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Baptists. South Carolina. Charleston Association, 1812.

Minutes of the Charleston Baptist Association.

[Charleston, 1812.] 12 pp.

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MINUTES

OF THE

CHARLESTON BAPTIST ASSOCIATION,

Held at the High Hills of Santee, S. C. from Oct. 31 till Nov. 4th, 1812.

1. THE two first days were employed in the usual exercises of devotion; two sermons being delivered on Saturday and three on the Sabbath, which closed with the administration of the Lord's Supper. These exercises were solemn and impressive, and a numerous congregation heard the word with silent, devout attention.

2. On Monday at 11 o'clock A. M. the Association Sermon was delivered by Rev. Joseph B. Cook, from 1 Cor. xiii. 13. "And now abideth Faith, Hope, Charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity."

3. Rev. Dr. Furman prayed at the opening of business. Letters from 29 churches were then read, an account taken of their state, and the names of their delegates enrolled.

4. Elected Rev. Davis Collins, moderator, and Rev. J. B. Cook, clerk.

5. Received, and read with pleasure, Letters and Minutes from corresponding Associations, some of which were presented by messengers, who were cordially welcomed to a seat. From the Philadelphia a Letter and Minutes of the last year. From the Warren a Letter and minutes of the last year. From the Georgia, no accounts. From the Bethel a Letter, by their messengers Rev. Messrs. John Rooker and Samuel M'Creary. From the Hephzibah, and Sandy Creek, no accounts. From the Savannah River, a Letter and minutes, of the last year. From the Edgefield, no accounts. From the Neuse a Letter and minutes of the last year. From the Cape Fear, a Letter and minutes of the last year, by their messenger, Rev. James Ranaldson.

6. Appointed the following Brethren a committee, in conjunction with the author, Rev. Mr. Roberts, to examine the circular Letter, viz. Dr. Furman and Mr. Cook; also appointed the same brethren, with the addition of Rev. Mr. Nixon, a committee to examine the minutes of corresponding associations with respect to subjects of special interest.

Mr. Nixon prayed. Adjourned till Tuesday 10 o'clock.

Met pursuant to adjournment. The moderator prayed.

7. The following churches petitioned for admission into this association, and, upon satisfactory evidence being obtained respecting their faith and order, were cordially received, viz. Goose Creek and Mount Olivet churches, dismissed from the Wassameaw church; and New Providence, dismissed from the Black Creek church, all constituted in the course of the present year.

8. The committee appointed to examine the circular letter, reported, that they were of opinion, it would be of advantage to make additions to the letter and some alterations, which would require more time than could be employed for these purposes at present, and that the author should be requested to make them, previous to its publication. On reading the letter, the association concurred in the report; and appointed Dr. Furman to assist the author in making the proposed alterations.

9. The committee appointed to inspect the minutes of corresponding associations, recommended, that this body unite with sister associations, in various parts of the United States, in warning their churches and the public against the following impostors or disorderly persons, who are travelling in various parts of the country, under the character of Baptist Ministers, viz.—William Thomas, John Williams, John M'Carey, William Dawes and Jesse Hasel. Concurred in.

10. Read the minutes of the last year, and took into consideration the reprinting of the Confession of Faith, system of discipline and Catechism. Dr. Furman reported, that the committee who were appointed to superintend this business, the last year, having received but few returns from the churches, and having weighed the subject maturely, recommend, that the Printing be suspended for some time longer, and that the association inform the churches and the public, that further opportunity will be afforded them to subscribe for the work and to forward their subscriptions. Agreed to.

11. Took into consideration the mission and school among the Catawba Indians. The following quere, from the High Hill's church respecting this business, was now introduced, viz, "Ought the school among the Catawba Indians, in our present circumstances, to be continued?" Answer—As a considerable debt is contracted on this business, for the discharge of which provision has not been made by the churches, and the school has not been well attended by the Indians this year, it is proper that the school be suspended, at least for a time; but that the mission be continued.

Read a letter from the Indian chiefs, &c. and requested Dr. Furman to answer it, and to state particularly to the nation, the sense of this association, on what respects their civil and religious interests.

12. Took into consideration the queries from the churches: 1st, that from the Charleston church, referred from the last year's meeting to this, on the subject of publick and private excommunication. To which the following answer was given. 1. The first evidence from the scriptures for the practice of our churches, of having both publick and private excommunications according to the circumstances of the case, is a negative one: That is, there is, as we conceive, no positive rule laid down in the scriptures for the manner of proceeding in such cases; the passage in 1 Cor. v. chap. 4, 5, verses usually referred to, being a description of the manner in which a miraculous apostolic act was to be performed; not the act of a church: The offence also being one of the highest kind. 2. The gospel favors the sentiment, that punishments should be proportioned to crimes, and as much as possible for the reclamation and benefit of the offender. "The Lord will have mercy and not sacrifice;" "Jesus Christ came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them." Crimes which under the Jewish law were punishable with death, are under the gospel, punished with exclusion from christian fellowship. 3. The intention of Joseph to put Mary away privately, and not make her a publick example, while he thought her an adulteress, and while the law was in force which punished adultery with death, is spoken of favorably in the New-Testament and ascribed to the goodness of the man; and lastly, the Apostle Jude positively directs, that a difference be made in proceedings with transgressors, according to the circumstances of their cases. Considering

therefore, the subject as left to the wisdom and discretion of the church, we think that in ordinary cases private excommunication is not only right, but most proper; in extraordinary cases, public.

2d Query, from the Welsh Neck Church—Should a person who has been baptized on the profession of his faith, yet afterward thinks that he was not then a true penitent and believer, be again baptized, when he considers himself as brought into possession of these qualifications.

Answered negatively.

3d Query, from the Ebenezer Church; How should dancing schools and balls be formed and conducted, that they may accord with the scriptures of the New-Testament, and that it may be found consistent with christian good order to send our children to them, and encourage them?

Answer—As we have nothing to do in dancing schools and balls, and have not made the regulation of them the subject of our studies, we are unprepared to answer this query.

4th Query, from the Little Pedee Church; Can a man, and a woman to whom he is married, be admitted into a gospel church, the man having another wife alive, chargeable with notorious infidelity and prostitution, who even after forgiveness and reconciliation, had again eloped from him and married herself to another man, previously to his marrying another woman?

Answer. If the case is accurately stated, the man in question had a right to a legal divorce; and in that case might have been regularly married again. But as our government does not grant divorces, but by a special act of the legislature, which we believe has in no instance taken place: And as the second marriage of the person referred to was contrary to law, it forms an objection of weight against him and the person to whom he is married.

13. Appointed persons to write to corresponding associations, and the following brethren messengers to some of them, viz. Paulling to the Georgia; the moderator and clerk to the Bethel; Denson to the Hephzibah; Belcher to the Edgefield; M'Kellar and Ellis to the Sandy Creek; M'Creary and Hodges to the Savannah River; White to the Cape Fear.

14. Agreed, that the Boston Association be considered as one with whom we shall regularly correspond.

Mr. Rooker prayed. Adjourned till Wednesday 10 o'clock.

Met pursuant to adjournment. Mr. M'Creary prayed.

15. Read and approved the letters appointed to be written to corresponding associations.

16. On motion agreed, that the moderator address a letter of thanks to Rev. Dr. Maxcy, for the excellent sermon, which he delivered on the sabbath morning, and request a copy of it for publication: And that Mr. Cook be requested to furnish a copy of the sermon which he delivered introductory to business, for the same purpose; also appointed Dr. Furman, in case copies of the sermons are furnished, to superintend the printing and distribution of them.

17. The association having taken into consideration the awfully alarming dispensations of divine providence, during the present and past year; and the existing state of war in which our country is placed, agree to observe the first Wednesday in March next, as a day of deep humiliation, fasting and prayer.

18. Agreed, that the association in future appoint a Minister to

commence public worship on the Saturday of our annual meeting, and another to act in case of his failure.

19. Agreed, that this association sympathize with the church at the Cheraw Hill, in the loss they have sustained by the death of their pastor, the Rev. Joshua Lewis, and with his aged widow on her bereavement. Mr. Lewis was very useful during his course in the ministry. He was, we trust, a good man, and much people were added unto the Lord through his instrumentality. He finished his course in a good old age; and died, we are informed, in much comfort and assurance of final happiness.

20. Agreed, that the subject of the next circular letter, be the following question, viz. "What are the scriptural evidences of infant salvation?" Appointed Dr. Furman to write the letter.

21. Agreed, that the next meeting of association, be at the Welsh Neck Church, on Society Hill, the Saturday before the first Lord's day in November, 1813.

22. Appointed the moderator to preach on Saturday, and in case of failure Rev. Benjamin Mosely.

Also appointed Rev. Edmund Botsford to preach the association Sermon on Monday, and, in case of failure, Rev. John M. Roberts. Collected money for printing the Minutes, and requested Dr. Furman to superintend the printing and distribution of them, as usual. United in prayer and adjourned.

MINUTES OF THE GENERAL COMMITTEE.

1. The following delegates appeared—Furman, Roberts, Nixon, Paulling, Tucker, Evans, Huggins, and Good.

2. Elected officers, Richard Furman President, David Adams Treasurer, John M. Roberts Secretary, James Harper and Isaac Gill Assistants.

3. Received, by the hands of the President, 122 dollars, 50 cents, transmitted to him by Mrs. Eliza A. Adams and Mrs. Hephzibah Townsend, Treasurers of the Wadmalaw and Edisto Female Mite Society, in aid of the Missionary Fund.

Agreed that the thanks of this body be given to those Ladies, and the society for their pious liberality.

4. Mr. Allan Sweat appeared as a candidate for the Churches' bounty, with a Recommendation from the Church at Pipe Creek; underwent examination, and was approved. Whereupon, agreed, that as soon as the state of the fund will admit of it, he shall be placed on the churches' bounty.

5. Agreed that the special committee continue to exercise the powers of the general committee, in things necessary, during the recess of this body.

6. Took an account of the contributions, and state of the fund, as exhibited below.

<i>Education Fund:</i>	<i>Missionary Fund.</i>
Charleston, contrib. \$194	\$ 84 87½
High Hills Santee, 25	25
Congaree, 2	5
Amelia Township, 5	10
Welsh Neck, 24	Wadmal. & Edis. Mite Soc. 122 50
Columbia, 18 37½	-----
Beulah, 11	Expenditure, 247 37½
Three Creeks, 13	Paid to Missi. \$121 43½
	do. School Mas. 90 94 } 247 37½
Charleston collec- } 292 37½	do. Educa. Fund, 35 } -----
tion rec'd by late } 194	
Treas. deducted, } -----	Remains due Mr. Lewis } \$159 6
	the School Master, } -----
	or £ 22 19 1
Specialties in hands of President 929 3 4	
Cash in hands of do. 27 4 11	
Cash repaid from Miss. Funds, 8 3 4	
Cash in hands of late T's Exec. 228 12 4	

£1216 3 0	

The Expenditures, as appears by receipted vouchers, have this Year amounted to £167 15 4.

STATE OF THE CHURCHES.

The Ordained Ministers' Names are in Capitals; Licenced Preachers, in Italics; from Churches distinguished by an asterisk [*] we have had no account, and their numbers are represented as they stood the last year. Pastors and Messengers to whose names an obelisk [†] is affixed, were absent; a dash [—] denotes a vacancy.

CHURCHES.	MINISTERS AND MESSENGERS.	Baptized.	Recd by Let.	Dismissed.	Excommn.	Restored.	Dead.	Number of Members	
Charleston,	RICHARD FURMAN,	46	1	12	4		6	476	
Welsh Neck,	{ DANIEL WHITE,† Saml. Evans, Martin Dewit,	4		1			2	98	
Ebenezer,	{ BEN. MOSELEY,† Timothy Dargan, Thos. Stephenson,			1				84	
High Hills Santee,	{ JNO. M. ROBERTS, DAVIS COLLINS, John Murray, William Potts,	29	2			1		226	
Cheraw Hill,	{ —, JOHN ELLIS, JAMES M'KELLAR,†	5					2	198	
Beauty Spot,	WM. BENNET, Edm. Brown,	3		5	3		4	45	
U. F. Lynch's Creek,	—, William Horton,	54	4		2	2		337	
Mount Pisgah,	{ J. B. COOK, Jesse Peebles, Wm. Cater, Cason Scott,	4	3	4				52	
L. F. Lynch's Creek,*	—,							16	
Rockey River,*	GEORGE WHITLEY,†							48	
Deep Creek,	{ FRAME WOODS,† JOEL GULLAGE, Rich. Graves,	4	1	2	1			72	
Little Pedee,	S. REAVES,† Wm. Whitman,	4	14	1	2	1	1	69	
Georgetown,	EDMUND BOTSFORD,†	24	1					86	
Gapway,	—, Henry W. Hodges,	3	3					47	
Lane's Creek.*	JESSE LEWELLIN,†							40	
Congaree,	STEPH. NIXON, Henry Fox,	20	1	1	1	1	1	94	
Black Creek,	{ JAMES COLEMAN,† Elias Norwood, Thos. Conn,	16		44	6		5	246	
Three Creeks,	—, Burrel Huggins, J. Jones,	6			1		1	29	
Wassansaw,	—, Mala. Nettles, J. Nettles,	10	1	27		6		50	
Wateree Creek,	{ RALPH JONES,† Asa Bell, Moses Knighten,			1	6			53	
Muddy Creek,	—, R. Carlisle, Hart. M'Gee,			1	1			13	
Catfish,	—, Henry Berry,				2	1		225	
Terrel's Bay,	{ WILLIAM PALMER,† Jacob Rowell, Wm. Phillips,	3	2			1	1	2	56
Beulah,	{ GEORGE SCOTT,† William R. Tucker, Isaac Price,	29	1			2		2	161
25 Mile Creek,	{ AARON WOOTON,† Alex. Crumpton, Wm. Ferguson,	13			26	1	2		76
Amelia Township,	{ JAMES THIGPEN, William Paulling, Jacob Bair,	81				3		3	282
Lynch's Creek,	S. TIMMONS, Jno. Courtney,	2				1			42
Columbia,	—, John Goode,	40	3	3			2		104
Camden,	—, W. Brazington, J. Mickel	10	1	3					37
Calvary,	{ BRADLEY RHAME, Jer. Rhame, Jno. Rhame,	27	2	4					78
Piedmont,	J. KNIGHTEN, Underh. Ellis,	33	2	2	1				65
Bethel,	{ WASHINGTON BELCHER, JAS. DENSON, John China,	76	9				1	1	106
Goose Creek,	{ MATT. McCULLERS,† Lewis F. Breaker,								28
Mount Olivet,	—, I. Layton, W. Owens, jun.								31
New Providence.	CHARLES WILLIAMS.								45

Increase this Year 525.

546 53 145 30 15 30 3498

THE CIRCULAR LETTER.

*The CHARLESTON BAPTIST ASSOCIATION convened at the High Hills
of Santee the 31st of October, 1812;*

To the Churches they represent, send Christian Salutation.

Beloved Brethren,

The subject on which we are now to address you is truly important, and merits your serious attention. This is Christian Liberty, in its nature and extent. These we shall endeavour to explain and illustrate, more especially in some of their branches, and to improve for practical uses.

Liberty, is a subject which may apply to man in his natural, moral, intellectual, and religious character: In its common acceptation, it stands opposed to natural bondage, or slavery: In a more particular and extended view of the subject, we should define it to be a manner of being, thinking, chusing, and acting, free from oppressive, or unreasonable restraint; and as a state in which are secured to its possessors important rights and privileges, which are highly conducive to happiness.

This definition is applicable, in an interesting and excellent sense, to christian liberty: That liberty wherewith Christ hath made his people free; to which they are called; and in which they are exhorted to stand with unshaken firmness. This is spiritual, or religious freedom: A freedom which the saints may, and do enjoy, in their souls, even while in a state of outward bondage. It consists in deliverance from the power of Satan and of sin; from the condemnatory sentence of the divine law, as a covenant of works; from the ritual of Moses; and from all presumptuous claims of men, who as civil rulers, or spiritual guides, would govern the mind, or restrain the conscience.

The rights and privileges which this freedom secures to believers, are unspeakably great and excellent; consisting of blessings spiritual, and eternal: Even all the blessings of that new and everlasting covenant which is ratified by the death of their Redeemer, and published in the Gospel of Salvation.

But though those whom the Son of God has made free, are free indeed; we are not to consider them as freed from their dependence and obligations as creatures; nor from the gentle yoke of the Redeemer, whose service is perfect freedom. They are not freed from civil government and human laws, when formed in consistency with the laws of God; nor from the legitimate authority Christ has given to his Church, to be exercised over its members for their conservation in faith and purity, and for the correction of sin and error.

In the enjoyments and pursuits of life, christian liberty lies within the limits of things lawful, and expedient. No man can have liberty to do an action unlawful in a moral sense: Nor should human laws be disobeyed, but when they evidently infringe on the laws of God. The christian therefore, with the rest of mankind, is amenable to those tribunals on earth, which God has established to take cognizance of things unlawful, whether civil or ecclesiastical, according to the nature of the case. Some things, indeed which are wrong, both in principle and action, human tribunals cannot reach; and with some they may not interfere; God having reserved judgment on these to himself.

In matters of expediency, a man's own understanding and conscience must judge for him; friends may advise, but cannot lawfully control. Very important actions, duties, and interests, are deeply concerned in this branch of christian liberty, such for instance, as relate to marriage, place of residence, professional employment, and things of a like nature. Subjects of opinion, things neutral, or indifferent; and mere circumstantials in religion, come also under the control of christian liberty, or are left to its discretion. "One man" says the Apostle, "esteemeth one day above another, another esteemeth every day alike; let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind." This maxim the Apostle applies to the eating of meat, or forbearing to eat it; and to a christian's going to the feast of a gentile: And it will be found to apply to many circumstances of life, on the propriety, or expediency of which there may be great diversity of opinion, even among wise and good men.

The liberty given by our Lord to his Disciples is an invaluable blessing: They should be careful, therefore, to preserve it in all its branches. In respect of private judgment and conscience, let them never be the servants of

men; nor in the articles of Faith and duty call any man *Master*, or *Father* on earth; knowing that in this sense, Christ only is their master; and that they have a Father in heaven, even God. But as they should be careful to preserve their own liberty, so should they take heed that they do not invade the liberty of their brethren. When men require of others, conformity to their own particular judgments, taste, or fancy in things which God has left to the free choice, or conscientious judgment of his people; or when they severely censure and condemn those who with respect to such things differ from them, in sentiment or practice, they are guilty of this invasion. Churches as well as individuals are chargeable with such improper, sinful conduct, when they require of their members subjection to principles, rules and usages which are not evidently founded on the word of God.

It should be a serious concern of the christian, not to abuse his liberty; not to use it as an occasion to the flesh; but to improve it to the glory of God, the comfort of his own soul, and the benefit of his fellow men. By its abuse great guilt may be incurred, and many serious injuries to himself and others produced. If left by his divine Lord to exercise his choice freely in things not forbidden, yet should he prefer the most excellent, and lay himself under strong voluntary restrictions, rather than fail to preserve his faithfulness and purity, to obtain the excellencies of virtue and piety, and to arrive at the summit of that usefulness to the cause of God, and man, of which he is capable.

To assist the conscientious mind in its endeavours to obtain these objects, we submit the following illustration, on subjects of expediency and social intercourse.

Are you in a state of affluence, obtained by inheritance, or the honest labour of your own hands? Without embarrassment to your estate, or injury to any man, could you erect for yourself a magnificent habitation, decorate it with splendid furniture, feast on the greatest variety of delicacies, wear the richest clothing, and support the most elegant, sumptuous equipage? And are you desirous of ascertaining whether such a splendid stile of living would comport with your christian liberty, or not? Bring it to the scriptural test: "All things are lawful for me; but all things are not expedient." If nothing more than your own pleasure, or gratification (no public station to be supported, or public benefit to be conferred) calls for this magnificent stile of living; moderation, prudence, spiritual-mindedness, temperance, liberality, and charity, will teach you to adopt one less splendid and expensive. These will teach you, after the example of Christ, and of the primitive christians, to turn your chief attention to doing good, as you have ability; and not to please yourself in a manner unbecoming a stranger and pilgrim on earth, and an expectant of eternal blessedness. Convenience, comfort, and decency in the stile of life, become all; something bestowed on ornament and elegance, is not improper for the rich; where genius, art, and industry are to be encouraged: There is also a magnificence peculiar to high stations of public authority and power; but parade, luxury, and pomp ill become the christian. The high gratifications of sense also, are always dangerous to the interest of the soul. He who has more than is necessary for the comfortable support of himself and family, will do well to encourage schemes of publick and private beneficence: Let him place of his abundance in the angelic hand of charity to distribute, and consecrate a respectable portion of it to the immediate service of the Most High.

Are you a child of God, in moderate, or in indigent circumstances? And do you, as one contented with his lot, regulate your habitation, the expenses of your table, your dress, and the enjoyments of your life generally, by the circumstances in which divine providence has placed you, without envying, or censuring your brethren, who, by the order of that same righteous providence, enjoy their liberty in a higher, or more extended sphere of action? You do well: divine wisdom approves your conduct; and christian liberty smiles upon you as one of her faithful sons. But be careful to preserve this happy state of mind, and righteous manner of acting. You are liable to err from various causes. Envy, hidden perhaps from yourself, may induce you to censure in a brother, what he does by the privileges of his station, or endowments, in things placed beyond your reach; which you would do on an exchange of circumstances, and would think right. Ignorance of justifiable motives which influence him in parts of his conduct, but do not act on you, not coming within your sphere, may also induce you to censure him. On the other hand, you

may be induced from affection and respect to those of superior talents and elevated stations, to submit your understanding and conscience too much to their judgment and influence, and to copy after them in things essentially wrong, or in which such, if right for them, would be wrong for you. "For to him who esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean."

In things immaterial, and indifferent in their own nature, but which through weakness of the human understanding, some consider in a different light, conscientious care should be taken neither to give offence, nor be offended. This conduct should be mutual: concession and forbearance become the followers of Christ. The general rule of duty in these respects, is strongly marked in the word of God, and lies between bold censorious judging on the one hand, (which the scriptures positively condemn;) and an unfeeling, presuming temper and conduct on the other, by which the self-sufficient professor grieves the tender consciences of persons truly pious. The doctrine of offence, which is embraced in this subject, consists of two parts; the one relates to offending a brother by grieving him and thus occasioning his distress; the other to injuring him, by causing him to offend against God. Much of what St. Paul says on the subject of offence, applies to the last mentioned particular. With respect to this he had formed the resolution, not to eat meat while the world stood, if it caused his brother to offend. A mistaken view of what the scriptures state on the duty of condescending to the weaknesses of christian brethren, has induced some persons of contracted, and too often of conceited, captious minds, to suppose, that they had a right on this principle, to demand of others, a compliance with all their ideas of propriety in manners and conduct, however childish and absurd; which claim they have made with great confidence, not suspecting, it would seem, their own fallibility, nor making the faithful, candid enquiries which are requisite for the knowledge of serious truths. But surely the indulgence of such a temper, was not the intention of the Holy Spirit, in dictating the scriptures. The persons most likely to be offended, grieved, or injured; and which claim the tender concern of the strong, are meek and humble souls, whose weakness is united with a tender conscience; or, the credulous and yielding, who too readily comply with the spirit and example of those with whom they are conversant. These justly claim the tender concern of their brethren. With respect to these, we ask, should we not in things indifferent, readily sacrifice our own pleasure, rather than wound their tender consciences? "It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak." The Apostle Paul assures us that "when we sin against the brethren, and wound their weak consciences, we sin against Christ." In reference to *them* he declared, "if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no meat while the world standeth."

Are not these passages of holy-writ conclusive evidence, that we should not suffer our liberty to become a stumbling block to the feeble lambs in the flock of our divine redeemer? What proportion can there be between our gratification in such transient enjoyments, and the pain and injury suffered by a humble child of God? If we will not exercise such reasonable self-denial, and tenderness, do we manifest the same mind which was in our compassionate Saviour, who pleased not himself? Who humbled himself from the highest glory of heaven, assumed the form of a servant, and became poor that we might be eternally rich?

Is it not demonstrably evident that christian liberty is abused and perverted, when we do not cheerfully prefer the spiritual peace and comfort of our brethren to the indulgence of our appetites and passions, in objects of unessential and minor importance? In matters of this kind, it is the characteristic of christian liberty, not to seek her own, but the honour of God, and the happiness of his people: And we know that "He who in these things serveth Christ, is accepted of God, and approved of men." "Let us therefore, follow the things which make for peace, and things whereby one may edify another;" "for meat destroy not the work of God."

As on subjects of prudence and opinion, whether literary, civil, political, moral, or religious, the wisest and best of men entertain different sentiments; is it not self-evident, that this diversity, if not directed, is permitted by infinite wisdom; and, have we not reason to conclude, for important purposes? As the rights of private judgment, and conscience are sacred and inalienable should they not also remain inviolate? Does not christian liberty justify and applaud in an individual, the adoption and practice of those rules which are

formed from a conscientious faithful adherence to the laws of reason and revelation, as far as they are discovered by him? Does it not also forbid him to censure and condemn a correspondent conduct in another person; though it should not, in its effects, circumstantially coincide with his own? And does not the Apostle, in his animated exhortation, apply appropriately, and with force to this point? "Who art thou, that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up, for God is able to make him stand."

After we have impartially searched, and honestly studied the scriptures on a subject of Religion; and with the full conviction of our minds have embraced what appears to us to be their true meaning, ought not christian liberty to be a holy barrier, against the intrusive interference of any human being? True it is, we may be wrong, when we think ourselves most right; and benevolence will dictate to a more enlightened, pious friend, to assist us in correcting our errors. To the counsel and aids of modest friendship, there can be no just objection. To these our hearts should be candidly open. But the conduct to which we have been objecting differs widely from the offices of friendship.— In the tender, delicate concerns of the conscience, we should never forget to do to others as we would they should do to us. This divine rule, rightly applied, would excite benevolence; but prevent censoriousness, and persecution. Had this golden rule been duly regarded, and the law of liberty correctly understood, what flames of antichristian malignity and persecution had been prevented, to the immortal honour of persons professing the religion of Jesus Christ!

Through the violation and abuse committed on christian liberty, by bigotry, intemperate zeal, and arbitrary power, those who ought to have lived in the most cordial friendship, have too often acted as implacable enemies! Witness not only the decrees, edicts, Inquisitions, massacres, racks, and flames employed by the church of Rome, formerly; but, in later days, the persecutions of protestants by protestants; and the violence of party-spirit among different denominations against each other; and, too often, among professors of the same denomination even now. By the sons of violence, and intemperate zeal, christian liberty, which is naturally allied to benevolence and God-like charity, has been cruelly, divorced from this heavenly alliance, and forced to associate with bigotry and superstition! But give this divine principle free course; let it operate with its native spirit and energies, and it will produce peace on earth, good will to men, and glory to God in the Highest.

With respect to the extent of Christian liberty, if as we have stated, it consists in freedom from the dominion of sin, from condemnation and wrath, from the tyranny of Satan, and the arbitrary claims of men who would bind the conscience; if it assures to the humble believer, immunities and blessings inconceivably great, even the blessings of grace and salvation; if it grants him on earth the privileges of God's House, and the enjoyment of all his good creatures, as far as these may be used to the glory of God, his own comfort, and the benefit of others; if the believer is not without law to God, but under the law to Christ; and if his liberty of choice and action, beyond human control, lies in things lawful, concerning the expediency, or expediency of which his own conscience, or prudence must be the judge. Then are we furnished with important data on the subject; and have governing principles of truth by which, as sons of liberty we should try our spirit and actions, and direct our pursuits. It is the duty and happiness of believers to assert their liberty, and claim its privileges in the fullest extent to which their gracious redeemer has granted them. But let them beware of counterfeits. Licentiousness, and arrogance, have assumed the name and garb of liberty. They have imposed on many, and may impose on us. Christian liberty can be only enjoyed in its true character; in connexion with daily self-denial; and it must be directed in its course by the word and spirit of God: "Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." The commands, prohibitions, and promises of the divine word are as a wall of fire to bound and guard the christian's liberty. This liberty in union with purity, truth and love, is a gentle chrysal stream, flowing in the channel opened for it by the gospel, and makes glad the city of our God; but licentiousness, as an impetuous, overwhelming torrent, sweeps away the mounds of truth and justice, and prostrates all the munitions of reason, prudence and religion.

We have seen that no privilege is conveyed by christian liberty to its possessors (if it can be called a privilege) to force the conscience of any human

being; or to persecute and destroy those who do not comply with their sentiments, and wishes. It is equally certain that neither Popes, Bishops, Councils, Presbyteries, Associations, Churches, nor private individuals, have any liberty, or right, to add to any doctrine, ordinance, or command, contained in the word of God, or to diminish from them; nor, to make that a religious duty which the word of God has not made so. Where the general nature of a duty is taught, but certain circumstances are left undefined; these circumstances, as before hinted, are, no doubt, to be regulated by the principles of christian liberty: So in that direction, "let all things be done, decently and in order," though decency and order will ever preserve their general character; yet there is much, in certain cases, left for christian wisdom and prudence to decide on, with respect to time, place, civil customs, and manners of a people or age, &c. But in positive institutions, the circumstances marked, or laid down in the word of God, are not to be considered indifferent, or discretionary. "The ordinances," in these respects, "are to be kept as they were delivered to us."

The following question which has relation to this subject, has been always interesting: In what sense are we to take the scriptures, when they assert, that believers are not under the law, but under grace; while, yet, they also assert, that they do not, through faith make void the law, but establish it; and that believers are under the law to Christ? To us it appears, that, in the first assertion, and others of a similar nature, the moral law, as a covenant of works, is principally intended; though sometimes, the abrogated ceremonial law, given by Moses, is connected with the moral, and also intended. In the latter assertion, though the moral law is also meant; yet not as a covenant of works, but is then considered as it is in its original nature and design, a rule of life; which, in principle and spirit, forms not only the rule of duty for man, but for all rational creatures. Viewed in this light, it is established firm as the throne of heaven, is connected with the gospel, and must, and will remain. Its authority is the authority of God; and our obligations to honor and obey it, are infinite. The gospel does not diminish these obligations; but increases them, by increasing our debt to the divine goodness and mercy.—Pharisaic hope, confidence, and pride; and antinomian profaneness, equally militate against christian liberty: The first, by rejecting the gospel of free grace for the scheme of human merit; and by deterring the poor, convicted, self-condemned sinner, from embracing the hope of mercy; the other by rejecting the governing authority of the divine Law, and by turning the grace of God into lasciviousness. Their advocates, while they promise their deluded votaries liberty, are themselves the servants of corruption. Though few comparatively do openly assert antinomian principles, yet a tendency to them in doctrine, is frequently perceivable; but in practice, the number of antinomians is great. Whoever indulges himself, habitually, in the neglect of known duty, or the commission of known sin, under the delusive persuasion that obedience to the divine commands is to him a matter of mere option, or indifference; or that he may venture upon such a course of life in confidence of the freeness and fulness of grace, or of his security in it, is a practical antinomian. Such walk after the flesh, not in the bounds of Christian liberty. Their confidence will be blasted: And as they remain servants of sin, so they have every reason to fear they will be overwhelmed with destruction.

When we inculcate that christians should assert and enjoy their liberty in its full extent, we wish to be understood as directing your attention principally to the spiritual, saving benefits, which are received by faith, and enjoyed in the exercise of sanctified affections, with a direct view to the glory of God, and the interests of the redeemer's kingdom. Where our liberty calls for the exercise of prudence and discretion, and affords present ease, indulgence to sense, and outward, earthly advantages; the man who will go to the full extent of his liberty, rarely walks in safety. Here he should be careful to keep his heart with all diligence, knowing that out of it are the issues of life: And to walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as the wise, because the days are evil. The dangers of prosperity are great! Nor are they confined to prosperity in worldly interests. Spiritual gifts, popularity, success in religious pursuits, as they respect the outward state of the church; even comfortable frames of spirit, and attainments in christian knowledge, may become occasions to the flesh for injuring the soul, through an abuse of liberty. When was it that the paternal care of heaven permitted the messenger of Satan to buffet Paul? Was it not when he was in danger of being ex-

alted above measure, through the abundance of the revelations he had received? When did David become carnally secure and fall into a great transgression: and Hezekiah fail to render to the Lord according to all the benefits conferred upon him, by becoming vain and ostentatious? We know that they fell into these evils, in times of prosperity, when the sphere of their liberty was widely extended; and after they had received great blessings from the hand of God.

The christian may hope, through grace, to escape these dangers. He who as a child of wisdom walks humbly with God, shall escape them. In the milenial age of the church, christian liberty shall be enjoyed to a higher degree than at present: In heavenly glory it will be perfected. For the arrival of that happy period; for the dawning of that blissful day, may divine grace prepare us! But while it is delayed, and we are continued in this state of trial, may we live as the free Citizens of Zion, and heirs of eternal life. O! thou eternal source of all wisdom, grace, and blessedness, irradiate our souls with thy saving knowledge, and inspire them with every grace and virtue which dignifies, exalts and adorns the christian character? Deliver us from the dominion of sin and error, and prepare us for the full fruition of thy love, in the perfect liberty of heaven!

In the application of the principles contained in this circular address, permit us, brethren, to exhort you to use your christian liberty with wisdom and discretion, and not to abuse it. Prize it as an inestimable privilege. Hold fast this good and perfect gift, which cometh down from the father of lights. Imbibe, and express in your temper and conduct, that benevolent, Christ-like spirit, which is the least doubtful characteristic of a faithful christian. Guard against extremes. Exercise tender concern for the weak, and forbearance toward contracted, querulous professors. Be not tenacious of trifles and shadows. But with the courage of a martyr, defend and support every doctrine, precept and institution, which is sanctioned with the seal of heaven. Remember that the kingdom of heaven does not consist in meat and drink: Therefore do not substitute mint and cummin in place of the weightier matters of the law. Beware that you do not strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel. Take the beam out of your own eye, before you attempt to remove the mote from your brother's eye. Finally, let the same mind be in you which was in your blessed and merciful redeemer. Imitate every imitable perfection of him who is the brightness of his father's glory, and the express image of his person. And then will you be enabled to improve your christian liberty, and all your talents, so wisely, and to such advantage, that God will be glorified, his church edified, the world benefitted, and your immortal felicity secured. May the Holy Spirit qualify and enable us all to live and die such wise, faithful and exemplary christians: And to the adorable Trinity, shall be ascribed all the praise, and glory, now and forever. Amen.

We have not only enjoyed an interview of peace, harmony, and brotherly affection, but have had encouraging, comfortable accounts, of a blessed work of grace being carried on in several of the churches; for which we desire to be thankful to the great author of all grace and benignity.

Requesting an interest in your prayers, and wishing you much of the presence and blessings of our God and Saviour, we remain.

Beloved Brethren,

Your's affectionately,

In Gospel Relation.

DAVIS COLLINS, Moderator.

JOSEPH B. COOK, Clerk.