circular Letter.

(Published by request.)

CHRISTIANS, FELLOW-HELPERS TO THE TRUTH.

THE CIRCULAR LETTER OF THE NOVA SCOTIA WESTERN BAPTIST ASSOCIATION, ADDRESSED TO THE MEMBERS OF THE CHURCHES.

Dear Brethren,—

Because of the blessings enjoyed by so many of the churches, during the year now closing, we call upon you, in this our annual letter to thank God and take courage. Much has been done—to God be the glory—but there remains much land to be possessed, and the church still needs to nerve herself for the conquest. While past blessings call for thankfulness and an increasing trust in our Heavenly Father, they increase rather than lessen, both the duty and the need of labor. As in almost every department of labor, so in this, past success only prepares the way for greater effort. Let us then, dear brethren not be slow to improve the present opportunities.

Fearing that there is a growing inclination on the part of many, to leave the work of the church exclusively to the pastors, and to look for prosperity through their single efforts, we wish in this Epistle to call attention to some of the ways by which you, brethren and sisters of the churches, may assist in building up this "pillar of truth, the church of the Living God." Not that we wish to lessen, in any degree, the responsibility or work of the ministers of Jesus Christ, for it must ever be their work to strive "by all means to save some," and to "feed the flock of God, committed to their care"; but that their work may be made more successful through your co-operation. Let the idea that when you have contributed liberally to the support of your pastor, you have done your whole duty to him and to the church be at once abandoned. His should indeed be a liberal support, but in his case it is emphatically true that "man cannot live by bread alone." He needs besides your hearty sympathies and earnest efforts in behalf of the cause he is endeavoring to advance. These tend to strengthen him and make him more enthusiastic in his work, and he in turn becomes a tower of strength to you. It is, in fact, almost impossible to overestimate the increase of strength and effectiveness which is thus secured to the church. Instead, then, of looking to your pastors to build up the church, aim to become "fellow-helpers to the truth." The following suggestions indicate some of the ways by which you may attempt this:—

1. *You may help them preach the gospel.* This is the peculiar work of the minister. His instruction from the court of Heaven is "preach the word." To this he should give his strength, from this he should suffer nothing to turn him aside. You may help him: First by a constant and interested attendance upon the ministrations of the Word. Few things have a more disheartening effect upon the trembling servant of Christ or tend more to produce poor sermons than the empty seats of brethren and sisters; while most important aid is rendered by intelligent upturned faces and heart-beaming eyes. The habitual desertion of your own church and pastor, in order to attend the meetings of some popular preacher, perhaps of another denomination, is the most effective way of preventing the growth of your pastor. Ministers are not such spiritual beings as to be entirely removed beyond the reach of those influences that affect other men. There is nothing more disheartening than desertion. Even the Master, felt this; as may be seen by the enquiry "Will you also go away?" How much more then must the humble servant of God feel it, when from time to time he finds himself deserted by those to whom he has a right to look for support. The act itself may seem trifling, but as it gives almost unmistakable evidence of lack of sympathy and interest, the result, in most cases will be serious. No man can continue to work with that enthusiasm necessary for success when he knows that he does not possess the sympathy and esteem of those among whom he labors. Whatever therefore indicates diminution of interest and sympathy weakens the hands of your pastor. Instead of this cruel desertion, an occasional word of encouragement may be safely given. Do not flatter, this will only disgust; but an occasional hearty word of commendation will be more valuable than gold.

You may, moreover, assist your pastor in preaching the gospel by timely and suitable references to the word preached. In this manner admonitions may be pressed home in such a way as to make the impression lasting which otherwise would have soon faded away. It is manifest that anything like criticising or fault-finding especially before the unconverted should ever be avoided. It must not be supposed that your minister will always say such things as please you; but then the fault may be in you. If things are said of such a nature or truth uttered in a way you think likely to do harm, seek an early opportunity to speak of it privately to your pastor himself. Do it in the right spirit and there is little fear but he will take it kindly.

Again, by living the truth preached, you greatly strengthen the heart and hands of your pastor. How can he stand up and proclaim the morality of christianity the highest of all morality if he sees around him professing christians whose lives are known to be grossly immoral. Or if he should do so, what would it profit those who heard. Have they not before them a practical demonstration to the contrary. Let the preacher, on the other hand, stand up in the midst of those who are living witnesses of the truth, as well as for the truth, and he can speak with boldness, for there are cleansed ones about him, whose very presence is enough to still the gain-sayer. The words of Baxter are in place here: "The world is better able to read the nature of religion in a man's life than in the bible." So also are the words of Christ: "The strongest argument for the truth of christianity is the true christian." The best means of bringing the world back to a belief in miracles is to exhibit the miracle of regeneration and its power in our own life.

2. *By bringing within the sound of the gospel those who are not in the habit of attending the public worship of God,* you may be a fellow-helper of your pastor and of the truth. As strange as it may seem it is nevertheless true that even in Sabbath-keeping Nova

Scotia there are many who from various causes habitually neglect the House of God. The faithful minister of Christ will seek out such, and by placing himself on kindly relations with them, endeavor to draw them to the sanctuary and to Christ. But he greatly needs the aid of the members of the church to accomplish this. If no effort be made by them, these persons are apt to think themselves not cared for, especially if they be persons in poor circumstances. Attention on the part of brethren and sisters in the way of invitations, to attend, and recognition and interest when they do attend, remove this feeling, and in most cases secure their regular attendance, often to their everlasting profit. The surest way to lead men to care for their own souls is to make them feel that we care for them. Are there not some among whom you mingle my brethren, who feel and that not without cause, "no man cares for my soul?"

3. *The training of those lately received* is another important duty devolving on the church. To this every pastor should apply himself with diligence. Those baptized are to be taught the things commanded by Christ and to be fed with "milk" or with "strong meat" as they are able to bear it. They should be trained to activity, encouraged to speak and pray in the social prayer meetings, to aid in the benevolent work of the church and in every way possible to assist in promoting the cause and kingdom of Christ. But it should not be supposed that the pastor, unaided, can, however faithful he may be, accomplish all this. The strong men and women of the church should likewise give themselves to the work. A great amount of interest is generally manifested in those who are enquiring, or who have professed conversion, but too often this interest ceases as soon as they have been baptized and received into the fellowship of the church. This is a great mistake, and a grievous wrong. They are still babes in Christ, and still need care and nursing. How many a youthful convert might have been saved from days of darkness and months or even years of wandering, had christians been faithful to their trusts. This point cannot be insisted upon too strongly at present. Many of you have had your numbers greatly increased by the gracious revivals of the past winter. It now remains, largely with yourselves to decide, whether these accessions shall weaken or strengthen you. If care has been exercised in receiving candidates for church membership, too much care cannot be exercised, there is reason to hope that a large proportion of those received are "new creatures in Christ Jesus." But this by no means precludes the need of your watching over them in love, and seeking to build them up in the faith. There is then no room for the quiet settling down to inactivity so often seen in churches after powerful revivals. Many youthful ones are looking to you, who are older, for an example, many ignorant ones for counsel, and many weak ones for help. If there is one time more than another in the history of the church, that christians need to be "steadfast unmovable always abounding in the work of the Lord," that time is after a powerful revival. For this is the time that those blossoms that have appeared, set in fruit, or are driven away by the rude blasts of temptations. It is the first few months or years of a christian's life that decides largely the character of that life. No after labor can fully atone for neglect here. We dwell upon this point because, by many, the church seems to be looked upon merely as a net, and when all the hopeful cases of the unconverted are gathered in, think there is nothing more to do for a time, and so relax their diligence and efforts until the prayer and conference meetings are almost entirely deserted. Hence revivals are brought into bad repute, and come to be regarded by many, merely as times of religious excitement, to be followed by religious declension. Brethren we call upon you to hold the ground already gained and carefully train your forces for further conquest.

4. The work of maintaining correct scriptural discipline in the church is closely connected with the foregoing. Nothing tends so much to destroy the usefulness of the church as failure here. Yet there is nothing, perhaps, so sadly neglected among the churches at present. Disorderly walkers are allowed to continue their disorderly walk, and at the same time remain members of the church. Now we do not take the ground advocated by some, that this work does not in any degree belong to the pastor, but we do most emphatically say that however much he may desire it, he cannot establish and maintain correct discipline without the hearty co-operation of the church. With this the task will still be difficult enough—without it, absolutely impossible. Notice here the admonitions of the Book which we profess to follow, "Brethren if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness." "Warn them that are unruly." Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly and not after the tradition which you received of us." "But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolator, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat." It is manifest from the very nature of these and similar instructions of God's word, that this work of discipline belongs to the church. The pastor may strive to restore the erring, and warn the unruly, but even these efforts will more likely be effective of good, if others are engaged in similar labors. If brethren were faithful in the discharge of these duties, much evil would be prevented in the outset, and the need of further action prevented. But when it becomes necessary to deal with any case of irregularity, there should be the fullest co-operation, not only between pastor and people, but among all the members. Unless there be concerted action, it is almost better not to attempt discipline. In this matter of discipline many christians appear to forget the words of Christ, "If any man come to me and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." They shield their friends in their wrong doing, even if the cause of Christ suffers, and regard any attempt on the part of the church to maintain correct discipline as an injury done to them. In too many cases this influence is yielded to, and a regard for the feelings of friends is pleaded for neglecting most flagrant disorders. Hence discipline either ceases altogether, or becomes partial in its character. But the church of God is the last place for partiality. Here all "are brethren," and "members one of another." What causes suffering to one causes suffering to all. When family connections or worldly position is allowed to control the discipline of the church,

she has "become carnal, and walks as men." Brethren shall not one of the results of this year of grace which so many of you have enjoyed, be a return to a more truly scriptural discipline? Remember it was for lax discipline, that Jesus complained against the church in Pergamos.

Without further increasing the number of these suggestions, the line of action, we wish to indicate will be apparent. We believe the church capable of becoming much more powerful for good than she is at present. To this position she can only attain by bringing into active operation the forces existing within her. These forces should be bound together by the golden bonds of sympathy so that the action of one shall be the action of all. Thus united she will become a power, whose influence will not be easily resisted. Error will fall before her and truth be established in her presence, and she will go forth as it is written of her, "Fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners."

For the Christian Messenger.

THE WESTERN ASSOCIATION AT LOCKEPORT.

Dear Brother,

From others you have received an account of the Association at Lockeport, which was one of much interest, permit me to say a few words of the place. This was the first gathering of Baptists, in this capacity, ever convened in Shelburne Co., and the honor has not been inappropriately conferred. The people of Lockeport are well worthy of it, and right royally did they entertain it.

The County of Shelburne has not been occupied by the Baptists in good earnest until quite recently. Since 1872, six places of worship have been built, and now another is being added to their number. Three men have been placed on the staff of ministers since 1870, so that now the wants of the county are quite well supplied, and this too at far less expense to the Home Mission Board than formerly.

Near the entrance of Ragged Islands Bay, Lockeport the commercial capital is situated. Into its small area is packed a large amount of the skill and wealth of the county. Here the fishing business is carried on extensively and skillfully. About 70,000 quinfals of dried, and 6000 bbls. of pickled fish are annually exported. To carry this on some sixty sail of bankers, carrying 750 hardy fishermen, together with a strong force of men on shore, and a dozen West Indian men are employed. The present bids fair to be a year of unusual success.

This is one of the places where work is fashionable, and idleness hides itself. Wealth does not here exempt from toil. Amidst the press and success of business, intellectual and religious advantages have not been overlooked. The first building standing out conspicuously as you approach the place, is their fine school house, which cost \$6000, well built as it is and furnished. Standing with the fine private residences of the place, is a commodious Temperance Hall, which cost about \$3000; and be it remembered that no grog shop has ever been allowed to disgrace this place: to which circumstance doubtless, it is much indebted for its prosperity—a prosperity which rum-drinking, and wine-drinking, and selling, never allows any community to enjoy.

The religious interests of the place are now under the care of the youthful pastor, Rev. E. Whitman, who is very happily situated among a kind appreciative people. For his comfort, a convenient parsonage hard by the church has just been built, a liberal salary is promptly paid him, and many good things given in a kindly informal way, to cheer him in his work. Under these stimulating influences of an external kind, and pressed by an internal influence of a purer kind, our brother is pressing into the work in good style. God is smiling on these labors, and the prospect is that more yet, of the skill and energy of Lockeport will be brought into the service of Christ more directly, to the great advantage of its inhabitants, and the glory of God. For this earnest prayer was offered during the session of our body, and the heavenly influence experienced, assured us that the Lord heard, and in his own good time will answer.

J. H. S.

THE ENGLISH CHILDREN.

To the Editor of the Christian Messenger.

SIR,—I heard by last mail from Mrs. Birt, that she expected to sail from Liverpool, about the middle of August, with from 100 to 150 children; persons who are desirous of having a child allotted to them should therefore send in their applications at once.

I would request all those who have children of the former parties under their charge to send in their quarterly reports without delay; over 140 children are now placed out, and I should wish to be saved correspondence as much as possible.

Yours obediently,

J. WIMBURN LAURIE.

Oakfield, July 1st, 1874.

FOURTH UNION SUNDAY SCHOOL CONVENTION OF THE MARITIME PROVINCES.

YARMOUTH, N. S., JUNE 20TH, 1874.

Dear Sir,—

The Executive Committee have made arrangements to hold the next Union Sunday-School Convention in this Town, commencing Saturday, August 29th. The first Session will be held in the Tabernacle Church, at half-past 2, P. M. Several prominent Sunday School-workers may be expected from the United States, Ontario, and Quebec, to take part in the meetings.

It is desirable that the Convention should consist, 1st, of one delegate from each Sunday School; 2nd, one from each Sunday-School Teachers' Association; 3rd, one from each Provincial or County Convention; 4th, one from each Sunday-School Union or other Sunday-School Organization. Pastors and Superintendents are *ex-officio* members of the Convention.