

Benevolence Among the Baptists of the Maritime Provinces for the Past Twenty Years, viz, 1882-1901, as Reported in the Year-Book and in the N. B. Annual.

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The object of this article is to answer two questions :

1. Is our benevolence increasing ?
2. Is it now what it ought to be ?

I. As to the first.

Of course we recognize the fact that the reports in the Year-Books are far from complete ; and also that much of our benevolence is of a character which renders report impossible. Yet on the other hand our gifts to the great enterprises carried on by our denomination, as reported by the treasurers of our denominational funds, ought to be a fair index of the benevolent spirit of our churches. For obvious reasons the figures in the following tables do not include the offerings to the "Centennial Fund," to the "Indian Famine Fund," and to the "Acadia Forward Movement Fund ;" nor the recent gifts of Deacon J. W. Bars of \$7000, nor interest on legacies. They do, however, include the amounts collected by the W. M. A. Societies, for surely the money raised by these societies is a part of the regular benevolence of our churches. It may be that in some churches the woman society is doing the larger part of the work of raising the denominational funds ; or possibly in some cases the Woman Society is doing the whole work. If that is true in any church, it certainly is not as it should be. Let us pull along every line ; W. M. A. S., Sunday-school, and church in general ; and let us pull together, to give our great denominational enterprises their proper support that God's Kingdom may come in the earth and his will be done.

TABLE NO. 1.

Membership.

1882-1901.

5-Year Groups	Yearly Average N. S.	Yearly Average N. B.	Yearly Average P. E. I.	Yearly Average Mar. Prov.	Gain Between the Year Groups, Mar. Prov.
1882-'86	24869	13540	1680	40.89	
1887-'91	26242	15069	1799	43.110	7.5 p. c.
1892-'96	27219	16760	1981	45.960	6.6 p. c.
1897-'01	29569	18988	2321	50.878	10.7 p. c.

This table shows that our denomination has made steady numerical progress between the 5-year groups, the largest gain being between the last two groups. The gain of 10.7 per cent. certainly marks a very high degree of prosperity in our churches. Let us now consider a second table which will show us our denominational offerings for the corresponding years.

TABLE NO. 2.

Benevolent Funds.

1882-1901.

(These figures include the offerings for denominational purposes given through the N. B. Convention as reported in the Annual. No treasurer's report is given in the Annual for 1900, and that for 1901 I have not seen.)

5-Year Groups	Yearly Average N. S.	Yearly Average N. B.	Yearly Average P. E. I.	Yearly Average Mar. Prov.	Gain per cent. between Year-Groups.
1882-'86	\$10308.45	\$5663.00	\$805.35	\$6841.80	
1887-'91	13936.95	5877.17	1057.86	2871.98	24 p. c.
1892-'96	16609.04	6813.37	1162.17	2458.54	18 p. c.
1896-'01	16986.99	8311.03	1260.97	26558.99	.8 p. c.

This table shows an increase from group to group, al-

though the rate of increase steadily diminishes. In order to know if this gain in the lump sum represents an actual gain in comparison with the large gain in members, we need a third table to show us the average gift per member for the same years.

TABLE NO. 3.

Benevolent Funds.

Yearly gift per member.

1882-1901.

N. B. These figures denote cents unless otherwise marked.

5-Year Groups	Average Mar. Pro.	Gain between Groups.	Gain per cent.	Loss between Groups.	Loss per cent.
1882-'86	42				
1887-'91	49	7	16 p. c.		
1892-'96	54	5	10 p. c.		
1897-'01	52			2	3.7 p. c.

This table shows that for the first three groups we made a somewhat steady progress; but the last group (1897-'01) reveals a falling off of two cents per member, as compared with the previous five years. This has occurred, too, when there has been a large gain (10.7 per cent) in membership. But two cents per member does not represent the actual falling off for the past five years. As the table shows, up to 1897 (or if we had the amounts for the several years, up to 1898) there was a steady increase; we might say a normal increase—not as large as it ought to have been perhaps, yet an increase. Other things being equal there would have been, we believe, a corresponding increase for the last five years. Such an increase would have meant an average of 60 cents per member instead of 52 cents. It seems fair to say, therefore, that we have suffered a real loss of about eight cents per member, or between 12 and 15 per cent. instead of 3.7 per cent.

How are we to account for this falling off in the past five years? There are three possible explanations. (1) We are poorer in material wealth than formerly. I can not believe that this is true for the Provinces. It certainly is not true for Kings Co., N. S. (2) Our members have not been giving as generously during these years as in former years. But we remember "the Indian Famine Fund" and "the Acadia Forward Movement Fund," and we see at once that this explanation is not the correct one. (3) Our gifts—in part—have been going in other directions. During these years the chief other direction has been "the Acadia Forward Movement." The treasurer of the college reports that \$4843.06 have been collected for this fund in the years 1898-'01. This represents an average of \$24 per member for each year. If we add this to the regular benevolence we have an average of \$76 per member. Now we do not mean to infer that, had there been no "Forward Movement," our denominational funds would have been \$76 per member. But we must conclude that, had there been no "Forward Movement," there would have been a fair increase in our denominational funds, as we have already indicated; and that our offerings to the college fund have cut into our regular offerings between 10 and 15 per cent. We are in fullest sympathy with "The Acadia Forward Movement." But we think that as a people we need to consider seriously whether this is not the real explanation of the decrease in our regular denominational offerings, and accordingly we need to see to it that this result shall not be repeated in connection with "The Twentieth Century Fund for Missions." For to keep up this decrease for the next five years would seriously hamper our missionary enterprises. The "Twentieth Century Fund" is asked for over and above the regular offerings. I presume that the fund for the college was supposedly pledged in the same way. But nature is nature, and if in order to meet one's pledge in one direction he must curtail his expenses in other directions, the gifts to the church and denomination—speaking generally—are the first to suffer. We desire, however, to say this in commendation of our people, the rate of loss has been comparatively small.

The figures for 1897-'01 furnish an interesting study. We give them in a fourth table.

TABLE NO. 4.

(We bring "Acadia" into our calculations in this table because its large and increasing deficit is seriously hampering its work.)

Year.	Membership.	Offering.	Average per Member.	Offering Without W. M. A. S.	Acadia Received.	Acadia's Deficit.
1897	50424	\$27894.10	\$0.55	\$19354.72	\$2002.28	\$644.24
1898	50551	24476.52	0.48	15782.80	1833.35	3004.05
1899	50846	24484.70	0.48	16072.92	1896.63	1087.03
1900	51750	29432.46	0.57	21269.10	1894.07	1313.69
1901	50821	26507.27	0.52	16748.68	2083.79	2144.19
Total		132795.04	0.52	89228.22	9710.12	8193.20

Several things appear from this table :

(1). The falling off began with the first year collection of "Acadia Forward Movement Fund." This tends to confirm what we have already said in explanation of the decrease in our denominational gifts. In two years only was the average per member equal to that for the years 1892-'96.

(2). The large amount reported for 1900 was due to the special work of Mr. Vining who visited our churches during the previous convention year. N. W. Missions received \$4357.05 (not including Mr. Bars's \$1000) against \$942.95 in 1899; and \$1221.76 in 1901. This means that N. W. Missions received about \$3000 more from our churches in that year than in ordinary years.

(3). Acadia has been having a yearly deficit which, according to the treasurer's report for last year, amounts in the aggregate to a little more than \$10,000. From the above table we see that Acadia has received 10.8 per cent. of the total denominational funds (not including the offerings of the W. M. A. S.) and that the deficit amounts to 9.2 per cent. of the same. In other words if our denominational offerings, apart from those of the W. M. A. Societies, had been given according to the convention scheme and Acadia had received the full 20 per cent; instead of deficit for each year of the five, every dollar of deficit would have been paid.

These figures certainly furnish us with matter for serious reflection. Let us take them to heart, brethren!

II. Is our benevolence now what it ought to be?

Every man must answer for himself, and every church. Each one of us know whether he gave the average of \$0.52 last year or not, and each church can soon reckon up whether its offerings equaled the number of its members multiplied by \$0.52. Many of our churches go beyond this average. Surely those that have fallen below it can bring their offerings up to the average.

Comparisons, I know, are sometimes odious, but they may be profitable, nevertheless, and the following are given simply to stir our thought and enlarge our vision. Let us see what others are doing in the way of benevolence. For the years 1897 and 1898 the Baptists of Ontario and Quebec gave on an average per year \$1.47 per member. Last year the Baptists of Manitoba and the North West gave \$1.59 to benevolent work, and that too while they were giving an average of \$12.00 per member for local work. For the four years 1898-1901 the Baptists of Maine gave on an average per year \$1.17 per member. The Baptists of Mass. for 1899 (this is the only Year-Book that I have at hand) gave \$1.95 per member. But you say these brethren are situated in different financial conditions from ours here in the Maritime Provinces. Very good! Let us grant that for the sake of argument. It would still be a question whether the difference in their gifts as compared with ours does not represent more than this difference in financial conditions. For my part I believe that it does.

But let us come nearer home and take the gifts of other denominations in these provinces and compare them with ours. I have at hand the minutes of the N. S. Methodists for the years 1898-1901: For their missionary and educational purposes they have averaged per year \$1.10 per member. The Presbyterians of the Maritime Provinces during the past five years have had an average membership of 40,800 and for the missionary and educational schemes of their denomination (not including the offerings to their "Twentieth Century Fund") they have given an average offering of \$66,405.00 per year or \$1.63 per member.

Comment is unnecessary. Each one may draw his own conclusions. Simply let me say this,—we evidently have much to learn in the art of giving and need to "abound in this grace also."

Brethren, shall we not ponder these figures and inferences, talk them over with our churches, discuss them in our county conferences, pray concerning them, until our hearts are stirred with a larger benevolent spirit, and our gifts more nearly correspond to the blessings which God has bestowed upon us and to the needs of the work to which he has set our hands? May God grant it! Wolfville, N. S.