

AMERICAN BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS FOR FOREIGN MISSIONS.

THE SIAM MISSION

AND

MESSRS. BRADLEY AND CASWELL.

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INQUIRIES are frequently made of the Corresponding and District Secretaries, by clergymen and others who have been perplexed by statements as to the circumstances in which Messrs. Bradley and Caswell became disconnected with the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. To facilitate the answering of these inquiries, a reprint is made of the statement in the Thirty-ninth Report of the Board, (for 1848,) and a re-statement of the facts is annexed, in another form better suited to the object in view. That made in the Annual Report, is as follows.

Partial statements having gone abroad extensively with respect to the dissolution of Messrs. Bradley and Caswell's connection with the Board, the Committee will probably be expected here to present to the Board a summary view of the case.

The first positive intimation received by the Prudential Committee of the existence of divided views and feelings in the mission, was in the year 1845. This information came in a letter from a member of the mission, and the statement was, that Messrs. Bradley and Caswell had adopted and zealously advocated peculiar views on the subject of sinless perfection in this life, that the conse-

quences of this upon the good feeling and union of the mission had been unhappy, and that the case had been gradually assuming a more serious aspect for the four years past. This letter was dated March 24, 1845, and appears to have been shown to the two brethren. A letter was at the same time received from Mr. Caswell, dated April 1, 1845, in which he freely confessed a change in his religious views: "I know," he remarked, "that in one sense I have forfeited my claim on the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions for support. I have entertained views which I did not hold when I entered its employ, and which by most of the patrons of the Board are considered at variance with the teachings of the Bible. So far as relates to any rights of mine as an individual, the Board might withdraw its support, I suppose, without any farther consideration of the subject." Mr. Caswell, however, deprecated such a result. Dr. Bradley wrote April 24th, embodying his "views touching the doctrine of sanctification in this life" in nineteen articles; and in the month following he made a supplementary statement. In the same month, another member of the mission wrote, declaring that a great breach had been made in the mission by the controversy on the subject of "perfectionism," which would not be healed till the controversy should cease; that in consequence of it, the mission was much divided and distracted.

In the latter part of the autumn, 1845, the case came before the Prudential Committee, and was made the subject of free conference; but, without any formal action. It was understood that the Secretary having charge of the foreign correspondence should avail himself of the views elicited in the conference, and write to the Siam mission freely on the subject. This he did under date of Dec. 4, 1845.

It will perhaps be the desire of the Board that the ma-

terial portions of this letter should be laid before them, and the following passages are extracted. They will show the manner in which the case was treated in its earlier stages of development.

"The *practical* error, (for such I regard it,) which has given rise to this correspondence, is one that has fallen more or less under our personal observation; and, with us in New England, it has assumed different aspects, according to the character of the individual, and the circumstances in which he was placed. Here, *perfectionism* is not, *practically*, the same thing among the Methodists, that it has been among the churches of our connection, within the circle of our observation. In whatever manner the doctrine may have been stated by its champions, it has exerted a very mischievous influence among us. This is a fact beyond question among intelligent men, who have been in situations favorable to observation. But the *cause* may not be so obvious and certain. Perhaps our people have not received the doctrine in the same theoretical view as the Methodists have; or, what is quite probable, they have been carried away by this one idea, allowing it to exert an absorbing influence, and thus to prove fatal to a well-balanced view of the facts in the gospel, and so to have the effect of a pernicious heresy. At any rate, judging by the fruits, (the rule prescribed by our Savior,) we have had, here in New England, much reason to regard the prevalence of the doctrine with apprehension and sorrow. In all the instances I have personally known, Christians have, for the time, been rendered less estimable as Christians, and less useful as church members.

"You must not understand me as saying these things reflect on the brethren in your mission, who have been supposed to be what is called perfectionists; but in order that you may perceive from what point of view we contemplate the subject.

"The letters above acknowledged were the first to give us any distinct intimation of a divided opinion among you on doctrinal subjects. The case is, therefore, too recent, so far as the Committee is concerned, for decisive action on their part. Two of the brethren of the mission have, indeed, avowed to us a change in their religious views. One admits that he entertains views, which he did not when he entered the employ of the Board, and which, by most of the patrons of the Board, are considered at variance with the teachings of the Bible; and that in this sense, he has forfeited his claim for support from the treasury of the Board, which might be withdrawn from him without any farther consideration of the subject. But the Committee have too high an esteem for these brethren to proceed in this summary manner. They have hope, too, that,—as it has been among good men here at home,—the diverging lines will soon begin to converge until they become one again. If, indeed, we could suppose that results would appear, in any of your members, similar to those we have seen so unhappily exemplified in some parts of New England;—should the idea of sinless perfection become absorbing, fanatical, censorious, disorderly, destructive of brotherly love in the hearts of its professors, lowering down the standard of the divine law, and substituting an unreflecting, joyous self-approbation for an enlarged and active benevolence;—then, upon such things being made evident to the mission, the Committee would feel bound to recall such, as being no longer the proper recipients of the funds committed to their disposal. And the Committee may feel bound to act, even with much less than this.

"You will perceive, however, that the *mission*, as such, has not yet made any communication to the Committee concerning these brethren; nor do we find that it has taken any action, *as a mission*, in the case;—as it is in

duty bound to do, if any of its members have fallen into serious errors, whether doctrinal or practical, and the suitable private steps have been taken with them in vain. The mission, not being an ecclesiastical body, (technically speaking,) it cannot depose or silence a minister of the gospel, as such, nor can it excommunicate one of its members from the church; but it can go, as thoroughly as any ecclesiastical body, into a consideration of the views and conduct of any of its members, whether clerical or lay, in order to determine whether it is proper to apply the funds to his support. Every member of the mission is responsible to his mission, in respect to his competency and faithfulness as a missionary. The mission cannot dissolve his connection with the Board, but they can go thoroughly into his case, and then refer it to the Prudential Committee, with the facts. If the case be flagrant, demanding immediate action, they can suspend him from the mission, until the action of the Prudential Committee can be had; and if he refuse to conform to the vote of the mission, they can withhold his salary. If he regard himself as aggrieved, he is of course at liberty to refer his case to the Prudential Committee.

"Now if you believe there is a case among you demanding the interference of the Prudential Committee, the mission, as such, ought to take it up, and if they do not succeed in recovering the erring member, or members, it is for the mission to see that the case go home in a state for intelligent action on the part of the Committee. At the same time it is and has been proper for *individual members* to write us on the subject,—feeling bound in conscience to do so, and giving the other party due notice (as appears to have been done) of what they intended to do.

"Before any steps of this sort are taken, I would suggest whether, for the present, all controversy, on both sides, should not cease entirely, and, as far as possible, all

irritating causes; and brethren determine to know nothing but Christ and him crucified, and to give themselves renewedly and more devotedly to efforts for saving the souls of the poor heathen around. The effects of this course can hardly be bad; and they may be very salutary on all your minds.

“But the distance of your mission from us, and the time it takes to exchange letters on that account, are such, that I must say,—If your hopes are disappointed, and causes of division and scandal, in the opinion of the mission of serious magnitude, exist, then we shall expect to be fully informed, as I have already said. Only let an intelligent principle of Christian charity actuate your counsels, and let no polemical acrimony affect your proceedings. Let the views which govern you be as much as possible *practical*. It is a great thing to sacrifice the usefulness of a good man for life. Let brethren *allure* one another into and along the paths of truth. Controversy ill becomes a mission and missionaries. I do not mean, however, that you should at all shut your eyes upon the serious errors into which your brethren may fall. If errors, that tend to paralyze the usefulness of a mission, cannot be removed in one way, they must of course be removed in another. I entreat you all to watch over your own selves, and over each other, with godly jealousy. Let the brethren who have adopted new views, be not too confident that those views are not, after all, erroneous in some important respects. Let the others be sure that they put a candid construction upon the language used by those brethren, and that they do not make the case worse, in their apprehension of it, than it really is.

“The Committee regard the very existence of your mission as placed in peril by this new cause of alienation among brethren, if it should continue to excite feeling and controversy. We shall keep our eyes upon it, and wish

to know, from time to time, how the matter stands. Perhaps the information had better come from the mission; the minority giving their own views, if not concurrent with those communicated in behalf of the mission.”

After the letter had been sent, from which the above quotations are made, one was received from still another member of the mission, dated July 24, 1845, in which he affirmed that, for about four years, Messrs. Bradley and Caswell had more or less frequently advocated the doctrine of perfectionism “in some of its peculiar features” at their religious Sabbath service in English; that their sermons on these occasions “were generally more or less spiced with it;” and even that the prayer-meetings of the mission were “sometimes made seasons of unpleasant discussion on this subject; and in some instances such denunciatory expressions had been dropped by these brethren, that some of the brethren holding the common views thought it best to withdraw from the meeting in one or two instances.” This letter was read in Committee in February, 1846, and the following minute of proceedings at that meeting is extracted from the records, viz:—“After the reading of a letter from Mr. Robinson of the Siam mission, dated July 24th, the Committee were unanimously of the opinion that Messrs. Robinson and Hemenway, of that mission, should have leave to remove to the Sandwich Islands mission, and that Messrs. Johnson and Peet should have leave to remove to the mission in China.” In relation to Messrs. Caswell and Bradley, it seemed advisable to await the result of the letter of December 4th. These proceedings were immediately forwarded to the mission, and in consequence of them Messrs. Johnson and Peet removed to China. Mr. Robinson’s health obliged him to embark for the United States, and he died on the passage. Mr. Hemenway, a brother-in-law of

Mr. Caswell, decided to remain, with the hope of seeing a change for the better.

No answer from the mission, as such, was received to the letter from the Comitée. Mr. Robinson was absent when it reached Bangkok. Mr. Hemenway thought that the case was already brought fully before the Committee. Messrs. Johnson and Peet had not yet sailed for China, and they stated that, though the subject of perfectionism had been dropped on both sides, for a considerable time, as unfavorable to their spiritual interests; and though there had been apparently a better state of feeling towards each other as a consequence of this, and a better preparation of mind for their work among the heathen; yet the position of both parties was painful and embarrassing, and fitted to detract from their confidence in each other as Christian teachers, and from that free and unembarrassed expression of opinion, which is so essential to Christian liberty and to a vigorous and manly piety.

Mr. Caswell and Dr. Bradley each wrote to the Committee, in reply, at great length.

The Committee reserved their judgment for nearly two years from the first announcement to them of this interrupted harmony of the mission. On the 26th of January, 1847, they adopted the report of a sub-committee on the subject, which concludes with the following remarks:

“On the-whole, the sub-committee cannot doubt that these two brethren, Messrs. Bradley and Caswell, have suffered themselves to be led into speculations, and the adoption of views, on the subject of the Christian's sanctification in this life, which are greatly to be lamented. Such speculations and views would doubtless occasion the utmost disquiet, if introduced into any other mission under the care of this Board; and were the Siam mission to be reinforced, they would be almost sure to, occasion disquietude and alienation among the new missionaries;

and perhaps it may be added, that they would occasion uneasiness in any one of the churches of this country, which, as churches, help to sustain the missions connected with the Board. Were a candidate for employment as a missionary to write on these subjects as those brethren have done, the sub-committee believe it would prevent and ought to prevent his appointment by the Prudential Committee, as a missionary. Possibly the views of Messrs. Bradley and Caswell have been misapprehended; and in cases of this sort it is always found difficult to demonstrate the precise nature of the opinions entertained. Still there may not be the least doubt of their existence, nor of their injurious tendency and influence. The sub-committee are of the opinion, that missionaries entertaining sentiments such as appear to be held by Messrs. Bradley and Caswell, so much at variance with those held by them when they became connected with the Board, ought not, if they retain such views, to remain in connection with the Board.”

Dr. Bradley arrived in this country in August of the last year, and immediately communicated to the Prudential Committee the fact, that, during his homeward voyage, he had become unsettled in his belief of the validity of Infant Baptism. And before an interview with the Committee became practicable, the following emphatic expression of opinion was received from Mr. Hemenway, dated June 1, 1847:

I have had a very strong desire that your mission to this people should be continued, and this has led me to hope against hope, that these peculiar views would be dropped so far as to avoid introducing them into our religious meetings. But from what I have seen the last year, and what I know of the feelings of these brethren, I cannot doubt that controversy would be renewed here, should any join our mission while they are still members of it. They read with avidity the Oberlin Evangelist and every work they can get which sets forth the same or similar views-with that school. Is it probable, therefore, that they will think it their duty to be silent? I do not wish to be understood as desiring their removal from the field; for I think they may be useful here; but if by themselves, they will be free to act according to their convictions of duty, and your mission

will be freed from a burden which has long hung heavily upon it. It would then be separated from the necessity of *feeling* that it must oppose those views, and its members might labor with more lively hope of success. Oh, if Messrs. Bradley and Caswell, instead of turning reformers to convert their brethren, had kept their minds wholly engrossed in missionary labors, harmony might now have prevailed among us, and we have been a prosperous mission.

The Committee were at length convinced that, with the two brethren retaining their peculiar states of mind and remaining in the mission, it would not be possible much longer to keep the mission in existence. The case was by no means one of mere doctrinal errors. It was not even necessary to determine precisely what were the new views embraced by those brethren. There was no doubt that they regarded themselves as having different views from those they had entertained when they were appointed to their mission, and from those of their brethren in the mission; and on a subject, too, which they themselves believed to be of the highest practical importance; that they were zealous in propagating these opinions among their brethren of the mission; and that the effect upon the minds of all their associates was extremely unhappy, till at length it had become impossible to keep the mission amicably and prosperously together, or to reinforce it with a prospect of unity and success. Added to all this, in respect to Dr. Bradley, was his change of views on the subject of Infant Baptism.

The Prudential Committee would not be understood as calling in question the piety of these brethren, nor as desiring to diminish the force of aught that has been said in commendation of them in former Reports. And their personal intercourse with Dr. Bradley, since his return home has been entirely fraternal. It has resulted in his asking, for himself and Mr. Caswell, a release from their connection with the Board, which has been granted.

THE FACTS RE-STATÉD, IN ANOTHER FORM.

I. It was not *mere doctrinal errors*, which led to this result.

The difficulty in the mission doubtless *began* in the fact, that Messrs. Bradley and Caswell adopted and advocated what were regarded by their brethren as doctrinal errors, and the continued existence of this fact continued the difficulties. But when the Prudential Committee first became cognizant of the case, in the year 1845, the statement not only was that these brethren "had adopted and zealously advocated peculiar views on the subject of sinless perfection in this life," but that "the consequences of this upon the good feeling and union of the mission had been unhappy," and that "the case had been gradually assuming a more serious aspect for the four years past." Also, that "a great breach had been made in the mission by the controversy on the subject of 'perfectionism,' which would not be healed till the controversy should cease,"—that "in consequence of it, the mission was much divided and distracted."

That the *dividing, distracting influence* of this controversy was specially in view by the Prudential Committee, and from the first, is farther evident from the fact, that the first letter addressed to the mission after hearing of this state of things, (which was received and replied to by Messrs. Bradley and Caswell, before the former left Siam,) recommended the entire cessation of "all controversy, on both sides, and, as far as possible, all irritating causes;" and that the mission was assured its "very existence" was "placed in peril by this new cause of alienation among brethren, if it should continue to excite feelings of controversy."

The first impressions of the Committee, as to the disas-

trous influence of the controversy, were strengthened by another letter received from Bangkok, soon after the letter above-quoted had been sent. That letter even affirmed, that "the prayer-meetings of the mission were sometimes made seasons of unpleasant discussion," and that "in some instances, such denunciatory expressions had been dropped by Messrs. Bradley and Caswell, that some of the brethren holding the common views, thought it best to withdraw from the meeting in one or two instances." In view of this unhappy and paralyzing conflict of views and feelings in the mission, the Prudential Committee adopted a measure, the effect of which would have been to leave Messrs. Bradley and Caswell *alone* in the mission, *but still to leave them there*. Messrs. Johnson and Peet had permission to remove to China, and Messrs. Hemenway and Robinson to join the mission at the Sandwich Islands. This proceeding was *solely* in view of the divided and unhappy state of the mission. It aimed to remove one of the conflicting parties, and the only one that could properly be sent to other missions, entirely from the ground. In respect to the two for China, there were indeed reasons, growing out of their knowledge of the Chinese language, in addition to the one under consideration, but in respect to Messrs. Hemenway and Robinson, there were no other reasons; Siam was their only appropriate home as missionaries. The immediate occasion, and in respect to a part of the brethren the sole occasion, of this proceeding, was the belief of the Committee, that the mission, as then constituted, could never work happily together. Messrs. Johnson and Peet actually removed to China; and when on the point of leaving Siam, gave an affecting view, as appears in the Report, of the blight that had unhappily settled on the spirit of the mission. Mr. Robinson's impaired health led him to embark for the United States, and he died on the voyage. Mr.

Hemenway, brother-in-law of Mr. Caswell, "decided to remain, with the hope of seeing a change for the better."

2. Messrs. Bradley and Caswell knew, before Dr. Bradley left Siam, that *mere doctrinal errors* were not the only difficulty in view of the Prudential Committee.

The letter from the Missionary House, dated Dec. 4, 1845, which is quoted at so much length in the Report, and makes so much allusion to the excited feeling and controversy in the mission, *was actually replied to, from Siam, both by Mr. Caswell, and Dr. Bradley*. The permission to the other four brethren to leave Messrs. Bradley and Caswell alone in the mission, was also received before Dr. Bradley left Siam, and the reasons for this permission were understood by all. The result to which the Prudential Committee came in January, 1847, and which is quoted in the statement from the Report, was forwarded immediately, and though it did not reach Bangkok till after Dr. Bradley's departure, it was among the first things communicated to him on his arrival in the United States; and in this result the *disquieting influence* of those two brethren's speculations is emphatically stated. If Dr. Bradley has ever said, since he has been in this country, that he was informed of no reason which operated on the Prudential Committee, except his alleged doctrinal errors, until after his connection with the Board was dissolved; his saying so was the result of great forgetfulness on his part.

3. It does not appear from the Report, that the doctrinal errors of Messrs. Bradley and Caswell would *alone* have seriously disturbed their relations to the Board.

On the contrary, it is probable that their relations to the Board might have remained undisturbed by the Committee, had not their new views and speculations resulted in *practical* evils of a very grave character. The Committee waited nearly two years after hearing of

the difficulties, to see if they could not be removed. They entreated the brethren, on both sides, to cease from controversy, and from whatever tended to irritation; to "let an intelligent spirit of Christian charity actuate their counsels, and no polemic acrimony affect their proceedings;" to be governed, as far as possible, by *practical* views, and not to be uncandid or self-confident in their opinions. When, in January, 1847, the Prudential Committee spoke of the sentiments of Messrs. Bradley and Caswell, as being incompatible with their retaining their connection with the Board, the Committee connected these sentiments with their actual "injurious tendency and influence" in the mission; with the "utmost disquiet," which "such speculations and views would doubtless occasion, if introduced into any other mission under the care of this Board," and with the "disquietude and alienation" they "would be almost sure to occasion" among new missionaries, should the Siam mission be reinforced; and the uneasiness they would occasion even "in any one of the churches in this country, which, as churches, help to sustain the missions connected with the Board." Had there not been such disquieting results in the mission, it seems probable that the Committee would not have felt themselves called upon to interpose as they did.

4. The Prudential Committee were forced to adopt the opinion, before they met Dr. Bradley on his return to this country, that it would not be possible to keep the mission in a peaceable and vigorous existence, should he and Mr. Caswell remain in it.

This opinion was confirmed by the emphatic testimony of Mr. Hemenway, a man of calm and good judgment, and already mentioned as near relative of Mr. Caswell, quoted in the statement from the Report. Let the reader recur to Mr. Hemenway's testimony. He declares his belief, notwithstanding his former hopes, that the controversy

would be renewed, should new missionaries come while Messrs. Bradley and Caswell were members of the mission. He did not wish them removed from the field, for he thought they might be useful there. "But if by themselves," he says, "they will be free to act according to their own convictions of duty, and your mission will be freed from a burden which has long hung heavily upon it." And he adds,— "Oh, if Messrs. Bradley and Caswell, instead of turning reformers to convert their brethren, had kept their minds wholly engrossed in missionary labors, harmony might now have prevailed among us, and we have been a prosperous mission."

5. Dr. Bradley's request for a release from his connection with the Board was not, in any sense, the result of compulsion from the Prudential Committee.*

It was the result of Dr. Bradley's convictions of duty, in view of *facts* calmly stated to him by a sub-committee from the Prudential Committee. His "*expulsion*" was not one of these facts. He was in no sense *expelled*. He stated, indeed, that both he and Mr. Caswell would prefer expulsion, to the asking of a dismissal; as the former would give to them and their views a stronger hold on the sympathies of the community. But he was reasoned with on the impropriety of *thus* creating an interest in their peculiar views, at the cost of a missionary society. The fact especially presented to his mind was, the certainty there appeared to be *that the mission must be discontinued*, unless he and Mr. C. saw fit to retire from it. The opinion of Mr. Hemenway, already quoted, was shown to him, and seemed to have an influence. Facts calmly stated, over which the Committee had no control, and which ought to have had, and were intended to have, an influence

* The facts stated under this head, are derived from other sources than the Report.

on his judgment and conduct, led him to ask, as they did the Committee to vote, his release.

6. The reasons for finally discontinuing the Siam Mission, are thus stated in Fortieth Annual Report, adopted by the Board in September, 1849.

"It was stated in the last Report, that the Prudential Committee were not able to decide as to the duty of the Board in respect to the continuance of this mission. The special committee to whom the Report was referred at the annual meeting, gave it as their opinion, that it would best subserve the interests of the cause of missions to relinquish the mission in Siam, and strengthen missionary stations in other fields, or institute new ones. It is due to Mr. Hemenway to say, that his feelings have been strongly in favor of a continuance of the mission. The question has not been an easy one for the Committee. But all things being considered, they came at length, unanimously, to the conclusion, that the indications of Providence authorized and seemed even to require them to leave this field to the other societies which had entered or were about entering it."

The foregoing statement, which embraces all the important facts in this case, must convince every candid mind, that the case of Messrs. Bradley and Caswell, as it came before the Prudential Committee, was not a simple case of mere doctrinal errors,—as has been often asserted,—but was a complex case, involving consequences fatal to the peace, union, efficiency, and as it has proved, the very existence, of the mission. The facts are stated just as they are; but without intending to reflect on the brethren, who were the occasion of the evil. Their conscientiousness is not questioned; but their conscientiousness made the difficulties, in which the mission and the Prudential Committee became involved, none the less a reality.