

**HISTORICAL SKETCH OF THE CAUSES THAT HAVE LED TO THE FORMATION AND ESTABLISHMENT OF THE NEW BRUNSWICK CONVENTION.**

(Published by request of the Home Mission Board.)

PART I.

During the last few years many inquiries have been made concerning the management of home mission work in this province, and also concerning the success attending it throughout the various periods of our denominational history. A brief review may now be in order.

From Dr. Bill's History we learn that domestic missions, as the fathers termed it, early had a place in the attention of our people, and almost from the beginning of the present century considerable missionary efforts were put forth. We pass over, however, the somewhat desultory operations of the primitive days—the time of associational control, and a little later, the district organizations—in order that a fuller account may be given of those periods in which we find the missionary activity of our people assuming a more systematic and permanent form, directly tending to the plan of organization we have reached to-day.

About the middle of the century Baptists here began to feel the need of a central board for the province, which might be able to call out and unite the resources of those communities in which our interests were strongest in the common support of those parts that were weak. Such an arrangement, it was thought, would more equally divide the force of available workers, and the sooner effect the evangelization of the whole province. There was even then the germ of the idea now more fully developed, and, with the best light and experience obtainable, the brethren of the time set about their mission.

Accordingly, March 21st, 1853, a meeting was called in Brussels street church for the special consideration of methods that would promote existing home mission interests and develop the true policy of the future. After due deliberation a body was formed, known as "The New Brunswick Baptist Home Missionary Society."

This organization, whose records are now a matter of history, received the hearty endorsement of the people, and soon began to make its influence felt among the more destitute sections of the province. Its work opened up with amazing rapidity. In 1854 it reported contributions amounting to \$1,775.00; in 1855, \$2,272.00; in 1856, \$2,204; and in seven years ending with 1860, a total of \$10,000.00, or an average of \$1,428.00 per year.

Now it must be remembered that at this time the membership of the churches was much smaller than at present, ranging from 4,806 in 1850 to 7,828 in 1860, which fact, when compared with the amounts given, goes to show the great interest then manifested in home mission work. For many years this society continued to flourish, doing much good and maintaining a strong hold on the affections of the people. To it, undoubtedly, is owing that systematic administration, which, with slight changes, has characterized the work of the last half century in our religious affairs. The best talents our denomination could furnish were called out in its service, and some of the brightest names on our church rolls were found from year to year serving on its board.

In time, however, interference came to disturb the peaceful course of our Home Mission Society—an interference which continued for several years, harassing its members and greatly

retarding its work. That interruption, it must now be said, came from without, and has been the fruitful cause of many regretful memories, troubling Israel even until this day.

About the year 1870 an agitation was commenced in the Maritime convention aiming to bring the home mission work of the three provinces under the control of that body. Let it not now be forgotten that Baptists in New Brunswick were at the time working harmoniously in home mission affairs, the board receiving each year hearty indorsement in the reports of the associations, with which it was accustomed to meet. Our brethren here were most peaceably united in the prosecution of their benevolent work at home when the proposal for a change came.

It is also to be noticed that the desire for an amalgamation of the home mission interests of the three provinces sprang not from the people themselves, but was a scheme thrust upon them by a few individuals who sought to effect their purpose through persistent agitation in the convention. It had been well if those brethren had first carefully consulted the real wishes of the people, according to Baptist ideas, and then, having found those wishes, had striven to follow the natural channel of their affections and sympathies in any proposed change. Failure to observe this common and simple principle in the prosecution of Christian work must inevitably bring trouble, especially with a people trained from their very conversion in the doctrine of soul liberty and personal responsibility according to the historic faith Baptists have held from the days of the apostles until now.

The agitation for a maritime board was kept up from year to year, until in 1874 a resolution was passed by the convention favoring the new departure. In accordance with this resolution, Rev. A. Cohoon gave notice for amendment of the constitution so as to arrange for the introduction of the home mission work of the three provinces into the convention. From the organization of the convention, in 1846, until that time, home missions had no place in the affairs of that assembly. The chief objects for which it had cared were Acadia College and foreign missions.

Our brethren here were disposed to look askance at the new step. The New Brunswick Baptist Home Missionary Society, having been approached on this question, gave its answer in the report of 1875, in the following words:

"Your board have considered with deep interest the proposition to place the subject of home missions under the care of the convention.

They fully recognize the importance of cherishing the deepest Christian sympathy and good feeling, not only among the Baptists of the Maritime Provinces, but with the whole Baptist brotherhood, and, indeed, with genuine believers in the Lord Jesus wherever they may be located. They, therefore, do most cordially unite with their brethren in those weighty and important objects which are under the charge of the convention, and if it should appear that the home missionary work also could be more efficiently carried on under its direction, they would most cheerfully acquiesce in placing it in the hands of that body; but in the first place your board believe the foreign missions—now largely expanding, and furnishing matter for grave and anxious consideration—together with the increasing importance of our educational operations, furnish sufficient work for the convention satisfactorily to perform; and, secondly, your board feel convinced that, from the very nature of the work, home missions can be carried on more satisfactorily by each province separately.

If the convention should take charge of the home mission work, there must still be an ex-

clusive board located somewhere. Should such board be established in this province, say in Moncton, or Woodstock, or St. John, or Fredericton, we believe that very few of its members could be in a position to understand the spiritual necessities of remote settlements, or the wants of the poorer churches of the different parts of Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia; and would feel it to be a serious responsibility to legislate for localities of which they knew so little; and if the board were located at Halifax, or Charlottetown, or Windsor, or Yarmouth, the difficulties, as far as concerns New Brunswick, would be as great. Dissatisfaction would spring up in places that felt themselves neglected, and we should soon be glad to go back to the original plan of committing the work, in each province, into the hands of brethren who would, necessarily, be more thoroughly acquainted with the peculiar necessities of the districts requiring special help in maintaining the worship of God.

The proposition for a grand union of the provinces for carrying on this work has many attractive aspects, but the practical difficulties attending it induced your board, on the 7th of June, to pass unanimously the following resolution:

*Whereas*, The subject of a union of this province with Nova Scotia in home missionary work was brought before the convention in Portland, in 1874, and left over for further consideration;

*Resolved*, That it is the opinion of this Board that home missionary operations can be more effectively and satisfactorily carried on by each province separately than by the proposed union, inasmuch as each province must be in a better position to understand the spiritual necessities of their respective localities, than a general board located in any one of the provinces.

When reviewed today these words seem truly prophetic. Literally indeed have they been fulfilled. Bro. Marsters and the late Inspector Duval were the esteemed secretaries of our board at the time, and to them no doubt is to be attributed the sound utterances here recorded.

The Western Association, at its meeting in Centreville, a little later in the same month, through its committee on home missions, Elder T. M. Munro, Chairman, in the concluding clause of the report, expressed its views as follows:

"Your committee would beg to indorse the action of the Home Mission Board at its last meeting relative to the non-advisability of union with the Nova Scotia Board respecting the home mission work."

This report, after a brief discussion, was adopted unanimously.

The new move had without doubt originated mainly among our Nova Scotia brethren. Taking it for granted that they would ultimately carry their point, they proceeded in due form to amend the constitution of the convention so as to let home missions come in. They soon succeeded without difficulty in transferring Nova Scotia home missions to the care of that body. This was done in the year 1878.

In the meantime the New Brunswick Associations were annually visited and urged to fall in with the proposed change. A few of our brethren, influenced by the action of Nova Scotia, and wearied somewhat with the importunity of the prime movers in the matter, agreed to it, but a majority of New Brunswick Baptists continued to hold out for some time.

The constant annoyance on this question had now become serious. Our Home Mission Society, worried by the frequent appeals made to