

## ARTICLE IV.

### THE CHURCH'S METHOD OF CONDUCTING THE FOREIGN MISSIONARY WORK.

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Questions have been started of late whether our present mode of conducting the foreign missionary work is either wise or scriptural. The method authorised and pursued by the Church at the present time has been publicly denounced as “unconstitutional,” “unpresbyterian,” “unscriptural,” and “newly invented.” In view of these and other statements of a similar character, it is deemed necessary to the interests of Missions that a simple statement be laid before the readers of the REVIEW in relation to this matter.

It is obvious, we think, to every reflecting mind, that if the work of Foreign Missions is carried on at all by a General Assembly, by a Synod, by a Presbytery, or even by a church Session, it must be done through the agency of a commission. The universal practice of the evangelical Church, ever since it has had a full and complete organisation, shows the indispensable necessity of employing such commissions (or Committees, as they are more frequently called) to carry on the work of evangelisation, not only within their own bounds, but in the regions beyond. To say, therefore, that it is a “newly invented scheme” argues ignorance or forgetfulness of the universal usage of all branches of the evangelical Church. Our own Church, at the time of its organisation, adopted this plan for conveying the knowledge of the gospel to the benighted nations of the earth, not simply because it was the plan in use among other evangelical denominations, but because they could not conceive of any simpler or more scriptural method of accomplishing the proposed object. And here is our ground of complaint against those who find fault with the present plan: it is that they do not offer any other that is wiser, more scriptural, or more constitutional. Two agencies are mainly employed in directing the foreign missionary work of our own Church, viz., the Executive Committee of Foreign Missions, and the missions, or sub-committees, that are employed in the different fields of

missionary labor to aid the Executive Committee in the proper discharge of its duties and responsibilities. We propose to examine the constitution and functions of both of these, to see if there is anything in either inconsistent with the Scriptures or with the Constitution of the Church.

The Executive Committee of Foreign Missions, as is generally admitted, is an ecclesiastical commission, though commonly called an Executive Committee, appointed by the General Assembly from year to year to prosecute the work of Foreign Missions. The Assembly delegates to it all the powers that are necessary, but only such as are necessary, to carry on the work; the Committee being always responsible to the Assembly for the faithful discharge of its duties. Its powers are fully defined in the Constitution and in the Manual of Missions, which bears the stamp of the Assembly's approval. Its powers are of a twofold character: 1st. Ecclesiastical powers, but only those of a more general character; 2d. Executive, financial, and administrative powers. In the exercise of its general ecclesiastical powers, "it appoints missionaries and assistant missionaries; designates their fields of labor; fixes their salaries; determines their particular employment, and may transfer a missionary from one field of labor, or from one department of work, to another, having due regard, however, to the views and feelings of the missionary himself in all these matters." And "the missionary, in case he feels aggrieved, has the right of appeal to the General Assembly, to which the missionary and the Executive Committee are alike responsible." It should be stated in this connexion, that the Committee in appointing missionaries always acts in concurrence with the Presbyteries to which they belong, the concurrence of the Presbyteries being expressed by the act of ordination. The Committee never undertakes to determine the question whether a man is suited or is called to preach the gospel, that being the peculiar province of the Presbytery. But it does inquire whether an applicant for the missionary work has the physical, the mental, and the linguistic and other qualifications to make a successful laborer in the foreign field. More than this: in order to maintain anything like an extended or systematic plan of missionary labor, it

is necessary that the Committee have the power of distributing the laborers and of assigning them their proper work, of course general regard being had to the preferences as well as the individual qualifications of the missionary.

But whilst the Committee, in virtue of the powers conferred upon it by the General Assembly, may exercise control in these matters of a more general nature, it has no right, and never attempts, to interfere with what may be denominated the spiritual or *churchly* functions of the missionary. It cannot, for example, tell the missionary when a church should be organised among the people to whom he preaches; who should be received into that church; who should be appointed elders or deacons; when and how discipline should be exercised. In all such matters the missionary's responsibility is to his Presbytery and not to the Executive Committee. Furthermore, the Committee may recall a missionary for incompetency, for neglect of duty, for irregularity of conduct, or for disobedience to instructions, but it has no judicial powers to try him as a minister. The moral and ministerial character of the missionary is entirely in the keeping of his Presbytery. The Committee can report to the Presbytery any irregularity, immorality, or heresy, on the part of a minister, that may be known to them, and they may also furnish testimony, if required to do so, in any judicial proceedings that may be instituted by the Presbytery, but they can go no further.

As to the general or administrative powers intrusted to the Executive Committee, there is, so far as is known to the writer, no serious diversity of views. It is pretty well understood now, that the work of Foreign Missions involves more than the simple public preaching of the gospel. This is undoubtedly the first and most important department of the work. But the command of the Saviour himself to evangelise all the nations of the earth, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever he had commanded them, shows that more than simple public preaching of the gospel necessary to the completion of the work of evangelisation. The word of God, if it has not already been done, must be translated, printed, and circulated in all the dialects and languages of the world, and this necessarily involves a great deal of secular

care and labor. A native ministry must be trained before the knowledge of salvation can be communicated to every creature in the world, and this involves the necessity of establishing and maintaining schools, colleges, and theological seminaries, all of which also involves much secular care.

Furthermore, such is the condition of society in most of the great heathen nations of the earth, that it is almost impossible to convey the knowledge of salvation to the female portion of the population of those countries without sending out Christian women, who alone can have access to them. But this again involves care, labor, expense, and much executive skill on the part of the Executive Committee. Now, in relation to all of these and various other matters of a similar nature, which it is scarcely necessary to mention, no ecclesiastical principles, strictly speaking, are involved, and, we suppose, by common consent all matters of the kind are left to the wisdom and discretion of such an Executive Committee as the Church might approve; that Committee rendering to the Assembly from year to year a strict account of all its proceedings. We would simply remark, in passing from this part of our subject, which does not require prolonged discussion, that in view of this brief exposition of the constitution and functions of the Executive Committee, we do not see how any simpler, more effective, more scriptural agency, or one less liable to abuse, could possibly be employed by the Church for the execution of her great commission.

We now turn to the Mission, technically so-called, as the second agency employed in the prosecution of the missionary enterprise. It is regarded as a sub-committee, and is composed of all the missionaries and male assistant missionaries in any particular mission field. It is not distinctly mentioned in the Constitution, but it is very plainly set forth in the Manual of Missions, which has the sanction of the Assembly. It bears, in most respects, the same relationship to the Executive Committee that the Executive Committee bears to the General Assembly, and is found to be almost indispensable to a wise and judicious management of the general work.

But there has recently been developed in certain parts of the

foreign missionary field a peculiarly bitter opposition to the Mission as an organised body. It has been caricatured and misrepresented in the public prints. It has been openly denounced before one of our Church courts as an unpresbyterian, unconstitutional, and newly invented form of Church government; that it has usurped ecclesiastical functions, and ought not, therefore, to be respected or obeyed by any foreign missionary. Furthermore, it has been characterised as a sort of “hybrid of Prelacy and Congregationalism.” Now, we propose to examine into the constitution and functions of the Mission, to see if it is at variance with general Presbyterian usage, or deserves the vehement denunciations that have been so profusely heaped upon it. We remark, then, in the first place, that the Mission is an organised body, but has no ecclesiastical powers whatever, and never pretends to exercise any of the functions of a church court.<sup>1</sup> The functions of the Mission are mainly advisory, and have reference almost entirely to secular and general matters. It recommends what salaries shall be given, but it never undertakes to fix those salaries. In its collective capacity, it prepares estimates of the funds that will be needed from year to year, but this is simply a recommendation to aid the Executive Committee in determining its appropriations. It recommends schools to be established and colporteurs to be employed, but it cannot establish the one or employ the other without the sanction of the Executive Committee. It may recommend the establishment of new mission stations, but no step can be taken in that direction until the approval of the Executive Committee is secured. It may sanction the return of one of its own members to this country on account of the failure of health,

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<sup>1</sup> An unguarded phrase in the Manual to the effect that “at its regular meetings it shall designate the particular work of each missionary laborer, provided this has not been previously done by the Executive Committee,” has been adduced to establish this charge. But even this, it should be remembered, is qualified by three conditions: 1st. If the thing has not already been done by the Executive Committee, which it seldom fails to do in the case of an ordained missionary; 3d. Such designation is always temporary, and is subject to the approval of the laborer himself; 3d. It must have the approval of the Executive Committee, and, before it can become permanently binding, it must have the sanction of the Assembly also.

but this can be done only when the case is too urgent to wait for the action of the Executive Committee. But it has positive duties to perform also. It is expected to see that all funds granted by the Executive Committee for public purposes are properly applied. It acts as a body of trustees, to hold property belonging to the Church at any particular mission station. It acts, though not formally so, as the board of directors to manage and control all the educational operations of the Mission. It has a voice in the direction of colporteurs, the circulation of religious literature, and in all matters of general interest. But whilst it has this general supervision of the work, it never interferes in an annoying way with the details of work committed to the care of any particular laborer. The fact is, and it is one of the remarkable features of the foreign missionary work, that every individual member finds himself so fully occupied with his own labors, that he has very little time, and, perhaps, equally as little inclination, to interfere with the duties of others. It is only when the annual estimates are to be made out, or the annual report is to be prepared, that the attention of the Mission is particularly called to the condition and wants of the general work.

Now, while we agree with those who hold that the Mission, as such, has no ecclesiastical powers, and that it ought to be resisted if it attempts to exercise the functions of a church court, we do not agree with them that the Mission, as defined above, is unconstitutional, unpresbyterian, and is not to be obeyed in those things in which it has a rightful control. It may not have the right to interfere with the spiritual or more strictly ecclesiastical functions of the ordained minister, as has already been shown; yet, if that minister undertakes the care of a seminary of learning, where no ecclesiastical principles are involved, it is simply absurd for him to claim exemption from all oversight in its management. The virtual position assumed by a minister who takes this ground, is, that he is a minister and a missionary, that this makes him a sacred and privileged character, and that whatever may be his avocation, whether ecclesiastical or secular, he is to be touched only with ecclesiastical hands. Now, let this matter be brought to a simple test. Here is Dr. \_\_\_\_\_, a professor in \_\_\_\_\_ Theo-

logical Seminary. He has been appointed to this position, and maintains it under the control of a Board of Directors. Furthermore, he becomes a member of an organised body called the Faculty, and in connexion with his associates agrees to be controlled by a certain code of rules or laws which are necessary and which have been adopted for their mutual government. Still further, Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ may be the pastor of a church without impairing his relationship either to the Faculty or the Board of Directors. In fact he has got into a position where his relationship is threefold, viz., to the Board of Directors, the Faculty, and his Presbytery, and he is amenable to each one of these only in their respective spheres. Now, suppose Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ comes to the conclusion that the power conferred upon him by the Presbytery is much higher than that of either of the others, and that, in fact, it exempts him from all obligation to obey them; suppose further, that he comes to the conclusion that neither the Board of Directors nor the Faculty have a *jure divino* stamp, that, therefore, he will in no sense whatever be governed by them. Now, need it be asked how such a case would be regarded and treated in this Christian land? And why should the matter be treated differently in a foreign and heathen country? The Board of Directors of a theological seminary or of a Synodical college are appointed by an ecclesiastical body, but they have no ecclesiastical character or powers of their own; and yet no good Presbyterian, even though he be a minister of the gospel, would hesitate to obey them in matters that properly belong to their control. The Faculty of a theological seminary, though it has its own organic form, is not a church court, and, from the nature of the case, could not be made one. And yet it would be a very anomalous attitude for one of the professors to undertake to say, he would not observe its rules and regulations simply because it is not a court. What would be the condition of a seminary if there could be no harmony or concert of action among its teachers? If the professor supposed had the care of a church in addition to his professorship, he would be amenable for its proper management to his Presbytery, and not, of course, either to the Board of Directors or to the Faculty, and so *vice versa*. And here lies the mistake of those who revolt

against the authority of a Mission, because it is not an authorised or acknowledged church court. May it not have claims to be respected and obeyed, even though it has not the power of a church court? Let this matter be looked into.

We ask if it is not a universal custom with all church courts to assign duties to certain members, in the discharge of which it is expected that they will be respected and obeyed, without being constituted a church court? Is this not done by church Sessions in the appointments and regulations that are made for the government of Sabbath-schools? Does the Presbytery not do the same thing when it appoints a committee to watch over and control its own missionary operations, or when it appoints committees to assess its churches? Does not a Synod or a General Assembly, when it establishes a college or theological seminary, appoint a Board of Directors to govern and control those institutions without constituting that Board a church court? Why, then, would it not be proper and consistent with Presbyterian usage for the General Assembly to regard the Mission, as above defined, as a supervisory agency in the missionary work, especially as no ecclesiastical powers, strictly speaking, are coupled therewith? How is it that our theological professors can cheerfully submit to the authority of a Board of Directors when it is not, and lays no claim to be, a church court? And why, it may well be asked, is the missionary so much opposed to the idea of acknowledging the authority of a Mission, when all of its powers are purely administrative, and when it is composed entirely of his own missionary associates?

But let us take a step in advance. What must be the condition of that Mission where all superintending agency is eschewed? Six or eight missionary laborers, all of them, perhaps, good and pious men, are set down in the same heathen community for the purpose of promoting its evangelisation. There is to be no concert of action among them, but every one is to carry out his own convictions in his own peculiar way. Now, it requires very little sagacity to see that this must result not only in a waste of the Church's resources, but in the end could result in nothing but confusion. It might result in all of these brethren devoting them-



selves to the one work of translating, because each thinks himself specially qualified for that particular kind of work; and hence we might have a half dozen different translations of the Bible, varying in many important respects from each other. Or it might turn out that every member felt himself called upon to preach only, and no one would be left to train a native agency, without which no missionary work could be thorough or permanent, and so *vice versa*. In consequence of this, the work would not only become lopsided, but its different parts might become fiercely antagonistic. Two colleges, for example, located in adjoining neighborhoods, and conducted on different plans, might become rivals for public patronage, and thus lead, as would be very likely to be the case in a heathen community, to disgraceful dissensions.

But we cannot, in the prosecution of the foreign missionary work, afford to dispense with the great value of harmonious and concerted action among missionary brethren. It cannot be dispensed with in this Christian land, much less in foreign fields. Our whole Church system is based on this well-known and almost universally acknowledged want of human nature. Mutual cooperation and oversight are not only necessary to the perfection of our characters as Christian men, but are equally essential to the preservation of the truth and the purity and permanency of the Church itself, and a fundamental idea of the Presbyterian Church polity. Our Saviour saw the necessity of this when he sent out disciples two and two. They did not go thus simply that they might be witnesses, as has been assumed without proof, but that they might be mutual helps to each other. Paul, even though an Apostle and endowed with the power of working miracles, never travelled without missionary companions. But this need of cooperation and companionship is specially felt in a heathen land. Here the missionary is thrown among a people of an entirely different character from any that he has previously known; he finds himself confronted with questions of a moral, social, and religious nature, which it is almost impossible for human wisdom to solve; he finds himself surrounded by trials and perplexities of which he never before dreamed. In short, he is placed in just that situation where he preëminently needs the sympathy, the counsel, and the

oversight of Christian brethren. How the foreign missionary can afford to cast all these behind his back, cannot easily be understood. If he were a wise man, he would covet that very aid which his missionary associates can afford him. Nor is this aid less to be valued because he and his associates are formed into an organic body, with certain well-known rules and regulations for their government. Indeed, their advice and oversight is rendered the more valuable on this very account. Nor does strong profession of loyalty to the Presbytery materially modify the matter. That is all right. Every minister feels it a privilege to be connected with a Presbytery, whose advice he can seek, and upon whose protection he can throw himself if he is unjustly assailed. But the Presbytery is too far off from the foreign missionary, and too little acquainted with his circumstances and surroundings, to give much sound advice or to exercise any necessary oversight. At the same time, the oversight of the Presbytery and the Mission do not at all come in conflict. The two occupy entirely different spheres. The Mission, as has already been shown, cannot, and does not, interfere with any of the ecclesiastical rights or functions of the missionary. So the Presbytery, having surrendered to the Assembly the general control of the foreign missionary work, has no right to interfere with the administrative functions that have been committed to the Mission.

But what is the real ground of this opposition to the Mission as a superintending agency? One would naturally expect just the opposite state of feeling. And if time allowed, it would be easy to show that in those of our Foreign Missions where the right of mutual oversight and control is acknowledged and practised, there is always peace and harmony among its members, and the general work is carried on with more than usual efficiency, and so *vice versa*. The views of those who participate in opposition to the agency of the Mission, if we rightly understand them, are, that the ordained missionary, when he enters upon the missionary work, should be left entirely to himself; that he ought to be allowed to pursue his work of every kind in his own way; that he ought to have complete and undivided control over the churches he may establish and the officers he may ordain, but subject to

no control whatever except that of his Presbytery, which, from the nature of the case, must, in a great measure, be merely nominal. Now, we do not pretend to say that these brethren distinctly foresee to what their speculations lead, or that they aspire to the exercise of powers that are unknown to the Presbyterian Church; but if we have not in the above views, as we understand them, the essence of Independency and Prelacy at the same time, then it is hard to say where they are to be found conjoined—Independency, so far as outward control is concerned, and Prelacy, so far as churches and church officers are to be governed by one man. It will be said that this prelatial power is to be maintained only until such time as the regular church courts are established. But who is to determine when and how those church courts are to be established? And is it not more than probable, after such training, that such churches will become either Independent or Episcopal, instead of Presbyterian? Whilst we adhere strictly to the principle that the Mission, as such, is not to interfere with the strictly ecclesiastical functions of any one of its ordained ministers, nevertheless, when a church is to be organised, or an officer to be ordained, it would be expected, as a matter of *ecclesiastical propriety*, that all the ordained ministers of the Mission would take part in the same. This is done when a neighboring minister or ruling elder happens to be present at the ordination of a ruling elder in a different church. It is also done when a minister from another Presbytery is present at the ordination of a minister of the gospel. But we are not sure that this would be done by a missionary who is under the influence of either Independency or Prelacy. After separating himself from the brethren of his mission, and conducting his work on independent principles, he would scarcely want one of those brethren to be present and assist at an ordination, when such would only falsify his own position.

We do not suppose that the Church will be likely to sympathise with these views, either in their Independent or Prelatical bearing. We do not look upon matters here at home in this light. Trust and accountability always go hand in hand. Christian people are not willing to give their money for religious purposes to any one who is not willing to render a strict account of the manner in

which that money is spent. So in relation to every important trust connected with the interests of religion. A college is not endowed and equipped to be placed under the absolute control of any one man. Oversight and control are regarded as necessary to its proper administration; and why should the missionary regard himself as an exception to this general rule? Is he, in consequence of his calling, noble as it is, endowed with higher wisdom than other men? Are his surroundings not of the very kind to make him feel the greater need of the counsel and advice of his missionary associates? Is that man not in danger of falling into grievous error, who undervalues or despises those guides and checks and restraints which have been appointed by the great Head of the Church for the government of his people?

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