

## Original Communications.

## A COVENANTER COMMUNION.

A Covenanter communion Sabbath!—the words carry us over seas and centuries to the braes and hills of the land of the Covenant. A company of hunted fugitives is gathered round some Frazer of Brae,\* or Wellwood, or some other of the "Cloud of Witnesses." While the bread of life is "Broken doctrinally and sacramentally," a watcher peers from yon gray crag, and the first crack of his carbine will give warning of the approach of Grierson of Lag, or Claverhouse of Dundee, with their dragoons, and will scatter the congregation in flight, or will rally them for a fight which will end in such a bloody defeat as that of Pentland Hills, or such a still more disastrous victory as that of Drumlogie. The people have taken their lives in their hands in coming forth to-day. A price has been set on yon reverend gray head, and proclaimed at every market cross in Scotland. The fingers that break the sacramental bread before the people to-day, may be crushed in the thumbscrews; the voice that speaks of the Lamb that was slain to-day, may utter its last testimony on the scaffold of the grass-market. But the sermon says nothing of these things. Christ crucified, the redemption from the curse of a broken law, is the theme, and the man neither pauses to curse the persecutor or glorify the persecuted. In prayer he deplores the faithlessness of a Covenant-breaking nation, but it is "our" faithlessness. The sin of the people is a burden to his spirit as his own sin. If you doubt the fact, look away from the eulogist and the decrier alike,—look to the published discourses of Fenwick, Cargill, Frazer, and a host of others. These men would have regarded no men as more truly their aspersers than the eulogists who bespatter them with fulsome praise, and who are equally ready to rant about "the green graves of the martyrs," and to persecute those who walk in the Christian freedom which the martyrs claimed for themselves.

But the scene which I would speak of now, is one very different in its external circumstances. For many years, indeed, after the cessation of persecution, and after restoration of the Covenanter ministry by accessions from the ranks of the kirk, no house of worship ever covered the heads of "the faithful remnant." They worshipped as their fathers had done in the brae. The parish kirk was their kirk also, and the reformation work of "the next free General Assembly," would open its doors to them. They were not a sect but "the true Presbyterian kirk of Scotland," witnessing in the wilderness till better days should restore the glorious edifice of the Covenanter Reformation to its pristine use. Even when the younger members carried the proposal to have houses of worship of their own, the old folks bargained that the communion should still be celebrated in the open air. Tradition tells with what indignation an old Cameronian preacher rejected the artificial shelter of a new-fangled invention, called an umbrella, as he stood before the people on such an occasion in a pelting rain storm.

But to-day, the children of the Covenant worship "in a ceiled house," and we will visit them in one which will be memorable in the history of the American Presbyterian Church, the First R. P. church of Philadelphia, in which the Presbyterian National Convention met in 1867. The edifice needs little description to any of our Philadelphians, or to many of our more distant readers. The exterior is not imposing. No unhealthy basement Sabbath-school room lifts it up in air, or deals colds and rheumatism among the teachers and scholars; for a spacious second-story room in the rear furnishes ample and healthy accommodations for them. The front is of brick, plastered, the style a simple Norman, and the whole is fenced in with an iron railing, whose apex-balls bear five iron spikes each, in symbolization (an Episcopalian rector alleges) of "the five points of Calvinism."

The services of a Covenanter communion, preserving as they do the traditional usages of the Scottish Reformed Church, are lengthy and elaborate. They come but twice in the year, and are looked forward to with expectation and interest. For weeks previous, the pastor waits in one of the rooms of the church to confer with and instruct those who apply for admission to membership by letter or examination. On the Sabbath previous, called "the preparation Sabbath," the usual services, and even the Sabbath-school exercises, are carefully adapted to the occasion. Thursday of the intervening week is kept as "the day of fasting and humiliation before God," public worship is observed morning and afternoon, the clergy of neighboring churches occupying the pulpit. On almost every evening of the week there is a prayer-meeting, and on Friday evening the Session meets in the lecture-room to receive applicants for membership. These sit on the front seats, facing the session, and rise as their names are called. Article after article of the "Terms of Communion" are read, and the candidates signify their assent to each by rising. They are required to promise assent

\* He was a New School Presbyterian, and held that Christ died for all men. The republication of one of his books on 17 divided the Covenanters into two parties in this very issue. The seceding minority alone perfected their organization.

to the Confession, Catechisms, and Testimony of the Church, in so far as they know and understand them, to covenant for the performance of all known duty, to promise to withdraw from secret societies whose requirements would prevent due attendance on the Church and their home, to contribute as they are able to the support of the gospel, to be faithful and punctual in attendance on the ordinances, and in private and family worship, and to acknowledge as brethren all who maintain a Scriptural testimony and a godly life. After the session has voted to receive them, the pastor in their name extends to each the right hand of fellowship. Thirty-five were thus received on Friday evening last.

Saturday is the day of immediate preparation, and in the afternoon public worship is observed. After an appropriate discourse the "Terms of Communion" are read in the hearing of the whole church, and the "tokens" of admission to the Lord's table are distributed in presence of the Session. The congregation pass up the central aisle to the space before the pulpit, and each receives a card with an appropriate inscription and Scripture texts, and on the reverse are blanks for the communicant's name and residence. In old times, and in some Western churches yet, these were bits of stamped lead, though others use round bits of tin, which, by being easily lost, cause no small discomfort to weak-nerved people, who incline to believe in omens. It was formerly required that every member be present at this place and time, to be thus acknowledged as a fitting communicant "so far as man's judgment goes;" but, to suit the needs of a busier generation, these may now be had to-day, through any member of the same family, or on the morrow of the session. The services close with an appropriate address, in which the duty of prayerful self-examination is urged on every "intending communicant."

The services of the Sabbath begin at 9 A. M., and on this occasion closed at 3.10 P. M. A congregational prayer-meeting assemblies in the lecture-room, and continues for upwards of an hour, the large room filling up as the time goes on. Geo. H. Stuart is in the chair to-day, as he always is at such times, unless he is sick, or from home. The addresses and prayers are fervent, short, and scriptural, and short passages from those terse old Psalms are sung at frequent intervals. They close after ten o'clock, with silent prayer, and the singing of that wonderfully appropriate Psalm CXVI. 12-9, and the benediction.

When those who have not received "tokens" have been supplied by the session, and the younger members have written the names and addresses for all who come up to two writing tables, all withdraw to the church, which differs much from its usual appearance. All the pew doors have been removed, and are piled up in a corner of the vestibule. Before the pulpit stands a table, on which the sacramental service is covered over with white linen. From near this, in three directions, down the middle, and right and left, for the length of the front aisles, extend long, narrow tables, draped in linen. Along these are, on each side, rows of seats extending the length of the tables.

After the exposition of an appropriate Psalm—an invariable part of the morning service—and other introductory exercises the "action sermon," always by the pastor, is preached: on this occasion from 1 Sam. xx. 29, "And he said, 'Let me go, I pray thee; for our family hath a sacrifice in the city, and my brother he hath commanded me to be present.'" The use made of the text is not just historic, but it is a very suggestive one for such an occasion.

About noon the immediate services of the day begin. A short interval is given for those who may wish it to withdraw. Then follows the Scotch usage of "fencing the tables." Those who propose to come to-day to the Lord's table are warned that before a man may eat of this bread and drink of this cup, he must examine himself. To this end the divine standard is presented, and "in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, the only King and Head of His Church," the violators of each several precept of the decalogue, are, "while continuing such and without repentance, debarred from this communion table." The specifications are searching and special, under commandment after commandment, and of a sort to bring a man's religious professions into very close contact with his moral conscience. The language used depends on the taste of the officiating minister, and varies with the circumstances of the times. Thus we notice that one prohibition—that which kept man-stealers and slaveholders out of this communion for sixty years, is no longer repeated. Men of petty minds sometimes make this service wearisome and almost ridiculous. A western minister thus "debarred" any one who would break the Fourth Commandment by "blackening his boots or shaving on the Sabbath." But in the mouth of one who has tact and judgment, this service (to-day) is solemn, impressive and practical. The relative duties of life as well as the religious and the personal are pressed home on the conscience in a most solemn hour.

Then the tone changes from the threatenings of the law to the invitations of the Gospel. Sinners against the law are excluded "while continuing such and without repentance," and, by equally divine warrant, all are invited who by faith and repentance, have turned from sin unto

God with full purpose of heart. Not they who feel that they have kept the law, but they who feel that they have broken it, are invited to come forward to-day. At the close of each of these exercises, certain traditional selections of the Scripture are read, to show the warrant for what is done, and the whole closes with the passage in which Saul is told, "Now, therefore, get ye up, for about this time ye shall find Him."

While the closing part of the XXIVth Psalm is sung, the tables are filled by communicants drawing near from their seats; the prayer of consecration is offered, after a short address giving an account of the institution as recorded by Paul for the Church in Corinth. Then the bread is taken and broken and given (as afterwards the wine), by the pastor to each communicant at the head of the tables. Each breaks off a piece (and drinks) for himself and passes it to his brother, and so for the length of the table. The elders' duty is to collect the "tokens," which record the residence and address of every actual communicant, and to see that the plates and goblets are supplied, and returned after use to the central table. Another brief address closes the services at each table, and the communicants retire, singing in continuation from the XXIVth and when that is finished, from the XLVth and sometimes the CIIIrd Psalms. In this way the tables are emptied and addressed, waited on, and dismissed, until all the members of the Church have united in the sacrament.

To-day four hundred and six thus come forward, and the tables are filled five times. They come in families, for this church is a church of households, and the children walk in the ways of their fathers. As we sit here, for instance, seven of one family are there at the table just across from our pew. The aged are here, and the young are not excluded through the timidity of their elders. One old lady has passed her ninety-third year, while we can just see the top of one little boy's head, above the pew, that rises between us and one of the tables. They that the Lord had especial compassion on, are here. One sits down with us whose only wisdom almost, is to know Christ; one's hands are guided to the "cup of the Lord," for only her inward eyes are open to the light. And so the time passes, till it is nearly three o'clock, when the last of the Saviour's guests go from His table. Other speakers unite with the pastor in the services, but the first and the last table are always his especial care, and when the services are closing, his voice is heard again in words which vary little more than the circumstances demand from year to year, in which the several classes of old and new communicants, of Christians of other names, and of those who have never professed Christ are addressed in words of affection and appeal suggested by the occasion. The Covenanter doxology, "the LXXXIIIrd Psalm from the middle of the 17th verse," is sung, and after the benediction they separate.

In the evening some brother minister occupies the pulpit. The tall form of ex-chaplain Rev. Jno. McMillan, Moderator of the Pittsburg Presbytery, is seen there on this occasion, and as a collection for foreign missions is expected, Christ is presented as our Priest and our Apostle also. At the close, Dr. Wylie, in a few words, introduces the subject, and calls on Mr. Stuart to present it more fully, which he does by calling on the people to make a thank-offering to God for his favor experienced at this delightful communion. He fixes the minimum at \$1,000, and the Trustees and Elders pass around with cards (unused "tokens") and then with collection boxes; and in a few minutes, more than the sum asked is given or pledged to be paid within a week.

As the mission Presbytery in Northern India declares itself in hearty sympathy with Dr. Wylie and his people, and have lost some supporters thereby, there is special need of liberality from the liberals of the Church.

On Monday night Mr. McMillan (whose presence in the Presbyterian Convention will be remembered, and was especially noted on account of his more than Presbyterian authority by *The New Englander*) preaches the sixth sermon (besides ten addresses) of the communion services. The names of new members are read by the pastor, and their persons are commended to our Christian courtesies. Passages of the New Testament bearing on the social and private duties of Christians are read, and the service is closed for another half year. The session propose, indeed, if the congregation approve, to hold less formal communions besides, at shorter intervals, but we know not what the result of their proposal will be.

We have dwelt thus on these services, because we wish our readers to see exactly what the traditional usages of the Presbyterian Church are, and to furnish some food for reflection to those who think that the communion services of other and less traditional branches of that Church have grown tame and unimpressive. That the old Scotch usages will, as a whole, suit other Churches, we have no expectation, but as this is an age in which taste is growing and developing in the direction of impressive and solemn forms of worship, we think that something may be learned, by seeing what the older Churches believe to be the proper way of doing "all things decently and in order."

ON THE WING.

## PRESBYTERY OF CAYUGA ON REUNION.

The special committee to whom was referred the subject of the reunion of the Presbyterian Church, with certain documents, beg leave to report as follows:

That one of the circulars comes from the Synod of Wheeling, and contains a series of resolutions "passed with much unanimity and cordiality" at a session of 130 members, setting forth in substance the following points:

1. That while a higher degree of unity is desirable among all Christians, an organic union of all parts of the Presbyterian family in these United States is especially desired.
2. That measures looking to a reunion between the Old and New School branches of our Church have so far advanced as to promise an early favorable settlement, and the desire is expressed that nothing may prevent this consummation.
3. That so many of the O. S. Presbyteries have

taken action in reference to the Basis overtured by the last General Assembly (1868) as to warrant the confident belief that the next General Assembly will be authorized to consummate the union without referring the matter again to the Presbyteries, dropping from the 1st Article the explanatory clauses and leaving as the basis of the reunited Church the common standards pure and simple.

4. The Synod of Wheeling on the ground of these facts solicits corresponding action by the several N. S. Presbyteries. And

5. They express their conviction that the O. S. Presbyteries in voting for the 1st Article in its amended form are to be regarded as giving to these N. S. brethren an assurance of their confidence and affection, and their desire to be reunited to them in good faith and on the basis of perfect equality.

The other circular, dated 4th of February, 1869, comes from the Central Presbytery of Philadelphia, and contains a series of resolutions unanimously and cordially adopted, and so nearly to the effect of those of the Synod of Wheeling as to make it unnecessary to do more than refer to them.

In response to these truly Christian and fraternal overtures, your Committee recommend the following resolution:

Resolved, That this Presbytery having at its last stated meeting unanimously adopted the basis for reunion, as submitted to the Presbyteries by the General Assembly in session at Harrisburg, in May, 1868, is still satisfied with that basis and would not for itself desire any modification. Our conviction of the duty and desirableness and feasibility of healing the breach in the Presbyterian Church remains unchanged, and our apprehension of the mischief that may result from postponing the reunion are if possible increased.

Whether it is constitutionally competent to the General Assemblies to bring about this result, in the assent of the Presbyteries to a basis different from that which was overtured to them, we will not undertake to decide, referring that point to the wisdom of the Assemblies. But in order to aid so far as in us lies, in effecting the great and blessed end of reuniting a Church which is, in fact, one in doctrine and polity and which never should have been divided, this Presbytery does hereby, for itself, authorize the General Assembly to which it belongs, to consummate, if possible, the Union with the other branch of the Presbyterian Church at the coming session in the city of New York, on the doctrinal basis of the standards pure and simple, dropping from the 1st Article, the explanatory clause, viz: "It being understood," &c., &c.; and also, dispensing with the Tenth Article.

Adopted unanimously and ordered to be published in the *American Presbyterian*, *New York Evangelist* and *Observer*.

CHAS. HAWLEY, Stated Clerk.

April 14th, 1869.

## HARRISBURG PRESBYTERY.

A correspondent writes:

The reports from the churches, of temporal prosperity and spiritual growth, were very encouraging. No marked revivals have occurred, but all the churches report an increase in numbers and in activity. Our Sunday-schools are prosperous. Our congregations are enlarging.

WILLIAMSPORT, &c.

One new enterprise has been inaugurated at Williamsport, that bids fair to soon be one of our strongest churches. A lecture-room has already been erected, and before another year passes, a fine church edifice, the Third Pres. church of Williamsport, will be ready to greet the coming of Synod at some future day. The benevolent contributions of our churches have been nobly sustained during the year. Some of the feeble congregations, as at Dauphin, Northumberland, and the Sixth church of Harrisburg, evince new life and zeal. The energy and vigor of Bro. Moore at Northumberland, though he has been there but six months, are already bearing rich fruits, as are also the faithful labors of Rev. D. C. Meeker at Dauphin. The additions to both these churches, when compared with the size of the congregations, and of the larger churches of the Presbytery, have been very large.

On Wednesday evening, Rev. D. C. Meeker was installed as pastor of the Dauphin church. Rev. Wm. Sterling presided, and proposed the constitutional questions, Rev. Dr. C. P. Wing preached the sermon, Rev. H. E. Niles delivered the charge to the pastor, and Rev. A. D. Moore, late pastor of the church, delivered the charge to the people. The occasion was one of great interest to all, and especially to the people, who are greatly, and for the best of reasons, pleased with their new pastor. The relation promises to be one of great blessing to this church, and his co-presbyteries congratulate themselves on the accession of Bro. Meeker to their ranks.

## REUNION.

As this Presbytery had never taken action thereon, the Reunion question came before it and occupied much of its time, and awakened great interest. We are few in numbers, but our position, in the very heart of Old-Schoolism, where, if re-union is effected, we shall be divided from each other, swallowed up, and lost in most hopeless minorities, gave added interest to the discussion. The Presbytery of Harrisburg has, through all the years of its history, been a peculiarly happy and fraternal one. There has been comparatively little change in its pastoral relations. Rev. Dr. DeWitt was in the First church at Harrisburg, nearly fifty years. Rev. Dr.

Wing has been at Carlisle over twenty-one years, and the church there will not listen for a moment to anything that looks like dissolving the bonds that bind them and the Doctor. Within the past few days, they have given him a furlough of six months, with a continued salary, and are about to invite a young man to fill the pulpit during the time, with the hope of securing him as a permanent colleague, if Dr. Wing so wishes. Rev. Mr. Sterling has been at Williamsport about eighteen years, and the present pastor of the First church, Harrisburg, is beyond the middle of his fifteenth year of service there. Our people seem to believe in long pastorates, and it is a favorable sign, that of the brethren who are on the ground, all but one is a settled pastor.

Our long and pleasant fellowship with each other, and the great probability that we shall be separated in the event of Re-union, and scattered we know not where, fling no light shadow on the future. We are a household, and we dread the breaking up. And it may as well be known that there is, among the oldest and wisest men of the Presbytery, no little apprehension in this matter of re-union. The unanimity of our O. S. brethren in amending the First Article of the Basis of Reunion sent down by the Joint Committee, and their very general silence as to the Tenth, thus accepting concessions to themselves, while they deny them to us, have tended largely to awaken distrust. The opposition to the Tenth Article is deep and quite general in this Presbytery, and nothing but the hearty desire to promote Christ's cause has led many of us, for the sake of Reunion, to yield preferences and deep convictions in this matter. Our final action was as follows:

1. An affirmative response to the Basis sent down by the Joint Committee.

2. A like response to this Basis as amended by the action of our branch of the Joint Committee at its late meeting.

Rev. Dr. Wing expects to attend the Assembly, and may safely be trusted, with any responsibility in this matter, which grows more weighty and serious as we draw toward a decision upon it. T. R.

## USELESS MINISTERS.

"If there are men, in the office of the ministry, quite useless, because unqualified for it, the Church is to a great extent responsible for this."

Now we believe this is true. The Church is, this hour, responsible for so many ministers being without regular employment.

We may inquire, Does the responsibility of the Church extend only to the preparation and personal consecration of her sons to the ministry? We think it is her high vocation to keep her ministry employed; to see that every man has a place to work for Christ, and is in his place, unless circumstances prevent. There are, doubtless in many instances, special reasons to account for the unoccupied talent of the sacred office. But is there a deficiency in the polity, or the spiritual state of the Church, or the ability of her ministers, which causes so many to be marked without charge?

Some of these are usefully employed in the various agencies of the Church. Still a large proportion have no appointed field of labor. Now, we ask, are such fairly set down as useless ministers? Are all these unqualified for the sacred calling? Are not many pining for the post of labor in the Master's vineyard most adapted to them? For we believe, there is a sphere of usefulness for every one, if we can only find it.

Moreover, many of these men, credited without charge, are securing the grand object of the ministry. What is the chief end of preaching, but to save souls? The Church has a strong tendency, in these days, to lose sight of the great aim of the ministry. Therefore, the acceptableness of her ministers, is not in the ability to be useful and edify the Church, but to be attractive and sensational. Hence the demand is not for mature minds, an aptness in teaching and expounding the Word of God, and guiding souls. As the Church becomes more spiritual, not so much guided by a worldly policy, she will find active employment for all her ministers.

Here, then, is revealed an exigency which the Church should meet, and how to reach it, is the practical design of the lines.

The Methodist, the Baptist and the Episcopal bodies have their several methods of disposing of this difficulty, which is to-day impairing our efficiency. Either they have some private way of retiring ministers, who become unacceptable, or they have a policy or system which keeps them employed in building up their own Church.

We think we have the best form of Government if we will only work it out. We believe we have as earnest a ministry and as earnest Church as any of the members of the Body of Christ. But it is manifest, we have not as yet secured all the elements of efficiency, when the Church educates her sons for the sacred office, reiterates her appeals for more men, but has no settled policy for keeping her men at work. She should have a definite system for maintaining her working capital to the highest degree of activity. Her piety and her educated ministry is her capital, and this she should thoroughly develop and keep constantly employed in dependence on the Head of the Church. She cannot afford to keep a single man off the post of duty. It is utterly impossible to awaken zeal for the Education cause, when she looks around upon a dozen ministers or more in each of her large towns unoccupied; and has twenty or thirty applicants for the first vacancy. Therefore, let us secure some method for employing every man in the ministry and so prove the demand is greater than the supply. E. B. B.