

American Board.

INTERFERENCE IN FOREIGN MISSIONS.

DR. WOOD'S REPORT.

It is deemed expedient to lay before the Board, at this time, a brief historic recital, and a re-statement of the views of the Prudential Committee touching interference of different Missionary Societies and Boards with each other, in conducting their operations.

Thirty-three years ago, the Committee reported that instructions had been forwarded to the Sandwich Islands to arrest the establishment, previously sanctioned, of a mission at the Washington Islands, as it had been ascertained that the London Missionary Society regarded that group as within their territory, and wished to occupy it.

Four years later, in 1837, in reporting on the mission then just commenced at Singapore, the Committee expressed the judgment that Singapore, Calcutta, Madras, Bombay, and similar commercial ports, being "the natural entrances to great fields of missionary labor," must "necessarily be, to some extent, common ground to different societies; that is, as was explained, so far as the printing press, and what might be necessary to make them effective, together with liberty, at the same time, to perform all kinds of missionary labor."

At the next annual meeting (in 1838) a paper from the Prudential Committee was read to the Board by the Foreign Secretary, on the subject of interference in missions. It gave an extract from a letter received from the London Missionary Society, which cordially endorsed the principle stated in the Report of 1837, and suggested that societies should furnish reasonable information to each other concerning their plans, which might affect the interests of others.

This was twenty-eight years ago. Then, and previously, it was a cardinal principle with this Board to avoid injuring the interests of any class of evangelical Christians who seek, under whatever forms of worship and church order, to spread the saving knowledge of Christ among the heathen, or to complete a work of evangelization which they had well begun to since. The Committee are not aware that a complaint of intrusion has been or can be urged against any of its missions in India, (excepting, lately, Madras,) and Ceylon; in Africa, and Persia, and Turkey, and Syria, and Greece; in Oceania, and among Indian tribes on this continent, its missions are in distinct and well-defined fields, which they entered when unoccupied, and which they cultivate, in general, as fully as is done by any other missionary agencies under similar conditions.

The Committee are happy to testify that the principle of non-interference is generally acknowledged, and seldom infringed, by evangelical missionary agencies in the foreign work. The Earl of Shaftesbury has spoken of it as "the received principle of missionary operations." In accordance with it, the American Board and English societies operating in the Pacific coast have agreed on boundaries there; the Church and London Societies have done the same for Madagascar; various societies the same in Africa and India. In conformity with it, the London Society, in 1835, declined to receive Mr. Rheanus, and other excellent missionaries of the Church Society, who left the service of the latter in Tinnelvey, and sought to come under the patronage of the former, which had a mission in the adjoining province of Travancore. Thus the American Board and the American Methodist Episcopal Society divide between them the Bulgarian field in Turkey; and the Church Missionary Society has refused to listen to urgent solicitations to enter among the Armenians, either in the provinces or the capital. When, less than three years ago, strong appeals were made by members of the Church of England, for aid to be extended to a company of converts in Constantinople, who, with an able pastor at their head, had withdrawn from the American mission, and pleaded conscientious convictions in favor of an Episcopal "Reformed Armenian" movement, the Committee of that great and noble society, after mature deliberation, unanimously declared "that the Church Missionary Society could not give the desired 'countenance or support, as it would be an unjustifiable interference with the great and good work for so many years carried on by the American Board of Missions in Turkey, with the manifest blessing of the God of missions.'" The return, soon afterwards, of the disaffected party to cordial relations with the mission of this Board, and other subsequent developments, attest the wisdom as well as Christian courtesy and justice of that decision.

favorable to the division of fields and arrangements of agencies necessary to prevent it, has, on the whole, gained strength in late years. Exceptions to which bear the Christian name, the first consists of the missionary propagandists of the Church of Rome. These, claiming that Church is the only repository of truth and salvation for the world, are justified by their principles in following us, as they do, with persistent zeal, wherever we go among the heathen, and, seizing, so far as they can, the fruits of Protestant labor and expenditure. Their position is frankly avowed. They assert a right to oppose and despoil our work, and we meet them as we do Fagan, Mohammedan, and other open enemies to it.

Two recent events indicate that a similar policy is likely to be pursued by the highly ritualistic portions of the Protestant Episcopal Church. These appear to be far more in sympathy with the Church of Rome than with non-religious, evangelical Christians, and increasingly animated by its spirit. In a late instance, which is yet happily without a parallel in the history of Protestant missions, an aggression from that source has been made on a field of small dimensions, occupied by this Board for more than forty years, and at least as thoroughly and successfully cultivated as any field of like character and equal extent has been by any missionary agency in the world.

Each of the several ecclesiastical systems is, in the eyes of its advocates, more scriptural and excellent than any other; and its universal prevalence is to them a proper object of desire. A particular mission may not be conducted in the best manner; or, however conducted, it may yield unsatisfactory results. But does any such consideration annul the evident dictate of Christian wisdom and duty, that the disciples of Christ, who are brought under equal responsibility and endowed with equal rights, by the command addressed equally to all, to "go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature," should so shape their action as not to embarrass and hinder one another in obeying it?

Interference, then, is unnecessary. All the followers of Christ can take part in spreading the Gospel without interfering with one another. Economy, and the best results, require the choice of separate fields; for the light is most diffused when kindled at many centres. Friction in this way is avoided. The collisions of rivalry on the same ground produce deplorable effects. The temptation to turn aside from a field of heathen, and so reap fruits of toil, or at least work on soil which others have found more productive, is often very strong; but this cannot be justified. Such encroachment is felt as a wrong by the previous workers; and it is well if they do not show human infirmity in resenting it. The trespassers on others' enclosures are under a dangerous inducement, in defending their aggression, to depreciate and misrepresent the character and labors of those whom they thus injure. How else shall we account for the efforts to bring removal upon the mission of this Board at the Hawaiian Islands, by the retelling of old, exploded calumnies by gentlemen whose love of truth we would not impeach, and even by high dignitaries of a Christian Church? Surely, nothing but the exigencies of a false position, opening the ear to testimony unworthy of credit, could lead to the utterance, by such lips, of statements utterly at variance with facts that are incontestable, and some of which are known to the world. By this means the enemies of Christian missions are made to rejoice, and their friends in all Christendom caused to mourn.

But more to be deprecated still are the legitimate effects of such an aggression on native converts, and the people at large. Its influence may be, and in the particular instance above referred to it seems likely to be, by God's grace, overruled for good; but still much evil must arise. Churches composed of babes in Christ, with the little knowledge and moral strength which converts from heathenism must be expected to possess, are easily desolated and rent by contentions. It was so in the churches founded by the Apostles. Two opposing ecclesiastical systems came, without great harm, to be presented in rivalry before such communities. Bishop Selwyn, the faithful occupant of the English Episcopal See in New Zealand, declared himself against such a presentation even when there may be the utmost charity among the missionaries, and said:—"We make a rule never to introduce controversy among a native people, or to impair the simplicity of their faith. If the fairest openings for missionary effort lie before us, yet if the ground has been pre-occupied by any other religious body, we forbear to enter."

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