

# The American Presbyterian.

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## American Presbyterian.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 14, 1867.

### THE PRESBYTERIAN UNION CONVENTION.

The High-water Mark of the Union Sentiment in the Presbyterian Churches thus far was reached in the Convention held in this city last week. Every fraternal feeling, every magnanimous purpose, all zeal for the common interests of the Presbyterian church and solicitude and hope for our country as affected by the condition of our church seemed at their flood. A divine breath seemed to blow upon the hitherto half-kindled affections of the people; a divine light seemed to shine upon their understandings; a voice of preparation for the coming of the Lord seemed to sound so authoritatively, that mountains began to sink and valleys to be filled up and the way began to straighten for what had seemed hitherto an almost impracticable undertaking.

The Union Convention was a success of such magnitude and character as overwhelmed its most sanguine friends with surprise; especially since the Old School church by its Presbyteries had taken such an equivocal attitude on re-union with our branch. In numbers it far exceeded their expectations, there being about three hundred and twenty delegates in all. And the character and ability of these delegates were such that it was declared by good judges the ablest body of Presbyterians that had ever convened in our country. Drs. Hodge, Breckinridge, Musgrave, Davidson, and Monfort of the Old School; Prof. H. B. Smith, Drs. Fisher, Stearns, Hatfield, Booth, Duffield, Jr., and others of our own church; Drs. Davidson and Harper of the United Presbyterian Church, Dr. Wylie of the Reformed Church, with such laymen as Senator Drake of Missouri and Robert Carter, of New York, and George H. Stuart, of our city, were sufficient to give high tone and character to the body.

An unwonted spirit of prayer was poured out. Fully one third of the time was spent in devotional exercises of the most delightful character. At every turn in the business, at every point deemed critical, or at any happy conclusion to the deliberations divine aid was asked, or thanks returned in earnest, spirited, brief utterances. The time thus spent was plainly not lost. It brought the hearts of the members so much nearer together that they were more thoroughly prepared for this peculiar work of union. It contributed to the deepening of the inner sentiment of unity, so essential to any real organic unity. It blew the flame and heated the materials more nearly to the welding point.

And, in fact, the great momentous work of the body was consummated with a facility and a dispatch which was not the least surprising feature in its history. The good sense and the strong, practical spirit of chairman and Convention quickly overrode any attempts to magnify points of order or to skirmish about mere business details. The great matter for which the Convention assembled was quickly put in hand, and the rapidity with which the committee prepared a platform, which, in the main, covered just what the Convention wanted, was only to be explained as an answer to prayer and as indicating the maturity and unanimity of sentiment in the body itself. It seemed a most happy arrangement of Providence that the convention of Evangelical Episcopalians, comprising the very best men in that Church and some of the noblest and most devoted Christian men of the land should be in session at Epiphany Church, almost within call of our body. The announcement made Wednesday evening, that we had a place in their prayers, sent an unwonted thrill through all hearts. The resolutions that were exchanged, and especially the deputation of Bishops McIlvaine and Lee, Rev. S. H. Tyng, Jr., and Hon. Judge Conyngham and Felix Brunot to the Convention on Friday set us all to thinking of a still higher and wider unity of the Evangelical forces of Christendom, as perhaps a little nearer than ever before.

And now, as to results, we can say: First, we have a definite platform, an embodiment of the aspirations of the advanced Union men of all branches of the Presbyterian Church in this country. What has been much thought and talked and written of

has at last been organized as an inchoate fact. There is a centre of crystallization, a rallying point, a test of the strength and practical qualities of the Union sentiment in each of these churches. Second, all the sentiments, impulses and convictions necessary to union have been developed, cultivated and strengthened in a remarkable degree. Never were so many members of so many different branches of the Presbyterian church brought so closely together and made to feel so powerfully their essential unity in spirit as on this occasion. Hand grasped hand, and eye looked into eye, and heart flowed to heart, and stubborn prejudice and uneasy suspicion vanished like dreams in the light of morning, as each one felt that every other was animated by zeal for the common interests of every branch of our Zion. It was a season warm with the discovery of very near relationship unfortunately discredited and ignored heretofore. In this feature of the meeting, encouraged and developed by the abundant and well sustained devotional exercises, there was the most effective preparation possible for Union.

But, thirdly, a better understanding, especially between the two greater branches was reached. There were several of the most impracticable of the Old School men in the body. In fact, the delegates from that branch were considerably more than one-half of the whole number present (180 out of 320) and more than twice as numerous as those from our branch. But it was made manifest, at the very outset, that the illiberal element of the Old School body, whatever power it might seem to have in the Presbyteries, had absolutely none at all in the Convention. The insolent attempt of Robert J. Breckinridge to browbeat the chair and hinder the business of the body, was put down in the most summary manner, and by none more heartily than the Old School men themselves. When that celebrated Kentucky champion of persecuting orthodoxy, clamored down from the stage so awkwardly, on Wednesday afternoon, it was felt that he had probably made his very last appearance in that odious character. He began his career as a persecutor in our city, and in our city it was met that his last futile efforts to perpetuate schism, and so to justify the deeds of his earlier life, should also be made. On the heels of this melancholy exhibition came the remarkable and cordial adhesion of Dr. Musgrave of this city, to the scheme of Re-union. The position of Dr. M., as an Old School man, of the most decided type, is quite notorious. These two incidents sufficed in a general way to indicate an improved sentiment in the Old School. On our side, where union sentiments were always at home, native born—and where wounded dignity and self-respect might have counselled an attitude of merely quiet readiness towards the Old School, there was an exhibition of magnanimity that disarmed whatever opposition might still have remained. We refer to Prof. Henry B. Smith's proposal to define the sense in which the Confession was received: in its historic, "that is Reformed or Calvinistic sense." This proposal was designed to meet the unworthy suspicions raised by the late article in the *Princeton Review*, and was resisted by not a few of the Old School men themselves, who are equally disgusted with that article, and equally unwilling even to seem to restrict the interpretation of the Confession within any limits of theological or philosophical exclusivism. Was it not a novel and instructive spectacle, when staunch Old School men were heard protesting against a proposition coming from the New School side, as needlessly rigorous in its orthodoxy? We could scarcely believe our senses when we saw and heard it. On the first vote upon the amendment, the Old School was divided, and the New School was unanimously in its favor! Well might an Old School brother who had done his part in the division of '37 exclaim, as the vote was announced: The New School is more orthodox than the Old! In like manner, on the question of embodying the Catechism in the Basis, the New School voted in favor and the Old School against it! How then could it be otherwise than that as New School orthodoxy vindicated itself, Old School suspicions declined? How could the Old School refuse to admit the propriety of tolerating a variety of interpretations of the Standards, when, after all, the Body which had ever most strenuously contended for

such liberty, has suffered no real damage, but rather the contrary from the permission? It was hence not so wonderful as it would have been a few weeks or days previously, to see Dr. Hopson on the platform of a Convention like this, virtually, if not in express terms, recognizing the soundness of the body whom he had so violently and causelessly assailed in his *Review* of July. Dr. Hodge, it is true, made very scanty admissions; he was far enough from the magnanimity of an open confession, of wrong done to innocent men by his outrageous article; upon one word indicative of sorrow fell from his lips; although probably nothing that actually happened in the Convention would have gone so far to break down the wall of separation as an admission of this kind from the Princeton professor. But if he did not confess his own faults, he seemed grieved for those of Dr. Breckinridge, and he repudiated distinctly, *mirabile dictu*—the necessity or obligation of any particular philosophical view of the doctrines of our Confession, in order to a right subscription.

Call it policy, or view it in the more hopeful light of a real work of the Spirit of God, Princeton does move—a little—after all. Fourthly, it was a remark of Dr. Hodge, and it was true, that the overpowering drift of feeling was towards nothing short of organic unity. All propositions looking towards a confederation of independent bodies were received with indifference or were at once rejected. All the prayers were burdened with desire for organic unity, now. Scepticism as to its early feasibility could not live in such an earnest atmosphere. And when the brethren of the Episcopal Church exchanged with us such cordial congratulations, it seemed indeed as if the organic unity of Presbyterians alone was little enough to undertake. Anything less would have been felt, under such circumstances, to be unworthy, not only of our zeal and our hopes, but of the manifest indications of Providence.

As to the other branches, the Old School and Presbyterians saw that on the platform of the Westminster Confession, there was no standing place for them, and they accepted the situation with a grace that won golden opinions. Everything possible was yielded to the United Presbyterians and Reformed Presbyterians on the subject of Psalm-singing, while the exclusivism of the communion table was dropped, as for the present an unmanageable subject. So that the outlook in these directions is quite obscure. But without doubt the hands of the Union men in both these bodies were greatly strengthened and a vigorous impulse communicated to their already growingly powerful cause. It will take an unusual amount of boldness and bigotry in those churches to protract resistance to a movement so nearly universal.

As for ourselves, though seeing in the condition and prospects of our own compact and vigorous Church, no necessity whatever for organized union with any other body, and though utterly unconscious of guilt as connected with denominational lines, or with the separate existence of our own body from the beginning to the present time, we cannot withhold our warm sympathies from a movement so promotive of that spirit of union which, with or without organized unity, is necessary to the honor and highest usefulness of the Church, and too many illustrations of which especially cannot be given in the Presbyterian body. Surely there is not a fibre of any regenerate soul but must beat in unison with such a purely, thoroughly Christian movement as this. In fact, the tolerant principles more or less distinctly announced on the more rigid side in the Convention, and towards which the tide is moving with steadier and stronger sweep, are just those for which our branch of the Church has struggled, which have been the watchwords of our editorial career, and which are every way suitable, safe and conservative of the genius of the American Presbyterian Church.

TABOR CHURCH received, at its communion last Sabbath, 20 on profession and 5 by letter, total, 25; making the entire additions for the past year, 107.

This is the fruit of constant pastoral effort, sowing beside all waters, laboring in season and out of season, and using every means for the upbuilding of the kingdom of Christ. The bedside of the sick and the house of mourning, where hearts are made soft by bereavement, by a judicious administering of the balm that is in Gilead, the consolations of the gospel of Christ, are the God-given opportunities to win hearts thus affected and softened, to the love of Jesus. It is by such a power that Tabor church grows, extending to all the invitation of Christ, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

### LETTER FROM ROME.

Rome, Oct. 15, 1867.

The situation here, at this date, is interesting and critical. Probably before this letter reaches America, Rome will be either in the hands of the insurgents, or of Victor Emanuel. Fighting is going on all around the Roman border and volunteers are flocking from every part of Italy. Among others, thirty-six students and a professor from the University of Pavia, came to the frontier in the same train which brought me into Rome. A gentleman reports eight hundred insurgents as arriving this morning—few of them armed. Indeed, arms are very difficult for the "Garibaldini" as the Roman papers call them, to obtain. Of one hundred and seventy who were marched into the city as prisoners, a few days ago, a considerable number had no arms at all when they were captured.

In the city great quiet prevails. Absolute silence seems to be the rule. No Roman can be induced to express an opinion or even to tell the news. The priests and monks in large numbers slowly walk about the streets and nothing but the anxious looks of the soldiers and an occasional procession of monks or nuns suggests the actual condition of things. All feeling is suppressed. There are some, however, who are ready to die for the Pope, but perhaps a considerable proportion of the people of Rome prefer Victor Emanuel. This state of affairs has given an additional interest to my visit to this city. Whether I looked down from the heights of the Coliseum upon a monk preaching, barefooted to a group of people in the arena, or whether I wandered in the catacombs among the bones of the early Christians and noted where the martyrs were laid in the rocks pious care and ever-enduring inscriptions. I could never for a moment forget that blood was still falling upon the thousand-times blood-drenched soil of Italy. I thought at the same time of bloody scenes in the Coliseum long ago, and of blood which just now drips in the "corso" from the carriage loads of wounded soldiers which from time to time are brought into the city.

And when I looked down from the dome of St. Peter's, upon the city and the Vatican, and all the mighty past of the popedom passed in review before my mind, it was with lively emotions that I reflected that around the base of the classical Soracte and of all the snow-clad mountains on the other side of the Campagna there were swarming thousands who were ready to die, to strip from the "Pontifex Maximus" every vestige of his temporal authority.

The very few Englishmen and Americans who happen to be in the city are somewhat anxious for the future. A lady from Alabama, that I saw, was hopeless. She desired to see every Garibaldian hung and quartered, but "since the effort of the South had failed, it was useless to hope for any good cause." A wagon-load of wounded prisoners which she had seen had revived all the unpleasant associations of the American war. Religiously a very unusual and hopeful condition prevails considerably among Italians at the present time which may perhaps be understood from an example better than in any other way.

I was riding in a night train near Rome a day or two since, and found myself alone in the compartment of an Italian railway carriage, with a rough Rob Roy sort of man. I could not help thinking that he might be the chief of a band of robbers in the mountains, and I felt just a trifle uneasy as I thought of spending the night with him.

I observed, however, that he seemed to be studying from time, a little book, by the dim light of the lamp. He could speak no language but Italian and was evidently a man of no great erudition.

Presently he asked me rather abruptly if I was a Catholic? I replied in the negative.

"Are you a Protestant?"

"I am."

"A Christian and Evangelical?"

"Yes a Christian and Evangelical."

My curiosity was excited, and I began a series of questions.

"Are you, Signore, a Catholic?"

"No, no," with expressions of disgust.

"Are you a Protestant?"

"No, a Christian, a Christian!"

He then showed me his little book. It was the gospel of Matthew, neatly bound by itself.

"I bought it," he said "in Paris at the Exposition."

And when I told him that I was a Protestant minister, his delight was unbounded and we were close travelling companions as long as we went in the same direction.

Ought not all the Lord's people of our country to pray for this nation with great fervor and unity, that what appears to be a breath of the Holy Spirit, may become a mighty work in the very seat and capital of error and superstition.

C. C. K.

[OFFICIAL COPY.]

### THE BASIS OF UNION.

As amended and adopted in the Union Convention November 8, 1867.

The Committee appointed to prepare and report a *Basis of Union*, to be submitted for consideration by the various branches of the Presbyterian church represented in this Convention, submit the following:

I. An acknowledgment of the Old and New Testament to be the inspired Word of God, and the only infallible rule of faith and practice.

II. That in the United Church, the Westminster Confession of Faith shall be received and adopted, as containing the System of Doctrine, taught in the Holy Scriptures; it being understood that this Confession is received in its proper historical, that is, the Calvinistic or Reformed sense.

Whilst the Committee recommend the foregoing basis of doctrine, they wish to be understood as recognizing the orthodoxy of the Larger and Shorter Catechisms; of the Heidelberg Catechism; and of the canons of the Synod of Dort.

III. That the United Church shall receive and adopt the Presbyterian form of Church Government.

IV. The Book of Psalms which is of Divine inspiration, is well adapted to the state of the Church in all ages and circumstances, and should be used in the worship of God. Therefore, we recommend that a new and faithful version of the Psalms be provided as soon as practicable. But inasmuch as various collections of Psalmody are used in the different Churches, a change in this respect shall not be required.

The Committee also recommend the adoption of the following resolutions, viz:

1. That we unite in requesting our respective Churches in their Supreme Judicatories, to appoint a Committee of five each, which shall constitute a Joint Committee, whose duty it shall be to meet, at a time and place to be agreed upon, and proceed, with all convenient dispatch, in an attempt to form a Basis of Union, according to the principles of this Report; which Basis, they shall submit to the Churches for their consideration and adoption; it being understood that this is not designed to interfere with the pending negotiations for union between two of the larger bodies represented in this Convention.

2. That in case the above Basis of Union should be adopted, a Committee be appointed to lay it before the highest Judicatories of the various branches of the Church, here represented.

3. That the members of the Convention, who may vote for the foregoing Basis of Union, to be laid before the Churches, shall not thereby be regarded as being committed to advocate its adoption when laid before the branches of the Church, to which they respectively belong; but shall be free to act according to the indications of Providence at the time.

4. As there is so much agreement among the Churches here represented in all essential matters of faith, discipline, and order, it is recommended that friendly and fraternal intercourse be cultivated, by interchange of pulpits, by fellowship with one another in social meetings, and in every other practicable way. By order of the Committee.

JOHN EAGERSON, Chairman.

The Convention voted by Churches, and on the adoption of the Basis as a whole, the final vote stood:

Old School, unanimous.

New School, unanimous.

United Presbyterian, ten for and one against.

Reformed Presbyterian, five for and four against.

Reformed Dutch, unanimous.

Cumberland Presbyterian, declined voting.

The report was declared adopted by the Churches voting *unanimously*.

Attest: WM. T. EWA, Secy.

CORRESPONDENTS must bear with us under the temporary exclusion of valuable contributions from our columns.