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THE CHARACTERISTIC AND DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF THE REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA.

BY REV. DAVID JAMES BURRELL, D. D.

THE *Reformed Church in America* has no noteworthy "characteristic features" to distinguish it from the larger branches of the "Alliance of Reformed Churches holding the Presbyterian System." It is, to all intents and purposes, identical in doctrine and polity with the Northern and Southern Presbyterian Churches.

Nevertheless it holds a separate existence, because of a belief, more or less prevalent among its adherents, that it has a real *raison d'etre*. There are those who aver that its power for good—which is not inconsiderable—would be greatly increased by an alliance with one of the larger Presbyterian bodies. Overtures looking to such a union have been made more than once, but for various reasons have come to naught.

I. The Reformed Church has an honorable history. It is the oldest evangelical organization in America. The first Dutch immigrants came over in the *Half-Moon*, Hendrik Hudson, skipper, in 1609. This was the year of Holland's armistice with Spain after a century of bloody conflict for religious liberty. The *Half-Moon* returned to Holland the following year, reporting an exploration of the Hudson River in vain search for the fabulous open passage to the Orient. An allusion to "fertile lands and fur-bearing animals" tempted the thrifty spirit of the Dutch

CUBA AS A MISSION FIELD—ITS SPECIAL ATTRACTIONS.

BY REV. R. L. WHARTON.

Cuba is perhaps more in the eye of the American people just now than any other country. It has been freed by the prowess of American arms, and is being guided to a stable form of government by American statesmen, hence is looked upon with a paternal regard. It contains within its borders a marvellously fertile soil and excellent harbors which command the trader's attention. In its defence was displayed a martial power almost unknown to Americans, and which has materially advanced the prestige of the "Stars and Stripes" among the nations of the world. For her sake the United States has become pre-eminently the representative of humanity and liberty. Cuba has called out all that was best in our government, and has through that means secured the opportunity of developing all that is best in herself. Whether the citizen of the United States views Cuba as the offspring of his own government and watches to see how republican principles will be received and maintained, or views the fresh laurels won for his own flag, he finds great cause to rejoice in the glory of his own country and to praise the "Pearl of the Antilles."

That this interest is beginning to be extended somewhat to her spiritual condition we are glad to note. That condition may well demand interest. It is entirely favorable for work. The door is wide open. Readiness is written everywhere. Everything beckons to the church that the time has come to execute the last command of the Master among this people.

The intent of this article is to point out the special attractiveness of Cuba as a mission field, and it is sent with the prayer that the young men of the Seminary and of the church at large may not only read, but think and act as well; that they may put themselves in such a position that if God points them to Cuba they may be ready to respond.

1. The first source of attraction is found in the *readiness* and *accessibility*. (a) At present the island is passing through a period of reconstruction, but at such a time men are always ready to listen. Old prejudices and customs are being laid aside. Men

are reading and thinking for themselves. Any man who brings a *real* message receives a respectful hearing. This is not more true politically and socially than religiously. Along with inquiry into civil duties there goes an examination of matters religious. As the realization of perfect liberty more and more dawns upon them there seems to deepen the suspicion that perhaps after all their consciences need not be in utter subjection to the will of a *man* because he assumes to bear the title "pope." This is more true with the middle and humbler class of people than with the wealthy. In the case of the latter, society rivets Romanism upon many. Outside of its fold the wealthy are ostracised and for this reason men who do not believe its tenets refuse to break with Romanism. This class furnishes only a small per cent. of the population, while all those others that have been so long "feeding upon ashes" are ready to hear and receive anything that satisfies the demands of the soul.

Such is the immediate condition of things; a condition which we cannot suppose will continue for a great length of time, and which presents an opportunity that demands *immediate* improvement. If society is allowed to crystallize without the impress of the church, and men are allowed again to adjust themselves to their religious environment, true religion will be at a discount, and the difficulties of the missionary will be augmented tenfold. Neglect on the part of a general to utilize glaring opportunities is often the ground upon which he is cashiered and dismissed from the service. Will any branch of God's church be less guilty or less worthy of the stern displeasure of the great Head of the forces if it fails to take advantage vigorously of the present condition of things?

(b) Again, this accessibility is noted from another standpoint. The war has left the population in a situation peculiarly favorable to mission work. Weyler's edict of reconcentration gathered all the people into the towns. Only a very small per cent. of these have yet returned to the farms. All the handsome country homes were utterly destroyed, and none of them have yet been rebuilt. Thus while there was a considerable country population, it is now all in or near the towns; but this means more ready access on the part of the missionary. It means less time lost in the road and less physical exertion, which in a tropical climate is a very important matter. Sooner or later this population is

going back to its former manner of life. If only we can sound the gospel in their ears, place the word in their hands, and set them to reading and thinking before they have passed beyond this easy reach, the result may be many centres of influence whose waves will act and react upon each other. Prompt, speedy faithfulness on the part of the church now may cause the heart of the missionary to rejoice in the future as he finds little circles in which the "fallow ground has been broken up," and the soil is all ready for the seed. Paul went to the great centres that he might not only reach the citizens of those places, but come in contact with foreigners who would carry the truth to their homes. Shall we not follow his great example, and while the circumstances are most favorable utilize the opportunity which God has thrown in our way?

(c) The attitude of the people towards Americans at present renders them more accessible than formerly, and than we can expect later. That attitude is one of perfect respect. Many recognize the superiority of the Americans. They regard them as their deliverers from a terrible bondage, and accord them the esteem and gratitude which that act calls for. Where a native might have little effect, one of these good Samaritans from the north finds an attentive ear. Every American is regarded as the friend of the friend of the Cuban, and naturally such a relation gives prestige to the missionary as well as others. That fanaticism which missionaries tell us exists in so many places is not found here. True, the cry is often heard, "Mira al Americana" ("See the American); but never are we greeted with the "foreign devil," nor even the "Yankee pig." Perfect courtesy is accorded the ladies, and the hat is constantly tipped to the Senior "Padre" of the mission. Instead of finding our lives in danger, as is true in so many places, we are even spared many of those petty annoyances which when persisted in amount to real persecution. It is no hardship even to the flesh to do mission work here except as the flesh is wearied by the abundance of work that is demanding to be done.

Such prestige will not always be ours. If the unscrupulous trader shall here, as he has done at so many places, prove himself unworthy the confidence of the people, we may expect the missionary to suffer as well. Is it not the part of wisdom to enter while the door is open rather than waiting till it is closed be com-

pelled to use one-half our strength forcing an entrance? He who works with the greatest wisdom meets with the greatest success. The young man who will devote himself *now* to the Cuban work will find himself among people who are circumstantially his friends, who respect his teaching, and who are groping for something better than that which they have. Shall not the sickle be put in where the grain is all yellow to the harvest?

2. The second great source of attraction is found in *the comparatively small amount of work that is being done*. The small amount of work as compared with the great need. All told, there are nine missionary societies represented on the island. The Methodist and Baptist Churches, ever at the front in pioneer work, have each ten men on the field, and the work for which they are planning is of a vigorous, aggressive character; but besides them other forces are very small. The Episcopalians have two stations. The Congregationalists, Friends, Northern Presbyterians, Southern Presbyterians, and Christian Alliance have one station each. While the United States government keeps *ten thousand* men on the island to guarantee civil liberty, all the churches of God combined entrust the spiritual liberty to the hands of barely a *score and a half* of men.

That responsibility which God laid upon our country was of a double nature. The first was accepted, and the stamp of divine approval was placed upon the efforts of American arms. The God of battles was with his people as they went up to fight his battles. The same God to-day points to the greater need, the greater opportunity, and the greater responsibility. Shall not hesitation on our part put us in much the same position in which the inhabitants of Meroz found themselves when they were visited with curses by the angel of God? (Judges v. 23.)

In the island there are at present twenty-two large cities, about ninety towns of more than five thousand inhabitants, and above five hundred villages having each a population of one thousand or more. Puerto Principe province, with one city, bearing the same name as the province, of forty thousand inhabitants, has no Protestant minister of any denomination. To a reader sitting in his room fifteen hundred miles away such a statement comes, perhaps, with greatly reduced force; but to one distant only a few miles it becomes a fearful reality. Every city in Virginia the size of Puerto Principe has more ministers than can be

found in the whole of Cuba, yet this city with its forty thousand souls, in the midst of a prosperous business section, has not one who is seeking to obey the explicit command of the Master.

Our own church has one station, that at Cardenas, manned by two men and two women. As many more could find every moment of their time occupied in this town alone. Avenues of work open up continually which cannot be entered. The gospel has met with a hearty reception. February 11th the first members were received—twenty-one in number—nearly all of whom bear the impress of true “soldiers of the cross.” This is the result of eight months’ preaching on the part of one man, and two months’ visiting and teaching on the part of the two ladies of the mission. If need plus opportunity form large elements in a call, Cuba beckons very strongly to the churches and young men of the South.

3. The third element of attraction for the churches of the South is the *nearness* of the field. All men are our neighbors, but the needy at our doors appeal deeply to our hearts and lay also an additional responsibility. The island is only separated from Florida by narrow straits ninety miles in width. So near that it may almost be classed as home mission territory. So near that many of its inhabitants are naturalized American citizens. The recent census puts the number of such citizens on the island at thirty thousand. These in addition to the large number of native Americans here show the close relation that has existed between the two countries, a relation that must needs be still closer in the future. Such intimate commercial relationship carries with it a tremendous opportunity and responsibility as well. It means simply that Cuba must be evangelized by the Southern churches or not at all. The Northern Methodists have determined not to enter the field. Only the Sunday-school Board of the Northern Presbyterian Church has taken any action, and that merely to the extent of placing one native in Havana to do Sunday-school work. The whole Protestant world is saying to the Southern churches, “Cuba is your territory; give it the gospel or make your excuse before the throne of an Almighty God.”

Besides, this proximity to our southern borders demands that we do the work as a matter of *self-defence*. Unless Cuba is made a Protestant country it will become an entering wedge for the evil system in vogue here into our own land. Already many

Cubans have sought homes in the cities of the South. Key West and Tampa and many other cities have very large settlements. The Americans on the island are numbered by the thousand; but the religion which this people carry with them, and that in which our own people find themselves here is Roman Catholicism of Spain's darkest hue. It is carried to our shores; our own citizens are tainted with it here. The evangelization of the island will mean the salvation of many of our own brethren, and will prove a bulwark to our own shores.

4. The work of this field may be done at a remarkably *low cost*. Surely that is practical. Our own church in the present unhappy condition of its treasury may well be attracted by that statement. The nearness makes travelling expenses to and from the field comparatively small. When once upon the field the missionary remains in enforced idleness for only a few months, as the language does not present those serious obstacles found in many countries of the Orient. A year is said to be amply sufficient to enable the average man to get ready for effective work. Many go to work in much less time.

The actual expenses of living now are greater than they will be later, when the country has recovered from the devastation of the war. It is estimated that under favorable conditions the soil may be made to produce five times the amount that has even been produced in one year; but with an increase in the supply there must be a decrease in price.

Rents are very reasonable; in this town extremely low, though in other towns and cities more expensive.

5. The last source of attraction is found in *the desperate straits* into which this people hath fallen religiously.

Many a church member who talked incessantly and cheered most lustily for "Cuba Libre" will say, Have they not a religion that is good enough? As well might he ask, Is bread not a sufficient remedy for hunger when that bread is permeated with a deadly poison? Some man may perhaps get a few crumbs into which the poison has not found its way, and have his life prolonged, but the great mass of those who feed upon it do so to their own death. The spiritual food which these people have held out to them contains a much larger per cent. of poison than of grain. By far the largest number of their prayers are offered to the Virgin, and that a mere telling of the beads accompanied by a

form which soon becomes so stereotyped that it can be repeated while the worshipper is planning mentally for a Sabbath-night ball.

In their little private shrines, which are nothing short of idolatrous altars, the crowned Queen of Heaven always occupies the central place, while her less important Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, may perhaps be given a corner or omitted entirely. It needs but a glance at one of these shrines to determine whether or not this is soil for mission work. One which has recently been brought to light and dismantled through the instrumentality of Miss Houston, of this mission, will serve as an example. In addition to the image of the Virgin and of Christ it contained a cross, rosary and a considerable number of "promesas," or offerings of gold and silver, made to the *Virgin* to purchase a blessing at her hands. One "promesa" consisted of a pair of rudely shaped eyes, made of gold which had been begged from door to door. This act of humiliation in addition to the gold itself was considered very meritorious. The poor woman's eyes were none the better, yet her faith remained unshaken until the true light had been flashed into her heart.

That miraculous power which enables the priest to *make a real god* and carry him in his vest pocket to the bedside of some sick person has destroyed much of the reverence for him who calls himself the "I AM." Mary and the saints are not so conformable to the priest's bidding, hence receive a great share of respect.

How a Christian could find himself all alive with zeal to free Cuba eighteen months ago, and now utterly disregard that spiritual bondage which is making her a trap door to the bottomless pit seems surpassingly strange. The despotism of Spain was grievous. That of Rome is much more grievous and far-reaching. The message of Christ is one of "liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound." In this fair island the chains of Satan have been strongly riveted, and are being held in place by the power of the Pope and his almost inexhaustible coffers.

Shall not our church be enabled to do vastly more to fill this need than she is doing at present?

Cardenas, Cuba, February 19, 1900.