

Jesus Christ. To sustain a correspondence with you is very desirable: for it tends mutually to invigorate and encourage us. To be correctly informed of the enlargement and increasing strength of Zion, of her faith, unity and persevering labours, to spread the gospel around the globe, greatly animates our spirits and zeal.

By the information derived from correspondence, we ascend the mount of promise, and anticipate the gathering together of an host of people for the living God. By it we are reminded of that glorious day, when "Lo, here is Christ, and lo, he is there" shall cease, and we shall know as we are known. You will perceive on our minutes some movements towards extending and perfecting the system of associational correspondence, in itself so desirable on every account.—We trust our favoured denomination will yet be more cemented, every section of our church better know the whole, a better digested plan of intercourse be adopted, and such a concentration of the wisdom and energy of the whole body be effected as shall secure more power and unanimity in all our efforts for the advancement of Christ's truth.

Dear Brethren, we have not the pleasure of being able to state that great numbers have been received into our fellowship during the year past, yet we desire to be thankful that some of the churches composing this fraternity, have enjoyed refreshing showers of grace, others have experienced a slower increase. A spirit of the most cordial unanimity and christain charity prevails through the whole body. Our present session has been important, refreshing and harmonious. We trust the spirit of the Lord has presided in our councils, assisted in our deliberations, and will bless this anniversary to our growth in grace and mutual edification.

And now Dear Brethren, wishing you grace, mercy, and peace from the great Shepherd of Israel, we subscribe ourselves your brethren in the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

JACOB H. BROUNER, *Moderator.*
HOWARD MALCOM, *Clerk.*

MINUTES

OF

THE SEVENTH SESSION

OF

The Hudson River Baptist Association,

HELD IN THE BAPTIST MEETING HOUSE IN OLIVER-STREET,
NEW-YORK, AUGUST 7th, and 8th, 1822.

1. At half past 10 o'clock A. M. brother LEWIS LEONARD, of Albany, preached the introductory sermon from 1 Thess. v. 12, 13.—"And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves."

Took up a collection for poor widows of Baptist ministers, amounting to \$35.

2. Brother BROUNER took the chair, and on motion *Resolved*, that LEWIS LEONARD be moderator and *Garret Conrey* clerk.

3. Moderator prayed.

4. *Resolved*, that the names of the messengers from the different churches be read, and the reading of the letters be deferred until the afternoon session.

The following is their statistical account.

N.B. The names of Ministers are in SMALL CAPITALS—of Licentiates in *Italics*—those of the Brethren not present are marked thus (*).

CHURCHES.	MESSENGERS.	Baptized.	Rec'd by Let.	Dis'by Let.	Excluded.	Retired.	Deceased.	Total.
Poughkeepsie,	{ AARON PERKINS, Dea. John Forbus, William Plummer, JOHN WILLIAMS, JOHN STANFORD, DANIEL HALL, <i>Garret Conrey,</i> Dea. Thomas Hewitt, :: William Colgate.	1	2	9	1	0	2	82
Oliver-street, N.Y.	{ :: Thomas Purser, :: E. Raymond, Thomas Garniss, William Williams, Leonard Bleecker, Joshua Gilbert, James Wilson.	18	20	9	3	1	9	518

CHURCHES.	MESSENGERS.	Baptized.	Rec. by Let.	Dis by Let.	Excluded.	Restored.	Deceased.	Total.
Mulberry-street, New-York.	ARCHIBALD MACLAY, John De Hart, Thomas Powel, Elisha Norcross, John Haslet, John Hunt, William Winterton, David B. Valentine, Elijah Lewis, Michael Noe, Joel Tay, Thomas Day, Junr. Nathaniel Price, Thomas Stokes.	25	6	18	7	1	0	414
	JACOB H. BROUNER, George Tillan, Caleb Willis, Ebenezer Wheeler, John Clapp, Robert K. Foster.	15	2	2	3	0	1	79
Hudson.	HOWARD MALCOM, Dea. John W. Dutcher, William Whiting, *Walker Noble, Simeon S. Hathaway.	22	4	13	1	1	1	132
† Troy.	*Josiah Converse, *Isaac V. Powelson.	3	6	17	5	1	2	257
Albany.	LEWIS LEONARD, *Friend (Humphries, William Adams, Eliakim Ford, Francis Browning, Joshua A. Burke.	12	11	5	4	4	1	180
Catskill.	Nathaniel Jacobs, Junr. George M. Kendall. George Henry.	0	1	9	0	0	0	79
King-street.		0	2	0	0	0	2	80
Newburgh.	CHARLES MAIS, Dea. Thomas Hubert, George Sharp, John McLagan, N. S. Davies.	3	4	0	0	0	0	25
Albany African.	NATHANIEL PAUL, John Swan, William B. Kendall.	15	4	0	0	0	0	29

† The Church at Troy was represented by Brother MALCOM.

CHURCHES.	MESSENGERS.	Baptized.	Rec. by Let.	Dis by Let.	Excluded.	Restored.	Deceased.	Total.
† South Baptist (New-York.	CHARLES G. SOMMERS, Daniel H. Barnes, John Watts, Elijah Pierson, Ebenezer Wilson, Thomas Skelding, John Smith.	3	7	0	0	0	0	25
† Cossackie.	WILLIAM STURGES, Dea. James Delanoy.	0	0	0	0	0	0	10
		117	69	32	24	8	18	1910

5. Resolved, that the Ministers present, who are not delegates, be affectionately invited to a seat with us this afternoon.

6. Brother SOMMERS, in consequence of ill health, declined preaching the Sermon for the benefit of the Education Society; wherefore Resolved, that Brother B. M. HILL, of New Haven, be requested to deliver a discourse, this evening, at 8 o'clock, to aid the funds of said Society.

Resolved, that we adjourn until 3 o'clock this afternoon.
Prayer by Brother HOWARD.

3 o'clock P. M.

Met pursuant to adjournment. Prayer by Brother STANFORD.

7. The following ministering Brethren, upon invitation, took their seats, viz. LARKUM, of Pennsylvania, HOWARD, of Windsor, Vermont, SMITZER, of Bethany, Pennsylvania, ELLIS, of New-York, Divine, of Philadelphia, JOHNSON CHASE, of New-York, Isaac Chase, of New-York, DRAKE WILSON, of do., THOS. B. STEPHENSON, of Staten-Island, WELSH, of Burlington, New-Jersey, WEBB, of New-Brunswick, and Ludlow, of New-York.

Proceeded to read the letters from the Churches.

8. The south Baptist Church in New-York, and the particular Baptist Church in the village of Cossackie, New-York, presented letters, and solicited a union with this Association: whereupon brethren STANFORD, WILLIAMS and MACLAY, were appointed a Committee to examine their faith and practice.

The Committee having reported that it is their opinion, that the above named Churches be received into Fellowship, it was

9. Resolved, that the Report be accepted. The Moderator then gave their Representatives the right-hand of Fellowship.

10. Communications from Corresponding Associations, as follows, viz.

† Added this Session. Constituted in the City of New-York, April 25th, 1822.

‡ Also added this Session. Constituted in the Village of Cossackie, July 20th, 1822.

ASSOCIATIONS.	Minutes.	MESSENGERS.	No. of			Total.
			Ch.	W. Min.	Bap.	
Warren,		- - -	39	25	129	4602
Boston,	min.	- - -	33	22	177	3478
Hartford,	min.	B. M. HILL, -	29	22	379	2665
New London,		- - -	17	23	86	1970
Shaftsbury,	min.	PAUL - - -	27	15	189	2865
Lake George,		- - -				
Saratoga,		Ashley - - -	26	18	52	3940
Rensselaerville,	min.	EBENEZER WEEKS,	19	17	100	1815
Cayuga,	min.	CLARK, - - -	38	23	349	3765
Franklin,		- - -	22	17	110	2198
Warwick,	min.	TEASDALE and Banta,	14	9	63	1648
Madison,		- - -	36	28	107	4365
Union,		- - -	14		26	1069
New-Jersey,		- - -				
Philadelphia,	min.	McLAUGHLIN & MURPHY,	22	29	104	2775
Charleston,	min.	- - -	37	25	193	3861

11. *Resolved*, That Brethren PERKINS, Purser and Burke, be a Committee to examine the minutes of Corresponding Associations.

12. The Circular Letter written by Brother BROUNER, and the Corresponding Letter by Brother WILLIAMS, were referred to Brethren PERKINS, MALCOM and SOMMERS, with their authors, for revision.

13. A Circular Letter from the Corresponding Secretary of the Board of Foreign Missions, containing a highly interesting summary of their proceedings for the past year, was received and read—whereupon,

Resolved, That this Association receives, with much pleasure, the Letter of the General Board, stating the successful advance of their arduous labours in the cause of Missions.

This Association has, from its first organization, been deeply impressed with a sense of the necessity, and actively engaged in the promotion, of the great and good objects, which have attracted the notice of the Convention. We admire the wisdom which devised the plan of uniting the whole strength of our Churches, in one sacred effort against ignorance and disorder at home, and pagan darkness and superstition abroad.—Go on and prosper. Our hearts are with you. We pray God to grant you success, and we pledge our best exertions in the service of the cause of truth at home and abroad.—Be not discouraged by the difficulties that obstruct your way. This great mountain shall become a plain; ignorance must yield, prejudice give way, opposition bow, darkness be dissipated, and the knowledge of God cover the earth. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth, as it is in Heaven.

14. *Resolved*, That Brother PERKINS be appointed to preach to-morrow evening, at 8 o'clock.

15. *Resolved*, That a Prayer Meeting be held to-morrow morning at half past 5 o'clock.

Adjourned till 9 o'clock A. M. to-morrow.

Prayer by Brother CLARK.

16. In the evening, according to appointment, Brother HILL of New Haven, delivered a discourse from Matthew xxviii. part of 19th verse, "Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations."

A Collection was taken to aid the funds of the Education Society, amounting to \$19 98.

Thursday 9 o'clock.

Met pursuant to adjournment. Prayer by Brother McLAUGHLIN

17. Appointed Delegates to Corresponding Associations, as follows viz.

ASSOCIATIONS.	TIME AND PLACE OF NEXT SESSION.	MESSENGERS.
Warren,	2d Tuesday Sept. New Bedford,	LEONARD.
Boston,	3d Wed. Sept. 2d Bap. m. h. Boston,	LEONARD.
Hartford,	1st Wed. Oct. Middletown City, Con.	LEONARD.
New-London,	3d Tuesday in Oct.	MALCOM.
Shaftsbury,	1st Wednesday in June,	PAUL.
Lake George,		LEONARD.
Saratoga,	4th Wed. in June, Fort Ann,	LEONARD and Browning.
Rensselaerville,	2d Wed. Oct. Union m. h. Windham.	PERKINS and PAUL.
Cayuga,	3d Wed. in Sept. Groton,	MACLAY.
Franklin,	3d Wed. in June, [ant Valley,	SOMMERS.
Warwick,	1st Wed. June, Bap. Stone m. h. Pleas-	PERKINS, MAIS and Purser.
Madison,	2d Wed, Sept.—Eaton Village,	MACLAY.
Union,	1st Wed. Sept.—Fishkill,	PERKINS, MALCOM and MAIS.
New-Jersey,		SOMMERS.
Philadelphia,	1st Tues. Oct. Lower Merion,	MACLAY.
Charleston,	Sat. before 1st L's day Nov. Eben.	Elijah Lewis.
Ontario,	4th Wed. Sept. [m. h. Jeffer's Creek,	MACLAY.
Columbia,	Friday, before 4th Lord's day in Aug.	
	Mount Pleasant, Fairfax Co [Vir.]	Powel.
New-York,	Last Wed. in May.	PERKINS, SOMMERS, and LEONARD.

18. *Resolved*, That we agree to the request of the Columbia Association to open a Correspondence, and that Brother Thomas Powel be our messenger.

19. *Resolved* unanimously, That we open a Correspondence with the New-York Association, and that Brethren PERKINS, SOMMERS and LEONARD be our Messengers to that body.

20. The Committee on the Corresponding and Circular Letters, reported, that, in their opinion, the Corresponding should be accepted; but that it is not expedient to adopt the Circular.

After much deliberation,

Resolved, that the Report be concurred in.

21. *Resolved*, That Brethren MACLAY, Barnes and Conroy, be appointed to prepare and publish with the minutes, the Circular Letter of this Association.

22. The Committee on the minutes of corresponding Associations made the following Report, which was accepted.

23. The Committee on the minutes of Corresponding Associations, beg leave to report: That, in their opinion, the 20th Art. of the minutes of the Hartford Association should be inserted in ours. Also that the impostor, under the name of a Baptist Minister, named in the 16th Art. of the Warwick minutes, also, be published in ours.

Hartford minutes 20th Art. "The Committee to whom was referred the request of the first Baptist Church, Sandisfield, report; that upon examination it appears that the character of their pastor Jesse Hartwell, has suffered greatly by personal slander and by civil prosecutions, and that by the confessions of his accusers, and by the records of the court, he is honourably acquitted, and in the opinion of the committee, is innocent of the charges alleged against him. Whereupon, *Resolved*, that the report be accepted, and inserted in our minutes."

Warwick minutes, Art. 16. "*Resolved*, that the note in our minutes of the last year, respecting that notorious impostor, who, under the cloak of a Baptist preacher, assumes the names of John Bird and Thomas Paul, of Boston, be reprinted in our minutes the present year."

24. *Resolved*, That Brother Colgate be appointed Treasurer of the Widows' Fund, in the room of our lamented deceased Brother Withington. The collections advised by the Association were then called for.

Education Fund—Hudson Church \$3 84.

Foreign Missions—Hudson Church \$10 00.

25. *Resolved*, That Brethren STANFORD, LEONARD and SOMMERS, be appointed a Committee to prepare a plan for the increase, and prudent application of the Widows' Fund.

26. *Resolved*, That the request of the Church at Poughkeepsie be granted, and that the next meeting of the Association be held in their Meeting House, on the 1st Wednesday in August, 1823, at 10 o'clock A. M.

27. *Resolved*, That Brother SOMMERS be appointed to preach the Introductory Sermon, and in case of failure, Brother MALCOM.

28. *Resolved*, That Brother PAUL preach a Sermon for the Benefit of the Education Society, on the evening of the first day of our next Session.

29. *Resolved*, That Brother STANFORD write the next Circular Letter, and that the subject of said Letter be the "Nature and Constitution of a Church of Christ;"—and that Brother PERKINS write the Corresponding Letter.

30. *Resolved*, That this Association do recommend Winchell's Arrangement of Dr. Watts' Psalms and Hymns, and also Dr. Rippon's. They also state that the advertisement of Rippon's Arrangement on the cover of last year's minutes was a private act of the Clerk.

31. *Resolved*, That this Association sympathize with the Oliverstreet Baptist Church in the loss of our much esteemed, and deeply

lamented Brethren, Deacons Cauldwell and Withington, late members of said Church.

32. *Resolved*, That Brother Barnes, and the Clerk, attend to the printing and apportionment of the minutes.

Adjourned until 3 o'clock P. M.

Prayer by Brother WILLIAMS.

3 o'clock. P. M.

Met pursuant to adjournment. Prayer by Brother MACLAY.

33. *Resolved*, That the committee appointed to draft a Circular, addressed to all the regular Baptist Associations within this State, inviting them to express on their minutes, their deliberate opinion on the propriety of constituting a "General Convention of the State of New-York," be discharged.

34. *Resolved*, That Brethren MACLAY, MALCOM and Colgate be appointed delegates to represent this body in the "Baptist Domestic Missionary Convention of the State of New-York, and its vicinity," to meet at Utica, the 3d Wednesday in October next.

35. The Association recommends to the Constituent Churches, that they endeavour to revive the Missionary Societies, where they exist, and to form new Societies, auxiliary to the New-York Baptist Missionary Society.

36. The Association also recommends, that the 1st Tuesday in September next be set apart as a day of fasting, and prayer for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon all the world, and especially upon the Churches composing this Body.

37. *Resolved*, That this Association recommend to the Churches the adoption of efficient measures for the increase of the Library of the Baptist Theological Seminary in New-York; and that they report at the next meeting of the Association.

38. *Resolved*, That this Association recommend to the Churches that they set apart the 4th of July next, for religious purposes.

39. *Resolved*, That Brother Hart supply King-street Church, the next, and the two following Lord's days, and that Brother Brouner supply said Church the 2d Lord's day in October.

40. Received the moneys for minutes.

Minutes were read and corrected.

41. *Resolved*, That the minutes be approved.

42. Distributed the minutes of sister associations.

43. After a very affectionate and pertinent address by the Moderator, the session was closed by Prayer, by Brother Barnes.

In the Evening, according to appointment, Brother PERKINS delivered a discourse from 1 Cor. vii. last clause of 31st, verse. "For the fashion of this world passeth away."

CIRCULAR LETTER.

ON

Church Fellowship.

BELOVED BRETHREN,

With pleasure we address you on the advantages resulting from Church Fellowship—a subject in itself interesting and important, which can never be presented to your attention unseasonably, and the consideration of which, under a divine blessing, may be productive of the happiest effects. In pursuing this object, it will be necessary to state the nature of Church Fellowship—the number and magnitude of the advantages to be derived from it, and the best means of securing these advantages to ourselves.

Fellowship supposes society. Man is very justly styled a social being; he comes into the world with a disposition for society, and in a condition that requires it. Much of the wisdom and goodness of Providence appears in giving us this social capacity and disposition; without it our noblest faculties would be of little use, for want of proper occasions for their exercise; but the social principle opens a way for the employment of our various abilities, and by reciprocal aids and encouragements we become effectually useful. Benevolence teaches us to consider the happiness of others as inseparably connected with our own, and a principal ingredient in it; and thereby extends our views, warms our desires, and animates our labours for the public good. The religion of Jesus felt in the heart, will excite tenderness and sensibility, expand and cherish our benevolence, unite us to each other in the bonds of sacred charity, and make us instrumental in promoting the happiness of society.

Church fellowship consists not merely in assembling ourselves together for religious worship; this may be done without fellowship with the saints; it is an agreement in certain general principles, views, and feelings. Fellowship with the saints can only be experienced by those who partake of the same spirit and grace of Christ; such persons are fitted for the enjoyment of religious ordinances, and can cordially unite in promoting the important designs of the Gospel ministry.

Those who profess the name of Christ, practically regard his sacred institutions, and have reason to hope that Christ has received them, should also receive one another into mutual communion in all the social parts and privileges of the Christian religion, seriously regarding the direction of the great Head of the Church in all matters relating to his worship; this accords with the apostolic advice, Rom. xv. 6, 7. "That ye may with one mind and with one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Receive ye one another, as Christ also hath received us to the glory of God."

Persons thus united in the fellowship of the Gospel have an equal right to all the privileges and immunities of the church. There are.

indeed, in Christian societies, distinctions of character and diversities of gifts; but the same spirit, and every true member of the church of Christ is useful while he moves in his proper sphere, and each in dividual stands in the same relation to the great Head of the body they are to call no man master, one is their master even Christ, and they are all brethren. Gal. iii. 28. "You are all one in Christ." 1 Cor. xii. 13. "For by one spirit we are all baptized into one body." Rom. xii. 5. "So we being many are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another." Eph. iv. 4. "There is one body and one spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling." While thus united, they enjoy the spiritual presence of Christ in the same ordinances, perform the same common duties with unity of heart, and are expecting the same glorious immortality. Tit. ii. 13. "Looking for that blessed hope." Col. i. 27. "Christ in you the hope of glory."

Church fellowship is of divine appointment; or a wise and gracious institution of God, designed for the preservation of true religion, and promoting the best interests of mankind. The apostles of our Lord, under the direction of his Spirit, formed their converts into distinct regulated societies, called Churches; hence we read of the churches of Judea, Galilee, Samaria, Macedonia, Galatia, Asia, &c., and of the apostles assembling with the church at Antioch, and of the people being added to the church. And every real Christian, if he would follow the directions of the word of God, and the example of primitive saints—if he would grow in grace, contribute to the support and propagation of true religion, do the highest honour to God, and the greatest good to men, must connect himself (as he has opportunity) with some regular Christian society, and unite with them in all the ordinances of divine appointment. And church fellowship, attended to in the spirit and on the principles of the Gospel, will be productive of many advantages.

This fellowship is particularly enjoyed in drawing near to God in special ordinances—in Baptism and the Lord's Supper. These are divine institutions, and are designed to continue through every age of the church to the end of the world; they are wisely calculated to promote the edification of Christians—they have been attended with signal marks of divine approbation, and Christ has promised his presence in the due administration of them; teaching them to observe "all things whatsoever I have commanded you, and lo I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." This promise secures the preservation and prosperity of the church, until the final appearance of Christ to judgment.

Christian fellowship is enjoyed in public worship. In every age the Lord's people have assembled for the purpose of religious worship. When he separated the seed of Abraham as a peculiar and holy nation, to bear his name and preserve his worship, in opposition to the general idolatry, he commanded all the males thrice a year to make their appearance before him, and worship him in one national assembly. And to all that had a true sense of religion, his public worship

was truly desirable, as the the 84th Psalm, in particular, witnesses; where, in the spirit of truly sublime poetry, the Psalmist strongly expresses his pious sense of the excellency and importance of public religion: and elsewhere he says, that dwelling in the house of God, appearing before him in his public worship, and beholding his beauty and glory in his sanctuary, was the one thing he desired, and sought after with the greatest ardency of affection.*

Under the New Testament dispensation we are charged not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some then was. And it is said by way of encomium on the first converts to the Christian religion, that they were together with one accord in prayer and praise. Our Lord himself also has directed us to address the throne of grace in the language of social religion, and say—"Our Father who art in heaven," &c., and has promised that "where two or three are met together in his name, there he will be in the midst of them."

This mutual agreement of many Christians in the same profession and practice, gives courage to individuals openly to espouse the cause of Christ. We do not love to be singular, and to be pointed at by the world, as standing and acting alone, especially in the affairs of God and religion: but when a good company unites themselves together for such a sacred purpose, this takes away the reproach of singularity; they all strengthen one another's hands in the ways of the Lord, and they bear up with more firmness of heart against the reproaches of the world. David was glad when his companions said to him—"Let us go into the house of the Lord." He took sweet counsel as he walked to the house of God in company. Christians encourage each other, saying, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths." Isai. ii. 3.

The presence of God in a special manner is enjoyed by his people in their social capacity. God has a particular regard to his church; the raising of this fabric was the grand object of his counsels before the foundation of the world, and he has respect unto it in all the dispensations of his providence. God honours it as his residence, Psal. cxxxii. 13. "The Lord hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever, here will I dwell for I have desired it." In the immensity of his being he is every where present, and fills heaven and earth. But his gracious presence is the peculiar privilege of his church. It is the presence of God which puts a peculiar solemnity on the ordinances of divine worship, and renders them efficacious for the important purposes they are designed to answer. When a mind that was involved in spiritual ignorance is illuminated by the light of divine truth—when an obdurate heart is melted in repentance, and taught to bow to the authority and grace of Christ—when a heavy-laden soul obtains relief from its intolerable burdens, and enjoys peace and consolation in believing—it is an evi-

* Psal. xxvii. 4. Psal. lxxiii. 1-3. Heb. x. 25. Rom. xv. 6. Acts i. 14, chap. ii. 1, 41, chap. ix. 31, chap. xi. 26. 2 Cor. viii. 1.

dence of the presence of the Lord. Accordingly, after the Prophet Ezekiel had given an emblematical description of the Gospel Church under the idea of a beautiful city, he concludes the account by saying, "the name of the city from that day shall be Jehovah Shammah, the Lord is there."

Fellowship is especially enjoyed in the exercise and discharge of the reciprocal duties of social friendship. Christians united in church communion enjoy familiar intercourse for mutual edification, and can give each other better assistance in every thing that relates to religion, whether public or private; they warm one another's hearts by mutual holy conversation; they support one another when ready to fall, and raise and restore those that are fallen in a spirit of meekness, Gal. vi. 1. But as Solomon says, "Wo to him that falls whilst he walks alone, who shall help him up? or how can one be warm alone?" Eccl. iv. 10. Hand joining in hand adds force and strength, assistance and stability, to any purpose or design whatsoever; and frequent meeting together gives fellow Christians opportunity of exhorting one another to maintain their common Christianity, and provoking one another to love and good works. Christians, when thus united in holy fellowship, afford better help to one another when under difficulties by advice, and under sorrows they relieve each other by Christian consolation and social prayers. They afford greater aid and strength to each other against temptations and dangers, because they are better informed of each other's circumstances and tempers. They know one another's wants and weaknesses more, they pity one another with more tenderness, and they guard each other against the common injuries and insults of men.

This fellowship has a tendency to promote watchfulness, circumspection, and consistency of character; is a happy guard against backsliding, a defence against the temptations of the world, and the defilements of a sinful age. Having given my name up to Christ in a public manner, how shall I dare to renounce him? Having joined myself to the followers of Christ, how shall I break those bonds, and depart from them, or disgrace that holy fellowship by any known sin? Having made a public profession of my avowed obedience to Jesus as a Lord and king, how can I dare decline his service, or indulge myself in those iniquities which his Gospel forbids? I have publicly engaged in the cause of God, his eye penetrates the inmost recesses of my heart, the eyes of angels and men are upon me, and shall I behave meanly in the presence of God—shall I disgrace myself in the sight of heaven—shall I dishonour God, grieve his Holy Spirit, and wound the minds of my brethren, by complying with the temptations of Satan, and yielding to the corrupt desires of my own heart?

Christian fellowship is enjoyed in meetings for social prayer. Here their prayers and praises are united; and such a union of prayers and praises is delightful and acceptable to him who inhabits the praises of Israel, and who has encouraged them to agree in asking mercies from God, and to strive together in prayer. Social prayer is a signal blessing to Christians, Prov. xxvii. 17. Prayer tends to enlarge and strengthen the bonds of Christian union; it tends to make the weak strong, and the strong stronger still. This is one of the mediums by which Christian

societies go from strength to strength; every one of them appearing in Zion before God, Psal. lxxiv. 7. This is one of the instruments by which the Holy Spirit fans the flame of true devotion, and keeps the soul alive to God. In short, prayer meetings are nurseries both to the gifts and graces of Christian Societies, and have often proved instrumental in fitting individual Christians for more extensive spheres of usefulness in the church and in the world.

Church meetings, when properly conducted, promote fellowship. The design of these meetings is to execute the laws of Christ relative to his church. Here the gates are opened to admit the righteous nation which keepeth the truth. And in receiving members on a profession of faith and repentance, gratitude and love are excited by hearing what God has done for their souls, mutual affection is awakened in the breast, and true fellowship is enjoyed. When members are dismissed or recommended to other churches of the same faith and order, we affectionately commend them to God in our prayers; and in excluding disorderly members, we are taught the importance of watchfulness, to take heed lest we fall; and the decent management of the affairs of the church in these meetings tends to its edification.

Church fellowship excites Christian charity and brotherly love. In the church our nearest and most endeared connexions dwell, it is the residence of our kindred and brethren. That man is considered as unnatural, and as having divested himself of the tender feelings of humanity, who discovers no affectionate attachment to his nearest connexions, the partners of his blood. But the affinity which grace establishes betwixt sincere Christians is in some respects more intimate and endearing than that which subsists amongst the dearest earthly relations: for all temporal connexions will soon be dissolved; whereas the union which is founded in religion cannot be destroyed by the stroke of death, but will remain indissoluble through eternity. As therefore the saints are all brethren in the Lord, children of the same heavenly father, and members of the same chosen family, this consideration cannot fail of inspiring them with ardent affection for each other; the Psalmist mentions it as one reason of his fervent wishes for the prosperity of Jerusalem, Psalm cxxii. 8. "For my brethren and companions' sakes, I will now say, Peace be within thee. Because of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek thy good."

How comfortable and edifying is it, when believers meet together not only in one place, but with one accord; when of one heart and one soul they look upon each other with cheerfulness, and embrace each other in holy friendship. "Behold how good and how pleasant a thing it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." It is fragrant as the richest perfume, and fertilizing as the dew of heaven. It peculiarly attracts the divine blessing, and is convincing to the world; "hereby shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one towards another."—Jesus prayed for union among his disciples.—"That they all may be one, that the world may believe that thou hast sent me," John xvii. 21. Union among Christians was the object of Christ's prayers, and of his death; he died "to gather together in one the children of God that are scattered abroad," and in his preaching he commanded his disciples to

"love one another," John xiii. 34. Union is the strength and safety of the church—next to truth there is no greater blessing than peace. The people of God are compared to living stones built up together; while the stones are united in the building, they are a support to each other; but if removed the building falls. They are compared to members in the body; while they are joined together there is mutual ministration to each other; but when divided from the body, no part can receive nourishment. The sunbeams united together cast the greater heat. It is union in an army, in a nation, in any society, that preserves it. Nothing can destroy societies but division; our Saviour confirmed this, when he said, "A kingdom divided against itself cannot stand," Matt. xii. 25.

Union among Christians is like—"precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard, that went down to the skirts of his garment, as the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion, for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore." Oil is a fine emblem of union, being healing, comforting, and exhilarating. Nor did the dew of heaven in time of drought ever prove more refreshing and beneficial to the mountains of Judah, than are the influences of grace when descending in soft silence from above upon the church; in the union and communion with which God hath commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.

Religion in the soul is progressive, and church fellowship is calculated to promote the edification of Christians, a growth in grace, and an increase of spiritual knowledge. The church is God's garden, where the righteous flourish like "the palm tree," and grow like a "cedar in Lebanon." "Those that be planted in the house of the Lord, shall flourish in the courts of our God; they shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing: to show that the Lord is upright; he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him," Psalm xcii. 12—15. The church is a garden of God's cultivating; the soil is rich, and well watered by the streams of that river which make glad the city of God. And those who enjoy the blessings of Christian fellowship revive as the corn, and flourish as the willows by the water courses.

"The plants of grace shall ever live,
Nature decays but grace must thrive;
Time that doth all things else impair,
Still makes them flourish strong and fair."

The church is God's nursery, where his children are nourished and brought up. "As new-born babes they desire the sincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby," 1 Pet. ii. 2. "Speaking the truth in love, they grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ; from whom the whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." They are nourished with the words of faith and of good doctrine, with the wholesome words of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord blesses the provision of Zion, and satisfies his poor with bread; and they grow from babes to young men, and from young men to fathers, till they all come in the "unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." By the ministry of the word and ordinances, God

enlarges the kingdom of his Son, subdues sinners to his obedience, reclaims backsliders, builds up his people, and prepares them for glory.

Church fellowship is a means of preserving the faith and worship of the Gospel in their power and purity. It is important that the Deity should be worshipped publicly, as the united act of many: To this church fellowship naturally obliges us. We are the offspring of one eternal parent, under the same general obligations to him, interested in common in many of the same wants and necessities, benefits and mercies, and therefore ought to offer up our prayers and praises unitedly to him, in a social or public manner. Were religious exercises to be practised by us only in private—were there no assembling of ourselves together to proclaim its excellencies and usefulness, and bear an open testimony by common consent in its favour—its public estimation would very soon decline; and, probably, its influence would soon be lost in the world. Without church fellowship there could be no celebration of ordinances in a becoming manner, no united prayers and praises could ascend to heaven—there would be no social attendance upon the word preached—no participation of the great ordinance of the Lord's Supper, which is a part of social religion, a sacred feast or representation of the blessed communion which Christians have both with Christ their Lord, and with one another. For this reason there must be fellowship, that the whole church may come together in one place, as 1 Cor. xi. 20.

Without Church fellowship the doctrines of Christ and his Gospel could not be so constantly and so extensively held forth to the world, and there would be no rational hope of the continuance or increase of Christianity among men. Individual Christians die out of this world from day to day, and there would be few rising up in their stead to support this religion, if there were no churches formed. It is in these assemblies the Gospel with all its blessings is published to the world; it is here unbelievers may attend and hear the glorious truths of the Gospel set forth in a proper light: and the name, the person and offices, the graces and glories of our great Redeemer are thus displayed among men, 1 Cor. xiv. 23. When the whole church is come together in one place, there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers; and when the important affairs of Christianity are managed with becoming order and decency, and the doctrines of salvation are set forth in a happy light, and the worship of God is maintained in its purity and spirituality, they that believe not are convinced, the secrets of their hearts are made manifest, they will worship God together with us, and report that God is among us of a truth, ver. 25. Hereby those that are convinced of their sin and danger, and have fled for refuge to lay hold on Jesus as their only hope, are encouraged to come and join themselves to the church, when they behold the beauty of the Lord in his Gospel sanctuary, and the appearances of his power and glory there. And happy are the persons who thus unite in the fellowship of the Gospel, and who by practising these duties, and communicating and enjoying these advantages, cast a glory upon the Gospel of Christ.

To secure these advantages to ourselves, we should study the nature and design of Christian Societies, and the respective duties of their officers and members, and do what we do from a principle of love to God and religion—that we may offer to him a reasonable service, and fill up

our place with propriety and honour, with advantage to ourselves and the community. Here it is that too many fail. They enter into the sacred and interesting relation of church fellowship without knowing, at least without duly considering, the reasons why, or the ends for which they do so. An affectation of extraordinary sanctity, and a desire of the applause of men—the gratifying an ignorant enthusiastic zeal—or the engaging deep in the little interests of a party, are, it is to be feared, too often the ruling motives in this case; at best they look upon it as little more than entitling them to the Lord's table, and not as engaging them in any special relation and duty to the society they commune with, and laying them under many peculiar obligations to exemplary purity in heart and life, as it most certainly does. And when this happens to be the case of the greatest and most considerable part of any religious society, either a coldness and inattention to their common interest, will bring upon them an insensible but sure dissolution; or spiritual pride, envious emulations, angry contentions, and uncharitable separations, tear them to pieces; to the great dishonour of the Christian name, and the ruin of that Christian charity which it is the peculiar design of such institutions to promote.

Some persons when they enter into church fellowship, form high and unjust expectations. A society of believers is indeed the most honourable society in the world, and it is an honour to be a companion with them that fear God. But the church militant is composed of imperfect beings, who in many things offend. Indeed, church fellowship is designed only for imperfect characters. He that is perfect can walk alone, and has no need of a companion; therefore, those who expect perfection in Christian societies err exceedingly. We ought not to think it strange if we meet with trials from Christians, for were it not so, to what purpose should we be admonished to forbear with one another. If the conduct of Christians was in all things uniformly consistent, there would be no exercise for a forbearing disposition, no exercise for God-like forgiveness. And since there is so little persecution in the world, we must expect to take up our cross in the church. May we, with Moses, deliberately choose, "rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season."

Perhaps the principal reason of uneasiness among Christians is, because their religious connexions dwindle into carnal or natural friendships; they mutually impart the whole of their family concerns to each other, by which means they reciprocally put themselves into each other's power; so that when a difference happens among them, they are capable of doing the most fatal mischief to each other's reputation, and of being more injurious enemies than they were ever comfortable friends. This personal friendship is merely carnal, and has no foundation in the Gospel of Christ, and therefore it is like every thing else that is worldly, transitory and of very short duration, and in the end fatal to the peace of every party concerned.—Brethren, let us cease from man, and trust in God.

If we would enjoy the advantages of Church fellowship, we should be careful that the materials of which the church is composed be good—not hay, straw, and stubble, but "living stones." Guard therefore the entrance of the church; let not the weakest Christian be shut out, and let not any of the ungodly come in, be they ever so

great : ungodly persons in a church, if they do not divide and destroy it, lay as a dead weight upon its prosperity. Christians can unite with Christians, and live together orderly and comfortably, but the godly and ungodly can never be harmonious ; none ought to be admitted to church communion, but such as do appear to the judgment of charity to be Christians indeed, that is, men fearing God, and working righteousness.

Every thing should be done decently and in order. The officers and the members of the church should study their duty, and keep themselves within the bounds of their proper places. " Study to be quiet, and do their own business." Those who superintend the temporal concerns of the church, occupy an important station ; much of its peace and prosperity under God depends upon them, and of course their's is a situation of great responsibility. To discharge the duties of their office honourably and successfully, requires great wisdom, unfeigned piety, and a disinterested and persevering zeal. Such is the truly critical position they occupy in the church of God, that they may either be the greatest promoters of its peace, or the greatest hinderance to it.

The private members must also move in their proper sphere, they are the members of one body. The eye, the hand, the foot, are all ornamental and useful, nor can the one say to the other—there is no need of thee, 1 Cor. xii. 12, 21. They are a family, the children of one father, and the heirs of the same glory ; they ought therefore to love as brethren, and to have no murmurings or disputings, Phil. ii. 14. There should be no aspiring after the pre-eminence. Let him who would be most noticed and most esteemed, be the most humble, the most gentle and forbearing, and the most devoted to God and the interest of the church ; yea, let him that would be greatest become servant of all. O ! if this advice of Christ, were conscientiously and strictly attended to, how many disputes would be prevented in Christian societies.

Our conduct should be regulated by the law of kindness. " A soft answer turneth away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger." We should forbear one another in love, this will keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. A man of understanding is of an excellent spirit ; the " wisdom that is from above is gentle and easy to be entreated." Humility takes away the fuel from the fire of contention ; only from " pride cometh contention." Love is the cement of societies, the foundation of peace, it " thinketh no evil"—puts the fairest sense upon doubtful words and actions ; " it beareth all things"—the fruit of love is peace. We should cultivate a forgiving spirit one towards another, Eph. iv. 31, 32. " Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice, and be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." " Blessed are the meek," who submit rather than quarrel, for " they shall inherit the earth." How lovely is the character of a forgiving Christian, who can hear himself censured and reviled, without reviling again ; who can sustain repeated affronts without kindling into flame and fury : who has learned to bear injuries, and

yet withhold himself from meditating revenge ; who can pass over many insults as if unnoticed ; forgive offences, and interpret all things for the best.

If we would promote the happiness of those churches to which we respectively belong, we should look well to the state of religion in our own souls, and be concerned to conduct ourselves in a becoming manner towards the Holy Spirit ; for the happiness and prosperity of Christian societies depend upon his influences, and if he is grieved he will withdraw.

" The Spirit like a peaceful dove,
Flies from the realms of noise and strife."

If we become negligent and lukewarm, we shall lose our relish for the provisions of God's house ; and influenced by a vain curiosity, shall be tempted to leave our proper seats empty. But if solid edification be the object we seek, we shall be more likely to find it in the church with which we are connected, than in roving from place to place.

An endless variety may gratify itching ears ; but merely to be entertained is not to be edified. Let us pray for the prosperity of Zion, and seek the good of Jerusalem. " The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." If we have an interest at the throne of grace, for what purpose can we better employ it than by imploring a divine blessing on the church, on the ministry of the word, and the administration of divine ordinances.

To conclude. As the civil, spiritual, temporal, and eternal happiness of mankind, and the credit of our holy religion in the world, depend so much upon the good order, real holiness, sincere and fervent charity of Christian churches, we most heartily wish they would attend to these important things with more serious and cordial concern. Did we but think and act agreeably to the true spirit and genius of the Gospel, and place religion, not in the little nostrums and peculiarities of a party, but in sincere repentance towards God, lively faith in our Lord Jesus, and the solid genuine fruits thereof in the works of piety, righteousness, benevolence, charity ; could we learn to differ in opinion without dividing in affection, oppose one another in meekness, forbear one another in love, and receive with Christian tenderness the weak in the faith ; or, instead of spending our religious zeal upon things indifferent, unite and employ it in promoting real Christian knowledge, and following after that peace and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord—we should soon find the God of holiness and peace dwelling amongst us, religion revive, the Gospel ministry honoured and blessed ; our churches would become seminaries of divine knowledge,* truth, love, piety, and every virtue, living witnessess of the great love and mercy of God to men—the brightest ornaments of the world, and the greatest blessings to it.

LEWIS LEONARD, Moderator.

Garret Conrey, Clerk.

* Psal. xlv. 9. Psal. xlvi. 3. Psal. lxxxvii. 2, 3. Eph. ii. 21. Phil. ii. 15, 16. Rev. i. 20, chap. xxi. 2.