

DR. ANDERSON'S LETTER TO MR. BARNES.

ON THE ARMENIAN CONVERTS IN CONSTANTINOPLE.*

Missionary House, Boston, March 16, 1864.
REV. ALBERT BARNES,—Dear Sir,—The American Presbyterian of the 10th inst. contains an article headed "The Armenian Converts in Constantinople," written in a friendly spirit, but under misapprehensions as to the ecclesiastical state and prospects of the churches in the missions of the American Board, which it seems proper for me, in the same friendly spirit, to make some effort to correct. And as you are the member of the Prudential Committee residing in Philadelphia, I beg the privilege, for that reason, of addressing myself to you.

The article states, that "the Missions of the American Board are giving some alarming indications of instability;"—that its "energy, zeal, devotion, courage, prayer, well-appointed machinery at home and ably-planned missions abroad, with schools, printing-presses, favor with the people, revivals and conversions," are "connected with loose views, or indifference, on the subject of church government; or with a certain reserve, which discourages a hearty, prayerful, and earnest attention to the subject;" and that its "mission churches probably exhibit the most meagre and defective system of church government to be found upon any of the mission fields of the great Societies of Christendom." The article admits, that "a system approaching completeness" was lately "inaugurated at the Sandwich Islands," but declares it to be "the one solitary instance in the whole world-wide field of the Board, after the lapse of more than half a century." And then the Board is said to be "ammonished, by the symptoms of disorganization for sometime exhibited at Constantinople, of the necessity of a thorough, comprehensive and tried system of church government;" and is exhorted to find the cure for the evils in the churches emerging out of the horrors of heathenism, in the "warm, close grasp of Presbytery, or of the best developed Congregationalism, thrown around the young converts, coming," as the writer says, "half-amazed and confounded from the dense darkness of heathenism."—I have multiplied quotations, that I might present the case fully and fairly.

The points to be noted are,—the alleged indications of instability in the Board;—loose views, indifference, reserve, on the subject of church government;—and the proposed cure for the evils supposed to exist in the churches. I wish to meet the allegations in no spirit of controversy, but in that of an inquirer, who more than ever believes himself to be as yet but a tyro in what he feels constrained to regard as the great science of foreign missions.

1. The writer represents the missions of the American Board as "giving some alarming indications of instability," notwithstanding its "energy, zeal, devotion, etc." The only indication of instability, however, which he mentions, is among the Armenians of Constantinople. Excepting that there is some-

* We give in full the paragraphs of the article of March 10th, to which Dr. A.'s letter refers:

The missions of the American Board are giving some alarming indications of instability. Energy, zeal, devotion, courage, prayer, well-appointed machinery at home and ably-planned missions abroad, with schools, printing-presses, favor with the people, revivals and conversions—all these and many other elements of success have been enjoyed by the Board, and great prosperity has attended many of its missions. But these things do not ensure permanency. Connected with loose views or indifference, on the subject of church government; or with a certain reserve, which discourages a hearty, prayerful, and earnest attention to the subject, from root to branch, as it deserves, the work of the missionary will be transient, will yield readily before internal dissension, or outward proselytism or national fluctuations. Pure independency among missionary churches, is such a palpable source of weakness, that we do not think it any where is inculcated; though by negligence, it may be the actual state of things in some cases. But the missionaries of a Board which combines two or more denominations, with diverse views on church government, naturally and without the intended or the felt exercise of authority on the subject, allow questions of church government to drift into the background; and the consequence is that the mission churches of this Board probably exhibit the most meagre and defective system of church government to be found upon any of the mission fields of the great societies of Christendom. Only a couple of years ago, after thirty or forty years of missionary effort, a system of preaching completeness was inaugurated at the Sandwich Islands, and that is the one solitary instance in the whole world-wide field of the Board, after the lapse of more than half a century!

The Hawaiian race is rapidly dwindling away, and the Sandwich Island Mission will perhaps, in the lapse of a generation or two, be blotted from the records of the Board. By all odds, from the records of the Board, the most interesting and important mission of the Board at this time, is that to the Armenians. Let the Board be admonished by the symptoms of disorganization for sometime exhibited at Constantinople, of the necessity of an element of permanence and a means of promoting homogeneity to be found in a thorough, comprehensive and tried system of church government; and let it there and church government instruct and encourage the missionaries to organize the entire Christian community into a sympathizing, well ordered and scriptural whole. Independency is a perilous experiment among old-established Christian communities; let the warmer, closer grasp of Presbytery, or of the around the young Congregationalism, be thrown around the young converts, coming half-amazed and confounded from the dense darkness of heathenism to the marvellous light of the Gospel.

what of the same uneasiness in one other small district of Turkey, owing to the same cause, I cannot imagine what other indications he could have had in mind. I think of none in Syria; or among the Nestorians; or in India; or in China; and he himself excepts the Sandwich Islands. As for the Constantinople difficulty, it is not yet expedient to speak as freely concerning it as we might, lest what we say be read there, and stand hereafter in the way of good. But I am quite sure that the cause of these evils was not in matters ecclesiastical among the Armenian converts. The interference of our evangelical German friends was an unexpected grievance, and never was anything more ill-advised. The evils have thereby been aggravated, and the "warm, close grasp of (a German) Presbytery," around these disaffected, misguided Armenians would, in my apprehension, only tend to augment and perpetuate the evils; and the final, not distant, result would probably be a return into the bosom of Mother Church. In fact such interferences, even supposing a mission to be slow and somewhat in error, are extremely dangerous; especially when they come with the offer of pecuniary advances. Dr. Wood, Corresponding Secretary of the Board for New York City, who was for years a member of the Mission to the Armenians, went to Constantinople, nearly two years ago, with the purpose of aiding his brethren in the organization of the Armenian churches, if possible, on an ecclesiastical basis, that has been seven or eight years before the public; and should he return the present season, without having succeeded, it will doubtless be owing in no small degree to such adverse influences from abroad, as I have just mentioned.

2. We are charged with "loose views, or indifference, on the subject of church government," or with a "discouraging reserve" on the subject. Which of these three things? They are not the same thing. And what evidence is there in respect to either? As I have long been the Foreign Secretary, perhaps I am the one chiefly meant. But I certainly have no such loose views, no such indifference, on the subject of ecclesiastical development in the missions; and, within the bounds prescribed for its Secretaries by the Board in 1856, I have had no timid reserve. I am not, indeed, in favor of transferring our Presbyterians, until the missionaries on the ground, who are the most competent judges, shall be ready for it; nor am I any more in favor of transferring our Congregationalism. Nor am I at all averse to the introduction of either when the missionaries are ready. "But I have used all my powers of argument and exhortation with the missions, to induce them to hasten the formation of native churches, and to ordain native pastors, and to give to the whole an ecclesiastical organization, of such sort as they shall deem most conducive to the stability of the new Christian communities and their growth in grace. I do not believe that more of earnest writing, on this subject and in this direction, can be found in the correspondence of any one of the "great Societies of Christendom." As for "Independency," spoken of by the writer, I am not able to discern so much as a trace of it anywhere in our missions, nor even a tendency towards it.

3. Prominent in the article under review, because printed in italics, is the declaration that the missions of the American Board "probably exhibit the most meagre and defective system of church government to be found upon any of the mission fields of the great Societies of Christendom." I may properly ask, what sort of "church government" is here meant? (1.) In the first stages of a mission there is necessarily the government by the missionary; for the same reason that a parent governs in a family of very young children. For a time, in the infancy of their churches, ministers become ecclesiastical rulers unavoidably, and equally so to whatever Christian denomination they belong; and there is now much diversity of opinion among missionaries as to how long this should continue. The opinion and practice have seemed to me to be quite independent of the previous ecclesiastical education and relations of the missionaries. I speak of course of an authoritative superintendency; not of that Christian, benign influence, or ascendancy, which the missionary will ever seek to retain over the native community around him. (2.) But when the time comes—and I believe it comes sooner than even missionaries are wont to suppose—that the missionary, having somewhat trained his churches for self-control, should organize them for a practical training still further, under his influence, towards self-government, how shall that be done? Here I must distinctly state what I believe to be the GRAND AIM in the missions under the care of the Board. It is not simply church government; it is rather a SELF-GOVERNED CHURCH. It is, that whatever of government there should be in the church, be exercised by the native churches themselves as soon as may be, and by them exclusively. It is well known that we deprecate having the missionary in the same ecclesiastical body with the native churches and

* See Memorial Volume, p 285; Annual Report of the Board for 1846, p 238; and Missionary Herald for 1846, p 317.

ministry; for he is a foreigner, his work is temporary, his duties are peculiar, and simplicity and congruity both forbid it. It would be a hindrance to the development of the self-governing power in the native churches and ministers; and the missionary, without this entanglement, will be able to leave sooner and with less embarrassment, for "regions beyond. I know that some other societies and missions take a different view; and if the absence of such organizations is what makes the missions of the Board seem somewhat meagre, in a public review, we must bear the imputation for the present. Notwithstanding, we are on the shorter road to the great consummation of our work; though we thereby get sooner into those troubles, which all missionary societies and missions must encounter, (and to which the great Apostle was no stranger,) when their churches are passing from a feeling of dependence into a feeling of independence. Self-government is sometimes a rather troublesome affair, but, in mission churches, it must precede self-support, and we go for its introduction as early as may be.

You will kindly bear in mind, dear sir, that I am not reasoning from a denominational but from a missionary standpoint—the *ex necessitate belli*. It was the infantile condition of the native Christian community at the Sandwich Islands, that made it important, when ecclesiastical authority was relinquished by the missionary, that it should not be extinguished but transferred, for a time at least, to the local ecclesiastical bodies, whether called Presbytery, Association or Conference; otherwise the missionaries would not venture to multiply native churches and pastors. The ultimate shaping into denominations was regarded by all as a thing for the future; but will of course be in the direction of one or the other of the two denominations to which the missionary fathers of the Hawaiian Church themselves belong.*

That our system, aiming at the institution of self-governing churches in some form, is yet "defective," in the sense of not having been fully carried out, I readily admit; but without reflecting on our able and faithful body of missionaries. That the wheels have moved no faster in the direction of organizing churches detached from the central stations, of ordaining native pastors, and combining them, in some form, for the management of their internal affairs, while their missionary fathers are living, and at hand with their wisdom and counsels—is to me somewhat of a mystery, even after my extraordinary opportunities. But when so many of the ablest and best men in the Church of Christ—as the missionaries are regarded as a body—concur in the thing, there must be a reason, and one which should command the respect of the Church. Whatever be the difficulties, I am persuaded they are not to be overcome by the authority of Boards or Ecclesiastical Bodies at home. Mere authority is nowhere more out of place or more ineffectual than in respect to foreign missions. "Of all men, foreign missionaries most need to be convinced. They need, also, that we enter with our liveliest sympathies into the difficulties of their position. In respect to the very essential matter of self-control, it is much easier, for a time, especially when the native pastors look to the missionaries for at least some part of their support, to govern them, than it is to teach them to govern themselves. Then there are so few precedents and so many troubles! Perhaps something like ingratitude takes the place of dependence, as at Constantinople; the native churches and pastors, becoming arrogant, demand a voice and agency in the disbursement of missionary funds; outside influences create jealousies; parties are formed for Paul, for Apollus, as at Corinth; or there is "another gospel," as in Galatia. We must not wonder if many of our brethren, especially the older ones, adhere too long to the old way, or at least would share the government with the native brethren. But though our march has been wary and slower than we could wish, be assured we were never so much on the onward move, in respect even to church matters, as we are at this moment. Our ecclesiastical materials have greatly increased since 1856; our churches from 119 to 154; our native pastors from 13 to 36. And these churches are as well organized and their pastors as effective as those in any other mission. And when our system shall, through the grace of God, have overcome the great incipient difficulties, and is boldly carried out with dependence on the ever-blessed Spirit—as it will be, though perhaps not till after my day—then none of the other great societies of Christendom will be found, I am persuaded, to have a system of church government more really effective than that of the missions under the care of the American Board.

4. I come, finally, to the remedy proposed for our evils, namely, "a thorough, comprehensive, tried system of church government." But where, I

* At the Sandwich Islands it is necessary that both the foreign and native Protestant clergy belong to the same ecclesiastical bodies. The case is there exceptional. The Islands have been Christianized. The mission has been dissolved. The missionaries remain there, have become citizens, and mere pastors, and as such are on an official parity with the native pastors. How easily and intimately the two classes will work together in such bodies time will show.

would respectfully ask, shall we find such a system of church government that has actually been "tried" on heathen ground? Where one, that has long "comprehended" young converts "coming half amazed and confounded from the dense darkness of heathenism?" Where one, so long in use in the foreign missions, that it may be pronounced "thoroughly" adapted to train native churches and ministers for self-control and self-support? Our friend in the American Presbyterian takes for granted that the denominational peculiarities of our own long civilized and Christian land may be readily transferred to lands, all the varieties of whose civilization differ totally from ours. I am sure he expects too much from mission churches, in the present stage of their progress, and that such would be the general opinion of our missionary brethren.

The criterion of success proposed in the article under consideration seems to me fallacious. The devil works from within the visible church as well as from without, and the greater the prospect of his overthrow the more desperate he becomes. I anticipate our most trying difficulties from our native churches; not in their infancy, nor in their childhood, but in their approach to maturity, when passing on to the stage of self-control and self-reliance. That will be the critical stage as parents generally find with their children. Our remedy is time, patience, prayer, the gospel, and God's grace. Such it is for Constantinople; and if the German Presbyterians and the high-church Episcopalians will only let our churches alone, we shall find our task easier and our trials less.

I am, my dear sir, with great respect, very truly yours,
R. ANDERSON,
Foreign Secy. of the Board.

REPLY.

Although the above letter was written in reply to a couple of paragraphs but little more than half a column long, the esteemed writer appears to have overlooked two points very clear in the article and very prominent to our minds in writing it. First, he says that in giving instances of apparent instability among the missions of the Board, we ourselves "excepted the Sandwich Islands!" The very first sentence of our second paragraph asserts the contrary. There are indications of instability in those islands, which we do not understand Dr. Anderson himself to question. The population is steadily declining. It is now, as stated by Dr. A. at the last Annual Meeting of the Board, but 60,000, and his opinion then was that it would run down to half this number before the decline was arrested. This looks like unsteadiness from whatever cause it may arise. We did not impute it to the ecclesiastical policy of Board. Second: the supposition that we intended to throw the blame of the defective church organization of the missions upon Dr. Anderson. "As I have long been the foreign Secretary, perhaps, I am the one chiefly meant." Did the writer overlook the first part of a sentence, the last part of which he has made the subject of extended comment? We said, and said it significantly: "The missionaries of a Board which combines two or more denominations, with diverse views on church government, naturally and without the intended or the felt exercise of authority on the subject, allow questions of church government to drift into the background." We reckoned it as a case of "unconscious influence" flowing from the nature of the organization of the Board, and we cannot well see how it could be otherwise. The missionaries, as Christian gentlemen, must feel a delicacy in taking any measures of a specifically ecclesiastical nature, lest they offend the denominational feeling of one of the other bodies represented at home. The executive officers of the Board may also be expected to share the same sentiment. However that may be, Dr. Anderson is mistaken in supposing that we had any special reference to his course as foreign Secretary in our remarks. We wrote what we had to say in full recollection of what had been written and said in former discussions and of Dr. Anderson's explicit statements and denials on the subject, and we have sufficient respect for Dr. A., to regret that he should feel it necessary to repeat those statements and denials in view of anything we have said; or rather he has imagined we intended to say. Nor should we have referred at all to his personal views in this discussion, had they not been introduced by himself and a consideration of them thus required on our part.

But to the argument of the letter. In our judgment the letter simply reveals more clearly than before the defective nature of our missionary church polity, while its argument is only an attempt to explain, and re-canoice us to, the fact.

1. Dr. Anderson's modest declaration under which we feel quite overwhelmed: that he "more than ever feels himself to be as yet but a tyro in what he feels constrained more than ever to regard as the great science of foreign missions," spoken doubtless of the ecclesiastical questions now under examination, indicates the very temper of mind from which such defects might flow. If such language were uttered and such feelings cherished of the system of truth to be taught the heathen, we may be sure the

teaching would be grievously defective. The utmost certainty and clearness ought to prevail on the doctrines to be inculcated and on other fundamental points connected with foreign missions. It is no merit to be modest here. Now, we are ready to sit at the feet of the veteran and accomplished Secretary, and learn of the science of foreign missions from the stores of his sanctified experience, second to that enjoyed probably, by no missionary secretary in Christendom. But when he speaks of being a tyro in missionary church government, we must re-monstrate. The notion that it takes a lifetime of more than ordinary length and opportunity to reach the light on this subject; that we have got to begin at the rudiments and solve the problem *de novo*; that man must regard himself as left to the lights of reason and experience only, and that God by inspiration and in the past history of his church has done nothing to guide him, is utterly unsatisfactory. We believe that Presbyterism and the best forms of Congregationalism are so nearly conformed to the indications of the New Testament on church polity, that we may accept them as universally applicable to regenerate men; that we may carry them with us everywhere "full-blown;" that we may have confidence in them though mere "tyros" in experience; that God has happily in a great measure relieved us of the necessity of experimenting or learning a "science" of their fitness. We by no means affirm that there is no room whatever for experiments, and that no novitiate need be served by the converts from heathenism. But with all the lights of Scripture and experience on church government, we think that the missionary Board which waits half a century before it claims maturity of view on the subject, has lost its best opportunities and will find it difficult to acquire a character or hold a position of influence for church order.

2. There is an admission in so many words that the missionary churches of the Board are defective in polity. "That our system is yet defective in the sense of not having been fully carried out, I readily admit." It is indeed "somewhat of a mystery" to the Secretary, even after his "extraordinary opportunities" that the wheels of organization "have moved no faster." The missionaries, somewhat to the Secretary's surprise, "concur in" this delay—their reasons, whatever they may be, must be respected. Mere authority of the Board or of ecclesiastical bodies "is nowhere more out of place than in respect to foreign missions." They must be convinced; allowance must be made for many peculiarities of their situation. Meanwhile, the organization remains defective.

Certainly this reluctance of the missionaries of the Board, to move in organizing church polities is singular. We never heard of the Old School Board having any difficulty, or needing patiently to convince their missionaries, after a quarter of a century to organize into ecclesiastical bodies as Presbyteries and Synods. We are of opinion that the three Presbyteries and Synod of Northern India, the Presbytery of Siam, the Presbytery of Shanghai, the Presbytery of Corisco, the Presbytery of Calcutta, arose pretty much spontaneously in those localities, as did the classis of Aroet under our Reformed Dutch brethren, after a very few years of preparation, and some of them have long been in perfect working order.*

But to return. Dr. Anderson further on admits that "our march" though wary, has been "slower than we could wish." And so far is he from denying the defectiveness of present organizations, that he speaks of the system of the Board as yet (in the fifty-fourth year) contending with "incipient difficulties," (the italics are ours,) and as possibly not to be carried out till after his day! Then,—and not till then,—will the superior effectiveness of the system of the American Board be proved. It is not seen now. It is defective, the missionaries do not carry it out. Dr. Anderson himself, says so, and wonders at their delay. But we must not complain or doubt; we must not draw comparisons with other systems established with facility on old bases, and working very well already. We must overlook defects and have faith, even though we "die without the sight." This sounds noble and spiritual; but is it practical? Suppose, meanwhile, rude German Presbyterians, and arrogant High-Churchmen and "Reformed Catholics" tempted by the defenceless condition of the unorganized flock, break in and steal away the elements of our leisurely forming system? What if the system be beautiful and grand in theory, but to be classed with those almost realized inventions which stopped short of the desired consummation, which could never in actual practice be made to work?

3. It is time to look at the system itself. Dr. Anderson objects to the terms we have used, such as "loose views," "indifference" &c., describing the attitude of the Board on church government. On the contrary, he asserts that he has no such loose views; that he has used all the urging and influence which ought to be used with missionaries to

hasten the work of church organization on their fields. We are left to infer that the fault—if any exists—is with the missionaries rather than the Home Board. The Board has a "system;" Dr. Anderson uses that term several times in the course of the letter; and yet it is difficult to find any positive features of a system in the document. Some negative features are plain: He is "not in favor of transferring our Presbyterism full blown to the mission churches, nor any more in favor of transferring our Congregationalism, except when the missionaries are ready." His system does not include the urging or commending these forms of government to the missionaries; there is simply an absence of objection to them. He writes, urging the missionaries as earnestly as he knows how; and, he believes, as earnestly as the Secretary of any of the great societies of Christendom does, to organize in such a way "as they shall deem most conducive to the stability," &c., of the new community.

The system of the Board would then appear to be simply to urge the missionaries to act—upon their own judgment, exclusively as to the form of organization, under the influence it is true, of an objection on the part of the Board to the transference of Presbytery or Congregationalism to the field, while the missionaries themselves are undecided. The Board has no policy with which to supplement the missionary's indecision, indifference or tardiness. Its "system" rests upon the supposition, that there is no policy of church government which can be recommended before experience. In the eyes of Presbyterians—not *jure divino* Presbyterians, either—these are "loose views."

But the "system" of the Board, as we find by further reading, involves another negative element, which we presume is among the few things authoritatively enjoined upon the missionaries, and which must materially circumscribe the exercise of their judgment in any movements towards organization. The missionaries must not belong to "the same ecclesiastical body with the native churches and ministry." They may not form part of the organization they establish. They indicate the materials and method to the native converts; they instruct and urge; but stand aloof from the result. They form a Presbytery, but though Presbyterians, they are forbidden to join it. If there are two native pastors, the foreign missionary cannot complete the organization by making the third. If there are two foreign missionaries, they cannot bring the first native pastor into union with them, and thus early throw around him the warm grasp of the church with which in its entire home organization he would thus promptly become connected, which would recognize his ecclesiastical parity, and relieve him of his sense of isolation and inferiority. The missionaries must wait not only until a sufficient number of churches and pastors exist, but until the material presents itself which can stand alone; which may be expected to maintain itself without any organic connection with the rest of Christendom. Can any other result be expected than a defective organization for a long time; and is it strange that the Secretary bids us postpone our expectations of a better state of things until after his day? We must wait until the native converts and churches are considered capable of exercising church government by themselves, before any government can be expected to appear upon the fields of the Board.

Dr. Anderson designs, we suppose, to sum up the system of the Board in the following language:

"Here I must distinctly state what I believe to be the GRAND AIM in the missions under the care of the Board. It is not simply church government, it is rather a SELF-GOVERNED CHURCH."

We are somewhat puzzled with this language; it implies a certain antagonism between church government and a self-governed church. It seems to suggest the possible rise of a self-governed church without church government preceding; or that those in favor of church government are necessarily opposed to a self-governed church as an ultimate aim. Suppose I am in the water busily teaching my boy to swim; a friend safe and dry on the bank points to his unassisted son hugging close to the shore, or floundering about in deep water, and in some danger of drowning, and calls out: "my grand aim with my son, is not so much teaching to swim, as independent swimming!" I shall be tolerably sure that my son will be an independent swimmer, while the other is still experimenting or has gone to the bottom. And I should regard my friend as having "loose views" on swimming.

The system of the Board is made up, according to the Secretary, of the following particulars:—(1.) Positive objection to the transferring of our Presbytery or Congregationalism to mission ground, so long as the missionaries, from whatever cause, do not decide to introduce either. (2.) Urging upon the missionaries the establishment of some form of government. (3.) Forbidding them to ally themselves with the natives in ecclesiastical organizations. (4.) Aiming at a self-governed, isolated, native church.

In other words, the Board does not enjoin upon its missionaries to adopt one or the

* The Foreign Missionary (O.S.) for April, has the following item:—By the direction of the Presbytery of Siam, a new church was organized in May last, at the station of Petchaburi, to which the brethren there were permitted to welcome three natives, receiving them by the ordinance of baptism.

[CONCLUSION ON PAGE 108.]