

## MISSIONARY SPIRIT:

### INSTRUCTIONS GIVEN TO ONE OF THE FIRST PERMANENT AGENTS

#### FOR FOREIGN MISSIONS

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The seeds of modern American Protestantism were sown in the early nineteenth century in two important ways. First, the "missionary spirit" became pervasive, influencing the thinking of active Protestants everywhere. Second, church organization developed, with full-time executives and agents, who neither pastored churches nor taught in educational institutions.

Pioneering both movements were the interdenominational voluntary societies. The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), founded in 1810 and headquartered in Boston, was the first of these national societies, and for several decades was largest in revenues. Their corresponding secretaries were among the first "church bureaucrats," and their agents, in cooperation with the agents of other societies, were the first full-time employees devoted to regional church life. The whole network was devoted to promotion of a missionary spirit.

When denominations later took over the work of voluntary societies, they also adopted this organization and the missionary spirit.

In 1832, the ABCFM began appointing "permanent agents." These were ministers who worked full time for the Board, promoting a missionary spirit and collecting funds across a specified area.

The following letter, giving directions to the fifth agent appointed by the Board, presents the general principles on which this new regional enterprise was founded. It is a clear summary of the domestic side of the early foreign missionary movement.

The author of the letter, Benjamin Blydenburg Wisner, was a corresponding secretary of the ABCFM. Born in Goshen, New York, 29 September 1794, he grew up in the frontier outpost of Geneva, New York. His parents were devout Presbyterians, and his father was a lawyer. Benjamin came to believe he was reconciled to God while attending Union College, in Schenectady, New York, and he joined the Presbyterian Church in 1816. After two years of study at Princeton Seminary, Wisner was called to Old South (Congregational) Church in Boston in 1821. Wisner identified with, and drew his church into, the Trinitarian wing of New England Congregationalism, which was then caught up in the missionary movement. In 1828 he became a member of the ABCFM Prudential Committee, which met frequently to

oversee Board activities. In 1832 Wisner became one of three full-time corresponding secretaries; he was given oversight of the domestic activities of the Board. Wisner died of scarlet fever on 9 February 1835.<sup>1</sup>

The recipient of the following letter, William Jessup Armstrong, was born in Mendham, New Jersey, 29 October 1796. Son of a Presbyterian minister, William attended Princeton College, where he made a public profession of religion in 1815, and graduated in 1816. He then studied for the ministry under the direction of his father, and attended Princeton Seminary for part of one year. Armstrong went to Virginia as a home missionary under the direction of the Presbyterian Board of Missions. Then he pastored First Presbyterian Church of Trenton, New Jersey, 1821-1824, and First Presbyterian Church of Richmond, Virginia, 1824-1834.

Always a friend of missions, Armstrong received a fresh baptism of the missionary spirit at a prayer meeting for missions on the first Monday of January in 1833. He immediately became a "temporary" agent of the ABCFM, preaching on missions and raising funds as he was able. At Armstrong's instigation, the Presbyterian Synods of Virginia and North Carolina in October 1833 organized the Central Board of Foreign Missions (CBFM), to promote missions in the two Synods, and to promote the work of the American Board. Armstrong was named the first corresponding secretary of the CBFM in May 1834, which by previous agreement automatically made him agent for the ABCFM in those two states.

Following Wisner's death, Armstrong was invited by the American Board to become its corresponding secretary for domestic activities, which offer he accepted in November 1835. In 1838 the Board moved him from Boston to New York City, to increase the Board's presence there. Armstrong supervised the domestic operations of the Board, directly represented it in the New York City area, and returned to Boston once a month to meet with the Prudential Committee and secretaries. While returning from one of these meetings, William J. Armstrong died in the shipwreck of the *Atlantic*, in Long Island Sound, 27 November 1846.<sup>2</sup>

The following letter, as a literary form, closely resembles Instructions to Missionaries. It was customary for one of the Board secretaries to read "Instructions" to departing missionaries at a public farewell service. Such

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<sup>1</sup>Information on Benjamin B. Wisner is from: Samuel H. Cox, "Memoir of Wisner," in Missionary Remains; or, Sketches of the Lives of Evarts, Cornelius, and Wisner, ed. Samuel H. Cox (New York: Taylor and Gould, 1835), 106-43; William Buell Sprague, Annals of the American Pulpit (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1857) 2:682-87; Warren Fay, A Sermon Delivered at the Funeral of the Rev. Benjamin B. Wisner, D.D. (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1835).

<sup>2</sup>Information on William J. Armstrong is from: [David Greene], "Memoir of the Rev. William J. Armstrong, D.D.," Missionary Herald 43 (1847): 109-20; Nehemiah Adams, A Sermon Occasioned by the Death of Rev. William J. Armstrong, D.D. (Boston: T. R. Marvin, 1846); Hollis Read, ed., Memoir and Sermons of Rev. Wm. J. Armstrong, D.D. (New York: M. W. Dodd, 1853); Sprague, Annals, 4:610-14.

Instructions gave the missionaries guidelines under which to operate, and also, when published, presented the philosophy behind Board policies to the general public. The following letter was never read publicly or published, but resembles instructions to missionaries in (1) presenting a new employee with a job description, (2) outlining basic principles that shaped Board policy, and (3) giving specific directions.

The following letter is preserved as part of the Central Board of Foreign Missions Papers at the library of Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Virginia (box 1, folder 21). A handwritten copy can be found in the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts (Series 7, volume 1, pages 216-27). There are only minor differences between these two copies, which could be attributed to copying errors. The following text is based on the Richmond original; the Cambridge copy has been used to help in deciphering difficult penmanship.

#### THE TEXT

Missionary Rooms, Boston, June 11th., 1834.

Rev. William J. Armstrong, Richmond, Va.

My dear Brother,

You have, doubtless, received my letter of the 29<sup>th</sup> ult. I got thro' my business at New York, so as to start to come home by the steamboat of wednesday afternoon of last week, but, owing to a severe storm on the Sound, did not get home till friday morning, having rode all night from Providence + been very sea-sick on the Sound. A consequence was that, friday, I did nothing, + ever since I have not been as well as before. Yet I have been very busy, so busy that I could not possibly before this time commence this letter to you. I found Mr. Anderson<sup>3</sup> gone from home, + a good deal of business in his department that must be immediately done in consequence of the near approach of the sailing of some vessels by which it was important to send communications +c. to some of our missionaries abroad. I hope my unavoidable delay to prepare this communication will not have occasioned you any serious inconvenience.

In the important service in which you are about to engage in the department of Foreign Missions, there are certain general principles which you will find it advantageous to have well settled in your mind, + to often recur to for your guidance.

1. The spread of the influence of the pure Gospel through the earth is the grand

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<sup>3</sup>Rufus Anderson (1796-1880), a corresponding secretary of the ABCFM, 1832-1866. As Foreign Secretary, Anderson was responsible for correspondence with missionaries overseas.

object<sup>4</sup> at which you are directly to aim. This you will keep in view in all your reflections, plans, communications, efforts, in prosecuting your work; doing that which shall seem to promise to contribute most, on the whole + in the long view, to the promotion of this object.

2. It is the grand business of the Church on the earth instrumentally to convert the world, i.e. of Christians, the followers of Christ. Not in any particular form or way, by ecclesiastical or voluntary<sup>5</sup>, organization, nor any other, specifically + in all cases; but in that way + form which in any given circumstances, shall be most feasible, + promise to call forth the greatest efforts, + make them most efficient. Of the truth of this principle Christians must be convinced; they must be brought to adopt it, truly + sincerely as their grand principle of action. And to contribute to this result, you will need to insist much on this topic, pressing the principle, illustrating it, showing its happy effects.

3. The more persons can be got to feel for + exert themselves for the salvation

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<sup>4</sup>The "grand object" of missions was world evangelization. In opposition to those who claimed that missions should have the dual objects of evangelization and civilization, Wisner and associates had declared in the 1833 ABCFM Annual Report, "The Board is, pre-eminently, a *society for preaching the gospel*. This is its primary and leading design--the grand object for which it exists. All its plans have an ultimate reference to the preaching of the gospel. The heathen are educated, and books are translated, printed, and distributed among them, that they may become attentive, thoughtful, intelligent hearers of the gospel."--ABCFM. Annual Report 1833:139. See also, ABCFM. Annual Reports 1832:165; 1836:113. In the life of the ABCFM, the phrase "grand object" was becoming associated with the idea of the primacy of evangelization over civilization.

<sup>5</sup>By the time this letter was written, tension had developed between those who believed missions should be conducted by voluntary societies, and those who believed missions should be conducted by denominational bodies. Originally arrangements had been made pragmatically, without reference to denominational polity. However, old school Presbyterians like Ashbel Green argued for the church's responsibility to conduct missions ([Ashbel Green], "The Best Method of Conducting Christian Missions" *Christian Advocate* 7 (1829): 61-68, 123-27, 166-69, 217-21.), while new school Presbyterians and Congregationalists like Leonard Bacon argued for overcoming sectarianism with voluntary societies ([Leonard Bacon], "Voluntary Associations" *Quarterly Christian Spectator* 4 (1832): 142-70.). The ABCFM, a voluntary society, was willing to work with church related mission boards like CBFM in order to appease the old schoolers and avoid strife. Wisner expressed the views of the ABCFM leadership when he described to another agent the organization of the CBFM: "It is ecclesiastically constituted. Nothing else would have gone among the Presbyterians of those states; + that being their feeling, I have no objections. It is the peculiar excellence of our Board that the churches may cooperate with it, + make use of its agency in discharging their duty to the heathen, organizing themselves for the work in whatever way they please. In themselves I greatly prefer voluntary Associations to ecclesiastically constituted Boards; but where the people prefer the latter, let them have them, only giving us the funds they raise + the direction of the missionaries supported by them."--Benjamin B. Wisner to Artemas Bullard, 13 Dec. 1833, ABCFM Papers, Houghton Library, Cambridge, Mass., ser. 7, vol. 1, p. 131.

of the whole world, the more nearly will they enter into + have the spirit of Christ, + have a principle of action in regard to benevolent efforts that will live + grow, + avoid the disappointments + perplexities + discouragements incidental to the selection of particular objects<sup>6</sup> of their benevolent interest + contributions, + devise to their own souls advantage from engaging in such a work. The selection of specific objects has an advantage in starting in people or individuals an interest in benevolent operations; but has so many disadvantages attending it, that it should not be advised except when necessary for that purpose, + then should be discontinued as soon as practicable. Yet on this, as on any other, part of the subject, the wishes of the people must be gratified. The case should be fairly stated to them, + then they should be left to their own decision, + that decision, when practicable, cheerfully acquiesced in. for

4. It is a fundamental principle in managing benevolent operations, that, as far as possible every body should be pleased, that all their thoughts + feelings in relation to the subject, the manner it has been brought before them, what they have done in regard to it, +c., should be pleasant. Hence an agent should, every where + in all his intercourse, aim to make himself agreeable, to give as little trouble as possible, should never so exert himself, to bring people into his plans as to displease them, should never press them so hard for money as to make the impression on their minds that he is unreasonable or to occasion them to regret after he is gone that they gave so much, or not to wish him to come again, +c. +c.

5. The principle means of accomplishing the great end sought to be accomplished will be the promotion of a true missionary spirit. This should be the first thing at which you aim every where, obtaining funds the second.<sup>7</sup> If you accomplish the latter without the former, there will be danger of unpleasant reaction, + there will be no security that there the good work will be continued. But if you succeed in producing a true missionary spirit, funds will come of course, the interest

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<sup>6</sup>The ABCFM had used "special objects" in fund raising as early as 1815, inviting individuals and organizations to support particular children in boarding schools in Sri Lanka (Samuel Worcester, "Second Quarterly Circular of the Prudential Committee of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions [March 1816]," Panoplist 12 (1816): 186-90). Missionaries soon complained of the extra work of helping students to write letters to their sponsors, and American supporters became discouraged when the children were not converted. Problems were publicly described when the Board attempted to discontinue the practice in 1848.--ABCFM, Prudential Committee, "Children's Fund for the Education of Heathen Youth," Missionary Herald 44 (1848): 176-77.

<sup>7</sup>Wisner had made this and the following point to Armstrong in an earlier letter appointing Armstrong a temporary agent: "The first thing in prosecuting an agency for the Board is to promote a missionary spirit, the second, to get funds; + the way to accomplish both, + that continuously, is to take pains to get Christians informed on the subject of missions."--Benjamin B. Wisner to William J. Armstrong, 11 Jan. 1833, ABCFM Papers, ser. 7, vol. 1, p. 34.

+ efforts begun will continue + increase, all the blessed reflex influences<sup>8</sup> of engaging in such a work will be experienced. A corollary is, that congregations that can give but little should not be passed by, for to them the missionary spirit is as important, in some respect more so, as to abler ones.

6. The great means of promoting the missionary spirit is information, in regard to the state of the Heathen world, their prospects for eternity without the Gospel, its indispensableness to their civilization + salvation, the duty of Christians to live for this object, the real tendency of the missionary spirit + effects to advance religion in our own country, the openings in Providence for missionary operations, the success that is given to them, +c. +c. On all these + kindred topics, the people need to be instructed in the very elements; it is so in every part of the country, it is emphatically so in the field where you are to labor. And remember, that it is not abstract argument merely, however conclusive, that will produce + sustain interest + action on this great subject, but chiefly well authenticated, well selected, + well arranged facts. With these keep yourself well furnished, + give them, not in the form of long, dry narrative, but with the liveliness of animated narration. The truth + force of this principle will lead you to make a judicious use of Missionary + Monthly or (as they are now to be called) Quarterly, Papers,<sup>9</sup> + to keep the Telegraph<sup>10</sup> speaking on the subject of Foreign Missions, + to make it a prominent object to promote the circulation of the

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<sup>8</sup>Promoters of missions believed that missions had two kinds of influence: direct and reflex. The direct influence of missions was on the hearers of the missionaries-- hopefully conversion. The reflex influence of missions was on the supporter at home. Reflex influences included: a deepening of faith, more revivals, initiation and support of domestic missions, greater generosity for domestic causes and the local church, more men going into the ministry, a firmer orthodoxy, and a greater spirit of Christian unity. See: Horatio Bardwell, The Duty and Reward of Evangelizing the Heathen (Newburyport, Mass.: William B. Allen, 1815); G., pseud., "The Influence of the Spirit of Foreign Missions on Domestic Plans of Benevolence," Missionary Herald 20 (1824): 383-86; Beriah Green, A Sermon Preached in Poultney, June 29, 1826, at the First Annual Meeting of the Rutland County Foreign Missionary Society (Castleton, Vt.: Ovid Miner, 1826); ABCFM, Prudential Committee, Statements Respecting the Necessities and Claims of the Missions and Missionaries Under the Direction of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, April 1831 (New York: Sleight & Robinson, 1831), 5.

<sup>9</sup>In 1824 the ABCFM began producing a series of tracts, which it called "Missionary Papers." These Missionary Papers included sermons, biographies of native Christians, and excerpts from ABCFM annual reports. In 1833 there were 14 Missionary Papers. By 1841 the Board had produced 532,250 copies of twenty-three Missionary Papers. In April of 1832 the Board began producing "Monthly Papers." They didn't come out every month, and were later retitled "Quarterly Papers." These were much briefer 4 page tracts with an illustration on the cover. Many described "heathen" practices, some were reports from mission stations, one explained the necessity of appointing agents. In March 1834 the seventeenth Monthly/Quarterly Paper was issued. The last, number 24, was produced in June of 1836; a total of 590,000 copies were printed for distribution.

<sup>10</sup>The Visitor and Telegraph was a weekly Richmond newspaper.

Missionary Herald.<sup>11</sup> You will every where recommend persons taking the Herald. If any cannot give more than the price for it, let them give it for that rather than as a contribution,--it will effect more for the cause. See that all names, of subscribers + persons entitled to the work gratuitously,<sup>12</sup> be accurately returned, of those entitled to it gratuitously once a year. Whenever they are willing to do so, get them to pay in advance. Get some one in each place or vicinity where there is any considerable number of subscribers, to act as agent, on the terms printed on the cover of the Herald, + notify us of his engagement. As you go round, each time, in your field, see that the business of getting payment for the Herald, by local agents or otherwise, is duly attended to.

7. Prayer is as real a means of converting the world as contributing funds, sending missionaries, printing + distributing Bibles + Tracts, + preaching the Gospel; + in some respects even more important. Let it be a primary object, therefore, to impress the people with this idea. And let the monthly concert<sup>13</sup> have much of your

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<sup>11</sup>The *Missionary Herald*, the monthly publication of the ABCFM, consisted primarily of letters from missionaries and reports from mission stations, and by 1834 had a circulation of 20,000. The *Missionary Herald* was a continuation of the *Panoplist*, which the Board took over and renamed in 1821.

<sup>12</sup>A large proportion of the subscriptions to the *Missionary Herald* were gratuitous. Free subscriptions were given to persons collecting \$15 for the Board in one year, treasurers of missionary associations that contributed over \$20, pastors whose monthly concert collections were over \$15 a year, and individuals contributing over \$10.-- ABCFM Prudential Committee Minutes, 11 Dec. 1832, Congregational Library, Boston, Mass. (microfilm).

<sup>13</sup>The "monthly concert" was a prayer meeting for missions, normally held on the first Monday evening of each month. The idea of a concert of prayer began in Scotland in 1744, and was widely promoted by the publication in 1747 of Jonathan Edwards' An Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God's People in Extraordinary Prayer, for the Revival of Religion and the Advancement of Christ's Kingdom on Earth (In The Works of President Edwards, ed. Sereno E. Dwight (New York: S. Converse, 1829), 4:429-503). At that time Edwards appealed for quarterly prayer meetings for "the revival of religion and the advancement of Christ's kingdom on earth." In 1784 Baptists in England made it a monthly concert, on the first Monday of each month. In 1797 the London Missionary Society designated that the prayers be specifically for missions. In the United States, the monthly concert of prayer for missions was initiated among women in 1812 by Mary Webb, secretary of the Boston Female Society for Missionary Purposes (Albert L. Vaill, Mary Webb and the Mother Society (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1914), 46-47). The first missionaries sent to India, in 1812, wrote back to their supporters in America requesting that they adopt the British practice of the monthly concert (Gordon Hall and Samuel Nott, "Letters from the Missionaries to the Rev. Dr. Worcester [8 April 1814]" Panoplist 11 (1815):183). By 1818 the monthly concert was generally observed by Congregationalists and Presbyterians in the North. The concert normally consisted of (1) prayer, (2) singing of hymns, (3) sharing of missionary information, and (4) a collection (Concentus, pseud., "Monthly Concert" Religious Intelligencer 13 (1828-29):804). As time went on, the sharing of news of missions became the central activity of the concert. For more information on the concert see: Charles A. Maxfield III, "The

attention. I know this is a matter attended with many difficulties, especially in a population so scattered as in Virginia + North Carolina. An article on the subject was published in the *Missionary Herald* for 1833, p. 76;<sup>14</sup> + a fine tract will soon be published, + no doubt inserted in the *Herald*.<sup>15</sup> One thing is clear, as much importance ought to be given to the Concert as possible. Hence in towns, + wherever there is a regular weekly meeting, it would be well to omit it on the week of the Concert, + let the latter take its place. And I have thought it worth consideration + experiment, whether, in such a scattered population as you generally have at the south, part--say the afternoon--of the sabbath preceding the first monday of each month, might not be profitably spent in such exercises as are usual + proper at a Monthly Concert, giving intelligence, appropriate exhortation, + prayer.<sup>16</sup> Think of this; + have it tried, if you shall think best.

8. Ministers ought to feel that on them rests the chief responsibility, + to be brought to take the principal leading labor, of promoting + sustaining missionary feeling and effort in their congregations.<sup>17</sup> If it is the business of the church to convert the world, if the missionary spirit is the very Christian spirit, it certainly ought to be so. Make it a prominent object, then, by conversation + in other ways, to

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'Reflex Influence' of Missions: The Domestic Operations of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, 1810-1850" (Ph.D. diss., Union of Va., 1995), 125-66.

<sup>14</sup>"Monthly Concert and *Missionary Herald*" *Missionary Herald* 29 (1833): 76-77.

<sup>15</sup>Ansel D. Eddy, "Method of Conducting the Monthly Concert for Prayer" *Missionary Herald* 30 (1834): 388-94.

<sup>16</sup>The shift of the monthly concert from Monday to Sunday, here described, soon developed. The old school Presbyterian General Assembly formally made the change in 1838. That year Armstrong, observing that many congregations had changed the concert to Sunday. He asked the ABCFM annual meeting to give its opinion, but they left the day to local preference (ABCFM Annual Report 1838:38).

<sup>17</sup>The strongest criticisms of the agency system came from local pastors, who saw the agents of a multitude of societies seeking to manipulate them and their congregations, to impose an agenda on the congregations disrupting their life, and undermining the authority of the pastor. Although the strongest criticisms were of the agents of anti-slavery and temperance societies, the criticism effected all societies. Pastors complained that agents were a "coordinate power" doing what it was the pastor's duty to do. This view was expressed by former ABCFM missionary Hollis Read: Hollis Read, "The Pastoral Office and Charities" *Literary and Theological Review* 4 (1837): 574-583. The ABCFM encouraged the involvement of pastors, for the more support that missions received from pastors, the less would be the need for agents. Armstrong later presented a paper to an ABCFM annual meeting on this subject: William J. Armstrong, "Relations of the Pastoral Office to the Work of Missions" ABCFM Annual Report 1842:75-79. After Armstrong's death, the ABCFM revised its agency system, declaring that the agent was not to be in any way in competition with local pastors, but was to assist the pastor in promoting missions: "Reorganization of the Agencies" ABCFM Papers, ser. 12.1, vol. 8, no. 13.



bring ministers so to feel and do, to take a decided interest in the missionary cause, to inform themselves on the subject; to preach directly upon it at proper intervals, + let all their preaching + praying evince that it has an abiding + prominent place in their estimation + affections; to prepare themselves for, + give interest to the Concert; to see that missionary intelligence<sup>18</sup> is circulated in their congregations, that contributions to the cause are regularly made once a year; to have all the business regularly + thoroughly done, every year within their charges.

9. Whether it is best to organize Male and Female Associations in the various congregations + to form any societies auxiliary to your Central Board, I cannot judge.<sup>19</sup> The great thing, in the department of the business now referred to, is to secure the regular bringing of the subject before the people, + their contribution to it once a year. In New England + in some other parts of the country, the plan of Associations + Auxiliary Societies (as detailed in Missionary Papers Nos. 1. + 2.)<sup>20</sup> is unquestionably the best, + contributes to diminish the amount of labor from agents required. But in other portions of the country, where the people are not accustomed to act by association, that plan does not work so well. If formed, associations soon die; + therefore had better not be formed. What will be best in your field, you + your Executive Committee will judge + decide. In some cases, no more formality of organization has been gone through than, once a year, to have appointed, by donors + contributors under the general supervision of the minister, + of the agent if he is there at the time, a treasurer + male + female collectors. It is best always to have the people subscribe immediately after a sermon; cards being circulated, or (what is better) slips of paper + pencils being put in the pews beforehand, for the purpose. This, surely, ought no more to [be] object to,<sup>21</sup> than Paul's direction might reasonably have been, to

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<sup>18</sup>"Missionary intelligence" was news of missions, as found in *Missionary Herald*, Missionary Papers, and other sources.

<sup>19</sup>The ABCFM developed a network of missionary associations, two in each parish, one for men and one for women. These associations collected funds for missions and promoted missions. The Board also developed regional auxiliary societies, which generally corresponded to the boundaries of Associations and Presbyteries, for the purpose of stimulating the associations to continue their work. See: "Systematic Charity" *Missionary Herald* 19 (1823):365-68. By January 1830, the Board reported 1603 Associations, of which 680 were limited to women, and 74 auxiliaries. The CBFM executive committee had already voted, "to conform as far as practicable," to the ABCFM plan of associations and auxiliaries ("Records of the Executive Committee of the CBF Missions," 7 May 1834 [p.23], CBFM Papers, Union Seminary, Richmond, Va.) and a few associations were organized.

<sup>20</sup>Brief View of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions and Its Operations, Missionary Papers, ABCFM, no. 1, Boston: ABCFM, [revised each year]. [Rufus Anderson], Hints to Collectors, Missionary Papers, ABCFM, no. 2, 10th ed., Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1834.

<sup>21</sup>The taking up of collections in Sunday worship was criticized by some as inappropriate activity for the Sabbath and disruptive of worship. See: Justin, pseud., "On the Practice and Mode of Collections in Churches" *Christian Advocate* 1

take + lay aside money on every sabbath day.<sup>22</sup> Simple collections, is the least desirable form of getting contributions from a congregation.<sup>23</sup> The subscriptions made should be distributed among collectors, who will promptly + thoroughly attend to their collection. The understanding should be that subscriptions will be called for without delay, unless the subscriber specifies a subsequent time when he will pay. And, except in special cases, subscriptions had better be made with the expectation of being immediately collected. The names of all who give \$10, or upwards, at one time, should, whether they say any thing or not about it, be, when the subscription is paid, returned as entitled to the Herald gratuitously for a year. Honorary members<sup>24</sup> are not entitled to it as such, but entitled to it on the other ground, during the year in which they make the donation which constitutes them honorary members. To constitute honorary membership the payment of \$50, if a clergyman, of \$100 if not a clergyman, must be made at one time.

10. It is of the utmost importance to raise up a generation that will from their very childhood have contemplated the conversion of the world as this great work, + formed the habit of acting accordingly.<sup>25</sup> Hence you will every where + continually, make it a prominent object to get children + youth interested + engaged in the work of foreign missions. With this view, visit + address sabbath schools, on the subject of missions. Strive to influence sabbath school teachers to keep the subject before the minds of the children. (A map + manual about to be published by the American Sunday School Union will be a great help in this). Encourage children's contributing regularly to foreign missions, either in the Sabbath school, or by having their names put down as subscribers with their parents, or (which may be done in towns +

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(1823):164.

<sup>22</sup>1 Corinthians 16:2.

<sup>23</sup>Wisner made this point in his earlier letter when Armstrong became a temporary agent. In that letter, he described how the subscription could take place: "It is better not to take collections when another method can be taken, but to get the people to stop after the sermon, + send round papers + for them to put down their names with what they are willing to give annexed + let the collectors call on them afterwards for the money, + on others who were not present."--Benjamin B. Wisner to William J. Armstrong, 11 Jan. 1833, ABCFM Papers.

<sup>24</sup>Honorary members had voice but not vote at ABCFM annual meetings. It was customary for women's associations or congregations to give the money needed to enroll their pastor as an honorary member.

<sup>25</sup>The ABCFM was steadily increasing its work with children. At this time the Massachusetts Sabbath School Society was publishing a series of books for children on the various missions of the Board, and on financial giving. From 1842 to 1846 returned missionary John Scudder travelled across the United States, addressing over 100,000 children and youth. In 1857 William Warren was appointed agent to work specifically with children.

compact country congregations) having Juvenile Foreign Missionary Associations,<sup>26</sup> in addition to the Male and Female ones of adults. It is not best that the husband + father of a family should give in his own name the whole given from his family; but a share of it should come directly from + in the name of the wife, the children, severally, + every other member of the family. It will thus contribute more to promote interest in the object, + the prevalence of the missionary spirit.

11. To obtain suitable missionaries is the great desideratum in prosecuting the missionary work. I say the great desideratum, not because funds are not greatly needed, to a constantly increasing amount, nor because constant + strenuous efforts are not needed to obtain them; but because, experience proves that, just in proportion as suitable men are obtain to be sent forth, funds can, by suitable efforts, be obtained.<sup>27</sup> You will, therefore, give a prominent attention to this matter, and in doing so, will, from time to time, visit the Theological Seminaries + Colleges + academies in your field,<sup>28</sup> + address + converse with the pious students on the subject of missions;--not to persuade them to become missionaries, but to convince them of the duty of being, wherever + however they shall be employed, for the conversion of the world; + to bring them to examine, every one of them, + intelligently decide, the question, whether it is the will of God that they should labor for the promotion of this grand object in this country, or among some unevangelized people. You will do well, at Theological Seminaries especially, to give the students that may be thinking on the subject of being missionaries, an opportunity of conversing with you privately, + to inquire particularly of their instructors about them individually; + to take + keep memoranda of what you learn, + of your impressions, in regard to each;--to assist you, + us, in forming an opinion of what they are specially fitted for, when they shall come to be appointed.<sup>29</sup> You will also keep your eye open for missionaries from among settled ministers. And when you think you have found one, of such talents + character, + in such circumstances as to age, family, situation, +c., that you think he may + ought to go, ordinarily before bringing the matter before him, write to me in

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<sup>26</sup>A description of a juvenile missionary association, frequently referred to in this period, is found in: [Anne Tuttle Jones Bullard], Louisa Ralston; or, What Can I Do for the Heathen? 2d ed., (Boston: Massachusetts Sabbath School Society, 1833), 95-96.

<sup>27</sup>The Board believed that every person who became a missionary had a circle of family, friends, and acquaintances, who would be influenced by the missionary's commitment to support missions. Therefore, more missionaries would mean more financial support for missions.

<sup>28</sup>At least two agents located their residence in the community in which a seminary was located. Although Wisner does not mention them, the Societies of Inquiry--student societies for the study of missions and duty--were critical for missionary recruitment. Agents communicated closely with these societies, found on most college and seminary campuses, and occasionally organized them, and helped them to expand their libraries.

<sup>29</sup>In theory, missionary candidates were supposed to be interviewed by the Prudential Committee in Boston. However, in more distant areas, such as Armstrong's field, the agent interviewed the candidates, and his recommendation effected the appointment.

regard to him, telling me all about him. And when you bring the matter before him, whether after or before communicating with me in regard to him, let it be, not in the aspect of persuading him to go, but of putting the subject fairly + fully before him, + bringing his own mind to decide what is his duty. It is fundamentally important, that a person's decision to be a missionary should have for its basis the intelligent + deliberate decision of his own understanding + conscience, + that his heart should fall in with that decision, so that the course that he takes shall be truly his intelligent choice.

12. It is very important to have all ecclesiastical bodies + proceedings imbued as much as possible with the missionary spirit.<sup>30</sup> Nothing will so effectually keep down the spirit of litigation + contention, + keep out heresy, + make such meetings promotions of true religion. Therefore, not only attend the meetings of the two Synods, as you are required to do, but attend, whenever you can, the meetings of Presbyteries; not to get resolutions passed, + then rely on them to accomplish the work, but in your preaching, addresses, praying, intercourse, there, to promote a missionary spirit. And it is well to get resolutions passed, but chiefly to furnish the opportunity of making speeches + thus exciting + fostering a right missionary spirit

13. The spirit + the reality of union between your Board and ours is of vital importance, to the prosperity of the general concern, + the prosperity of the work, + the happy reflex influence of it, within your particular territory. You feel this, I know, as strongly as I. You will do what you can to diffuse + deepen the feeling. The facts + principles which have a bearing on the point are stated, as well as I can state them, in the article on the "Organization of the Board, its relations + responsibilities to the churches, +c.," in the Herald for January of this year, p. 28,<sup>31</sup> of which some extra copies were struck off for distribution as a Missionary Paper, with some of which you will be furnished.

14. You will feel that to you is entrusted the general supervision + management of the whole Foreign Missionary business within your field. Your Committee will aid you; but it will be, chiefly, by their sanction + cooperation in the measures you shall devise + propose. We will aid you; but it will be, chiefly, how + when you shall desire it, + in carrying into effect what you have devised. Let your

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<sup>30</sup>ABCFM leadership was concerned with the "feeling" that people had at denominational meetings. In 1836 Armstrong attended the Presbyterian General Assembly meeting and the meetings of the Synods of Virginia and North Carolina. The wrangling, partisanship and heresy trial at General Assembly was a sharp contrast to the Synods. At Virginia Synod, "On all important subjects there was entire unanimity . . . The missionary meetings, which were held almost every night during the Synod + attended by the members, contributed I think very materially to the harmony + good feeling which prevailed . . ."--William J. Armstrong to ABCFM Secretaries ABCFM, 14 Nov. 1836, ABCFM Papers, ser. 11, vol. 4, no. 50.

<sup>31</sup>"Organization of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, Its Relations and Responsibilities to the Churches, &c." Missionary Herald 30 (1834): 28-35.

mind, therefore, be awake + alive to the whole subject, to devise + do whatever you can to promote the cause, + to see that any part of the business, within that field, is properly done; keeping an eye to all other agents, + to every thing, that, so far as you can prevent it, nothing shall be improperly done, nothing inefficiently done, nothing neglected.

15. Feel at all times and every where that you are a foreign-missionary man, devoted to the great work of promoting, directly, the conversion of the world. Let this be your great business every where + at all times, in ordinary preaching + praying, in social intercourse, +c., as well as when engaged in the appropriate business of your office. And being such, you will keep aloof from every thing that might in the least interfere with your best + greatest influence in this blessed cause, run from many things which it was proper + duty for you to be decided + active in when a pastor. I need not specify. You feel the truth and the force of the principle, + will judiciously apply it.

16 Going about as you will be among all the churches in the large territory constituting your field, it is of the utmost importance that, every where + at all times, with ministers, + private Christians, in social intercourse + in families, as well as in the pulpit, you should take great pains to exert a benign, peaceful, sanctifying, heavenly influence. No man has so immense a responsibility resting on him in this respect as a general agent of a benevolent institution. If he feels + acts aright, he may be the instrument of an immense amount of good, aside from his appropriate work; if he feels + acts wrong, in his general temper and deportment, he will hinder his own appropriate work, + in other ways occasion an immense amount of evil. No tongue can tell the importance of his being a holy, peaceful, benevolent, devoted man, that shall diffuse about him every where the very atmosphere of the spirit of Jesus Christ. O how much he ought to think of this, + pray in regard to it, + strive to be just what he ought.

I began this letter with the general plan before my mind of first stating some general principles, + then giving some specific counsels. But, I have given pretty much the specific counsels, in stating the general principles. But it is of no consequence what plan has been pursued, if I have stated the most important things. I have written, too, as you have perceived, on the supposition that your principal business will be that of agent; which will, doubtless, be the fact. You will want an assistant secretary, residing at Richmond, to keep the minutes of meetings of the Executive Committee in your absence, + to answer letters which may come when you are away + require an immediate reply.

On the subject of keeping accounts + acknowledgements of donations, both Mr. Hill<sup>32</sup> + myself have written with sufficient distinctness + fullness to Mr. Gray.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Henry Hill, Treasurer of the ABCFM, 1822-1854.

<sup>33</sup>James Gray, treasurer of the Central Board of Foreign Missions, 1833-1837.

There is now in process of being picked out for you, + will be forwarded to you in a few days, a large supply of Missionary and Monthly or Quarterly Papers. While I have been absent so much this spring, several of the numbers have got nearly out of print; so that of some numbers you will now receive quite a small supply. I shall keep a memorandum, however, + as soon as they are reprinted, will make up their deficiencies. You will not be profuse of these Papers, while you will use them as freely as will conduce to the promotion of the cause. Why might not, one or two of each be given to each congregation, to form a kind of Missionary library, to be kept at the Church, + taken, one at a time, by a family, + returned next sabbath; some one taking charge of them, + keeping an account of their being taken + returned; + thus the several numbers be generally circulated in the congregation? They are designed for gratuitous distribution.

If any thing has been omitted in this long letter in regard to which you want information or an opinion, write immediately, + it shall be communicated as soon as practicable. And always write freely about any thing about which you may wish to communicate. Once a month I wish you to write, giving me a general outline of where you have been, what you have found, how succeeded, +c. +c., + inform me where letters will find you during the next month.

And now my dear brother, the Lord sustain you, + your beloved companion, in the privations + labors of this great + good work; give all the wisdom + humility, + faith, + zeal, + perseverance, that you need, to approve yourself to him in it, + secure his blessing. And may he greatly bless you in it, that you may rejoice in having undertaken it, + find that you have been the instrument of great good, to the churches + people within the bounds of the two Synods, + to a world perishing in superstition + idolatry, + thus of greatly promoting the glory of God.

Affectionately yours,  
B. B. Wisner,  
Sectr. of the A. B. C. F. M.

P. S. I shall pay the postage of this letter; but hereafter we will let the postage of letters to you come out of the treasury of your Board, + of letters from you to us, out of the treasury of ours.