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REV. ABNER JONES

The Man Who Believed
and Served

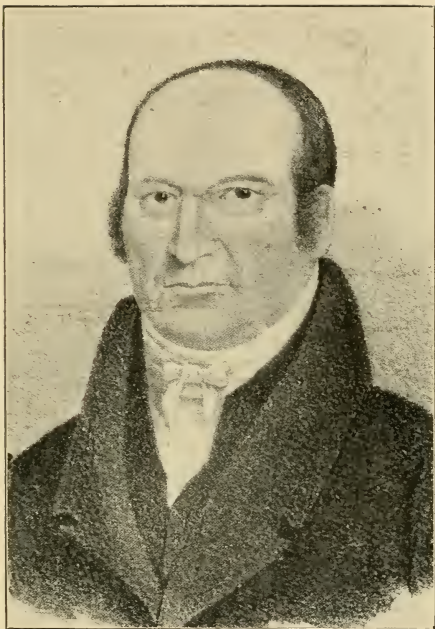
BOOKLET—THREE

By

J. F. BURNETT, D. D.
Minister in the Christian Church



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REV. ABNER JONES, M. D.



Site of the log cabin erected by Abner Jones' father, the first settler in the town of Bridgewater, Vermont. The rock pile indicates the exact spot of Abner Jones' boyhood home.

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FOREWORD

This is one of a series of booklets prepared and issued under the direction of the Secretary for Department of Publishing of The American Christian Convention, that the members of our churches and Sunday-schools may be well informed as to the history and distinctive principles of

THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

which accepts and proclaims:

The Lord Jesus Christ as the head of the church.
Christian our only name.

The Bible our rule of faith and practice.

Individual interpretation of the Scriptures, the right and duty of all.

Christian character the test of fellowship.

The union of all the followers of Christ, to the end that the world may believe.

Several of the booklets are from the pen of John Franklin Burnett, D. D., who has given many years of his life to research and investigation of the subjects he presents. Others are by men of outstanding ability who have given many years of service in the Christian Church. They will present the distinctive principles of the Christian church as essentials in Christian life and the basis for church unity.

While the booklets have not been prepared es-

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pecially for study books, yet the subject matter presented can be studied with profit by the individual, students, Christian Endeavor societies, Sunday-school classes, etc., particularly as a part of programs for stated week-day meetings. It is the hope of the Secretary for the Department of Publishing that they will be given by pastors to all new members as they are accepted into church. They are also intended for general distribution, by pastors and religious workers in our churches, to those who may be interested in the church and principles of the Christians.

No. 1 is *The Origin and Principles of the Christians* with an account of the co-ordinating of the bodies of different sections.

No. 2 is a historical and biographical sketch of Rev. James O'Kelly, who courageously stood for individual liberty in religious thought and worship.

No. 3 sketches the life of Rev. Abner Jones, a pioneer in the thought that character and life are the true test of religious fellowship as over against dogma.

No. 4 is a sketch of the life of Rev. Barton W. Stone, a scholar and religious teacher who advocated that the Bible is the book of life, and the only rule of faith and practice necessary for a Christian, as over against any formulated creed.

No. 5 combines sketches of Elias Smith, publisher, and Horace Mann, educator.

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No. 6 gives sketches of the pioneer women workers of the Christian Church.

That all who use these booklets judiciously may be supplied, they will be sent free on request and payment of postage, 15c. for one dozen, 40c. for fifty, 75c. for one hundred. Order them from The American Christian Convention, or The Christian Publishing Association. Both are in the Christian Publishing Association Building, Dayton, Ohio.

If the hopes and wishes of the Department of Publishing are even in a measure realized, the effort and expense of the publication of the series will be justified.

O. W. WHITELOCK,
Secretary for Publishing.

REV. ABNER JONES

The Man Who Believed and Served

Creeds and confessions? High Church or the low?

I cannot say; but you would vastly please us
If with some pointed Scripture you could show
To which of these belonged the Savior, Jesus.
I think to all, or none. Not curious creeds
Or ordered forms of churchly rule be taught,
But soul of love that blossomed into deeds,
With human good and human blessing fraught.
On me no priest nor presbyter nor pope,
Bishop nor dean, may stamp a party name;
But Jesus, with his largely human scope,
The service of my human life may claim.
Let prideful priests do battle about creeds,
The church is mine that does most Christ-like deeds.

—*John Stewart Blackie.*

Abner Jones was four years old when the Declaration of Independence was signed. He was born amid the birth throes of a nation, and his first breath was that of political liberty. The first sounds that fell upon his youthful ears were the screams of the American Eagle, as it proudly beat the air in celebration of the great victory of the Revolutionary war.

He belonged to nature's noblemen, whose high-born spirit refused the low servilities of political and ecclesiastical courts, but who proudly stood erect in the presence of both king and

pope, and declared that of right all men are free. To that generation liberty was the simple birth-right of all human beings; they claimed it as such; they revered and held it fast as the inalienable gift of God, which was not to be surrendered to power, nor sold for gold. It was theirs as men; without it they did not esteem themselves as men; it was essential to their happiness, a thing to be prized above wealth, ease, honor, country, or life itself. They claimed for each person a perfect individual freedom in matters of conscience. No one was authorized to be master over thought, or commissioned from on high to tell men what to believe. No man, nor group of men, could sit in judgment in the realm of thought. God had given to man the boundless element of truth, the shoreless and fathomless ocean of love, and who should direct his path. We now know that there was manliness in the words of Patrick Henry, "Give me liberty, or give me death." The spirit of liberty and equality was in the air, and many thousand hearts echoed every sound that went forth in hope of its realization. The farmer's cottage, the pioneer's cabin, and the well-to-do trader's mansion, all gleamed in radiant light as the word went forth that the yoke was to break, and the bondage end. Amid such surroundings Abner Jones first saw the light of day, and had grown to young manhood e'er the spirit had subsided, or the tumult ceased. He was born a freeman in

principle, a freeman in thought, a freeman in action, and when grown he came to his inheritance, and in the consciousness of that high born right he refused allegiance to all kings, except the King of kings, and confessed to no bishop, except the Bishop of his soul. But while he was so well favored in the spirit of his early years, he was nevertheless greatly handicapped by the severe limitations of his material surroundings.

He was born in Royalton, Massachusetts, April 28, 1772. Eight years afterward his father moved to Bridgewater, Vermont. At that early day the state was yet a wilderness, and his father the first settler in that part of it.

In his Memoirs he says: "Our house (though to the popular part of mankind may seem strange) was erected without either plank, joist, boards, shingles, stone, brick, nails or glass, but was built wholly of logs, bark, boughs and wooden pins, instead of nails. The snow was four feet deep, and the weather extremely cold, and many trees within reach of the house, and two miles from neighbors. We were favored, however, with warm clothing and solid provision, and enough of it. The great plenty of wood which was so nigh was easily collected into large heaps before one end of the house (the greater part of which was open) and set on fire, thus it was kept day and night until the weather grew warm. What little household furniture we then had was drawn two miles on hand sleds, by men

on snow shoes, which made a path sufficiently hard for my mother, and such of the children as were not able to assist in drawing the hand sleds, to follow after."

And this was not the only limitation. Vermont was a wilderness, dense, dreary, melancholy. Poisonous serpents were in the grass, wild beasts were in the forest, skulking Indians were in the shadows, and treacherous white men were by no means unknown. Fifty miles back from the Atlantic Coast the country was an unbroken jungle. Dense forests and impassable morasses added to the difficulty of travel, and in places made it impossible. Travel was on foot, or horseback; schools were few, and poorly equipped; the entire population of the United States would not exceed three and a quarter million, when young Jones cast his first vote, and yet, with all these limitations, and more of like character besetting his path, he marched steadily on, until his name and his fame have been entwined in the hearts of all who know and love the Christian Church. None of us have ever seen this great pioneer of religious liberty in the flesh, but we have breathed his spirit, we have felt his presence, we have known his power, and we have been aided by the strength of his faith and the character of his courage. He is a force never to be forgotten; he made his contribution to the cause of Christian freedom, and though dead, he yet speaketh.

When he was but eight years old, he was deeply concerned about his soul, and went through all the soul-racking experiences common to those early days. He says of such experience: "I know not a better similitude than the wilderness in which I then dwelt; uncultivated, and inhabited by wild beasts of prey, dreary and melancholy." But from out the gloom his soul emerged into the light, and from that time begins the life about which we write. That the reader may know something of his religious experience, we repeat it as he tells it in his Memoirs:

"A dreadful event occurred just at this time, in which a man was accidentally shot by his intimate friend, while hunting deer. As may well be supposed, in a population so sparse, a tremendous excitement was created which ended in a 'revival of religion so general, that it seemed there was not a person come to years of reflection, who did not share in it, and many were brought out of darkness into God's marvellous light.'

"I remember of having my attention more than usually called up to the concerns of my soul, in the above mentioned reformation, by hearing Mr. Benjamin Burch speak about death, judgment and eternity. Although I was only nine years old, the pride of my heart was so great that I was ashamed to let any one know that I felt concerned about my soul, neither could I bear to have any one see me weeping. I now felt the need of religion more than ever I had done before. I was fully convinced that I must be born again or be damned. I used frequently to resort

to secret prayer. The place which I chose for this purpose was at the foot of a rock, where it seemed there was a place carved out on purpose for me to kneel down in.

“About this time there came a man by the name of Snow, into these parts, who was a Baptist preacher, or rather an exhorter. He had a meeting appointed one evening about a quarter of a mile from my father’s, which I attended. As I was going, I remember of trying to pray that God would have mercy on me. I felt particularly desirous that I might get some good that evening. I do not remember ever to have had such a desire before. When I arrived every thing seemed overspread with gloominess and darkness, and every thing of a religious nature appeared melancholy, and I do not remember that the thought ever passed my mind that religion yielded any joy, or peace. All the advantage I thought of, was that it would save my soul from eternal misery, and on that account I felt desirous to obtain it, feeling fully satisfied of my lost, undone condition. It appeared to me as though for a moment I was lost, and then every thing appeared new. I really thought that the preacher had entirely altered his subject from something that was melancholy, to something joyful and happy. The following thoughts passed through my mind in swift succession: What is this? It is something entirely new; it makes me completely happy; I wish to enjoy it forever. After the speaker had done, my father rose and gave a word of exhortation, as I had often heard him before, and which always until that time seemed to fill my mind with gloom. But I really thought my father spoke as he never had before, for it

appeared to be glorious. I did not at that time think the alteration was in me, but thought it was in my father. The unspeakable joy and peace which I then felt, I cannot describe. I was completely happy, and wished for nothing more. The fear of being miserable was entirely gone from my mind, and the dreary gloom that before rested on my mind had vanished away. All this time I had no idea what it was that caused this change in my mind. From whence it came, and whither it went, I could not tell. I had no thought that I was converted. My mind remained in this situation for a number of days, not knowing what these things meant.

“At length one day, as I was passing from the house to the barn, these words came to me with great force: ‘For this my Son was dead, and is alive again; was lost, and is found.’ Luke 15: 24. This was the first passage of Scripture that was ever sent home to my heart. It seemed to open, and explain to my understanding, how I had been dead in sin, and made alive in Christ; and also how I had been lost, but was now found of Christ as a Savior. From that moment a hope sprang up in my soul of eternal life.”

This experience was not unbroken. He had seasons of doubt and despair. At one time, while working in the field, he felt so depressed that it appeared to him that he was eternally deprived of hope. He really felt that he had begun his eternal, endless, despairing misery; he believed that he heard the voice of God saying to him, “Depart from me ye cursed.” In his despair he dropped his work, and ran with wild, reckless speed to his mother, who was able to comfort

him. For some years his experiences were contradictory; at times the most exhilarating joy would overflow his soul, and all would be light and peace; at other times the most indescribable gloom would settle down upon him, and he would walk in darkness and in doubt. But at last he was firmly anchored in the faith of the gospel, and was assured of his acceptance, and on the 9th of June, 1793, he was baptized by Elder Elisha Ransom, of Woodstock, Vermont, and received to membership in the Baptist Church.

When twenty-one years of age he was deeply impressed that he must preach the gospel, and the question came to him, "If I must preach, what shall I preach?" He was far from being satisfied with the views, or creed, of his brethren; he determined to give the whole matter a careful and serious investigation. He accordingly took the Bible, and without note or comment, and without consulting any individual, or receiving sympathy from any living being, he commenced a prayerful and careful examination of the Book itself. He was led to conclude that the name Baptist was not the authorized name for the followers of Jesus Christ, and that the polity of the Baptist Church could not be supported by the Scriptures, and yet for a while he continued in fellowship and in service with the church. The story of his call to the ministry, and his courage in the matter of his ordination,

is told by his son, A. D. Jones, in the following language:

“Elder Jones commenced preaching in September, 1801, and from that time to the day of his death he gave himself with great fidelity to the good work. From the first, he announced his determination to stand alone, and acknowledge the authority of no church or set of men. He and about a dozen others, laymen, and residents of Lyndon, covenanted together in church form, and called themselves CHRISTIANS—rejecting all party and sectional names, and leaving each other free to cherish such speculative views of theology as the Scriptures might plainly seem to teach them. This was probably the first FREE CHRISTIAN Church ever established in New England.

“He immediately became an itinerant, and went wherever and whenever he was invited; and soon found large congregations in all the neighboring towns. He presently extended his sphere of labor into the adjoining States, and in the course of two or three years swept nearly the whole extent of New England.

“When Elder Jones commenced preaching, he had great doubts about his being called of God to this work. He therefore made a vow, that he would preach one year, unless convinced before its expiration that he was doing wrong. He had property enough to support his family for that length of time, and he supposed that if God had called him to the ministry He would provide bread for his family. The year went round, and plenty crowned his board. He had not touched the little he had accumulated in his medical practice. So his fears were somewhat abated, and

he more fully believed that the hand of the Lord was in it, and that he must now consecrate himself entirely to the work of the ministry.

“He accordingly looked around him for the means of ordination. Now it happened about this time that he was invited to attend a quarterly meeting among the Free-will Baptists. He was pleased with the zeal and piety of the brethren, and his heart was strongly drawn towards them. He preached among them, and to much acceptance. They were desirous that he should become one of their number, and solicited him to do so. I will let him give his own account of the conference that passed between them:

“‘I attended the Elders’ conference, and gave them my views of being nothing but a Christian; and that I could not be a Free-will Baptist; yet that I heartily fellowshiped them as Christians, and so far was happy to unite with them in the work of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I further observed that I should be glad to receive from them the right hand of fellowship as a Christian, but not as a Free-will Baptist; for the Lord had taught me that I must be a Christian only. Although their fellowship was very desirable, as I was entirely alone, yet I determined that it should be known what kind of fellowship was meant.

“‘I said to them, “You came out free, but the devil sent the name of Freewillers after you, and you have picked it up.”

“‘Elder Randall observed, “We glory in the name of Freewillers.”

“‘I answered, “I will not acknowledge any of the devil’s impositions. Understand me perfectly, brethren, I do not wish to join the Free-will

Baptists. I wish Christian fellowship. If hereafter it should be asked, 'Have you joined the Free-will Baptists?' the answer will always be, 'No.' It shall not be said thereafter, 'Brother Jones, you belong with us, and our rules are thus and so.' I will never be subject to one of your rules; but if you will give me the right hand as a brother, and let me remain a free man, just as I am, I should be glad.' "

" 'On these grounds, the right hand of fellowship was cheerfully given. A number of months after this they voluntarily appointed an ecclesiastical council, and ordained me a free man.'

"Elder Jones received ordination on the last day of November, 1802. Elders Aaron Buzzell, Nathaniel King and Nathaniel Brown were the officiating clergymen."

From childhood he had been taught the Scriptures according to the Calvinistic formula. The doctrine of the trinity, original sin, vicarious atonement, literal punishment for sin in a literal lake of fire, had been his daily mental and moral diet, from his earliest recollection. When he came to know for himself the truth as it is in Christ Jesus, he felt his intellect outraged and his moral sense at war with the system of doctrine, and hence there was nothing for him to do but to count the cost, pay the price, and meet the issue, and this he did bravely, courteously, and courageously. When James O'Kelly went out from the Methodist Conference, no doctrine was involved, but when Abner Jones went out from the Baptist Church nothing but doctrine

was involved. Immediately the brand of a heretic was upon him, and he was religiously ostracised, and his doctrine denounced as of the devil and dangerous. Always in such separations love is put to shame, and the truth suffers. But like all men of vision he was willing to suffer for conscience sake. He had faith in what he believed; he had faith in the future; he believed that no man, or group of men, had the right to say to honest seekers after truth, this is true, and this is false, but that every man must find the truth for himself, and finding it for himself it is his alone. No great man has ever been inspired through his memory, nor by the ideals of the past. Abner Jones was a truly great man, and he was not afraid of the future, and, like the Master, he set his face steadfastly to go to *his* Jerusalem. He was not unmindful of his obligation to those who had first taught him the way of life; his friends were now doubly dear to him, seeing that he must be separated from them, but cost what it would in friendship, and in fellowship, his duty was imperative, and his way clear, and like the hero that he was, he walked out alone to dare and to do for the right. Nor was he ignorant of what he would have to suffer in the untrodden path he had chosen for his feet. He knew that he would have to run the theological gauntlet, and that doctrinal sticks and stones of enormous size would be hurled at him by minds of gigantic strength, and hearts of con-

scientious conviction; he saw the wall, grim and dark, that was to separate him from those he loved; he saw the fiery red tongue of envy and hatred protruding from every pulpit he had hitherto occupied; he knew that everything would be done within the possibility of human strength to crush him, and silence his teaching; he knew that he would be looked upon as a disturber of society, and a preacher of strange doctrine; he knew that the firesides at which he had sat and held sweet communion with his brethren would be his to enjoy no more; he knew that the tables at which he had eaten would be given to another; he knew that he would be spoken of among his old friends as "one that is not of us" and that upon his head would fall the anathemas of the whole church, but what could he do? That old sweet spirit of freedom that he had breathed through all his early years now surged through his soul and permeated his whole being and, like a mighty power moving toward a glorious hope, he went out into that truth which makes all men free.

While Abner Jones was not college trained, he yet merited and held a creditable place among the educated of his day. He was a teacher in the common schools, of recognized ability; he studied medicine, and was a successful and popular practitioner for several years; he acquired a creditable mastery of the Greek, Latin and Hebrew grammars, and could read with tolerable readi-

ness in each of these languages; he accumulated considerable property while practicing medicine, all of which he used in maintaining his family while preaching the gospel to the poor. These facts are recited that the reader may know something of the man whose contribution to the Kingdom of God has met the approval of the church for more than a hundred years, and which grows in favor with men as the years go by. What was his special contribution?

That Character is a sufficient test of Christian Fellowship.

He taught that it was not so much what a man believed, as it was what he was in life and conduct. It was more than incidental that this pronouncement came from Abner Jones. His character was an embodiment of his teaching. James O'Kelly, the sturdy personality, that towering individual, stood for the right of the one man; he could not be absorbed; his individuality was impressive and convincing, and it was fitting, indeed it was inevitable, that he should speak for the individual. But Abner Jones possessed no such impressive personality. His strength was in his character. He was a brother among brethren; a physician in the sick room; a nurse at the bedside; a pastor in the home; a preacher in the pulpit; a laborer in the field and at his trade; and when he spoke it was with his character, as well as with his tongue. It is indeed significant that the distinctive principles of the Christians had for

their expression distinctive types of men. O'Kelly, with a strong, convincing personality, stood for the right of the individual; Jones, the man of character, stood for character as the sufficient test; and Stone, the man of the schools—the book man—for the Bible as a sufficient rule of faith and practice.

Abner Jones never taught, as some would have us think, that there could be Christian character in the absence of the fundamental principles of Christian faith. He did not admit that one could accept or reject Christ, and still have Christian character; neither did he admit that one could accept or reject the doctrines of repentance, faith, prayer, or any other fundamental doctrine of the Bible, and still have Christian character; he never taught that one could believe or disbelieve them and one would be as good as the other. Abner Jones knew, as we all know, that we cannot have a Divine command before us, and say to all men, you can treat that command as you like; if you like it, keep it; if you don't like it, don't keep it; it really does not matter; please yourselves, and all will be right in the end. Such teaching never entered the mind of Jones, nor is it to be found anywhere in all his teaching. But in the field of interpretation he maintained a Christian character, he was entitled to fellowship, no matter how widely he might differ from his fellows in intellectual conception of truth. When a man gives proof that his heart is right with God, and his

life is right with men, why should there be a divergence that would debar him of fellowship! Rev. Henry Ward Beecher said that he was sensitive in behalf of theologies, but that when theology put its hoof upon a living, palpitating heart, his heart cried out against it. Abner Jones said as much before Mr. Beecher was born, and his followers have been saying it over after him. The fact is that most of the religious controversies are of detail. Christians cannot stand apart, except on matters which do not touch individual Christian character. Individual Christian character, let it be said, is not what a man believes, for devils believed, and remained devils; not what he is on the Sabbath Day, when he is influenced by the sanctuary, the music, the prayers, the sermon, the fellowship and the spirit of worship, but what he is on Sunday, and in the week-days when life is wearing, and working, and weaving for him the garment which he is to wear when he stands to be judged for the deeds done in the body, and it was Jones' contention, and the contention of all his followers, that such a character should have Christian fellowship despite the mental attitudes he may chance to hold. Not that belief, as elsewhere stated, can be ignored, for what a man believes makes all the difference between life and death, salvation and destruction. A man sincerely believing that there is no precipice before him, when there is one, will not be saved from a broken neck, should he go forward and fall over, but as

to the question of that precipice being a thousand feet perpendicular, or sloping after the first five hundred feet, men may dispute about to their hearts' content.

Doctor Jones knew and taught, as we must know and teach, that there are some things about which opinions are not admissible.

Life is not a matter of opinion. Life is real; life is a fact. But accepting life as a fact, we may then express opinions concerning its development. We may differ in our opinions as to the best way to develop life. We may discuss the time that a child should enter school; what books should be studied, and for what length of time. We may discuss the age at which one should join the church, enter society, engage in business, without in any way disagreeing about the fundamental fact.

Law is not a matter of opinion. Law is a fact. I do not mean a law, this or that law, but law as it enforces itself in nature, in life, and indeed in all things. Knowing that without law the sunrise would be irregular, the seasons uncertain, society insecure and progress impossible, then we may proceed to discuss the various methods, and believe in the multiplied ways by which law is enforced, and none of our beliefs, opinions, or arguments would either change the law, or affect our character.

Health is not a matter of opinion. Health is a fact. When once we are agreed that health is

a fact, and of supreme importance, then we may discuss whether we should eat much or little, few or many times a day; whether it is better to drink water hot, or cold, or whether we should drink it at all; whether or not we should retire early, and rise early, or retire late and sleep late.

Farming is not a matter of opinion. Farming is a fact. The soil must be cultivated, or life would perish from the earth. Farming must be done according to seed and season. Even though a farmer should believe with all sincerity that seed planted without preparing the ground would be as good as seed sown in well prepared ground, or that one month of the year was just as favorable as another for planting seed, and would act accordingly, he would find himself with barren fields and empty barns. But, having settled that farming is a fact, and is governed by law, he may differ from his neighbor as to whether or not turnips have greater food value than potatoes, or whether white corn is better than yellow, without affecting his harvest, or changing his character. His belief would influence his course as a farmer but would not change his personal virtues. His truthfulness, honesty, uprightness, and indeed all other personal virtues would remain unchanged. His rating as a farmer would be in the fact that he farmed, that his fields produced grain and his orchards fruit, and not upon any belief that he might have about relative values of seed, or the kind of machinery to be used. All these princi-

ples hold good in matters or religion, as well as in the ones mentioned. Let it be settled that the Bible is the word of God, that Jesus Christ is God's son, that he came into the world to save men, that sin must be forgiven, or the soul suffer, that repentance toward God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ puts the life into proper relationship to the Divine government, and other fundamentals about which there is not, and never has been, disagreement, and believers may have opinions *ad infinitum*.

The mischief is that we attach far too much importance to things that are mere matters of opinion, and the result is that we have sectarian and denominational bigotry on all sides; one little bigot trying to slay another little bigot, and to make out that he holds in his own little head, and carries in his own little heart infinite truth and eternal justice. We have all too long been running up and down the lists of men's opinions, examining their beliefs to see what ones we could adopt, when we should have been inquiring about the central purpose of their life. When Doctor Jones found a man who was fundamentally right in the central purpose of his life, he hastened to invite his fellowship, and he asked, even demanded, fellowship on the same basis, and that has been the fundamental plea of the Christians from his day until now, and may God forbid that it shall ever be otherwise.

When men differ in opinion, see truth from dif-

ferent angles, they give evidence of life, a sign of vitality, and the assurance of progress. When a man says there is no God, he puts himself outside the realm of opinion. When a man says there is no such thing as truth, no such thing as honesty, no such thing as virtue, no such thing as the sanctity and purity of the home, he puts himself outside the realm of opinion. With such a man there is no discussion, nor argument; no exchange of thought, for there is nothing to discuss, no point to argue, and no thought to exchange, and with such men neither Jones nor his followers had fellowship.

To the end of time men will differ in their thinking. Truth is infinite. All facts break up into countless forms as soon as men begin to investigate them, and men describe, and interpret what they see. Abner Jones contended that it was wrong to impose the duty of seeing all things in the same light, and from the same angle, and that intellectual tests would not answer where truth was infinite and the human mind finite. And why, I ask, denounce two men of equally good character, but who chance to see truth from different angles, and within different limitations. We must know men by their fruits, but their fruitage must be in service, and not in doctrine. Christian character is in life, not in doctrine; in service, not in commandments; in heart, not in intellect; in love, not in syllogisms. Abner Jones, for himself, saw certain forms of obedience, and certain interpreta-

tions of truth, so clear and distinct that he could not think, nor speak independent of them, but he never taught that they should be tests of Christian faith for others. They were to him a means to an end, and hence his fellowship was based upon Christian character. He believed and taught that a man is not a man because he thinks aright, but because he acts aright. He contended that a man who repented of his sins and accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior possessed the fundamental and necessary elements of Christian faith, and from that point on his attitude toward God, and his conduct toward men, was a sufficient basis for Christian fellowship, no matter how widely he might chance to differ from others in matters of doctrine and commandments. He little cared whether his neighbor went to this church, or to that one, provided he was a true worshipper while there, and afterward he would graciously and effectively wait upon his Lord in loving personal service to His children. To him it was far more important to visit the sick in the name of the Lord, than it was to wait upon Him in proclaiming a doctrine, or yielding obedience to an ordinance. Were Doctor Jones living today, he would not be a stranger to the emphasis we are now laying upon service, for he taught it, and he lived it, through all his years, beginning with his freedom from ecclesiastical domination.

It was urged then, as it is now, that the test was not specific enough for so vital a matter; that by

it any one could be admitted to church fellowship, no matter what he believed. But, as explained elsewhere, that was not true, but it is true that no matter what one believes, ones acceptance or rejection is based upon what one is in life and character and not upon what one chances to believe about certain theological doctrines. Goodness is the only orthodoxy that God cares anything about, and every man who lives the Christ life is accepted of him. There were then, and there are now, those who ask questions about facts and feasts, about moons and modes, about days and doctrines, mechanical scholars, mechanical Christians, technical legalists, who must always go to priest or book to know what they must believe and do. Such ones fast by rule, and go to church by rote, they read their Bibles by measurement, and their prayers by seasons. Jones could not bind himself to fast on certain days, or do any other thing according to code or decree. He believed and taught that the man who determined to know nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified was entirely orthodox. Today no man of immoral character would be admitted to church membership, though he believed, accepted and endorsed all the doctrinal requirements of the church.

The character test is quite largely the one that holds first place in business, as well as in the church. A great American banker testified before a congressional committee that banks loaned money on character security, rather than on prop-

erty; that no matter how much property a man might have, if he did not have a good character, he could not borrow money. When asked if that was the way he loaned money he answered, "Yes; I have drawn my check for a million dollars to men who had no property at all." The Vice-President of a large and prosperous Loan and Savings Association said to the writer: "There is a moral value which has a rating: we take a character risk as well as a property risk, but we never take a property risk alone." This principle is the basis of partnerships for trade or manufacture. Men of large estate in committing their affairs to agents or managers are guided by the same principle, for if a man is not truthful, trustworthy, honest and discreet, no matter how much he may know, he has neither part nor lot in a business organization of character and standing. More and more character and not creed is becoming the basis of fellowship in the domain of the church. Within the month (March, 1921) the writer had a letter from a Christian woman, a licentiate member in a Christian Conference, telling him that she had been teaching in the Sunday-school of a strictly orthodox church, and that when the pastor was told that she did not believe all the doctrines of the denomination, he expressed great surprise and disapproval that she had been teaching. The purpose of her letter to the writer was for advice. She was advised to remain true to her conviction of truth, and not to appear in a false

light, or to pass for something she was not. She was reminded that the test of fellowship in the Christian Church was not doctrinal, but character, and that she had better resign, and be true, than to teach and be false. She prepared her resignation, and handed it to the pastor of the church, reminding him of the situation. He would not accept the resignation. He very frankly said to her, "Your character and your service are both acceptable to me and my church. You keep on teaching the Bible and we will say nothing about the doctrine."

Two things appear to the writer to be true. One is that Christian character is a safe and equitable test, for by it men are accepted at their full value, neither receiving a premium for certain beliefs, nor suffering a discount for others. The second is that a doctrinal test for church membership reduces the standard to the approval of an ecclesiastical court, and no such court is divinely authorized. We are to call no man master, for one is our Master even the Lord Jesus Christ.

Abner Jones, having assured himself of the ground of his faith, started out with great enthusiasm and high hope to preach it to others. It was to him so reasonable, so Biblical, that he never doubted its acceptance by others, but in this he was sadly disappointed. It was not long until he, and his followers, were excluded from the Baptist churches, and having none of their own, they were without places or worship. Henry Wendall,

a member of Doctor Stillman's church, hired a hall in Boston, at his own charges, paying for it at the rate of \$150.00 per annum, and a Mr. Cole, of Charlestown, opened the upper story of his dwelling for Conference meetings, seating it at his own expense. The audiences that gathered in these places for worship were large and orderly, and yet they were disturbed by the rabble, to the extent of storming the house. Especially was this true in Boston, where the interruption became so distressing that the congregation made appeal to the town authorities for protection. The petition was sent to the "Selectmen of the town of Boston." The document is quite elaborate and bears date of September 16, 1804. It recites the disturbance, and the means that had been taken to prevent it. After the usual formula of address common to that day the petition says in part:

"It is now more than four months since we have met in this place, as above mentioned. We had not long occupied, before some young men—by their appearance from 14 to 18 years of age—began to disturb us by talking loud in meeting, stamping and scraping on the floor with their feet, laughing out loud, whistling and caterwauling, running up and down stairs eight or ten at a time, striking on the stair-casing with their staves, and yelling in a most ridiculous manner, with language most obscene and insulting. Ladies have been treated in such an insolent manner by them, that they dare not pass that way, even in the early part of the evening, without protection. We have had our lights frequently blown out, our lamps in the

entry knocked down and broken, every evening on which we meet, unless we watch them. We have several times had our door locked, in order to prevent our coming out when we wished. Segars have been smoked in time of meeting repeatedly. It is common to have our house stoned in time of worship. We believe in one instance that as many as about twenty stones or brickbats have been thrown against the house in time of one meeting, together with a number of loud, tumultuous huzzas. Loud, do we say? Yes, so loud that they have been heard on Charlestown Training Field. The gate at the entrance of our yard has been torn down repeatedly while we have been worshipping. When people go out of worship, they cannot walk peaceably, but have often been insulted in the most shameful manner. Firing squibs at the house and into the yard, has of late become common. As near as we can judge, not far from twenty were blown off in one evening. Fire, flying in such a manner around a house, at such a dry season as this, is truly alarming. Many more things might be named by us, but we forbear.

And now, gentlemen, as you stand in the characters of fathers and guardians of the town, we request that you would in some manner, as you in your wisdom shall think best, use your influence to stop such tumultuous and disgraceful conduct. We feel firmly attached to the government of our country, as well as being desirous of our own peace, and in the violation of either gives us pain.

We entreat you, gentlemen, to act by the golden rule, and in this case do as you would wish to be done by. We are very sensible that many unfavorable stories are reported about our manner of worship, and many things which are entirely

false. We endeavor to regulate our form of worship as nearly according to the Scripture rule as possible; we will not set ourselves up as being perfect, but liable to err as well as others. We assure you we mean to be governed by the laws of our land, if we conduct otherwise the law is open."

Despite all these interferences, handicaps and discouragements, the man kept on, and the Lord was with him and abundantly blessed his labors. It will be of interest to know that the first church he organized was at Lyndon, Vt., in 1801. This was before his ordination to the ministry. The second church was organized in the autumn of 1802, at Hanover, N. H., and the third during the winter of 1803, at Piermont, in the same state. The first meeting-house erected under his labors was at Salem, Massachusetts. It was situated on English Street, was twenty by forty feet, and bore the name *Christian Tabernacle*.

Abner Jones died May 29, 1841.

The sources of information available to the author were the early publications of the Christians, church histories, etc. But the principle authorities consulted were the "Memoirs of Abner Jones," by Abner Jones, 1807, and the "Memoirs of Abner Jones," by his son, A. D. Jones.

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