1786

Address to the pious and benevolent, proposing an annual subscription for the support of missionaries in the Highlands and adjacent islands of Scotland, the isles of Jersey, Guernsey, and Newfoundland, the West Indies, and the provinces of Nova Scotia and Quebec.


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AN ADDRESS
TO THE
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ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION
FOR THE
SUPPORT OF MISSIONARIES
IN
The Highlands and adjacent Islands of Scotland,
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The West Indies, and the Provinces of Nova Scotia
and Quebec.

BY THOMAS COKE, LL.D.

LONDON:
PRINTED IN THE YEAR MDCCCLXXVI.
Bristol, March 12, 1786.

Dear Sir,

I greatly approve of your Proposal for raising a Subscription in order to send Missionaries to the Highlands of Scotland, the Islands of Guernsey and Jersey, the Leeward Islands, Quebec, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland. It is not easy to conceive the extreme want there is, in all those places, of men that will not count their lives dear unto themselves, so they may testify the Gospel of the Grace of God.

I am,

Dear Sir,

Your affectionate Brother,

John Wesley.

To Dr. Coke.
AN ADDRESS
TO THE
PIOUS and BENEVOLENT,
&c. &c. &c.

Dearly beloved in the Lord,

SOME time past I took the liberty of addressing you, in behalf of a mission intended to be established in the British dominions in Asia; and many of you very generously entered into that important plan. We have not indeed lost sight of it at present; on the contrary, we have lately received a letter of encouragement from a principal gentleman in the province of Bengal. But the providence of God has lately opened to us so many doors nearer home, that Mr. Wesley thinks it prudent to hazard at present the lives of any of our preachers, by sending them to so great a distance, and amidst so many uncertainties and difficulties, when so large a field of action is afforded us in countries to which we have so much easier admittance, and where the success, through the blessing of God, is more or less certain.

We cannot but be sensible of the fallen state of Christendom, and the extensive room for labour which faithful ministers may find in every country therein. But some of the nations which are called Christian, are deeper sunk in ignorance and impiety
piety than others; and even of the most enlightened, various parts are still buried in the greatest darknesses.

No kingdom under heaven, I believe, has been more blest with the light of the gospel than North Britain. Numerous have been the men of most eminent piety and abilities, whom God in his providence and grace has been pleased to raise among that people. And yet, in the Highlands and adjacent Islands, many scores, perhaps I may say hundreds of thousands, are little better than the rudest barbarians*. The state of this unhappy people has been fully laid before the Public by a very laudable society in Edinburgh, which was formed for the very purpose of spreading religion in those benighted parts. But the members of this benevolent institution have candidly acknowledged their great insufficiency for this important undertaking, for want both of money and men. And indeed the grand design of that society, which is almost entirely directed to the establishment of schools will by no means interfere with the present plan. We may, by the grace of God, supply their defects; and while they are leading the rising generation to the light and truth, we may, under the divine blessing, be arresting those of maturer age in their present career of sin and folly. The Lord seems to be pointing out our way in the present instance, for he has lately raised up a zealous young man, well versed in the Erse (the language spoken by the people of whom we are now treating), to whom Mr. Wifsey has given an unlimited commission to visit the Highlands and adjacent Islands of Scotland.

* A late writer employed by the government to stimulate the improvement which may be made in the fisheries in that part of Scotland, and who has been indefatigable in his researches, trembles not to assert it as his considered judgment, that the people in that country who answer this description are not more than half a million.

We have also one or two more in our view, who are masters of the Erse language, who, we have reason to believe, would accept of a similar commission. But the charges would be considerable, and our present regular expenses in Scotland, beyond what the poverty of our Scotch societies can afford, are full as great as our contingent fund will bear. This is therefore the first object of the present institution—To establish and support an Erse Mission in the Highlands and adjacent Islands of Scotland.

The Isles of Jersey and Guernsey make the second object of our institution. The Lord has been pleased, by our much respected brother Mr. Brackenbury, to begin a very promising work in those islands. Several societies have been formed: and the Lord has also raised up a very sensible and zealous young man, whose native language is the French, and who is likely to be highly useful to the cause of God. He is now stationed in Guernsey, where some assistance has been already given him to supply his necessary wants, and probably more will be yet required. In Jersey Mr. Brackenbury bears the whole burden of the expense at present, but we cannot expect this to be always the case. No doubt but the larger societies will soon be enabled to support their own expenses; but still, as the work increases, the infant societies will stand in need of assistance. This is therefore our second view in the present institution—To nurse and carry on the work which is now breaking forth among the French Protestants in our islands of Jersey and Guernsey.

The third object we have in view, is our West India islands, where a field is opened to us among the negroes beyond any thing that could have been expected. Eleven hundred blacks have been already united in society in the island of Antigua through
through the successful labours of Mr. Baxter; and the greatest part of them, we have reason to believe, are converted to God. But we have only that single minifter in those islands, Mr. Lambert, whom we sent from the States, being obliged to return on account of his ill state of health. Nor can our brethren in the States afford us any assistance in the West Indies, the call for preachers being so great on the continent. In the island of St. Christopher’s we have received considerable encouragement. And the planters in general are constrained to acknowledge, that the negroes who are united to us and to the Moravians, are the most laborious and faithful servants they have: which favourable sentiment, through the blessing of God, has opened the whole country to our labours among the blacks; and we seem to want nothing but preachers, under the divine influence, to gather in many thousands of them. And these islands seem to have a peculiar claim on the inhabitants of Britain. Our country is enriched by the labours of the poor slaves who cultivate the soil, and surely the least compensation we can make them, is to endeavour to enrich them in return with the riches of grace. But the grand consideration to the children of God, is the value of the souls of these negroes, a set of people utterly defiled by all the world, except the Methodists and Moravians. And yet I have no doubt but a most glorious gospel-harvest would soon be displayed to our view among that miserable people, if they were sufficiently supplied with gospel-ministers. This is therefore the third object of our institution—To establish and support missions in our West India islands.

The provinces of Nova Scotia and Quebec and the island of Newfoundland, make the fourth and last object of the present plan. We have lately sent a Missionary to Harbour Grace in Newfoundland, and his labours have been blessed; but his single endeavours are not likely to carry the work of God to that extent which every pious soul must with for. In Nova Scotia we have about three hundred whites and two hundred blacks in society according to the last accounts, but have only three travelling preachers for the whole province; so that most of our congregations have preaching but once in a month. In the province of Quebec a few pious soldiers have formed societies at Quebec and Montreal on the Methodist plan, among whom we have reason to believe that our preachers would be gladly received.

Such an open door has not been known perhaps for many ages, as is now presented to us on the continent of America. And it has long been an adjudged case in our conferences, that “when God is at any time pleased to pour out his spirit more abundantly, we ought at that time to send more labourers than usual into that part of the harvest.” If it be a principal mark of true wisdom in temporal things to watch every opportunity—how much more in spiritual, which are of infinitely greater importance? How attentive should we be to the times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord, to improve to the utmost all those blessed occasions. Nor should any lover of Zion object to the distance of those countries from us. Oceans are nothing to God, and they should be no obstruction to his people in respect to the love they should bear one towards another. This therefore is the fourth and last object of the present institution—to send missionaries to our provinces in America and the island of Newfoundland.

* See the Large Minutes of our Conference, Qu. 9th.
A particular account of the missions, with any letters or extracts of letters from the missionaries or others, that are worthy of publication, shall be printed as soon as possible after every one of our annual conferences, and a copy presented to every subscriber; in which also the receipts and disbursements of the preceding year, with an alphabetical list of the names of the subscribers (except where it is otherwise directed), shall be laid before the Public. The subscribers of our circuits respectively will be so kind as to bring the money subscribed to the ensuing conference, and so from year to year.

The preaching of the gospel is an object of the greatest importance; and the present state of mankind must cause very frequent and painful sensations to the truly pious—that the kingdom of Jesus Christ should be circumscribed by such narrow bounds, and Satan rule so great a part of the world: but “how shall they call on him in whom they have not believed?” And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and “bring glad tidings of good things.” And as the Lord is pleased in general to carry on his blest work by second causes, let the sacred ardor of divine love kindle in your souls, my beloved brethren, a holy zeal of being honoured instruments in promoting of it, according to your several stations. Numerous and wonderful are the promises in sacred writ which assure us that “the fulness of the Gentiles shall come in.” That “all shall know the Lord from the least to the greatest;” that “righteousness shall cover the earth as the waters the sea.” That “the Hea-

then shall be the inheritance of the Messiah, the uttermost parts of the earth his possession, and all the kingdoms of the world the kingdoms of our Lord and his Christ.” We know not, it is true, the particular time. However, let us all, as far as lies in our power, contribute to this great event, and prepare the way for it.

The Roman Catholics have manifested astonishing zeal in the missions they have established in China and other parts of the East. Their contributions for the purpose have been almost boundless: and shall Protestants be left zealous for the glory of God, when their religion is so much more pure. Alas! this is really the case. Nor let us object that the Romanists are richer than we—that even crowned heads have used their utmost influence in the former case. But let us rather remember that God works by the smallest means, yea he delights so to do. He rejoices in “perfect strength in weakness, and to ordain praise out of the mouths of babes and sucklings.” Hitherto the Lord has blessed us in this very way, raising very large and lively societies from very small beginnings. And if we engage in the present undertaking in the spirit of faith, our endeavours shall be successful: they shall spread like Elijah’s cloud, and a gracious rain shall descend on the inhabitants of the earth. Let us do all with prayer and thanksgiving, and that God who never fails his people, will assuredly use us for his own glory.

Blessed be God! our spiritual resources are amazing. Numerous, I am fully persuaded, are the preachers among us, who, in the true spirit of apostles, count all things but dung, that they may win Christ, and win souls to him; who carry their lives in their hands, and long to spend and be spent in their Master’s glorious cause.
causes. Let us therefore endeavor to draw forth these resources, and spread them out to the uttermost. Then shall the little leaven imperceptibly win its widening way, till it has leavened the whole lump of mankind. And while we are unitedly watering the whole world around us, our own souls shall be watered again; the Methodist Connection shall become a seminary to fill the vineyard of Christ with devoted laborers, and be made the most valuable, the most extensive blessing, not only to the present age, but to the generations that are yet to come.

I am,

Dearly beloved in the Lord,

With great respect,

Your humble and most affectionate

Brother and Servant,

THOMAS COKE,

London,
March 13, 1786.