

THE
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I.

DR. SHEDD'S SYSTEM OF THEOLOGY.

IN the three brief pages of reference to American theology, with which Dorner concludes his *History of Protestant Theology*, that eminent author informs us that, so far as he is able to survey it, theology on this continent "has as yet no connected literary history." We are gravely told that "the numberless parties" existing here, mainly engaged in external labors and conflicts, "have not as yet been able to do much for the advancement of theological science." Yet the hope is expressed that by "the introduction of English and Scotch, and especially of German theology, now abundantly taking place, and transporting into the country many elements of culture," theology may hereafter attain among us not merely a recognizable existence, but also "a new and even an independent form and combination"—a form and combination which somewhere in the future, provided these favorable conditions continue, "may in many respects resemble the theological development of the Church in the first centuries." But at present, in the estimate of Dorner, "America is as yet merely on the threshold of its theological existence."

But what shall be said of a history of Protestant theology written within twenty years which makes no mention whatever of that remarkable anthropological controversy, involving many of the most fundamental principles in evangelical Protestantism, which agitated not only New England but the whole country during the latter half of the eighteenth and the first decades of the present century—a controversy which gave to the Protestant world the treatises of Edwards on Original Sin and the Freedom of the Will, and a large

The Statistical Report shows progress, though not very marked or rapid, in almost every department, in the past year ; and the tables furnished, affording a basis of comparison between 1876, 1882, and 1888, show in each period immense strides in numbers, in property, in contributions, and in work at home and abroad. Much and grateful interest was evoked by the announcement that an elder of the Church, well known for his public spirit and generosity, has offered to pay three fourths of the entire debt on Church property in the Presbytery of Darlington, provided the other fourth is raised by the end of the year. This splendid benefaction will involve a donation of seventy-five hundred pounds. Another exceptional event was the invitation received from the Lord Mayor of London to an entertainment at the Mansion House, where Presbyterianism had not been officially recognized for two hundred and fifty years.

It will be understood that in this very rapid survey none but the outstanding features of the Synod's work have been so much as glanced at. Still it may be well to add, in closing, that the Presbyterian Church of England, though a small is yet a fully organized body ; and that reports from every one of its eighteen standing committees, as well as from its numerous special committees, were presented, discussed, and disposed of. The attendance of members throughout betokened a genuine and healthy concern in the affairs of the Church. Out of two hundred and eighty-seven possible Elders' commissions, no fewer than two hundred and seventy-eight were actually presented ; and in spite of the manifold attractions which London presents to country brethren, the attendance up to the very last sederunt showed a much higher average than usual.

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THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

THE one hundredth General Assembly met in Philadelphia last year, the city in which the first General Assembly was organized. It was fitting that the General Assembly should begin the second century of its history by meeting in the city of New York, the metropolis of the new world.

The Rev. William C. Roberts, D.D., LL.D., the President of Lake Forest University, was chosen moderator. Dr. Roberts has won the confidence of the Church as a pastor of one of the leading churches of New Jersey, as a secretary of the Board of Home Missions, and as president of a Western college. By his election the Assembly expressed its interest in Higher Education in the Western States, of which Dr. Roberts is at present the most conspicuous representative.

We have no space to discuss all the important matters that came before this active and energetic Assembly. We shall confine our attention to several items of chief importance.

I. The Committee appointed at the last Assembly " to revise the proof-texts of our Standards and to suggest such changes as may, on examination, be found

desirable," found the matter more difficult than many imagine, and simply reported progress, with the request that Drs. Shedd, Welch, and Morris, as "recognized exponents of dogmatic theology," be added to their number. The exegetes on the Committee were Dr. Green, the only representative of the Old Testament department; Drs. Marquis, Riddle, and Vincent of the New Testament department. But Dr. Vincent was relieved of duty at his own request. The exegetes on the Committee, therefore, are all conservatives. The addition of dogmatic divines was a wise step, but it would have been still wiser if some "recognized exponents" of Historical Theology and the newer exegesis had been added. The study of the Westminster Standards and their proof-texts belongs to the department of Symbolics and Historical Theology. The fault in the study of the Standards and their proof-texts has been that these have not been interpreted in their *historic sense*. Professional historians especially, those who have devoted themselves to the study of symbolics, ought to be on the Committee. The proof-texts are no part of the constitution of the Church; they have no other authority than the approval of the Assembly that ordered them to be attached to the printed text. They do not bind the conscience of any minister or elder. The best work the Committee could do would be to recommend that they be stricken out and no longer printed in the official copies of the Standards issued by the Church. They are appended to the constitution, and so mislead many to suppose that they are a part of the constitution. If any proof-texts are to be printed, they ought to be those adopted by the Westminster divines themselves. The Westminster divines framed the documents, and gave the texts of Scripture that seemed to them to support the statements of the documents. The historic proof-texts should go with the historic documents. A revision of the texts is only an underhand way of revising the documents, and of introducing an inconsistency and lack of harmony between the documents and the proof-texts. It is true that the Westminster divines have in some cases misinterpreted the Scriptures, but the American Committee certainly did not improve the situation in 1794, and I doubt whether the present Committee will be able to satisfy the General Assembly with the fruits of its exegesis. I prefer the exegesis of the Westminster divines to anything that the majority of this Committee is likely to give us.

II. The most important matter that came before the Assembly was the Revision of the Confession of Faith. The Assembly took the following action: "Whereas overtures have come to the General Assembly from fifteen Presbyteries asking for some revision of the Confession of Faith, and whereas, in the opinion of many of our ministers and people, some forms of statement in our Confession are liable to misunderstanding, and expose our system of doctrine to unmerited criticism, and whereas, before any definite steps should be taken for revision of our Standards, it is desirable to know whether there is any general desire for revision. Therefore resolved that this General Assembly overture to the Presbyteries the following questions: (1) Do you desire a revision of the Confession of Faith? (2) If so, in what respects and to what extent?"

These overtures were called forth by the overture of the Presbytery of Nassau

to the General Assembly of 1888, "asking that the proper steps be taken for a revision of the third chapter of the Confession of Faith, with especial reference to Sections 3, 4, 6, and 7."

The General Assembly took this action by a large majority, because they thought that the question having been raised by so many Presbyteries, it was due to all parties to give all the Presbyteries of the Church an opportunity of giving their opinion on the subject. It is difficult to determine how far the movement for a revision of the Standards has gone. The opposition to the motion in the Assembly was so slight, and the action itself was so hearty, that it would appear that the movement has already assumed great dimensions, especially among the younger and more silent members of the Presbyteries, and that the leaders of the Church have come to recognize the fact.

It is interesting to note that the Cumberland Presbyterian Church less than a century ago began their work of revising the Westminster symbols, just at the same points where it is now proposed to revise them by the Presbytery of Nassau. At first the Cumberland Presbytery required of its candidates the adoption of the Westminster Confession, "with exceptions about *fatality*." The Cumberland Synod soon after adopted a synopsis of doctrine, and then in 1814 revised the Westminster Confession, chiefly in chs. iii. and x., omitting iii. 3, 4, 6, 7, and x. 4 altogether, and revising iii. 1, 2, and x. 1, 3. The Cumberland General Assembly finally framed a new Confession of Faith. But this does not give entire satisfaction to that evangelical and energetic Presbyterian Church. It is also noteworthy that our own branch of the Church was not altogether successful in 1788 in its revision of the Confession in chs. xxiii. 3 and xxxi. 1. It removed from the Confession the Westminster doctrine of the relation of Church and State, and asserted the independent rights and liberties of the Church; but it did not define the relation of Church and State in accordance with the new American circumstances. This neglect in their revision has been the occasion of great differences of opinion and strife in our Church. The recent revision of ch. xxiii. 4 is an awkward piece of surgery.

The attempts at revision that have been made have not been satisfactory. In my judgment revision cannot, from the nature of the case, be more than awkward patchwork. The Westminster symbols were framed by one of the ablest body of divines that has ever been assembled, chosen by the English and Scottish Parliaments to represent all parts of Great Britain, and, so far as possible, the different ecclesiastical parties then existing in the land. They themselves began their work with a revision of the XXXIX. Articles of the Church of England. But they soon saw that revision was not the way, and they gave it up, and set to work upon the Westminster symbols that they have given us. These documents cost an immense amount of labor by divines who gave their whole time to the task for many months at public expense. These symbols were born of the throes of the second Reformation in Great Britain. They express its principles, its spirit, its life, and its great ideas. These documents are consistent and harmonious throughout. We cannot mend here and there without introducing disturbing, inconsistent, and inharmonious elements.

Those who object to ch. iii. will not be satisfied with chs. ix. and x. The revision of these chapters would in consistency have to blot out sentences here and there in several other chapters of the Confession. The Larger and Shorter Catechisms would have to be dealt with in the same fashion. For what is the objection that these brethren have with the Westminster symbols but with its Calvinism? They are either semi-Arminians or else real Arminians, and they desire to get the historical Calvinism out of the Standards, for it is to this that they find it difficult to subscribe. In objection to this course of procedure, I would state: (1) That the statements of the Calvinistic system in the Westminster symbols are the most cautious, firm, and carefully guarded that can be found, and I would not trust any set of divines now living to revise them or improve them. (2) Many of the objections to them—such, for instance, as the charge of *fatalism* by the Cumberland Presbyterian Church—are not valid as against the Standards themselves interpreted in their historic sense, but only against certain scholastic text-books in theology that have put a false construction upon them. These scholastic systems of theology should be discarded, and the Westminster Standards should be studied in their historic origin and historic meaning. (3) Those who hold to the historic Calvinism cannot consent to the removal of that Calvinism from our Standards. We certainly cannot consent to the introduction of Arminian or even semi Arminian views into the Standards, as the Cumberland Presbyterian Church has done in their revision. We cannot consent to omit all reference to these great questions that have ever distinguished the Reformed Churches from all others. We have never heard of any theologian who was able to give a definition of these mooted questions in which the different parties can agree. If we could attain such a statement the long strife would come to an end. But it is vain to look for such a thing in this transition period of theology.

If we are to amend the Standards to suit the semi-Arminians in the Church, others have equal claims for revision in behalf of their doctrines. The Premillenarians are a large party in our Church. They object to the doctrine that the Church is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ in ch. xxv. 2, and to certain statements in chs. xxxii. and xxxiii. with reference to the Resurrection and the Last Judgment. Are we to revise Premillenarianism into the Standards, and so make them a burden to the vast majority of our Church? Shall all definitions of these mooted questions be stricken out? Is it possible to unite in new statements that will comprehend both parties? Revision at these points seems to be impracticable. Are we to revise the Standards in the interests of those who do not believe in the imminence of the advent of Christ, or of those who find comfort in the doctrine of the annihilation of the wicked, or of those who hold to the errors as to the person of Christ wrapt up in the Kenosis theory? What are we to do with those who deny the validity of Roman Catholic baptism and ordination; with those who hold low and Anabaptist views of the Church and the sacraments; with those who hold the views of the Plymouth brethren as to human nature, justification, and sanctification? If the Presbyterian Church is to revise the Standards to suit all these claimants, who are at

present in the ranks of her ministry, it is clear that more than half of our venerable documents will be revised away. Surely we ought to pause and think well before we enter upon such a perilous undertaking.

The situation of the Presbyterian Church at the present time is an unfortunate one. Large numbers of the ministers have drifted away from the Standards, some here and some there, and it is clear to the careful observer that these, and many others who desire greater liberty of opinion, are eager for revision. They are not agreed on any one point as yet. They cannot agree unless in a general movement to grant liberty all along the line, and to make a thoroughgoing revision. It is doubtful whether it is possible to do this. The Premillenarians can hardly unite with the semi-Arminians. At almost all points of divergence from the Standards the number of diverging ministers is comparatively small. The great majority adhere to the Standards when any single section is in consideration. But when we consider the great number of points of divergence, the number of those who diverge is greatly increased, so that it is probable that the majority of our ministers depart from the Standards in one or more places. The Church is generous and tolerant in regard to most chapters of the Standards. The only sections where there has been any intolerance in recent years is in the doctrines of the Scriptures and the Future Life. It is clear, then, that we are passing through a transition period. We have not reached a goal, we are in movement, we are drifting toward an uncertain future. It is wise to hold fast to the historic creeds, and let them measure the extent of our orthodoxy and the extent of our departure from it. In this transition period we must be generous, large-hearted, open-minded, catholic, and tolerant of departures that do not strike at the vitals of religion.

The difficulties of our situation are, however, not so much with the ministry as with students for the ministry. Those who are in the ranks of the ministry manage in some way to soothe their troubled consciences, or to toughen them by lax interpretation of the Standards or the terms of subscription. It is astonishing what tricks of legerdemain are possible in some cases. But there are tender consciences among our ministers who are troubled. These are gradually withdrawing from our Church, and ministers from other denominations with less scruples are taking their place. Young men in our colleges are debarred from the ministry by difficulties of subscription, and are unwilling to give up their liberty of investigation for the sake of entering the Presbyterian Church. Students in the seminaries, fearing the ordeal of Presbyterian examinations, enter other denominations where there are prospects of greater liberty. The Presbyterian Church has not been able for some years to supply a sufficient number of ministers to fill our ranks. There is little prospect of improvement for the future. And there is a feeling in some quarters that the average quality and standing of the ministry has already been lowered, and that the average is likely to become lower still.

It is clear to many minds that something must be done to give relief to tender consciences, and to overcome the glaring inconsistency of exacting more from candidates than is required of ministers. Greater liberty of opinion must

be conceded if the Presbyterian Church is to have ministers to supply its churches and to carry on its work.

But there are several other ways for relief that are preferable to revision. We might appoint a Committee to construct a new and simpler creed. The Presbyterian Church of England has done this. That Church is in a very favorable situation for doing it. On the whole, the Committee have produced a valuable document. I doubt whether any other Committee could have done better work. But the American Presbyterian Church is not in so good a condition. We are larger, more divided in opinion, and as a body not so far in advance in the theological development of our age. We are at the beginning of a state of transition, where it is impossible to construct a permanent document upon which we could agree.

The United Presbyterian Church of Scotland adopted a Declaratory Act, which gave relief to many troubled consciences. But such an Act only deals with a few of the mooted questions. It virtually sets up two standards of doctrine that are not in harmony. It doubtless has done good service in Scotland, but it would not suit the American Church.

The American Presbyterian Church is in a better situation to meet the difficulty than any other Presbyterian Church. We have only to adhere to the historic lines of our development. The greatest divine our Church has produced was Jonathan Dickinson. He framed the Adopting Act of 1729, by which our Church adopted the Westminster symbols, agreeing

“that all the ministers of this Synod, or that shall hereafter be admitted into this Synod, shall declare their agreement in and approbation of the Confession of Faith, with the Larger and Shorter Catechisms of the Assembly of Divines at Westminster, as being in all the essential and necessary articles, good forms of sound words and systems of Christian doctrine, and do also adopt the said Confession and Catechisms as the confession of our faith.”

This Adopting Act is at the basis of the Westminster Standards in our Church, and the terms of subscription must be interpreted in accordance with it. The “essential and necessary articles” are all that an American Presbyterian subscribes to. These make up “the system of doctrine” in the formula of subscription. The difficulty now is the same that has been all through our history. There are three parties in the Church: those who hold to lax views of subscription, those who hold to stiff views, and those who hold the historic view. The first method of relief is, as we have seen, to *interpret the standards themselves in their historic sense*. The second step in relief is now suggested, to *interpret the terms of subscription in their historic sense*.

It is true that there will be doubt as to these *necessary* and *essential* articles, but the Adopting Act provides that tender consciences shall declare their scruples to the Presbytery, and the Presbytery is to decide whether such ministers are erroneous in essential and necessary articles or not.

We grant that even this will not give all the relief that is required in our day. In my judgment, it does not grant indulgence to semi-Arminians and Premilnarians, because the necessary and essential articles are those necessary and

essential to the Westminster Standards themselves, as the Supreme Court decided in the Hawker case in 1763.

But there is further relief in the spirit of toleration which prevails at present in our Church, and is likely to increase rather than diminish. It is true that the Presbytery must act in accordance with the constitution if called upon to act by the intolerance of any heresy hunter in its bounds. And if questions were raised in our Church courts with regard to many of these differences now tolerated, the Presbyteries could not officially tolerate them. Therefore these tender consciences are at the disadvantage of being tolerated without law and by the neglect of the court to execute the law of the Church. But, on the other hand, the number of those thus tolerated is so large, and the perils of questioning their position are so great, that the difficulty is theoretical rather than practical. Such a state of things is necessary in a period of transition until the goal is reached and definite action can be taken.

If any further relief is necessary, the history of the Church teaches us that it should be given by a revision of the terms of subscription, so that a larger departure from the Westminster symbols may gain a right to exist in the Church. I agree with Dr. Warfield that "the true relief for a Church that finds itself too strictly bound to a creed," is "simply to emend the strictness of the formula of subscription." I am in favor of such a movement in preference to revision, or a New Creed, or a Declaratory Act. It is simpler, more comprehensive, and more in accordance with the historic lines of American Presbyterianism. In the mean while, I think that our Presbyteries should be generous in their toleration of differences. The spirit of catholicity and comprehension should prevail all over our Church. It will not do to tolerate Premillenarians and be intolerant toward semi-Arminians. It will not do to tolerate the Kenosis theory, and be intolerant toward those who seek relief from the hard doctrine of the eternal suffering of the heathen, who have never heard of the historic Christ. It will not do to tolerate low views of the Church and the sacraments that are contrary to the Standards, and then insist upon high and extra-confessional views of the Scriptures. Toleration and comprehension should be consistent and not capricious. Unless the Presbyteries become more consistent and less capricious in their attitude toward young ministers and candidates, some of us would prefer that the Presbyteries should adhere strictly to the constitution, and exact of all their members everything that the terms of subscription exact.

I am satisfied with the Confession as it is, and with the terms of subscription as they are. They are not too exacting for me. They are the highest attainment of doctrinal advance in the Christian Church. Any true progress in theology must build on them. But I have great sympathy with tender consciences, especially in young men. I have great respect for noble, high-spirited Christians who demand liberty of investigation, and will not accept these doctrines on the authority of the Presbyterian Church. I hold before me the ideal unity of Christ's Church. I think that the present divisions in Christ's heritage are sinful, and that the separation of Christians into different denominations

because of differences of opinion on unessential matters is greater heresy than the errors in doctrine that have produced the separation. True progress for Christ's Church in every denomination is in the path of catholicity, removing one after another the barriers that separate Arminians from Calvinists, Episcopalians from Congregationalists and Presbyterians, Lutheran from Reformed, until at last they may be united in one holy and catholic Church organization. New creeds, new declaratory acts will only increase divisions. Let us maintain the old creeds as our historic banners, but lay stress on them only on those matters in which there is a consensus of the churches of the Reformation.

III. Another matter of great importance that came before the General Assembly for decision was the Report of the Committee of Conference on Co-operation between the Northern and Southern Presbyterian churches. This Report embraced four departments, as follows :

I. *Co-operation in the Foreign Mission Work.* In Japan and Brazil the missionaries of the two churches have already united with missionaries of other Presbyterian bodies in the organization of independent national churches. In China there is a movement in the same direction. There are no hindrances in the way of this movement in any of the missions of the two bodies.

II. *Co-operation in the Home Field.* This is a more difficult matter. But agreement has been reached in the following particulars :

1. Where Presbyteries belonging to the two Assemblies cover the same ground, they are advised to endeavor, either as Presbyteries or through their committees, to agree as brethren to have the efforts of one Church expended in certain fields, and the efforts of the other Church expended in certain other fields, within their common bounds, so as to prevent hurtful rivalry or antagonism.

2. Where there are weak churches which, standing alone, cannot support a minister, but which can be grouped with churches connected with the other Assembly so as to form one ministerial charge, the Presbyteries having jurisdiction are advised to allow such churches to be grouped under a minister from either body to whom their respective Presbyteries are willing to give them in charge, and to have their contributions to the general benevolent funds pass through the channels appointed by their respective Assemblies ; and where such churches are sufficiently near they are recommended, a majority of each congregation agreeing, to consolidate and form one congregation, with such Presbyterian connections as may be most agreeable to the membership.

3. That persons connected with churches under the care of one of these Assemblies who may remove into the bounds of churches under the care of the other Assembly, be advised to unite with those churches, and to seek their peace and prosperity. And where such persons are found in sufficient numbers to organize a church (there being no other Presbyterian church in their immediate vicinity), they should form such organization under the care of the Presbytery with which the contiguous Presbyterian churches are connected ; provided said Presbytery belongs to either of these Assemblies.

Within the bounds of a Presbytery connected with one Assembly there may be communities, composed largely of persons who are members of churches connected with the other Assembly, whose affiliations and preferences are too strong to permit them to sever their connection. In such cases, when these persons shall have been organized into a church under the care of the nearest Presbytery connected with that Assembly to which they prefer to belong, they should receive from the Presbytery within whose bounds they reside that sympathy and good-will which are implied in the fraternal relations established between the two Assemblies.

III. *Co-operation in the evangelization of the colored people.* This is the most difficult matter. The Conference Committee made a strange mistake in the following statement of their report, "while by conceding the existing situation it [the Northern Assembly] approves the policy of separate churches, Presbyteries, and synods, subject to the choice of the colored people themselves." This was stricken out by the General Assembly. This action was explained by telegram to the Southern Assembly, as follows :

"The Assembly further resolved that this clause was stricken out not to prejudice future action, nor to outline the future policy of the Church, but simply because this Assembly did not believe that it stated the historic facts in the case." We are glad that the Southern Assembly agreed to this modification of the Report, and that the Report as amended has been agreed to by both parties. We are in full accord with the action of the General Assembly. The Northern Assembly has not yet approved the policy of separate churches, Presbyteries, and synods for the colored people. That is an open question of policy that is still discussed among us. It involves not merely the policy of separate Presbyteries on the grounds of color, but also on the grounds of nationality, language, and different opinions as to forms and methods of work and doctrine.

I would oppose any such separation on the grounds of color or race, or without the express wishes of the colored people themselves. But I am in favor of such separation into different churches and Presbyteries, because I believe that it would be for the best interests of all concerned. I hold to this opinion without yielding in the slightest degree to any prejudice of race or color, but because I believe that Presbyteries will be most efficient when they are constructed on the "elective affinity" plan. It is my opinion that the work among the Germans would be more efficient if the German ministers and churches were organized in Presbyteries by themselves. I think that, having abandoned the territorial principle of parishes so far as the congregations are concerned, there is little propriety in insisting upon it so far as Presbyteries are concerned. I would insist upon union in the same synods, because the synods are now representative bodies, and, so far as possible, correspond with the political divisions into States and territories. I think that the recognition of the coexistence of different Presbyteries in the same territory will remove the most of the difficulties that now stand in the way of our union with the United Presbyterian, German Reformed, and Dutch Reformed churches. These bodies very naturally are unwilling to be swallowed up in the Northern Presbyterian Church, and overwhelmed by majorities that would gradually do away with their distinctive principles. If, however, these distinctive principles could be conserved in congregations and watched over by Presbyteries of their own order, they need have no fear of synods and General Assemblies. The settlement of this question that divides us from our Southern brethren will virtually determine also the question whether we are to form a still more important union with our Northern brethren in the other branches of the Reformed Church. The only definite action taken in this branch of co operation was the following :

1. That the relations of the colored people in the two churches be allowed to remain in *statu quo*, the work among them to proceed on the same lines as heretofore.

2. That all proper aid, comfort, and encouragement, in a spirit of kindly Christian sympathy, brotherhood, and confidence, shall be extended by each Church to the educational and evangelizing efforts of the other for the colored race, with a view to the encouragement of every laudable effort to this end on both sides.

3. The schools and churches under care of the Board of Missions for Freedmen, and any corresponding work undertaken by the Southern Assembly, especially its Tuscaloosa Institute for the Education of Colored Ministers, shall be heartily recommended to the givers of our respective churches for practical aid, as mutually concerned in the same great missionary work for the glory of God and the blessing of our common country.

In the matter of co-operation in publication, education, and other matters, there are no difficulties in the way, and no action was required.

This action on co-operation certainly improves the relations of the two churches in some respects. But the minority report of the Committee, which was not adopted, seems to be correct in its statement

“that any form of co-operation which does not look toward speedy organic union, and is not designed to promote and result in union, will retard and probably prevent it;” and there is certainly grave danger “that, however well intended and carefully arranged and guarded, the inevitable friction which must attend attempts to co-operate, on the part of two great denominations laboring zealously in the same territory for the same object, will excite competitions and rivalries, and impose limitations and restraints much more likely to embarrass and antagonize than to create warmer fraternal feeling or greater harmony.”

The Northern and Southern churches are not ready to unite in one organization. They are not in sufficient accord at present. The only practicable union is in an Alliance or Confederation of the Reformed Churches in America, and the churches should set their faces steadily in that direction.

IV. The next item of importance was the consideration of the report of a special Committee on increasing the number of ministers. The discussion developed such a difference of opinion that it was referred to a new Committee made up by consolidating the special Committee on Education with the special Committee on Vacant Churches and unemployed ministers, with Dr. Niccolls chairman. These matters have been discussed recently in this REVIEW, and there is no need of adding anything at present.

The Assembly appointed a Committee on Deaconesses, Dr. Warfield chairman, and resolved that a third secretary should be elected for the Board of Home Missions, and “that the Board should make such arrangements that one, or, if necessary, more of its secretaries shall have their official work specially directed to the immigrant population.”

The Assembly adjourned to meet in Saratoga next May. The cost of the meetings of the General Assembly to the Church is increasing from year to year. It is said that the Assembly meeting in New York cost more than forty thousand dollars. It is doubtful whether its service to the Church is worth as much as that. Many are thinking that the money expended for this purpose would do more good if it were expended for Home and Foreign Missions. The

greater portion of the time of every Assembly is taken up in debates over Resolutions and Deliverances that merely express the opinions of a majority of the delegates, and have no binding force whatever upon the ministers and the churches. Add to this the routine reports of the Boards, and nine tenths of the time of the Assembly has been consumed. Other denominations larger than the Presbyterian Church do not deem it important to meet every year. There is no inherent necessity that the Boards should make annual reports to the Assembly. Triennial reports to triennial assemblies would be amply sufficient, and would not hinder in any way their successful work. It would be a relief to the Church and the general public if the deliverances of the assemblies could be made still less frequent than every three years. Triennial assemblies, meeting for a longer period, composed, as they would be, of representative men, would do more service to the Presbyterian Church than the assemblies as they are at present constituted.

Furthermore, the assemblies are too large, and are not fairly representative of the Presbyterian Church. Synodical representation must come in time, and each Synod should pay the expense of its own commissioners. There is serious doubt whether the churches will submit much longer to such a large annual tax to pay the expenses of such assemblies.

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