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MORE BOARDS IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.—
SOME INQUIRY INTO FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES.

It seems as if this question of *Boards*—which involves so many other questions—stood erectly in the way of every theoretical investigation, and every practical movement, connected with the welfare of the Presbyterian Church. In one aspect, it is like a panacea,—to which every sickness instinctively directs itself,—when its pains can be assuaged by no other means: while in another aspect, it is like a settled chronic disease, which has fastened on the constitution, and which not only affects the character of all other maladies, but affects the type even of health itself. It is hardly possible to attempt any thing—or to say any thing—that is not liable to be resented as “an *attack on our Boards* ;” hardly possible to turn in any direction, that one is not encountered with some *caveat* warning you off as a trespasser upon some ‘float,’ or some ‘pre-emption,’ or some ‘right of way,’ or some ‘vested interest,’ or if nothing else can be produced, some ‘contingent remainder’—in which some Board already *in esse*, or some Board *in posse*, and nearly through its incubation—has a prior and exclusive interest—or at the very least, an eminent domain covering the territory. And there is this great matter about the whole affair—that by means of them, the church question itself, which for our generation is a question of exceeding great importance, is placed in a most peculiar position. For to favour *them*, is accepted as sufficient proof of favouring every good object they have in view—and as discharging the sum of our duty towards that good object: whereas, to act, or even to argue independently of *them*, easily passes into a proof of opposition, at once to the church herself—and to the particular objects you may be so unfortunate as to suppose you have liberty to love and promote, without an *exequatur* out of the chancery of some Board. And moreover, through them, ecclesiastical power is so directed and applied, that the very notion of a Church, as independent at once of the State, and of society itself, becomes a sort of illusion, which appears and disappears, just

as the exigencies of the argument may demand. For, if the argument so demands, the *Boards are the church*: if it so demands, they are merely the *religious element of human society*, acting voluntarily: if it so demands, they are *the State*, seeing they are nearly without exception, re-enforced with corporate powers, directly or indirectly, by the civil power: or if it so demands, they are a *combination of all three*,—the Church, the State, and Society—each contributing certain elemental qualities to them, and the combined result being—practically, a very peculiar engine of power—and theoretically, a very peculiar moral problem: a sort of *lap*, where Church, State, and community,—all cover the same territory. Considered from the church side of the question—the practical result—is multifarious. It enables the church to omit doing, a vast deal which otherwise, she would never think of omitting. It enables her to do by means of the Boards, many things she would never think of doing. And then, by means of corporations belonging to Boards—what is there, she may not find means of mixing herself up with ?

Very lately, matters long pending before the Board of Domestic Missions, with regard to the best method of disposing of the question of Church Extension, have been brought, as we understand, to solemn debate, and decision; and the issues reached have been, in some degree, laid before the public, in certain statements, reports of committees, &c. ; but, the whole matter is probably to come once more—with urgency, before the General Assembly—upon the Annual Report of the Board itself. Upon the subject of creating an additional Board for the express purpose of taking charge of the subject of Church Extension in the form of building new places of worship ; we transfer to our pages, in the form of a foot note, an article which appeared, lately, in *the Presbyterian* ; which presents briefly, some of the main objections, to such a proceeding.* Not intending to dis-

*CHURCH EXTENSION—A *Fifth Board* !—A fifth Board is the suggestion, Messrs. Editors. A separate Board for the great matter of aiding all who want and deserve aid in erecting Presbyterian churches; the next Assembly to determine whether this fifth Board shall be erected or not. Meantime, you rather invite the expression of opinion through your columns. May I give mine, with some reasons for it?

1. If the Assembly creates another Board, no matter for what, we shall probably have such an explosion in the Church that the other four Boards may be excluded from more churches than the new one will be able to visit by all the agents it will deem it prudent to appoint. The *principle of any Board*, is not in such repute in our Church at present that it will bear pushing any further, without the most serious practical danger to great existing interests. Another Board—and at Philadelphia !

2. The subject of *church building*, any where, is not a subject of that character that it either ought to be, or practically can be made, in the existing condition of our Church and country, the ground of a successful general organization; even admitting the *principle of Boards* to be wholly unexceptionable and universally approved. Whenever the Church tries the experiment it will fail. The Church Extension Committee were distinctly told this same thing before they completed their organization.

3. Of all the ordinary interests of the Church of God, the building of meeting-houses is the most distinctly *local*. *When* one should be built, and *what sort* of one it should be, are exactly the things which a central Board, remote from the locality, cannot possibly decide wisely. And the larger the country is, and the more diverse the circumstances are, the more radically absurd it is to attempt a general, central organization for an object of this description. The chances are overwhelmingly against wise and efficient action.

cuss that particular subject, however; nor the particular posture of the Board of Missions; the occasion seems to call for some more general consideration of the whole question of Boards, in connection with the General Assembly of our Church. And upon that subject, we take leave to offer a few observations—in the most condensed form possible.

1. All Ecclesiastical Boards, strictly speaking—are based upon the principle of *Independency*. They are contrivances of imperfect union and concert of action, necessary in a form of church polity—that has no bond of stable union or concert, in itself. Therefore, also, they are a method—but a very imperfect one—by means of which, various denominations may act in concert; precisely because,—as in the case of *Independency*—they have no permanent internal bond of concert and union, with each other.

2. In a system like Presbyterianism, such Boards, are like two powers, inconsistent with each other, placed in the same machine. They are heterogeneous to the fundamental principles of the system. They never can be worked, on their own principles, so as to be made completely harmonious with the principles of the Church. Their principles, and the principles of the Church, never can, by possibility, be in active exercise at the same time—without conflict. The Church never can, by any possibility, be made to do as much, by means of them, as she can be made to do without them. And ordinarily, and inevitably, the dead point of the opposing principles, is far below the real capacity of either machine separately; is soon reached where the two machines act together; and at it—further power being impossible—without violence to one or other of them—every particular cause comes to a dead stop—till the violence is applied; and stops again at the same place, as soon as the violence is removed.

4. The cheapest, the surest, the most permanent church builders on earth, *are faithful ministers of the gospel*. Give these to the people; and the people will give you houses for them to preach in. Withhold these from the people, and the best meeting-houses built and bestowed on neighborhoods will do little good. There may be exceptions, and, to a certain extent, large cities may be the most constant exceptions; but the nation over, that is the common rule, and the hard-working, experienced ministers will tell you so. Shall we substitute a human scheme to ill-do, for a divine scheme to well-do?

5. So far as the work of missions involves the work of new erections for public worship in destitute settlements, it is as much a regular and natural portion of the business of the Board of Missions as the providing of accommodations of a similar kind, in the foreign field, is the work of the Foreign Board. Why not organize a *sixth* Board, for church *extension* in foreign lands?

6. We have about three thousand places of public worship in our connection. Who built them? An immense proportion of these have been *rebuilt*—many of them several times—each time better and better. Who rebuilt them? The Church may rest satisfied, when that answer is given, that one of those indestructible logical necessities has been made articulate, which is out of the reach of short cuts, clamour, idle wishes, and all manner of contrivances. Work, work, work amongst the people. Presently you will have three thousand more churches. But who will build them? Must I answer? *Tour converts must build them*, or they_ never can be built.

7. There is a double—yea, a triple—delusion on this whole subject, which is diffusing itself through the Church, and which is pregnant with mischief. The first is, that meeting-houses, expensive as compared with the condition of those who are to occupy them, are really necessary; the second is, that this growing clamour comes from

3. This inexorable logic of the nature of things, against which men are constantly wasting their strength, explains, in a great degree, the phenomena of the operations of the whole class of Boards. For purposes appertaining to the community of Christians in general—like a Bible society; they work extremely well. For purposes appertaining to several sects, or to a particular sect that has no other and superior principle of union and concert,—like the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions; they work better than anything else they could devise. For purposes appertaining to a church powerfully, thoroughly, and organically united for concert of action, they obstruct the free and natural action of the body : and just to the whole extent that their action—is a natural and vital *Board action*, the natural and vital *church action*, ceases. The Presbyterian Church has had this, *as an instinct*, so powerfully exhibited to her, that she has carefully excluded voluntary Boards, which operate for causes analogous to causes for which she operates; and she feels more and more restless, under the action of all voluntary Boards. There is but one more step—to wit, the clear appreciation of the real ground of the difficulty—and the application of the remedy.

4. It is very certain that there is a wide difference between *Ecclesiastical* Boards, and *voluntary* Boards; and that the Presbyterian Church clearly appreciated this difference, in the great Pelagian Controversy; and that she made a definitive stand against the latter, and for the former, as her own means of doing her own work, so far as she would use any Board. In all which she was, doubtless, wise and right. But this merely comes to the main point, without deciding it. It merely reaches the question of the inherent nature of Board action, of itself—and no matter if ecclesiastical. This question was seen clearly enough, and enunciated plainly enough, all through that controversy; but—in the midst of other questions, more immediate, and more important, it was, perhaps too entirely, remit-

self-denying, earnest, successful ministers, whose work is hindered by the want of such houses; the third is, that there is some sort of ecclesiastical pressure or contrivance, by means of which the piety of the Church may be frightened or caressed into diverting from more proper and more pressing *general* objects the immense sums of money which might be so readily lavished on this work. If I escape being torn to pieces for saying this, it will prove that the delusion has not yet extended with virulence beyond the north-western angle of the Church.

8. I have labored in the ministry for many years, and in many widely different places. I have had an opportunity, which not many have had, to see this very matter of church building—*extension*, as they call it now—in all its phases. It is a work, in its proper place, of vast importance; one that, rightly managed, cannot well be overrated. But it is one that cannot be done by a central, general organization. Moreover, let me say, for the comfort of our young brethren, who are so urgent for good churches, the hardest thing in this world to kill outright is a Presbyterian interest, once cast into a community, even in the form of a single family. No doubt the rich, out of their abundance, and the poor, out of their poverty, even ought to send the gospel to the destitute. If the church will do that, it need not fret itself much, whether it be on Mars Hill, or in the upper chamber, or in the market-place, or in the school of one Tyrannus, or in the town hall, that its first utterances are made audible. Nor do I recollect a single place in the New Testament where the contrary is taught. Let us help every good work, according to its place and its degree; but let us have less clamour about schemes that are at once hazardous and impracticable, and no more Boards.

9. Nevertheless, I think it altogether probable that the Board of Missions will suc-

ted for future treatment. Everything admonishes the Church, that that future is fully come.

5. The best and most natural defence of Ecclesiastical Boards, as connected with our church courts, is that they are, strictly speaking, *commissions* of the church courts; say of the General Assembly. A *commission* is different from a *committee*, mainly in this, that the latter examines and *reports*, the former examines and *concludes*. The power of the Church court is complete in both respects; and one of the most curious freaks in the world, is the shyness of our Church, to the name *commission*,—even while habitually using the thing for every sort of purpose, except perhaps, the most appropriate purpose of all—namely, *judicial* business. But, upon what principle they who repudiate the clear power of the church courts to constitute commissions, whether temporary or permanent,—can defend our Boards, is one of those mysteries of logic, still buried in the brains of some great thinker, who has not yet delivered himself. For ourselves, we have no objection to the *name Board*; only we desire the *thing* intended, to be distinctly understood, and definitively constituted, according to the unalterable nature, duties, interests, and exigencies of the Church.

6. Mainly and fundamentally, we desire that the whole nature and pretence of true Board action and Board organization—as a principle of Independency, shall be extirpated, as a part of our ecclesiastical machinery, heterogeneous and hurtful of itself,—and not, by any means, sufficiently cured, by the amount of ecclesiastical control substituted for the voluntary control. And we desire, that church action shall be substituted for Board action : that it shall be substituted *directly*, in every case, where it may be conveniently, wisely, and profitably so substituted; and that it shall be substituted *indirectly*, as a church action through Boards, instead of a Board action through and upon the Church, (if the name, *Board*, must be retained.)

7. As to the present mode of organizing our Ecclesiastical Boards, and the principles upon which they are constituted, and act,—noth-

cumb to the urgency of a portion of its own missionaries, in a particular quarter of the Church; that the General Assembly will give way to the same urgency thus countenanced by the central power; that a combination of motives—some very good, some not so very good—will silence opposition: and that this fifth Board will be established and located at Philadelphia. I say I think matters look in that general direction; and it is because this is my opinion that I feel bound to say what I have written above, in the somewhat faint hope of causing the Church to pause and reflect before taking such steps. Disaster to the particular cause proposed to be promoted; peril to all the great objects committed to the other four Boards, and most especially to those already located in Philadelphia; commotion in the Church, and possibly much good as the collateral result, but in a way little expected by those who promote this new Board, and not congenial to the feelings of such as dislike violent and sudden changes, even for good, when they can be avoided : these will be, it seems to me, the probable, if not the necessary results of the creation of this fifth Board. How long will the Church, with its present notions of things, endure *four* Boards in Philadelphia? What likelihood is there of promoting peace, union, efficiency, or any other good thing, by applying a principle which is more and more distrusted in the Church, to objects utterly heterogeneous to it? What likelihood is there of increasing the liberality of the Church, by shocking its common sense, arousing its distrust of the wisdom of its rulers, and attempting to stultify principles and methods which have been commensurate with its own existence and by means of which its entire progress has been hitherto accomplished?

ing can be more obvious than the following results : 1. The control of the Church, is merely nominal : 2. The control of the Board itself, is merely nominal: 3. The whole immense power, is lodged, in a form nearly irresponsible, in one, or at most two or three officers—surrounded by three or four personal friends, and acting back upon the Church, and in the Church, by the most powerful means, which are furnished, and supported by the Church herself. 4. The single officer at the head of the Board of Domestic Missions—taking the case exactly as it stands, is only less dangerous to the Presbyterian Church, than Dr. Peters was in 1837, because he is a friend instead of an enemy; because he is orthodox and not heretical : his *position*, of itself, is as perilous to the Church—or very nearly so; and it is that of which we speak, and of that particular Board, as the one least in accord with the nature of church power. 5. And yet, after so great departures from fundamental principles, and so long continued—is the Church compensated, by the greatness of the gains she has made, above what she would have made, otherwise : or does she see the smallest probability of such a compensation, in prospect, by persisting in her present mode of treating these immense practical questions?

8. How great the difficulty, was, of getting the Board of Foreign Missions located in the city of New York—they who took part, in that attempt, cannot well forget. Does any body doubt, now, that it was a wise act? How great was the difficulty of getting liberty for the General Assembly to meet out of Philadelphia; and how much greater still to get out of Pennsylvania, who can forget: and yet who doubts the wisdom of that change? How clear did it appear to all of us, in former days, that a Board located at Boston, could no more work, with power, in the Presbyterian Church, even if it were a Presbyterian Board, than the centre of motion of a great system, could be outside of the system itself ! How manifest did it seem, in those days, that every tendency to the centralization of power—was an evil tendency : that the *local* form of this centralization, was the worst form of it: and that when it became centralized, localized, and irresponsible—the very consummation of theoretical danger—was reached? Were we all deluded? If not, why do we continue for so many years, to make a point on one side of the Church, becoming more and more one-sided,—the permanent, local centre, of all our efforts, except in the single matter of Foreign Missions? Nay, one hardly dares to whisper a suggestion of change, unless he is

10. It may be said no one has suggested the location of this fifth Board at Philadelphia. But has any one any idea that any other principal point in the bounds of the Church would cordially accept the burden of its management? Has any portion of the entire Church, except Philadelphia and the North-west, systematically urged this general organization of the Church for Church building? The scheme comes before the Assembly again and again, from the North-west, and from the bosom of the Board of Missions, and from the fountain-head of influence, through our religious press in Philadelphia. And so it is to come again, by these means, into the next Assembly. At Philadelphia, or in the North-west, the Board must be, if there is any Board about it. If at the North-west, where are the means to be gathered? If in Philadelphia, how long will the other three Boards abide there ? If in either place, what can be done by it that cannot be better done without it?
A WESTERN MAN."

ready for whatever may be cast at him, or upon him—from Quarterlies down to circulars, and from the thunder of Boanerges down to the pious whine of slick conservatism !

9. *Practically*—it may be properly enough demanded, what do we suppose can be done—or ought to be done? Simply and directly this : 1. Remove two of the present Boards, out of Philadelphia. 2. Place the two that are removed, in such positions, as the good of the particular cause each represents, shall indicate to the Assembly, that makes the change. 3. Organize all four of the Boards, in such a manner, that they shall be, really and truly, charged with the work committed to them respectively, and really and truly responsible for it. 4. Commit to them nothing, but the proper work belonging to each one of them, as immediate agents of the Church of Christ; and let all they do, be done, with, by, and through, the Church herself—and not as powers, independent of the Church—nor for objects heterogeneous to the Church, nor by methods foreign to the Church. 5. Break up, utterly, *the one man power*, wherever it may linger in any part of any Board: our Church government is not hierarchic—it is a commonwealth. 6. Transfer the election of all the chief officers of all the Boards, to the General Assembly itself; and, as far as possible, associate ruling Elders or Deacons, in the chief executive administration—especially the financial part of it. 7. By these, and similar means—as far as the habits, the necessities, the principles even, of the Church, may require the continued use of any portion of our present apparatus—let it be simplified, renovated, and brought into a workable condition, and placed in an advantageous posture: bad parts eliminated, good parts strengthened,—shocks and jars avoided—and a fair and complete opportunity afforded, without commotion or revolution, of bringing up the Church, with power, to her glorious work, in all its departments.

There is a sedulous, and apparently a concerted attempt made to convince the Church that she is not only perfectly satisfied with every thing, just as it is; but desperately in love with it. This is all idle. Articles in leading Reviews, editorials in leading Newspapers, Reports from the Boards even, or harangues in the General Assembly, even from Secretaries, Agents, or Missionaries, are all very good in their way : but none of them have any marketable value; none of them will support a beneficiary, or print a book, or send a missionary, or build a church. We must have men; we must have means: without both—the work of these Boards must all cease. Therefore, after all the Reviews, and editorials, and Reports, and harangues, the question of men, and means—still recurs;—and recurs in a manner most unsatisfactory—all the Boards being judges. The question of men and means, is not a question of Reviews, editorials, Reports and harangues; but it is a question, simply, of piety and ability, on the part of the Church; and nothing else, either more or less, can ever be made out of it. And whenever you put the means of reaching that piety and ability, on a satisfactory footing—there will be no need either of Reviews, editorials, Reports, or harangues,

to convince any body, that they are on a satisfactory footing. The result itself, will convince every body. But so long as the means by which you attempt to reach that piety and ability, are not only incompetent, but injurious—all the Reviews, editorials, Reports, and harangues, in the world will not supply that fatal defect. You will reach the *dead point*, first or last; and there you must stop—till you change your machinery. Reviewing, editing, reporting, harangueing—or even making more Boards—might continue to the day of judgment, for that matter, without relieving the difficulty. You must change the machinery: or you must put up with what the machinery can do. We prefer to change the machinery.

[For The Critic]

A DIORAMA OF THE CHURCHES.

WITHOUT invidiousness or censoriousness, and with a determination “not to set down aught in malice,” we desire to give a view of the various principal Ecclesiastical bodies of our country, with the intent of exhibiting their changes within comparatively a few years, certainly within our remembrance, and that not yet embracing the “threescore years and ten.” The changes have been various, both as to forms, ceremonies, customs, doctrines and other views, but all, as we think, verging towards a weakening of first principles and in the general, having a downward tendency.

The main reason which we think will be given for these changes, is, conforming the Churches more *to* public opinion. “Our country is improving. Our taste is becoming more refined. Architecture is altering its character, and our public buildings ought to exhibit its changes. Music is becoming more and more attractive, and where can it be better used to advantage than in the house of God. Oratory is more sought after, and the pulpit is the best arena for its display. The strict old Puritan notions are in process of explosion, and we must meet the charge. Religion ought certainly to be attended to by all, and more general good will be effected by avoiding singular habiliments, language, or even deportment;—in fine—while we take the “good old Book” mainly for our guide, we think there are some things in it that we have misapprehended, or misunderstood, and it will be more judicious to be guided by “the fathers,” or others, in connection with it.

These and other things of a kindred character are at the root of almost every change, and it will not take much to prove that the most potent ingredient, in the working of this change, is a growth of worldliness in the midst of God's professed people. In many cases, the Church approximates so nearly to the world, that the line of demarcation is scarcely visible, and the wayfarer can pass from