

Pam 4626

BOARD OR NO BOARD.

AN EXHAUSTIVE DISCUSSION OF AN IMPORTANT
QUESTION.

BY R. H. GRAVES, D. D.,
CANTON, CHINA.

FOREIGN MISSION BOARD, S. B. C.,

RICHMOND, VIRGINIA.

BOARD OR NO BOARD.

An Exhaustive Discussion of an Important Question.

BY R. H. GRAVES IN THE RELIGIOUS HERALD, OCT. 12, 1893.

My attention has been called to Bro. Herring's propositions, as recorded on page 44 of the Proceedings of the Southern Baptist Convention. I love and esteem Bro. Herring very much, but cannot help feeling that his judgment is greatly at fault. His plan would practically do away with the Foreign Mission Board altogether, as it would leave nothing for them to do. I, on the contrary, am persuaded that we need the Board for the effective prosecution of the mission work. Whether we look at the home work of the Board or its work in foreign lands, it is needed in order that our mission work may be carried on in the most economical and efficient manner.

I.—HOME WORK FOR FOREIGN MISSIONS.

1. *Transmission of Funds.* The mere transmission of money to foreign lands, the only function which Bro. Herring would allow the Board, is the least important of their duties. Any bank could do this, and probably at a less cost (if they did not charge too high a commission), as the rent of the board-room, salaries, etc., would not have to come out of it. But it is the *apportionment* of funds to the various fields that demands the judgment and wisdom of the Board; it is meeting unexpected demands upon their credit, caused by sudden exigencies on the mission field; or securing the endorsement of their notes, owing to the failure of the churches to send up their subscriptions in time, that give them anxiety.

If the Southern Baptist churches are to have efficient missions in various lands, I do not see how the work can be accomplished without a Board. Partisan and guerilla warfare may vex the enemy, but to accomplish a permanent conquest a well-ordered plan is needful.

2. *Missionary Intelligence.* The Centennial effort was termed an educational campaign. One great want of our churches is missionary intelligence. Those who are already contributing for

missions must know how their money is spent, and those who have not begun to give, must become interested in the Lord's work among the heathen. How is this work to be done except through missionary literature? The *Foreign Mission Journal* and the leaflets and tracts from the Maryland Baptist Mission Rooms have already been the means, in God's hands, of cultivating intelligent giving among our people. They have been the instruments of enkindling and keeping warm the missionary spirit among the young, and of cultivating systematic and regular beneficence. No paper issued by a single church or association could give the varied and wide information that our general publications do. Without some central bureau of intelligence our churches would soon be woefully behind those of other denominations.

3. *The Plan of Separate Missions has been a Failure.* Of late years brethren Baldwin and Powell have gone forth with a noble spirit of consecration and enthusiasm; but what has been the issue of their enterprise? The very spirit of *abandon* and faith, (?) which proves so attractive to many earnest-hearted believers and creates so much enthusiasm, often proves of less value in the field than the *staying* qualities. The Romans are said to have chosen their centurions, not on account

of their dash and daring, but for their never being panic-stricken or taken at unawares. Most of those who most earnestly supported these self-denying men now feel that it is wiser to send out men of sober judgment and to trust a board to select them. A long siege is needed to undermine systems of religion; the work cannot be accomplished by an unsupported cavalry charge.

The Goshen Association undertook the support of Bro. Cabaniss, and the Big Hatchie Association that of Bro. Crawford. It is well that it is in connection with the Board; for in both cases, I believe, the support of these brethren finally fell upon the Board. Churches becoming responsible for a man's support *under the Board* is a good plan, but I fear that, if they acted entirely independently of the Board, there would be much waste of power. The ancient Egyptians and, of late, modern European engineers have opened artificial lakes as storage reservoirs for the waters of the Nile, and have thus largely increased the area of cultivation in that land. Thus a Board acts as an equalizer, and, by collecting money from many sources, *averages* the supply to each field and makes it possible to do steady, progressive work. Spasmodic work accomplishes but little. Years of seed-sowing often precede the joy of the harvest in heathen lands.

Bad crops in the country or a disastrous fire in a city may so cripple the resources of a single church, or even a group of churches, as to make it almost impossible for them to meet their responsibilities with regard to a work in a distant land. The same principle of the equalizing of burdens that proves useful in insurance companies and beneficial associations, holds good with regard to the earlier stages of Christian work, both at home and abroad.

4. *The experience and judgment of a Board are useful in selecting men for the field.* Almost every Board has to reject as many applicants for appointment as it accepts. Years of experience teach men the physical and moral make-up that are best for particular fields. Individual churches may be better judges of a man's piety, but they cannot judge so well of his fitness for a special field. If they will certify the Board as to their confidence in his piety and consecration, the Board can be the better judges of many other qualifications. I have known of instances where a Board has sent out missionaries against their own judgment, owing to pressure from the churches, and these men have proved failures. It may be poor health, it may be love of change, it may be disappointment at home; but after spending a year or two on the field they have had to return.

5. *To conduct our foreign work by means of individual churches would be to work differently here from what experience has proved to be the most efficient method in other departments of Christian effort.* If the motto for foreign missions should be, "Churches to the front," and everything else is unscriptural, the same principle applies to home missions and State missions and seminaries. Each church should send a man to work among the Indians, or the negroes, or the frontier settlements of our own land, or the destitute portions of our own State, or should get its own pastor to train any young man who wished to study for the ministry. Why should the foreign field be an exception? The moment a group of churches or an association attempts to do any joint work, they must commit it to a single man or a committee, and then we have a secretary or a Board, though it may be under another name. Some strong city churches may be able to send a man to a foreign field and sustain him in his work there, but the great mass of our churches would be cut off from all privilege and responsibility of helping in the conversion of the heathen. This would be a great calamity for the cause. It would undermine any effort to develop the resources of our churches by cultivating systematic beneficence. It would deprive the great mass of our membership of the opportunity of giving, except

for local objects, and would be doing despite to God's poor ones in order that a few rich churches might conduct mission work in a way to please themselves. It may be well for some men, who have the means, to go out as self-supporting, independent missionaries, and for some church, which has the means, to send out one of its own members as its representative among the heathen; but the great majority of preachers and of churches cannot do the work in that way. Nor would it be best for the continuity or efficiency of the work, or the growth in liberality of the churches at home that it should be so. A wealthy preacher may preach for nothing, or a wealthy layman may build a church at his own expense; but such things do not tend for the good of the cause on the whole, but only serve to stunt the liberality of the members of the church.

6. *A Board tends to secure the missionaries stated and equal salaries.* It may be said that the other plan tends to throw the missionary more directly on God for the supply of his daily wants. It may be so. But the same rule should apply at home. If it is best for pastors and professors in our colleges to have a regular salary, it is quite as important that a man removed from his friends, with no one but God to whom to look, should have a stated support. It is well known that

many churches are neglectful with regard to paying the salaries promised to their pastors. If this be the case with those whose needs are daily before the eyes of their people, how would it be with missionaries out of sight, whose wants would be known only through letters asking for remittances? The minister at home has his remedy. If the church fails to fulfil its promise and give him a living support, he can resign and seek work elsewhere; but a missionary, if he wished to resign, would have to secure the means of paying his passage home before he could take the first step.

Then, there would not "be an equality" as to salaries. A man with a large family might get no more than one with none. All would depend on the church who supported him. At home a man's salary is dependent to a great extent on his ability as a preacher, his efficiency as a pastor, his tactfulness, or his gaining the affection of those to whom he ministers; in the foreign field much would depend on his own representation of his work or his needs.

7. *To abolish the Board would tend to narrow the interest and sympathies of a church to a single field.* The church which supports a missionary in Mexico would be doing nothing for the heathen, and the churches which sent a man to Africa would be

giving no help to our brethren laboring in papal lands. This seems to me to be different from Paul's doctrine as to the solidarity and fellowship of all believers. Individuals in the church who felt called of the Spirit to help the cause elsewhere would be deprived of the opportunity; whereas now there is perfect liberty in giving. Any one who wishes may specify the field to which his contribution is to go, but the mass of our members will give to the Lord's cause in all destitute fields.

II.—THE WORK ABROAD.

If a Board is of service for the advancement of the foreign mission work at home, it is equally useful in securing the efficiency of the work on the field.

1. *It tends to secure continuity and permanence in the work.* The work of planting Christianity in a foreign land is not a mere transient one. Paul compares it to cultivating a field—"Ye are God's husbandry;" to building a house—"God's building." Some persons have an idea that all that is needed to preach the gospel is to bear a testimony. I knew a man who called himself an independent missionary, who learned simply to repeat the Creed and the Lord's Prayer, and went about the villages selling books and repeating these

sentences, persuading himself that he had offered the gospel to the Chinese, and if it was rejected it was at their peril. Others go to the other extreme and think that to preach the gospel means to open a school; that there is no hope for the present generation, but that the *young* are our only hope. These are both mistakes. Announcing the gospel message and bearing an earnest, intelligent testimony to God's grace in Christ Jesus is indeed our primary duty; but it does not embrace the whole commission; training the young is a duty, but attention should be paid especially to the children of our converts. Planting the gospel includes a *series* of duties.

“Testifying the gospel of the grace of God” to the heathen is the chief work of a missionary, but, if God gives him converts, they must be taught. When the second generation come on they must not be neglected. The objection to a single church being responsible for a station is that, if their missionary breaks down or goes home, there is no one to take up the work. A missionary after many disappointments succeeds in renting a dwelling and leasing and fitting up a chapel in some town; after four or five years his health fails, or after eight or ten years he returns home. What is to become of the advantage gained? Can the church support *two* men, so that the young man can be learning the language

and preparing to take up the work? If not, then there must be a time when there is no leader. A church at home without a pastor for two or three years is apt to retrograde; much more one among the heathen. If, however, a man comes out in time, he has to spend two or three years in learning the language; if not, the older missionary has to give up his vantage ground, or hand over his work to a missionary, perhaps, of some other denomination. No one but his own church is responsible for the station. His nearest neighbor, supported by another single church, could not forsake his own field to look after that of the man who is going home. If he has gathered a strong native church, they might look after themselves; but if not, what is to become of the few believers—mere babes in Christ? The missionary is morally and legally responsible for the rent until the lease expires; will the home church go on paying it when the house is unoccupied? There are many such practical difficulties. I am convinced that a thoroughly independent localized work cannot be carried on, except with great loss of labor and waste of the Lord's money.

2. *Independent mission work may tend to lead men to send too roseate accounts of their work.* I do not mean that men would purposely deceive. But it is but human nature for a man to speak hopefully of a work in which he is personally inter-

ested, and which he carries on in his own way, without any checks or balances. Some men are very visionary and deal largely "in futures." They picture things less as they are than as they expect them to be. Others are very imaginative, and see present things in a rosy light—very differently from what they are viewed by men of larger experience and more sober judgment. When the interest in the work and the means forthcoming to carry on the work are entirely dependent on the letters of one man or woman, the temptation will be to present everything in as encouraging a light as possible. Instances have occurred to my own knowledge, where enthusiastic persons, with a vivid power of description, have secured large sums of money for some special branch of work, or some fruitless scheme altogether disproportionate to their real value. The sober, plodding man, cautious and matter of fact in his statement, is placed at a great disadvantage, compared with his more vivacious compeer, though he may be really accomplishing a more enduring work. In a mission, a man's (or a woman's) plans must be approved by his brethren on the field before the Board will take them up. The home churches too often call for thrilling adventures and interesting incidents. These frequently depend much on a man's temperament, on his recklessness or want of tact. Then, too, novelty has

much to do in keeping up interest. When everything is new and the missionary is without experience, it is easy to write entertaining descriptions of the manners and customs of the people. In four or five years, however, the theme is exhausted, and the facts themselves do not strike the missionary. It will then be a difficult task for him to keep up an interest in his field, unless there be a great spiritual ingathering. I remember once hearing a man complain that the churches which had promised to support him failed to forward the means. Visiting among these churches, I heard the complaint that the missionary failed to write and keep up the interest of the people in his work. I fear this would not prove a solitary instance, if many men were sustained by individual churches independently of a Board. For a few years all may go well, but a testing time will come.

3. *Avoiding friction on the mission field.* It is a sad fact that there is sometimes friction between those who are working for a common Master. It happens sometimes, as many city pastors can testify, between pastors at home. A man joins one Baptist church when a neighboring pastor thinks he rather belongs to his territory. So on the mission field inquirers frequently go from one church to another; if the churches are in the

same mission, it makes but little difference; but if each represents a separate interest, there might be a misunderstanding. This may be a little thing, and yet it is worth avoiding, as the consequences may not be so little.

These are some of the reasons which lead me to think that we cannot conduct our foreign mission work efficiently and economically without a Board or some corresponding body of a different name. There is nothing human to which some objection may not be urged. No man is perfect. Boards may make mistakes, but so may missionaries and churches. In order to unify our work and give it prominence and efficiency; in order to develop the resources of our churches and give all our members, even the poorest, an opportunity to have a chance in giving the gospel to the perishing heathen, I can see nothing better than a Foreign Mission Board.

The Foreign Mission Journal.

No Baptist in the South can keep fully informed concerning the Foreign Mission Work of the Convention, who does not read the "Foreign Mission Journal." And lack of information certainly brings about lack of interest, more or less complete, in that work. The Journal is published in pamphlet form, furnishing to its readers not only full information about our own missions, such as can be found only in the letters of the missionaries themselves, but such general information about other mission fields as will help to keep the reader of its pages not entirely ignorant of what is going on in mission work in his own times.

The paper is furnished at as nearly cost price as possible, the rates being

From 1 to 10 copies, 50 cents each per year.

" 10 to 25 " 30 " "

" 25 to 100 " 25 " "

Each paper will be separately addressed if desired and forwarded to the subscriber.

ADDRESS:

Foreign Mission Journal,

RICHMOND, VA.