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A LETTER TO A CHRISTIAN OUTSIDE THE CHURCH.

My Dear Sir:—I recognize you as one of those who, because of the Christian character of their lives, are sometimes referred to as members of "the church outside the churches." I use the phrase guardedly. There is no "church outside the churches." There are Christians outside the churches, and I have reason to regard you as one. My purpose here is to point out a reason or two why you should join a Baptist church.

You are a believer, but you do not say much about it. You have a hope in heaven, but you do not boast of it. You are acting as a gentleman should in your daily intercourse with your fellows, and you stand well, therefore, in your community. But you have never reached the point of making a profession of conversion and joining a church. Did it ever occur to you that you are by thus standing afar off withholding friendship from your best Friend and refusing to testify to Him who is your Saviour? The church is the army of Christ's witnesses.

Now I would not have you move one step in this matter until you have decided that you are a converted man. If I were an unconverted man I would rather be outside the church than in. My ultimate chance of conversion would be as good, if not indeed better. But, think you now, are you or are you not converted?

It is a serious question; it is a most grave question; it is the most terrible of questions; it is the supreme question of questions. It is the question of misery and happiness, death and life, hell and heaven. You and I are moving irresistibly toward the grave and the final judgment. Neither of us knows what a day may bring forth. We know what it means to face Eternity in doubt, for we are intelligent. Very probably you cannot settle every doubt at once, but I am sure that you can at least relieve yourself to a vastly satisfying extent. There are men and women that have arrived at a point of perfect assurance. With Paul they regard the death of the body as no more than the death of the grain of wheat—a death that introduces incomparably larger and more beautiful life. I confess that my periods of doubt continue to come, but I rejoice to say that the intervals are much farther apart than they once were and the doubts by no means so intense. For the most part, all my reckoning looks toward heaven. Where I used to fear the horrors of the Pit—even after I was converted—I now contemplate with something akin to longing the joys of Heaven. If doubts come, I usually find that foolish and sinful performances on my part have made way for them.

There is another matter. You look for a sign. You do not know whether you are a Christian or not because there has been no violent upheaval in your nature. Now regeneration is the greatest change in the world. To become a Christian involves a deep turn in one's character. But I do not say that you must needs undergo a terrible time of it. Some of the noblest Christians that I know underwent so gentle a process that they cannot say when they were converted. For my own part I recollect three distinct periods in which I was earnestly concerned. During each of them I offered myself to God. But at which of them I became a Christian I cannot say. I know this, that each year I am a new Christian; that is, every little while I look back and say that I am not what I was last year this time, my views are clearer, my fellowship closer, my happiness more real. You see, Christianity is a matter of growth, and it may begin so gently in a man

that it will not wrench him. Moreover, you and I were raised in a Christian atmosphere. We were already moving unconsciously along the Christian path. Had we been on the Damascus road with murder in our hearts for the church we might have been blinded in the Light. But we were used to the Light—dangerously used to it; and yet I can never think without emotion of the greatness of that love, that gave life for me, as sinful and insignificant as I am, that I might live forever in joy.

I advise you, then, to search your heart. If you think you have not been converted, go out alone and meditate the matter with God. Ask Him in Christ's name to save you now and settle the question. Then talk candidly with some friend.

But I have supposed that you are converted. And I set out to give you a reason or two for joining a church.

You cannot afford to stay out in the cold. This is not slang; it is bitter truth. It is cold to the soul outside the church. I do not say that you will fall from grace; but your religion will not grow, you will not enjoy it, and the lamp of hope will burn low. This is but reasonable. A gentleman met me the other day and, drawing close to me said, "I reckon I'll have to tell everybody, I cannot keep it; I have had a fresh and joyful experience from God." He was perfectly happy. He and his family had rejoiced the whole night through. Bye and bye he confessed that he was afraid that He would lose his joy, and that he did not know what to do. I ventured to tell him. "You will likely get used to the present exaltation," I said; "the human race has immense capacity for getting used to things; and the only thing you can do is to move upward. You must continue to rise; you are soaring now, but there are infinite heights above. Find them, and joy will be renewed like the eagle's strength. God made us to soar forever." "But what must I do?" he pleaded. "Well, you must environ your religion properly. You must pray much; you must read your Bible every day; you must look-out for opportunities to do good; you must keep your mind on Christ." And here is where the church comes in, my friend. The church gives you call to worship, it gives you instruction, it gives you work, it gives you company and fellowship. In short, it helps you to environ your soul properly and helps you to soar. Outside the church your soul grows lonely and selfish and little and weak. All that it craves is denied it. A new-born soul outside the church is like a new-born babe without a mother.

But, you ask, why should I join a Baptist church? Well, do not join one if you do not think that it is the right one to join. Your first reason for joining a church should be that you think it is the church for you to join, just as you marry a woman for a thousand reasons, but mainly for one, namely, that she is the woman for you. This is the main reason. But there are some particular reasons.

The Baptist churches aim to be like the New Testament churches. They deny the right of man to improve upon the models of Christ and His apostles. They carry you back to the simple days of Jesus and the brethren.

The Baptist churches stand nothing, not even themselves, between you and God. They place the Bible in your hand and bid you be led by the hand that led Abraham and Moses. They recognize the supremacy of God and the soul and they give them all reverence.

The Baptist churches offer a perfect brotherhood. All are equal in them. Preacher is not above people. They compose a democracy in which every man is brother, servant and sovereign. This is a recognition not only of your manhood, but of your standing before God.

Finally, the Baptist churches are doing a great work. Their missions girdle the globe; their churches are everywhere; their schools are found in almost every nation. They are a vital people standing for live principles and performing a great and timely mission. They will give your life a world-wide outlook and influence as well

as an eternal career. They, therefore, infinitely enlarge you. At the same time they are voluntary. They leave you to your God, and you and He determine your duty.

Of course there are other reasons, and I may take them up at some other time. I have mentioned the foregoing because I thought they would appeal to a man of your intelligence; and I hope that you will earnestly think on them.

Sincerely yours,

P. S.—Of course there are men in the church that you have reason to think are unworthy. Do not judge them too rashly, and be assured that they should not be obstacles to the rise of your soul. I am quite sure that among the excuses heard at the Judgment will be that So and So was in the church. I am sorry for So and So. It is a grave thing to be an offense. But I wonder by what reasoning a man can justify his failure to do right by another's success in doing wrong. Go into the church and give it a light that will light the darkness up or drive it out. Then you have done your duty.

ADVANTAGES OF THE COUNTRY NEGRO.

(Kelly Miller in April Southern Workman.)

The average city negro grows up in the shade. He is completely overshadowed by his overtowering environment. As one walks along the streets of our great cities and views the massive buildings and sky-seeking structures, he finds no status for the negro above the cellar floor. The city negro of education and culture is forced into menial employment because higher forms of occupation are pre-empted by the more favored class. There are a dozen competitors for every dollar in sight, and in the great majority of cases, the negro is handicapped by his color.

The country negro, on the contrary, is on terms of equality with his environment. He is not confronted by suggestions of inequality at every turn. Nature is a mother who is equally kind and beneficent to all of her children. An acre of ground will yield as much for the black as for the white tiller. The markets are color-blind. No one inquires into the color of the producer of the best produce in the market except as a matter of idle curiosity. No labor organization has yet placed a boycott upon negro farm labor. The farm offers for the negro the only really unhampered field which is open to him on an unlimited scale.

"SOMETIME, SOMEWHERE."

"Unanswered yet, the prayer your lips have pleaded

In agony of heart these many years?
Does faith begin to fail, is hope declining,
And think you all in vain those falling tears?
Say not the Father has not heard your prayer,
You shall have your desire, sometime, somewhere!

"Unanswered yet—tho' when you first presented
This one petition at the Father's throne,
It seemed you could not wait the time of asking,
So anxious was your heart to have it done?
If years have passed since then do not despair,
For God will answer you, sometime, somewhere.

"Unanswered yet! But you are not unheeded;
The promises of God forever stand;
To Him our days and years alike are equal.
'Have faith in God!' It is your Lord's command.
Hold on to Jacob's angel, and your prayer
Shall bring a blessing down, sometime, somewhere.

"Unanswered yet? Nay do not say unanswered;
Perhays your part is not yet wholly done.
The work began when first your prayer was uttered,
And God will finish what He has begun.
Keep incense burning at the shrine of prayer,
And glory shall descend, sometime, somewhere.

"Unanswered yet? Faith cannot be unanswered:
Her feet are firmly planted on the Rock,
Amid the wildest storms she stands undaunted,
Nor quails before the loudest thunder shock.
She knows Omnipotence has heard her prayer,
And cries, 'It shall be done, sometime, somewhere.'"

—Miss Ophelia A. Browning.