

THE PRESBYTERIAN QUARTERLY.

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I.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF FAITH.

EVERY intelligent reader of the Scriptures has observed how much they have to say about faith; how prominent a place they give it amongst the other graces of the Spirit. They say we are united to Christ by faith; that we are justified by faith; that we live by faith; that we walk by faith; that we are sanctified by faith; that we are saved by faith. They thus give to faith a prominence and ascribe to it an efficiency such as are asserted of no other grace in the long catalogue of the graces. As grand summaries of their teaching on this subject, they say, "According to your faith be it unto you;" "without faith it is impossible to please him;" "he that believeth shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."

There are many, however, who do not understand why it is that so much is thus said about this grace, and why there is ascribed to it so much importance in the plan of salvation. They think there is something strange about it; something arbitrary; something that needs explanation; something that very much needs explanation; something that is derogatory to religion in the view of the intelligent; for, as they suppose, the faith so much insisted on is, to some extent at least, a blind faith, an unintelligent faith, an unreasoning, and therefore an unreasonable, faith; and so a faith that inevitably brings about a conflict between itself and reason, and thus forces the intelligent into the dilemma of choosing in religion whether they will be controlled by knowledge or by ignorance; by reason or by mere credulity. There can be no doubt that there are many who

VI.

GENERAL NOTES.

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF 1902.

THE General Assembly which met at Jackson, Miss., in May, 1902, was one of unusual interest. The beauty of the little city, the cordiality of the reception extended to the commissioners, the hospitality of the people, the spirit of harmony and good-will which prevailed, notwithstanding several warm debates, and the many subjects of far-reaching importance which enlisted the attention of the body, all combined to clothe the sessions of this Assembly with more than ordinary interest. From the retiring moderator's sermon, with its earnest and able discussion of the great subject of Christian education, and the felicitous speeches of welcome by the Governor of the State and other prominent citizens, all through to the closing exercises, nothing occurred to seriously mar the pleasure and good feeling of the occasion. One or two severe and, we think, uncalled-for remarks were made, but, fortunately, they did not provoke the hot retort which usually follows, and there is reason to believe that no deep scars were left of the wounds inflicted. Most of the members, at least, who took active part in the proceedings, were willing to listen patiently to those who were of the contrary opinion and answer their objections in calm and sober discussion. As a consequence, the business of the Assembly was transacted in an orderly manner and with reasonable dispatch. The Rev. Dr. W. T. Hall, of South Carolina, was happily chosen moderator, and accomplished his responsible task with ease to himself and much satisfaction to the commissioners. He was courteous and firm, not easily confused, prompt in his decisions, and all of his rulings were accepted without appeal. No charge of unfairness was at any time preferred against him.

The first matter which created a breeze in the Assembly was the report of the Theological Seminary of Kentucky. The Rev. Dr. Walden, of Georgia, objected to the reading of the report when it was presented, on the ground that the last Assembly refused to approve the consolidation of the Northern and Southern seminaries:

in Kentucky, and, therefore, it did not properly come under the supervision of the Assembly. The question was docketed, but was called up the next day when the Rev. Dr. Hemphill, of Kentucky, moved that the report be received, read, and referred to the Committee on Theological Seminaries. This motion precipitated an earnest debate, in which Drs. Walden and Hemphill were the principal participants. The former contended that our relation to this seminary was essentially different from that which we sustain to the other seminaries of the church. Since over this we could only exercise a joint control with the Northern Assembly, he questioned the wisdom of our assuming any responsibility for its conduct. The matter of control was attended with embarrassments and apprehensions; complications were likely to arise; and while he did not desire to undo the action of the last Assembly, and disclaimed any sectional prejudice or disposition to reflect upon the brethren who had been instrumental in securing the consolidation, he believed that the wise course would be to "leave the entire responsibility to the Synods of Kentucky and Missouri." Dr. Walden presented his argument with much ability and clearness, and it made a deep impression upon the Assembly. Dr. Hemphill made an elaborate and able reply. He gave a brief historical sketch of the educational movement in the Synods of Kentucky and Missouri during the last forty years; he expounded the articles of agreement by which the two Presbyterian seminaries in Kentucky had been consolidated; and he clearly explained the action of the last Assembly in receiving the report of this transaction and in assenting to what had been done. The Board of Directors had not asked for the "consent" or "approval" of the Assembly, but only for its "assent," which had been given. The "responsibility" referred to in the action of the Assembly as having been left to the Synods of Kentucky and Missouri was "not the responsibility of the management of the institution, but the responsibility of making the consolidation." The two Synods assumed that responsibility, and had entered into a well-considered compact with the Northern Synod of Kentucky for the future conduct of the seminary, in which all of our rights are carefully protected, and now the General Assembly is only asked to exercise such general control and oversight over the consolidated institution as it exercises over its other theological seminaries. Dr. Hemphill also discussed the question of the coöperation of our church with other religious bodies, and showed that that was one of our distinctive principles. The constitutionality of this question had been settled long ago,

and we are now in coöperation with the Northern Presbyterian and the Dutch Reformed churches in the theological seminary in Japan, and with the Northern Presbyterian church in the theological seminary in Brazil. He felt that the brethren in Kentucky and Missouri had been led into this movement by the Spirit of God, and that in bringing it to a successful issue they had only performed their bounden duty. Dr. Walden moved to refer the question to a committee of five, but his motion was laid upon the table. Drs. Leavell, Tenney, Woods, and Judge Beckner also took part in the debate, and when the matter came to a vote the report was received, read, and referred to the Committee on Theological Seminaries without a dissenting voice. After this debate the committee felt that its work would be easily accomplished. Several overtures were placed in their hands protesting against the action of the last Assembly or asking for the reversal of it; but when the committee brought in its report, declining to entertain these overtures, and dealing with the Kentucky Seminary as with the other institutions of like nature, the report was adopted without debate and with practical unanimity. The progress of the Kentucky Seminary will be watched with much interest in the church. The apprehensions of many are by no means removed, but the brethren in charge of the seminary enjoy the confidence of the church in a marked degree, and the feeling widely prevails that they will prove faithful to their trust. There is reason to believe that this institution will become, more and more, a power for the training of ministers of the gospel who shall combine true scholarship with soundness in the faith.

The next matter which elicited the interest of the Assembly was the teaching of the Confession of Faith on the subject of "Elect Infants." This question has been prominently before the church in one form or another for the last three years. The Assembly of 1900 passed a resolution touching the statement of the Confession, Chap. X., Sec. 3, "Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated," etc., in which it declares that "the present language of the Confession cannot, by any fair interpretation, be construed to teach that any of those who die in infancy are lost," and ordered that this language be inserted as an explanatory foot-note in future editions of the Confession. Serious objection was taken to this action in various parts of the church, principally on the ground that the foot-note would be a virtual change in the constitution by the vote of a single Assembly, without the question having been submitted to the Presbyteries and a subsequent Assembly, as the book provides. The

Assembly of 1901 revoked the order to publish the explanatory footnote, but refused to change the language adopted by the former Assembly, giving five reasons for their action. Several of these reasons, notably the fifth, were highly objectionable to a considerable element in the church, and eleven overtures were presented to the Assembly of 1902, expressing dissatisfaction with the attitude in which we were placed, and asking for some positive statement upon the subject by the Assembly. The Committee on Bills and Overtures suggested an action under three heads. The first was in these words:

"1. That the request to rescind the action of the last Assembly (*Minutes* 1901, page 59) in regard to the foot-note which was adopted by the Assembly of 1900, be respectfully declined, because the relief desired can be secured as effectively by other forms of action."

After considerable debate Dr. Hemphill offered a substitute for this recommendation which was adopted and became a part of the final action of the Assembly, although the official Minutes do not show it. The stated clerk is a remarkably accurate man, but in this we are confident that the Minutes are in error. The language of Dr. Hemphill's substitute was, "The Assembly does hereby rescind the fifth reason of the last Assembly for declining to amend the Confession, which is in terms following: 'Because while we have a well-grounded hope, founded on Scripture, that all infants dying in infancy are saved, yet the Confession of Faith goes as far as the Scriptures justify a positive creedal statement.'" There were many in the Assembly who did not think that this rescission of the fifth reason was necessary, but were willing to yield to the wishes of those who felt aggrieved by it. Quite a number voted against it, but it was carried by a large majority. This action, in direct opposition to the action of the Assembly of 1901, shows what a wide difference there may be in the constitution of successive Assemblies, and how far any one of them may come from expressing the real mind of the church.

The second recommendation of the committee was in these words:

"2. This Assembly is fully persuaded that the language employed in Chap. X., Sec. 3, of our Confession of Faith, touching infants dying in infancy, does not teach that there are any infants dying in infancy who are damned, but is only meant to show that those who die in infancy are saved in a different manner from adult persons, who are capable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the word.

“Furthermore, we are persuaded that the Holy Scriptures, when fairly interpreted, amply warrant us in believing that all infants who die in infancy are included in the election of grace, and are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit.”

This was adopted by the Assembly without any dissenting votes, as interpretative of the teaching of the Confession upon the subject of the salvation of infants dying in infancy, and perhaps is as nearly expressive of the general faith of the church as any statement which can be framed. Many would have been content with the negative declaration in the first paragraph, believing that to be consistent with the historic position of our church; but others contended for something positive, and, as after all the second paragraph is only a *persuasion*, to which all agree, it was permitted to pass.

The third recommendation of the committee proposed that an amendment to Chap. X., Sec. 3, of the Confession be sent down to the Presbyteries for their concurrence, in the following words: “All infants, dying in infancy, are included in the election of grace, and are regenerated and saved by Christ, through the Spirit, who worketh where and when and how he pleaseth.” This was the critical point in the report, and was earnestly pressed, especially by Dr. N. M. Woods, the chairman of the committee; but, after a long and able debate, it was finally stricken out. The vote on the motion to strike out stood: Yeas, 94; nays, 83; absent and not voting, 12. The debate, unfortunately, did not enter into the merits of the question, except in a very limited way. Some of the advocates of the change threatened the Assembly with a “Bible reading,” in which a superabundance of proof would be presented to sustain their contention; but the “Bible reading,” unfortunately, was never given. One would have imagined, from some of the talk indulged in, that many of the members of the Assembly were wholly unacquainted with the teaching of the Scriptures upon this subject, and that “new light” had broken forth from them which the advocates of revision were eager to dispense to their less enlightened brethren; but the “new light” was not forthcoming. An effort was actually made, therefore, to revise the Confession upon a point which affects our system of doctrine without the presentation of any serious argument from the Scriptures to show that the Confession in its present form is anti-scriptural. The Confession has been accepted for two hundred and fifty years by the church as expressive of its faith as to the teaching of the Holy Scriptures upon the subject of the salvation of infants dying in infancy. If a change is now deemed

desirable, the burden of proof surely lies upon the advocates of change to show wherein the Confession is inconsistent with scriptural teaching. The Confession does not positively affirm the salvation of all infants dying in infancy because the framers of it were unable to discover that doctrine unmistakably taught in the Scriptures; they therefore contented themselves with showing that such of the elect as infants dying in infancy, and other irresponsible persons who are not capable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the word, are saved by Christ through the Spirit, without the hearing of the word. This is a wise provision of the Confession which permits two parties to live under it, those who are able to derive from the teaching of the Scriptures an assured conviction for themselves of the absolute certainty of the salvation of all infants, Christian and heathen, who die in infancy, and those who are unable to discover that the Scriptures make a positive revelation upon this subject. The position of practically all the great teachers of theology in our church, as Thornwell, Breckinridge, the Hodges, Shedd, Dabney, Warfield, and others, has been in harmony with the Confession. They have accepted the silence of the Confession, because they understood it to be consistent with the silence of the Scriptures. Strange to say, the greatest arguments which have ever been made in favor of the universal salvation of infants, like that, for instance, framed by Dr. Stuart Robinson, have come from men who were satisfied with the declaration of the Confession. It may be safely affirmed, therefore, that all men desire to have an assured conviction of the scriptural truthfulness of this doctrine, and will cordially welcome any "new light" upon the subject which the friends of revision will be kind enough to furnish.

True to the short-sighted policy of our Assembly, when any question of vital importance is before it, the speeches were limited to ten minutes' each, an exception being made in favor of Dr. Strickler, who was opposed to revision, and Dr. Woods, who favored revision, both of whom were allowed thirty minutes each. As a consequence, the merits of the question were hardly touched. Dr. Strickler was wise enough to see this, and made a forcible argument, in which he confined himself, in the main, to discussing the inexpediency of undertaking to revise the Confession of Faith. Several other brethren succeeded in interjecting a few remarks upon the subject, and then Dr. Woods closed the debate for the committee in a vigorous speech of thirty minutes, in which he earnestly besought the Assembly to send the proposed amendment down to the Presbyteries;

but, as we have already seen, when the matter came to a vote, this recommendation was stricken out.

As a whole, the debate was unsatisfactory, as such a debate must always be when a vital doctrine is the issue, and the Assembly, acting as if time were more valuable than truth, insists upon setting an arbitrary limit to discussion. One admirable custom of the Westminster Assembly was that discussion was free and untrammelled, and those wise framers of the Confession were willing to spend weeks and months upon the consideration of a point which our restless commissioners would fain dispose of in two or three hours of time, divided into superficial speeches of ten minutes each. The worst of it is that the plea is usually made in our Assembly that the commissioners are *thoroughly* acquainted (*sic*) with the question at issue; that all has been said which can be said, and that all are ready to vote. Any student moderately conversant with theology could not have failed to discover during the debate on "Elect Infants," in the last Assembly, that many of the commissioners possessed a limited and erroneous acquaintance with the reformed system of doctrine. Dr. Strickler recognized this, boldly referred to it in his address, and made it a strong point in his argument against an attempt at a revision of the Confession. If the discussion of this subject would lead to a revival of the study of systematic theology among the ministers and members of our church, it might be profitably prolonged for years to come. Honest and intelligent discussion of such subjects, conducted in the right spirit, are more to be desired and of greater profit to the church than the fear of outside criticism, which so frequently manifests itself in our church courts, and influences many to hasty legislation upon vital doctrines of the Scriptures.

Two judicial cases came before the Assembly, one a complaint of the Rev. Z. B. Graves against a judgment of the Synod of Louisiana, and the other an appeal of the Rev. E. T. Hoge against a judgment of the Synod of Virginia. The former had been suspended from the ministry on account of unsoundness of mind, and the latter because of habitual inefficiency. As no question of doctrine was involved in either case, they were easily disposed of, the Assembly affirming the judgment of the lower courts in both instances. The former case was settled by a compromise which is open to criticism, but was perhaps justifiable under the circumstances. Against the action of the Assembly in the latter case, Judge T. W. Coleman entered an able and vigorous protest, on the ground of irregularity in the proceedings, both in the Synod and in the Assembly, because

the record shows that the evidence in the case taken by the Presbytery was not transmitted to the higher courts, although the Book of Church Order specifically requires that this shall be done. Judge Coleman was manifestly right in his protest, which was admitted to record without answer, for the obvious reason that no sufficient answer could be given.

Touching the matter of Ecclesiastical Commissions, it was found that the proposed amendment to the Rules of Discipline, sent down to the Presbyteries by the Assembly of 1901, had failed to secure the approval of a sufficient number of Presbyteries to make it a part of our organic law. Many of the Presbyteries were not ready to act, and asked for a continuance of the *ad interim* committee. This was done, and the committee was enlarged by the addition of the following names: R. P. Farris, D. D., A. C. Hopkins, D. D., S. M. Smith, D. D., A. B. Curry, D. D., and the Rev. J. D. Leslie. It is to be hoped that this subject will receive the earnest consideration of the able committee which now has it in hand, and that some final conclusion will be reached which will be satisfactory to the church, and which will make the commission a more serviceable agency in the transaction of ecclesiastical business than it has been.

The reports of the Executive Committees were encouraging, and received earnest consideration by the Assembly. It is to be observed that several of the committees, notably those on Foreign Missions, Home Missions, Publication, and Ministerial Relief, suggested definite forward steps which look to the enlargement of their work, and that the Assembly enthusiastically adopted their suggestions. The periodic cry of Retrenchment and Reform was not heard, but the watch-word was Progress. The opinion seemed to prevail that our church has reached a point in her history where her work must either advance or recede, and this Assembly was determined that it should advance in all departments, and fearlessly adopted plans for future enlargement.

The working force of the Executive Committee of Foreign Missions was strengthened by the election of the Rev. W. R. Dobyns, D. D., of St. Joseph, Mo., as Field Secretary. This was a happy choice, and it is the earnest desire of the church that Dr. Dobyns will consent to accept this responsible and useful office. The receipts of the treasury show a small increase over last year, and the committee was able to report that all obligations have been discharged. All of our foreign fields, however, need reinforcements, and, therefore, the Assembly asks the churches for an annual contribution

of two hundred thousand dollars to properly maintain and carry forward our work. It also heartily endorses the effort now being made to induce churches and individuals to undertake the support of individual missionaries.

Home Missions also occupied a large share of the attention of the Assembly. An able *ad interim* committee which has been considering the better organization of this department of the church's activities made an elaborate report, which was referred to the Standing Committee. When this matter came up later in the session for discussion, the plan appeared not to be sufficiently matured for adoption, and was referred back to the *ad interim* committee, with instructions to report to the next General Assembly. In the line of progress, Dr. Morris' committee was permitted to augment its force by the appointment of a General Evangelist, who will occupy much the same position in the department of Home Missions that the Field Secretary will occupy in the department of Foreign Missions. It should have been said above that a portion of the plan of coöperation suggested by the *ad interim* committee was sent down to the Presbyteries for their consideration and consent to its adoption. The Assembly asks fifty thousand dollars for this cause, and recommends the support of individual ministers by churches and ladies' societies.

The cause of Publication is of growing importance and interest to the Assembly. Under the efficient management of the Rev. Dr. Hazen, whose recent death is deeply deplored by the entire church, it has steadily prospered, and now appears to be on the eve of a great enlargement of efficiency and influence. It is much regretted by the committee that at this interesting juncture the beloved secretary should have been stricken down. The business of last year was much larger than in any previous year, and promises yet greater development. The department of Sunday-schools and Young People's Societies, under the wise and vigorous management of the Rev. Dr. Phillips, gives manifest signs of growth in power and efficiency, and altogether the cause of Publication appears to be in a very healthful condition.

The first annual report of the Executive Committee of Ministerial Relief was received with marked attention and interest. It showed that the work had been carefully organized, a manual prepared, and the importance of the cause repeatedly brought before the people. The receipts, in round numbers, were about twenty thousand dollars. Of this, five thousand dollars goes to the endowment fund, and fifteen thousand dollars to the annual support fund.

The Assembly has entered upon the task of accumulating an endowment fund for the support of our aged and infirm ministers and the widows and orphans of those who have passed away. The plan suggested by Mr. S. H. Hawes is simple and practical, and, if adopted by the churches, will certainly result in the accumulation of a large sum in a short time; but of course neither this nor any other plan will succeed unless earnestly followed by the people. The Assembly commends the plan to the churches, and asks for twenty thousand dollars to the support fund this year. This should be the minimum, for if the entire amount is placed in the hands of the committee, the average apportionment to the beneficiaries would not be over one hundred and twenty-five dollars each. The Assembly unanimously elected the Rev. I. S. McElroy, D. D., of Kentucky, as secretary, and thus placed the committee on the same basis as the other executive committees of the church. It is to be hoped that the reproach which has rested upon our church for years because of our neglect of our aged and worn-out ministers will soon be removed.

The Colored Work, under the efficient management of the self-denying secretary, the Rev. D. C. Lilly, D. D., is evidently progressing, notwithstanding the indifference with which the church treats it. It is pitiful to record the facts that the contributions to this cause last year were less than six thousand five hundred dollars; that only two churches within our bounds gave as much as one hundred dollars each; that only four Presbyteries gave over two hundred dollars each, while forty-eight Presbyteries gave less than one hundred dollars each. But notwithstanding this niggardly way in which the cause is supported, the secretary and the Executive Committee are doing a noble and, in many respects, a marvellous work. At Stillman Institute the students are trained in industrial pursuits, as well as in literature and theology, and are accorded the privilege of supporting themselves by their daily labor, while most of the money contributed by the churches is expended in the maintenance of ministers and churches. It is to be deeply regretted that our people are so slow to appreciate the importance of this work. There is, perhaps, no field of labor in which we are engaged, either at home or abroad, which promises as large visible returns for the means expended as this work among the colored people.

Nothing occasions greater concern in the church than the steady decrease in the number of candidates for the gospel ministry. The Committee on Education reported an increase in the annual contributions to the cause, and a consequent addition of thirteen and one-half

per cent. to the maximum amount heretofore promised to each student; but only one hundred and sixty-two candidates received aid during the year. We may be sure that there will be no marked increase in the number of candidates until there is a revival of spiritual religion among us, and until the church begins earnestly to pray the Lord of the harvest to send forth more laborers into his harvest.

Near the close of the session the Assembly adopted a recommendation of the Committee of Bills and Overtures, sending down to the Presbyteries a proposed amendment of the Book of Church Order, the object of which is to eliminate the Latin thesis from the examination of candidates for the ministry, and substitute therefor a thesis in English upon some common head of divinity. We deplore the restlessness in our church which is perpetually seeking for some modification of our standards. This movement to abolish the Latin thesis, which was inaugurated by the Rev. W. L. Lingle, one of our clever and accomplished young ministers, of whom we expected better things, found ready support in the iconoclastic spirit of the chairman of the Committee of Bills and Overtures, and was rushed through at a depleted session of the Assembly, at which less than half of the members were present and voting. We fail to see the wisdom of this amendment, and we confidently hope that it will be overwhelmingly defeated by the Presbyteries. The advantage of the Latin thesis is that it tends to hold up our standard of a liberal classical education for our ministry. No honest man will consent to hand in to his Presbytery a Latin thesis entirely cribbed from Turretin and the *Catechismus Minor*, and we do not believe this is often done. We admit that this exercise is not always prepared with the care which its importance merits, but it is of immense benefit to any student of theology to become acquainted with the Latin terminology common to the great historical discussions of this subject. Ben Jonson characterized Shakespeare's classical attainments by saying that the great poet "knew small Latin and less Greek." It is our experience, in the examination of candidates for the ministry, that the student who is deficient in Latin is, in this respect at least, like Shakespeare, and we would complete the comparison by adding a superlative, and venture to describe such a man's classical education by saying that "he knows small Latin, less Greek, and least Hebrew"! The argument which would abolish the Latin thesis, on the plea that it is not well done, would play havoc with the study of Greek and Hebrew. We beg the iconoclasts in our church, whose tribe, we regret to say, seems

to be increasing, to pause before the whole temple of classical learning in our ministry is destroyed. Before leaving this subject we desire to say that, in our judgment, much that was said in the discussion of this matter in the Assembly was an unwarranted reflection upon the scholarship of our theological students. We are sure that during the past two years several candidates have presented Latin theses as parts of trial before East Hanover Presbytery which gave evidence of great care and diligence in their preparation, and were highly creditable to the authors' knowledge of the Latin language.

The committees on the Twentieth Century Fund and upon Christian Education made elaborate reports showing the encouraging progress which these important movements are making in the church. The interest in education, and whatever pertains to its advancement among us, is spreading, and our people seem to be determined to place our institutions upon a better basis. As our wealth increases, it is to be hoped that the spirit of liberality will advance *pari passu* with it, and that our schools, colleges, and seminaries will receive that hearty and generous support which is necessary for their maintenance and proper equipment. The great educational movement among us, represented by these two committees, is something that cannot be hurried, but is the work of years. Nevertheless, its progress and ultimate success depend upon the enthusiasm and energy with which the people enter into it. We therefore look with much satisfaction upon the wide-spread interest in this cause which manifests itself in the church.

The Assembly's Home and School, at Fredericksburg, Va., was found to be in good condition. Under the efficient management of Mr. S. W. Somerville, the superintendent, and through the self-denying labors of the Rev. H. H. Hawes, D. D., the agent, the institution has been admirably sustained and the outstanding indebtedness reduced to about six thousand dollars. The Assembly instructed the Executive Committee to apportion this sum equally among the Presbyteries, and ask them to make payment as speedily as possible in order that this beloved institution may be relieved from debt, and thus enabled the more satisfactorily to do its work. The Assembly also directed the Executive Committee to confer with the Executive Committee of Ministerial Relief as to the wisdom and propriety of uniting these two causes under the same management. It is not clear that anything will be gained by such an arrangement, but the matter will doubtless receive the earnest consideration of the two committees.

The Committee on Foreign Correspondence brought several matters of importance before the Assembly. One of these was the report of Rev. Dr. McNeilly, our special commissioner to the Synod of Mexico. It was a cheering message from the brethren in our sister republic; and now that the Presbyterian forces are united there, we may expect to hear even better things in the future. We had a report also from the western section of the Alliance of Reformed Churches, and an admirable address from the Rev. G. D. Matthews, General Secretary. The eighth General Council of the Alliance will meet at Liverpool, England, either in June or July, 1904, and the committee nominated delegates to represent our church in that meeting. An effort was made not to appoint any persons who had ever been appointed before, which seemed to us an unnecessary limitation, inasmuch as a number of those who have been appointed to previous councils have been unable to attend, and there appears to have been no sufficient reason why they should have been excluded from the privileges of the next meeting if their brethren desired their presence. The Alliance is doubtless doing good in bringing about a better understanding between the various branches of the Presbyterian faith throughout the world, and is thus far a contribution to the commendable effort to bring together into a more homogeneous and strengthened association the tangled ends of modern Protestantism. As a further contribution to the same desirable consummation, we deeply regret that the overture from certain brethren of Nashville, Tenn., requesting the appointment of a committee to consider the advisability of organic union with the Reformed Church of America did not meet with a more favorable reception. The committee reported against the overture—that is, a majority did—on the ground that the matter should have come before the Assembly in “a more official manner;” and the recommendation of the majority was adopted. Perhaps the Nashville brethren acted without sufficient deliberation; but this question is not a new one in our church, and having come before the Assembly, there was no possible danger in our appointing the committee asked for to counsel with a similar committee from the Reformed Church. The spirit of exclusiveness which has long exercised too much control in our church is neither wise nor Christian, and for ourselves, we shall hail the day with joy when it shall entirely disappear from among us. We cannot persuade ourselves that our church is the only “remnant” left of orthodox Christianity.

The Assembly was deeply concerned about the spiritual condition

of the church as this was revealed in the report of the Committee on the Sabbath and in the narratives from the various Presbyteries. The narrative adopted by the Assembly takes a gloomy view of the state of religious life. We wonder if it presents a true picture of our condition, or if it is not somewhat the reflection of a bad habit we have fallen into of deploring the low state of piety among us. We have heard few narratives read during the last twenty years, whether coming from Sessions, Presbyteries, Synods, or Assemblies, in which the minor tone of lament over the decline of spirituality did not predominate. Is it true that the former days were so much better than these, and the fathers so much more pious than their children? If the story of church historians is to be credited, they were not. The church has always been subject to seasons of spiritual depression, and that which we are now admittedly passing through is not worse than many that have preceded it. We have no disposition to make light of the situation, but neither do we believe in hoisting the white flag of a continual lament and keeping it conspicuously displayed in the presence of the enemy. The Assembly, in answer to some overture, ordered a day of fasting and prayer, which, the papers tell us, was honored in the breach rather than in the observance. The explanation of this may be found by some in the low spiritual life of the church. We prefer to find it, and we believe with better reason, in the fact that the people did not recognize the necessity for such a day. It is a grave mistake to resort to extreme measures when necessity does not require it. The Assembly acted with greater wisdom in adopting a Pastoral Letter on Religion in the Home. This admirable paper was prepared by a committee, consisting of Rev. Drs. G. L. Leyburn and F. M. Woods, and Ruling Elder H. H. Dean; it was ordered to be read in the churches, and the Executive Committee of Publication was directed to publish fifty thousand copies for distribution among the people. There is a tenderness and "sweet reasonableness" in this letter which we believe cannot fail to touch the hearts of parents who have grown neglectful of the family altar, and our united prayer should be that this message may be followed with the demonstration of the Spirit and power. Evil is many-sided, and ungodliness is constantly assuming new shapes. We find it difficult to maintain in the present day many cherished practices in vogue among our fathers. Family prayer is one of them, and its decline is deeply to be deplored. We should be persistent in our efforts to see it revived, just as we should never cease to fight for the proper observance of the Sabbath. Still, we insist that a certain growing laxity

in these matters does not necessarily imply, as some would have us believe, that spiritual life is dying, and that faith in Christ will soon cease to exist. Spiritual life in this respect, like ungodliness, manifests itself in new forms, and if out of the whole body of Christians a greater number are careless in family religion and Sabbath observance than formerly, it is also true that a greater number than formerly are engaged in active Christian work, there are more intelligent students of the Scriptures, there are more consecrated liberal givers, and there is a far more wide-spread interest than ever before in the evangelization of the world. Modern Christianity, while it has modified some of its old-time characteristics, yet has assumed many new phases which are obviously in the nature of a proper scriptural development, and it is certainly unwise and short-sighted in God's people in lamenting over our losses to forget our gains. We walk by faith, and not by sight, and, on the whole, the outlook is cheering.

RUSSELL CECIL.

Richmond, Va.

THE NORTHERN ASSEMBLY.

THE Assembly which met in Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, New York, on the 15th of May, 1902, was a meeting of unusual historic importance.

It was noted for the prominence which it gave to the subject of Home Missions. This great cause was lifted into the place of preëminence by an elaborate celebration of the one hundredth anniversary of the organization of this branch of the church's work. The occasion gave birth to several addresses of lofty and inspiring eloquence, and to some papers of permanent historical value. The review of the century's achievements in Home Missions necessarily pointed attention to the marvellous expansion of our national life. It showed how the church had ever before it the worthy task of keeping step with the hardy pioneers who followed the star of empire as westward it took its course. "The Winning of the West" is a thrilling story, filled with deeds of daring, and the pathos of patient suffering. Those who bore a worthy part in the conquest did not wear soft clothing, nor dwell in king's houses; they were toil-stained and weather-beaten, rugged heroes, filled fresh from nature's fountain with the great elemental forces of life. They were in advance of the deteriorating influence of a luxurious and pampered civilization. Among these worthies, standing in the very front rank, and