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GENERAL COUNCIL
HELD IN
PHILADELPHIA
1880
UNITED STATES



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REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS

OF THE

SECOND GENERAL COUNCIL

OF THE

PRESBYTERIAN ALLIANCE,

CONVENED AT PHILADELPHIA, SEPTEMBER, 1880.

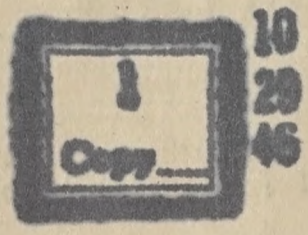
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The REV. W. P. BREED, D. D., of Philadelphia, read the following paper on

THE DIFFUSION OF A PRESBYTERIAN LITERATURE.

Literature is thought made visible, tangible, portable. It is a chief medium of contact between mind and mind. As such it ranks among the most potent of moral forces. For mind is a sensitive plant that feels and often thrills under and is sometimes permanently modified by the touch of a single thought. Into the mind of one tottering on the brink of moral ruin, the thought of what he is losing, of what may yet be possible for him to achieve, has come like the touch of an angel's finger to save him and revolutionize his life. And one thought is often as potent to slay as another is to save.

And when a thought has done, or at least begun its work in the mind that gave it birth, it may go forth and repeat that work in other minds, and set up a new series of mind-moulding thinkings that shall never end. That thought may modify opinion, may change the creed, may introduce a new and powerful element into the dominant aim, motive and purpose, and thus determine the conduct, and thus the destiny.

The power of written or printed thought marks almost the whole pathway of religious progress. The moulding influence on the world's history of those ten mighty words—the decalogue—overpasses the reach of the imagination. Under the reading of a few sentences of the book recovered from the rubbish in the temple-cloisters at Jerusalem, the king rent his clothes in anguish of heart. And the reading of that Book in the ears of the people issued in a religious awakening that shook the land from Dan to Beersheba. To this power the Reformation owed its rapid progress and sweeping success. Tracts from Wyclif's pen stole from hand to hand into countless homes, and the theses of Luther swept Europe like an American prairie fire.

And never before has the power of printed thought been so great, nor so extensive as it is in our day. The avidity for the printed page is almost universal, and it is insatiable. Book-hunger is one of the predominant traits of the time. Owing to the facilities for education, almost everybody can read, and the all-pervading excitements of the day secure the actual perusal of pages that no man can number.

And of printing pages to feed this book-hunger there is no end. Like tree-leaves are book-leaves for multitude. They are thrust in at the door; they are thrown in at the window; they are piled into the lap in the railway car; they reach us in every form—in the bound volume, in the review, in the magazine; in the newspapers, the daily, the semi-weekly, the weekly; hundreds of them, thousands of them, millions of them.

The number of books in the libraries of the world reaches to even hundreds of millions, and the clang of the press, as it adds to the

number, ceases not day nor night. The annual issue of newspapers in the United States alone numbers some six hundred millions.

The moulding effect of this book power on the public mind and heart, conscience, character and conduct is immeasurable if even it be not inconceivable.

The general character of this omnipresent page forms, therefore, a very important element in the question as to the need of a Presbyterian literature.

Unquestionably the newspaper press of our day is the medium of a vast amount of excellent writing, of valuable information, and the instrument of powerful, intellectual quickening. And the number of newspapers is not small which not only abstain from what might offend devout feeling, but which expend large effort to procure and publish religious intelligence.

On the other hand, the number of them whose moral influence is as deadly as extensive, is by no means insignificant. In fact newspaper and magazine literature ranges in moral character through all gradations, from the sublime heights of a pure Christian morality and lofty integrity of principle, down through non-religion, irreligion, scepticism, infidelity, atheism, coarse vulgarity and obscenity. Of many a newspaper the following, from the pen of another, will be recognized as anything but an untruthful portrait :

“ It has vastly more power to occupy than to guide, to distract and agitate than to settle and inform the public mind. It is only made to sell, without the responsibility of books and treatises, which are exposed if they do not add something solid to our information or our edification. It collects, with preternatural industry, news—good, bad, indifferent—from all the winds of heaven, and pours it as from a myriad-mouthed watering-pot upon the ever-thirsty attention of the American people. It has become the only reading of millions—their pulpit, library and gallery of art. It helps to make restless, smart, curious, superficial people ; to keep up a perpetual buzz and fuss about politics ; to drag crime, suicide and robbery before the minds of the whole nation. It sometimes devotes itself for months to the detailed following of hateful cases of vice and filthiness, corrupting a whole generation of youth by their lascivious confessions.”

Not less varied in character are the more permanent issues of the book-press. It sends forth volumes of priceless value ; and, as we are assured, within two years, it has put into circulation, in New England alone, some 20,000 copies of “ Paine’s Age of Reason.”

In the presence of facts like these we are ready for the question, “ What are the marked features of a Presbyterian literature ? ” To this we reply, a Presbyterian literature is the embodiment and expression of the thoughts that make up the Presbyterian system. It is, therefore,

1. First of all, pre-eminently a *theistic literature*. As the sun is the centre of the solar system, so God is the centre of the Presbyterian system. As the planets receive their hues from irradiated sunshine,

so all the parts of the Presbyterian system receive their hues from irradiated God-shine. God is the beginning, the continuance, the end of all; God infinite, eternal and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth. Of him, through him, to him are all things, to whom be glory evermore. The glory of God is a reason infinitely sufficient for any decree, any act of his. The highest service to which the creature is competent is to show forth the glory of God. The inscription on the banner of Presbyterianism reads: "It is enough for one universe if God be glorified." Man made in the image of God, man made a little lower than the angels, man in all his greatness, and on earth — there is nothing great but man—man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

It is also the will and active power of God that makes the world go round. It is God's eternal decree that we see embodying itself in the events of time. Historic phenomena are merely the dust of God's chariot wheels, as he drives on to his predestinated goal. Napoleon the First fancied himself the child of destiny, and that thought in his heart quadrupled his power. The Presbyterian does not fancy, but knows that he is a child of destiny, and that when he is working upon a heaven-assigned task he is simply weaving his free thought and action in with the eternal decree of God; and this knowledge puts the shout of victory on his lips when he fires his first gun.

With this ennobling idea of God, his greatness, his goodness, his unlimited power, his unrestricted presence, and his universal providences—a God "of purer eyes than to behold evil, and that cannot look upon iniquity"—Presbyterian literature palpitates from title-page to finis.

2. Presbyterian literature is also emphatically *Christological*.

It is full of Christ—Christ, the eternal and co-equal Son of God, very God of very God; in execution of the eternal decree for the salvation of countless millions, becoming man, rendering a perfect obedience to the law, setting before men an example of absolute perfection; bearing the sin of his people in his own body on the tree, rising again from the dead and ascending to heaven, and there ever living to intercede for those whose sins he bore.

3. Presbyterian literature asserts a clean-cut, distinctive *anthropology*.

It holds before the face of man the mirror of God's word, and shows man to himself as he is portrayed by the Spirit of God, as fallen in Adam, as crippled in the fall; and not merely crippled, but smitten with disease—"the whole head sick, the whole heart faint;" and not only diseased, but slain—dead in trespass and sins, and hopelessly and forever dead, but for the operation upon his nature of the new-creating, life-giving power of the Holy Ghost.

4. Presbyterian literature presents a bold biblical *eschatology*.

Man must die and be raised again from the dead; appear before God in a final judgment, there to give an account of all the deeds

done in the body, and thence to pass either into life eternal or into punishment everlasting.

5. And Presbyterian literature has its well-outlined, clearly defined system of polity.

This polity involves those great principles of representation, of transfer of obligation, of vicarious action and endurance which pervade the whole kingdom of God, as that kingdom touches the race of man. These principles bind the Father of the race and all his posterity into an organized unity. They pervade the individual family. They are resistlessly forcing themselves into recognition in the state. They are working with the power of destiny to mould political organizations the world over into representative and constitutional forms.

These are among the vital, controlling ideas that interlace, pervade and throb in a truly Presbyterian literature.

Further, these ideas have realized themselves in biography and history. They have shown, in the sphere of practical life, their competency to build up character, to inspire man with aims as lofty, to equip him for achievements as daring, to nerve him for endurance as protracted and crucial as the imagination can well conceive.

To go no further back in time, they have left foot-prints of superlative glory in the valleys of Piedmont, in the cities and on the plains of France, among the dunes and canals of the Netherlands, and all over Britain. These principles spake on the tongue of the aged Palissey the potter. When King Henry said to him as he lay chained to the floor of the Bastile, "If you do not recant, I shall be compelled to give you over to the flames," he replied, "Sire, listen to me, and I will teach thee to talk like a king; I cannot be compelled to do wrong." They spake by the lips of Knox that day when issuing from the presence of that wicked beauty, the Queen of Scots, he overheard the courtiers whisper, "He is not afraid;" he replied, "I have looked many an angry man in the face, and have not been overmuch afraid; why should the tears of a pretty gentlewoman afray me?"

And thousands of times they spake also in the words and acts of woman. France was trembling with the agitation produced by an oppression no longer tolerable. All eyes looked for a leader. Coligny hesitated, for never did he draw sword on a Frenchman, but with a shudder. In the meantime, the cause was in imminent peril. Charlotte de Laval, his wife, upbraided him with his hesitation. "To be prudent in men's esteem," said she, "is not to be wise in that of God, who has given you the science of a general that you might use it for the good of his children." "But," he asked, "could you hear of the defeat of the army under the lead of your husband, and not murmur against him and against God?" "I could," she answered. "But," he continued, "think of the anxieties, the privations, the bereavements, the woes that may come, not only on others, but on you and yours. Meditate on these things for three weeks, and then I will abide by your decision." Fixing her tear-moistened eye upon him, she answered, "Husband, the three weeks are up; do your duty,

and leave the rest to God. I summon you in God's name not to defraud us any more, or I will witness against you at his judgment."

They spake also in the eyes, the heart, and by the lips of Jeanne d'Albret. When word reached her that her husband had apostatized and given orders that her boy Henry should be committed to the tuition of Rome, and that she should follow his base example, she caught up her boy Henry in her arms and exclaimed, "Had I my child in one hand, and my kingdom in the other, sooner than go to mass, I would throw them both to the bottom of the sea, so that they might be no hindrance to me in the way of duty."

These now are some of the elements of a Presbyterian literature—these ideas, these principles, and these embodiments of them in character and in historic acts.

Can now the question be even raised, *cui bono?* What good is to be expected from confronting the general mind with these ideas and these examples? from pouring such a literature into the great deluge of printed thought that fills all the valleys, and rises more than fifteen cubits above the tops of the highest mountains?

The question as to the actual practical effect on men of these thoughts, ideas, principles, has found repeated and effective response in the verdict of keen-eyed observers of many whose affinities are other than Presbyterian.

Of the system which forms the embodiment of these ideas, Prof. Dorner, of Berlin, has said:

"In its manly, resolute temper; its energy of action, which also expresses itself in strength and energy of thinking; its zealous breathing of soul for the increase of God's kingdom; its willing self-surrender, and its fortitude of pursuit in great and bold designs for the furtherance of Christ's reign; it is these qualities that I admire in Presbyterianism."

Of this system Mr. Gladstone writes:

"It has given Presbyterian communions the advantage, which in civil order belong to local self-government and representative institutions—orderly habits of mind, respect for adversaries, and some of the elements of judicial temper; the development of a genuine individuality, together with the discouragement of mere arbitrary will and of all eccentric tendency; the sense of a common life and the disposition energetically to defend it; the love of law combined with the love of freedom; last, not least, the habit of using the faculty of speech with the direct and immediate view to persuasion."

The *Edinburgh Review* not long since gave the following verdict upon this system:

"The high intelligence which has long distinguished and still distinguishes the lower classes of Scotland," it says, "may largely be attributed to the Presbyterian form of church government, especially taken in connection with the Calvinistic creed. The apprehension of that creed cannot fail to stimulate the mind; the working of that form of government has accustomed Scotsmen of every rank to look

upon it as a duty and a right to exercise their judgments on questions involving directly or indirectly the most important subjects of human thought. The Presbyterian polity has also tended to foster that liberality of opinion in secular politics which prevails among the middle and lower classes in Scotland. Such must of necessity be the influence of a church strictly democratic in its constitution, recognizing within itself no distinctions of persons, no grades or rank of office."

The Rev. Dr. Curry, an able and fair-minded leader in the great Methodist Church in America, has written of the Westminster Confession that it "is the clearest and most comprehensive system of doctrine ever framed. It is not only a wonderful monument of the intellectual greatness of its framers, but also a comprehensive embodiment of nearly all the precious truths of the gospel. We concede," he says, "to the Calvinistic churches the honor of having all along directed the best thinking of the country. Some of the best fruits of Christian life," he adds, "have been exhibited among those who have been at least in theory Calvinists."

Ralph Waldo Emerson heaves a piteous sigh over the lack of Calvinism in the brain and heart of our day:

"Our later generation appears ungirt, frivolous, compared with the religions of the last or Calvinistic age. There was in the last century a serious habitual reference to the spiritual world running through letters, diaries and conversation, yes, and into wills and legal instruments, compared with which our liberality looks a little foppish and dapper. The religion seventy years ago was an iron belt to the mind, giving it concentration and force. A rude people were kept respectable by the determination of thought on the eternal world. Now men fall abroad, want polarity, suffer in character and intellect."

And how familiar have become the ringing sentences of the historian Froude:

"When all else has failed; when patriotism has covered its face, and human courage has broken down; when intellect has yielded, as Gibbon says, with a smile or a sigh, content to philosophize in the closet, and abroad worship with the vulgar; when emotion and sentiment and tender imaginative piety have become the handmaids of superstition, and have dreamt themselves into forgetfulness that there is any difference between lies and truth, the slavish form of belief called Calvinism in one or other of its many forms has borne ever an inflexible front to illusion and mendacity, and has preferred rather to be ground to powder like flint, rather than bend before violence, or melt under enervating temptation."

Now the question before us is as to the desirableness, importance, duty and necessity of making a way into the general deluge of printed thought for the ideas that have made such assertion of themselves among men.

We are by no means to forget that the general evangelical press is doing a vast and excellent work. If, however, in the Presbyterian system there are not distinguishing and powerful elements of thought

and doctrine, then the existence of that system is an impertinence. But if its constituent ideas, thoughts and doctrines impart to it a special and distinctive character, and if this system bearing this character has stamped itself on the best life of the world, this very fact makes it imperative on the thirty or forty millions of those who hold this system to keep the mind of the world ever confronted with these thoughts and principles.

Not that we are to lose sight of the fact that there is a constant, large, and effective outlay of talent in the publication of Presbyterian newspapers and magazines. One of these magazines, which, if not a formal organ of this Council, is at least a child of this Council—I mean “*The Catholic Presbyterian*”—month by month brings the reader face to face, as no other within the reach of our knowledge does, with the condition and prospects of the Presbyterian Churches of the world—the struggles of smaller Presbyterian bodies here and there, in the great awakening sympathies, evoking prayers, and in many ways excites and fosters a religious, healthful Presbyterian enthusiasm. It embodies a kind of Presbyterian literature we should like to see diffused a hundred times more widely.

But aside from all that is or can be done by Presbyterian newspapers and magazines, we assert the duty of organizing and operating agencies for the thrusting in earnestly, constantly, profusely, among the thinkings of men the great ideas that pervade a true Presbyterian literature.

The legitimate aim of such a literature, be it remembered, is, omitting no doctrine of the word of God; embracing all those ideas which Christians hold in common; to present these common ideas in their logical and necessary connection with those other great truths which distinguish Presbyterian from other systems of polity and doctrine. One of the necessary results of this Council is a weighty contribution to such a literature. We do not hesitate to affirm that the volume of Proceedings of the Edinburgh Council contains a body of Presbyterian thought of which no Church need to be ashamed. It is superfluous to affirm that the Presbyterian element in the theological and ecclesiastical literature of the world holds no second place, whether for biblical soundness or for intellectual power.

And the aim of this paper is to make clear the duty of the thirty millions of Presbyterians in the world to organize agencies in their several local centres for the placing of her literature within reach of every reading person. This involves the idea of aggression, of propagandism. There must be no waiting for men to apply for these books, any more than there must be a waiting for men to come in quest of the gospel. The command is, go—go into all the world; and the duty of Presbyterians is to go, in the persons of commissioned agents from door to door, and from town to town, and from province to province, and present these volumes, induce their reception and perusal, pray with the recipient, and thus get the thoughts enclosed in them deep into the minds and hearts of men.

It would be both interesting and instructive to recite the story of such efforts in the Protestant Church since God gave the printing-press to the world. It would be both instructive and interesting to report the statistics of such work done by the various Churches represented in this body. But statistics of vast movements outreach the apprehension, and fail to produce definite practical impression. Let it suffice to call attention to the doings of one only of these various branches:

The branch of which we speak possesses an organized agency for the publication and diffusion of a literature imbued with Presbyterian ideas. Before the organization of this board, the leading publishers of Philadelphia were importuned to republish two British volumes of a Presbyterian character, and not one of them could be found who was willing to take the pecuniary risk. These very volumes have now been published by this board, and tens of thousands of them have been sold. It puts into the hands of the public more than 500,000 volumes every year. It has sent out more than 100,000 copies of the Westminster Confession of Faith; some 2,000,000 copies of the Shorter Catechism; nearly 2,000,000 copies of the Child's Catechism; nearly 20,000 copies of Boston's "Four-fold State;" more than 30,000 copies of Alexander's "Religious Experience;" nearly 10,000 copies of Dickenson's "Five Points of Calvinism;" nearly 20,000 copies of Fisher's "Catechism;" more than 50,000 copies of Fairchild's "Great Supper;" nearly 10,000 copies of "The Christian's Great Interest;" between 15,000 and 20,000 copies of Matthews' "Divine Purpose;" from 12,000 to 15,000 copies of Shaw's "Exposition of the Confession of Faith." And as these volumes are permanent and last for years, there must be now in the various families of thisland some 5,000,000 copies of the publications of this one agency alone; and it adds to that number, as I have stated, more than 500,000 volumes a year. It keeps from seventy to one hundred agents in the field, going from door to door to sell or give away these volumes. If, now, the whole thirty millions of Presbyterians in the world are doing a work like that of this one branch, which numbers a little over one-half million of communicants, then there go into the hands of the reading world from year to year considerably more than 35,000,000 volumes of brain-stimulating, heart-stirring truths; then, in the course of ten years, there would be in the hands of the reading world a good deal more than 300,000,000 of these volumes.

We hail the existence of this Alliance and the meeting of this Council as another great agent for the creation and diffusion of a genuine Presbyterian literature.

At this point, the REV. MR. NISH, who was in the chair, left it, calling DR. BREED to it, in order that he might present the