

# THE PRESBYTERIAN AND REFORMED REVIEW

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## I.

### RECENT DISCUSSION IN MATERIALISM.

THERE are phases of contemporary materialism which have little in common with the doctrines of ancient and mediæval materialists, and which in point of subtlety and philosophical attractiveness are quite in accord with the advanced position of nineteenth century thought. The idealist of to-day flatters himself that he avoids the inconsistencies of Berkeley and Fichte, so the materialist smiles at the mention of Priestly, D'Alembert, and Holbach. But these growths respectively in idealistic and materialistic thought have not been parallel. Idealism has tended in the last thirty years to withdraw its gaze from the thought-ultimate as a monistic conception, to perception as a dualistic relation, that is from cosmic to psychological idealism; while materialism has tended in quite the opposite direction, *i. e.*, from the crude postulate of matter in bulk to the search for an ultimate materialistic principle, that is from psychological to cosmic materialism. Each has strengthened its flank and the battle is now joined between psychological idealism and metaphysical materialism.

Spiritualism has gained vastly by this change of base. As long as the ontology of spirit rested upon a dogmatic assertion of universal mind, there was no weapon at hand wherewith to attack the corresponding assertion of universal matter. I have as good right to assert an universal as you have and *chacun à son goût* is the rule of choice. But now that philosophy is learning to value a single fact more than a detailed system, and is sacrificing its systems to the vindication of facts, it is spiritualism and not materialism which is profiting by the advances of science. Materialism has appealed to the metaphysics of force, spiritualism has appealed to consciousness

### III.

#### COUNTRY MISSIONS.

DO such things as Country Missions exist?

When we talk about missions, along the line of our general experience, there comes up before us a very distinct picture. It is made up of dark alleys and slimy courts and tumbling tenements, of poverty and ignorance and filth, of general wretchedness and far more general godlessness. Or, a picture of another kind—a little more respectable perhaps, but none the less distinct. It is made up of decent streets and houses and decent people, but people decently without the Gospel and decently indifferent to having it in their midst. Perhaps they are foreigners; perhaps they are native Americans; perhaps they are workingmen; perhaps they are trades-people. Be that as it may, they are in need of having the Word of God brought to them, in need of the sent-Gospel, the missioned-Truth. And they, together with the class first mentioned, constitute what we generally mean when we talk about missions.

But it is evident, at once, that these are peculiarly city pictures. We do not think of them as being possible in the country. In fact, when we say "country," streets and alleys and courts and tenements disappear. The picture loses its background and ceases to exist. We are anxious, however, to have it understood that in spite of this fact, essentially the same mission conditions exist in the country as in the city. We must remember that what makes a mission condition of things is not courts and alleys and tenement flats; nor even ignorance of mind and poverty of means, but an absence of the Gospel. An unevangelized community, wherever it be, is *ipso facto* in a mission condition. "Missions" means simply the sending of the Gospel at the cost of the sender. Well, there are conditions in the country which require the sending of the Gospel in just as much a mission way as in foreign or home or city fields. That is to say, there are communities in the country where the Gospel is not, communities unevangelized, communities that need the Gospel sent to them at the cost of the sender. Such things as "Country Missions" do exist.

Shall we make it plain what they are and how they have come to be?

I. We hear ministers in the city frequently talk about the drain that is being made upon the down-town churches because of the centrifugal movement of the population. Their people are moving all the time further and further away from the home church, and becoming thus less and less able to attend its services. And then, when we talk about the way in which people used to go great distances to attend divine worship, in all weathers and in spite of all difficulties, the city ministers say the times are degenerating and people are not willing to make the sacrifices for God's house and worship which they once were willing to make. But country ministers will have to confess essentially to the same condition of affairs. There is not perhaps the same centrifugal movement of the people away from the central church; but there is, noticeably of late years, the same degeneracy of inclination to go considerable distances to church.

By way of illustration, if the presumption of dragging in one's own church be pardoned, the writer is told that twenty years ago the roads leading to the town where he preaches would be of a Sunday black with teams and saddled horses and people on foot, coming five and ten miles to church. That is not the case now. There are families plenty, much nearer than five miles, but a distance now of two or three miles makes them very irregular in their coming. Again, under the pastorate of one of the writer's predecessors, a certain one of the outlying summer Sunday-schools used to assemble in the morning for a regular session, dismiss, line up along the road, take off its shoes and stockings and march into the village, re-shoe-and-stockings itself and go into church and then, after church, walk home. There are no such performances now. If there is a summer Sunday-school in the neighborhood its members generally content themselves with that and leave the town church alone. In fact, during a recent summer, there were two families who, from five miles away, walked into church and then back to the afternoon session of an outlying school in their neighborhood; and so strange a sight was it that it excited universal comment. And one summer was evidently enough for them, for long before the good weather had ceased, they had stopped.

Again, some few years ago, one of the writer's elders and himself made a reconnoissance of a little settlement, three miles equally distant from their own church and another church in an adjoining Presbytery, with reference to the possible establishment of a Sunday-school. They found, of the twelve families in the neighborhood, not more than two went to either church, and none of the children had been in attendance upon Sunday-school since the former school in the settlement had been given up. That was only a question of

three miles either way. And it was from this very same settlement in former days that the above-mentioned Sabbath day's journey was made by the bare-foot school.

In short, people in the country will not go to-day the distance to church which they formerly thought nothing of going; so that communities that used to flow with Sabbath regularity into the central church stand to-day stagnant, without the Gospel and unevangelized, as far as the preached Word is concerned.

II. We hear ministers in the city say: The people with whom the churches have to deal are not the same class of people as a generation ago. They are not as susceptible to church influences, not as receptive of the truth, not as much in harmony as people used to be with the Sabbath day and the services of God's house. This, of course, is not saying that the Church is declining, that her own people are not as grand and good, as energetic and evangelical as ever. But the community around the church—the people with whom the churches come in contact—seem harder to reach and influence than before.

Essentially the same thing is true in the country. The movement of the farmers is into the country town. There comes a time when they are too old to work their fields. They rent them out on shares and take up their abode in the village, living on their rentals, and the little that they have laid by in a hard life's work. They now come perhaps more regularly to church; but a different sort of family has come into their old place on the farm, that does not come to church at all. It may be a Roman Catholic family, in which case you cannot touch them. Often they are families hostile to religion—indifferent, careless, godless, and consequently in general unapproachable. The writer has, in the course of his outlying work, met with new-comer families where there was not a Bible in the house, where they would not allow a cottage prayer meeting under their roof, and would not go to it when it was next door—and this in a corner settlement where one of his present elders was born and brought up.

Most frequently these new-comers are poor and respectable working people—perhaps members of church, but simply that and nothing more—while they have all the modern prejudices that go against capital and wealth. Their landlord, from whom they are renting the farm, is very likely a member of the village church. He is relatively to them rich. They do not feel on a level with him sufficiently to go to his church. The families farming around them are very likely, to a large degree, strangers to them—perhaps owners of their own places. They cannot feel enough on an equality with them to go to their church and sit along side of them in their pews. So they do not go anywhere at all.

In short, there is in the country as in the city, a movement on the part of the outside community away from the church. It may come from one cause or another. It may have behind it one excuse or another. But it exists. It is there, and the consequence is that these communities stand to-day without the Gospel and unevangelized. There is in the country, therefore, an essentially mission condition of things that has, in some way or other, to be met. The minister in the country cannot afford, any more than his brother in the city, to let this state of affairs lie neglected at his door. It has to be reached out after and taken hold of and done something with. The future of the country just as well as of the city church depends upon what becomes of and comes out of these Gospel-less places.

Now we think we shall not be going too far when we say there will have to be done for these country mission places, *essentially* just what is being done for the mission places in the city. (1) *The Church service, in some form or other, will have to be taken to them*, and by "Church service" is meant not simply the summer Sunday-school, which is good enough in its way, but, what is known in the country as the distinctive "preaching service," conducted by the minister himself. We know that many of our brethren in the country differ with us at this point, especially when it is pressed to the length of locating mission chapels in these communities. They say that the more you preach in these settlements around you the less these settlements are going to come to your central church. But the fact already is, however much we may regret it, that these settlements do not now come to the central church, and they will continue not to come in spite of all the preaching which the central church affords. And, more than that, if the Gospel be not taken to them, not only will they not be won to the church, but the time will come when the central church will have little or nothing of a constituency outside of the immediate village in the midst of which it is. And the surrounding country which the central church was supposed to evangelize will be occupied by some more aggressive denomination, or at last in its desperate need be handed over pure and simple to the tender mercies of the Presbytery or perhaps to the care of Synodical Sustentation, or even the Domestic Mission Board, to be handled like the regions of the West.

But (2), *This preaching service will have to be taken to these communities in a certain way.*

(a) It will have to be furnished without money compulsion. The preaching will have to be done freely by the minister of the central church in addition to his regular work at home. The Sunday-school in connection with the service will have to be equipped by

the church. The people of course should be asked to contribute to the current expenses, and might be urged towards self-support, but should be given to understand that the church pledges to them the school's continuance, and guarantees them such preaching services as the pastor may be able to supply. If a chapel is built, whatever the people may give towards it, the church should see that the building is put up and kept in good repair. There must be no money necessity forced upon the community where the work is to be done.

(b) The undertaking will have to be reasonable—by which is meant that it should not be attempted if it is beyond the requirements of the place. The writer knows of a chapel in a neighboring Presbytery built at the earnest desire of a certain member of the local church at a cost of some \$2500, and placed on a piece of his own farm away from everything else in the world. That chapel to-day is virtually dead, and its work has ceased. Rightly so—for it should not have been put up at all, unless it could have been placed where it would be surrounded by a constituency on which it could rely for support. The undertaking will have to be in the shape of a Sunday-school only, until there can be developed the addition of a preaching service. The preaching will have to be done through the week, until services can be arranged for on the Sabbath day. The district school-house or a hall or unoccupied rooms will have to suffice for accommodation, until the place is ready for a permanent chapel of its own. In other words, it will have to be in a district where it is really needed, and where it will be really supported. It will have to be in a place far enough away or peculiarly enough situated to have the people beyond the likelihood of coming to the central church, and this central church will have to be strong enough in itself to establish such a work and maintain it after it is established. In short, this preaching service will have to be taken to them in such a way as to last, and be a settled service in the place.

Now, it is readily admitted that all this may seem the simple vision of a country parson. The writer has consequently taken upon himself to gather up the experience of his own Presbytery in this country mission matter. In that Presbytery there are some twenty-nine pastorates and some four stated supplies.\* To these thirty-three pastors and stated supplies was addressed a series of questions, the answers to which have been formulated, and are here presented, in order to show that in the area covered by the Presbytery, a country mission condition of things exists.

1. The first question had to do with the matter of outlying Sunday-schools, and was as follows: Has your church any outlying Sun-

\*These are essentially the figures of the last "Minutes," though compiled before the "Minutes" were issued.

day-schools? If so, how many? How far from the church? How long continued during the year? What is the average attendance?

The relevancy of this question is evident. If there is no mission condition of things around these country churches, we would expect this question to be answered in the negative. Without any such condition to appeal to them, these churches would simply content themselves with their own local work. There is no reason for the existence of outlying Sunday-schools, except on the theory that the children brought into them would otherwise be without the Gospel—unevangelized. If a church can evangelize all its surrounding community with its own local school, then that community is not in a mission condition. If it cannot so evangelize it, then it is. Now here are the answers to this first question. From the thirty-three pastors and stated supplies addressed, thirty-two made reply. (1) Of these thirty-two replying, sixteen reported one or more outlying schools, aggregating thirty-four, or an average of more than two schools for each church. (2) Of these sixteen churches, five kept up one or more of their schools all the year through. (3) Of these thirty-four schools, the average distance from the central church was about three miles. (4) And the average attendance was anywhere from twenty-five up to one hundred and one hundred and ten.

2. The second question put before them was: Have you any preaching points outside of your own church, either in connection with outlying Sunday-schools or not? If so, how many? How far from the church? How often is service held? What is the usual attendance?

The significance of this question is also apparent. Sunday-schools might simply mean that there were children in the surrounding neighborhood who could not come to church; and that might be thought to have but little bearing on the mission condition of the community. We think, of course, it has great bearing. But granting that it is subordinate, here is this matter of preaching points. Certainly, if a country church has reached out around itself with the preached Word, it means that the surrounding country is without the Gospel to an imperative degree. Here are the answers to the question: (1) From the thirty-two replies, sixteen churches reported one or more preaching points, aggregating twenty-four—corresponding thus very nearly to the figures in the Sunday-school replies, showing in other words that most of the outlying Sunday-schools are also preaching stations. (2) At these twenty-four points services are held at eleven once a month, at eight twice a month, at one three times a month, at two four times a month and at two occasionally. (3) The average distance is about the same as in the case of the Sunday-schools—about three miles. (4) The average attend-

ance is considerably more—not as low as twenty-five in any case, and above one hundred in many cases.\*

3. But a third question was asked. Are there any mission chapels connected with your church? If so, how many? How far from the central church? How often and in what way used? When erected? Are they deeded (as property) to your church? Are they under the control (ecclesiastically) of your Session?

The significance of this question is also evident. If the mission character of the communities surrounding these country churches is sufficiently needy to demand a permanent organization in shape of a building, and if the surrounding settlements are sufficiently populated to justify such a permanent location of the work, then country missions assume in relation to these churches proportions they would not otherwise have. (1) Of the thirty-two replies, ten churches reported one or more mission chapels, erected at their preaching points, aggregating thirteen buildings. (2) Of these thirteen buildings, ten are deeded over to the trustees of the central church as the property of the said church; and nine are under the ecclesiastical control of the Session.† While the writer knows that in the deeds of three it is stipulated that should the people connected with the chapel ever organize themselves into a church, the church is to be of the Presbyterian order, in which case the property will be deeded to the new organization by the central church.

4. It will be noticed that all the questions so far have had simple reference to facts. They show what the churches are doing, and what the churches are doing shows the need there is of something being done. But another line of questions was placed before the brethren. They were asked their opinion (1) as to whether they thought the influence being exerted by these preaching points was beneficial or not, especially in the matter of the attendance at the central church and the spiritual good of the community in which they were located; and (2) as to whether, in their view, it was worth while for country churches to put such things as chapels at their preaching points.

Of the sixteen churches having preaching points, all have replied in some form or other to Question (1). Of these, seven are doubtful as to the influence exerted by these preaching points on the attend-

\* In one case additional services are held in the poor-house and the county jail, and, in one case, preaching service is held once a month in one of several surrounding union schools. The testimony of the Presbytery, however, is decidedly against the plan of union schools. In more than one case union schools have been prepared, furnished and put into working order by Presbyterians only to be handed over in the end to another denomination.

† The reply in the case of two of these buildings was, however, rather uncertain as to the financial and ecclesiastical control on the part of the central church.



ance at the central church, some saying they have not helped the church attendance, others that they have decreased it, and two even questioning whether they have had any beneficial spiritual influence on the communities where they are located. On the other hand, seven are of the opinion that these preaching points have helped the church attendance, some saying decidedly so. While twelve say without hesitation that whether the attendance at the central church has been increased or not, the spiritual influence on the communities at these preaching points has been prominently for good. As to Question (2) with reference to the "worth-while" of mission chapels, twenty-seven replies were received out of the entire thirty-two. They are perhaps the most interesting of all, as they go to show what the views of country pastors are in reference to permanent aggressive work in this matter of country missions. Of the twenty-seven who made reply, four, while not questioning the wisdom of preaching points, are doubtful about the wisdom of such things as permanent chapels. There are five who are free to say decidedly that they are not worth while. There are seven who say they may be, on certain conditions, which conditions amount generally to this: a real need of them, a real prospect of their support, and a discreet management of their affairs. There are eleven who say decidedly and unqualifiedly "Yes." And of these, six belong to the ten who have chapels connected with their churches, and have had thus chapel experience in their own individual cases. Of the four remaining out of these ten, there is one who says "No;" there is one who declines to express an opinion, while there are two who say "Yes," on conditions, which conditions are about the same as above. In short, of the ten who have had chapel experience, but one single one says that chapel work is a failure.

To sum up then the experience of the writer's Presbytery: a mission state of things exists around its country churches. That mission state of things these churches are meeting (1) with Sunday-schools, (2) with preaching stations, (3) with chapel organizations. And the general testimony is that the work which is being done is being blessed of the Lord.

Our own views are very decided.

I. We have no question that there does exist in the country this mission condition of affairs. We have seen it—felt it—come in contact with it in our own country work.

II. We have no question but that this mission condition of affairs should be met and that quickly. We can see no reason why the church in the country, as well as in the city, should not be aggressive. It is the church's normal condition. It was the church's primitive condition. Why should we in the country allow ourselves to be

abnormal and unapostolic? People say you cannot make any impression on country people. Very good, if country people have degenerated to such a callous state of heart and soul, it is largely because the country churches have made no effort to impress them.

If a church wants its people put to work and kept at work and blessed in their work, there is no better way of meeting its desire than just this way. Every country church has, on its outskirting borders, some of its people who are finding it more and more difficult to take part in the work of the central church. They need work of some kind. Give them this work to do, and they will be thankful, and the church at home will be blessed in return by their quickened spiritual life. We are persuaded that in the case of many who are not in favor of this country mission work, their views have come largely from the fact that they do not know the mission needs that lie around them—nor the mission workers who lie away unknown and undeveloped in their congregations.

If it be argued that such work, as has been sketched in this paper lies beyond the time and strength of any one pastor who would be faithful to his own particular people, then it may be replied that the church is coming unquestionably to more of a parish method in its work—and nowhere is there a better field for that method than in these country charges. We have had ably set before us, in recent books and articles, the need that city congregations are in of concentrating their forces around a central church, which, under the working management of a corps of ministers, should radiate its evangelizing power into the surrounding localities. But in the country everything is already concentrated, and waiting only for the ministers who will go in and do the work. If any churches are so situated as to give an opportunity for the carrying out of this parish idea, they are the churches in the country. It would take a great deal of readjusting among the city churches to get them ready for such methods. In the country, readjusting would not be needed. By their very local relation to each other and to the outlying region, they are already adjusted to these methods. They have the central point in the village church. They have the circumference points in the surrounding settlements. All they seem to need is the radiating influence to connect the circumference with the centre. And that they may have by a wise and judicious, but energetic and persevering employment of this parish method. If again it be argued that country churches are not able, as city churches are, to support a plurality of ministers over a single charge—that they find it difficult properly to support one, then the reply is easy that they would be much better able to give proper support to one or even more ministers if their outlying localities were properly developed,

the people gathered into the church, and the members of the congregation itself stimulated by this work to a proper sense of their responsibility to the population which lies around them. Country churches should not be put down as necessarily indolent and impotent. We are sure they are possessed of abundant possibilities in the way of working and giving. If they have a bad name to-day it is because it has been given to them by those who neglected to draw these possibilities out. But should it seem for the present to be beyond their power to come up to this high level of parish work, in the support of more than one minister, they could, at little additional cost, throw their field open to young assistants from our seminaries and training schools. No better place could be found for young men to learn the art of reaching and holding men than the place that throws them in contact with country folk. It is in many ways a testing place. It is in many ways a training place.

If a young worker for Christ would have himself taught the lessons of simplicity and sincerity and persevering patience, here is certainly a place where they may be taught. And if even this should seem to be impracticable, there is the plan of field-grouping by which neighboring ministers share the preaching and pastoral care of mission points lying between their churches. If the personal reference be pardoned, we may say one of the chapels connected with our church is so cared for, and has prospered under the care. But the desire on the part of our chapel people in general, for stated and frequent preaching at their several chapel points, has led the young men of our church to provide financially for a minister's help during the six months of the year (October to April), when country work produces the best results. Under this arrangement regular preaching service will be held in two of the chapels every Sabbath—at one in the afternoon and at the other in the evening.

We have been led to this paper by the belief that this matter concerns the church at large. That the country churches are interested in this question stands to reason. It involves their present efficiency and their future existence. But none the less does it come home to the churches in the city. For to them are coming by the slow but sure flow of modern populations the young men and women who are born and raised in the country. If they are neglected by the country churches, into what will they develop when they have drifted into town? If they are reached after, and won and trained, could there be a better accession to city Christianity than they will make when the city becomes their home?

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