

CMS

Three Years of Home Mission Work in Asheville Presbytery.

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When in the fall of 1896 the Synod of North Carolina set off a part of the Presbytery of Mecklenburg to form the Presbytery of Asheville, it was not making a new departure. It was only taking another step in the forward policy pursued from the beginning.

From 1770 to 1795 the Presbytery of Orange included the whole State of North Carolina. In the latter year, the Synod of the Carolinas created a new Presbytery out of the counties west of the Yadkin river, giving it the name of Concord.

In 1812 the Presbytery of Orange was again divided by the setting off of the Presbytery of Fayetteville.

A few years later Fayetteville in turn was cut in twain, and the southwestern half of its territory received the name of Wilmington.

In 1889 the Synod created the Presbytery of Albemarle out of parts of Wilmington and Orange, thus making four Presbyteries east of the Yadkin.

In the meanwhile the same process of division had begun west of the river. In 1869 the Synod divided the Presbytery of Concord, by setting off seventeen counties to form the Presbytery of Mecklenburg. In 1896 Mecklenburg in turn came under the knife, and, by a surgical operation not entirely free from pain, the eleven counties west of the Blue Ridge mountains were cut off to constitute the Presbytery of Asheville.

Presbyterianism in North Carolina has multiplied by division. The old Presbytery of Orange has become seven; instead of twenty-three ministers there are now one hundred and sixty-three; and the few hundred members have become thirty-five thousand strong. A hundred years ago a handful of Presbyterian corn was cast into the soil of North Carolina. The fruit thereof now shakes like Lebanon.

When in 1869 the Presbytery of Mecklenburg was erected, it had on its roll 23 ministers and 39 churches. The communicants numbered 3,376. The contributions to Home Missions amounted to \$2,753, to Foreign Missions \$738.

In the spring of 1896, before the erection of Asheville Presbytery, Mecklenburg reported 41 ministers, 86 churches, 8,746 members, \$5,235 for Home Missions and \$6,216 for Foreign Missions. This is a net gain in 27 years of 18 ministers, or nearly 80 per cent.; of 47 churches, or 120 per cent.; of 5,370 communicants or 160 per cent.; of \$2,482 in annual contributions to the cause of Home Missions or nearly 100 per cent.; of \$5,478 in annual contributions to Foreign Missions, or nearly 800 per cent.

The Presbytery of Mecklenburg as originally constituted was, to borrow the parlance of gerrymandering politics, "a shoe-string district." The extreme length of the territory was not far short of three hundred miles. Charlotte, though not the geographical centre, was in influence and blue blood the heart of the Presbytery. Church life west of the Blue Ridge, because of its distance from the heart, was suffering from sluggish circulation. The Synod, therefore, in the fall of 1896, created a new body with a heart of its own, and gave it the name of Asheville Presbytery.

The new Presbytery held its opening meeting in the First Presbyterian Church, Asheville, Dec. 2, 1896.

Let us measure the growth of this infant now entering upon the fourth year of her life:

1. New Organizations and Buildings. Six churches have been organized, an average of two a year.

Eight buildings have been erected, two are under way and three will probably be begun as soon as the roads get dry enough for heavy hauling.

2. Number of Communicants. The membership has increased from 1,000 to about 1,300, a net gain of 300 or 30 per cent.

During the same period of three years; the Presbyterian Church as a whole, North and South, has had a net gain of only about $4\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. That is, the number of

communicants has multiplied nearly seven times as fast in the Presbytery of Asheville as in the Presbyterian Church throughout the United States.

3. Contributions. Two great causes are selected as representing the interest of the church in aggressive work at home and abroad.

The contributions to Foreign Missions have increased from \$542 to \$982, a gain of 81 per cent.

Home Missions from \$923 to \$2,484, a gain of 170 per cent.

4. Gains that cannot be tabulated or expressed in figures. Three years ago Hayesville, Murphy, Andrews, Bryson City and Dillsboro were under one pastorate. This large field has been divided into two groups, and our working force there doubled. There was no church building either at Dillsboro or Andrews. Now we have two buildings (church and school) at Dillsboro, and one at Andrews. A debt of \$800 on the Bryson City Church building and another of \$75 on the Hayesville building, both of long standing, have been paid.

Three years ago the church at Hendersonville was grouped with Mills River and Midway, and was paying \$300 for half time of a pastor. This church is now giving \$500 on pastor's salary, and with the aid of a supplement from the Presbytery is able to have a pastor for the whole of his time. We may confidently expect this church to become self-supporting in a very few years.

Three years ago the churches of Waynesville and Bethel were receiving a supplement of \$150 from the Presbytery. They are now supporting their pastor without aid, and are growing rapidly in membership and strength under the ministry of Rev. Frank D. Hunt.

BARNARDSVILLE. About two years ago Messrs. Robt. V. Miller and R. A. Garrett, members of the First Church, Asheville, held religious services at this point, which were blessed to the conversion of a considerable number of souls. The people of the community expressed a desire to have the Presbyterian church begin work among them and in response to this invitation Rev. E. MacDavis was sent to minister to them. At that time there was not a member of the Presbyterian church in that neighborhood.

Now there are two church organizations with about one hundred members, and two church buildings in course of erection. A member of the First Church, Asheville, has given \$500 for the building at Barnardsville, and the citizens of that place have donated an eligible site and \$250 in money or its equivalent. The people of Dillingham, three miles east of Barnardsville, on Upper Ivey River, are putting up the other building, the Home Mission Committee furnishing only hardware and paints. Land, lumber, and labor have also been offered in the Barnardsville field for manse and school.

5. Administration and policy. The work is administered by the Presbytery through a committee of Home Missions, the members of which are chosen annually by the Presbytery upon the recommendation of a special committee on nominations.

The committee is required to report to the Presbytery semi-annually, and has no authority beyond that delegated to it by this body.

The committee meets once a month in regular session, with special meetings at such times as the exigencies of the work seem to demand. The members have given themselves to the work with fidelity and enthusiasm, no one of them having ever failed to be present at a regular meeting unless sick or out of town.

It is the duty of this Committee, "under the direction of Presbytery, to take the general oversight of feeble churches, especially when vacant, and of missionary fields in our bounds, with a view to secure for all destitute places adequate evangelistic and pastoral laborers." (Manual of Asheville Presbytery, p. 10.)

The churches receiving aid are urged to advance to the point of self-support as rapidly as possible, in order that the work may be extended into new and destitute fields.

This is not an untried policy, but one which has been in vogue for many years in all the Presbyteries, and in the pursuance of which the Synod of North Carolina has made such rapid strides in the last fifteen years. In 1885 there were 20,000 members of the Presbyterian Church in the State; there are now 35,000. This remarkable growth is the result of a revival of religion which began

in the Synod fifteen years ago and which has been going on ever since.

6. The Guiding and Providing Hand of God. Mr. Spurgeon, in speaking of the founding of his Pastor's College, remarks that "it seems to be God's plan that works of usefulness should develop themselves in obedience to a living force within, rather than by scheme and plan from without."

It has been so in this work. The new Presbytery from its very birth seems to have been carried along by a force that was born for it. The workers have not so much pushed the work as they have been pushed by it.

And yet the work has not always been easy, and there have been times when the way seemed compassed with darkness. But the pillar of cloud has refreshed us with its shade under the burden and heat of the day, and the pillar of fire has shone upon our way when God has called us to march in the night.

Again and again have we been "brought by a way we knew not, and led in paths that we have not known: and he hath made darkness light before us and crooked things straight."

God's ways are past finding out, but sometimes He Himself condescends to reveal them. There have been in the Home Mission work of Asheville Presbytery many marked instances of God's direct guidance and provision. Three examples will be gratefully recorded here:

(1) As our work developed we reached a point where it seemed to the Presbytery almost necessary that we should have an evangelist to be the hands and the feet of the Home Mission Committee. The serious question arose, How are we to get the means for this work? We could not afford to draw on the funds of our general treasury, for this would take the bread out of the mouths of our missionary pastors. At this juncture, the Presbytery of Mecklenburg and two beloved elders were moved to come to our aid, and through their timely liberality we have been enabled to employ Rev. R. P. Smith for the whole of his time without cost to our Presbytery. In each case the money was given for the employment of an evangelist, and the gift of one of the elders was called

forth by his confidence in the fitness of the particular man whom we have chosen for this work.

(2) Among the strategic points discovered by Rev. R. P. Smith and Mr. R. S. Eskridge, in their investigation two years ago, none surpasses the Fine's Creek region in Haywood county, especially for the establishment of a good school. One of the leading citizens of that community reports that in the Fine's Creek school district, which is six miles by eight, there are seven hundred and fifty children of school age. Of these only one-half are enrolled as pupils in the public schools, and only about one-half of those enrolled attend regularly enough to get much benefit, and those who attend every day get only about ninety days schooling in the year. The people of the district have from the beginning shown an eager desire to have us establish a school.

Again the question of means confronted us. Now, see how God wrought for us!

Two years ago, Mr. Walter M. Smith, a Presbyterian elder, and a prominent merchant of New York City, was sent to Asheville by his physician for a season of rest. During his short stay he became very much interested in the work of the First Presbyterian Church and of the Presbytery of Asheville.

When the Home Mission Committee issued the pamphlet setting forth the progress, need and prospects of the work, a copy was sent to Mr. Smith, as to others who had shown special interest in this cause.

In a few days the chairman of the committee received a letter, from which the following extract is made:

STAMFORD, CONN., April 6, 1899.

MY DEAR FRIEND:—You may possibly remember that I spoke to you of a young man, a convert of Water Street, whom we had sent to the Bible Institute, Chicago. He studied there a year, and came home last fall so full of love for the Word and for the Master, that I was led to send him back for six months longer, and then have him to return to Water Street as an assistant missionary.

I visited him in January. A more thoroughly consecrated man I never saw or knew. I wrote him enclosing

a check with which to return, and we expected him on April 4. My letter reached Chicago March 15, at 5.30 p. m. At 7. he passed away. On the 18th. we buried him from Water St. Mission my own pastor officiating. It was his thirty-fourth birthday. He was born again on Oct. 8, 1895, and from that moment he never lost sight of Christ for a second of time.

Every Lord's Day morning he preached Christ and him crucified to the inmates of the county jail, and many through his loving word were led to the foot of the Cross and confessed Christ.

When I received your note last night and read your pamphlet, I asked the Lord if this was what he wanted me to do. I have my answer.

If some poor lost one will listen to the story of this poor boy (brought up a thief, with no education except such as he could acquire by the instruction of other thieves), who could be saved by grace, could master the Word with so much intelligence as to command the respect and love of every one with whom he came in contact; then let this be known as a fund in memory of Ira B. Snyder, the converted thief of Water Street Mission, saved by the grace of God, October 8th, 1895; died in Chicago, March 15th, 1899.

Yours faithfully,

WALTER M. SMITH.

The point selected by the committee for the investment of this sacred fund is the Fine's Creek district. In the early part of January Mr. Smith, accompanied by Mr. S. H. Hadley, the Superintendent of the Water Street Mission, made the long journey from New York to visit this field. He was much impressed by what he saw, and has considerably increased his original gift. He sent us checks at various times to help with the building we were erecting, and has donated a beautiful and sweet-toned bell to "ring out the old, ring in the new." We expect to put two teachers in this field next fall, and are planning more extensive developments in the near future, as God may guide.

(3) There is only one county within the bounds of our Presbytery in which there is no Presbyterian church,

Our evangelists reported after their prospecting tour that in this county there was only one completed church building of any denomination. Ever since their visit, the people of this county have been sending to us the Macedonian cry, "Come over and help us!"

Again the question of ways and means confronted us, and again we appealed to him who has said, "The silver and the gold are mine."

A member of the First Church, Asheville, has promised us \$500 for the erection of a church building, and the Society of Soul Winners has engaged through Dr. Guerrant to put into our hands \$30 a month towards the support of a minister for the field. With this start we expect to begin operations there as soon as spring shall fairly open.

To carry out the plan of establishing and maintaining both a church and a school at the county seat, we shall need to have these gifts supplemented by others.

There are many other needy and promising fields which we might enter at once if we had the means to inaugurate and support the work. This is our opportunity. Shall we let it go by?

While we do not desire to draw off contributions from other destitute regions, we earnestly appeal to those who feel an interest in the mountain work to aid us in giving the Gospel and Christian education to those who are calling aloud for these blessings.

Contributions may be sent to Rev. R. F. Campbell, chairman of the Home Mission Committee, or to Mr. W. A. Blair, Treasurer, Asheville, N. C.

We send our hearty thanks to all the kind friends who have helped us hitherto.

Asheville, N. C., March 15th, 1900.