

The American Presbyterian.

New Series, V^c John A Weir 15 July 69

Strictly in Advance \$2.50. Otherwise \$3.
Postage 20cts. to be paid where delivered.

PHILADELPHIA, THURSDAY, MAY 27, 1869.

Genesee Evangelist, No. 1202.

Home & Foreign Miss. \$2.00.
Address:—1334 Chestnut Street.

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THURSDAY, MAY 27, 1869.

A REALITY WORTH CONTENDING FOR.

Are the American liberties of Presbyterianism a phantom? It is confessed that as maintained by our denomination, they are entirely consistent with orthodoxy. No one cherishing these liberties, proposes for a moment, as many Congregationalists brought up in Calvinism do, to associate in any organic way with Arminians, or with Pelagians. But we claim these that liberties are peculiarities of our branch as such. Others wink at them, tolerate them with more or less indulgence, while as denunciations they know nothing of them, or have actually denounced them, and striven to brand their adherents as heretics. And at any time, in perfect accordance with their principles, spirit and history, they may turn the whole force of their ecclesiastical machinery against such exceptional individuals among them as hold them. What security have men holding a general atonement, and a natural ability of the sinner, and denying federal headship, for their positions as *recti in ecclesia* in the Old School Church? What security does mere toleration give?

Liberty is indeed enjoyed to some extent in the Old School Church by men of a similar doctrinal position with our own, but it is a stolen liberty; it is precarious, because utterly inconsistent with the history and precedents of that branch, and because no word or line is found in its records as a distinct branch to give color of a warrant for such liberty, unless in the transactions connected with the present Reunion movement.

The American liberties of Presbyterianism are a distinctive reality and characteristic of our Church, proclaimed as such in all our periodicals, known in all our practice, and announced in some of our fundamental papers, (such as the *Protest* of 1837, and the *Auburn Declaration*), and informing our denominational literature, official or not.

Our Church is a great experiment with Calvinism and Presbyterianism, designed to test their powers of expansion and self-adaptation. The question which multitudes of intelligent men have a deep interest in seeing settled is, whether these systems can maintain themselves in the world without a marked and repulsive degree of narrowness? Can Calvinism be Calvinism while relinquishing its claims to validity in every part? Is an extended creed or rubric, the infallible antecedent of bigotry? Can a truly Calvinistic and Presbyterian system show flexibility, breadth of theological thought, and wide humanitarian sympathies, without the sacrifice of a single essential feature?

The affirmative answer to these questions, is found in what we have called—and we think the phrase made its way before the world through the columns of this paper—the American Liberties of Presbyterianism. The existence of the New School Church, so-called, establishes the important fact, that a reasonable measure of doctrinal liberty is compatible with loyalty holding to the great fundamental ideas of the Calvinistic system, and with subjection to the Presbyterian form of government. In other words, our Church presents a hopeful solution of the important problem of providing ample range for independent thinking within the limits of a vast and majestic system of Scripture truth. We have shown it altogether unnecessary to make long strides towards Romanism, in order to be secure from Latitudinarianism. Such a great truth has been demonstrated and illustrated by the separate existence of the "New School" Church. Congregationalists, with their lack of organization could do it only in isolated and ineffective instances. No existing branch of the Presbyterian Church had felt it any part of its mission to unbar the iron doors of its elaborate written system; and so, that it might be done at all, it was necessary that some new and grievous development of the rigorous element, should take

place in the Presbyterian body and that in the throes of the accompanying convulsion, a New Branch should shoot forth, and thus the lusty old stock of Calvinism in this third century of its existence proves its marvellous vigor, and blooms and bears fruit for the new age as for the old. A root almost out of dry ground!

Those who smile at our zeal for these liberties, who are incredulous as to their importance, or who pooch-pooch the demand for their express recognition in any organic reconstruction, are mocking at some of the gravest realities in the history of the American Church. Those who would quiet our anxieties by lofty assurance, that in any event, and upon any basis these liberties will be perfectly safe in the reconstructed Church, ought to bring us a warrant for more than human foresight. Those who wish us to unite on the ground of general confidence in the liberal spirit of the other body, should explain to us more satisfactorily than it has yet been done, why that liberal spirit has twice failed, utterly failed, to get formal expression in the votes of the Presbyteries.

LETTER FROM THE ASSEMBLY.

NEW YORK, Monday Morning.

The Assembly having settled itself and become fairly conscious of its own character, may be spoken of more confidently by an observer. It is, again, the largest ever convened, numbering 257 members. Every clerical delegate but one, and he from California, is in his place, and the places of thirteen Elders only are vacant. The Synod of Tennessee has a full representation, so have the new Synod of Kansas and the old Synod of Missouri. There is only one place, an Elder's, vacant in the far-off Synod of Minnesota, and only one each in those of Wisconsin and Iowa. The new Presbytery of South Carolina, represented by Rev. Silas McKinney, but without an Elder, is assigned on the roll, to the Synod of Pennsylvania. It is a familiar saying, at such gatherings: "We have an able Assembly;" it could never be more justly said than now. Not only have we 32 titled ministers, most of whom have worn their honors long and well, but we count eighteen laymen whose professional position as judges, Congressmen, physicians, etc., is in like manner recognized. The abundance of good material, naturally led to an abundance of candidates for moderatorship, seven excellent men having been nominated, and five names remaining to be voted upon. The choice, after three ballots, fell upon Dr. P. H. Fowler, of Utica, who has since proved himself among the very best of moderators; courteous and unassuming, yet quite at home in the chair; prompt and of good business capacities. Business has moved forward with cheering rapidity; every permanent Committee had reported by Saturday morning early; and but for the matter of Reunion, there must have been an early adjournment.

The New York Press

almost unanimously and with unusual fullness had announced the coming of the two Assemblies, and gave more or less careful and correct accounts of our history, character and prospects—particularly upon Reunion. Mr. Greeley himself wrote Thursday's article in *The Tribune*, and it is by his particular desire that space has been given for the very full and admirable reports of the proceedings, which have thus far appeared in that paper. More interest has been shown by Mr. Greeley and his associates of *The Tribune* in these proceedings, than perhaps in any religious matter hitherto, unless it was the Revival of 1858.

Reunion.

It is remarkable that while this subject is felt to be the most pressing and important before the body, and while something decisive is felt to be impending, not a few of the once warm advocates of early reunion, especially in this section of the Church, are found comparatively cool and indifferent—hurt, not a little, by the treatment their carefully prepared plans have received at the hands of the other

body; while some of the most cautious and reluctant in former years, are now yielding to what they regard as signs of a change in the other body. But there is a very strong popular current for reunion, which will probably control the action of our body as it has done heretofore; and there is, moreover, a sturdy and able band, abler we think than last year, who will give every plan that may be submitted, a thorough sifting, and doubtless be able to save us from a disastrous surrender of principles. The special Committee of ten to confer with a like Committee of the other branch, appointed by the Moderator on Friday, was of such a high character as to give general confidence. Dr. Patterson of Chicago, and Judge Strong of our city, who are members, may be relied on to secure whatever elements of caution are needed in the joint deliberations, and it may not be amiss thus early to say, that wisdom, and not precipitancy, seems likely to characterize the conclusions of the whole Committee on our side. Dr. Musgrave's speech this morning, as a delegate from the other branch, was a very able plea for the dropping of all mere administrative matters from the terms of union, and for the Standards "pure and simple" as the only Basis. The good taste of making his congratulatory address a plea for his own plan of Reunion was very questionable. And the implication that our side of the Joint Committee had proposed another doctrinal basis than the Standards, aroused the indignation of not a few of our brethren. True, he was warmly, even vehemently applauded in his more general declarations, as to carrying his own body with him on that plan, but when he asked specifically for a union without guarantees for liberty, there was a manifest falling off in the applause. The Moderator's reply was exceedingly cautious and satisfactory, as our readers will observe. Perhaps some plan will be announced by telegraph as commanding the assent of both Assemblies, before these words reach the great body of our readers, but we will venture to predict (1) that there will be no reunion here and now, and (2) that no plan oblivious of our liberal character or giving over all the details to the united body will pass with anything beyond an approach to unanimity in our body, if it passes at all.

Besides Reunion there seem few topics likely to create discussion. Among these few is probably that in regard to the Sunday School Committee, whose work the Publication Committee aims to accomplish and has been accomplishing, and would formally absorb its functions, if the Assembly is inclined. The S. S. Committee is likely to resist this proposal. Dr. Fowler's admirable report of his visit to the Free Church of Scotland, with its instructive suggestions has been referred to a Committee. It ought to be discussed and some practical inferences should be drawn from it.

Abundant hospitalities and courtesies have been offered to the ministers of the Assemblies. The best homes in this wealthy part of the city are freely opened to its members. Invitations to visit the great artistic and literary attractions, the mission fields, etc., of the city, have poured in upon the members. On Saturday evening large numbers of both Assemblies visited the annual Exhibition of the NATIONAL ACADEMY OF DESIGN. It was pleasant amid the display of nearly 500 works of art, to notice that eight of the very choicest landscapes, by Paul Weber, gems that practised eyes would pick out across the room—were marked as the property of one of the members of the General Assembly, one not unknown to Philadelphia—Rev. Thomas Street.

On Sunday many of the members as usual filled pulpits in the city and vicinity; and at night, in Dr. Adams' great church on Madison Square, an immense audience listened to able and inspiring addresses on City Evangelization by such men as Revs. George J. Mings, Dr. John Hall and Stephen H. Tyng, Sr.

To night a social reunion of both the Assemblies will be held at Apollo Hall, when very pleasant social interchanges among the brethren and their friends are expected. I shall use the telegraph if anything of importance occurs before the paper goes to press. J. W. M.

The General Assembly.

Under a bright sky, and with a fresh and genial air to keep off fatigue and maintain the annual spirit, the General Assembly in goodly numbers, convened in the church of the Covenant to-day. Many of the best and ablest men in the Church are in the body; Adams, Patterson, Fisher, Humphrey, Herrick Johnson, Sunderland, Wing, Heacock, of Buffalo, Fowler, of Utica, Pratt, of Ohio, Vincent, of Troy, Crosby, of New York, Darling, Stearns, and many others, giving force and dignity to the body and fitting it to deal with the great questions before it. California and Nevada are well represented, one of the delegates having come through to Omaha, with first train direct from Sacramento. The appearance of the body however is governed rather by the sinewy and somewhat rugged faces which predominate, telling of hard work in the Master's service; much more than deep thought and aesthetic culture. The people are represented, the active and the working, rather than the thinking element of the Church. There are not a few fine professor-like faces; faces in which the contemplative, shines calmly and beautifully over the other elements of character, but they do not give expression to the *tout ensemble* as viewed from the platform.

The church of the Covenant is one of the richest and most striking in architecture, within and without, in which the Assembly has ever met. Painting in bright colors, carving and gilt lettering abound. The audience room is divided into nave and aisles, with roof finished in a lofty clerestory, and carved columns rising from the floor to the ceiling. It is in a commanding position at the corner of Thirty-fifth St. and Park avenue, which is a continuation of Fourth Park. Close by, on Fifth avenue, is the Brick Church, in which the Assembly of the other Branch is in session. And already on Thursday afternoon, news came that a Committee on Reunion, to confer with a like Committee of our own body, had just been ordered to be appointed. But we need not anticipate.

The Moderator's sermon before our Assembly like that at Harrisburg, was on Reunion: Text—*That they all may be one*. It was able, wide in scope, and lofty in sentiment; starting with general views, it came, step by step, to the particular phase of reunion before the two Presbyterian bodies.

Great stress was laid by the speaker upon the absolute advantage of organic union. From this part of the argument, which was strong and beautiful, we make the following extract:

Take the duty of mutual defence. The Church is, thus far, surrounded with enemies. Can an army be defeated without an organization in the army that opposes it? Take once more the vast and still increasing work of the Church. Isolated bodies of men never accomplish great results. Even a common mechanical business requires unity of organization. How much more an enterprise extending over the world, and perhaps through generations, and requiring for its accomplishment the talents, knowledge and resources of millions of men? If the Church is to stand against the wiles of the devil, if she is to conquer the world, making disciples of all nations, beating down everywhere the strongholds of error and sin, and building up the glorious kingdom of her Lord, will she not need concentration of her efforts, combination of her means, and some degree of unity of plan? Are scattered efforts, such as may be made by a little body of men here and another there, paying no attention to each other, and one pulling down what the other has built up, likely to succeed? And if the force of the whole Church is to put forth together, must there not be some one recognized centre, from which all its operations may receive their direction? It seems to me, nobody can dispute this. Nor can I doubt that when the world comes to be actually converted, not only all the denominations that now exist will have to put aside their denominational isolation and something of what they now claim as their denominational independence, but that Christians of England and America will have to make common cause with those of France, Germany, Italy, Austria, Russia, Switzerland, and even of Asia and Africa, and consent to have their action regulated by some common law, and perhaps common administration. This is at least the natural way. God may dispense with it if He chooses. But as a question of natural

means through which we know He ordinarily works, the conclusion is obvious.

Approaching the particular question before the two Assemblies he said:

And this brings me to the particular question now before the two Bodies of Churches met together in this city by their Commissioners to the General Assembly. I confess to a sense of awe, of deep solemnity, making every nerve quiver, as I approach a theme fraught with interests so vast, and so vital to the welfare of our beloved Church and the cause and kingdom of our blessed Lord. Here in these two Assemblies is to be determined in effect, a question that will decide the destinies of the Presbyterian Church in these United States, perhaps for many generations, perhaps for the whole of its future history. Shall it be strong or weak; shall it have influence or become of little account; shall it sow far and wide the seeds of doctrine and order, which we verily believe are of the highest importance to the Christian interest in our country and the world; or shall it, perhaps, find itself, after a few years of unnatural rivalry and mutual hindrance and distrust, sunk from its high prestige as one of the great national Churches, its branches withering, its roots drying up, and its name no more a word of honor or of power? It is very rare that such a crisis occurs in the history of any religious body. The state of our country and the world, just now, gives the question an importance hardly to be paralleled, and if the opportunity be lost now, it is likely to recur in our day, perhaps never.

Let me call your attention to a few facts open to all. The struggle between the powers of light and darkness was never fiercer, nor the foe more confident or better furnished than now.

See on the one hand, Romanism, which has seldom failed in an emergency to renew its strength, gathering itself up for a new onset, resorting to all the arts of which it knows so well how to avail itself, summoning its ecclesiastics from all parts of the world to a council for the common defence and advancement, pouring its emigrant poor into our new country, and more or less into other Protestant countries, to be the ready tools of its priests in controlling the policy of free governments; corrupting, with its false doctrines and perverting ritualism, one large branch of the Protestant Church; already boasting of its expected ascendancy in this favored land, and, wiser than of yore, changing its tactics, laying hold of the facilities of the age, and using our methods as well as its own for the accomplishment of its purposes. Can a divided, disintegrated, pulverized Protestantism cope with a compact, closely organized Papacy? Well may it laugh at our poor, petty divisions and subdivisions, pecking here and skimming there, and scarcely bringing together against its own vast army so much as a single well compacted corps. Well may it trust to the power of disintegration among us, if so wise and far-seeing a body as the Presbyterian Church cannot close up its ranks and act like one in such an emergency.

A rapid view was taken of the various forms of infidelity to be met by the Churches both as diffused in literature and through the community, and as embodied in the German element of immigration. The following thoughts are appropriate, and too frequently overlooked:

It is a mistake which some have made that indifference to one's own denomination is in favor of general unity. Who cares for union with a body which has in itself no organic life? Had our own Church acted on this principle, its two great branches would not have stood as now, negotiating for reunion. It is the strength internal and external of both the Bodies; it is the high standing before God and man which they have severally achieved, and the work which they have done, and by the grace of God, made themselves still capable of doing, which makes them now desirable, one to the other.

After an eloquent description of the great advantages enjoyed by our own denomination in its different branches, in doctrine and polity for wielding a saving influence upon men, he throws his appeal for union into the following form—an appeal to a sentiment which may be laudable, which ought to be pure, but which too often becomes a grasping for power.

With such advantages what should hinder this Church from doing a great, far-reaching, and permanent work? If distinct denominations must continue for the present, what should hinder it from placing itself at the very head of the Evangelical host, and leading on the general movement for the conversion of the world? If we were only united, and could gather around us all that properly belong with us, how easy would it be for us, strengthening each other's hands, and kindling each other's enthusiasm in the noble cause, to make our influence felt in every department of life? There are denominations that have larger numbers, and perhaps greater versatility, but where is there one, on the whole, better adapted to produce deep, strong, and lasting results?

Towards the close, he puts the following significant declarations on record:

I rejoice to know that our own Presbyteries have not been wanting at such a time in any concessions tending to a full agreement with their brethren. It is a re-

cord that will stand to their honor, whatever be the result of the now pending negotiations. As to the terms yet to be considered, I have purposely avoided entering into a discussion. As our Presbyteries have approved of the Overture sent down by both the Assemblies, and also consented, on terms which seemed to them just and fraternal, to the amendment proposed by the Assembly at Albany, propriety seems to require us now simply to wait and see what may be further suggested.

With all the power, and eloquence, and justice of the sentiments of the discourse, was it quite the thing, to appeal to our body in behalf of union, as if the difficulties had come from our side of the house, either at the beginning of our divided state, or at any stage of our history since? It is a significant fact, in this connection, that the retiring Moderator of the Old School Assembly, Dr. Musgrave, had not a word to say on the subject, his sermon being on the very old-fashioned theme of Faith.

With considerable difficulty, and thrice calling the entire roll, the Assembly in the afternoon elected a Moderator. The first vote showed sixty-one each for Dr. Fowler of Utica, and Dr. Chester of Buffalo, and fifty-eight for Dr. Howard Crosby, besides quite a number for Drs. Wing and Sunderland. The second vote was ninety-one for Dr. Fowler out of two hundred and eleven votes cast, not yet a majority as required by the rules. The third vote gave him a decided majority, and he was placed in the chair, to the very great relief of the clerk, Dr. Butler, who had, without assistance, called the entire roll three times, repeating many names twice or thrice. Dr. Fowler's remarks, on taking the chair, were brief, and delivered in a clear and audible voice, a very great matter on this most noisy corner, for, to the usual turmoil of the New York streets, was added frequent and startling reports from blasting operations, going on, as it seemed, under the very eaves of the church. New Yorkers take such things as matters of course; it is their only way of digging cellars, in many parts of the city.

Rev. Geo. A. Howard and our co-presbyter, who seems to take naturally to the desk in Presbytery and Synod, Rev. Wm. E. Moore,—two capital men for the work were chosen clerks.

During the routine business, reading the docket, &c., that ensued, some interest was excited by the announcement made by Dr. Crosby, that the other Assembly had resolved to appoint a Committee of five Elders and five laymen on Reunion with our branch; accompanying it with a motion that we respond by appointing a similar Committee to-morrow morning. Drs. Adams of New York, and Taylor of Cincinnati, and Mr. Adair opposed the motion, which was favored by Drs. Darling and Crosby, and passed. The Assembly then adjourned.

FRIDAY MORNING.

The prayer meeting this morning by no means equalled in character the average. The prayers and exhortations turned much upon Reunion; yet the language generally was noticeably guarded as compared with that heard at former Assemblies. Towards the close, Mr. Dodge introduced Rev. J. C. Stiles, D.D., formerly a member of this body, now with the South, who offered prayer. Elder Robert Carter, of the other branch, was introduced, who bore an invitation to our Elders to meet with the Elders of the other branch in a social prayer meeting, which was cordially accepted, one of our Elders remarking that the Elders were "all right," and that if the matter were left to them, Reunion would be consummated at once.

The long list of Committees was announced with apologies for any infelicities which might be exhibited in the selection. Dr. Crosby having been announced as Chairman of the Standing Committee on Publication, asked to be excused, on the ground of opposition to the cause itself. He was excused, after a division, by a very decided vote.

Mr. Griffith read the report on Foreign Missions, which was brief in comparison with former reports and which showed no change in the standing of the cause in our body, and the value of which was lessened by the want of full and fresh statistics.

[Continued on Page 164.]