

CONVENTION SERMON.

The Present Situation of the Baptists of the Maritime Provinces.

A DISCOURSE DELIVERED BEFORE THE BAPTIST CONVENTION AT THE 34TH ANNUAL SESSION IN TRURO, N. S., AUG. 25, 1879.

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Some who are present may remember that at our last Annual Session, there were several brethren who, in view of the small portion of each session which is devoted to the actual business of the denomination, expressed the conviction that it would be expedient to dispense with the custom of presenting an Annual Sermon, and proceed to substitute for it the discussion of some leading topic relating to the exigencies and demands of the denomination.

Being in accord with those who cherish such a view, I trust the members of the Convention will pardon me, if to-day I shall deviate considerably from the usual form and substance of a Sermon, and shall lead you to the consideration of matters somewhat practical.

I shall not, however, forsake the beaten track of all my predecessors in the custom of selecting and presenting a portion of Holy Scripture as a nucleus for my remarks. The text will be a double one and may be found in Joshua xiii. 1: "And the Lord said unto him... there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed." Numbers xiii. 30: "Let us go up at once and possess it: for we are well able to overcome it."

The remarks which I propose to offer will be on

THE PRESENT SITUATION OF OUR DENOMINATION IN THESE MARITIME PROVINCES, AND OUR REQUIREMENTS.

As the passage selected from the Book of Joshua implies that at the period of its utterance, the ancient Hebrews had already obtained the possession of a portion of their goodly inheritance, so it has been with us as a denomination during the century of our history in these Provinces which has just been completed.

We have under divine direction been largely instrumental in achieving a religious and civil liberty for ourselves and other denominations which we wrested from the Episcopal hierarchy, and from a domineering political oligarchy.

Many of the leading principles and practices for the introduction and acknowledgment of which our denomination contended almost single handed, and in the face of fierce opposition, have now been largely accepted and partially adopted by our opponents.

Notably among these, (is the necessity of a converted church membership;—the exaltation of Scripture as authority superior to catechisms, creeds, and confessions of faith;—the injustice and unscripturalness of initiating involuntary subjects, such as infants, into the church by a so-called baptism;—the right of laymen to exercise their gifts of prayer and exhortation in public assemblies;—the recognition of woman's services in various prominent departments of church work;—the separation of Church and State, and the adoption of the voluntary principle in the support of religion;—these and other principles and practices of a similar primitive and apostolic character, which in the days of our fathers, were opprobriously stigmatized as "New-light," are now either partially received, or, at least, respectfully treated by many evangelical bodies.

Nor need we be surprised at such a result, for principles are immortal. They will not be put down, but evermore fight their way on to victory.

These advances and radical changes in other denominations which serve us as landmarks to denote the triumphal advance of our principles, will one day be mapped as capes on the coast of Ecclesiastical History, by means of which Christian organizations, not bearing our name, sailed into the haven of primitive Christian simplicity, apostolic orthodoxy and true unity, and thus became the happy possessors of that "faith which was once delivered to the saints."

Then will it be seen and acknowledged that the true and only remedy for schism, was what Baptists have ever maintained, namely, the full and exact obedience of Christ's order to his disciples, to whom he said, "Go teach them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you."

But not only have we succeeded in largely possessing the land as far as the propagation and acceptance of our distinctive principles are concerned, but our denominational organizations and our status as a people indicate a creditable measure of progress during the thirty-three years of the existence of this Convention.

What marked improvement has occurred since the year 1846. Then, the total membership of our churches was only about 12,000. It is now three times greater.

Our College and Academy were then comparative weaklings, and the continued existence of the College was by many considered to be problematical. Thanks be to God! the brave and hopeful hearts of Crawley and Chipman and others who fraternized with them would not entertain the thought of failure. Their hopefulness and firmness commanded final success.

The number of students in the College was then exceedingly small. The Catalogue of 1879-80 will show the respectable number of 80 or more.

The Academy is in a flourishing condition, and a Female Seminary has at last found "a local habitation," and in the near future will doubtless make for itself a name of which we shall all be proud.

The old buildings, in which our Institutions were cradled, have been supplanted by chaste and commodious edifices which are a credit to the denomination. The corps of instructors in the College and Academies are persons of ability and character, second to none in our Provinces, and they enjoy in a remarkable degree the confidence and esteem of the churches.

The state of our finances is not so prosperous as could be desired, yet it is far from discouraging.

The amount of our possessions in property and Endowment is certainly in advance of what even the most sanguine 30 years since supposed possible.

Our Foreign Mission, after a discipline of forty years wandering in the wilderness of doubt and uncertainty, has at last been located, and is now almost fully established in all essential respects.

Missions Compounds have been procured and suitable buildings are either completed or are in progress of completion at the stations. Infant churches have been organized, and some converts from heathenism have been gathered into the fold of Christ, and the prospects of the future are most promising.

Our Home Mission interests have advanced slowly but surely, though not in the same proportion as other denominational interests, nor as the merits of the Home field deserve; but better days are in prospect for it.

Now in view of all the progress that has been made during the thirty years past, may we not exclaim, "What hath God wrought!" "Behold it is marvelous in our eyes!"

But there still remains much land to be possessed in all the various departments of our denominational enterprise.

Let us glance at the requirements of each of those branches of Christian effort which are assigned a place in the legislation and care of this Convention.

I. FOREIGN MISSIONS.

This enterprise, I am happy to say, seems to be deeply imbedded in the affections of the denomination, and has received their liberal support, but yet by no means a support adequate to its claims and necessities.

So far as our individual Mission is concerned, we have settled our missionaries on a field which contains a teeming population in the hundreds and thousands of villages adjacent to the territory occupied by our Mission.

Perhaps there would be no exaggeration in affirming that the population which surrounds the centres occupied by our missionaries and their assistants, and to which they may have access, is three or four times greater than the entire population of our Maritime Provinces.

These millions are still sunk in the depths of unutterable vileness, enveloped in the night of ignorance, their spiritual vision being overspread by a veil which has ever thickened during forty centuries.

Our aim is to rend this veil,—to permeate hearts of adamant with truth and love,—to purify the deep gulfs of pollution,—to strike off the manacles of Satan, and to lead them into that spiritual

liberty wherewith Christ makes his people free.

To accomplish this, many appliances and resources are absolutely necessary.

Our Foreign Mission Board, if they would discharge their duty, must urge upon the churches to consider in a practical manner those necessities of the Mission. Salaries are requisite for the support of our missionaries and their assistants, preachers, colporteurs and teachers. Houses affording shelter for the missionary families, buildings for school purposes, and for native assistants, must also be provided on the respective compounds.

The nature of the climate is such, so physicians and missionaries who have lived in the tropics assure us, that Europeans cannot hope to be healthy in small low-roofed houses beneath a vertical sun. Besides this, many materials which in this country may be used for building, there are honey-combed and destroyed by the insatiable ants.

Good houses, and consequently somewhat expensive ones, must be provided, and though the large outlay seems to be extravagant at the outset, it will prove to be economy in the end.

Our missionaries are very likely to break down in health, and the remedy to restore them, may likely be an expensive trip to their native land. This is an expense which sooner or later will inevitably present itself.

Provision must therefore be made for reinforcing the mission occasionally as sickness and death remove our pioneers. Such reinforcements may be demanded two or three times within a generation, or before the self-supporting stage of our Mission among the Telugus can be reached.

Our school work also will demand a continued outlay of money for many years to come before it can be sustained by the natives.

To sum up the whole matter, after our building operations are completed, we shall probably require to make an annual expenditure on each of our three stations, of at least \$2,000, besides an additional appropriation of a few hundreds on sub-stations, and in meeting unforeseen expenses.

II.—HOME MISSIONS.

Of this department of our work, I am not so well prepared to present a just idea of its necessities as are some others. Certainly the magnitude of its demands has not been overestimated by our denomination. Its importance is not likely to be unduly magnified.

Nor will the fullest legitimate support and cultivation of the Home Mission field prove antagonistic to the interests of either our Foreign Mission or Educational enterprises, but, on the contrary, helpful.

In proportion as we propagate our principles at home, organize new churches, and strengthen the weaker ones, shall we find an increase of ability to send the gospel abroad and to foster our Educational institutions.

Every dollar judiciously expended on the Home Mission field aids materially in raising a dollar to sustain the missionary on the Foreign field.

This, then, is the work to which the churches should bring their best powers and amplest resources, and most fervent prayers. I will not attempt to-day to state what is the extent of the field in which our three Provinces claim Home Mission effort. I only know that there are several counties in which there is no Baptist Church or Mission located, and several other counties where there are but a very few churches, and they exceedingly feeble. And in counties occupied by many and strong churches, there are many waste places utterly uncultivated.

From almost every quarter there is coming the plaintive Macedonian cry, "Come over and help us," and there is either no response or but a feeble one.

I suppose that to-day there is abundance of room in our Provinces, and of employment for, from 50 to 75 Home Missionaries, to occupy new fields and to supply poor and destitute churches. For it must be admitted that the poor and feeble churches present a field which we cannot with safety permit to be neglected. From the localities where these feeble churches are situated, there comes a large proportion of the young men and women who annually increase the population of our cities and large villages. Many of these little churches

are drained of their young life blood and vigor to give strength and numbers to the populous city churches. Gratitude and justice alike demand that the stronger churches which absorb the vital wealth of the puny churches, should, at least, aid them in continuing their existence and Christian work.

But for many sections of the land we need an Itinerant Ministry who may labor in school houses, and in private residences as did our forefathers, and pave the way for a settled pastor. For, in this respect, as in some others we have foolishly departed from practices and instrumentalities on which the God of Heaven, in former years, set his signet of approval. What that eminent English writer, Isaac Taylor, said of another denomination, may, I fear, be truthfully said of us: "Methodism has ceased to be an inspiration and has become an institution."

We may be informed by some that "Times are changed, and that what was useful in one age, may not be so in another." But, brethren, have we not as a denomination materially changed, and are we not losing much of the real power possessed by our godly and devoted predecessors?

The early pioneer-ministry of our denomination in these Provinces seemed to recognize the fact, old as Christianity itself, that there are two kinds of ministrations necessary to the organization and edification of churches.

One is a Ministry of Initiation like that of Christ's forerunner, John the Baptist; and the other is a Ministry of Education like that of Christ and his Apostles, though Christ combined both kinds to some extent.

He spent a goodly share of his precious ministry in teaching his disciples and apostles, but he frequently went forth accompanied by his pupils into the towns and villages to preach the "everlasting gospel of the blessed God." And therefore a great share of the preaching of primitive and apostolic days was of this itinerant character. "They went everywhere preaching the Word." They sought the people publicly and privately, in the market, the street, and the field. They never dreamed that a church edifice and a pulpit were requisite to the fulfillment of their commission.

The proclamation of the divine message delivered in godly simplicity required no rostrum, no stately edifice with cushioned pews, and mellifluous organ. It required only the ears of hearers. Had the apostles demanded the erection of sanctuaries there were few to build them and to sustain them. Persecution rendered church property insecure, and interfered with public assemblages of Christians. Notwithstanding the absence of sanctuaries, converts were made and churches were gathered. At least a century elapsed before church buildings were known and occupied. Under similar circumstances did the forefathers of our denominations in this country labor. All of them were, more or less, itinerants, and they were considered that it was degrading to their manhood or to their sacred office to run after men who were running away from them and from Christ. For what men hate they usually avoid, and the hated object must pursue them to overcome the opposition. These facts explain the marvellous success of our early preachers.

Those among us who did not know the men, or enjoy intercourse with them can scarcely estimate them correctly. They left behind them no literary productions by which we can judge of their mental or theological ability. But as the pyramids have been measured by the shadows they project so may we measure the Mannings and the Crandalls, the Hardings and the Chipmans by the influence they exerted and do still exert. They were God's noblemen, whose insignia of nobility was not worn on the robe but on the heart. These men had the good sense to perceive that frequently the heart draws more than the head, and that some men who can adroitly parry assaults made by logic and rhetoric are vulnerable to utterances which proceed from the warm heart, palpitating with love to God and man.

These successful pioneers were men who waited not for fields and churches to open to them. They made their own fields. They reached back settlements, travelling through forests on horse back

or on snow-shoes, and sought out perishing sinners and won them to Christ. Through their instrumentality, churches were born in school-houses, barns and log cabins, which have since become efficient and prominent among the sisterhood of our churches.

But we, their descendants and successors, have too much neglected the destitute and sparsely settled places, and very few either of our younger or older men seem to have any taste for itinerant work, and yet, if we are to thrive in the future, and to go up and possess the land in the name of our King, we must return to the practice of the fathers. We must "stoop to conquer," as did our Lord, and must learn to "honor,"—that is, to value,—"all men." In the spirit of humility, we must "condescend to men of low estate," both in the backwoods, and in the fishing hamlets, in the lumbermen's camps, and in the narrow lanes and in the unfrequented outskirts of our cities and villages, and give them all the gospel. Everywhere must we endeavor to seek out men lying prone and powerless in the mire of defilement and in the pit of sin, and lift up the fallen pillars of humanity from their deep degradation and ignorance.

What difference should it make to a truly devout and loving minister of Jesus, what material God sets him to work upon? We are all his workmen, and if he chooses to give one a piece of pine and another a piece of mahogany or of ebony to fashion, he will not judge us according to the material, but according to the quality and quantity of the work when it shall be presented at the Great Exhibition of the Universe.

Let our Home Mission work, then, reach out to all portions of our Provinces, and embrace all classes and engage the services of pastors, of evangelists, itinerant preachers and colporteurs.

Let even our courtly and hand-gloved pastors, whose aim has seemed to be to centralize and crystallize the gospel instead of distributing and diffusing it, and also our aspiring students for the ministry, occasionally betake themselves to regions destitute of preaching, and give the gospel to the poor. Let them cordially shake the horny hands of fishermen, lumbermen, and back settlers, and tell them "the old, old story" of Calvary and its victim.

Contact with the sturdy sons of toil will not injure the polished and refined pastor, and it will benefit the toilers. Long after the visitors have departed, their visits will be spoken of and their affability appreciated and praised, and best of all, the Lord of the servants may be adored.

The pastor will return to his home to be henceforth an ardent friend and supporter of Home Missions, and some semi-sceptics, who sit in his congregation as listless or captious hearers will commence to perceive and to believe that Christianity is indeed of God, and leads men to love their fellows with unfeigned affection, and to look sympathizingly beyond the narrow circle of their own individuality, with a view to improve the sad condition of society. This is the most effectual evidence Christianity can offer of its own truth to those who sneeringly say, "We do not believe the human race was ever destined to be saved by a system which exhausts itself in collecting people for worship one day in seven, in splendid church edifices, who live snugly the other six in the circle of their own tastes, interests and culture."

If then, dear brethren, we would as a denomination prove ourselves the true successors of the Holy Apostolic Church, we must be most forward and diligent in showing ourselves to be the whole-hearted friends and servants alike of the lowly and lofty. Then shall we surely gain the hearing and command the confidence of the masses, and win the allegiance of the fainting, scattered multitudes who surround us.

I have already suggested that in that arm of our Home Mission work that is essential to the efficiency of our Christian "army of occupation," as was the cavalry of the British army to the late successful attacks on the Zulus, we should include the Colporteur.

But to render the Colporteur service effective we must have a full supply, not only of general religious literature of an awakening and edifying character, but of denominational books in which not only truth is presented, but the whole truth as regards the constitution and polity of a gospel church and Christian ordinances.

If we decide to employ such an agency so essential to propagating our distinctive tenets, and to the education of our membership in comprehensive and intelligent views of doctrine, we must carry out the scheme endorsed at previous sessions of this Convention in respect to establishing a denominational Book Depository.

This ought not, however, to be undertaken until a capital of from three to five thousands of dollars has been secured, or an assured subsidy of at least \$500 a year from the churches for the gratuitous circulation of tracts, and for the grant of aid to indigent Sunday Schools.

Probably no investment of an educational and mission character would yield such large and permanently beneficial results to the denomination.

To sum up all the demands of our