

American Presbyterian.

New Series, Vol. I, No. 22.

Genesee Evangelist, No. 941.

PHILADELPHIA, THURSDAY, JUNE 2, 1864.

CONTENTS OF INSIDE PAGES.

General Assembly—Third and Fourth Days.....	170
Roll of the Assembly.....	171
Editor's Table.....	171
Correspondence in Burnside's Division.....	171
What is Cost to be a Christian.....	171
Allentown Church.....	171
Sonnet of Michael Angelo.....	174
A Word about Clouds.....	174
Women's Anti-Slavery Movement.....	174
Letters from a Lady.....	174
Garibaldi and Tenyson.....	174
Franklin and his Paper.....	174
Religious World Abroad.....	175
Publication Committee's Report.....	175

JOHN CALVIN—III.

HIS CHARACTER VINDICATED.

In this world it is the fate of greatness to be misapprehended, and of merit to be abused. The man who assails error or wrong, soon learns that there are blows to take as well as blows to give. Not rarely some weakness of his own invites the arrow that may reach him "between the joints of the harness." The praise he receives is qualified by criticism or censure, and the hisses that the mention of his name excites, may sometimes be more noticed than the applause.

To such experience as this, John Calvin was not a stranger while he lived, and over his dust that has rested for three centuries in its grave, sharp conflicts have been waged. His character and his doctrines have alike been assailed; obsolete slanders have been revived; and prejudice has spared no efforts to deny his merits and exaggerate his faults.

And faults no doubt he had. His nature was not congealed rose water. He was not gentle and winning like Melancthon. He had not the hearty impetuosity and broad humor of Luther. And yet he was capable of the warmest friendship, and he could inspire the most entire confidence and the strongest attachment. True, the current of his feelings seemed like a winter stream, frozen and impassive, but underneath the surface of cold logic and natural reserve, flowed a strength of human affection, for which the world gave him little credit till revealed by his correspondence.

He stands charged too with the abuse of power. Unquestionably he held the reins of discipline with a firm hand. He would not allow the manifestly unworthy to hold a place in the church—an intolerance which was a scandal to many then, but if an offence, one which the modern church has seen fit to copy. He would not tolerate misdeeds and vices, which in our day spurn the memory of Puritan restrictions, but he repressed them in the name and in the cause of sound morals, and under the pressure of a stern conscientiousness. If he wielded power with a firm hand—if sometimes himself "the power behind the throne," he shaped the laws and secured their execution with unbending rigor—it was not from any vulgar or common-place ambition. No man loved power less for its own sake. None ever exercised it under a sterner sense of responsibility to God. He was not eager for place. Greatness was thrust upon him. His tastes were scholarly not worldly. It was Farel's imprecation that first forced him into public service. It was the importunity of friends, the intercession of protestant cities, and the supplication of Geneva itself, that overcame the reluctance of the exile to return. "I tremble in my innermost being," so he wrote to Farel, "when mention is made of my return." And to Viret he says, "Shall I go then to Geneva to secure my peace? Why not rather submit to be crucified?" This was the expression of genuine feeling. Hypocrisy at least Calvin's enemies have rarely ventured to lay to his charge.

But the burning of Servetus! This clings to Calvin's memory like the fabled shirt of Nessus. God forbid that any man in these days should attempt to defend the justice or the policy of the deed. Let it be that Calvin deprecated such severity. Let it be that Servetus had steeped himself in perjury, that his violent and outrageous blasphemies betokened the raving maniac rather than the daring speculator. Let it be that he was not a man to be reasoned with, or one whose solemn promise could be trusted. Still the deed was wrong. It was a blunder as well as a crime. But to judge Calvin fairly we must remember the spirit of the age, and the question which was at issue. No less an authority than Prescott has remarked, "the immorality of the act and of the actor seem to me two very different

things; and while we judge the one by the immutable principles of right and wrong, we must try the other by the fluctuating standard of the age. The real question is, whether a man was sincere and acted according to the lights of his age. We cannot fairly demand of a man to be in advance of his generation, and where a generation goes wrong, we may be sure that it is an error of the head, not of the heart." If such principles of historic judgment are sound, Calvin is entitled to the benefit of them. But besides this, a pressure was put upon him, the force of which we are unable fairly to appreciate. Servetus was a scandal alike to Papist and Protestant. By the sentence of the Romish Church his life was forfeit. He had incurred infamy which no protestant advocacy could venture to excuse. Was such a man to find refuge and toleration at Geneva? Was such a man to be allowed to cover protestantism with the odium of lies, blasphemous errors and crimes? What would the world say? What would Rome say? What was the boasted Reform of Geneva, if the state that repressed ruinous vices, gave shelter to the Hydra of deadly error?

But even in such a proceeding as that which resulted in the doom of Servetus, Calvin's participation was limited to what he regarded as the line of duty. He was stern and inexorable in fidelity to his convictions. We cannot cease to respect him even when he errs.

His theology has been represented as tinged with his own bilious hue, and it has been inferred that his sympathies were as narrow as by imputation his creed is assumed to have been. But this is a gross mistake. Calvin was too sagacious, as well as liberal, to tithe mint, annise and cummin. The horizon of his sympathies was broad as Christendom. He did not dream that the Church of Christ was contracted to the limits of the Geneva Republic, or bounded by the Alps. One of the three great objects which he perseveringly prosecuted, was that of Christian Union, the promotion of the harmony and communion of the several protestant churches, not only in Switzerland but throughout Europe. "Fain would I," he said, "that such a harmony reigned among all the churches of Christ in this world, that the angels might sing to us from heaven." In keeping with this was his view of the essentials of faith. No *typhissima verba* restrictions chilled his sympathies. Clear and definite in his own views, he did not demand that others should swear in *verba magistri*. "If even the doctrine," he wrote, "is marked with error, it is enough for me if only that which is fundamental remains."

Such was John Calvin, a man whose individuality of character is strongly marked, but whose broad views, liberal sympathies and heroic firmness commend him to our regard. Perhaps no branch of the church accepts fully today all the peculiarities of his theological system, but as a system in its great features it stands now, as for three centuries it has stood, like a granite pillar based on a pedestal of rock. It has been the study and admiration of the greatest minds. It has exerted a world-wide influence. It has inspired to heroism. It has taught endurance. Back of the great historic movements of these last three centuries, we discern again and again the shadowy and operative presence of the Geneva theology. It hovers over the dykes of Holland, where the tide of Spanish invasion recoils before the valor of Dutch Calvinists. We recognize it in Round head encampments, Puritan Conventionists, and Scotch Communion, and we hear its familiar tones from the lips of the great leaders of religious opinion down to the present times. With the Mayflower it crosses the ocean, and with the fathers of the Presbyterian Church, it colonizes a young empire for freedom and for God. If noble pioneer missionaries have braved the wilderness, and the Presbyterian pulpit has been true to the cause of civil and religious liberty, and if we read to day with just pride the record of the ministry in "the times that tried men's souls," it is but justice to the claims of historic truth to recognize our indebtedness under God to the influence and teachings, the life and labors of John Calvin.

THE GERMAN STREET CHURCH, ON Monday, May 23d, unanimously elected Rev. Josiah Young, of Sunbury, pastor of the church.

THE ASSEMBLY.—MODERATOR'S SERMON.

Last week, by timely arrangements, we were enabled to lay before our readers the moderator's sermon, entire; we have no doubt they appreciated our endeavors, and most of them, probably, have read the whole sermon. We hope they will do so, if they have not. Its highly appropriate theme; the comprehensive, penetrating, exhaustive, yet not tedious, handling it received; the clear and logical statements which of themselves have the force of argument; the admirable combination of fidelity to the truth, with charity to all who think differently; the manly, earnest, evangelical spirit, breathing through the whole, unite to give it a place among the very first of our Moderators' Sermons. On the subject it treats of, it must, we think, pass as authority. We cannot forbear quoting half a dozen sentences, in which, as it seems to us, the gist of the whole matter between us and the other branch is stated:

"Our ground has always been that both parties may and ought to live under one standard in peace and quietness. We do not object even to those of the most straitest sect, provided that, concerning zeal, they do not insist upon persecuting the church. But if it is claimed that the only basis of union is our acceptance of the theories of immediate imputation, unqualified inability and a limited atonement, even if we held to these dogmas, we could not accede to the terms; for they annul the very principle of a broader ministerial fellowship, without which no reunion could be lasting. We cannot afford to enter a communion which would exclude Edwards and Dwight, Richards and Woods."

Whatever is distinctive in the attitude of the so-called "New School man" is here stated. He is "New," not so much in the more liberal doctrinal views he entertains, as in the liberal attitude he maintains towards those who differ from him. There was a time when we regarded the statement of this position as of great importance in the discussion of the question of union; but further reflection leads us to doubt its practical value. Who, in point of fact, are habitually and on principle, tolerant of various shades of opinion in the Calvinistic churches? Who are naturally and necessarily zealous for every tenet of their creed, and of the philosophy of their creed? Where is the "New School" spirit of union found, but with the liberal-minded doctrine? Is it not idle to expect a high Calvinist to be tolerant of more moderate views? Should we agree to admit "those of the most straitest sect" to our organization, on the supposition that they had become "New School," so far as the abandonment of the persecuting spirit is concerned, might we not, ere long, find that both they and we were mistaken; that the spirit of intolerance is inseparable from ultra-Calvinism; that it must and will assert itself in restlessness and division of some sort or other? The high-Calvinist is, as we all know, an exceedingly conscientious person in regard to the doctrines and shades of doctrine he holds. He is unrelenting when upon the track of an error, real or supposed. Some of those who took part in, or approved of the expending acts, doubtless believed that they were doing God service by such high-handed measures. Intolerance is, we fear, wrapped up with the very fibres of their system. In their psychological position they cannot help it. We may therefore well hesitate about a new union with these elements. Twice we have tried to fuse them, with but temporary success. Of one thing we may be certain: that if such a sermon, as this catholic and masterly performance of our moderator's, were once heard in the assembly of the other branch, there would be more hope of a genuine and permanent union than there is now. Its spirit surprised no one in our assembly; would that be the case in the other body?

GUARDING THE PULPIT.—The Presbytery of Pataskala, O., at its recent meeting, passed the following:

Resolved, That in view of circumstances as existing in our immediate vicinity, we earnestly advise our vacant congregations to allow no minister to occupy their churches, or otherwise labor among them, who does not cordially approve the action of our last General Assembly on the state of the country.

The Corner Stone of Olivet Church, Mount Vernon and Twenty-second sts., in this city, was laid Monday, May 30.

LETTER FROM CONSTANTINOPLE.

[We yield our columns, with pleasure, to the veteran Missionary, Dr. Riggs, of Constantinople, who, in the subjoined communication, furnishes explanations and corrections of statements made in recent German publications, on the Pera church difficulties, quoted in our columns some time ago. We expressed, at the time, surprise and censure at the discourtesy shown by the Evangelical Church of Germany towards our missionary brethren in Constantinople, and we are prepared to learn that the representations on which the German churches acted, are highly colored by the false zeal, through which the writers, Pischon and Pfeiffer, have looked at the facts. Why cannot such statements as this of Dr. Riggs, be laid before the Evangelical Alliance at Berlin, or sent to the *Kirchenzeitung*, the organ of that body, for publication? Such statements, together with the example of the Turkish Missions' Aid Society of Great Britain, would go far to disabuse the minds of German Christians, and alter their course. How much they need light, appears from the fact that the present King of Prussia, in view of such representations as are here corrected by Dr. Riggs, has just subscribed two thousand thalers in aid of the Pera church; his predecessor subscribed one thousand.]

TO THE EDITOR OF THE AMERICAN PRESBYTERIAN:—Dear Brother,—In your paper of March 10th, you state succinctly the position of the Pera Church, of this city, and the views of Prussian friends in respect to affording them aid. Will you allow me the space to make a few brief statements respecting some of the points touched upon in that article?

In your quotation from the *Kirchenzeitung*, the "Pera community," for whose accommodation it is proposed to build a church, is represented as consisting of "more than 1000 souls." Now it is very likely that the hope may have been expressed, that should a commodious and inviting church building be erected, the congregation would be greatly increased, and this estimate may have been founded on some such anticipation. It would however have been wiser as well as truer, to have stated it as an anticipation. The actual Sabbath congregation does not average thirty persons.

Mr. Pischon says: "The prospect held out in the beginning of the mission, that by degrees the Armenian church would be left to arrange its own ecclesiastical affairs, was never realized." The implication here is most ungenerous, as well as unfounded. The fact is that the mission has steadily urged the native pastors and churches to go forward in the management of their own ecclesiastical affairs, availing themselves of our advice only so far as they should be perfectly satisfied with it. The missionaries, after organizing the native churches, have never even voted in the reception or exclusion of members, or in the election of pastors or other church officers, or in the administration of discipline. They have acted together with the native pastors (in all cases on a footing of perfect equality) in examining and ordaining pastors elect, examining and licensing candidates for the ministry, and in hearing and deciding cases which have come up from individual churches,—in short, in all ministerial duties.

Pastor Pfeiffer says that the native pastors "are not invited even as guests to the councils held in reference to their own churches." Now the real meaning of this complaint is that they are not invited to the business meetings of the Mission, in which, it is true, we act by ourselves, as trustees, and the only responsible trustees of the funds of the Board. If Pastor Pfeiffer's statement is understood of any properly ecclesiastical meetings, precisely the contrary of that statement is the truth.

Your editorial remarks are valuable, and your view of the necessity of a compact organization of the churches here, agrees with our own. We have labored for this from the beginning. The native churches also admitted it in principle, and incorporated in their constitutions certain rules which imply the existence of a body consisting of all the pastors within a given district with lay representatives from the churches; but they have thus far failed to carry out this organization in practice, mainly on account of the scattered position of the churches, and the consequent expense in-

olved in the attendance of pastors and delegates on the necessary meetings.

You will be interested to learn that measures have at length been taken by the native pastors themselves, for the organizing of associations of the churches wherever practicable, and so far as I know, the only pastor who dissents from these plans and measures, is the Pera pastor. So far from accuracy is Chaplain Pischon, when he represents the pastors generally as preparing to abandon any direct connexion with the mission, and to found an independent organization.

How the statement that NINE of the evangelical Armenian churches are found in this city originated, I cannot imagine, unless it has been from a misunderstanding of some manuscript statement. The fact is that there are four, three co-operating with us, and reported (as you observe) by the Board, and one (the Pera church), not at present so co-operating.

Permit me to add a remark on the use of the term *heathen*, as applicable to the state of the oriental Christians. It is true, that in a loose way we speak of heathen at home, &c. But in speaking of the classes of people for whom missionary labor is expended, the term *heathen* has become so entirely synonymous with *pagan* as to render unsuitable its application to any Christians or even to Mohammedans.

Most truly yours in the Gospel,
ELIAS RIGGS.

Constantinople, April 18, 1864.

LETTER FROM DAYTON.

DAYTON, Ohio, May 25th, 1864.

DEAR BRO. MEARS:—A ride of eight hundred miles and more brought us from Philadelphia to this gem-city of Ohio. We first tried to scale the Blue Ridge over that master-piece of engineering skill—the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, but the angry Potomac had swept away our crossing at Harper's Ferry, and so cheated us of our expected feast upon Nature's wild beauties among the mountains of West Maryland and Virginia. We turned back, therefore, and set down again at our starting point, after having lost a day. We joined company for a night ride over Pennsylvania's giant railway, with several hundred of our noble boys returning wounded and worn from the front to their homes. After a morning cup of coffee at Altoona, we climbed the steep of the Alleghenies, with the sun smiling merrily upon the fresh glories of spring, and the silvery murmuring waters sparkling in the mountain gorges.

Time and the cars went swiftly amid the pleasantries and mutual entertainment of our company, among whom was the ever-genial pastor of "Old Pine Street," and after a peep in passing at dingy, sooty Pittsburgh, and Ohio's capital, the morning of Thursday found us in this beautiful and hospitable place.

Dayton, with its population of near 30,000, is the second city in Ohio in the amount of taxable property. Situated on the east side of the Great Miami, fifty miles from Cincinnati, the depot of seven railroads and the Miami canal, with its beautiful private residences and broad shaded streets, with its tasteful churches, court-house and romantic cemetery, with its extensive mills for linseed oil and cotton and paper, with its people so warm-hearted, genial and kind, it is a place that will long be remembered with appreciation by the General Assembly of 1864.

The sessions of this body were opened on Thursday, 19th inst., at 11 A. M., by a noble sermon from the retiring Moderator, Rev. Professor Henry B. Smith, of New York, on CHRISTIAN REUNION—the theme which is engaging the heart of the whole Presbyterian world. Your readers have had it already spread before them in your columns. The present Assembly is a fair representation of our church. On its roll you will find the man of intellectual calibre, the man of executive ability, the man of heart, the polished rhetorician of the city, and the rough, earnest standard-bearer of the frontier. The spirit of all is that of Christ. It is good to be here. The hearty, warm expression of brotherly love in debate, in the morning prayer meetings, in the social greetings of the brethren, is inspiring and full of cheer. The Assembly has done itself a happy honor in its choice of our well-known and beloved co-Presbyter, Rev. Thomas

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Brainerd, D. D., as Moderator. His Christian courtesy and dignity, his ready tact in disposing of difficulties, his grace and felicity in responding to the salutations of delegates from other Christian bodies, have charmed every one. Our Old School brethren have sent us most kindly assurances of their affection and regard, by the mouth of Rev. Edmund P. Humphrey, D. D., and at their invitation we have this afternoon spent an hour in prayer for our country in concert with them, as represented in Assembly at Newark, N. J. The business of the Assembly has its usual interest, if not more. The Reports of the several Permanent Committees on Foreign and Home Missions, Education and Publication, show progress, though they by no means give evidence that the church yet appreciates the responsibility of her stewardship. Oh! that our Zion could be aroused to respond to the claims of the Master. Rev. Thomas S. Hastings, of New York, in an address last evening before a meeting called in the interest of Foreign Missions, made allusion to the contribution box in the Cathedral of Montreal. Over it was a great open eye, which turns every way upon the giver; and Jesus still "sits over against the Treasury and beholds how the people cast in." May the church learn the lesson of liberality developed throughout the land by the discipline of the war.

Monday evening was devoted to a conference upon the interests and work of the Christian Commission. Rev. D. W. Thompson, of New York, and Buddington, of Brooklyn, on their way home from the bloody field of Resaca, were present, and by their graphic painting of the scenes from which they had just come, filled all with new hatred of this monster rebellion, and with warmer love and admiration for the noble men who stand a living rampart between it and us.

It need not be said that this Assembly is loyal. If there be any copperheads here they certainly keep very close in the grass. And as for these generous homes where we are so hospitably entertained, there is hardly one which has not brave, dear fathers, husbands or sons gone forth at their country's call. On an excursion last Saturday to the Miami Bluffs, which bear upon their crest the ruins of a fort built in the highest style of military art long before the memory of the Indian, we had the pleasure of meeting General Alexander M. Cook, whose immediate family has already offered four slain-victims upon the altar of Columbia, and who has very recently enrolled himself under the Presbyterian banner of our Great Captain, adding another to the noble list of our Christian soldiers.

The Assembly have been gratified twice during its sessions, in the reading, through the thoughtful gift of the editor, of the "AMERICAN PRESBYTERIAN," which is highly esteemed everywhere among those who love loyalty to their church and country.

I cannot close without an acknowledgement of the unremitting attention and kindness to the comfort of the Assembly of Rev. Dr. Spees, and the Committee of Arrangements.

Fraternally and eternally, J. G. H.

RELIGIOUS INTELLIGENCE.

Methodist.—The Laymen of the Church held a large meeting last week, and appointed a committee of twenty-five to see to the selection of lay-delegates in the coming year. The General Conference sent down to the Annual Conference for their action, a resolution to include in the Rule on Slavery *Slaveholding* as well as the Slave-trade; thus excluding slaveholders from communion.—Among the most exciting scenes of the General Conference still in session here, have been the discussions on the noble address of the Bishop, upon the subject of slavery, and the reception of a delegation from the General Convention of the Colored Churches, which has also been in session in this city. The addresses of the delegates were eloquent, and elicited much applause. We were struck with the superior order and quiet of the African Conference, the dignity and refinement of the Bishops—among whom presided the venerable Father Quinn—and the large, attentive audiences. One hundred and ninety delegates were present. When we commented upon the good appearance of the body, and the silence of the religious press in regard to the meetings, an intelligent clergyman of their body replied, "What we are we have made ourselves, under God," and the remark was added, "and that, too, while enslaved at the South, and in the face of prejudice at the North."