

REPORT
Of the Executive Committee of the Southern
Board of Foreign Missions.

The Executive Committee of the Southern Board of Foreign Missions, were they to confine their Report to the transactions of the past year, could compare the whole in a very few sentences. They could refer in the Treasurer's exhibit, showing that the receipts of the fiscal year amount only to \$3,328.90; and, that appropriations have been made in the same amount. They could state that they have published, both in newspaper and pamphlet form, the last report of the Board according to directions. They could add that they made the necessary arrangements for the employment of your Secretary and Agent, the Rev. Mr. Gilchrist, who, under their direction, instituted a correspondence, and performed other services in the office; but who, after a brief excursion to some of the churches on the Southern borders of the Synod, tendered his resignation, which, from consideration urged in his letters, and others which the Committee can exhibit, if required, was accepted on the 6th of April last;—that, consequently the Board have been without a Secretary and Agent to urge upon the churches its claims, the greater part of the year. Indeed, nearly all that has been contributed have been the voluntary and spontaneous offerings of the friends of the cause. Would that these offerings had been far more numerous and bountiful !—But we must be thankful for the day of small things; and even hope against hope—remembering that the silver and the Gold are the Lord's, and that at his pleasure he can make it subservient to the promotion of his cause. The Committee have not assumed the responsibility of filling the vacancy occasioned by the resignation of Mr. Gilchrist.

Here the Committee might conclude their report—But it would not be doing justice to a subject of such amazing importance, and involving a most fearful responsibility, without bringing before the board some considerations which seem to the Committee to observe their serious and candid attention.—And,

1. *The principle upon which the Boards of the church are constituted.* It will be admitted that every organized church is literally a society formed for the express purpose of enlarging and edifying the body of Christ—and, as such, it has all the elements of a missionary establishment. The same is true, but on an enlarged scale, of a Presbytery, and of a Synod. And what pertains in this respect to the inferior judicatories of the church, pertains in a still higher degree to the General Assembly, which is designed to be a bond of union between *all our churches*, in which all are represented, and by which they are all constituted into one body having the same faith—preserving the same order, exercising the same discipline, and pursuing the same objects. The essential features of our Ecclesiastical system are therefore simplicity, stability, uniformity, and efficiency. It differs from the congregational system on the one hand, and from the prelate on the other, and thus occupies the true medium between Radicalism and lordly domination. Our churches can act in concert through the medium of their Judicatories, and thus bring their united strength to bear upon the great command to evangelize the world; and thus one of the defects of the congregational system is avoided—a system which can only act in isolated and detached parts, except as loosely connected in voluntary associations. And thus also is it preferable to the prelatic system, as it allows a fuller exchange of views, and affords the safety which arises from a multitude of counsellors. In the Judicatories of the church—where these Judicatories are large—it has been the invariable practice to refer the subjects upon which they were to act, to Committees—and often to appoint Committees *ad interim*, for the transaction of business connected with the peace, and prosperity, and advancement of the Kingdom of Christ, during the recess of the Judicatory, and at the same, or at a subsequent meeting, to receive the reports of these committees—to amend, reject, or

adopt them according to the deliberate sense of the body from whom they received their appointment. Now the Board of our church are in fact nothing more or less than Committees *ad interim*. They are invested with no other powers than those which are absolutely necessary for the successful prosecution of the objects committed to their charge—with no more powers than are the Committees of the Church of Scotland, to which our Boards have a striking analogy—and had not usage already given them the name which they now bear, we should much prefer the appellation of Committee to that of Board, as more characteristic, simple, and appropriate. We then regard our Boards of Mission, Foreign and Domestic, our Board of Education, and our Publication Board as Committees *ad interim*, and their Secretaries as Chairman of these Committees to whom specific departments are entrusted, and as invested with specific powers, which they are not at liberty to transcend—and for the discharge of their duties, they are to make a full and fair report to the Body in session, from whom they received their appointment. If they have been negligent, remiss, or unfaithful, that is a subject which comes fairly before the Judicatory on the reading of their Reports, and may then receive the full investigation which the subject merits. And it is competent also to the Judicatory—nay it is their duty—to approve, reject, or amend the plans which may be suggested by their Boards for future action. It seems, indeed, to the Committee, a matter altogether impracticable to conduct, either of the benevolent departments of our church with any efficiency or success, except through Boards or Committees, to mature the plans, provide the means, and to carry out in all their complicated details the objects for which they were appointed. And this too is in perfect harmony with that Ecclesiastical control, for the securing of which the contest was so long and arduous.

2. *The objects which these Boards or Committees are designed to secure.* And here the Committee beg to be indulged in a seeming digression from the specific object of their report, while they make a simple allusion to the other departments which, as a church, we are pledged to sustain. The Board or Committee of Publication, has, for its object, the extension of the knowledge of Christ, through works which are deemed sound in the faith and order of the Gospel. And from this source there is to be anticipated a greater unity in doctrine and in discipline, with more love for the truth of God, and greater zeal for the promotion of his glory. The Board or Committee of Education, takes the oversight of the sons of the church who are desirous to enter upon the Ministry, but who have not the means of qualifying themselves for the arduous and responsible task. But an oversight which is [“in” ?] perfect unison with the control of the church to which they belong, and of the Presbytery under whose care they may have been received as suitable candidates. While it is perfectly competent for Presbyteries to do this, without such a Board, the Board is still of great use in concentrating the energies of the church, and as her almoner in dispensing her bounty to those who are needy. The strong is thus brought to the assistance of the weak, and the Apostolic lesson of bearing one another's burthens, practically illustrated. The same general remark is applicable to the Board of Missions, (we allude to the Domestic department,) by which feeble churches are aided in sustaining the Institutions of the Gospel, and the *waste places*, which are many and broad, are cultivated by the laborers whom it sends forth to plant and gather the harvest of the Lord. But the Board claims nothing—attempts nothing, which is not perfectly compatible with the ecclesiastical control. The Presbyteries within whose bounds the labor is performed, yield not a particle of their liberty or independence in the reception of such laborers—Nay, they direct their labors, and have the entire oversight of the men—as much so as any other members of their own body. The chief benefit of this Board or Committee consists in their taking a particular survey of the entire field, and in bringing the energies of the church to bear upon the culture of those parts which seem most to require it, and from which the most abundant harvest is anticipated to the praise of God's glorious grace. While it is perfectly competent to Presbyteries to do all this, without any general Board, it should still be remembered that some Presbyteries are weak, and some are strong—some have but little Missionary labor to perform within their limits, and some, much—and to preserve that “*equality*,” which the Great Missionary to the Gentiles recommended, is the peculiar

design of this Board of the church.

We come now to that department of Christian labor which it is our immediate concern more particularly to examine. The field is the world. In this world, there are *the elect* of God, who are the peculiar inheritance of Christ—and it is his command that his Gospel should be every where preached, as the grand instrumentality of gathering into his fold such as shall be saved, and of making manifest to principalities and powers—to his rational creatures in all parts of his wide dominion, his glorious grace. But to whom is the command given? To the Church.—And the Church, as an organized body—and as individual members, are bound to obey it. Not Foreign Missions have for their object the cultivation of this field—and they are to be undertaken and prosecuted in obedience to this command. Now it is competent to a Presbytery and to a Synod to embark on this enterprise—to establish and take the oversight of Missionary stations in any part of the unevangelized world which they may select, and to form churches there which shall be amenable to their authority. But as we have a tribunal which unites all our Synods and all our Presbyteries, and all our churches, in one body, it seems more expedient that the planning and management of the Foreign and Missionary work should be under its control, than under the control of the Synods and Presbyteries—1st, Because greater unity of design will be secured—2ndly, Because greater security of support can be afforded to those whom it may send forth—3dly, Because it can bring to bear upon a great object the concentrated energies of the entire church—4thly, Because Presbyteries and Synods which are too feeble of themselves to sustain a Mission can still contribute their aid towards sustaining the Missions established by the whole body—5thly, Because united effort in this cause, binds together in closer fellowship and unity the entire church, and makes every branch of it feel that it is a part of the same precious vine—6thly, Because the same amount of care and labor in their oversight and management can accomplish vastly more than if dispersed among the Presbyteries and Synods.—7thly, Because the apathy of one branch of the church may be stimulated by the zeal and activity of another, and thus be provoked to love and good works by the power of example. 8thly, Because it tends to excite a greater interest in all the members of the church when they can perceive that a great work is in progress and that they themselves are bearing a part in the labor. These are among the reasons which show the expediency of committing the cause of Foreign Missions to our General Assembly—and to Boards or Committees of their appointment and under their direction and control.

3. *The duty of the Church to engage in the work of Foreign Missions.* It is included in the command of Christ—a command which has never been repealed—and which enjoins upon his disciples to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. And hence is it the test of discipleship—a test which the blessed Saviour himself applied, when he said, “if ye love me keep my commandments.” It is moreover by the Church—the Church, as the appointed instrumentality of God, that his manifold wisdom, as exhibited in the Gospel of his Son, is to be made known to the nations of the earth. The clear and explicit command contains the *principle* upon which the action of the Church is required. And a complete illustration of this principle is presented in the conduct of the primitive disciples. They went every where preaching the Gospel.—They sent every where the heralds of the Cross. A burning desire actuated the bosoms of the Apostles to publish the glad tidings of salvation, not merely where the name of Christ was known, but where it was unknown. The motto inscribed on their banner was, *onward—onward*. And hence their travels, their labors, their epistles, their plans, their projected designs for visiting far distant lands, and their appeals to the Churches for aid in the prosecution of their labors of love. And hence the weekly contribution of the Churches for the furtherance of the cause—and their readiness to aid in the journeyings, and to supply even to abundance, the wants of those who were sent forth to bear to the benighted nations of the earth the message of grace. The Apostle could therefore say, “I have all, and abound,” and could say it too, to the credit of the Churches which had contributed to his support, and to the reproof of those through whose lack of service—whose failure in their duty he had been left to endure want. Such is a brief notice of the duty of the Church as

it is contained in the command of its ever living and glorious head, and as illustrated by the conduct of the primitive disciples. And now shall we obey the command? Shall we imitate the example?

4. *The means by which this object is to be effected.* We may pray “thy kingdom come.” We may plead the rich promises of the Gospel. We may feel every assurance that the prophetic descriptions of Messiah's reign will be literally verified. But is that *enough*—is that *all*—is that the sole instrumentality to be employed by the Church in the accomplishment of this glorious work? May not all this consist with a *faith which is dead*, and upon which Heaven frowns? In plain terms, men imbued with the spirit of their Master must go forth to the work, and liberal contributions must be made by the Church to sustain them, otherwise they will have reason to apprehend that the curse of Meroz will rest upon them—because they came not up to the help of the Lord—to the help of the Lord against the mighty. It is a reflection upon this age of boasted light and liberality, that Agents must be appointed to visit the Churches, and press upon them the command of Christ, and the claims of perishing millions. Every Minister of the Gospel, so far as this cause is concerned, should feel that he was sadly deficient in duty did he not impress with line upon line and precept upon precept, on those to whom he ministers, this command and these claims. And it is a clear evidence that his heart is not in it when he suffers a month to pass by without presenting to his people light upon the subject, and soliciting their contributions for its support. Be they poor, or be they rich, let them see that none are so poor as those who are without the Gospel, and that all are comparatively rich on whom this inestimable gift is conferred. In addition to the contributions at the Monthly Concert—and it is to be feared that in some of our Churches these special seasons of prayer for the extensions of the Gospel are unheeded—there should be at least an annual effort, when all the members of the congregation should be affectionately urged, by their love to Christ and to the souls of men, to contribute as God has prospered them for the promotion of this cause. Had this been done the past year we should have been spared the extreme mortification of presenting so meagre an account of the receipts in our treasury. How unlike that Church of old which exhibited the riches of its liberality during “a great trial of affliction” and oppressed with “deep poverty”—a condition of which none of our Churches have an equal right to complain. But the responsibility rests not upon Ministers alone. The Elders of the Church should feel that when there is “a lack of service,” as the Apostle expresses it, a portion of the blame devolves upon them. For as ensamples to the flock they should be so in their liberality, as in every other part of what is properly called Christian conversation. A penurious Elder more nearly resembles Ananias than Gaius. But it is not penuriousness alone to which is to be attributed the little that has been done. Light has been wanting—faith, and zeal. They have not been taught that it is more blessed to give than to receive. They have not spread their thoughts abroad and looked—and looked till their eye has afflicted their hearts, upon the wretchedness of man in his wanderings from God—upon the condition of the perishing heathen—perishing for the bread of life, which has been broken for the world. And if any agency is required beyond what is presented in the simple organization of our Church, it is an agency of visitation to go from church to Church and spread before them the great objects upon which we have embarked—and their claims to support through the united effort of all its members. And to show them that instead of being satisfied with present attainments as almost a work of supererogation we have as yet bestowed the veriest pittance—only the crumbs that fall from our tables, and the bare gleanings of our harvest fields. And that when the tithes shall be brought into the store-house of the Lord, in compliance with his institution, it will be seen by the blessings that he will bestow. But were the Church what it should be, even such an agency would not be needed. The liberality of all our congregations would anticipate and provide for the necessities of the Church, and none of its objects would languish for the want of adequate support. A specimen of the ability of the Church was given, when an appeal was made in behalf of our Board of Publication. But an appeal in behalf of Foreign Missions—important as the other object is, has claims ten, nay a hundred fold greater, upon their liberality—and claims which we cannot pass by unnoticed without incurring the guilt of not caring for

the glory of Christ, and for the souls of those who are perishing for lack of vision.

5. *The result to be anticipated from effort to support of Foreign Missions.* The promise is, He that soweth sparingly, shall reap also sparingly, and he that soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. It has been but a few years since the cause of Foreign Missions has engaged the attention of the Churches, and this attention has been comparatively limited. But yet the results have been such as to gladden the hearts of those who love the Lord Jesus Christ. Look at the heralds of the Cross scattered here and there, diffusing light amidst the dense darkness which surrounds them—the Churches which they have planted—the native assistants who cheerfully proffer their aid—the multitude of schools conducted under their auspices—the printing presses which are employed as auxiliaries in the great work—the translation of the Holy Scriptures which they have made in the languages of the principle nations of the world—the refinement and civilization—the comparative freedom from ignorance and superstition, which have every where been among the fruits of their labors; and more than this, the deliverance of multitudes, hundreds of thousands of souls from the dominion of sin, and their translation into the kingdom of Christ. These are results over which angels rejoice. And greater results than the past may be confidently expected from greater efforts to extend the cause. And are not results like these worth infinitely more than the expenditure which it has cost to accomplish them?

What if the Spirit of God should be poured out upon all our Churches; and what if the hearts of many of our young men, and of many of our young educated men, who have engaged or purposed to engage in other professions and pursuits, should feel that they were called of God to publish the Gospel of peace, how speedily would a host be raised up, of the very kind of men which the enterprise demands. And should the consecration of wealth keep pace with the consecration of talents and personal service, how rich would be the offering—how abundant. And is such a result impossible? Is there any thing too hard for God? Is it wrong to make the speedy enlargement and beauty of Zion, not only in Christian but in Heathen lands, the subject of our fervent desires, our importunate prayers, and our most confident expectations? If the promise is sure that “the heathen shall be given to Christ for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession,” such a result as we have supposed is not only probable, but certain. And who can say that it may not be near? Or who can imagine that it is not to be accomplished through human instrumentality, while the glory shall all redound to the praise of Him who is the author and finisher of faith.

The Committee would conclude their Report by suggesting to the Board the propriety of recommending to the Synod to take the entire subject under their special consideration—in order that if there be any defects in our present organization they may be remedied—if any abuses, that they may be corrected—if any neglect on the part of those who have had the chief management of the business, that this neglect may receive the proper censure, and that others more worthy and more faithful, may be chosen to fill their place, and that they may search into, and if possible, remove the cause or causes, of that apathy which manifestly rests upon both Ministers and people in relation to the enterprise—confessedly the grandest and most responsible of any upon which the Church has ever embarked.