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FINDING THE BOOK OF THE LAW.

BY ROBERT WHITTET, SR.

“When the king heard the words of the book of the law, he rent his clothes.”—2 KINGS xxii. 11.

To know not we're amenable to law—
A law we wot not of, nor yet can tell
Aught of its precepts, nor how far they're well
Or ill ; to feel no sense of solemn awe
Inspiring rev'rence for their maker, or to draw
Obedience, and then—as does light dispel
Night's darkness, and show the hidden pits that dwell
Unthought of in the way, and every flaw,
Revealing perils that entail defeat—
How startling 'tis, though past the danger point,
To see the risks we've run ! and when once more
We feel that safety is assured, how sweet
To let the heart in gushing joy anoint
Itself in gratitude, and faith restore !

PRESBYTERIAN POLITY IN THE MISSION FIELD.

BY REV. JOHN L. STUART.

WHEN the Presbyterian missionary starts to the foreign field, he naturally carries his Presbyterianism with him. And he naturally teaches the converts the Presbyterian polity as the system contained in the Scriptures without so much as alluding to Episcopacy or Congregationalism. The convert naturally believes in the Presbyterian polity as he comes in contact with the elders when Moses was sent to them in Egypt; he keeps along with them as he reads through the Old Testament and the New, nor does he finally part with their company until near the close of Revelation. And then, when he closes the book, the impression is left on his mind that they will be met with in the heavenly home and still be his companions throughout eternity. It would be hard to keep him from being a Presbyterian. The Chinese fall very naturally into the government by elders, as it is a system which prevails throughout the land as a kind of democratic government, independent of the imperial system. It seems to be a remnant of the tribal rule after the general authority had passed into the hands of king or emperor. It is their own government handed down from the very cradle of the race and very dear to their hearts. It is one of the institutions which exist as a matter of course, and the officials cannot administer the affairs of the general government without taking into account the authority and the rights of the local elders when they are dealing with the people as communities in respect to matters in which they have common interests.

The missionaries of the church of England found this out both in India and in China, and they adopted the system of elders in the administration of the local affairs of the churches. Bishop Moule in the city of Hangchow told me about fifteen years ago that his church had found it to be the best system for the mission field, and asked me to give him some points in the practical working of the system to aid him in inaugurating it in his church.

When the missionary is in a new field in the beginning of the work, all ecclesiastical authority is, of course, in his hands. He admits the converts and administers discipline when it is needed. After a while elders will be appointed and ordained by him, and then he will exercise power jointly with them as moderator of the session. All Presbyterian bodies act alike up to this point, but regarding the formation of Presbyteries there are four theories and four different practices. They are the mixed Presbytery, the purely native Presbytery, the Amoy plan, and the Japan plan.

The mixed Presbytery, the oldest and almost the universal practice, is so called because it is composed of both foreign missionaries and native pastors and elders. In the first instance missionaries form a Presbytery by uniting with native elders, and afterwards native pastors and evangelists become members of the Presbytery as they are ordained. This Presbytery is united to some Synod in the home land, and thus becomes an integral part of the church, and sends its delegates to the General Assembly. In the practical working of these bodies it was found impossible to avoid friction along national or racial lines when jointly administering the affairs which sometimes belong to one and sometimes to the other race or nation. A fruitful source of trouble was found in apportioning the funds furnished by the people of one nation to be used in work for the benefit of the people of the other nation. On the whole the plan has worked well, and Presbyteries have grown into Synods, and Synods into General Assemblies in some mission fields.

Nevertheless, efforts have been made in several fields to avoid the difficulties and troubles inherent in this plan by a modification of it.

In Amoy, China, about thirty-five years ago, the English Presbyterians and Dutch Reformed missionaries united with the native pastors and elders to form a Presbytery on a modified plan. The main features of this are as follows:

1. The church in the foreign field is to have no ecclesiastical connection with the parent churches in the home lands. It is the Presbyterian Church in China.

2. The foreign missionaries retain their connection with the home Presbyteries or classes, and are entirely under their ecclesiastical jurisdiction.

3. The foreign missionaries have full membership in the native Presbytery, with all the rights of presbyters.

4. The foreign missionary may be excluded from membership in the Presbytery by a vote of its members, but he is not subject to further discipline by it. He enjoys all privileges and equal rights in the deliberation of its assemblies, yet is not subject to its discipline. A recent writer in the Chinese *Recorder* remarks that "This unique position has been sustained for more than a quarter of a century without the least sign of friction or the slightest misunderstanding on the part of the natives." The Presbytery has grown into "a Synod with twenty-five church organizations with entirely self-supporting pastorates, having a membership of 3,029 communicants."

In Japan, about fifteen years ago, five different Presbyterian bodies, *i. e.*, Northern, Southern, Cumberland, United and Reformed, united in forming the Presbyterian Church of Japan. A constitution was adopted which limited and restricted the membership of foreign missionaries according to their relation to the native churches. Some were simply nominal members, some were corresponding members, with the right to speak but not to vote, and some were full members, with all the rights and privileges of presbyters. Five years ago, when I had occasion to visit that land, only one member of our mission was entitled to be a full member of Presbytery, and that was on the ground of his election to serve on the Home Mission Committee, if my memory serves me right.

There is one other plan which may be called the Southern Presbyterian plan, as it was adopted by our church twenty-five years ago. Its distinctive feature is to establish a purely native church in the mission field. The main characteristics may be stated as follows:

1. The church in the foreign field is to have no ecclesiastical connection with the home church.

2. The missionaries retain their connection with the home Presbyteries, and are subject to their jurisdiction.

3. They are not to become pastors of native churches, nor can they become members of the native Presbytery or exercise any of the rights of membership without the permission of the General Assembly.

This plan was acted upon by our missionaries in Mexico,

Brazil and, I think, in Greece, and Presbyteries were formed, composed entirely of native members, while the missionaries had no relation with them except that of friendly advisers. After a trial of a few years this plan was abandoned, and the missionaries in Brazil and Mexico joined the Presbyteries, becoming full members with all the rights and privileges involved in membership. What were the reasons which led to this change of plan are not known to me, but, presumably, it was dictated by wisdom gained from experience of its disadvantages.

In China we have not yet formed a Presbytery of any kind. When it became desirable to license three candidates in the Hangchow Church, the missionaries of that station organized themselves as a body of presbyters and examined and licensed them, and then reported their action to their respective Presbyteries, and it was approved by them. Then, in 1895, the time came when all things seemed ready for the church in Hangchow to have a pastor, and on referring the matter to my Presbytery, Louisville, it gave me authority to invite four brethren to join with me in forming a body of presbyters and to proceed to ordain and install a pastor over the church. This plan was followed; the church elected one of the licentiates, Mr. Dzen, as pastor. We examined him as to his knowledge of Scripture, theology, history, government, discipline, etc., and finding him duly qualified, we ordained him and installed him pastor over the church. Then this body of presbyters, having accomplished the object for which it was organized, was dissolved, and each member of it reported the action to his own Presbytery, and it was approved in each case. After serving the church four years his conduct was called in question. He asked for an investigation, and the three members of the station, together with Mr. Little, who was providentially with us, formed a body of presbyters and proceeded to inquire into his case as if we were a regular Presbytery. Finding that though no charges could be sustained against him, yet the interests of the church seemed to demand his resignation, he took our advice and resigned. The church accepted his resignation, and we dissolved the relation and declared the pulpit vacant. This body of presbyters was then dissolved, and each one of us reported his action to his own Presbytery. In this way we tried to conserve one of the fundamental principles of our polity, that all power is to be exercised jointly,

and not severally, though we think that every evangelist has power and authority to do everything necessary to plant the church in a new field, and that he can exercise this power individually when it is not possible to secure the coöperation of other presbyters.

The present state of our church in China is this: There are eight churches organized with elders and deacons, and there is one ordained native minister. It might be feasible to ordain two or three more pastors, and then we could organize a *purely native Presbytery*. But the question arises, Would this be a wise policy? I think that the majority of us shrink from this step. We fear that a purely native Presbytery would make some grave mistakes before they learned the right use of the power and responsibility committed to their hands, and some of us think that it would be wise to try one of the other plans by which the active and official assistance of the missionaries was secured for the Presbytery in the infancy of its days. Thus a few native pastors and elders would be trained under the actual working of a Presbytery which had a strong missionary element in it. In the course of time the native element would predominate, but the advantages of their early training would abide with them. This is a live question with us now, as the time for establishing the pastorate in other churches and then of organizing a Presbytery seems to be very near at hand. The advice and coöperation of brethren in the home land will be very acceptable to us who are facing it.

Kuding, China.