

## Messenger and Visitor

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### The Maritime Convention and Home Missions.

At the approaching meeting of our Maritime Convention important interests of the denomination will necessarily, as in other years, come up for consideration. Our Foreign Mission work, with its vast field and great opportunities, but comparatively meagre equipment, will doubtless be strongly pressed upon the attention of the body.

In connection with our educational work it is understood that plans looking to some extension of the field of operations and an increase of efficiency are to be submitted, and these will doubtless demand special attention at the hands of the Convention. It is, however, with another highly important denominational interest connected with the Convention that we are principally concerned in our observations at present.

The Home Mission department of our work has been connected with the Convention for more than twenty years, during which much faithful work has been done, and valuable results have been secured. It must, however, be felt on all hands that the connection of this branch of our work with the Convention, under existing conditions, is in some respects far from satisfactory. The difficulty is of course chiefly on account of the conditions which now obtain in New Brunswick, where, for two or three years past, a large part of the home mission work of the province has been carried on through the agency of the N. B. Convention. The H. M. Board of the Maritime Convention has not at all sought to interfere with the work of the N. B. Convention. But, to meet the wishes of those churches which have not desired to come into connection with the latter, the Maritime Convention has from year to year appointed a committee on Home Missions in New Brunswick, through which committee churches not connected with the N. B. Convention might co-operate in this work. The result has been a kind of two-headed executive in Home Missions in this province. The Board of the N. B. Convention and the Committee of the Maritime Convention have met and worked together. There has been little or no friction, we are informed, in their relations. But there is a general feeling on both sides that the present arrangement cannot be perpetuated with advantage, and that it will be of great benefit to the interests of the Baptist cause in the province, if some common ground can be speedily found on which the full force of the denomination shall co-operate through a single executive in home mission work.

At this point it seems worth while to ask two questions. 1. Are the Baptist churches of New Brunswick generally willing to unite in a provincial organization for the carrying on of home mission work and the promotion of other local interests? 2. Provided they are willing to do so, are the churches of the other provinces willing to do likewise, thus taking the subject of Home Missions out of the Maritime Convention and committing them to provincial management?

We are of course not in a position to answer these questions. A few years ago they seemed to receive their answer in the negative. But it is not certain that that answer was final. Some misunderstandings and opposing counsels have occurred, which would have been avoided we believe if brethren had known each other better and trusted each other more. But perhaps some mist has now been cleared away, some prejudices removed, some irritations allayed, and there may be a more general disposition and ability to consider the whole situation dispassionately and with regard to the best interests of all concerned.

If the Baptists of New Brunswick are willing to sink all differences of opinion and bury all prejudices so far as cordially to unite in a provincial organization for home missions and other local work, is there any reason why those of the other provinces should not organize in like manner and for the same purpose? We do not see that there is. It may be said that it would be multiplying organizations; but that would not necessarily be the case. If each province shall have a convention or a general association—with the larger provinces judiciously districted (as in part they now are,) and holding district meetings quarterly—there would be no need of retaining the present associations. One convention or general association in each province, with the district meetings, would certainly be organization enough for all local purposes and would serve local interests, we believe, more effectively than under the present arrangement. Then the transference of home mission work to provincial organizations would relieve the now overcrowded Maritime Convention of a part of its work. Besides it would probably be found that under the proposed arrangement biennial meetings of that body would be sufficient. Considering the difficulty which is being experienced from year to year in obtaining entertainment for the Convention there would be in that a very appreciable gain. The grand aim, however, of the change in organization here suggested would be to promote uniformity and harmony of operation, and to hold the denomination in these provinces together in bonds of peace and united endeavor.

In view of the considerations here briefly presented, it would seem to us advisable that, at an early session of the approaching Convention in St. John, a large and representative committee should be appointed to take into consideration this subject, with a view to advising the Convention what changes, if any, are desirable in our present organization.

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### The Christian Conscience and Wine Drinking.

The proper attitude of Christians to the drinking customs of the present day is a question of importance on which every Christian should be willing to receive sound instruction. The remarks of Dr. Schaeffer in the *Sunday School Times* of July 31st respecting the application of Paul's teaching in the Bible lesson of the current week to this subject, appear so judicious and well expressed that we take the liberty of presenting them to our readers. Dr. Schaeffer says:

"There is no question of conscience in these days, that I know of, that is so nearly like that of which the Apostle speaks; as that of total abstinence. In those days, there were some Christians who thought that it was idolatrous for them to eat meat that had been offered to idols. In this they were wrong, but until their consciences were enlightened, it was really wrong for them to eat such meat. Paul first strove to enlighten their conscience by telling them that an idol was nothing, and that it made no difference whether they ate or whether they abstained from eating. But to the brethren he also wrote, that if they came in contact with any of these 'weak brethren,' and saw that they would be led into sin by the example of those who eat, for the sake of Christ they had better yield to the weak consciences of the unenlightened brethren. This was most considerate, and showed that the Apostle was filled with the spirit of the Master who pleased not himself. Now in the matter of strong drink, we may take the same stand, and be willing, for the sake of the weaker brethren, to yield our own opinion. For example, I may be able to use wine in moderation, and not in any way injure myself. And yet for the sake of others over whom I have an influence, I may be, and ought to be, willing to give up this right, lest my brother should stumble through me, and fall. But there is another side to this whole matter of our conduct in the matter of total abstinence. In some respects the question of drink is not at all like that of meat offered to idols, for no man ever was enslaved by eating such meat as many are in the drink-habit. This is the essence of the whole temperance question. It is safe for me to abstain from all intoxicants, not only for the sake of my weak brother, but for my own sake as well. History tells of such grand men, who have gone to ruin by means of the drink habit, that no one can really consider himself perfectly safe who is a moderate drinker.

What man is there in any community who cannot look back and see the playmates of his youth, who now are ruined by this one gigantic evil? What calling is there which does not furnish its quota of drunkards? Even the sacred rank of the ministry has its victims, as we all know. In this city of New York in the denomination to which I belong, I have known at least three such wrecks in the past twenty-five years. It may be that our scholars have the idea that drunkards belong only to the ignorant and coarse classes. In this they are much mistaken. If we could, in any large city form a procession of all the drunkard doctors, drunkard lawyers, drunkard business men, drunkard ministers, that had been in the city for the last twenty-five years, the procession would be one of the most appalling that has ever marched the streets of any city. This is what should make all our scholars feel that, since the danger is so great, they had better take the only perfectly safe course, and abstain from all strong drink, before it has gained any power over them. Prevention is so much better than cure, and so much easier, that we may well push with all our might today, to get our scholars to become total abstainers."

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### Knowledge and Love.

In the Bible lesson for next Sunday two grandly important things are set forth by way of contrast.

It is hardly necessary to say that there is no conflict between knowledge and love any more than there is between faith and works. One cannot be a Christian without love, neither can he without knowledge; these two essentials of Christian character must always go together, and each should help the other. There was danger, however, in the church of Corinth—a danger not confined to that church or age, that love might not keep pace with knowledge in the development of christian life and character. No one who has observed the life and writings of Paul as given us in the New Testament can doubt that he valued knowledge, and especially all knowledge having reference to Christ and his salvation. He would have his brethren abound in knowledge and rejoice in the full liberty of the gospel. But he would not have them ignorant that there is something more important than knowledge. Divorced from love, knowledge is likely to minister to self-conceit and to puff up rather than to build up. All human knowledge is at best partial, and the man who thinks he knows anything absolutely and prides himself on his understanding has yet to acquire the beginning of true knowledge. But love is the same here and forever. The man who loves is linked by his love to God and to his fellow-men, and thereby held in true relations. Love is universal. God loves, and His humblest human child may answer Him in love. Love is divine, for God is love. Love, therefore, not knowledge—is for the Christian, the supreme guide, the grand unifier and edifier of the church.

The practical subject to which the apostle immediately applied this principle was the eating of meats sacrificed to idols. The conditions prevailing in Corinth were such that food which had been consecrated to some heathen god was constantly being offered for sale in the markets of the city or formed a part of the bill of fare at tables where Christians might find it convenient to eat. The question with which the Corinthian church was troubled was—"Were Christians free to eat such food or should they abstain?" What Paul says in this passage and elsewhere certainly implies that, in the nature of the case itself, there was no reason why they should not eat. Knowledge said, "The case is clear. The heathen divinities have no real existence. The idol is but an idol—it is nothing in the world. The food is God's good creature, and the fact that superstitious hands have consecrated it by an unmeaning ceremony, to an idol, does not make it less so. Therefore, I may eat without fear and without offence."

Paul seems to say that such a conclusion would be quite correct, if only all men had this knowledge. But all have not. Here is a brother who has not been able to climb up to the grand height. Some clouds of superstition still hang round him. He cannot get rid of the feeling that an idol is something, and that to eat food consecrated to an idol is a sin against Christ. Here, then, love must be

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