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BY GEORGE HOWARD,

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Communications.

FOR THE FREE PRESS.

TO THE

Church at South Quay,

THIS LETTER IS DEDICATED BY
THE PUBLISHER.

TO THE PUBLIC.

The many erroneous reports in circulation, calculated to injure, very materially, the character of Mr. JONES, have suggested to me the propriety of submitting the following letter before the public; though it was originally written to me for my own private gratification. It is hoped that the public, in its criticisms, will exercise that kind and forbearing spirit which the nature of the case, and the circumstances, under which the letter was written, so eminently demand at their hands. The dedication, the Publisher conceives, is appropriate without being offensive.

J. B.

(Near South Quay, Va.—Dec. 1833.

MY DEAR FRIEND: The friendly solicitude you seem to manifest for me, in consequence of the unfortunate situation in which I have been so unwillingly placed, elicits my warmest and most unfeigned gratitude: hence I cannot reconcile it to myself to deny the reasonable request you make of me,—namely, to give you a statement of the facts in relation to my case, together with such commentaries upon them as may seem necessary, in my estimation, to vindicate my character from the foul aspersions which have been thrown upon it. I could not, I say, deny this reasonable request, without doing injustice to the kind feelings which prompted it, and to the intimate and cherished friendship so long subsisting between us.

To reasonable and candid minds, a simple statement of the facts would, perhaps, be sufficient; yet a few remarks explanatory of the proceedings, by me, will serve to elucidate the case more clearly and present the point in all its deformity. I shall, therefore, in examining the case somewhat minutely, have to trespass upon your attention longer, than perhaps, under other circumstances it would seem necessary.

All I ask is, that you will suspend your judgment, until the merits of the case are presented before you, through whatever source you derive your information; and then form your opinion accordingly. Thus arraigned before any tribunal, however rigid in its scrutiny, I fear not the result. Impressed with a belief that my conduct in relation to this matter has been guided by pure and proper motives; and being sustained by the conscious integrity of those motives; I have nothing with which to reproach myself; and believing that you are prompted by the goodness of your heart to obtain a correct statement of the case, so that you may fairly decide thereupon,—regardless of the reports in circulation, to which exaggerated aspersions are often made, I entertain no apprehensions, but that you will concur with me in sentiment fully and entirely.

In July of 1827, through the instrumentality of Elder John Harrell of the Baptist church, (whom I venerate as a father, and for whose Christian-like conduct and integrity, I entertain the most profound regard,) the Lord was pleased to warn me of the situation in which I was placed. At his hands I sought and obtained mercy. In August of the same year I joined the Baptist church at South Quay. During the interval between that time, and sometime in the year 1832, not a circumstance, of a serious nature, occurred to disturb the harmony of the society;—though I confess there appeared occasionally to be a system of measures, in embryo, which somewhat alarmed my apprehensions, and which was to receive its final denouement in the tragical act to which your attention will be called in the sequel; however, as I said, those measures were not sufficiently palpable to produce

any discord of moment, until a resolution to the following effect was brought in:—"Resolved, therefore that if any member of this church shall in future fail to contribute to the church funds, it shall be the duty of one, or more of the deacons to apply to him, and if he still refuse after having promised, it shall be the duty of such deacon to report his delinquency to the next Quarterly Conference, to be dealt with," &c.

I immediately determined to resist this measure, because I conceived it an aggression upon the rights of the members; because it compelled them to pay, whether they were disposed to do so or not—whether the purposes of the money, so paid, were agreeable to them or not; because it was calculated to create distinctions in the church; because it favored the rich at the expense of the poor; because it extorted from those not in a situation at all times to pay; at a time too when their little pittance might perhaps be essentially necessary to gratify some want (not imaginary) and that at the risk of expulsion: but principally, because, the funds so collected were to be appropriated to purposes far from being charitable, as I understood the meaning of the term; and because it was essentially anti-republican, and inconsistent with the simplicity that should characterize the church of God, every where enjoined by the sacred scriptures. These objections every candid person must confess were weighty, and if conscientious could not be disregarded: I consequently refused to conform to the requisitions of the law in the manner prescribed, the very first opportunity that presented itself;—resolving at the same time to contribute to the wants of the poor as occasion might require, in the way of voluntary donations.

It is not my object to criminate others—I only vindicate myself—But Sir, if you had been at the June Conference, (the time when this grave and weighty charge was brought,) and witnessed the many pointed and personal remarks made on the occasion, you could not have resisted the conclusion that some concerted arrangement had been made to produce the very effect in which the affair did ultimately result. You will understand the money thus to be collected, was intended, mostly, for the payment of a stipulated salary to the minister. I admit there are occasions on which ministers have a claim to our bounty—and that it is reasonable and just for us to administer to their wants—if they are needy we ought to assist them—But at the same time I am of opinion the money should be raised by voluntary contributions and never by extortion. In the present case none of these circumstances existed,—and therefore it was hard to compel them who needed it more to pay it to him who needed it less; that the minister far from being in needy was in affluent circumstances; and at all events, admitting that he was in need of it, that it was much more consistent with principle and the general character of our holy religion to obtain it in the way of charitable donations, than to extort it by force. I contend that there is no authority for such a procedure to be found in the New Testament, the oracle of our church; and therefore was determined not to submit to it. Nor was I alone in advocating this opinion, even in our own church, for many of the members concur with me in sentiment,—there are other churches also whose members have since told me that no such resolution could find a place on their records—and that they should hold me in full fellowship. Nevertheless I was disregarded: my objections were considered as futile and absurd: my course was declared to be dictated by a parsimonious and niggardly disposition; and my case, as it was called, was deferred from June to September Conference to give me leisure to reflect on the subject. At the September Conference I was at a considerable distance from home on business that could not well be dispensed with, and consequently did not attend the Conference—but requested several of the members to say to the Conference, that I wished them to dispose of the subject—this was the first Conference from which I had been absent in six years: However the case was not disposed of, but deferred to a called Conference to be held about the first of October, and I was accordingly cited by the authorities of the church to appear to answer this grave and weighty charge.

At the October Conference I was not present—having been subpoenaed to attend the Superior Court of Elizabeth-City county, as a witness in a very important case. I addressed a letter to the church and assigned therein the reason of my absence—the excuse was considered as sufficient—I also requested they would dispose of the case; this they thought proper not to do; and I was again cited to appear at the next Conference to be held in December. In the meantime abundant evidence appears to indicate to me the cause of this anomalous procedure: my resolution was fixed to have nothing more to do with the matter until it was finally disposed of; to let them take their own course and work it as they pleased. I set myself upon a cast and was de-

termined to stand the hazard of the die, be it for weal or for woe. I did not attend the Conference conscious of having acted throughout upon correct principles; and being satisfied in my mind, that according to an old adage "Death was in the pot," I determined to leave them to their own deliberations, to decide the matter as they might think proper—concluding not to deprecate any judgment, to which in the plenitude of their zeal for the purity of the church, they might subject me. Not that I wished, by this measure, to show any contempt for the process of their Court—or to set their proceedings at defiance; but it was because I was desirous that the original question about the church funds should be settled; and as so utter a disregard for my feelings on one occasion had been manifested, I was determined to give them no farther opportunity whilst the present case was pending for another attack. In the mean time my case was brought up in due form, and the dreadful anathema of excommunication was fulminated against me, with all the horrors of Romish superstition. Here ended the drama. And, surely, no Nullification (right or wrong) ever met with so severe a rebuke; and no Force Bill ever went to work with such vengeance.

Now that passion and feeling have subsided, let me coolly examine into the grounds of this unheard of procedure, and see whether it can be sustained by even the shadow of a reason: I wish you to accompany me, as critically as you please, whilst I develop to you the profound absurdity whereon my expulsion has been predicated—if productive of no other advantage, it will serve, at least, to show, that even in the councils of the wise, folly will sometimes gain the ascendancy.

Several members of that Conference have told me that if I had been present, they would not, and could not have expelled me,—others say they do not know for what I was expelled; tho' they were present,—Now the inference to be drawn from these words, "had you been present they would not, and could not have expelled you," is, that I was expelled for failing to attend—this at least is implied: then if the inference to be drawn, be correct, it appears that the Conference aware of the flimsy grounds on which they proceeded in the first instance, to wit, my refusal to contribute to the church funds under their resolution, shifted their operations and commenced their attack in virtue of my failing to appear conformably to their citations: For I have also been told by a member who was present, that it was urged by some that my absence of itself, was sufficient to expel me. Their first point therefore seems, in a measure, to have been abandoned,—(justly too I conceive;) and as they cannot ground any proceedings because of my non-attendance at the October Conference inasmuch as they admitted my excuse to be amply sufficient,—they are obviously reduced to the necessity of supporting their charge on the ground of my failure to attend at the December Conference. Now my friend, suppose for the sake of argument, I had been sick, and unable to go from home (and such was the case for any thing they knew to the contrary)—what would have been their mode of reasoning? I leave you to judge.

Admit, however, that their proceedings had not been marked by these distinguished defects, and that by virtue of their religious ubiquity it was fully ascertained that my default was wilful and malicious, yet I contend that their admission of the insufficiency of the first point, whereon to sustain their proceedings, is enough of itself to overthrow their proceedings on the second. A member of that Conference said to me, the next day (perhaps) "that the question was waived, and that I was not expelled for the charge first brought against me, for if I had been, there would have been a split in the church,—and that, said he, they well knew." By this, it does appear that the first ground was deemed INSUFFICIENT; yet the second which is altogether dependent on the first for its existence, is SUFFICIENT: Strange logic! Now Sir, suppose, in any series of dependent propositions, forming a process of reasoning, it was admitted that the first on which the others depended was fallacious; would you believe that any deduction therefrom was correct, logical, and to be depended upon? Surely not. Would you Sir, believe it right to expel a member for not appearing when cited to answer a charge, when the charge itself is not sufficient to authorise the expulsion?

Thus, my friend, have I been excommunicated from church, exiled from the society of Christians,—declared unfit for communing with those whom I was once proud to call my brethren—and lamentable to tell, the Conference seemed to recognize no grade in their punishments proportionate to the nature of the offence,—for they have associated me, in the annals of their church, in the same degree and on the same day, with those expelled for adultery, &c. &c.! Sent forth into the community with the imputation of a stain upon my morals, and an anathema upon my name.—And charged by a church militant with

being a back-slender from my church, and an outlaw from my God: and for what? Echo answers—what? Was it for failing to contribute to the church funds? Some say not. Was it for failing to appear at the September or October Conference? Surely not. Was it for failing to appear at the December Conference? Ostensibly it was; but my previous reasoning has been exerted to little purpose, if it has not shown the utter absurdity of this ground.

Thus my name has been erased from the rolls of the church either for failing to contribute to the church funds, or for not appearing on one occasion when cited; and that the second time I had ever been absent from a Quarterly Conference since I first entered my name on the record. There are many other facts and circumstances connected with this case, tending very strongly to corroborate the impressions made upon my mind as to the nature of this proceeding; but the great length to which this letter has been spun admonishes me to withhold them at present. Perhaps their development may be elicited on some other occasion,—until then I shall rest satisfied with what I have said; not doubting but that the case is exhibited in a point of view sufficiently strong to answer the purpose for which it was intended.

Six years have elapsed since I first became a member of the Baptist church at this place; gratified with a pleasing hope, that a radical reform had been effected, (whatever may be the opinion of others who pretend to know better,) and elevated with the prospect of being enabled, in my humble sphere to contribute to the advancement of the Christian religion—that little, to be sure, was humble, yet sincere and disinterested,—emanating from the purest motives of my heart. How those hopes have been blasted, I will not attempt to portray. In severing the ties which have bound me so long to many members of that church, I feel the most sincere and heartfelt grief. I have cherished them with a warm and a devoted affection, and presumed so far as to think that, that affection was reciprocal.

I shall ever look back upon the time spent with them as the happiest of my life; and the retrospect will constitute no inconsiderable item among my future enjoyments. Though my prospects will perhaps be enveloped in gloom for a while, yet like the cloud of a summer's sky, they will be dissipated as soon as the light of truth shines upon it. And though, the world, too, may condemn me, still there is a principle within that admonishes me that all there is right,—a principle which supersedes all positive institutions in its operations upon the human mind. Sustained by it, I entertain no apprehensions as to the rectitude of my moral conduct.

I have thus, my dear friend, performed the promise I set out with, and fulfilled your request, though, I must confess in a much more expanded form than I at first anticipated. This hasty sketch, such as it is, you are at liberty to dispose of in any way you think proper, subservient to the purpose of my vindication.

With sincere esteem,

Yours, &c.

WM. M. JONES.

The Rev. Thomas Meredith, of the Baptist church, has issued a new publication at Edenton, called the "Biblical Recorder and Journal of passing events." Mr. Meredith is now the editor of three periodicals, viz: Edenton Miscellany and the Recorder, weekly; and the Baptist Interpreter, semi-monthly.

Indiana Newspapers.—We heard lately of a newspaper establishment in Indiana, somewhat novel in character. A printer has provided himself with a supply of wooden types, and having set up the form of his paper, each of his subscribers furnishes him with a piece of linen or muslin of the proper size, whereupon the printer inks his type with swamp mud, and takes the impression upon the cloth for each patron, who receives his paper on Saturday, and after reading it, has the cloth washed and sent back in time for the next impression.—Spy.

The Cincinnati (Ohio) Gazette says, there are before the Legislature, at least five hundred applicants for divorce.

Mrs. Willard, in her Letters from France, lately published, states that it is the settled intention of General Lafayette, to re-visit this country, and that he will probably be accompanied by one of his grand daughters.