

THE INDEPENDENT BAPTIST REVIEW

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Jack Keep, Editor

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FORGOTTEN MISSIONARY HEROES - ELISHA L. ABBOTT

by L. Duane Brown, Ph.D.

It was a hot December Sunday in 1837 in the Burma jungle. The new missionary from America was traveling on his first tour of Kyootoo. At 10 a.m. he had gathered about sixty tribal folks around him in a bamboo house for worship and instruction. As the day progressed more and more people came to hear this passionate and loving servant of Christ. These tribal people called the "wild ones" were the Karens of Burma.

Then someone called out, "The house is falling!" Over two hundred had gathered from distant villages to hear Mr. Abbott so far and more were on the way. Mr. Abbott's own words were, "The people hastened out, spread a mat on the ground in the open fields, upon which I sat, and themselves gathered around and sat on the ground. A few old men sat near, who would question me when they did not understand. All around was the darkness and stillness of night. Not a cloud obscured the heavens, which were spread out over our heads as a beautifully bespangled curtain. In one hand I held a dimly burning taper; in the other the Word of God...Midnight had long passed away ere the assembly dispersed, and then they withdrew reluctantly."

This story typified the remarkable man from Cazenovia, N.Y., who was educated at the new Baptist college at Hamilton. He came to the field of Burma in 1836 single but soon married. He survived an attack of jungle fever, then plunged into mastery of the Karen language. Few missionaries have experienced the revival results which the Lord brought to the Karen tribes in those years. The response of the Karens to the Gospel was remarkable, especially in view of the reluctance of the Burmese people in general.

But what distinguishes Mr. Abbott is not the fifty churches he started, the thousands of converts he baptized (one day he baptized seventy-five), nor the training schools he established. It was the vision of SELF SUPPORT or the indigenous policy which he promoted. His development of this innovative idea that the Karen Churches should support their own pastors and missionaries caused no small stir among his missionary brethren as well as the missionary board that sent him to Burma. The board even stated that the unusual success of the Karen churches was not the indigenous policy but "wholly

attributed to peculiarly favorable providential circumstances.." ("Missionary Magazine" May 1843, page 112)

One writer states, "E. L. Abbott was far in advance of all contemporary foreign missionaries, boards and secretaries, in his views as to the necessity of bringing up the congregations of converted heathen to the practice of self-support." This conviction came from the Scriptures in spite of the fact the Karen people were poverty stricken and under great persecution by the Burmese. Many Karens were crucified, often with a two foot stick pounded down their throats to delay death.

It was not just funds that caused him to challenge the policy of American money used for support of the national pastors and evangelists, but the whole scope of how nationals were used in the ministry. He wanted the churches to become independent and self reliant. His motto was American support for Americans, Karen support for Karens.

Abbott's views were radical! It had been fourteen years since a national had been ordained; so he ordained Myat Kyau and Tway Po over the objections of other missionaries and disapproval of the executive officers after the event. But they were so successful that two more were ordained by other missionaries. Also he did not like calling national workers "assistants" but pastors. He further wrote, "Now, these churches should not only be self-supporting (if possible), but reproductive. They should be taught that the responsibility of raising up and sending forth evangelists to their fellow-countrymen rests upon them, and shown, that what individuals cannot do, a combination may. I endeavored to make the pastors ... understand that they, as a body, were deeply responsible in this matter; that they are to recognize and send out the heralds of mercy; and that they are responsible for their support."

One missionary raised an extra \$5,000 for the Burma field. But Abbott would have nothing to do with these funds. In fact he twice returned half of the gifts back to America! But the American Baptist Missionary Union, which was the reorganization of the old Triennial Convention, was never in agreement of this indigenous policy. Neither was the venerable veteran Adoniram Judson, who felt it would give support to the "good works" philosophy of Buddhism.

But other missionaries were awakened to this revolutionary method. Abbott's helper and later his successor often disagreed with him but gave unwavering defense to it. John S. Beecher became so strong in his indigenous views that it led to his dismissal from the mission board. But the Karens would not accept any other missionary but Beecher because "Teacher Abbott" said he was his replacement. Beecher eventually returned to the Karens under a different mission board and began a self-sustaining school for the Karens. The school was recognized just before Beecher's departure and death in England. He also was reinstated to the Missionary Union before he died. If Abbott had lived longer, he might have been able to convince the Board of this policy, which nearly all independent Baptist mission boards take for granted today.

He once wrote to his Board, "Heathen countries must be evangelized through a native ministry. That ministry must be educated by foreign aid. Give to them and their country the Bible and theology, education to teachers and ministers, books, etc., and a general guidance such as Paul gave to the churches he had planted...After we have given to the country or people an educated ministry, teachers, the Bible, and a literature, the rest must be self-sustaining ... churches must sustain themselves, must begin, must learn, and believe and feel that is the law of Christ's kingdom. The missionaries must teach if we would have the native ministry and people believe it and begin to act upon the principle."

Had Abbott lived and served longer than the eighteen years, he might have changed the missionary philosophy of that generation of Baptists. History shows that the Karen churches prospered and became missionary minded in sending missionaries to other tribes in Burma and Siam. Even by 1910 most of the 774 churches were self-supporting! Historian Torbet states, "The advance in self-support and self-direction of the Karen churches and schools was truly remarkable. Carpenter, like Abbott and Beecher, his predecessors, pointed out the contrast between the Bassein Mission, which had supported practically all of its work since 1854, and the other missions in Burma."

Furthermore, when the churches of Burma went apostate around the turn of the century, the Karen churches stayed true to the Bible. Certainly the indigenous practice played a key part.

A lesson can be seen in allowing a mission board so much authority over the missionaries. These well-meaning leaders at the home land cannot evaluate the needs of the field as can the missionaries. Instead of helping and supporting, mission boards often interfere with this sacred work of Christ. The Missionary Union would not even let Abbott give the reasons for his views (Carpenter, page 157). In fact five outstanding missionaries resigned over the high-handed tactics of the board (besides Mr. Beecher being dismissed).

While Elisha Abbott died in Fulton, N.Y., his grave memorial is located in Bassein, Burma, which reads, "Established fifty churches among the heathen, in which self-

support was wisely practiced from the beginning." What a debt owed to this forgotten missionary hero!

EDITORIAL

SOCIAL SCIENCE AND BIBLE TRAINING

Do you remember when the Presidents of schools for the training of ministers, missionaries and evangelists were men whose training and experience was in theology and Bible? I have noticed that there is a trend away from that practice. As the work of the ministry becomes more secularized the major "work of the ministry" is no longer "Preach the Word!", but counselling, marketing and recreation, among other things.

The new President of Practical Bible Training School, in N.Y., is Dr. Dale E. Linebaugh. He holds a B.A. degree in psychology from Bryan College, and a M.Ed. in community counselling from the University of Tenn. He is a member of the American Association of Mental Health Counsellors and the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists.

The Alumnus of the year at PBTS (1991) is Rev. Geo. Miller III. Miller, who is head of student affairs, holds a B.A. degree from Bryan College and a M.A. in marriage and family counselling from Syracuse University.

The new President of Grand Rapids Baptist College & Seminary is Dr. Rex Rogers who came to Grand Rapids from the Kings College in N.Y. He holds a Bachelor of Arts from Cedarville College, an M.A. in political science and a Ph.D. in political science.

It is interesting that these schools, founded in the midst of theological conflict by pastors, are now led by men who are social scientists. These remarks are not intended as a reflection on the Christian character of these men. Nevertheless, do not be surprised if you begin to hear more of the "cultural mandate" teachings coming from these schools.

AWANA - WHERE IS IT GOING?

On October 25, 1991, I wrote to AWANA headquarters informing them that they had chartered a club in the Grace Baptist Church (SBC) of Woodbridge VA. I asked if it was AWANA policy to charter clubs in SBC churches. I said "The SBC as you must know is a Convention including both believers and unbelievers. There is blatant infidelity taught from the pulpits of many of their churches. The Convention is also part of the Baptist World Alliance."

The Director of Home Missions responded, "There are Southern Baptist churches that have affirmed their agreement with the AWANA doctrinal statement, and therefore, are chartered."

I wrote again and suggested that the Director may not understand some things about the Southern Baptist Convention. I pointed out that some churches whose denominations have affiliation with the NCC/WCC could sign the doctrinal statement of Awana. I asked, "Would you therefore charter an American Baptist Church ...?"

In recent years some practices of Awana have been troubling to the churches. In 1989 Awana announced their intention of changing the memory work to the NKJV. Only after a strong protest by many churches did they delay this decision. Awana has become a denomination in the sense that many people look for an "Awana" church rather than a "fundamental" church.

Another pastor wrote Awana asking, "... does it matter that the SBC includes apostates? ... May I also ask if you have any standard as to the National Association of Evangelicals?"

On December 9 I received a response from AWANA Headquarters informing me that if an ABC church is on record as not supporting the Convention, the Board has authorized the granting of a charter. There are indeed some ABC churches chartered by AWANA. The Director of Home Missions stated in his letter, "I am well aware of the liberal aspects of the SBC of which you speak. However, it is beyond the role of Awana to make a change in that situation." I have also learned that the United Baptist Church of New Carrollton, Md. (SBC) is also chartered by AWANA. This is the church in which the AWANA missionary has his membership.

The official position of the old GARBC was "You cannot fellowship with us until you break your ties to the Convention." If your church is in AWANA you are in an organization with both ABC and SBC churches.

Our church here in Virginia will not exchange letters with a Southern Baptist church, but we are thrown together with them in Awana activities and olympics. Has Awana become an "inclusivist" organization?

"THE INDIGENOUS POLICY"

Be sure to read the excellent lead article on Elisha Abbott by Dr. L. Duane Brown. Abbott was the "Father" of the indigenous method of missionary work. Most mission boards claim to follow the indigenous method, but on closer examination it will be found that they do not practice it. One missionary wrote me: "I do not believe I could defend the indigenous policy from the New Testament." National pastors and evangelists are being supported on some fields through the "work funds" of missionaries. Property is being purchased and buildings are being erected with American money. When I called these facts to the attention of the president of a Baptist mission agency, I was told that this has been the practice for many years. The general attitude is that "it works". Pragmatism seems to be the guide in Christian work today. One appeal said in essence that the Charismatics had the money and wanted to buy the property, but we should beat them to the punch! Honesty requires

Christian workers to say, "We no longer follow the indigenous method." Instead, inquirers are misled about this practice.

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Theme: "CHRIST ABOVE ALL"

"And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. (Col. 1:18)

SPEAKERS

Dr. Raymond Buck Central Baptist Seminary, Minneapolis
Dr. E. Allen Griffith West Chester, PA
Missionary David Kilgore
Rev. John Kain Bremerton, WA
Rev. Warren Birdsall Shickshinny, PA
Dr. L. Duane Brown Parsippany, NJ

LETTERS

From Texas: This is to say "Thank you" for IBF Review of Sept.'91. Your choice of the message "A Double Check" was exactly what is needed. ... a doctrinal bull's-eye!

From Indiana: Congratulations on the break that many of you have made with the GARB. ... I served on the board of Grand Rapids for a dozen years. The direction of the movement was very obvious in the decisions of that body...."

From Pennsylvania: It is my joy to be part of the IBF. I long for the fellowship I had in Essington, Pa.

From Ohio: Our GARB church was never told of a split. All that was said was that there were some troublemakers in the GARB and everything was fine after the 1990 conference. We see that GARB is not living by it's original statement of faith and are concerned.

From a Missionary: [Regarding the editorial on missions] The sad fact is that many churches do not want to know anything. They are content to send their money and receive a prayer letter. Their mentality is "If anything is wrong the mission board will let us know." There is also the thinking that if a mission agency is "approved" then it must be O.K. I think mission boards generally have strayed so far from their original purpose that there is no hope for them. It seems their philosophy is the more hierarchy we have, the better we will be able to do the job.

IS THERE NO LONGER A BATTLE?

Dr. Allen P. Dickerson (copied from Maranatha)

There is a cliché being passed around in the ranks of fundamentalists that raises a serious question. The statement is this, "It is time for fundamentalists to stop battling and start building bridges." This, of course is the language of new evangelicalism.

The real fundamentalists after the turn of this century, many of whom were still around when I started preaching over 38 years ago, never talked about "building bridges," they talked about "burning their bridges behind them" leaving the liberal denominations and paying a great price as they went and determining never to return.

A Bible fundamentalist, who is of necessity a separatist, has no interest in "building bridges" to new evangelicals, charismatics, Southern Baptists, liberals, compromising pseudo-fundamentalists, or anything else that is contrary to the Biblical position of ecclesiastical and personal separation.

We do not need to build any bridges to our Bible-believing fundamental brethren, we are to love them and respect them. We may not agree with every jot and tittle, but be that as it may, we are to respect and encourage the weaker brethren, who are truly brethren and desire to do right. We are to love the souls of all men and desire to win them to Christ, but we are never to "build a bridge" that leads across the river of separation onto the shores of compromise.

The other statement is that we fundamentalists are "to quit battling." I served in the United States Navy in World War II, I am a bit of a student of history, and it is impossible to study history without learning something of warfare. I believe that a man who turns his back and walks away from the enemy while the battle rages is called a "deserter" and believe you me, the battle is raging. The arch enemy of the cross, Satan, is leading the forces of darkness in an all out assault against the cause of Christ and the cross. Sometimes it is open warfare and sometimes it is subtle insurrection.

Paul told the saints in Ephesus, "Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." He told Timothy, "Thou therefore endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." He said, "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life." Be assured the battle is not over. Perhaps some have grown weary and retreated to the rear, but Satan, "as a roaring lion walketh about seeking whom he may devour." But thank God, the victory, in God's time belongs to the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, Jesus Christ.

I am encouraged by the words of Gal.6:9, "Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."

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