

Transactions

of the

Baptist Historical Society.

May a Minister take State Pay?

THE Church at Whitchurch, in Hants, possessed LVII. documents, giving a fairly consecutive body of facts from September of 1690 till 1852, including a history of the Church during the period 1690—1714, drawn up by James Millard, pastor, 1811—1817. These are now lodged at Regent's Park, though a careful transcript made by Miss Marion Cox, of Hurstbourne Priors, is available locally.

One document is of much earlier date, being the Circular Letter from the Western Association met at Wells, despatched 12 April, 1656. This was not called the first meeting, but was certainly important; under Thomas Collier's guidance it published a Confession of Faith quite independent of either the London Confession of 1644, or the Assembly's Confession. The Churches of this district, Cirencester, Bristol, Wells, Somerton, Chard, Taunton, Honiton, Exeter, Dartmouth, Plymouth, Lyme, Weymouth and Dorchester, had been visited in 1655 by Henry Jessey.

The subject matter of the letter could only arise under Cromwell, who permitted patrons and tryers to install any one to a living irrespective of his precise Puritan views. It was the Baptist churches which kept up a pressure on Baptist ministers to dissuade them from accepting any such public post as Jessey was occupying in Southwark.

For the following transcript we are indebted to Mr. Arthur Tucker, of Horsebridge.

“Question—Whether it be lawfull for a Minister of the Gospell to take a sett maintenance of those who

are without, for preaching to the Church or to the world?

“We answer that a Preacher of the Gospell ought not to accept of the place of Minister to a Parish, or Lecturer, or Chaplain, not to take a sett maintenance of the world for preaching the Word, and that for these reasons—

“1. Because God hath provided another way for the maintenance of the Ministers of the Gospell, viz., by the Church or Churches, III Ep. John 7, 8, 9; I Cor. ix, 7, 8, 18; Phil. iv, 15, 16; and if these be such that the Church which sends them forth be not of sufficient abilities, we judge it is the duty of other Churches to be assistant in such a case that the Ministers of the Gospell be not exposed to temptation in this thing, and of this we are persuaded, that such is the abilitie of the Churches, that if they be faithful and forward in the worke, and seeke not great things to themselves, they may be provided for, without taking a sett reward from the world, which would be honorable to the gospell, III. Ep. John 7, 8, 9, and whereby they might condemne the practise of the false church and their mercenary ministry.

“2. Because the taking of such a stipend doe putt a tye and fetter upon the feete of the Ministers of the Gospell to preach at certain times and places according to the will of man, whereby they are made the servants of men and deprived of their liberty to follow (I. Cor. vii., 23) the Lord freely and fully in the worke, and this liberty of a Minister we (Acts xx., 26) judge ought to be dearer to him than any outward enjoyment whatsoever, yea, than life it selfe; and seeing all saints, and Ministers especially, are to pray that the Word of God may run and have free course, then those who are sent to preach ought not to enter into such bonds, which by sad experience proves a snare unto them; and this is to be noted also that

Wisdomes's Messengers are said to be Maidens or Virgins, which showeth their freedome in the worke (Prov ix., 13) of the Gospell.

"It stops the mouth of a Minister from bearing an open and full testimony against the practise of the Parish Ministry, who, Balaam-like, run after the reward; and seeing this is the way of Anti-Christ's Ministers, it becometh not Christ's thus to follow the reward, whither that goeth, thither to goe.

"4. It hath the appearance of that horrible evill of covetousnesse and teaching for hire, and selling the gift of God for money, which is contrary to these Scriptures, I. Thess. v., 22, Mic. iii., 11, Acts viii. 20.

"5. To these considerations we add that command of our Saviour to His disciples whome he sent forth to preach the Gospell to the world, Matt. x., 7, 8, "Freely ye have received, freely give."

"These things considered, we judge it is the duty of a Church whose ministers take such sett rewards of the world, to endeavour to convince him of the saide evill, and if he continually goeth on in his practise, the Church ought to deale with him for the same, as that which gives an occasion to the enemies of the truth, and just grounde of offence to the Church of God, contrary to that rule, I Cor. x., 32. We conclude our answer with the proposalls of these three things to the serious consideration of the churches and ministers concerned in the matter.

"1. Whether some brethren have not, without a clear call from God, taken up a trade of preaching to get into a trade of maintenance.

"2. Whether the large rewards allotted by the world for preaching the Word be not a means to draw off divers ministring brethren from the service of the Churches, whereby many offences come.

"3. Whether a man may justly be judged by himselfe or others to be called to goe about to preach the

Word as a Gospell minister, which hath not faith to believe that God will be with, and provide that nothing shall be lacking to him in the worke.

“Subscribed in the name of the messengers of the severall Churches, by us

“THOMAS COLLIER.

“JOHN PENDARVES.

“NATHANIEL STRANGE.

“From Wells the 12th day of the 2d month 1656.”