

# THE ASSEMBLY HERALD

VOL. XI

MAY, 1905

NO. 5

## Porto Rico and Cuba.

### Progress in Porto Rico A Testimony.

*By John Willis Baer.*

Our flag has been flying in Porto Rico for five years. In that time the Island has made unprecedented progress along all lines; never in all its history have such advances been made. The missionary and mission teacher, with open Bible and uplifted Cross, entered the Island very soon after our army of occupation left it; and to see the results of the sweep of the religion of Jesus Christ over the island, as I did recently, makes one exclaim with sincere gratitude, "What hath God wrought!"

Five years ago there was but one Protestant church; now we Presbyterians alone have over fifty preaching stations on that island. Other denominations are doing a splendid work for God, each denomination working in hearty sympathy and co-operation with the others, and our denominational lines so far have not crossed nor has there been unnecessary multiplication of men and machinery in the field.

It would surprise you to know that on Sundays there are now gathered in the Protestant churches of Porto Rico more people than gather in the Catholic churches of the island. This does not mean that the majority of the million inhabitants of the island have renounced Catholicism, however. It means that, of the people of the island who are loyal to their church, the larger proportion are Protestants. The natives have been turning away from the old *regime* of the Spanish priest, and at his door must be laid much of the miserable life that has kept Porto Rico down.

The change has been reactionary and revolutionary. Our mission schools are filled with Porto Rican boys and girls, being taught the same studies as the boys and girls here,—and with it all, the open Bible. In large centers and in small country districts, our missionaries are holding services, building chapels and churches, and the natives are turning to God and worshiping with gladness the Master whom we love to serve.

The medical missionary's work on the island has been particularly blessed. In some districts the missionary has had a daily clinic where he has treated over two hundred patients and been obliged to turn away others. Our hospital at San Juan, operated by the Woman's Board, is crowded and is the pride of everyone on the island. The hospital is particularly well located very close to the ocean, with every surrounding in its favor; and so far the results of the surgical and medical work have been of the kind to cause hearty thanksgiving. One must see with his own eyes the crowds of patients waiting at the door of the hospital and at the medical missionary's dispensary, to appreciate the wonderful opportunity for service Christ has placed in the hands of these servants of his. At the hospital in San Juan at an early hour, and often before daybreak, people gather, coming from miles around, patiently waiting their turn. It was a rare privilege to go with the doctors to the "shacks" in the poorer districts of the city and country, and see them ministering to their out-patients, carrying comfort and healing and the gospel



EDWARD P. COWAN, D. D., SECRETARY.

## Presbyterianism Among the Negroes.

*Rev. Wm. H. Weaver, D.D., Atlanta, Ga.*

From the beginning of Presbyterianism in this country, there have been negroes who have held that distinctive system of church doctrine, order and ecclesiastical polity, and been a part of that regenerate membership which has made the Presbyterian Church what it is, and so peculiarly fitted it, for the indefinite extension of the Redeemer's Kingdom. These negro people were connected with the Presbyterian churches that were organized and composed almost wholly of white people. Early in the last century, efforts were put forth to reach with Presbyterian influences, free negro people, in some northern cities and in cities of certain border States, and in the District of Columbia, who preferred Presbyterian services, separate from those they might enjoy in churches composed of white members. As a result of these efforts Presbyterian churches among negro people were organized in certain cities of the States of New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and in the District of Columbia. In later years the number of the cities in which such negro Presbyterian churches have been organized has been considerably increased. But the growth or development of Presbyterianism among the negroes, in local, particular, distinct church life has been in the South during the last forty years, and under the direction and fostering care of the Presbyterian Board of Missions for Freedmen, the authorized and accredited agency of our General Assembly for fulfilling the *Church's mission* to the negroes of that section; and through similar efforts made by the Southern Presbyterian Church,

the United Presbyterian Church and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church; so that now, there is a large number of negroes in connection and communion with the several branches of the Presbyterian Church, and a much larger number under the uplifting influence and power of Presbyterianism.

The Presbyterian Church (North) especially through its present system of educational and evangelistic work conducted and maintained by its Freedmen's Board is reaching and helping the negroes in such a way as commands the attention and respect of all observers, and demands the support of all who love the Lord Jesus Christ, and would do what He commands.

During these years of effort and endeavor thousands of negroes have been gathered, brought under Christian influences, and trained in the ways of right living and doing. Presbyterianism is giving to the negroes the gospel of *Jesus Christ*, and in the doing of this "informs and trains them in *doctrines that are Biblical*, and in a *morality that is Christian*. It is accomplishing this by preparing and providing for, and sending to these needy people, a ministry so trained and qualified in head and heart as to be able to render the service needed and required of them. And further, it is doing this by giving to the negroes the benefits of a practical Christian education—an education which trains in that which best fits for the duties of life, which leads up to the highest plateau of thinking and doing, because its first and chief aim is to lead to Christ.

The Presbyterian system brings to the negroes a special advantage where it can be applied with vigor. The office of ruling elder gives occasion for the selection of

the wisest and most prudent to conduct affairs, and the accumulated experience of such a class is of great importance to a people and in communities, but a short time, advanced to the responsibility of applying rules of moral discipline, and made judges and guardians of sound doctrine in church organization.

Intelligent ruling elders in Presbyterian churches bring to bear upon their families the restraining, uplifting helpful influence of Christian morality and Bible doctrine. The exercise of the powers of this office under the guidance of a pastor and the supervision of Presbytery still further qualifies to fill the office, and multiplies the number possessing the qualifications. The presence among the negroes of well qualified negro pastors or ministers, has a like effect, and is even more conspicuously manifest.

Men who by reason of their culture can preach with efficiency, and who by reason of their relations of fellowship and consecration can bring the gospel home to the hearts and sympathies of all classes with irresistible power—who can bring the encouragements of the gospel down where the discouragements of life are most oppressively felt—to whom the sorrowing can the more trustingly disclose their griefs, and from whom the guilty will the more confidently inquire the way of forgiveness. The office of the Christian ministry in Presbyterian pulpits where high qualifications are required is in itself a blessing in its influence, and a powerful stimulant to the hope and effort in and to the negroes' improvement. In this office can be seen representatives of their own race associated with other Christian brethren, in possession of the highest privileges granted to man, and in the discharge of the highest responsibilities that have been laid on man.

The doctrine of the parity of the ministry as illustrated by the presence of hundreds of negro bishops in the Presbyterian Church is to every intelligent and aspiring negro a pleasing and encouraging evidence and foretaste of his admitted and recorded, if not yet fully enjoyed equality.

It is a fact not to be questioned, that Presbyterianism is not gathering into its communion the great masses of negroes in this country; nevertheless there is another

equally important fact, that is not to be questioned—namely—that much has been done, is still being done, and is yet to be done by it, in changing the character of the worship and service of these people, to what is right and proper, and thus to influence their religious and home life, and so bring about their highest and truest Christian uplift.

### Acquaintance with the Work.

*By Rev. S. J. Fisher, D.D.*

Naturally it will be granted that money is the great need of this work. But antecedent to this, and helping its supply it is the need of a greater acquaintance with the work by pastors and people. It is one of the striking and encouraging characteristics of this great missionary problem that the more perfect the investigation the deeper the interest. The sense of its necessity and value rises as one studies it. Familiarity does not breed contempt, but a solemn enthusiasm.

In the biography of the late General Armstrong, the story of his growth in philanthropic purpose is most interestingly told. When he first became an officer of colored troops he had no zeal in their advancement. He was indifferent to their development. But an acquaintance with their needs—their ignorance, helplessness and degradation gradually created a desire to help them to a nobler life. From the care of their physical wants, he developed a longing to see them elevated mentally and spiritually, and at last he was led to enter upon the service which created Hampton. Our own Dr. Payne who recently rested from his labors at Mary Holmes Seminary and went to his reward, began as the colonel of a negro regiment that career of devotion to the degraded and oppressed which grew in consecration with the years.

Every thoughtful minister or layman who acquaints himself with the work—investigates its plans, measures up carefully its results and listens to its best advocates will become intensely interested. "While I was musing the fire burned" is eminently true of all who truly ponder the work among the Freedmen. Then out of the fulness of the heart the mouth will speak, and churches will be moved.