

# The American Presbyterian.

New Series, Vol. IV John A. Weir 18 July 67

Genesee Evangelist, No. 1099.

PHILADELPHIA, THURSDAY, JUNE 13, 1867.

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### EDITORIAL NOTES ON THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY. II.

For the first time in five years, the Assembly has been called upon to issue an appeal. It was a case of no special magnitude, yet it occupied full one-sixth of the entire session, consuming one whole day and parts of three others. A strong effort was made to throw it out of the house on the ground of informality, but the Assembly good-humoredly waited until the informality could be remedied by telegraph, and then deliberately heard the dry details of the case, gave the parties opportunity to be heard, called upon the lawyers in the body to illuminate the subject with their views, and then decided with great unanimity not to sustain the appeal.

Doubtless the possibility of Re-union has in one or two instances told unfavorably upon the distinct work of our Church in this Assembly. This was the effective argument with which Dr. Cuyler procured the indefinite postponement of the Standing Committee's proposal to have the Publication Committee commence upon a Hymn and Tune Book for public worship. He did, indeed, mention his friend, Dr. Robinson's "Songs for the Sanctuary," as a book worthy of general adoption, but the possibility of Re-union and the hope that the whole Church might then undertake the work with better prospect of entire success had most weight with the body. The same sort of argument was used in reference to the proposal to inaugurate the work of Foreign Missions on a denominational basis. In like manner Dr. Adams succeeded in deferring action upon a separate Secretaryship for the work among the Freedmen, arguing the inexpediency of commencing separate action at this state of negotiations for union with a body thoroughly organized for that work. These cases illustrate the evident tendency of such negotiations to dampen our ardour in that work of development, which has been so successfully carried forward in our Church during the past fifteen years, and for which there is still not a little room in more than one direction. Whether the union is consummated or not, it is the dictate of wisdom and the demand of duty, in our opinion, to go on lengthening the cords and strengthening the stakes of our own Zion. It is because we have pursued this policy so diligently and so effectually under the blessing of God, that we are a body with whom it is worth any other body's while to unite. It was when we began in earnest to take care of ourselves, that others began to care for us.

The report on the Freedmen, which contemplated the immediate appointment of an Associate Secretary, under the control of the Permanent Committee of Home Missions, from the pen of Herrick Johnson, was a brilliant paper, and was powerfully vindicated by its author on the floor of the Assembly. Nevertheless, it was finally thrown out by a reference of the subject to the Permanent Committee with entire power to act or not as they saw fit. Although this was done in deference to the wishes of Secretary Kendall, and of Dr. Hatfield, chairman of the Permanent Committee, it is, in our judgment, no act of kindness to the already severely burdened Secretary. There will be some pretty decided disposition to find fault, if he comes up to the Assembly next year, after the third or fourth attempt of the kind on the part of the Assembly, discouraged by himself, with no greater progress in the direction of distinctive effort on this field, or without more powerful and comprehensive reasons against such effort on the part of our body than he has yet given. In either case, he will have more to do, than ought be laid upon the shoulders of mortal man. There is no doubt that our branch of the Church is losing—may have lost prestige by her extraordinary inactivity as a denomination in this matter, and very many of our Churches are and have long been dissatisfied, that they are obliged to work through irresponsible channels, or to do nothing at all for the freedmen. We believe the cause of the freedmen would be better off by ten thousand dollars, over and above expenses, the first year that a separate bureau or Sec-

retaryship was established by our own body. And if it had not been for the haste in which the matter was disposed of, on the last day of the session, we doubt whether it would have met with the discouraging fate which actually befel it.

In general, our Assemblies, and this among them, show a haste to close business and get away at an early date. On Monday morning we doubt whether a sergeant-at-arms could have gathered from all parts of Rochester more than 120, or at most 150, of the 233 enrolled members. One hundred Commissioners had probably left the city at that time. The count at a vote in Cincinnati about the same time, showed over 200 members present in the Assembly of the other branch, a body but little more numerous than our own. There are some very good reasons for the brevity and despatch of our highest ecclesiastical court. We are harmonious and homogeneous. Leading questions of policy have all been satisfactorily settled and are out of the way. The time for discussion is passed. We are cleared for action now. There seldom arises need for long speeches, and the body, with its strong, practical bent, is quickly disgusted at such rare attempts in this line as are made by the inconsiderate.

This, however, is only one side of the case. It is well worth inquiry whether this extreme business-like view is not pushed too far; whether really there is not and will not always be a call for the highest deliberative wisdom incompatible with haste; whether there are not new forms and channels of denominational activity and liberality incumbent upon us to disclose, organize and commend to the regard of the Church; whether our Assembly does not lose some of the most valuable elements of dignity, influence, usefulness, and public interest by the strong prejudice of the majority against a session of more than nine or ten days, whatever may be the amount of business on hand. Thus in the present session, such important matters as the Freedmen's Mission and the Sustentation Fund were crowded into the closing hours of the last day, when all debate was limited to three minute speeches. Besides these important subjects, final action was had on the last day, also, on Home Missions, Foreign Missions, Education, the appeal of Silas Miller, the question in church polity of the exact status of a church member who has taken a certificate of dismission and carries it in his pocket; and I do not know how many other less important things.

In the report on Foreign Missions, the case of Rev. R. G. Wilder came up, on application of the two Michigan Presbyteries of Monroe and Detroit that the Assembly take charge of the Kolapoor Mission. Mr. Wilder's labors were handsomely recognized in the report on Foreign Missions adopted by the Assembly, but there was a decided unwillingness to inaugurate a new policy in Foreign Missions by taking charge of the work at Kolapoor. The report on Education, also adopted, gives leave of absence unsolicited to the Secretary, Dr. Mills, for one year, with salary continued. This is a kind and judicious act on the part of the Assembly, as Dr. Mills is in impaired health and needs rest. The Publication Committee, notwithstanding the opposition of Dr. Robinson, was entrusted with the entire control of the *Presbyterian Monthly*, but at the same time, was saddled with the entire expense, which heretofore has been shared among the different committees represented in its pages. As it will hereafter, by direction of the Assembly, be devoted mainly to Home Missions, its columns will doubtless show a great increase of interest and value, and it is hoped that a position nearer if not quite attaining, self-support will be given to it by the churches. On Church Erection, the most encouraging feature was the zeal with which the cause was urged on the floor of the Assembly by Dr. Adams, of the Madison Square Church, New York. He pledged his earnest efforts among his own people in its behalf, and said they would, he hoped, go beyond the liberal contribution of the year before. This cause, going hand in hand with Home Missions, will guarantee, at least to a considerable extent, a house over the head of the missionary and his infant congregation, and save him from the terrible and crushing burden which hitherto has been laid upon him, in addition to the sore trials incident to his position as a pioneer in the work of extending the kingdom of Christ.

### OUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED.

The *O. S. Presbyterian* of this city has at length accorded us an answer to our queries in regard to its soundness, liberality (*sit venia verbo*), and comprehensiveness in the matter of reunion.

Our queries of April 25th were:—  
"I. Does the *Presbyterian* subscribe to the language of the answer to the 16th question of the Shorter Catechism—'Sinned in him and fell with him,' taken in its literal import?"

"II. Does the *Presbyterian* believe that subscription to the doctrine of a limited atonement is necessary to good standing in the Presbyterian Church; or, in other words, does it regard the belief that Christ died for all, one of the New School peculiarities which must be ruled out of the re-united Church?"

In reply the *Presbyterian* June 1st says:—  
"To the first question we answer, that having subscribed to the language of the answer to the 16th question many years ago, we still accept it, and believe that as Adam was our federal head and representative, so we 'sinned in him and fell with him' in his first transgression.

To the second question, we answer that we hope all 'New School peculiarities' will disappear in the 're-united Church,' and that all will join in proclaiming, as Old School men do now, the sufficiency of the atonement for all, and its efficiency for those who were given to Christ by the Father. Upon the subscription of the *American Presbyterian* to such sound and wholesome doctrines, we propose that it be admitted to 'good standing in the Presbyterian Church.'"

Our readers will see how indirect and evasive are these answers. They are not the replies of one who is anxious for a perfectly clear and open understanding on mooted points, but of one who has a policy to pursue and an end to gain, which can prosper best under non-committal phrases. The *Presbyterian* hopes all New School peculiarities will disappear in the re-united Church. We have no doubt the respected proprietor of *The Presbyterian*, and the sixty-two others who, with him, formed the minority in the General Assembly at Cincinnati on Re-union, cherish this hope, but as they were outvoted two to one in that body, it would seem that the great majority did not share their views. We shall see.

### PROVIDENTIAL LEGISLATION.

We can think of no other term, which so well as the above reverent one, properly characterizes the most important act of the last session of our State Legislature. Near the close of the last month, like a thunder-clap from a clear sky, there fell upon the keepers of taverns, saloons and drinking shops generally, the intelligence that a bill for the suppression of some of the worst but most gainful parts of their soul-traffic, had quietly passed all the forms of legislation, and to the surprise of all, friends and foes alike, had become a perfected law of the State of Pennsylvania. Though bearing the not very alarming title of "An Act to enable police officers to enforce order in licensed houses, and to exterminate the unlicensed traffic," it turns out in detail to be the best law on the subject, short of an absolutely prohibitory one, which has emanated from any legislature. The orderly portion of our people accept it with delight; the bar-room constituency with howls of indignation.

The Act consists of ten sections. The first contains some general and not new directions respecting the suppression, by police force, of disorderly conduct in or around licensed taverns or eating houses. Keepers are required to call for such force when occasion arises, and if necessary, the police are to close up the place until quiet is restored. The second section forbids any person from selling, giving or disposing of any strong or spirituous liquors, wines, ale, beer, or any intoxicating drink, to any apprentice, or any person under twenty-one years of age, without the written consent of the father, mother, guardian, master or mistress, as the case may be, of such person. The third section forbids the disposing of intoxicating liquors to any habitual drunkard, or any person then under the influence of such liquors, under the penalty of a forfeiture of license. The fourth section forbids the selling, giving away, or disposing of such liquors to any person, when requested not to do so by the husband, wife, parent or child of such person, under penalty of forfeiture of license. The fifth requires the entire closing of bars and places of sale on the Sabbath, the time extending from twelve o'clock Saturday night until sun-rise Monday morning;

and also the closing of them every night from twelve o'clock until sun-rise. Persons travelling without violation of law may, however, be received and lodged. The sixth provides that any conviction for the violation of any provision of the act shall work a forfeiture and annulling of license. The seventh requires sheriffs, constables, police officers, &c., to act, either upon their own observation, or information from any respectable citizen, in compelling the observance of the law and bringing offenders before the magistrates. It also requires magistrates to entertain complaints made under oath by any citizen of the vicinity for any violation of it. The eighth requires the sheriff, constable or any member of the police who finds any person intoxicated in the street, highway or drinking shop, to arrest such person and detain him or her until sufficiently sobered to testify, and then compel his or her testimony as to the place where the liquor, which caused the intoxication, was obtained, and the person who furnished it. The ninth renders any dealer who shall sell intoxicating drinks to any person in violation of any of the above provisions, liable for all damages which may be sustained in consequence of such sale. Suit may be brought either by the injured party or his or her next friend. The tenth grades any violation of any provision of the act as a misdemeanor, punishable with a fine of not more than twenty dollars, or, in default of the payment thereof, with imprisonment of not more than five days. This is in addition to the special liabilities above-named.

Such is the law. The history of its enactment, were it not for the gravity of the subject, would be the rarest legislative joke of many years. In its passage through the Senate, where it originated, there was nothing particularly remarkable except the absence of any signs of alarm on the part of the liquor interest which supposed itself well guarded by watchful agents at the capital. The vote on its final passage by that body was taken by yeas and nays. We do not remember the figures, but the majority was a large one. Of the Philadelphia Senators, one voted in the affirmative, two in the negative, and one was absent. The liquor dealers of this city, so far as they knew anything about the matter, had somehow obtained the impression that the lower house would kill the whole thing, or at least amend it by excepting Philadelphia from its operation. With the selfishness so instinctive in their craft, they had no money to support a lobby effort for the protection of their brethren outside of the city limits, so long as they felt themselves secure. They knew the Philadelphia representatives—with an exception or two, to be legislators of their own making—and they expected to be taken care of. They had all faith in the power of the notorious fact that, for years past, with the exception of one or two assembly districts, the real primary meetings for nominations are the Sunday and other gatherings at their saloons; that from thence names are sent up and men forced upon the nominating conventions, and that all the following formalities are but simple ratifications of the will of the pot house politicians. Thus represented in the lower house, why should they be alarmed?

Next came the tidings that the Governor had affixed his name to a new liquor law. What law? Where is it? A few days brought along the copy. Almost spontaneously the Philadelphia dealers assembled in a meeting and formally organized. This time the term indignation meeting was no misnomer; indeed, it was an indignation and consternation meeting. Who voted for this law? was the cry. There had been no call for the yeas and nays, and so far as could be learned, no one had voted against it. Here was fresh wrath. The city representatives—our men—where were they? Inquiries were put on foot, and adjournments had to await the result. The report came in that no Philadelphia representative was to be found who knew anything of the matter. No one heard of any such bill in the House, or knew of its passage until, after the adjournment of the Legislature, it came to light in the newspapers. Little by little the mystery was at length solved. It appears that the bill went from the Senate to the House, late in the session, (April 5,) when the table of the latter body was piled with unfinished business, and legislation became more rapid than thorough. Instead of being sent to committee, (the usual course) it

was laid on the table. On the 9th the House passed or otherwise disposed of one hundred and fifty-six bills. Almost all of these were read only by their titles! and members hastened to vote for them and get them out of the way, without any knowledge of their contents. They were mostly what are called private bills, but among the heap lay this, "Act to enable police officers to enforce order in licensed houses, and to exterminate the unlicensed traffic." Amid a bill-passing frolic, it was read by its title and passed *nem. con.* On the 17th, after the adjournment, the Governor, we presume with deliberate and cordial hand, affixed his signature of approval.

Thus, without any tactics or strategy or special effort on the part of the friends of morality and order, God has given us this good law—we mean good as far as it goes. The providence is none the less real, because it comes through the overruling of a reckless legislation for a great good. We are indebted to an exasperated company of soul-traders for an *expose* of the manner of the passage of this act, and we shall hereafter no doubt, be indebted to them for a persistent and unscrupulous series of efforts to resist its execution, to neutralize its efficiency, and to secure its repeal at the first possible moment. For the latter result their hope lies in the vigorous hold of the bar-room power over nominating conventions. If the vantage ground which this providential interposition has opened to the friends of order, shall stimulate us to a radical reform on the subject of primary elections, it will make the law a blessing even above what was first hoped from it.

### HOME MISSIONS.

The following summary of the admirable financial statement made by the Treasurer of the Permanent Committee, Edward A. Lambert, Esq., was handed to us by that gentleman:—

Whole amount received (of which from Legacies, \$10,944 15.)	\$129,076 52
320 churches contributed, Members,	110,100
625 churches non-contributing Members,	40,000
Amount per member of entire Church,	73½ cents.
Increase over previous year,	18 per cent.
Largest amount contributed by any one church—"Madison Square," N. Y.,	\$6,937 39
Largest amount per member—"Church of the Covenant," N. Y.,	15 58
Synod contributing the largest amount per member, "Synod of Missouri,"	1 88
Presbytery contributing the largest amount per member, "Pittsburgh,"	5 57

DR. BRECKINRIDGE, in the debate on the majority and minority reports on Reunion, in the Assembly at Cincinnati, took ground against either and against Reunion itself. In one of his speeches, he is reported to have said that the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church, makes no provision for receiving ministers and churches in a lump. Very true. But does it make any provision for turning out "ministers and Presbyteries in a lump" without hearing or trial? And if constitutional scruples may be set aside to do a wrong, may they not be set aside to right that wrong?

ERRATUM.—In giving the list of 63 votes cast in the Cincinnati Assembly against laying the minority report on reunion on the table, the types made the sixty-three in one place, "the majority." As, however, we had previously, in the same article, spoken of them as the minority, we hope few, if any, of our readers were misled.

THE NARRATIVE of our General Assembly will be found in full, with Obituary list, on the third page. It is the result of much conscientious labor, and is perhaps needlessly minute; but we rarely have, in these documents, so complete a photograph of the condition of the Church as here given. We trust it will be generally read.

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