

Messenger and Visitor

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Denominational Debts

Some remarks were offered in this column a few weeks ago in reference to the evil of running into debt, and as those remarks seem to have provoked no note of dissent, we take it for granted that we have for once at least written something with which in theory—whatever may be said of the practice—there is a pretty general unanimity of opinion; that we are all pretty well agreed that, both for individuals and for churches, debt is a good thing to keep out of, and that if financial liabilities which cannot be met immediately are incurred at all, it should be only under conditions which afford a well-grounded assurance that they can and will be met within a reasonable time.

If this is the case with individuals and churches, does not the same rule apply with equal force to a denomination? Anyone who has given much attention to the reports of denominational work and the financial statements of denominational treasurers will not need to be told that the word DEFICIT is a very familiar one in connection with these reports and statements; and after this ominous word, DEFICIT, there is frequently evidence, which is none the less forcible for being figurative, that the denomination does not interpret in any strictly literal sense the Scriptural injunction, "Owe no man anything." It seems to us, however, that a number, large or small, of churches, united and organized for the purpose of carrying on religious work, should feel themselves bound by the same principle in regard to incurring financial obligations as those which apply to the single church or to the individual Christian, and if there is any difference in the cases, the responsibility is all the stronger upon the denomination not to run heedlessly or unnecessarily into debt. We would not say that there must never be a balance on the debit side of the account. It would indeed be a blessed thing if deficits could be entirely avoided, but if that is impossible, there certainly should be a determination to avoid incurring debt to the degree of embarrassment. In the business world the attempt to carry on extensive operations on an inadequate capital leads too frequently, not only to embarrassment, but to dishonest makeshifts in the frantic struggle to make ends meet, and finally to disaster which involves many innocent persons with those who are justly responsible for failure. Evidence that it is possible for lamentable disaster to result from an attempt on the part of religious bodies to carry on business on a like insufficient basis would not be hard to find.

In our own denomination, and doubtless in others as well, it sometimes becomes a serious question for those in charge of the benevolent enterprises, how far they should pledge the denominational credit in the interests of the work. Certain work has been undertaken, responsibilities have been incurred; it seems impossible to withdraw, or even to retrench, when the demands for enlargement are so urgent and the promise of results so great. The pressure upon a board of management under such conditions to incur increased financial responsibilities is very strong. And yet, when deficits go on accumulating from month to month and from year to year, the situation must become a more and more trying one for the board. Evidently there is a point beyond which those in charge of the work are not justifiable in going, in the way of incurring financial obligations, and perhaps a word of caution in this respect will not be deemed out of place. A condition of things in which increasing deficits are reported from year to year and in which boards of management are compelled to labor continually under the embarrassment of an

insufficient income and an overhanging debt is one that calls for amendment.

Now, when such a condition of affairs is reached, it seems to be a matter of justice and honorable dealing that one of two things should be done;—either there must be a retrenchment in expenditure, with of course a corresponding curtailment of operations, or more capital must be provided. We do not wish to sound any note of alarm louder than that which the facts fully warrant in respect to our own denominational work. The financial operations of the body generally we believe to be in the hands of men in whose ability and honesty of purpose the fullest confidence may be placed and who may be trusted to carry on the denominational enterprises on a safe financial basis. But from the constant report of depleted treasuries and accumulating deficits in connection with our principal boards of management, it seems evident that our yearly income is insufficient for the promotion of the work which we have in hand, and if income does not increase, then retrenchment in some branches of work at least would seem inevitable. This alternative is the more unpleasant to face in view of the great opportunities for enlargement and the urgent calls that are upon us from many sides. It would indeed be a sad thing to have to say to ourselves and to the world that, because of inadequate means, we are unable to move forward in our mission work and our educational work on the basis of expenditure necessary to meet in any reasonable measure the growing demands of the time.

Now the practical question with us is, Has the denomination reached the limit of its ability? Have the Baptists of these Provinces undertaken more work in the Lord's name than their financial ability would fairly enable them to carry through. Do the empty treasuries and the yearly deficits, of which we have so frequently to hear, indicate that we are trying to do a work for God which He has not given us the ability to provide for? Surely there is no other than a negative answer to these questions. The fact is not that the Baptists of these Provinces have not been entrusted with capital sufficient to provide adequately for the religious enterprises which they have undertaken, but that they do not put the available capital into the business. And the consequence is that our boards of management are placed in the most uncomfortable position of having to carry on our work with an uncertain and always insufficient provision. Is this honorable? It is estimated, we are told, that an increased yearly income of at least \$10,000 is necessary in order that the various denominational boards may be able to carry on free from debt the work which they have in hand, and that without any material enlargement upon the present scale of operations. Are our people able to provide this additional income? Who can doubt it? This would mean a total contribution to our denominational work—in addition to the sum raised by the W. B. M. U.—of but little more than 50 cents per member of the reported membership of our churches. It is impossible to believe that this is not easily within the ability of our people, and the investment of this money in the Lord's work would bring large spiritual returns to the investors. If Christian men and women will only recognize it as a duty and a privilege to invest in the work of the Lord some definite proportion of their income, according as He has prospered them—doing this regularly and promptly, there will be no report of depleted treasuries and boards embarrassed through lack of means to carry on the work which has been given us to do.

Editorial Notes.

—The death of the Rev Dr Newman Hall, widely known as a distinguished minister of the Congregationalist body in England, occurred in London last week at the age of 85. As a preacher and evangelist and an author of evangelistic pamphlets Dr. Hall exerted a wide and powerful influence.

—Mr. Albert Dawson, of London, writing in the Boston Congregationalist, says the discussion in regard to Dr. Parker's 'Congregational Church' idea is becoming more definite and outspoken. "The spirit in which his proposals were received favored, their adoption, but now several of the leaders of the denomination have declared against the scheme in whole or in part. Dr. Mackennal has taken his stand beside Dr. Parker, but Dr. Guinness Rogers regards the idea as 'contrary to the whole genius for Congregationalism,' and cannot see what will be gain-

ed by substituting 'Congregational Church' or 'Churches' for 'Congregational Union.'" Principal Fairbairn and Dr. John Brown are also quoted as among those who maintain a more or less critical attitude toward Dr. Parker's scheme. It seems probable that if a scheme were worked out which would effect the improvements which Dr. Parker had in view, the result would be nearer to a Presbyterian than to a Congregational polity. The advantages of the two are scarcely capable of combination by an elective process, and the question at last would be whether on the whole Presbyterianism is better than Congregationalism.

—The Casket quotes from a contributed article, having reference to the Grande Ligne Mission, which recently appeared in the MESSENGER AND VISITOR, the following words:

"Roman Catholics, Children of Protestants and Priests of the Roman Church have been won to Christ through this great mission, and then sent forth as flaming torches to light the feet of others into the path of salvation." In this connection our contemporary asks: "Do Baptists really believe that Catholics are without Christ, plunged in spiritual darkness, out of the path of salvation? And if not, then one more question: Is it the part of good Christians, or is it even compatible with common honesty, to use language which plainly implies that they are, and to employ proselytizing agencies among them which even more plainly, in their way imply the same thing?"

In reference to this we may say that we do not hold ourselves responsible for all the words or all the ideas of our correspondents. Further, we do not believe that Roman Catholics are so immersed in spiritual darkness that they have no light and are altogether out of the path of salvation. On the contrary, we rejoice to believe that many are saved by faith in the one atonement for sin and through a new life begotten in the heart by the Spirit of God. But we also believe that Baptists are acting wholly within their right and their duty in promoting such an institution as the Grande Ligne Mission, which has for its objects the dissemination of the truth of the gospel among the French people of Quebec, whether Roman Catholic or Protestant. If the Baptist view of what the New Testament teaches concerning Jesus Christ and His gospel is true, then it must be admitted that, to say the least, the gospel which Roman Catholicism preaches is a most lamentably defective one. The very existence of Protestantism in the world is a standing protest against the insufficiency of the Roman Catholic gospel. The light is not given that it may be hidden under a bushel, and Baptists have no need to apologize for letting their light shine wherever it is needed most.

—Miss Ellen M. Stone, the American missionary, held captive by brigands since early in September, is reported by a despatch from Constantinople to have been released. This despatch, which is generally received with credence, states that Miss Stone arrived at Strumitza, Macedonia, on Sunday morning. No one was there to meet her as the captors of Miss Stone had given no intimation as to where they intended to release her. Madame Tsilka and her baby, it is said, were also released. The first news of Miss Stone's being at liberty received by her friends was contained in a telegram received by Mr. Dickinson, the American Consul at Constantinople, from the vice-consul at Salonika. It is stated on the authority of Mr. Spencer Eddy, first secretary of the United States Legation at Constantinople, who had charge of the negotiations for the release of Miss Stone, that the brigands who captured the missionary were not professionals, but that the affair was political the money being wanted to aid in freeing Macedonia from Turkish rule.

—The Zionist movement, which has for its object the peopling of Palestine with Jews, continues to attract a good deal of attention. The leaders of the movement are said to anticipate important developments as a result of the visit of Dr. Theodore Herzl, of Vienna, founder of the Zionist movement, and president of the Zionist Congress recently held at Basle, Switzerland, to Constantinople. Dr. Herzl was summoned to the Yildiz Palace by a special telegram from the Sultan, and the Zionist leader is now negotiating with the Sultan for the acquisition of concessions in Palestine permitting of the unimpeded immigration and settlement of the Jews there. Dr. Herzl's demands include a charter granting some simple form of home rule and opening the Sultan's crown lands to Jewish colonization. A representative of the Jewish Colonization Association, which was endowed by the late Baron Hirsch with a large sum of money, is also at Constantinople, which is taken to signify that the trustees of the Baron Hirsch fund are about to concentrate their resources upon Palestine.

Rev. H. F. Waring's Lecture.

The event of the season in church circles in St. John was the lecture delivered by Brother Waring at Brussels street, on the evening of February 18th. The very large and representative audience which gathered, (at twenty-