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I. Literary.

PASTORAL VISITING.*

By Rev. E. M. Green, D. D.

While preaching is the chief work, it is by no means the only work of the ministerial office. In order to perform the duties of his calling with any measure of fidelity, the pastor must come near to his people—nearer than he can get in the pulpit. It is the "house-to-house" part of his work that brings him and his message into closest contact with them. Not only does pulpit work need to be supplemented by personal work, but his intercourse with his people in their varied and often striking experiences develops to the pastor's view innumerable applications of divine truth, sometimes new and surprising; the experimental knowledge thus acquired he carries back with him to his study and his closet, and subjecting it to the crucible of his own thoughts, he seems to get a new message from on high; then carries that message into the pulpit, prepared to preach with unwonted appropriateness to their real necessities. The best sermons are not manufactured in the study; they are born amid the throes of pastoral sympathy.

The pastor must know his people—know them all, old and young; and there is no way in which this can be done so well as seeing them in their homes. He must cultivate their affections, drawing them to himself, that thereby he may draw them to Christ. He should feel, and lead them to feel, that he is one with them in heart, and in those great interests of the soul which bind men closest together—one with them not only in church

* Part of an address to the students of Union Theological Seminary, May 28, 1899.

THE VETO POWER OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY, ONCE MORE.

By Rev. Thomas C. Johnson, D. D., Union Theological Seminary.

I. Reasons for Speaking on this Subject Again.

We hope to clear up a possible misconception on the part of some of one of the arguments used by us in the last issue, to dissipate some supposed corollaries from our position, presented by a champion of the view of the minority, and incidentally to illustrate somewhat the moral beauty of representative government of the Southern Presbyterian type, and particularly to show the moral excellence of the paragraph 142 of our Book as interpreted by us.

II. The Contention on the Subject of the Assembly's Veto Power in the Last Issue Stated, and Confirmed.

Our contention was that the Assembly has the right to veto a change proposed by a previous Assembly and approved by a majority of the presbyteries, if the enacting body judges the change to be wrong or injurious.

We argued, *first,* from the representative character of our Presbyterian Church government. The representative principle characterizes the whole system. Hence the members of our higher courts are not, and cannot be, instructed delegates. They are not deputies, tools. Hence the vote of a presbytery in favor of a proposed amendment cannot be construed as an instruction to its representatives. We argued, *second,* from the most natural interpretation of, and the history of, paragraph 142.

These points were but briefly pressed, as our editors had limited our space; and to-day we still have but little space and less time for that which we wish to say. The most of this must be given to a consideration of the corollaries supposed to follow from our position; but a word in the way of the confirmation of our arguments:

1. We take it for granted that our assertion of the *representative* character of our church government will be admitted by all

intelligent Presbyterians, and that most of our critics will feel obliged to show that the representative principle lapses in the particular sphere of amending the constitution in order to break the force of our argument; but in doing this, they will have to show also that in this sphere the moral beauty and glory of our government which elsewhere places obligation to right, truth, duty and God so high, lapses; that our government in this sphere no longer makes God the Lord, but a body of men who have expressed their will by a formal vote. This is horrible, but they must do it. They must show that a commissioner in the Assembly, while engaged in enacting a part of a constitution which he offers to the world as the true interpretation of God's word as he sees it, is the deputy, the tool, of a presbytery, and as such must execute its will when he knows it to be wrong, and that he is not a *representative* of the church, of whose conscience God is the Lord.

Hence, from the character of Presbyterian government—from the representative principle—from the principle that the members of our church courts must do about every matter that which they think they ought to do in the light of the requirements of God's word as interpreted by the constitution so far as made, which constitution, all agree, must make God the Lord of the conscience, we would say of paragraph 142, it must be capable of such an interpretation as to leave God the Lord of the conscience. Else it is a monstrosity and a foul blot in our Presbyterian standards.

If this paragraph 142 could be fairly construed as the minority construe it, it ought to be thrust with horror from the Book.

2. Our interpretation of this paragraph, given with intelligible clearness in our former article, we observe, further, allows it to have harmony with the rest of the standards, allows God to be Lord of the conscience in the work of amending the standards. Moreover, 142, ii. must be looked at in connection with the amendment enacted by the Assembly of 1884, 142, III. (See p. 54, Book of Church Order), which was in the following words, "Amendments to the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of this church may be made only upon the recommendation of one General Assembly, the concurrence of at least three-fourths of the presbyteries, and the enactment of the same by a subsequent Assembly." We take it that few brethren will be rash enough to

say that a veto power is not given here to the second of the two Assemblies spoken of; but for the benefit of any who do not quite see, we may point to the fact that in the year 1884, the very year of the enactment of this amendment, a presbytery overtured the Assembly of that year to order to be prefixed "to all future editions of the Confession as an organic part of the same," "the provision of the Synod of 1788 for amending the Confession of Faith and Catechisms by two-thirds of the presbyteries proposing alterations and amendments to be enacted by a subsequent General Assembly." (See Minutes, 1884, p. 249.) The movement of the time was in the direction of making it more difficult to change our standards; but this overture shows that some did not sympathize therewith. The phraseology of the amendment of 1884 was deliberately chosen to make change of the Confession of Faith and Catechisms possible only by the concurrent action of two Assemblies and three-fourths of the Presbyteries. Moreover, intelligent men of the time understood the amendment as we understand it. For instance, in the *Central Presbyterian* of June 4, 1884, we read, in the report of the Assembly, "An amendment was *enacted* providing that the Confession of Faith may be changed by two General Assemblies and three-fourths of the presbyteries concurring." The meaning of the amendment of 1884 is as we have described. We know this not only for the foregoing, but for other reasons as well; and this shows that in regard to proposed changes of the most important parts of the standards the Assembly has the veto power. Now who will dare to say that 142, ii. should not be interpreted in harmony with 142, iii., if that can be done without straining?

Once more, the meaning put upon paragraph 142, ii. by men in 1884 appears in references to Dr. Farris' overture of that year as an overture "to change the mode of amending "the Book of Church Order." Dr. Farris' endeavor was not looked upon as an effort to change the phraseology, but the *mode of amending,* and that too within the first five years after the adoption of the new Book of Church Order when the framers of the book were as yet, for the most part, alive and sensitive to all interpretations placed upon it. They thus appear to have interpreted the paragraph as we ourselves.

But some one says, "What will you do with the *shall* in paragraph 142, ii.? This paragraph does not say 'a succeeding Gen-

eral Assembly *may* enact. That would make it discretionary with the body; but it says *shall* enact, and *shall is always imperative in the second and third persons.*" We answer, but after a conditional conjunction, "*shall* is used in all persons to express futurity simply;" and that is the case here. Nobody can doubt it who understands the character of our Presbyterian government, or the history of this particular paragraph.

Some of our readers may regard us as having spent too much of our short space in demonstrating that two times two are four, in proving what was already so clear as to need no proof. Our apology is that one of the readers of our last article wrote us that *shall* always expressed a command in the second and third person, and that our standards nowhere give to the Assembly veto power.

He was wrong in both assertions, as perhaps in a score of others in the same letter. But from another brother came a letter of a different sort. Admitting the justice of our contention, he yet supposed certain unpleasant corollaries to flow from it; and he asked us to consider them and write on them for the pages of the Magazine. We propose accordingly to turn to those he presented, together with two others suggested from another quarter.

III. Supposed Troublesome Corollaries From Our Position.

First, "There is no sense in submitting the proposed amendment to the Presbyteries if the Assembly succeeding has the power to reverse their vote."

This is not a true corollary from our position. While the Assembly has the right of veto, it may not wish to exercise it, but, on the contrary, to enact the proposed change. The possibility of a change being defeated by the Assembly certainly grounds no right of inaction on the part of the Presbyteries any more than the possibility of the Presbyteries' defeating a proposed amendment should ground a right of an Assembly's refusing to propose an amendment which it saw ought to be made. Our church government proceeds on an humble view of man's capacity, on his liability to err, and on the view therefore that his government should be highly constitutional, one power bearing on another as a check, as well as a servant. There is, as in every

thoroughly constitutional government, a provision of checks, in the form of demands for concurrent majorities. Take the case before us. The majority of one Assembly is utterly impotent to effect an amendment. It can propose it and refer the proposal to the Presbyteries for their action; that is all. The majority, even the three-fourth's majority, of the Presbyteries cannot amend the book by themselves; but they can consider the proposed change and declare their vote to the succeeding Assembly. They can defeat the proposed change, or further it so far. The succeeding Assembly, apart from the action of the Presbyteries and of the foregoing Assembly, can do nothing; but if it chooses to enact the change, if its majority act concurrently with that of the preceding Assembly and that of the Presbyteries, the proposed amendment becomes law.

You say, "This is a slow way to secure a good thing." We say, Yes, but it is equally a slow way to get a bad thing. And one merit of our system is that so many bodies are required to narrowly examine a proposed change that if it be wrong, the wrong is apt to be discovered; and if it be right, clearly right, that also is apt to be discovered; and the change not made, or made, according as it is wrong or right.

It is to us a profound source of satisfaction, seeing we already have standards of such excellence that our representative and constitutional government provides a tedious mode of changing them; and calls for the employment of the united wisdom of all her presbyteries and of two Assemblies, separated by the interval of a year ordinarily, in order to effect a change. But this by the way.

There is certainly sense in submitting a proposed amendment to the Presbyteries, because otherwise no change can ever be made. The Presbyteries must favor the amendment, and formally declare the fact, else the Assembly's efforts are estopped.

Second, "The Presbyteries will soon get to sending men known to be in accord with the majority vote of the Presbytery. The theory you contend for will not work."

We answer that it has been working in our church. There are many Presbyteries where it has worked gloriously for years. Take a Presbytery like our own, Roanoke. We might elect a good man supposed to be fully competent to serve the church as commissioner from Roanoke in the Assembly; we might elect

him in part because he was known to represent the prevailing view of the Presbytery on a proposed change in the standards; but I am sure that the Presbytery would not for one moment regard him as our tool, deputy, but as our commissioner going to the Assembly as a servant of God, bound to seek light on all the subjects to be handled there, and to do the thing he thinks he ought, according to the constitution, after availing himself of the light of the united wisdom of the Assembly. We would hope that he would show just that sort of Christian manhood shown by the retiring Moderator at our last Assembly, who stood on the floor and declared that, though he had voted in one way on the question in his Presbytery, and with the majority of the Presbytery, he now felt that duty to God and the church called upon him to vote to the contrary, since the light subsequently thrown on the question had convinced him of the mistake of both himself and the Presbytery.

Oh! yes, our theory will "work," work gloriously. It has worked; is working. It helps to make large manhood in Christ Jesus as well as to guide the church into wise paths.

Third, "Your view does not seem to harmonize with the facts of history. The General Assembly in America grew up out of the Presbyteries, and whatever power it has, it has only because the Presbyteries delegated these powers to it."

Now, I remark on this objection that it is a worthless old petard, incapable of damaging any position; that it is not filled with good giant powder at all, but with fictions instead of facts, and confusion instead of clear judgment. The constitution of the General Assembly did not emanate from the Presbyteries. There is in many quarters an impression that it did, but the impression is without foundation in fact. "The Presbyteries," says Samuel J. Baird in his able *History of the New School,* "were not called to take any part whatever in the transaction, except that the General Synod sent them for perusal a copy of the first Draught of the Constitution it was about to establish, and invited them to submit their remarks upon it. But it was not framed by their instrumentality, nor submitted to their vote; but, by the Synod ordained as the fundamental law of the church, to which Presbyterians were required to conform themselves." Our

* *History of the New School*, p. 129.

brethren who appeal to history should learn it. Baird knew this history.

Then, in talking of the Assembly's power as being delegated power—that power delegated by the Presbyteries—they practically say that the Assembly is not a court of the church at all. They seem to make it a sort of executive committee of the Presbyteries. They truncate our system of courts and the very principle of unity, and give us instead of the Presbyterian Church a member of Presbyteries, which Presbyteries they may on the same principle abolish, save as executive committees of the sessions, and thus bring us to independency. Moreover, as they know so much of "delegated power" and the right of Presbyteries to instruct their "delegate," and, we suppose, of members of sessions to instruct their representatives to Presbyteries, they will make us double-first cousins to the Congregationalists.

Space fails us to notice other absurdities bound up in this objection to our position.

Fourth, "Your interpretation is a dangerous step toward the centralization of power, and *in the direction of Prelacy.*"

We have taken no step at all. Re-read our former article and this one for proof. But we have endeavored to show that paragraph 142, is susceptible of our interpretation, and must be so interpreted in order to have harmony with the rest of the standards and leave God the Lord of the consciences of our commissioners in the General Assembly. We have, too, taught nothing derogatory to the constitutional rights of the Presbytery. We have endeavored in these papers to follow Thomas E. Peck and James Henley Thornwell as they followed God's teaching. Hear Dr. Peck:

"The dictum by which the unity of the church, the power of the parts, and the power of the whole over the particular parts, are expressed is as follows: 'The power of the whole is in every part, and the power of the whole is over the *power* of every part.' The power of the Presbyterian Church of the United States is in the General Assembly, the Synod, the Presbytery, the Session, and the power of the General Assembly is over the power of the Synod, Presbytery, Session. This last expression is intended to preserve the rights and powers belonging to the lower courts (guaranteed by the constitution). The General Assembly has

no power directly *over the part,* but only over the *power* of the part, which implies that the part has a power.[1] "

The charge made against us here is made in sheer misunderstanding. We do not tend to centralization. But we have the General Assembly a *court* of the church; we have oneness to the church; we have our standards so far consistent with themselves; we have God the Lord of the conscience.

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[1] *Ecclesiology*, pp. 196, 197.