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THE  
BIBLIOTHECA SACRA.

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ARTICLE I.

THE AMERICAN BOARD AND ECCLESIASTICAL  
COUNCILS.

BY THE REV. A. HASTINGS ROSS, D. D., PORT HURON, MICH.

INTRODUCTION.

THE oldest of American foreign missionary societies, after a long career of prosperity and honor, has, to use the words so aptly quoted by its venerable president, fallen into a place where two seas meet, and is in danger of being broken in pieces. It has not been defrauded of its funds, nor have its officers proved recreant to any trust; yet the foreship sticks and remains immovable, but the stern begins to break up by the violence of the waves. It looks as if radical measures were needed to save it.

Perhaps we ought to remind ourselves that by no device can trouble be wholly avoided in a world of sin. If the American Board were perfect in organization and perfect in administration, storms would arise through the infirmities, errors, interests, or sins of others. The mere fact of trouble is, therefore, of no conclusive force against the Board. Unless the kind of trouble is such as to reveal or suggest some defect in organization or in administration or in both, we

should be warranted in dismissing the matter as an inevitable incident of human affairs, not to be remedied, but to be borne with Christian patience. But the unanimous action of the Board at Des Moines in proposing a possible relief in councils, "in difficult cases," indicates that the storm is not wholly due to human infirmity. And whoever reads the great debate at that meeting, and the discussions that have followed, cannot fail to discern two questions lying at the bottom of the whole matter—a question of theology and a question of polity. The scope of this paper excludes wholly the theological question, and confines us to the question of polity. Yet this, as respects the present controversy with the Board, is the vital one, and calls therefore for the closest study.

#### ORIGIN OF THE AMERICAN BOARD.

The American Board did not have its origin in the missionary zeal of the churches, but in the desire of a few young men to preach the gospel to the heathen. This desire was communicated to the General Association of Massachusetts at its meeting in 1810. That Ministerial Association embodied the purpose of these young men in a society of many initials. This society was duly incorporated on June 20, 1812, by special charter from the General Court of Massachusetts, and is known as "The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions."

#### NATURE OF THE AMERICAN BOARD.

The charter is the fundamental law of the Board. That charter names certain men and their associates as "a body politic," with all the rights and liabilities of the same, with power to choose all needed officers. Its fifth section gives the Board power to "elect by ballot any suitable persons to be members of said Board, either to supply vacancies, or in addition to their present number." These members are called the Corporate Members, and constitute the legal body politic. Their present number is two hundred and twenty-three, but

is not a fixed number. Honorary membership is secured by the payment of a sum of money. Such members may participate in the deliberations of the Board, but without the right of voting. The Prudential Committee is the annual creation of the Board for the purposes of executing the will of the Board in matters entrusted to it. The Secretaries assist in the deliberations of this Committee without the right to vote.

The most salient point in this charter is the provision which requires the Corporate Members, who constitute the Board, to perpetuate themselves by ballot. This is convenient, has a pecuniary value, but makes the Board a close corporation. The nature of the American Board is therefore that of a self-perpetuating, close corporation, in which it is like a bank or railroad corporation, which elects its own members.

#### COMPREHENSION OF THE BOARD.

There is retained a reminder of the original comprehension of the Board in the first words of its name, "The American," which time has made pretentious. The intent of its founders was to make it the channel of all American foreign missionary work. The original members belonged to the Congregational body, as it was constituted by a Congregational association of ministers. At the first meeting after their incorporation, they elected eight Presbyterian members. In the following year a member was elected from the Associate Reform Church. In 1816 one was elected from the Reformed Dutch Church. At its fiftieth anniversary its Corporate Members were distributed as follows: One hundred and five were Congregationalists; eighty-one, Presbyterians, New School; seventeen, Presbyterians, Old School; nine from the Protestant Reformed Dutch Church; and two from the Reformed German Church.

It was soon found, however, that polity is more fundamentally divisive than doctrine; and one by one these denominations withdrew in support of their own boards until the

American Board is left again in the hands of its original founders. If this has been "by accident," it has nevertheless been inevitable, brought about by laws which not even Christian love and missionary zeal could reverse. In all present and future arrangements the Board must be regarded as confined to the foreign work of the Congregational churches.

#### FUNCTION OF THE BOARD.

The Board is the agent or intermediary between the donors of men and money and the foreign missionary service. Its object is "to propagate the gospel among unevangelized nations and communities, by means of preachers, catechists, schoolmasters, and the press." For this end its Prudential Committee are required "to cause the more inviting fields for missionary enterprise to be explored, if necessary; to appoint the places where missions shall be attempted, and to determine the scale upon which they shall be conducted, and to superintend them; to appoint, instruct, and direct all the missionaries of the Board;" etc. Also "to appoint agents at home and abroad, with such powers and duties as they may think are demanded by the best interests of missions." The said committee is required to "inquire carefully into the character and qualifications of the applicants, whether males or females, before taking them under the patronage of the Board." "Every person received by the Prudential Committee as a candidate for missionary service is expected to hold himself at the discretion of the committee, both in respect to the field of his labors and the time of his going forth."

The same committee has the power to recall any missionary for cause deemed satisfactory to itself, with no right of appeal on the part of the dismissed to a council of churches to review, or advise in the case.

The function of the Board may be truthfully stated as receiving money and men from the churches, and using them, in the conduct of foreign missions, according to its own discretion.

## RELATION OF THE BOARD TO THE CHURCHES.

In origin, nature, and function, the Board has no direct relation or responsibility to the churches, but is independent of them. Such is the fact. It is a self-perpetuating, close corporation, having the charter right to manage its own affairs.

It claims not to be the plenipotentiary of the churches, nor to stand in the place of the churches. Its relations are to the donors, as such, and to missionaries, as such; its responsibilities are to them. This of course involves the right and duty of judging whether a candidate is adapted to the work, and whether a missionary is faithful to his engagements. . . . It is impossible to take for granted their adaptation to the missionary work; or to allow the determination of it to rest with ecclesiastical bodies, or to be adjusted by the ecclesiastical status. The Church Missionary Society of Great Britain, many years since, had occasion to assert the same right, as regards its missionaries, against the claims of certain bishops. The Society admitted, as unreservedly as the Board does, that every missionary and candidate must be *rectus in ecclesia*, and that this is a point to be decided by ecclesiastical bodies; but held that the whole question of the use of the funds was exclusively for the Society to determine.<sup>1</sup>

While asserting for the Board this independence of the churches as to management, Secretary Anderson said:

Whatever name may be given to the agency [for raising funds for the support of missionaries], it is strictly auxiliary to the pastoral office, and to be employed only where it can operate with advantage to the cause. . . . Since the year 1823, the effort has been to throw responsibility for raising the funds upon parochial agencies, upon collectors appointed by the people themselves, and of course upon those also whose duty it is to see that collectors are appointed. The whole responsibility ought evidently to rest there. The difficulty has been to create and sustain a sufficient local feeling of responsibility. Adverse events are constantly occurring. Pastors and active church members die, or are removed,<sup>2</sup> etc.

Thus the Board, which claims not to represent, act for, or stand in the place of the churches, has, almost from its origin, not turned to the donors, but to the churches, for the raising of funds.

In view of its origin, development, and history, Dr. Dexter calls the American Board "an independent organization."<sup>3</sup> To which the *Andover Review* replies: "It is an idle boast, that the Board is an independent corporation. Should its nom-

<sup>1</sup> Memorial Volume, A. B. C. F. M. p. 100.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189.

<sup>3</sup> *Congregationalist*, for July 8, 1886.

inal become a real independence, it would be an idle society" (vol. vii. p. 193). Professor Samuel Harris, D. D., speaks of the power of the Prudential Committee as "practically so nearly irresponsible," and says: "Under the present plan the churches are called on only to give money for carrying on missions over which they have no control, and for the support of men in whose selection they have no agency or responsibility."<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, it is said that the Board is responsible to the churches. Thus Dr. Dexter, as if correcting the impression of a preceding article, says: "It is idle to say that the Board is not under the control of the churches, simply because the Prudential Committee refuse to depart from the established policy. The churches cannot reach it so quickly as is the case with some other societies, but it is in their hands."<sup>5</sup> The Board has been responsive in a remarkable degree to every suggestion for change in times past, which would put it in closer accord with the will of the churches, on which fact it claims that it is a serious misrepresentation to say that the Board is "an irresponsible corporation."<sup>6</sup>

Yet it is literally true that organically, legally, and essentially the American Board is a close corporation, independent of the churches. Its dependence on the churches and responsibility to them arise from its need of men and money.

#### THE BOARD NOT ECCLESIASTICAL.

It is obvious that the American Board is not an ecclesiastical body. It can neither organize churches, nor associations, nor presbyteries; it cannot admit members to the church, nor excommunicate them; nor can it transfer them from one denomination to another; nor change their ecclesiastical relations.<sup>7</sup> So far the principle on which the Board acts is that

<sup>4</sup> Reprint Am. Board and Eccl. Councils, pp. 8, 12.

<sup>5</sup> *Congregationalist*, March 31, 1887.

<sup>6</sup> Annual Meetings, 10.

<sup>7</sup> Memorial Vol., p. 98.

of entire non-intervention. In 1871 an occasion gave rise to the following action :

Neither this Board, nor its Prudential Committee, are in any sense a theological court, to settle doctrinal points of belief, but a body instituted by the churches to make known the gospel of Christ, . . . . . maintaining that faith, and that only, which is universally received by those Christian bodies whose agents they are, and who furnish the funds they administer.

The Board cannot, therefore, make or adopt a creed, without trenching on the province of the churches. It can only accept and apply the creed of its supporters. It is not the function of the Board, or of its Prudential Committee, or of its Secretaries, to decide disputed theological questions. So much at least seems indisputable.

#### THE BOARD EXERCISES ECCLESIASTICAL POWER.

Unfortunately for its peace, ecclesiastical questions cannot be limited to the matters above specified. The primal function of the Board is an ecclesiastical one. It is the province of the churches to evangelize the world, and to control their agencies in prosecuting this glorious mission. The Board, then, in selecting, sending out, controlling, and recalling missionaries, and in managing missions, acts so far forth ecclesiastically. In collecting moneys and in examining candidates, it is an ecclesiastical body, or acts in place of the churches. Both its charter and its efficiency may justify its history in dealing with these questions; but the fact that it deals with them, and must deal with them, does not remove the charge of exercising ecclesiastical authority. If it should presume to enforce any narrower creed than that generally held by its constituency, it would, in doing so, only make evident the ecclesiastical power which it has all the time exercised. Its assumption of independent doctrinal sovereignty in such case would be but the assertion of a power inherent in its charter and history. There would be no usurpation in it. The Board has always determined the fitness of candidates physically, mentally, morally, and doctrinally; and has never taken them on their ecclesiastical standing. Nor can it wisely remit this



duty. But it has always been true, that "the Committee in refusing appointment or reinstatement on account of theological opinions, virtually assumes ecclesiastical functions which properly belong only to the churches through their appointed representatives."

THIS INCONSISTENCY THE CAUSE OF TROUBLE.

It was inevitable that this exercise of ecclesiastical power by a non-ecclesiastical society would bring trouble. The wonder is, that it has been delayed so long. Congregationalists are jealous of their rights. They resent and resist usurpation when discovered. They begin at length to see that their duty does not end in providing men and money for others to control. The churches are beginning to ask why they have not also a voice in selecting and placing the men for whose support they give their money. Right here lies the origin and gravity of the present controversy. "Those difficulties," says its honored president, "all arise from the fact that the theological fitness of candidates for missionary service is determined by the Board through its Prudential Committee." Again:

This dissatisfaction with the Committee, . . . . and this division in the Committee were possible only from the fact that it has rested with the Home Secretary and the Committee to decide on the theological fitness of candidates for missionary work. If the members of the Committee had been chosen, as but for this they would have been, . . . . not a lisp of recent or present difficulties would have been heard.\*

Professor Harris says :

It is impossible to have the liberty of Congregationalism and the summary authority of a national and hierarchical organization both at once.

And the *Andover Review* says :

One thing is settled. Neither the Board nor the Congregational denomination will be content to leave the theological soundness of candidates for missionary appointment, or of missionaries in service, unrestrictedly to the Prudential Committee.

Again :

We hope that wise counsels will prevail, and that the will of the Board expressing the will of the churches will authorize the Committee to change its policy.

It seems certain that the present trouble in the Board has

\* Letter in *Congregationalist*, Nov. 4, 1886.

its continuance and peril, if not its origin, in this exercise of ecclesiastical functions by a non-ecclesiastical body. "All this difficulty has come simply from the fact that the Prudential Committee have been a theological committee—the whole of it."<sup>9</sup>

#### THE PERIL GREAT.

If the trouble had arisen from a recent usurpation of ecclesiastical functions by the Prudential Committee or by the Board, the peril would have been as slight as transient. But the cause of the difficulties is organic and has been in exercise from the beginning. This makes the matter serious in the extreme. The Board as an independent corporation, has by the terms of its charter the right to determine the fitness of candidates—a right made invulnerable by more than seventy-five years of unquestioned exercise. The Manhattan Association of Ministers, after an elaborate report by an able committee, adopted a resolution recommending the continuance of the old method by a vote of twenty-one to two. Their position has been largely approved, as against the proposed change. And that too in the face of these words of President Hopkins: "The difficulties are not radical and need not be chronic. A single slight change in our mode of working might, and I trust would, restore essential harmony."<sup>10</sup>

Those on the other side feel, with the Hon. Alpheus Hardy, who said, in declining to be any longer a member of the Prudential Committee, that the Board has become "a partisan in questions that are not within its province." And they say: "Not till hope [that wise counsels will prevail in a change of policy] is destroyed, should vital relation to the Board be relinquished." "Any society must learn that its position is that of a servant to the churches, and must cease to lord it over God's heritage. We can therefore bide our time."<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> President Hopkins. *The Great Debate*, p. 75.

<sup>10</sup> Letter in *Congregationalist*, Nov. 4, 1886.

<sup>11</sup> *And. Rev.*, vii. pp. 197, 198.

The ecclesiastical peril is greater than the theological peril; for many who reject the theological speculation of future or post-mortem probation are arrayed against the present method of the Board. Among them are found such men as the venerable President of the Board, Dr. Mark Hopkins; ex-President Noah Porter, D. D.; President Timothy Dwight, D. D.; Professor Samuel Harris, D. D.; Professor George P. Fisher, D. D.; Dr. Lyman Abbott, and many others. It is safe to say that such voices will not cease at the bidding of any society. The method of the past must be supplemented or changed. No one who sees clearly the issue and the peril but would welcome some solution, if founded on right principles.

#### THE CRISIS AND ECCLESIASTICAL COUNCILS.

It became apparent at the last meeting of the Board, as the outcome of the great debate, that some ecclesiastical remedy is needed to meet the crisis. Hence a resolution "was passed unanimously amid great applause," reading as follows:

*Resolved*, The Board recommends to the Prudential Committee to consider in difficult cases, turning upon doctrinal views of candidates for missionary service, the expediency of calling a council of the churches, to be constituted in some manner, which may be determined by the good judgment of the Committee, to pass upon the theological soundness of the candidate, and the Committee is instructed to report on this matter to the Board at the next annual meeting.

This tentative proposal, if adopted, would leave the organization of the Board as it is, but would supplement the Prudential Committee with a resort to councils in difficult cases of doctrinal doubt. This proposed remedy would allow the Prudential Committee to exercise its ecclesiastical functions as hitherto, except in difficult doctrinal cases. As this would advertise the doctrinal doubts of all candidates for whose examination councils were called, the resolution has been amended by general consent so as to refer the doctrinal examination of all candidates for the ministry in mission fields to councils, the examination of all others for the missionary service being left by inference with the

Prudential Committee. For it is hardly to be supposed that councils would be advocated for the theological examination of all, male and female, who go into the foreign work. Does this remedy meet the whole case?

#### THE REMEDY FAVORED AND REPUDIATED.

President Hopkins says: "Such a solution would relieve the Board from a permanent point of attack." "It is, indeed, to be presumed that no other course would now be tolerated, whatever former usage may have been." Vice-President Blatchford, President Dwight, ex-President Porter, Professors Harris and Fisher, the *Andover Review*, *The Christian Union*, and others, favor resort to councils. It has been called "the only proper authority," "the churches represented in ecclesiastical councils;" "a Congregational method of relief;" "in the line of the best traditions of the Board;" "simple, easy, practicable, and in strict accord with Congregational polity," etc.

On the other hand, it is repudiated as impracticable and uncongregational by the *Religious Herald*, *Advance*, *Congregationalist*, the Manhattan Association, including Drs. Storrs, Taylor, Behrends, Virgin, Ingersoll, and others, some of whom claim that "the Board has no *right* to transfer its duties to others;" that "councils have no *right* to have any voice in the direction of the expenditure of the funds of the Board;" "that the policy proposed is wholly uncongregational."

#### COUNCILS LOOK IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION.

A council of churches is an ecclesiastical body; the American Board is not. It would seem more congruous for an ecclesiastical council to have charge of the ecclesiastical duty of examining missionaries in theology than for a non-ecclesiastical body to continue to do this ecclesiastical work. The proposal to refer the theological examinations to councils looks, therefore, like a step in the right direction, in restoring to the churches a long-neglected right and duty. This cannot

be met by a blank denial, nor by an appeal to a continuous custom. The proposal, therefore, deserves commendation, as indicative of a disposition, on the part of the Board, to adjust itself to new conditions, notwithstanding past methods. There is the greater need, then, for a thorough discussion of the whole question; for it may be that we are not shut up to one of two methods, as is stated in these words: "The alternative is becoming clearer and more definite in the present discussion—either the Board is an ecclesiastical institution independent of the churches in the theological tests which it may impose, and competent to override councils, or it must acknowledge the supremacy of councils, and the rights which they confer upon those who have gained theological standing by their authority."<sup>12</sup> In our view of the question we are not shut up to present methods, or to a resort to councils. Our discussion of the remedy proposed is therefore relieved from the pressure of this sad alternative.

#### COUNCILS INADEQUATE.

Councils meet on letters missive defining the scope of inquiry and result. They organize, do their work, usually in great haste, dissolve, with no power to reassemble. They cannot even preserve the records of their proceedings, since they leave no officers. The charity of others, or of the parties calling them, is relied on for the preservation of records. They cannot be corresponded with after adjournment, nor correct mistakes, nor be dealt with, nor be held responsible for anything. They are then dead and irresponsible. It would not seem to be wise to commit to such bodies the most vital question connected with missions, namely, the doctrines to be taught the heathen. Yet it has been said of a candidate: "Let the church of which he is a member call a council of the churches in its immediate neighborhood. . . . Let the council thus constituted . . . decide as to the ordination of the man to the Christian ministry in the foreign field; and let that de-

<sup>12</sup> *And. Rev.*, vi. pp. 300, 301.

cision be final" (Professor Harris). A church in the most obscure corner of the country may thus be called upon to ordain, with the assistance of its neighbors, a missionary, whose action, contrary to all Congregational principles and customs, shall be final—a decision, not advice. It would hardly seem to be wise or safe to leave the most vital question of all to "obscure, transient, and irresponsible councils." These "creatures of a day" cannot adequately discharge so responsible a trust. "To imagine that there is some mystic quality in each and every local council to voice the faith and thought and will of the whole denomination, clear across the continent, is to trifle with good sense."<sup>13</sup> The plan takes out of the hands of the Prudential Committee, and puts it into the hands of some unknown and remotely responsible parties, conclusive judgment upon the most vital and essential qualification of a missionary.

#### COUNCILS AND THEIR ENVIRONMENT.

The proposed councils are, by the terms of the resolution, "to be constituted in some manner, which may be determined by the good judgment of the Committee," and vicinage councils have been urged as the most satisfactory. But theology often has a local shading, so that a council called from the neighborhood would be packed by limitation, as was the case with the council that dismissed the elder Edwards from the church at Northampton, Mass., in 1750. There have been times, and there may be again, when the environment of Andover, Boston, Hartford, New Haven, Oberlin, and other places, represented a greater or less divergence from the traditional faith, while each had its peculiar type of doctrine. It is even now claimed that all the Congregational clergy of one city, with one exception, are at least hospitable to a doctrine which others call heresy.<sup>14</sup> A council called from such a city would be packed by its environment, and could not therefore be trusted to voice the faith of the constituency of

<sup>13</sup> *Advance*, Feb. 24, 1887.

<sup>14</sup> *Christ. Union*, April 14, 1887, p. 3.

the Board. That constituency will not consent that councils so biased shall determine the orthodoxy of the missionaries they support. If a college or seminary should happen to be located with such an environment, that college or seminary or both would naturally be colored by its surroundings—if, indeed, it had not so colored the churches that their pastors would reflect its own peculiar tinge—and then draw to it, and into church membership with it, the youth of similar sympathies. Thus a little discreet prevision of a coming council of ordination might easily and naturally transfer all difficult cases to councils within such environment. Such things are not beyond the endeavor of even good men. Communion with enforced creeds have found that mental reservations admit the most variant beliefs. This packing of councils by environment becomes a serious, if not a fatal objection to the proposed resort to councils of the vicinage. No Presbytery ordains without assent to the Westminster Confession, so that with them environment has little chance of doing evil.

#### COUNCILS AND THE PARTIES INTERESTED.

If councils be chosen by selection from churches beyond the vicinage, then the suspicion of a picked and packed council in each case is aroused, which is as fatal as the fact of packing. It would not be safe for the Board to commit the most vital question of fitness for mission work to councils so chosen. Yet this objection of bias arising from vicinage or selection from a wider field might be set aside by making the parties interested, the parties in calling councils. The candidate for missionary service is one party, and the church to which he belongs, or some other church, might stand for him in calling a council. The churches supporting the Board constitute another party in interest, and the Prudential Committee might stand for them in calling the council. Each of these parties could choose one-half the members of the council, without regard to vicinage. This method rests on the principle that the parties interested should share equally in any

expedient of relief; and if resort to councils be had in this matter, it should be to those thus mutually chosen by the parties in interest. We venture to affirm that there is nothing in our principles or polity to forbid such councils. If the past has not had them, it has been because they were not needed, not because Congregationalism cannot use them.

#### DIVIDED AND CONTRADICTORY COUNCILS.

There would be danger that this method would give divided councils in certain difficult cases, and even contradictory councils. If a candidate be passed by a bare majority vote, or defeated by a tie or majority vote, strife would follow. And if councils be chosen from the neighborhood, then one will approve a man as orthodox whom another council would condemn. Thus council would oppose council, to the damage of the peace of the churches. The Board would send out one and refuse to send another of the same faith. Neither divided councils, nor contradictory councils, would commend themselves to churches, nor improve the efficiency of the Board. Indeed, what could be regarded as a more dangerous experiment? It is not likely that it will be tried.

#### MISSIONARIES NOT PASTORS.

Missionaries are sent out and supported by the Board; pastors are selected, called, ordained, installed or recognized, and paid, each by his own church. No council at home puts a pastor into his office in a church. If one should attempt it against the will of the church, no other council would repeat the usurpation. The council advises the church, that is all. The church may reject the advice, and so assert its liberty. But the proposed council puts a man into the missionary service, to act for all the churches, and to be paid by all. He stands thus as the representative of them all, and not of a part. No home church takes a man as pastor because he has been ordained by council; but each church selects its own pastor, judging for itself of his personal and theological fitness. Missionaries are not like pastors.



## A PART NOT THE WHOLE.

The remedy in councils lies open to another serious, if not fatal defect. Ten or twenty churches of the vicinage, or selected from a wider range, may satisfy any church in installing a pastor, but it is not so clear that they can act for four thousand churches in determining the theological standing of missionaries. A parochial church, after having selected a council, may well be satisfied with its advice; but it does not follow that four thousand churches will be satisfied with the decision of a small council called either by a single church or by the parties interested. The difficulty is not removed by changing this little council from place to place, and state to state, as the candidate may desire; for it is still a very small part acting for the whole. It is said that "by this method we gradually obtain, not a provincial opinion, not the view of any local clique, but the sentiment and belief of all the churches" (Professor Harris). If it were certain, or even probable, that the decision, not advice, of these councils would always be the same, the four thousand and more could safely let the few assembled in council speak for them; but in that case the right of the whole to decide in matters concerning all would have to be set aside. For our principles do not require that a part shall act for the whole in matters of common concern. Local councils have no such right or infallibility, that their voice must be obeyed by a whole denomination. The churches that support the Board have no belief in the magic of councils, called here and there, of few and often obscure churches, that they can settle the theology of missions for the whole body. The Manhattan Association well says on this point:

It hardly appears an equitable thing to have the entire constituency of the Board committed to the approval and support of a missionary by the action of some remote body, which it did not appoint, and does not know; hardly equitable, either, to place the power of sending out missionaries most largely in the hands of churches whose contributions for their support are necessarily the smallest. Now, all churches co-operating in the Board are in this respect on an equal footing, whether their gifts of money to the treasury are larger or less.

This is true, but the complaint is, that the contributing

churches have now no voice at all in choosing missionaries or conducting missions; for all this is done by the Board, a close corporation, self-perpetuating. The equal footing is therefore no footing.

#### THE ROOT OF THE DIFFICULTY.

This brings us to the root of our present troubles, which neither the existing method nor the proposed remedy removes. When a church offers men and money for foreign missions, or for any other cause, and a society replies: "We will take your money, but your men must be tested by a creed which we impose," no wonder the church asks the society: "By what authority do you impose the test?" and "Who gave you this authority?" If the answer be given: "We derive this authority from our charter granted by the Great and General Court of Massachusetts," no one will regard it as satisfactory. If it be added: "It is yours to give both men and money, but it is ours to use them according to our best judgment," no one would regard it as sufficient. If still under the pressure it affirms: "We are not an ecclesiastical body; neither the Board nor the Prudential Committee are in any wise a theological court to settle theological points of belief," the question is conclusive: "Why then do you presume to usurp the ecclesiastical functions of the churches? For it is the province of the churches to determine theological doctrines, to test the orthodoxy of candidates for the ministry at home and abroad, and to evangelize the world. We are competent to manage all our affairs, parochial and missionary; to determine and enforce under the word, the conditions of fellowship, and we cannot submit to have any power, however venerable and honored, stand between us and our own divinely appointed work, to regulate it or control it." To this there is no answer.

#### THE CHURCHES RESPONSIBLE FOR MISSIONS.

We hold it to be fundamental that a local church is independent, under Christ, of all external control in all its affairs; that it is its duty to do all it can in making disciples of all the

nations; that, in conducting work in which all alike are engaged, each church should join with others in fraternal coöperation; and that the instrument or agent used in conducting this common work is under the control of the churches doing the work. It is not the master, but the servant; the channel of operations. Hence any Board which is not organically the representative of the churches, and under its control, is abnormal and foreign. It is not true Congregationalism to confide what is the concern of all to a few individuals formed into a non-ecclesiastical society, or to a few churches. The churches should manage the work given them to do; for they are the best custodians both of orthodoxy and of liberty. They are stronger than the strongest iron-clad creed ever made. They can, therefore, be trusted with the blessed gospel of the Son of God.

#### THE UNIT OF ORGANIZATION.

Christ has made the local church, not the individual believer, the life centre of Christian endeavor, "the organ of the Spirit" (Bunsen). Hence "the parochial church is scripturally the unit of permanent organized association for Christian fellowship and mission work."<sup>15</sup> The work of evangelization at home and abroad is committed to the churches, which are the integers of all Christian operations. Circumstances led our fathers to substitute individuals for churches, and so to rear voluntary societies instead of ecclesiastical boards; and hence the present storm. Had the American Board been an ecclesiastical body, it is safe to say that the present severe attacks upon it would not have been made; or, if made, would have been shorn of their chief force. The work of evangelization at home and abroad in all its departments belongs to the churches as churches, and they betrayed their trust when they allowed individuals to usurp it. There is no inability in our polity to do the work; but, instead there has arisen friction in re-adjusting an abnormal development of polity—that is all.

<sup>15</sup> Voluntary Associations, 14, reprint of a valuable report made to the Gen. Association of Conn. in 1872.

## THE PRIMITIVE CHURCHES.

Active missionaries were first sent out by the persecution which scattered the Jerusalem church, except the apostles (Acts viii. i, 4). The churches recognized the abrogation of the ceremonial law (Acts xi. 1-18; xv. 1-29). Neither the apostles nor individuals, but a local church, began foreign missions (Acts xiii. 1-3), and the missionaries on returning reported not to individuals, nor to a society, nor to the apostles, but to the church that sent them forth (Acts xiv. 27). Churches contributed money for benevolent and missionary purposes (1 Cor. xvi. 1, 2; 2 Cor. viii. 1-5, 18, 19; xi. 8; Phil. iv. 15; 1 Tim. v. 16). So natural is this action of the churches, that the Board turns to pastors and churches for funds. It does not seek to reach the churches through individuals so much as to reach the individuals through the churches; thus making the local church the unit of solicitation. Certain it is that the primitive churches were independent, with the right and power to use their men and money, and to manage all their affairs.

## COMBINATION OF CHURCH UNITS.

If, through reason of persecution or distance, churches could not organize in systematic work, they would labor separately, rendering one another such help as they could. But, as soon as they could combine their wisdom, means, and labor, they would do so, both for economy and efficiency. They would combine in ways suited to their independence, that together they might conduct the work. For the churches, which Christ has made the organs of the Spirit and the units of labor and combination, to form, or to allow to be formed, outside societies, organically independent and irresponsible, whether close corporations or not, would be repugnant to their fundamental principle and would produce trouble, as everything abnormal must in due time.

## RETURN TO FIRST PRINCIPLES.

The difficulties arising from the exercise of ecclesiastical

functions by a non-ecclesiastical body, and the impossibility of remedying the anomalous defect by ecclesiastical councils, render it imperative that we return to first and right principles. The need must be imperative when the honored President of the Board can say, and say truly: "The present method is not in harmony with the Congregational, or any other ecclesiastical polity." "If the Congregational polity does not recognize as belonging to itself the power of sending out properly qualified missionaries, then that polity ought not to exist." It is unquestionable, both on scriptural and on rational grounds, that the churches ought to manage their missionary affairs as their parochial business. A corporation, though composed of Christians, if not a church or the representative of churches by organic connection, is not an ecclesiastical body, and infringes upon the rights of the churches when it undertakes to conduct for the churches, missions or anything else. There was a "provisional necessity" for such corporations before our churches became organized, but there is no necessity for their continuance as non-ecclesiastical bodies, "now that the churches, as churches, are prepared to assume the work and give to it its normal, divine place."<sup>16</sup> The churches are entrusted with the work of missions; they are able to conduct missions; our polity is not inadequate to the work; it can and should assume what belongs to it.

#### REVOLUTION TRUE CONSERVATISM.

If it be said that this is revolutionary, we reply that it brings the whole matter down to principle, whether it be revolutionary or not, and settles it on a foundation that cannot be moved. No expedient will long endure. We must build on the rock of right principle, that no such storm may trouble us in the future.

When change becomes necessary to accomplish the original end of an institution then change is conservatism.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Voluntary Associations, 15.

<sup>17</sup> Mem. Volume, 33.

New methods are always in order when those that have preceded have been clearly proven inadequate or unwise.<sup>18</sup>

Some change is necessary to secure "a due regard to the rights and liberty of the churches."

It cannot be doubted . . . . . that the purity of evangelical faith, the legitimate freedom of thought, and the rights and liberties of the churches, so far as they are affected by the appointment of missionaries, are safer in the hands of all the churches and pastors engaged in practical Christian work over all the country, than they can be in the hands of any ten men, however wise and good, in Boston, or in Chicago, or in any other city.—[Dr. Harris.]

#### THE BOARD EASILY ADJUSTED TO PRINCIPLE.

We are not shut up to the remedy in councils proposed, or to the abandonment of our polity, or to unecclesiastical societies. Strange as it may seem, the American Board, which as a close and self-perpetuating corporation stands farthest away from the principles of our polity, is, of all our voluntary societies, the most readily adjusted to our polity. The abnormal nature of them all was clearly exhibited in the report on Voluntary Associations made to the General Association of Connecticut in 1872, which was printed and widely circulated, and reprinted in 1881 by Rev. Amos S. Chesebrough, Chairman of the Committee. Independently, the same defect with its remedy has been pointed out by the writer in lectures and on committees since 1872. The weak spot thus exhibited has been made the centre of attack during the past year; but it can easily be made impregnable by a slight change in the method of making Corporate Members. A complete remedy and defence are near at hand, if the members of the Board have courage and grace enough to use them. The Board must be made an ecclesiastical body. If the Prudential Committee had been chosen by the churches through the Board, not a lisp of recent or present difficulties would have been heard.

#### PLAN OF ADJUSTMENT.

The Board has no voting life membership made such by

<sup>18</sup> Manhattan Association.

the payment of a small sum of money. It is instead a close corporation, with comparatively a small legal membership. Its Corporate Members are the legal Board, and number at present two hundred and twenty-three. This body of men can be made representatives of the churches, so that what it does itself, or through its officers and committees, the churches will do. Its examination of candidates, appointment, management, would then be ecclesiastical, and the root of the present troubles in their ecclesiastical form would be entirely removed, while the efficiency of the Board and its organic structure would be unimpaired. The only change needed would be in the method of nominating or selecting Corporate Members.

We may outline the plan: Let the terms of office as Corporate Members be what it now is or else limited to a specified number of years, as the Board may determine. Let them be distributed as follows: One Corporate Member for each state organization of Congregational churches; one for every forty churches or major fraction thereof in any state or territory; and one for every \$4,000 or major fraction thereof donated by any state or territory. This distribution would give a present membership of two hundred and thirty-six, but increasing as churches and contributions increase. Then let the churches in their state or territorial organizations nominate by ballot men for Corporate Members, and let the Board elect those nominated, as it does now those nominated by committee.

**SCHEDULE DISTRIBUTING CORPORATE MEMBERS OF THE AMERICAN BOARD ACCORDING TO STATES, CHURCHES, AND CONTRIBUTIONS, EXCLUDING LEGACIES :**

1. One member for every State Association.
  2. One member for every forty churches, or major fraction thereof.
  3. One member for every \$4,000 contributed and major fraction thereof.
- (Minutes of American Board for 1886. Year-Book for 1887.)

STATE.	Churches.	Members.	Donations.	Present Corporate Members.	PROPORTIONATE DISTRIBUTION.			
					States.	Chur'h's	Dona- tions.	Total.
Alabama .....	20	1,261	\$ 95 76	1	1	1	0	2
Arizona .....	3	102	13 30	0	1	0	0	1
Arkansas .....	9	333	5 60	0	0	0	0	0
California .....	114	7,308	5,117 81	8	1	3	1	5
Colorado .....	31	1,872	1,109 73	0	1	1	0	2
Connecticut .....	297	55,404	50,905 69	25	1	7	13	21
Dakota .....	140	4,461	1,034 14	1	2 <sup>18</sup>	4	0	6
District of Columbia.....	4	1,119	1,281 06	3	0	0	0	0
Florida .....	29	534	170 89	0	1	1	0	2
Georgia .....	18	1,604	59 71	1	1	1	0	2
Idaho .....	1	14	00 00	0	0	0	0	0
Illinois .....	251	27,695	25,079 68	18	1	6	6	13
Indiana .....	33	2,089	486 77	2	1	1	0	2
Indian Territory .....	12	198	6 32	0	1	0	0	1
Iowa .....	261	19,917	5,991 31	6	1	7	1	9
Kansas .....	189	9,242	1,507 77	1	1	5	0	6
Kentucky .....	12	326	12 03	0	0	0	0	0
Louisiana .....	19	1,472	20 00	0	1	1	0	2
Maine .....	244	21,111	12,720 68	6	1	6	3	10
Maryland .....	2	272	333 03	0	0	0	0	0
Massachusetts .....	536	94,987	138,558 57	71	1	13	35	49
Michigan .....	282	19,832	9,604 86	8	1	7	2	10
Minnesota .....	145	10,243	6,238 29	5	1	5	2	8
Mississippi .....	8	168	5 00	0	1	0	0	1
Missouri .....	79	6,406	4,414 42	3	1	2	1	4
Montana .....	6	207	00 00	0	0	0	0	0
Nebraska .....	155	6,452	1,502 17	0	1	4	0	5
Nevada .....	1	45	19 75	0	0	0	0	0
New Hampshire.....	188	19,943	10,683 90	6	1	5	3	9
New Jersey .....	25	3,563	4,585 35	6	1	1	1	3
New Mexico .....	7	102	9 40	0	0	0	0	0
New York .....	261	37,501	37,478 41	18	1	7	9	17
North Carolina.....	16	1,004	19 04	0	1	0	0	1
Ohio .....	228	26,739	11,652 70	11	1	6	3	10
Oregon .....	27	1,116	235 70	0	1	1	0	2
Pennsylvania.....	90	8,150	1,659 27	2	1	2	0	3
Rhode Island.....	28	5,883	11,118 25	7	1	1	3	5
South Carolina.....	3	304	10 00	0	0	6	0	0
Tennessee .....	22	1,115	63 30	0	1	1	0	2
Texas .....	15	612	179 25	0	1	0	0	1
Utah .....	4	218	3 25	0	1	0	0	1
Vermont .....	198	19,775	15,257 23	8	1	5	4	10
Virginia .....	2	143	94 50	1	0	0	0	0
Washington Territory..	51	1,196	111 95	0	1	1	0	2
West Virginia.....	2	145	12 72	0	0	0	0	0
Wisconsin .....	201	13,982	7,254 58	5	1	5	2	8
Wyoming .....	8	294	00 00	0	0	0	0	0
Forty-Seven.....	4277	436,379	\$376,596 66	223	36	110	89	236

<sup>18</sup> Divided, in view of two states.



## FEASIBILITY OF THE PLAN.

All our state and territorial organizations meet at least once a year, and can readily make such nominations. It does not change the charter or interrupt the legal continuity of the Board. The Board has acquired a legal personality of the utmost value in the prosecution of its work, which makes its bills as good as gold to its missionaries in every land. Against any change in the charter may be urged its "historic value," its "commercial value," and "uniformity of administration." Our proposed plan does not contemplate a change in the charter.

It is true that bare nomination by the churches does not cover the organic relation wholly, as the election of Corporate Members by the state bodies would, but the nomination would put the Board into substantially the same organic connection with the churches. The needed election by the Board, in order to preserve legal continuity, would not prevent the nominees from being the representatives of the churches.

The change could be easily effected. The state organizations could nominate and send the men with their credentials to the Annual Meetings of the Board. These credentials could be referred to a committee, and action taken on their report. The plan is easily understood and can be readily carried out.

The present Corporate Members could be retained until the adjustment is effected by filling vacancies, or such of their number from any state as should not be named in a vote of retention or acceptance might resign for the good of the cause, and their vacancies could be filled by nomination. Details can easily be arranged, if the Board desires to relieve itself of its abnormal position and come into the closest relations with the churches.

## THIS PLAN NOT NEW.

Apparently in response to the report made in 1872 by a

committee of the General Association of Connecticut, already referred to, "the Prudential Committee. . . . decided, after careful deliberation, to call the attention of the Board to the nature of its organization, and to submit to its wisdom the inquiry whether any modification is practicable, and at the same time expedient." The reasons assigned for their action have been emphasized since then. They say that "they bring forward this question, not because of any urgent demand for its consideration from the churches, nor because of any embarrassment which they have felt in administering the trust committed to them, but because there has been for many years an impression in some minds that a closer fellowship with the churches will make the organization more effective, and because the very absence of any pressure for a change makes it all the easier and safer to do whatever may seem desirable." Then they suggest a plan, saying: "The Prudential Committee suppose it to be practicable to adopt a rule whereby, (1), the number of Corporate Members shall be fixed at two hundred or more 'active members;' (2), that one-half of these shall be chosen on the basis of contributions; (3), that the other half shall be chosen on the nomination of our State Congregational bodies—the nominations to be (say) thrice the number of the vacancies, so that the election by the Board shall be substantial, not formal merely," etc.<sup>19</sup> The committee to which the paper of Secretary Treat containing this proposal was referred, reported in 1876. They dismissed the proposal in seven lines "as complicated, liable to divers frictions, and deficient in that facility of operation which is essential to the best results."<sup>20</sup>

It has now become painfully evident that the simplicity of a close corporation, rejecting this suggestion of closer fellowship with the churches, might do for a bank, but not for the conduct of missions for the churches. While rejecting responsible connection with the churches, that very committee

<sup>19</sup> Annual Report, 1875, xv. xx.

<sup>20</sup> Report xxxiv.

reported a series of resolutions, the fifth of which is, in part, "that the Prudential Committee be instructed to make special efforts to interest the ministers and churches of the Western States in the missionary work."<sup>21</sup> The churches were to be allowed no voice, but urged to give men and money!

#### THE CHURCHES WILL BE HEARD.

Ten years have given urgency to the voice of the few, and increased their number to many. The question has passed "the absence of pressure," and must now be decided in the heat of controversy, but it must be decided. The Board cannot go on in the efficient simplicity of a close corporation separated from the churches. It must come into responsible connection with them in some way. These words are ominous:

The churches should await the action of that meeting [the Annual Meeting of 1887], even if right decisions are not reached in the meantime. While it now seems as if further postponement beyond that date could not be tolerated, the opportunity should be awaited. . . . So long as it is intended to use the constitutional methods of discussion and voting, is it not advisable to resort to material pressure by refusing supplies?

Regard should be had to —

The serious responsibility of weakening a great organization suddenly, and of adopting measures which may signify the creation of a new society without deliberate and concerted action. Such a course should not be entered on until it is shown beyond a peradventure that the difficulty is too great to allow further co-operation.<sup>22</sup>

The relief in councils pressed by some is certain to be rejected as inadequate, irresponsible, contradictory, confusing, and uncongregational, in that it makes a small council determine the theology for missionaries for the whole body of affiliated churches. Yet the growing voice of the churches will be heard.

#### OUR FATHERS AND COUNCILS.

It may be pressed, as it has been, that councils are the peculiar Congregational remedy inherited from the fathers. But this claim is at best only partially true, and rests on a mis-

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* xxxv.

<sup>22</sup> *Andover Review*, 197.

apprehension of our early history, as we have elsewhere shown. At first a council was largely the eye and ear of the state, that its right hand might regulate ecclesiastical affairs according to the last chapter of the Cambridge Platform. When church and state became separated, Congregationalism relied for a time on occasional councils, but soon instituted stated fellowship of the churches, district, state and national, so that the voice of all our churches can now be heard in matters which concern them all. The churches are prepared to conduct missions.

#### ADVANTAGES OF THE REPRESENTATIVE PLAN.

We may state some of the advantages of adopting substantially the plan suggested and dismissed more than ten years ago, with scant consideration.

1. The plan brings the American Board into closer fellowship with the churches. The churches will feel that the Board belongs to them, and is a part of their work; and the Board will no longer tell what great things it is doing, but what the churches are doing, in evangelizing the world.

2. The plan brings the Board into harmony with the principles of our polity. It will no longer be a splendid but abnormal growth, but instead an efficient, organic channel through which the churches do their common foreign missionary work by their own representatives.

3. The plan makes the Board an ecclesiastical body representing the entire body of churches, and responsible to them. It would no longer be a non-ecclesiastical body doing ecclesiastical business. It would be the total body of the sustaining churches acting in concert in fulfilling the great commission of the risen Lord. This plan, if it had been adopted in 1876, would have forestalled the present difficulties. It is not too late to prevent others.

4. The plan can be easily effected, leaving the methods of administration, which long experience has perfected, unchanged. By making the Board ecclesiastical, they are made ecclesiastical.

5. The Corporate Members become the best agents for the Board. They would report officially to their respective bodies, explaining matters to them, and asking instructions. This would be far more wholesome and effective than the present method. For now a Secretary comes from an independent corporation, speaks in a general way of its work in a mass meeting, not in a deliberative body, where no one has a right to inquire into particulars, or call for specific explanations.

6. The churches could on this plan instruct their Corporate Members, as representatives, to vote as their churches desired. The churches would thus feel that they were carrying on the work of missions according to the commission given them, and would not relieve their hearts and hands by the thought that an independent Board, in whose management they have neither part nor lot, is doing the work for them according to its own best wisdom.

7. There can be no permanent peace until the churches do their own work. No compromise measure will endure. Let the work of the churches be laid upon the churches; and God will give his people peace.

8. The churches can be trusted with the work. All questions of orthodoxy may be safely committed to their hands. Their faith is a surer guard against error than creed or corporation.

#### CONCLUSION.

It is said that the oldest missionary society in America should have to pause in its grand career, to adjust itself to the churches that have been its chief supporters. Yet it must remove the strangest anomaly in ecclesiastical history, that the free and independent churches of the land, so jealous of their liberties, should have bound themselves by the hands of voluntary societies so tightly that their only duty in evangelizing the world is to give men and money, with absolutely no voice whatever in the management of the work.

The most democratic of all the denominations has chanced to employ in its service the least democratic of all the missionary organizations; one that does not represent

the churches, is not constituted by the churches, has no responsibility to the churches, is under no control or direction of the churches, and would be able to say, if it should be so unwise, We do not care what the churches may think concerning our work or its methods, and we do not propose to ask their opinion.<sup>23</sup>

In 1876 it formally declined to give the churches voice in its management. It cannot again refuse to hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. And there is no other way of hearing the voice of all the churches but through their chosen representatives, nominated and elected in some such way as we have indicated. For the best adjustment of our beloved American Board to the churches that support it, let all good people devoutly pray.

NOTE.—The writer is indebted to the Rev. Robert Stapleton, lately from England, pastor of the Congregational church at Imlay City, Michigan, for the following important facts:

“In England there is an organic union between the local church and the London Missionary Society. Each County Union (a similar body to our local association or conference), elects two of its members to act on the General Board of Directors, also a Special Delegate who meets with the Executive. The General Board of Directors nominates the Executive Board and the officers of the Society. Thus the Society is virtually managed by the churches. Again, the County Union, through its officers and the pastors of the churches, arranges for the visit of a missionary, once a year, to each local church. He gives a description of the work upon his own field. A knowledge of the great needs of the heathen world is thus brought home to the hearts of Christians, by one who has been in contact with those needs.”

The plan we have presented brings our churches into similar organic connection with our foreign missionary society, so that the American Board will be virtually managed by the churches, when the plan is adopted.

<sup>23</sup> *Christian Union*, March 31, 1887.