

THE
PRESBYTERIAN QUARTERLY
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Art. I.—THE FORMATION OF OUR STANDARDS.*

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“ON Saturday last, the Assembly of Divines began at Westminster, according to the ordinance of both the Houses of Parliament, where Dr. Twist of Newbery, in the County of Berks, their Prolocutor, preached on John xiv : 18—‘I will not leave you comfortless, I will come unto you,’ a text pertinent to these times of sorrow and anguish and misery, to raise up the drooping spirits of the people of God who lie under the pressure of popish wars and combustions.” In these simple and somewhat sad words, the parliamentary newspaper of the time records

* Minutes of the Sessions of the WESTMINSTER ASSEMBLY OF DIVINES while engaged in preparing their *Directory for Church Government, Confession of Faith, and Catechisms* (Nov. 1644 to March, 1649), from transcripts of the originals, procured by a Committee of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. Edited by PROF. MITCHELL and REV. JOHN STRUTHERS. William Blackwood & Sons, London. [A noteworthy volume, and which, by its notes, preface, introduction, and index of names (there should be by all means, also, an index of topics), is made doubly valuable. I wish it might be reprinted, and so brought within the reach of every member of Pan-Presbyterianism.]

to London, where they are still preserved in immense bags, encumbering the office from whence they proceeded.

It is venturing little to assert, that if parliament had not yielded; if it had resolved to enforce taxation in America; if it had supported it by penalties in America, or by condemnations for treason in England, the revolution would have come ten years sooner than it did. But it might have failed. The ten years of perverseness which followed, on the part of the king and his ministers, were necessary to convince all men how incurable was their folly and their domineering spirit. They served to unite a far larger part of the colonial people in the idea and the purpose of securing their rights and protecting their children by the sword. They added to the population, the prosperity, and the resources of the colonists, gave them confidence in themselves and in each other, and prepared the powers of Europe to help a gallant and enterprising people against the haughty tyrant of the seas.

Art. VIII.—THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY.

THE General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of the United States met in the Tabernacle Church, Brooklyn, N. Y., on Thursday, May 17, 1876, at 11 A.M., and was opened by a sermon by Rev. E. D. Morris, D.D., the Moderator of the previous Assembly, on the Past and Future of Presbyterianism.

Rev. Henry J. Van Dyke, D.D., of Brooklyn, was chosen Moderator, and presided over the Assembly in a manner which greatly assisted the progress of its business and the harmony of its proceedings. It is rare that any Assembly encounters so little to mar its concord, or hinder its efficiency, or hurry it into rash and hasty measures, which a "sober, second thought" is sure to deplore.

The proceedings of the Assembly are now so fully reported, first in the Assembly Journal, and then in the weekly journals of the Church, in which they are subjected to still further dis-

cussion, that there is no longer the occasion which formerly existed for that extended record and discussion of its acts, in this QUARTERLY, which once constituted a principal feature of the annual number for July. It is only in special cases, or with reference to peculiar topics, that any record or discussion is called for here, beyond that already set before our readers from within the Assembly or without it. Smooth was the current of debate and procedure in our late Assembly, and it ran so much in the groove of ordinary routine topics, that little remains for us to bring to the special attention of our readers. We will just note the proceedings in regard to correspondence and

FRATERNAL RELATIONS WITH THE SOUTHERN CHURCH,

partly for the purpose of bringing the several votes together in continuous order, where they can easily be referred to hereafter, and partly for the purpose of interpreting their import. The whole subject was orderly in the hands of the Standing Committee on Correspondence. Dr. Talmage, under the dubious cover of a question of privilege, offered and advocated, with unwonted fervor of centennial eloquence, the following resolutions, which were introduced by reading the first, but not the last, part of the following telegram he had received from Dr. M. D. Hoge, in answer to one sent upon his own motion to Dr. B. M. Smith, Moderator of the Southern Assembly :

SAVANNAH, GA., May 24, 1876.

To Rev. T. De Witt Talmage :

Any spontaneous resolution of your Assembly will receive most respectful consideration. Dr. Robinson is committed to move to appoint delegates, if the word "present," etc., be stricken from your last year's resolution.

MOSES D. HOGE.

After reading the first sentence, Dr. Talmage moved the adoption of the following paper :

Whereas, All past attempts to establish fraternal relations between what is popularly called the General Assembly South, and what is popularly called the General Assembly North, have failed ; and

Whereas, We believe that, as in cases of individual dispute, no adjustment is effected by the rehearsal of the past, so the rehearsal of differences between great bodies of men can never bring amity ; and

Whereas, We sincerely regret the alienation of the past, and disapprove any words spoken in times of high excitement, which may be regarded as impugning the sound Presbyterianism and Christian character of the Southern brethren ; therefore,

Resolved, That we bury in one grave all misunderstandings and differences, and all expressions that have been interpreted as offensive between the two sections of the Presbyterian Church, and in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, stretch forth both hands of invitation, asking our Southern brethren to unite with us in fraternal relations.

Resolved, That we request the General Assembly, now in session in Savannah, on the receipt of this resolution, to send two delegates to our meeting in Brooklyn, telegraphing us of the departure of those brethren, and that, on the receipt of that telegram we immediately send two delegates to meet the Assembly in Savannah, so that neither the Northern nor Southern Assembly shall adjourn until the Church on earth and in heaven have begun a jubilee over the glorious consummation.

Dr. Talmage and his associates sought to prevent the reference of these resolutions to any committee, in order to put them forthwith through the Assembly by means of the momentary enthusiasm created by his ardent speech. The Assembly, however, under the judicious counsel of Drs. Van Dyke and Musgrave, declined to adopt this course, and referred them to the Committee on Correspondence, with instructions to report as soon as possible. The next morning, Dr. Prime, Chairman of the Committee on Correspondence, reported the following paper, which was adopted, with only one dissenting voice:

Whereas, This Assembly and the Assembly now in session in Savannah, Georgia, accept the same Form of Government and Directory of Worship, and are closely bound together by historical, as well as doctrinal and ecclesiastical, ties; and, whereas, these churches, one in faith, order, and labor, are called by the Great Head of the Church to united efforts for the extension of his kingdom throughout the country and the world; and as no adjustment of differences is accomplished by rehearsal of the past; therefore, with a view to the expression of the united and hearty wishes of this body, that at the earliest practicable moment we may see the establishment of correspondence with the other Assembly; we hereby

Resolve, That this Assembly reiterates its cordial desire to establish fraternal relations with that Assembly on terms of perfect equality and reciprocity as soon as it is agreeable to their brethren to respond to this assurance by a similar expression.

This was forthwith telegraphed, by order of the Assembly, to the Southern Assembly, at Savannah.

Dr. Prime, from the Committee on Correspondence, reported, on the last Monday of the session, as follows:

Brethren: The south wind blows pleasantly over us this morning, and so those of us who long to meet again, renders such a meeting possible, with honor to ourselves and glory to the Head of the Church. Our overture to our Southern brethren has met with a consideration becoming gentlemen and Christians. If it is met in the same spirit by us, the great question of reconciliation is settled, and the day of separation and sorrow and division is forever past, and generous and fraternal relations are again established. The Southern Assembly's action was unanimous,

and I trust that our response will be equally unanimous. With these words, let me report the following action of your committee: The Committee on Correspondence, having received from the Moderator, to whom it is addressed, the following communication from the Moderator of the General Assembly in session at Savannah, Ga., beg leave to report the message, and to recommend appropriate action. He then read the following telegram:

SAVANNAH, GA., May 27, 1876.

To Rev. H. J. Van Dyke, D.D. Moderator of General Assembly.

We are ready to enter most cordially into fraternal relations with your Assembly on any terms honorable to both parties. The Assembly has already, in answer to an overture from the Presbytery of St. Louis, spontaneously taken the following action:

Resolved. That the action of the Baltimore Conference, approved by the Assembly at St. Louis, explains, with sufficient clearness, the position of our Church, but inasmuch as it is represented by the overture that misapprehension exists in the minds of some of our people, as to the spirit of this action, in order to show our disposition to remove on our part all real or seeming hindrance to friendly feeling, the Assembly explicitly declares that, while condemning certain acts and deliverances of the Northern Assembly, no acts or deliverances of the Southern Presbyterian Assembly are to be construed or admitted as impugning in any way the Christian character or standing of the Northern General Assembly, or of the historical body or bodies of which it is the successor.

B. M. SMITH.

Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States.

Continuing, he said: The overture of this Assembly having been received by the General Assembly in the South with such a cordial expression of gratification, the committee recommend that the same resolution, declarative of the spirit in which this action is taken, be adopted by this Assembly, namely:

In order to show our disposition to remove on our part all real or seeming hindrance to friendly feeling, the Assembly explicitly declare that, while condemning certain acts and deliverances of the Southern Assembly, no acts or deliverances of the Northern Presbyterian Assemblies, or of the historical body or bodies of which it is the successor, are to be construed or admitted as impugning in any way the Christian character or standing of the Southern General Assembly.

S. IRENÆUS PRIME, *Chairman.*

The applause that greeted both the telegram and the resolution proposed by the committee having subsided, Judge Strong moved, the adoption of the latter, from a conviction, he said, that it would lead to an early restoration of fraternal relations with the Southern Church—a consummation which his brethren had so long devoutly wished. Those of us, he continued, who, during the heat of the war were unwilling to retract anything we said, can now meet on the common platform without taking back what we have said, and what it would be wrong and unmanly to retract. This action of our Southern brethren indicates that they have stretched forth their hand in generous fellowship, and I am sure we can accept it in a corresponding spirit. I hope that it will lead to a complete reunion of the two divisions of our Church, and that the feeling of cordiality and good-will between them, will be more general and widespread than ever before. I move that the resolution be adopted, and I should like to see the action consummated by a unanimous, standing vote.

Dr. Fowler arose immediately, but, anticipating that he was about to repeat his argument for considerate deliberation, the delegates strove to silence him by loud and repeated cries of "Question! question!" Raising his voice above the din he finally made himself audible, and said:

Mr. Moderator : I am gratified beyond expression that my feeling of apprehension as to the result of this action is likely to be disappointed, and I join heartily with my brethren in that feeling of joyful cheer with which they have hailed the reply of our Southern brethren.

Dr. Musgrave said, that as the reply had come so unanimously from the Southern Assembly, he would move with all his heart the adoption of Dr. Prime's resolution.

Dr. Talmage then read the following telegrams addressed to himself, apparently with reference to the resolutions he had before offered to the Assembly :

SAVANNAH, May 27th.

We approve of your resolutions, with the exception of the passage about the impossibility of agreement in reviewing the past, and could have fraternal relations on the other grounds specified. [Signed] Stewart Robinson, John B. Adger, Benj. M. Smith, Wm. Arrow, M. D. Hoge."

SAVANNAH, May 27th.

If your Assembly had adopted the resolutions you reported to me, we would have established fraternal relations on those terms. M. D. HOGE.

[We suppose this to refer to the expression of regret and disapproval of past utterances to our Southern brethren contained in Dr. Talmage's resolutions.]

The motion to adopt the resolution was then put, and as every delegate rose to his feet to signify his approval, a burst of applause arose, died away, and arose again. The doxology was then sung by the whole Assembly while standing.

While we deeply sympathise with this solemn jubilation, we do not yet see evidence that it will certainly inaugurate fraternal correspondence. We hope it may. But we remember one no less enthusiastic at St. Louis two years ago, over the supposed return of Dr. Brooks to our church, which left matters just as it found them. We trust more has now been gained, and that we are on the threshold of restored fraternal relations. But we cannot be sure that this consummation is at hand, till we learn how our Southern brethren construe and intend to carry into effect the recent action of both bodies in the premises. It is proper to observe, however,

1. Our Assembly has simply reaffirmed its adherence to the position it took in 1870, when it sent delegates to the Southern Assembly, meeting at Louisville, Ky., proposing to them the opening of fraternal relations, and was repulsed with the charge of Cæsarism, and the demand that, as a condition precedent to fraternal correspondence, it disown some deliverances of preceding Assemblies touching the war, and in support of the United States government. We are ready and de-

sirous, and we have uniformly been, to enter in such relations on terms of "perfect equality and reciprocity," and on no other. Much as our church desires it, it is settled that we will not purchase it by any one-sided confessions or regrets over the doings of past Assemblies. As we offer no humiliations before them, so we ask none from them. The fraternal relations or reunion, whether they come now or hereafter, will, in our opinion, never be on any other basis. It is as strange as it is vain for any, South or North, to seek, by any device, or on any pretext, to labor for fraternal relations on any unequal footing. We hope that all parties will now understand this.

2. It does not yet certainly appear that our Southern brethren are ready to cease making this demand for some confession from us a pre-condition of union. We trust they are, and hope soon to see decisive evidence of it. But meanwhile, they assert the position of their Church to be adherence to the Baltimore platform, which expressly demands confessions of regret from us. Whether they merely assert this *in thesi*, or intend to insist upon it in practice, does not yet appear. The telegram from Dr. Stuart Robinson and others, as it now reads, is of uncertain construction. Whether it means that the past is, or is not, to be a hindrance to the opening of fraternal relations, unless some concessions are made by us, is not yet clear. Of course, all doubt will soon be dispelled by the tone of the Southern Presbyterian press, which, as we now write, has uttered no certain sound on the subject. It would not surprise us if there should be a difference of sentiment among them, running nearly along the line of division between the friends and opposers of representation in the Pan-Presbyterian Council. *

* The following which we now find in the *Presbyterian* of June 17th, seems to confirm this view:

The *North Carolina Presbyterian* accepts the action of the Northern and Southern General Assemblies as the end of all controversy. It says: "Neither Assembly can now go back of this solemn utterance. Corresponding delegates will, accordingly, we do not doubt, be appointed by both bodies when they shall meet again next May. We confidently believe that this consummation, so devoutly longed for by so many hearts throughout the South, as well as in the North, will be universally hailed as a special blessing from the Father of light."

The *Southwestern Presbyterian* seems to take a different view of the action of the Assemblies from the *North Carolina Presbyterian*. It says: "If the Northern

3. It is to be noted that the Southern Assembly is careful in communicating their welcome resolution on fraternal relations, to inform us that it had already been adopted in response to an overture from one of our Synods or Presbyteries. There is a manifest implication that such "spontaneous" action on the subject is more grateful to them, and less exposed to perplexing opposition, than any drawn forth under promptings or apparent pressure from the Northern Assembly.* This confirms the judgment of those in our body, who have, since our repulse in 1870, been of opinion that the attitude on our part most likely to further and hasten fraternal relations, is that which, while making manifest our desire for them, leaves it to our Southern brethren to initiate negotiations for them. This was the precise import of the resolution adopted by our Assembly, and telegraphed to Savannah; but which in our opinion was of far happier effect, as coming to the Southern Assembly after they had adopted their resolution, than if it had preceded and perhaps thus prevented or embarrassed it.

brethren feel that fraternal relations are 'an established fact,' they must have come to the conclusion that they have compelled or induced the Southern Church to abandon our position, while they have completely maintained their own. But the truth is, neither Assembly, in this courteous intercourse, has receded a particle from the position occupied last year. At the opening of the Assemblies next year, they will stand in precisely the same attitude in which they stood one year ago." We have since learned that the *Central* and the *Southwestern Presbyterian* take the latter view, while the *St. Louis Presbyterian* and the *Louisville Observer* take the former. So the Southern Presbyterian journals are about equally divided on this question.

* This is still more evident from the subsequent letter of Dr. Smith, Moderator of the Southern Assembly, to Dr. Van Dyke, Moderator of ours. This, after reciting the history in detail of the manner in which the action of the Southern Assembly in respect to this matter was brought about, proceeds as follows: "The whole object of this history is to make it clear that our *original action was adopted irrespective of your telegram* to me, which, though unofficially announced to the Committee of the Whole, was not officially brought before the Assembly for action till the paper of our Committee on Bills and Overtures had been adopted by a vote of eighty-three to six. The six offered, but withdrew a dissent. Your telegram was then officially presented, and after consideration by the Committee on Bills and Overtures, the reply sent you, embracing their former action, was adopted unanimously, and prayer offered in thanks to God for his great favor in bringing us in this and other important deliberations, to such unanimous conclusions, though not at first anticipated. May he bless this and all efforts to promote 'the things that make for peace,' and may he be with you and your Assembly in all your deliberations."

"Yours fraternally,

"B. M. SMITH."

4. We think it right to protest against a style of speaking which lumps together the Presbyterians of the country, North and South, as subjects of indiscriminate denunciation for perpetuating the breaches and animosities caused by the war, after the other principal bodies have healed them. We insist that, whoever may be obnoxious to such denunciation, it is not the Northern Church. We have, since 1870, signified in every possible way our desire for this result, and have made overtures for it; have declared the action of former New and Old School Assemblies of which our Southern brethren complained, null and void. But more than this has been demanded. Some expression of regret, or contrition even, amounting to a virtual condemnation of the course of those two bodies in the premises. This we have no power to do. We have no right to run our drag-net through the acts of those Assemblies, and to utter sentence of condemnation upon them, or any of them. If we enter upon such a task, it will lead to endless heartburnings, jealousies, and contentions, whose tendency must be toward ultimate disruption. Moreover, these are matters of history, which we cannot make or unmake. As such let them and their actors abide the judgment of posterity and of heaven. We stand where we have ever stood, ready to let by-gones be by-gones, and to receive our Southern brethren with open arms, in terms of perfect "equality and reciprocity," neither making nor asking humiliation nor confessions. There we have stood and trust we shall always stand. If fraternal relations are not consummated on this platform, those who prevent it, North or South, must bear the responsibility.

SUSTENTATION AND HOME MISSIONS

Occupied much of the attention of the Assembly, in a renewed attempt to secure an adjustment of their mutual relations, satisfactory to all parties. It was brought before the body in the regular annual report of the Board of Missions; in the very elaborate and able report of the special committee appointed by the previous Assembly to investigate the subject, a and report to this Assembly, presented by Dr. Bronson, its chairman; and in reports of each of the two committees, to which each of these were respectively referred. The result of the whole, after due debate upon the presentation of the subject made in these several reports, was to leave the subject

very much in the same position as before, with this single difference that, whereas, since the separate committee and the secretary in charge of Sustentation were abolished at St. Louis in 1874, and the whole matter put in charge of the Board of Missions, as a distinct department, to be conducted by that Board on its own proper principles, and sustained by a separate and distinct contribution from the churches in its behalf, the question has been raised in various quarters, whether it should continue to be a distinct department, thus conducted in its own methods and sustained by its own collections? This question is now put at rest, and the distinctive Sustentation department of the Board is insisted on with renewed and imperative emphasis. The Church does not mean to give up this great movement to provide for its pastors a living support, and to lift up its weaker churches to a condition of self-sustentation under regular and permanent pastors. In order to economize cost of administration, and harmonize its workings with the vast Home Missionary operations of our extended new settlements, the Assembly has made the experiment of placing it jointly with the evangelizing of new and frontier settlements under the care of the Board of Missions. But it has resolutely withstood every attempt to merge it indistinguishably in the missionary department. It insists upon an efficient administration of it upon its own basis and merits. It is making the experiment, whether this can be done under the Board of Missions, with its present executive and clerical force. The Assembly was on the verge of providing for this work its own special secretary, to whom the responsibility of conducting it efficiently should be allotted. It forebore, wisely we think, under the assurance given, and in the full confidence, that its will would be carried out by the able and trusted executive officers now in the Board, without any more specific arrangement. This confidence, we are sure, will not be disappointed, so as to lead to the necessity of committing this department to a distinct secretary in order to keep it in being. The vote on sustentation was,

That pastors be enjoined to impress the importance of this department upon the people and to take separate and distinct collections for its support.

The Board shall invite contributions from all our churches for sustentation, keeping a distinct account thereof, and only the amount given for this purpose shall be expended in sustentation work.

QUESTIONS RELATING TO TERM ELDERSHIP.

Overtures from the Presbyteries of Wooster and Blairsville, asking light as to the "position of existing sessions in churches which adopt the system of election of elders for a limited time, as provided for in the eighth section of chap. xiii, *Form of Government*, brought out the following deliverance from the Assembly ;

A constitutional rule must have power to effect whatever is necessary for its practicable operation. So soon, therefore, as any particular church under this new provision of the constitution shall determine, by a vote of its members in full communion, to elect elders for a limited time, and they shall be elected and set apart for their office, elders in office by virtue of an earlier appointment cease to be acting-elders in that particular church—otherwise, the session would not consist of three classes, as in such cases required.

This decision is probably just. Yet, if it relieves some churches from perplexity, it plunges others into it, insomuch that it will itself lay a foundation for serious complications. The following letter, just received from a highly esteemed pastor of an important church, discloses some of these, to the solution of which attention must speedily be given :

REV. L. H. ATWATER, D.D.

DEAR SIR : The General Assembly, as you have doubtless observed, has decided that churches which adopt the term eldership, put their life elders, previously elected, out of active service.

This decision is of importance to us, and I wish your advice. Three years ago our congregation elected *four additional elders* to serve for a term of years, Presbytery deferred action on that point, though it subsequently approved our book to date, in the usual form. This spring the elders elected for the short term, three years (the others for five), were re-elected without any other action on the part of our congregation—the understanding being, that under the new constitutional rule the course was lawful.

Now the question arises :

1. Under the new rule, was it right for us simply to continue the arrangement previously adopted, or ought we to have put the question squarely to the congregation, whether they would now adopt the term service ?

I suppose there are many churches having term elders, not precisely in accordance with the provisions of the new rule ; will it be necessary for them to square themselves precisely with it ?

2. Does the recent interpretation of the new rule set aside our life elders ? Our congregation did not adopt the term service by deliberate preference for life service ; it only voted to elect *additional* elders on the term principle.

3. Will the recent interpretation stand ? Can those elected for life be set aside without voluntary resignation ? Has the congregation all authority under the new rule, and the session none ?

You will readily see that our position is an unusual one. It is doubtful whether, on

2 square vote, our people would adopt the term service instead of the life. We could get along peaceably at present if we could be left undisturbed, but of course we must conform to law.

REDUCED REPRESENTATION.

We quite agree with Dr. Adams, that the position in which the project for reducing the size of the Assembly is now left, is adapted to confuse the action of Presbyteries. The sending down to the Presbyteries of two alternative plans is pretty certain to insure the defeat of both, and if this be not sufficient, the reference of the subject to a committee to report to the next General Assembly, will serve very effectually to tide over the subject to another year. We do not, however, agree with him in the feeling, that no reduction is called for, or is less than a matter of imperative necessity. But it is far better to bear present inconveniences with patience a while longer than to rush into some rash, crude measure, under the spur of supposed necessity. We cannot assent to that plan which, retaining our present system in other respects, changes the unit from twenty-four and its fractions to fifty and its fractions. It would place the whole control of the church in the hands of a small minority of its ministers and people. Some inequalities there must be, and to them we cheerfully submit. But all such inequalities must have their bounds, or all order and justice are subverted. To give to three ministers, constituting one Presbytery, the same power as fifty in another, is to run the principle of Presbyterian representation into the ground. It sacrifices the very end and substance and inner spirit of Presbyterian and representative organization to its mere form and letter. Far more equitable and safe, in our judgment, is the other overture, which makes the number fifteen, to be increased when necessary, the unitary basis for one, and but one delegate to the Assembly, such delegates to be in equal numbers, ministers and elders, so far as the even numbers go, and in the case of any odd number, making the delegate a minister one year and an elder the next. This, or something like it, seems to be the only method of reduction not intolerably unequal, with direct Presbyterian representation, which has not been vetoed. Although there will be some liability to occasional confusion in the order of alternation of ministers and elders, perhaps it

is as free from difficulties as any scheme which accomplishes the object.

Possibly, however, every scheme of reduction is bound to fail, because so few are willing to forego any privilege of membership in the Assembly which they now possess. We observe that every year, during and after the meeting of the Assembly, the necessity of some reduction is almost universally felt, and schemes begin to be devised and discussed for accomplishing it. The discussion of them goes on, and objections to them are made and answered, until at length, before the next Assembly meets, it begins to be insisted on that the Assembly is none too large; no reduction in its size is needed; it makes a great moral impression by the sheer force of its numbers: in a word, the great majority will not abridge their present privileges of membership. Perhaps this is the predestined result of all schemes of reduction.

It is not to be denied, that, in a certain aspect, and for certain purposes, there is the advantage of a great moral impression in large numbers. This is true of the annual gatherings of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. It is an immense missionary mass-meeting of two or three days' duration, and is more prominently an enthusiastic than a deliberative, legislative, or judicial convocation. For such an unusual jubilation, almost every considerable city can bear a strain upon their hospitality for half a week—sustained themselves by the contagious enthusiasm of the occasion—which would be out of the question if continued half a month.

If, by any means, the length of the Assembly's sessions could be shortened from two weeks to one; or if the system should come into vogue, of Presbyteries bearing the expenses of their commissioners, we do not know but the continuance of the Assembly at its present size would be the easiest solution of the problem. As regards the possibility of shortening the Assembly's sessions, much has been already accomplished by the system of judicial commissions, which can hardly fail to be a permanent feature of our system. We are not sure that a judicious committee of expert parliamentarians might not devise ways of saving time in much of the routine business, and in the methods of disposing of the boards of the

Church, which might shorten the sessions of the Assembly. In such ways the difficulties of our present over-grown Assemblies might be mitigated without loss of their obvious advantages. But we are of opinion that, if the Assembly is not reduced, it will not be long before increasing numbers of the commissioners will attend either at their own or their Presbytery's charges.

ROMISH BAPTISM.

The Assembly of 1875, in answer to the question from the Presbytery of Genesee: "Should a convert from Romanism, applying for admission into the Presbyterian Church, be again baptized," answered unanimously, "That the decision be left to the judgment of each church session, guided by the principles governing the subject of baptism, as laid down in the standards of the Church." This did not satisfy the Synod of Missouri, which memorialized the last Assembly to declare such baptism invalid. Dr. W. L. Breckenridge supported the petition in an elaborate and protracted argument, after which the Assembly referred the whole subject to a special committee to report to the next Assembly. This action was wise. Certainly no new action ought to be taken on such a subject without a much more thorough discussion than there was either time or preparation for in the Assembly. The real discussion must take place in the church before the meeting of the next Assembly, if that body is to be prepared for it. It involves some of the profoundest questions and distinctions in theology and ecclesiology. He who thinks the case self-evident, or is settled forever by a flippant syllogism or two, made up of ambiguous terms and propositions, shows that he has not got below the surface of the subject. The fact that, in the past, Romish baptism was pronounced invalid by a decided majority in both the Old School and New School Assemblies, but against the earnest opposition of such professors and doctors of theology as Charles Hodge and H. B. Smith, and the general sentiment of Christendom, is evidence that it cannot safely be disposed of without careful and prayerful study. This it will, doubtless, receive in the year to come.

But certain collateral questions arise here, scarcely less important than the topic in chief. They respect the Assembly's function and prerogative in the premises, with the due scope and limits thereof. Locke found it a necessary pre-requisite

to learning the truth, to study and learn the measure of the instrument by which we learn it; that is—the human mind. Hence his immortal treatise on the Human Understanding. It is a part of the progress and normal development of all sensitive and intellectual organisms, to constantly advance in a knowledge of themselves, their powers, and functions. All living constitutions of human societies keep alive by an ever-advancing process of self-understanding and self-exposition. This is true of the constitutions of England and the United States. They are constantly defining themselves in judicial exposition. As fast as old questions are determined respecting the powers of the government in its different departments and officers, others come to the surface which press for adjudication. It is so in the church. It is still a vexed question, what is the province of the General Assembly, as respects propounding doctrinal dogmas, or terms of communion, not explicitly set forth in our standards; or, if it propound them, how far they have more than the mere moral force belonging to the declarations of such a body of men—how far, in short, they have authority which binds the church, and subjects non-compliance with them to church discipline and censure. This has nothing to do with the binding authority of the Assembly, in respect to the bounds of presbyteries and synods, the constitution and regulation of its own boards and officers, and the usual orders to inferior courts. Nor is it the question, whether it must interpret and apply the standards in all cases judicially brought before it. Of this there is no doubt. But the question is, whether it has authority to make declarations of doctrine or practice, which, without the constitutional sanction of presbyteries, have the binding force of law in the church? Take this very question: Would its declaration, that Romish baptism is invalid, and that sessions must require re-baptism in such cases, as a condition of admission to the Lord's table, be binding, like the prescription in regard to adult baptism, if unsanctioned by the presbyteries, so that non-compliance would subject to church discipline?

Take the requirements made by the O. S. Assembly, at Pittsburgh, in 1865, in regard to the conditions of the reception of Southern ministers and Christians to our own presbyteries and churches; were they binding like "constitutional rules?"

L. H. A.