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DELIVERED AT THE

CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

OF THE

## GENERAL ASSEMBLY

OF THE

# Presbyterian Church,

PHILADELPHIA, PA.,

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## HOME MISSIONS.

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*Cincinnati, Ohio.*

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THE home mission field of the American Presbyterian Church is a chosen sphere of providential preparation for prophetic purpose. Its shores are washed by the two great commercial oceans. Its land is bisected by the Mississippi Valley and trisected by the Allegheny and the Rocky mountains. With a diversity of elevation from the sea level to three thousand feet above timber line, and with a climatic range from the tropical to the high latitudes of Northern Maine, Montana and Alaska; it furnishes fit surroundings for every plant that is good for food, or shade or beauty—for every animal that is useful for pleasure or for labor, and for every taste and want of man. Its interlocked web of railroad and of telegraph makes each inhabitant the next-door neighbor of every other. The people of this land understand one language, enjoy one system of laws, are protected by one government, love one flag, centre their hopes in a common future and believe in a common Christianity. Insignificant minorities may here and there dissent from either of these, but in view of their diverse origins this is a wonderfully homogeneous people.

Without going into minute details let us endeavor to grasp the leading groups of its 60,000,000 of inhabitants. If we can correctly comprehend the character and tendencies of the present 60,000,000, we can without much uncertainty determine what will be the character of the hundreds of millions which will be its population in the near future. As to races, about 2,000,000 are native Indians or Mexicans; 8,000,000 are colored people of the South; 10,000,000 are foreigners not yet Americanized, and the other 40,000,000, though many are foreign born or born of foreign parents, are English-thinking Americans. As to the ages of these 60,000,000, one-third are children under fifteen years of age, and two-thirds or 40,000,000 are adults.

If we turn now from race and age to the religious characteristics of these people, recent statistics will show that 12,000,000

are professing Christians of the various evangelical denominations. We may count about 4,000,000 more of their total 7,000,000 as the earnest adults of the Romish Church, making a total of about 16,000,000 or more than one-third of the adult population of 40,000,000 in this country in direct, avowed and intentional union with some branch of the Christian Church. I do not call the Romanism of this country identical with the Romanism of lands where the Pope has undisputed sway. I should by no means rate them along with Protestants, but in this land of free Bibles, free schools, unlimited travel, complicated business relations and abundant newspapers, no Romanist can so escape the knowledge of the distinction between Protestantism and Catholicism as to evade the responsibility of his own position. But even omitting the Romanists from the account, if the Protestant-professing Christians of this land were equally distributed among the whole population, each Christian would only have four persons (and two of them children) for whose information as to the Gospel he would be responsible.

By the best available statistics (those of Dr. Dorchester) there is now a Protestant minister for every 692 of our population, and a church for every 518 of that same population. It is thus perfectly obvious that unity and energy, blessed by the spirit of God, is amply adequate to hold and mould this nation for God and His Bible.

This hopeful prospect is greatly brightened by the recollection of the rapidity with which through the last one hundred years Christianity has been gaining control in this land. When, one hundred years ago, the General Synod dissolved itself and left the General Assembly the Supreme Court of our Church, the best information would only give 1500 ministers then to more than 60,000 Protestant ministers now, and 2000 churches then to 120,000 Protestant churches now. In 1880 the communicants were only one in every fourteen of the inhabitants. By 1886 there was more than one communicant to every five inhabitants. From 1850 to 1886 the population increased 152 per cent; while the communicants have increased 243 per cent. It has come now to this, that there are about as many ministers in this country as there are "saloon-keepers and bar-tenders;" the census of 1880 reporting 64,698 "clergymen," and 68,461 "saloon-keepers and bar-tenders."

The record of our Church in this growth is a noble one. One hundred years ago the General Synod represented but a small number of ministers, churches and church members. The revolutionary war was not so exclusively political or financial as it is often represented. Along with the sentiment that resisted "taxation without representation," there was also

a sentiment that Presbyterian freedom in this land was in grievous danger from the intolerance of prelacy. The churchmen were generally Tories; the Presbyterians and the Congregationalists were mostly patriots. Dr. John Witherspoon in the Continental Congress and his signature to the Declaration of Independence was a just symbol of the attitude of the denomination which appointed him to preach the opening sermon of its first General Assembly. The nation tried the "independent" method of government by the articles of confederation. Those articles made the general government a national council, with liberty to advise anything and power to enforce nothing. The new Constitution of Madison, Jefferson and Hamilton, which was adopted by the States in that memorable year, 1788, was simply the representative republicanism of Presbyterian Church government applied to the nation. Presbyterians of that day little comprehended how rapid their growth would be when the call of the battle-field would give place to the call of the mission-field, and, relieved of the distractions of a disorganized and inefficient government, they should be allowed to take up their Church work in quiet and in peace, under the stable rule of delegated authority.

In these figures I now give I count in, not only the numbers of the bodies here assembled to-day, but the numbers of that earnest and evangelical body, the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. That Church maintains its Presbyterian form of government and recognizes itself as an offshoot of that denomination which organized the General Assembly in 1788. Here is one century's work. The 177 ministers and 431 churches and 18,000 communicants of 1788, have grown to 8333 ministers, 11,212 churches and 1,007,311 communicants now.

It is often said that Calvinistic theology destroys all efficient motives to good works. The Home Mission history of our Church in this land is an extremely practical reply. Whatever religion will convert the pocketbooks of its church members has given the very best proof of the thoroughness of its regenerating work. The two bodies represented here had last year 847,165 members, and gave, from 1881 to 1887, \$4,865,330 for home missions. There are other bodies, with two-and-a-half times as many members, and none gave within a million dollars as much for Home Missions in the same time.

So when measured by this test of religious charity and aggressive evangelism, orthodox religion stands in sharp contrast both with scientific skepticism and the so-called "liberal Christianity." Prof. Yeomans, the ablest scientific skeptic of this land of his day, was keenly alive to this proof of the power of Bible religion. He said, "While there are \$54,000,000

invested in churches in New York City, if there is a scientific society in New York that owns a roof or a shelter I do not know of it. Religious people everywhere are pouring out their money in behalf of all manner of religious enterprises in quantities that are without precedent, and that we take it as very solid proof in this money-grabbing age of the reality of their faith and the intensity of their enthusiasm." So Unitarians and Universalists and those odds and ends of ministers and churches, that claim the curious name of "liberals" in religion, set themselves forward as having a monopoly of "advanced religious thought." The peculiar character of their advancement is singularly illustrated in their movement as to number of churches as compared with the number of evangelical churches from 1850 to 1886. In 1850 the evangelical churches numbered about 40,000 congregations, and those of these so-called liberal Christians numbered about 1300. In 1886 the evangelical churches had increased to over 120,000 congregations and the liberal congregations were *twenty-six less* than they were in 1850. Their adoption of the name "liberal" Christians is a curious illustration of how a people can select, as the descriptive adjective in their name, the one conspicuous adjective that gathers in itself the bitterest irony in the light of their conduct. If "liberal Christianity" has an organization for either Home or Foreign Missions, its officers are unknown to the public; but evangelical Christianity has during the current century contributed quite \$100,000,000 for Home Missions alone, not to say anything of \$75,000,000 more contributed to Foreign Missions. The patrons of liberal Christianity and advanced thought, to save their money in the way of establishing educational institutions, began the century by stealing Harvard University, and are closing the century by stealing Andover Seminary.

The Presbyterian denominations here represented have always been in the very forefront in Home Mission effort. Record of earnestness is found in the earliest minutes that are extant of the first Presbytery, for in 1707 it is enjoined that "every minister of the Presbytery supply neighboring desolate places." The subject was before the First General Assembly, for it called on the Synods to recommend suitable missionaries, and the next Assembly, in 1790, appointed Nathan Ker and Joshua Hart as missionaries to labor for three months for \$100 each. So it went on growing till 1802, when a "standing committee" was appointed. It has now reached magnificent proportions, in work for Home Missions, Freedmen, Evangelistic work, Sabbath-school and Publication, Church Erection, etc. Last year, to the various organizations engaged in one or other form of Home Missionary work, our 845,167

members gave \$1,052,944 in money, or an amount equal to \$1.24½ per member, and this too when the amount given per member by evangelical Christians to Home Missions is an average of only thirty-three cents per member.

But it will be said that the explanation of all this is found in the failure of the Presbyterian Church in its Home Mission work to preach the Gospel to the ignorant and the poor. Such a statement, however, entirely overlooks the real difficulty the Presbyterian Church meets in preaching to the ignorant and the poor. The real difficulty is that the ignorant do not stay ignorant under such preaching, and the poor when converted and educated will not stay poor. Calvinism is a coherent system of logical doctrine and is developed by rational and consistent study of the word of God as God's word. Every sermon is an education. All its thought tends to vigorous intellectual development. The study of the Shorter Catechism is a first-class mental gymnastic. Such preaching, such books and such newspapers, together with the persistent study of God's word in the Sabbath-school and in the home will thoroughly cure the ignorance of those that are under such influences.

So in the cities and in the country the Gospel is preached throughout the poorer districts by Presbyterian missionaries, Sunday-school workers and godly men and women. If now the converts of these regions would stay poor, we would get credit for what we are doing. But the theology which requires of converts that they should persevere in religious conduct, whether man sees them or not, and solely from the motive of heartfelt love to a Redeemer, makes young men and women worth more in the commercial market on account of their integrity. It makes them energetic, economical and thrifty. As a result in every large city and, to no small extent, also in the rural districts, there is a steady stream flowing from these sections where the Gospel is preached to the poor, to those districts where those have settled who have accumulated property. What is needed is simply that those who owe wealth and intelligence to Presbyterian inspiration and culture should not forget the "rock whence they were hewn, nor the hole of the pit whence they were digged," but in their prosperity stand by with their bounty the churches and missions where they first were found by the Saviour.

If from this survey of the past any should inquire as to the forces to be relied on for the future, *past victories are an ample answer*. Now the tide is all in our favor. One hundred years ago French sympathy in the revolution made atheism popular, and this century opened with a sharp struggle between skepticism and formalism on the one side and Home Mission revivals



on the other. The future probably has not for American Christianity another conflict under such disadvantages. In this connection it is important not to overlook two collateral forces which have substantially come into being within the last century, and are sure to play a conspicuous part in the next. Both will be either allies or enemies of the Church, and will be affected by the Church and powerfully influence the work of the Church.

The first of these is the American free school. Puritans and Presbyterians one hundred years ago planted the school beside the Church; and out of this determination of their people to educate their children grew that unique thing, the American Public School System. Of course, it is not now all that it should be. Justifying its taxation of the childless rich on the plea that it proposes to make the children of this generation good citizens in the next, it yet with ludicrous inconsistency for want of compulsory attendance leaves the children of the dangerous classes to grow up without education. And to keep up the consistency of its inconsistency, while admitting that mere secular knowledge without morality only makes criminals more skillful, the American free school sets itself up as worthy of support by taxation, because it teaches morality while excluding from its text-books that only standard of American morals, the Christian Bible. That Bible ought to be put back into these schools. But, without being blind to these defects, it must not be forgotten that the 250,000 teachers of this land are as a mass people whose oral instructions and whose lives enforce genuine Christian morals. They may not formally teach the Bible, but we ought to be profoundly thankful that to so large an extent they live it and assume its truth. Neither in the large cities nor in the most secluded backwoods district is it possible for teachers of known corrupt life and character to maintain their position. The licentious, the profane and the vulgar are by public opinion absolutely excluded from this work of training the children. As a result the Church is relieved from the expense of a large part of this educational work, and in its religious labors starts far in advance of what it otherwise could do. These 250,000 American school-teachers are efficient allies in the maintenance of virtue and the establishment of the truth, and ought to have our incessant prayers.

In 1800 there were not more than 200 secular newspapers in this country, and not a single religious newspaper till sixteen years later. At present this is the land of great dailies, multitudinous weeklies, diversified monthly magazines and ponderous quarterlies. Undoubtedly the secular press of this country is very far from what it ought to be. By its Sunday editions

and its superabundance of sensational, blood-curdling accounts of crime it is responsible for a great deal of vice. On the other hand, however, it must not be forgotten that, though newspapers may differ as to the actual character of public men and institutions, they do not seriously differ in their standard of morality. Lying, fraud, dishonesty, profanity, licentiousness and all such evils are almost universally denounced and exposed. Not a few of these papers may indirectly undermine public morals, but probably none of them will avow such a purpose. Thousands of them, especially of the weekly papers, are edited by men of the purest character and the deepest religious principle. We cannot easily overrate their value as conservators of public morals and antagonists of covert crime. They efficiently promote every genuine public charity and philanthropic movement, and even their criticisms of ministers and denominations, though oftentimes unjust and severe, are not specially unhealthy. He does well who uses his influence for the purification of this press and uses the press as an organ for the promulgation of philanthropy and religion. If the press was prayed for as much as it is denounced, it would probably be improved.

With this century along side of this secular press have grown up the religious weeklies of this country. It is capable of demonstration by figures, that the religious press is growing in its circulation more rapidly in proportion than is the secular. That growing circulation is proof of the increasing religious character of our people and of the tremendous power Christianity wields through that same religious press. He has a large congregation who as a preacher is heard by two thousand people per week. That is an utterly insignificant newspaper which is not read by twice that number. When, therefore, we are considering our resources for that century on which we this day enter, let us enroll on the very forefront of our efficient agencies the religious papers published in the interests of the denominations here represented.

In all that has been thus far said, no word has been uttered that was intended to disparage the importance of our sister evangelical denominations in the Christianizing of this American Home Mission field. These sister denominations are our allies, our friends and loyal soldiers under the common Captain of our salvation. We greet them well to-day. We rejoice in their success and call them to rejoice in ours. United Protestantism is doing a workingman's day's work every day in these United States. "Each hour for ten hours of every day a new congregation is gathered and a new pastor ascends a new pulpit to speak for God and humanity, for temperance and for law, and above all and beyond all to call sinners to

repent and believe in Jesus Christ for the salvation of souls." In view, therefore, of what we are doing, the question as to what is wanted for the future has but one answer. *The future calls for simply the intensifying of the aggressiveness of the past.* We want no new Gospel and no merely sensational machinery as a substitute for "the old story of the cross" and the divinely appointed messengers and means of grace. These have shown ample flexibility in adapting themselves to every new device of Satan and every new form of work. The territory of this land is covered with Presbyteries made up of ministers and churches thoroughly alive to the needs of the age and with keen eyes to see and seize each point of strategic importance. The men whom God by the voice of His Church has called to organize and push this Home Mission work in our denominations are of the Bismarck style of ability in administration, and of the Von Moltke type of generalship in the field, and thoroughly loyal to their heavenly King. We occasionally hear charges of needless competition in small fields as between the denominations here met together, but remembering that we are all human the extreme rarity of these charges is proof positive that they are mainly groundless. The whole ministry and membership of both Churches are on the eager watch against any needless waste of funds. If there was anything in the charge the clamor would be persistent. When a whole forest is thronged with hunters and only at very rare intervals a chance-shot is heard and then no wild meat is bagged, you may be sure that game is scarce in those woods. Men who have hard work to raise money are sure not to waste it on needless territory. Brethren, we are able to furnish the cities, towns and sparse districts in this land abundantly with the preaching of the Gospel, and so long as no large population is neglected let us not be mean toward small towns.

To do that work completely but three things are needed, the Holy Ghost, the living men and the means to send them.

The only place where there is danger of lack of zeal is in the matter of pocketbook and bank account piety. The providential indications are most assuring that this too is coming. Wealth is rapidly learning that city missionaries are a better protection than policemen, and that the converted are neither anarchists nor communists. If for no other reason, self-preservation is compelling mission work in cities and in rural districts. On every side the rising tide of benevolence proves that pentecostal liberality was only the prophecy of its culmination in this passing dispensation of the Holy Spirit. I believe that the present spirit of the Church within and the present providence of God without justifies the confidence that

the benevolence of the past in this land shall be outshone in the triumphs of the future, and that the Church of God will really take and possess this land. The men and women for the work as missionaries and teachers have always been on hand in larger supply than the secretaries were able to send. In the name of the young men and women of our Presbyterian Church, I protest against every insinuation that the missionary spirit of self-sacrifice and that crusade spirit of chivalry which covets opportunities to bear hardship for the Master are wanting among them. You have but to let them know that means for a living support are provided and you can go through the colleges and female seminaries of our Church, and the summons of your slogan will bring after you in trooping crowds the brightest, the best and the strongest of our sons and daughters anxious for this work for the glory of God.

The one supreme need of the Church is, however, that promised gift of God's Holy Ghost. To give that is in His plan and promise. In geologic ages He built this continent. In time's fullness He filled it with His Church. He will not let His purpose fail for lack of "power from on high" on that Church in this work. And more—His purpose for this land ends not in this land. He made the American Church what it is for that large work it can do, and has to do in obedience to Him, in the conversion of the other lands of the earth from the darkness of heathenism to the noonday of the Gospel. Right gladly, therefore, do I resign this platform to my brother, who will lay before you that plea in the name of God for the nations of the earth.