

SHALL THE BAPTIST WOMEN
OF THE SOUTH

Organize

FOR MISSION WORK?

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SHALL THE BAPTIST WOMEN
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ORGANIZE FOR MISSION WORK?

THE question of the organization of Southern Baptist Women for mission work, has been exciting thought and discussion for years. Men and women both, have been thinking of it, and talking of it, and sometimes planning for it; and of late how prominently it has been brought before us in our religious papers; our wisest men taking it up as one of the living questions of the hour. If we ask the cause of all this agitation of this subject, the answer is apparent. It is the constraining cause of a great necessity which is upon us. The missionary charts, with their great black pall of heathenism, are saddening our eyes, and weighing upon our hearts. Every map of the world we look upon, repeats the same story of need, and emphasizes our Saviour's words as to the greatness of the harvest and the fewness of the laborers. Infidels cast in our teeth, our small successes, the extent of heathenism, and christian worldliness and indifference, and our cheeks burn with shame. No wonder that the women whose hearts are fired by these things are asking what can *we* do? As in time of their Country's need, women have found ways of helping, although they could not go into the forefront of the battle and share its dangers as men must do, so in this time of crying necessity in the church, women are seeking ways and means, by which they may express their longing desires, in practical activity.

Many years ago, such women as these began by contributing as they could to this cause. Then they induced their neighbors to join them, and so a local society was formed. The next step was an attempt to extend this interest among the sisters of a neighboring church. No idea of endangering the existence of the churches entered their minds, and so the work grew on. Some women were found whose hands were free, whom God had given education, and some capacity, and who were regarding these things as talents committed to them, and were asking of their Lord, Paul's question, What shall I do? and as God opened up the way before them, they took up the work with joy, and State organizations came into existence. Still no idea of fostering a tendency that would endanger the very life of the churches entered into their minds. These women loved their churches, and were the foremost in home work, teachers in the Sunday schools, and the pastor's most earnest co-laborers. According to the eternal law of God, an opportunity embraced brought new opportunities with it, the work broadened, and deepened and extended. Womanly eyes saw the immense amount of work that was needed in the home field. They began to look for new and better methods—for plans for inspiring greater enthusiasm in themselves and others. A few ladies who were attending a convention, met and talked about it. Would it not be best to unite our strength, to compare our plans, to report our successes and failures, and thus help each other?

Some thought it would, but others were afraid.

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They feared they might go beyond the quiet path marked out for women; they feared notoriety, and dared not trust themselves, knowing that ambition, and vanity, and love of display, were the besetting and wily foes of women, as well as men. They knew also the conservatism of both men and women of the South, and desired not to go into any new plans without thought and preparation, nor to injure and retard the work, by forcing on plans for which the churches generally were not prepared. But while Baptist women hesitated and waited, women of other denominations went forward, and now their advancement, and our slow progress began to be marked.

Ruth Alleyn has compared for us the gifts for Foreign missions, of our Southern Methodist sisters, with ours. This body of christians has been chosen because they have about the same advantages and disadvantages with ourselves, their membership being more nearly equal to ours, both in point of numbers, intelligence and wealth. Our membership is some larger, yet in 1887, Methodist women, according to recorded statistics, gave more than four times as much as Baptist women; and when we turn to the total contributions of Southern Methodists and compare them with the total contributions of Southern Baptists, hoping to find the deficiency made up, disappointment awaits us; the Methodists are still ahead, giving in 1887 about \$234,000 to \$154,559 from the Baptists.

We are not surprised to find that these facts are making an impression, that Baptist women are asking, How is it that Methodist women, beginning eight

years after us, have gone so far ahead, and that we who profess to follow more closely than any others the written word of our Lord, are lagging so far behind in carrying out his last command? Miss Moon has sent her answer to this question, across the ocean from China. She feels this painful contrast, sees her co-laborers of other denominations cheered and stimulated by the enthusiasm at home, and by the increased facilities for work that are being furnished them, and her heart is stirred within her, and she sends us her earnest protest against the continuance of this state of things. Her voice accords with the many voices at home that are saying, it is organization that we need, that its lack is a sufficient explanation of our deficiency; and this answer seems to others more reasonable than to suppose that Baptist women are much less devoted and self-sacrificing than the women of other denominations.

We will then now consider what advantages we might hope for from organization. From the meaning of the word we might infer that organization is in itself a power. The idea the word brings before us, is the conception of a single aim, and a number of organs working in their separate spheres, to promote that aim. Again it is work systematized and made regular, instead of spasmodic unconnected efforts. All of us have been taught the greatly superior value of such work by our own observation and experience in life. We see that it is helpful in the smaller duties of life, and that its need is emphasized in proportion to the extent and importance of the work attempted. We see that political leaders

have discovered its necessity, and are using it with effect. Religious bodies also are unable to conduct their work without its assistance; even Baptists, jealous of the independence and rights of individual churches, have been forced to avail themselves of the strength and power that organization gives. It is a plan by which strength can be massed, and the individual works not alone, but with all the momentum given him by the body with which he is connected. It has been beautifully illustrated for us, by the ignited coals, brought into close contact, producing the glowing fire, spreading its light and warmth all around. We ourselves have felt the power of union. When is it our hearts glow and hope and determination wake up afresh, and the drudgery and pain of work seem light in the radiance that assured success is pouring upon them? Is it not when God's people are meeting together, their hearts beating as one, their aims one, their gifts considered only as something to be consecrated to the great cause? Organization we have seen is work systematized, also has the power of united effort, has been found necessary by all who have attempted to influence and lead large masses of men. Let us see if there is anything in the special work before us, to demand organization. We are told that in our churches, *two-thirds* of the members are women. What a grave responsibility is theirs! If Jesus has called women into his churches, he means them to be workers, and will again show the wonders of his power, by making the weak things of this world to confound the mighty. Let these women be alive with missionary zeal, and how long will it be before

the whole church will be missionary in practice as well as in name. A glance at these women as they are, will show us the need of organized effort, if we would secure this result. Multitudes of them are scattered through country churches. They are busy women, pressed with household cares. Many of them read very little, and their thoughts are taken up with home and neighborhood interests, while the world and fashion are constantly making new demands for every dollar at their disposal. Influences from without must come to them, to make them realize the part that the Great Captain expects of them, in this mighty conflict with the forces of evil. They do not realize the hosts of heathendom, while everyday life is very real, and very absorbing, and who will make the heathen also *live* before them, except some who have already awaked to this consciousness. And if we turn to the cities, I doubt not, workers there will tell us, that the same need exists. Life is even more absorbing, and soul-engrossing, and the world so much more interesting than the hordes of barbarians and half-civilized heathen. But these classes do not represent all of our women.

We have others, who in the providence of God are freed from the necessity of labor, and have not the same engrossing home duties. We are taught by the Apostle Paul, that all gifts are bestowed for the good of the whole church. Suppose these could find a way by which they could use their leisure, to develop and help their less favored sisters. What a new joy and holy purpose would illuminate their lives, and how better could they help their sisters than

by teaching them the blessedness of unselfish giving? Christ's great commission is in reality a gift, a gift that calls out all the noble powers of the soul, faith, patience, energy, fertility in resource, love that cannot be daunted by unworthiness. Who that has given and striven, has not realized the Saviour's assertion that such shall be repaid a hundred-fold even in this life? No other gift can so glorify dull and commonplace lives, as this gift of a share in establishing the kingdom of God on earth. To extend this blessedness to all, and to bring these two classes of women together in mutual helpfulness, is the aim of the proposed organization.

The common sympathies and duties of women would seem to point to women as having a peculiar capacity for influencing other women. No one else is attempting to do the work proposed. The pastors are in many cases most efficient helpers, and we cannot reach the highest success without them, but their hands and minds are too full to expect of them the patient continued work in this one direction which is absolutely necessary and which can be accomplished by women. We know this because much has been done by means of State organizations in the South already, and the advantages and disadvantages of organization have been put to a practical test. What has been done I have tried to find out and place before you, but failed in getting the facts for a report, that would prove of any service. The Boards of our Convention can tell us whether woman's organizations have produced good results or not, whether as a general rule those States contribute best

which have them or those which do not have them. My own observation has been that the States contribute most largely that have organizations, and that the interest in missions in those States is steadily increasing. The inquiries made also brought out facts that impressed upon me the great extent of the field that lies before us, and how small a proportion of the churches has been reached; even the best organized States, Maryland excepted; having established societies in less than one-fourth of the number of churches.

We will now consider the dangers there may be in organization.

In the address of the Virginia committee, one of the dangers is pointed out in strong terms, and seems to be the chief cause of opposition to the movement on the part of many others, if we may judge by the prominence given it, in the articles on this subject in our papers. That address says, "That the formation of separate societies on the part of church members, to stimulate activity on special lines of really church work, *does* obscure and weaken the idea of church obligation by intruding the lower idea of society obligation, we fear, is unquestionable. In some cases, for illustration, a woman's missionary society has taken up so much of the working force of the church, that to it is quietly surrendered almost the entire business of raising money for missions, inso-much that the members not in the society, seem to doubt if it is their duty to give to this cause. Such it may be is not a usual case, but it is the result towards which the tendency works." This objection

came with the force of a great surprise to some, as such an instance as the one given, which the committee intimate *is* unusual, had not come under their observations. On the contrary, many pastors in whose churches societies had been formed, had expressed their convictions as to the worth to the church of a society. Among those expressions we recall such words as these, "A woman's mission society is the best thing in the world for a dead church." These expressions on the part of pastors, make this idea appear to have come from theoretical deduction, rather than from practical observation, and we all know that theories can never be trusted, until they are proved by actual experiment. But if this danger is threatening us, all unconsciously to ourselves, we should thank the committee for their warning, and let their earnest words as to the supremacy and value of the church, make us very careful to emphasize this truth, both in our own minds and the minds of others, so that we shall consider ourselves charged with the larger duty, of doing all that is in our power to stimulate the interest of the whole church in missions.

We must bear in mind in considering this address, that the committee is very careful to say that they do not oppose organization on the part of Virginia women, but they *urge* it, and only oppose *separate* organization. They give us to infer, that the danger *may be avoided* by avoiding separation from the churches. The women also who have expressed a wish for general organization, have stated in very clear terms, that they did not desire separate organi-

zation. It would seem that the committee and the women agree. The committee have not entered into detail in their address, and we cannot tell the advice they would give, as to the practical methods of forming an organization and avoiding separation, but we can tell how we have attempted to do this in South Carolina.

The gifts of our Woman's Mission Societies have been constantly reported through the churches, to the Associations and Conventions, though sent through the Central Committee. The society is considered a committee of the church, to do a certain work, and is represented by the churches in the Association and State and Southern Baptist Convention, and we have not wished any other representation. We do not see why money sent to a Woman's Central Committee, cannot be as easily reported as that sent to an Educational Board, or any other Board, and this is done in South Carolina, without the slightest friction. The money is sent to the Central Committee, that we may be a unit in work, and reap the advantages of unity. Then we want a vital connection between the societies, that they may encourage and stimulate each other, and the Central Committee is the connecting link. Again, we must have reports, must know what the societies are doing who are working and who are not, or we cannot work intelligently. Somebody must circulate leaflets according to the needs of the field. Nothing but a constant communication with the societies, can make this possible. Again, the Central Committee took pains very early in their existence, to obtain the

sanction and support of the State Convention, which was very cordially given them; since which time they have been considered as a committee of that body, and make yearly reports through their pastor. In this way we have attempted to make our mission work, the work of the churches, and we have never heard of any boastful comparisons on the part of the women, nor of any rivalry, except that which the Apostle enjoins when he says, "Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works."

Another danger, (and we think this a main cause of opposition) is, that our women shall become unwomanly, that they shall leave the sphere that God has ordained for them, to assume another for which they were not intended. We join our brethren, in saying from our hearts, God forbid; and we desire to thank them for warnings, and even for adverse criticisms, which may have the effect of keeping our eyes open to the danger. I think I may say for all the christian women whom we represent, we simply desire to know our duty, and use our talents so that we may receive the Master's "Well done." We want to know the measure of our responsibility, and be assured that we are not represented by that wicked and slothful servant, who hid his Lord's money. In thinking it over we could see nothing in God's word which could be construed into meaning that women must not work among women, that they might not teach other women to give to God, that they might not unite together to strengthen each other in this good work.

Other dangers have been pointed out to us, such

as desire for notoriety, the desire for place and power, which the Saviour has constantly to rebuke in His disciples, and vanity and love of display in reporting our work ; but these dangers lurk around every path of work, and were we to wait until they no longer exist, we must wait until we are safe in the heavenly home. Another danger is so imminent in the church, the danger that we shall lose the opportunities open to us, and in this crisis fail to win the victories that might turn the tide in the conflict, through our coldness and worldliness, that these lesser dangers must not affright us from attacking with all our united strength, these powerful ever-present foes, indifference and self-indulgence.

Our aim in organization is to make of every Baptist woman an intelligent and active friend of missions, and to induce in such a regular systematic habit of remembering this work, in both their prayers and gifts. Representation should not be an aim. Our gifts can be represented by our churches in the Convention, and this is sufficient. We are satisfied that our brethren are conducting the business affairs of Missions in the fear of God, and to the best of their ability, and we rejoice in their greater wisdom and larger experience, and are content that they shall continue to be our trusted leaders. We organize simply for greater efficiency in work, and our work is the work of the Convention. We do not desire a separate work, but if in some particulars we separate ourselves as women, it is that we may gather greater momentum with which to push forward our united work.

A general organization must be effected on the same general principles as a State organization. It will need a Central Executive Committee, to which the Central Committees of the States shall bear a relation similar to that of the local Societies to the State Committees. While it would seem in our case not advisable that money should be sent through the General Committee, as multiplying the agencies increases the expense, reports should be regularly sent from all the States, and a correspondence maintained with them. The duties of this Executive Committee would be, to endeavor to excite deeper interest in the States already at work, to make continued and strenuous efforts to induce those States to fall into line, which are as yet not making any organized effort ; to allay opposition ; to circulate information ; to be a general medium of communication between the States ; to disseminate new plans ; to arrange for meetings, if meetings should be thought advisable ; in fact, in every way possible to promote enthusiasm and earnestness in the work. I have not deemed it within the scope of this paper to present any more definite plan for organization ; that can be considered when we have decided the question : "Shall we form a general organization?"

Much will depend on the spirit which we show. The brethren are our guardians, and if they have feared for us, and tried to hedge us around, it is a proof of their concern, and when they realize what we want to do, that we do not wish to wander in any dangerous ways, but are only trying to follow them as our leaders, and trying to carry into practice what

they have taught us from pulpit and press, their anxieties will cease, we will have their hearty "God speed," and we shall all work together in unity.

What a glorious vision bursts upon our view! All these mighty hosts of Baptist women one united band, consecrating their time, their energies, their treasures, to the advancement of Christ's kingdom on earth. Already some of the first struggling rays of that blessed day are dawning upon us, in the increasing number of workers, and greater unity and broader sympathies which are binding women together, and we believe the vision shall become an assured reality. Christian hearts are the same, and if the sacred fire that is burning within us is regarded, in all humility and reverence, as the gift of God, to be communicated to others, they too, will flame and burn, and reacting upon us, we shall be consumed with desire, until, like our Lord, before all others, that prayer shall break from our lips: "Thy Kingdom come," and we too, shall find it our meat to do the will of Him who sent us.

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