

### THE HAYSTACK PRAYER MEETING.

**M**ANY of our readers have doubtless seen accounts of the Centennial Celebration of the Haystack Prayer Meeting, at Williamston, Mass., last October. A monument upon the spot commemorates that eventful meeting, bearing the names of the five young men who attended it, viz.: Samuel J. Mills, James Richards, Francis L. Roberts, and Byron Green. The following address from "The Maritime Baptist," by Rev. R. O. Morse, will, I think, be of interest to many, if not all, of our readers:

As the result of a deep religious awakening which had made itself felt in Williamston and many surrounding localities, it had become the custom of a number of the students of Williams College, founded in 1793, at Williamston, to meet every Wednesday afternoon, in the valley south of the college for prayer. Sometimes when they had more leisure, they would go to a grove in the opposite direction. It was in this latter direction that the five young men wended their way upon that historic afternoon, but a thunderstorm led them to leave the grove and to take refuge under a haystack in Sloane's meadow nearby. The subject of the conversation turned upon the moral darkness of Asia, and Samuel Mills, the leading spirit of the group, proposed to send the Gospel to that dark, heathen land, uttering the words which have since become a missionary classic, "We can do it if we will." The five young men present then each offered a prayer, four of the five making the heathen world the burden of their petitions. Mills was especially enthusiastic in his prayer; he prayed that God would strike down the arm, with the red artillery of heaven, that should be raised against a herald of the cross.

These prayer meetings were continued in the grove near by until cold weather, when a good woman gave leave for the students to meet in her kitchen. After a time she asked that the door might be left open in to her sitting room, that she might listen, and later she opened the sitting room itself, and there this meeting was continued for at least forty years. At these meetings missions to the heathen were always kept to the forefront. Thus, as has been said, "the first personal work of effecting missions among foreign heathen nations on the part of American youth" were made at Williamston that afternoon one hundred years ago.

Although the story of the haystack meeting was well known, the precise spot of where it was held was not known until 1854, when the only survivor of the group of students, the Hon. Byram Green, identified the place. Two years before, a stranger passing through Williamston who had been deeply impressed by the faith and zeal of the students at the haystack, sent back a gold dollar, saying that it would at least purchase a cedar post to mark the spot, and prophesying that it would some

time be marked by marble. In 1857 this prophecy was fulfilled, and the cedar stake was replaced by marble, through the generosity of an alumnus of the college. President Mark Hopkins said in his address at the dedication, "For once in the history of the world a prayer meeting has been commemorated by a monument."

The missionary enthusiasm of these devoted young men found expression two years later, when on Sept. 7, 1808, two of the original five, Samuel J. Mills and James Richards, together with Ezra Fiske, John Seward and Luther Rice signed the constitution of "The Brethren." This was a secret organization, the purpose of which was "to effect in the persons of its members a mission or missions to the heathen." Each member pledged himself to "keep absolutely free from any engagement which shall be deemed incompatible with the object of this society," and to "hold himself in readiness to go on a mission when and where duty may call." Two years later, when the members entered the Theological Seminary at Andover, Mass., the society was transferred there, and the names of Adoniran Judson, jr., Samuel Newell and Samuel Nott, were added to the roll. From the time that Judson joined The Brethren he appears to have been the leading spirit among them; but one impulse moved them all, and they were exceedingly active in their efforts to kindle missionary enthusiasm among the churches and ministers wherever they went. The secret character of their organization grew out of a general lack of sympathy on the part of many of the churches of that day with what appeared to be such Utopian plans. The society still lives, although under a modified constitution, and has proved to be one of the influential organizations of history. Its membership, from Mills to Neesima, has included many noted missionaries.

But what came of this movement? Here were young men anxious and preparing for missionary work among the heathen. But the churches must be awakened to sympathy with their ideals. Time and space forbid our tracing the scattered missionary movements which providentially had prepared the way for the work of these young men. But men of faith, and piety, and large vision, in all denominations, were becoming interested in missions. Thus, the soil was ready for the seed. These young men were all Congregationalists. They therefore appeared before the General Association of that body which met at Bradford, Mass., on June 28, 1810, and asked to be sent as missionaries to the heathen. A sufficient number of influential members were in sympathy with them to ensure the success of the project. The following day the first Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions was elected, and thus the first foreign missionary society on the American continent came into existence.

But these young men were not yet ready to take up the work to which they had devoted themselves. Their studies were not yet com-