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THOUGHTS IN PROSPECT OF THE  
PHILADELPHIA COUNCIL.

TEN years ago, the present writer crossed the Atlantic, having been appointed by his Church, along with the late Rev. William Arnot, to convey greetings to the reunited Church at Philadelphia, as well as to other Presbyterian Churches in the United States and in Canada. His companion was a great Phil-Americanist, if one may coin so awkward a word, and strongly disposed to view with the most friendly eyes every thing characteristic of the great democratic Continent. He was one of the men who have risen, but who, like Moses in days of yore, or like Robert Burns, Hugh Miller, and David Livingstone in days more recent, never lose the feeling of brotherhood with the class from which they have sprung. All honour to such men, and to William Arnot among the rest, who never kick the ladder by which they have risen, nor despise the undistinguished toiling multitude in whose ranks they were first enrolled. One thing that made America interesting to good Mr. Arnot was, that in that country the working man, if well-principled and industrious, had a better chance than at home—carried less weight on his back in the battle of life—had a brighter prospect for the evening of his days—more likelihood of sitting in the gloaming under his vine and under his fig-tree. It was a characteristic of our dear friend that though he was a thoroughly spiritual man, “who lived by faith of joys unseen,” and felt, as Chalmers put it on a memorable occasion, the littleness of time and the vastness of eternity, he had no fanatical disregard of the secularities in their relation to moral and spiritual life. He believed, with Agur, that for serving God as well as enjoying life, a middle position between poverty and riches was the desirable lot. He knew that in America a larger proportion of the population enjoyed the means of comfort than in Britain; and one of his objects was, to ascertain more thoroughly than he had done on an earlier visit, whether this only made men more intensely secular, or whether it gave a more robust and healthy

## CHURCH ORGANISATION IN FOREIGN MISSIONS.

IN a late article by the present writer upon the naturalisation of the Church in our foreign mission-fields,\* it was suggested that in many places it might be found wise, at the first, to devolve the government and instruction of the infant churches upon a bench of co-equal elders, who should divide the work of the pastorate among themselves until such time as the church should be prepared for that separation, in some measure, of the functions of the teaching from those of the merely ruling elder, which has obtained among us. It is proposed, in the present paper, to discuss this question more fully than was possible in the former article.

It is admitted, to begin with, that there are doubtless countries occupied by our foreign missionaries where the system of the home pastorate may be adopted with little or no modification. Such, for example, is the case in those Romish countries like Mexico, Chili, &c., where the conditions of society are not materially different from those which prevail among ourselves. But in most of the heathen lands where our missionaries are labouring, we believe the case to be different. There may be, indeed, individual communities,—in such countries, for example, as India,—where, as in Calcutta or Bombay, it may be possible at once to introduce the very form of church organisation which we have in Scotland or America. In these countries, however, we believe that such cases will be found to be exceptional. We fear there is reason to think that our missionaries have often been in too much haste to introduce the one-man-pastorate of the European and American Churches, and that the growth of a church bearing the true individual character of the particular people or race has been thereby seriously retarded. Fixed in the conviction that the primitive form of church government was Presbyterian, men have apparently jumped to the conclusion that therefore the *present* form of Presbyterianism is the primitive and apostolic arrangement,—a point which, we may venture to affirm, has not yet been established, nor is likely soon to be. Under this belief, they have felt not only that, if they established churches, they must give them a Presbyterian form of government,—in which they have been right,—but that it must be that particular development of Presbyterian principles which has obtained among ourselves, wherein, as it seems to us, they have often been as clearly wrong. For, to take any one of our full-grown ecclesiastical systems, and attempt to set it up bodily in our heathen fields, regardless of the widely differing conditions of the case, is, we submit, a grave mistake. It is a mistake, because, in so far as any such system is well suited for us in the West, it must be, by pre-

\* See *Catholic Presbyterian*, Nov. 1879, p. 347.

sumption, in some degree unsuited for, say, Asia or Africa. It is a mistake, again, because we thereby needlessly perpetuate and extend, in the visible Church of Christ, divisions and schisms which are contrary to the spirit of the Gospel; and we neglect a golden opportunity of returning to those elemental principles of polity for which,—as most Protestants, we think, must agree,—we have full apostolic sanction. In too many instances, moreover, the course pursued has proved a mistake by its practical working.

But it is time to endeavour to make good these assertions, and to point out, if possible, a more excellent way. What principles shall guide us in the organising of new churches among the heathen? This is, we admit, no question to be answered in a spirit of hasty dogmatism. It is often much easier to point out what is wrong, than to indicate or carry out practically that which is right. With too much actual experience ourselves of the difficulties of the problem to assume the tones of infallibility, we venture to suggest the following principles:—

1. In all cases, churches should be organised at once. Where there may be even two or three families converted to the faith of Christ, they should, we judge, be in some fashion organised for the purposes of government, instruction, and worship. For this we have not only the self-evident principles of common wisdom, but the sanction of apostolic example. We read of the apostles that they did not wait, but apparently at once on the formation of a Christian community, ordained over them elders in every city (Acts xiv. 23; Titus i. 5). This, we believe, most Presbyterians at least will admit. When a Christian community is formed, we are to take from among them the men best fitted for the position, and make them elders of the churches. Such, indeed, we think, has been the practice in most, if not all Presbyterian missions; and in so far, we have but followed apostolic precedent.

2. But here the venerable precedent left us by the apostles has been too often abandoned. Instead of formally committing the instruction and government of the church to the elders thus chosen, missionaries have very commonly settled down and become themselves the pastors, after the European fashion, of the churches which they have organised. We only echo the admissions of many a missionary in such a position, when we say with emphasis that this ought not so to be. It is a state of things utterly abnormal. It is in glaring contrast to the practice of the apostles. It has worked badly, wherever it has been tried. It has greatly hindered, where it has not entirely prevented, the development of a vigorous and independent church life.

Testimony of the highest character might be adduced, upon this point, from those who have had experience on the ground, and know whereof they speak. Thus, in the Allahabad Conference of 1872-3, the Rev. Mr. Harding, missionary of the American Board to Bombay, said: "We believe it to be almost impossible to form vigorous, self-sustaining churches, while missionaries act as their pastors. The mis-

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sionary is generally supported by foreign funds ; and while he remains a pastor, the necessity and duty of self-support can hardly appear. Moreover, his position as dispenser of funds, his relation to paid assistants and teachers, and his general character as a foreigner, would cause his opinions to be yielded to as authority ; and self-government, under a feeling of responsibility to Christ, could hardly be realised."

The general prevalence of these missionary pastorates in many of our mission-fields has also prevented, to a great degree, the development of a distinctively native type of doctrine and order of worship. The converts from heathenism, receiving the Gospel year after year in forms learned in the Theological Halls of the West, have apparently come to think the form inseparable from the substance of doctrine. Out of such churches come preachers who not only preach a doctrine which is foreign—which of course they ought to do—but preach it in a foreign fashion, which as clearly they ought not to do, imitating sometimes, as we have had occasion to notice, not merely the theological phraseology, but even the grammatical blunders and foreign idioms of the missionary pastor ! Moreover, by these missionary pastorates the wide extension of the Gospel has been greatly hindered. It has kept the missionary at one place, when, having established a church, he ought to have moved on, as Paul did, and establish others. Instead of being able to say, with Paul, that he has "now no more place in those parts," and that thus he stretches himself "to preach the Gospel in the regions beyond," he finds that he still has very much place in the regions where he first began, as witness the two sermons on the Sabbath, the Bible class, and the weekly evening lecture to a native church to which he continues thus to minister, not for a few weeks or months, but for years, or for a life-time. To stretch himself "to the regions beyond" is almost impossible. The congregation, taught from its first beginning to depend upon the foreign missionary, feel that they fare hardly enough when the missionary leaves them even for a preaching tour of a few weeks. Let him speak of leaving them altogether to administer their own affairs, and they are filled with consternation. We could name churches where such a state of things has existed, till now a second generation of native Christians is on the ground ; and yet, despite the earnest efforts of the missionaries to establish over them a native pastorate, they are apparently as helplessly dependent on the missionary, for all pastoral care, as they were thirty years ago ! Can we imagine such a policy on the part of the apostles and primitive evangelists ? And had they done so, what would have been the result ? Had Paul, for example, felt that in view of the needs of the church at Philippi, he must spend his life with the Philippians, where had been his apostolate ?

But it is asked, with some confidence, what is the missionary to do ? In these churches in heathen lands, it may be, and often is, a long time before a man suitable for the office of a pastor can be found. What is to be done in the meanwhile ? Shall we leave the young church without

a pastor? We ask in reply, where in the New Testament is there any intimation that the apostles ordained pastors, in the modern sense of that word, over the churches which they formed? We read once and again of their ordaining "elders" in every church, and that, having done so, they left them and went elsewhere. Where is there the slightest hint that, at this early period, any one from among these elders was singled out and appointed by Paul to a position like that of the modern minister or pastor of a church, or that, until such an officer was found, they did not dare to leave the church? If, according to the Divine wisdom, the pastorate be so essential to the organisation and instruction of the church under *all* circumstances, that, without it, no church can be wisely left to itself, why have we no distinct directions on the subject in the Pastoral Epistles? Why are not the special qualifications of this officer added to those of the "bishop" (or elder) in the epistles to Timothy? Why did not Paul charge Titus to ordain a *minister* for every church before he left it, instead of merely—"elders"? For our part, we fail to see that, in the church as at first organised, there was any officer strictly corresponding to the modern pastor. Unless we are greatly mistaken, the pastoral office, as we now have it,—however good, useful, and necessary it may be for us, and for all fully developed churches,—was not in the original formation of the ministry of the church. It was a normal development from the original form of government and instruction by a number of co-equal elders. It seems to us to lie on the face of the inspired record, that Paul never waited until he could find a man fit to be, in the modern sense of the word, the pastor of a church, before he would leave it to itself. He ordained elders or bishops over each church, and then committed the whole work of teaching and ruling the flock to them, to divide the labours and responsibilities of the work among themselves as might seem most expedient. If this be so, what sufficient reason can be shown why, under circumstances precisely similar, the missionary of to-day should not go and do likewise? Have we any good reason to think that Paul would do differently to-day in most of our churches in India, China, or Africa,—that he would settle down to be the pastor of a young church, because he could not find the right man to fill the place occupied by the pastor of the West?

We return now to the question, what shall the missionary do? Shall he leave the young churches without a pastor, rather than himself assume the office? Unhesitatingly we answer, "Yes," if by this is meant the modern pastor, as set forth in our form of government. And yet we answer "No," in the primitive New Testament sense of the word. For what, in truth, is the eldership, rightly conceived, but a voluntary joint-pastorate of the church? We would have our missionaries, in this matter, follow in faith what we believe to be the inspired example. Let them, when they organise churches, ordain over them elders; and then, fearlessly "commending them to the Lord on whom they believe," stretch themselves "to the regions beyond" for the further extension of

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the Gospel. Nor, finally, are we to be understood as arguing that the missionary should thenceforward wholly cut loose such churches from his care and oversight. So far from this, these churches, like young children, will perhaps for some time require incessant care, advice, and direction from the missionary. He will, like Paul and Barnabas, "visit the churches" which he has organised, and "see how they do." The eldership will need instruction and guidance, and often the churches too.\* Moreover, recognising still the principle of development, he will seek gradually to raise up and train a class to be set apart for giving their whole time to labour in the word and doctrine, and supported therein, in due time, by the voluntary offerings of the Lord's people. Only, he should not commit the blunder of supposing that what is important, or even necessary to the full development of the adult man, is therefore, of necessary consequence, the best thing for an infant. For such a plan of church organisation under the conditions indicated, we believe not only that we have, as already argued, the high sanction of the example of divinely guided and inspired apostles, but also that we should find therein many notable advantages over the plans which have been commonly pursued.

For, in the first place, the churches would be trained, from the very first, to that independence and self-reliance which, under the usual system, has proved so hard to develop. Instead of being taught, as now, practically to rely on the strong arm of the foreign missionary, they would thus understand that on themselves rests the main responsibility of government and instruction.

This plan would also meet the vexatious, and,—as it has proved in some missions that we could name,—the hitherto insoluble problem of the support of a native pastor. The pecuniary question has been one of the main difficulties, thus far, in the establishment of independent churches in our foreign mission-fields. It is plain that if a man be set apart to give his whole time to the pastoral care of a church, he is rightfully entitled to a full support. But whence is this to be raised? Most of these young churches in India, China, and Africa are very poor. Fix the stipend as low as we will, they are not able to pay it. Shall the Church in America or Europe supplement their contribution? This is often done, and to the inexperienced might seem a very simple and

\* The people will need to be taught that they should submit themselves to such as are over them in the Lord, as is fit. In particular, the elders will be taught that they shall stately assemble the church for the worship of God in Christ; that they shall, according to the ability which the Lord may give them, instruct the people in the Word of God; and that they shall carefully watch the purity and the peace of the church. Under such conditions, we shall not look for the modern sermon as it has been developed among us. In many cases, the instruction will consist in simply reading for the people such parts of the Scripture as they can best understand, with such explanations and comments and applications to the practical life, as any of the elders,—or, after the example of the synagogue, any person in the church on whom the elder may call,—may be able to give.

excellent solution of the difficulty ; but, in fact, with this arrangement, difficulties only multiply. For example, what shall be the salary ? If, as has been often done, it be fixed at a point much higher than the average income of the people, this works great mischief. It elevates the pastor unduly above the average condition of the people of his church. It degrades the ministry, by making the pastorate an object of ambition to covetous and unworthy men. It makes the church, in many cases, despair, from the first, of reaching the position of self-support ; a moderate salary they might in time hope to be able to pay of themselves,—a high salary they, with good reason, look upon as unattainable. We affirm, without fear of contradiction, that no one thing has more effectively hindered the development of independent, self-sustaining native churches in many foreign fields, than the high salaries which, with mistaken wisdom, are paid to many of the native pastors and helpers from the treasuries of the home Churches. Shall we then give a low salary ? We shall not thereby escape serious difficulty ; men educated, even as pastors commonly are, in heathen fields, feel that they are justly entitled to more ; and when they hear of the hundred thousands which the Churches at home contribute for the support of the Gospel, and which are supposed to be at the disposal of the missionary, they will not, and do not, generally take kindly the refusal to pay at a high figure. In this way, sad alienations often occur between the foreign missionary and his native helpers. In some parts of Northern India, in particular, this unhappy state of things is quite well known, and formed the subject of earnest discussion at both the Lahore and the Allahabad Conferences. It appears to the writer that the root of all this trouble lies in the direction indicated. Have we not been trying to establish a form of Church government and organisation, which, however well adapted to us, and however Scriptural in principle, is in advance of the position of the majority of our foreign mission-churches ? And is not this the real significance of these trying experiences in the matter of the native pastorate ? On the apostolic plan of church organisation, there would evidently be no room for trouble of this sort. Here and there, indeed, upon our mission-fields, there may be a native church which, in wealth, intelligence, and numbers, is ready for the one-man-pastorate ; but we believe that, for the great majority of churches, which are weak and poor, the original Presbyterian system of rulership and instruction by a plural eldership, is the one form which is adapted to their need. The other will, no doubt, come in due time, but we act most unwisely in attempting to force it prematurely.

It would be another advantage of the plan which we urge, that it would set many a missionary free from pastoral duties, to a more unrestricted engagement in that great work of furthering the propagation of the Gospel and organising new congregations, for which he was sent out by the Church. Further, the various foreign churches, thus left to

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themselves, would be able to develop freely and naturally in a form which, though probably not quite identical with any that we have among ourselves, would be better adapted to the characteristics of the people than any form in Western Christendom. And finally, we see here, if we mistake not, light upon the subject of Christian union. After the admissions of churchmen like Lightfoot and Jacobs, and the admirable argument of the Rev. Mr. Barton before the Allahabad Conference, it is not too much to say that most Christians will admit that the form of government for mission churches which we have advocated, has the imprimatur of the apostolic sanction. Divergences between us begin at a later point. Why is it chimerical to hope that we shall see a Christian union which is impossible upon our developed Western systems of government, realised on the basis of the primitive, apostolic plan of a plural eldership, watched over and directed for a while, as all agree to be necessary, by the evangelist sent out from home?

But, it will be urged, the argument is not all on one side; there are weighty practical objections to this plan, as notably the following: It is objected that such young churches, gathered from among the heathen, specially need the very best instruction and oversight that we can give them, better certainly than any which such an eldership will for a long time be able to afford. To this we answer, in the first place, that the objection would have been of equal force against the same arrangement as actually made in the churches first established by the apostles. Those churches would no doubt have been far better instructed by Paul and Barnabas than by any man or men who could have been found among themselves. But for all that, Paul and Barnabas thought it wiser to leave them. In the second place, while it is true that, in respect of his greater knowledge of the Word of God and higher intellectual training, the foreigner will have a great advantage over his native brethren in the eldership, yet the advantage is not all on his side. In the matter of a personal knowledge of the inner life and habits of the people, the native brethren will probably be far superior to him. They may know little of God's truth; but they will, probably, be better able to fit the little that they do know to the peculiar needs of the people. Finally, it is to be remembered that the plan which we argue does not contemplate the utter abandonment of the elders and the churches so soon as the elders are ordained, but, on the contrary, an oversight for a while of both elders and churches by the missionary, till they shall be able to dispense with such external help. Thus, defective instruction will be supplemented, the elders themselves better taught, and erroneous practices corrected as they arise.

But it will be urged, and with no little reason, that grave errors in doctrine and in practice will be sure to appear in churches thus left to themselves, with such a rudimentary form of government. Indeed, we have heard some say, so to leave them would only be to consign the churches to destruction. To this we answer, that, under such



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conditions, errors and abuses would no doubt appear; but so it was in the churches which the Apostle Paul established, and in like manner left,—witness the errors touching the second advent in the Church of Thessalonica, and the licentious practices which went unrebuked in Corinth. Still, the fact remains, that, even guided by the infallible Spirit of God, who knew all this before, Paul did thus leave these churches to the pastoral care of the eldership; nor did he, because of these abuses, change his policy. If this be so, it shows that while the evils which occurred were recognised as inevitable, yet it was perceived, by the wisdom of God, that still greater evils would follow from the adoption of another course. And let it be remembered that, by taking the other course, we have not escaped great evils. This has been already abundantly shown. The child who is early left by himself to walk alone, will no doubt get some ugly falls and hurts; still, it is far better to leave him to walk alone under a gradually decreasing oversight, than to carry him for years in the fear that he will get hurt. As for graver consequences, such as the utter apostacy from Christ of many converts and churches, we can only say that if our converts be of such a sort, the sooner we know it the better. We shall surely not be acting wisely if we nurse churches composed of such converts. But we are persuaded better things. Churches thus left did not lapse into heathenism in Paul's day; why should they now? They have the same Almighty Saviour as the primitive churches had, the same promise of the Holy Spirit, in reliance on whom alone, indeed, can we hope for growth in any case. Nor has the experience of later than apostolic times been such as to give great force to this objection. Conspicuous above all, stands the record of the Church in Madagascar. From that country, as every one knows, the foreign missionaries were banished for years, the churches subjected to the most relentless persecutions for a generation, and their very Bibles and religious books to a great extent destroyed. And yet, left entirely to themselves, so far as regards human help and counsel, we read of no lapse into heathenism. On the contrary, they maintained among themselves an elementary form of church government; and, placed by the providence of God under the very conditions which, some would persuade us, must needs be so ruinous, they have been distinguished, among other churches planted in heathen lands, by their early arrival at a state of vigorous, independent, self-sustaining life. We have great confidence that the mission which shall venture, in its organisation and subsequent dealings with newly-formed churches among the heathen, to follow in faith and prayer the example of the apostolic practice, will not be put to shame at last by the result.

S. H. KELLOGG.