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THE CHALLENGE OF SCIENCE.*

FRAZER HOOD, Ph. D., Litt. D.,
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In a recent issue of a national literary weekly my eye was caught by these words: "The present age has little use for logical subtilities, 'facts, not theories,' is its motto. Yet a little dialectic might save civilization. . . . Plato did not know countless things which we know, but had he known them he would have seen to it that something better came of them than the made world in which we live."

This editorial comment was occasioned by the phrase, "the rush of progress, a menace to the world," occurring in an ad-

*This article was the first of a series of addresses delivered by Dr. Hood last January in Schaffer Hall, Union Seminary, Richmond, Va.

How happy the meeting when we have done His will. So I close my penknife and restore it to my pocket. I thank God for the little letter that taught me so much. I have found it bright with all heavenly light, rich with all Gospel Grace, and charged with a divine message to my soul. Its place in the inspired Book is justified. It has also found a lodging place in my grateful heart.

THE LEXINGTON ASSEMBLY, 1925.

By REV. WALTER L. LINGLE, D. D., LL. D.,
*President of The General Assembly's Training School for Lay
Workers, Richmond, Va.*

This article is not intended to be a connected narrative of all that was said and done at the recent meeting of the General Assembly of our Church at Lexington, Ky. It is rather intended to review and discuss some of the more important matters which came before the Assembly.

Entertainment.

It has been my privilege to attend a great many meetings of the General Assembly, and I can testify that the Assembly has always been handsomely entertained wherever it has met, but Lexington went a little beyond anything that I ever saw before. It was one round of entertainment after another. All of this was exceedingly delightful and added a great deal to the pleasure of the commissioners, but from the point of view of the work which the Assembly needs to do, there is such a thing as too much entertainment. A good deal of time was spent in the early days of the Assembly in making excursions of one kind or another. The result was a very crowded docket and much hurried work in the last two days. Perhaps the stated clerk and moderator ought to be appointed as a committee to advise beforehand with the church in which the Assembly is to

meet as to how much entertainment is compatible with good work on the part of the Assembly.

The Moderator.

The election of the moderator is the one thing in every Assembly that excites most interest. By the way, the Assembly of the Northern Presbyterian Church has appointed a committee to devise a new method of electing the moderator so that the presbyteries may have a part in his election, as is the case in some branches of the Presbyterian Church.

Rev. George Summey, D. D., LL. D., of New Orleans, was elected moderator on second ballot, and filled the office with grace, dignity and fairness. The brethren who are always eager to raise points of order were practically out of a job, for the moderator's decisions left no points to be raised.

The Stated Clerk.

No Assembly ever had a more efficient stated clerk than Rev. J. D. Leslie, D. D. Perhaps the average commissioner does not realize how much the stated clerk does before and during the Assembly to make the wheels of the machinery go smoothly. What is more, he has the grace of doing this without being or seeming officious.

Review of the Year.

The chief work of the Assembly is to review the work of the past year, and to plan for the work of the coming year. The review of the work of the past year is done mainly through the reports of the Executive Committees and the various other agencies of the Church. It would be exceedingly valuable if some good writer, with the gift of condensation, could take all these reports and weave them into one story, giving a bird's-eye view of all that the Church has done at home and abroad during the year.

As a matter of fact, rather short shift is made of these re-

ports. For example, the Secretary of Foreign Missions will take the printed report of his committee, and spend ten minutes as a maximum in calling the attention of the Assembly to some of the high points in it. A printed copy of the report is then placed in the hands of the commissioners. In this same way all the reports are presented in the shortest possible time, and printed copies put in the hands of the commissioners. It would be interesting to know how many commissioners read these reports or even keep them.

We ought to find a more excellent way of presenting these reports, and of thus giving the Assembly a clear-cut view of the Church and its work. We might leave off some of the many excursions, or leave out some of the so-called popular meetings, and give more time to each secretary or chairman to present his report adequately, with the distinct understanding that the secretary would not spend his time in exhortations, but in laying the facts of his department before the Assembly. For the time being he would be an instructor, telling the Assembly of the work of his department for the year.

The view of the Church which we got through these reports this year did not drive us into roseate optimism, but it was hopeful. From the financial point of view there was some decrease in contributions, but more members were added to the Church on profession than in any previous year in the history of our Church, with the exception of 1921, which reported 169 more members on profession than was reported this year. The total membership of our Church is now 456,585.

Standing Committees

Until three years ago it was the custom for the moderator to appoint all the Standing Committees of the Assembly. That was a tremendous task. A new rule became operative three years ago. By this rule all the commissioners are divided into about a dozen nominating sections. Each of those sections meets and nominates a certain number of members of each committee. The moderator then chooses the chairmen for the

various committees. This plan saves a great deal of time, takes a great load off the moderator, makes the committees more representative, and puts every man in the Assembly on some committee.

More and more of the work of the Assembly is being done by these Standing Committees. This is necessarily true as the work of the Church grows larger. It is also a fact that many of the ablest commissioners spend more time in committee meetings than they do in the Assembly proper. They are absent from the Assembly when very important questions are up for discussion and action. This ought not to be. It might be avoided in two ways. First of all, let the committees leave off some of the excursions and entertainments and get down to work. In the second place, let the Assembly adjourn the whole of Friday afternoon and the whole of Saturday if need be, in order that all committees may have their work ready for the opening of the Assembly on Monday morning.

The Church at Peace.

The Judicial Committee made a very significant report. The complete report reads as follows: "Your Committee on Judicial Business reports that it is a matter of gratitude to God that the Church seems to be at peace, as there is nothing of a judicial nature before the Assembly." The newspapers played this up in large headlines. It was news.

This was a peace-loving Assembly. There were very few sharp or vehement words. We cannot be at peace with sin and wrong, but why should it be considered a strange thing when brethren dwell together and work together in peace and unity.

The Assembly also stood for peace on earth and good will among men and nations. A strong anti-war resolution was adopted and then reconsidered and replaced by one that was a bit milder. The leading advocates of the peace resolution were a group of the younger men who were in the great war. The Bible ideal for the world is that it should be a warless world, and all Christians should work and pray to that end.

The Country Church.

For several years the Assembly has given much time to the consideration of the country church. This is a subject of large importance. Lincoln said that the Lord must love the common people, for he made so many of them. If that is good logic, he must also love the country people, for he has made so many of them.

At one time our population was largely rural and the country churches were our most flourishing churches. But times have changed. Our population is becoming more and more urban, and the city churches have completely eclipsed most of the country churches in size and perhaps in activity. There has been a large drift of population to towns and cities. This has left many of the country churches stranded. What can we do about it?

The suggestion is made that we need to raise up an order of country pastors, who will go out with the avowed purpose of giving their whole lives to the work of the country churches.

The Assembly also provided for the election of a Director of Country Church Work. A part of his duties will be to give courses in our theological seminaries on the work of the country church. As a matter of fact, the large majority of the candidates for the ministry have always come from country churches. The most of us have the degree of R. F. D. written all over us. It remains to be seen just what the Director of Country Church Work is going to tell these candidates from the country as to what they ought to know and do about the country church. It is hoped that the Director will be a man who knows the country church by actual experience. The position has large possibilities for good.

Revision of the Book of Church Order.

Four years ago the Assembly appointed a committee to undertake the revision of the Book of Church Order. Each year the committee has reported progress, and each year has received from the Assembly more comprehensive instructions. In

1923 the Assembly called upon ministers and presbyteries to study the changes proposed by the committee and to make criticisms and suggestions. There was a fine response. The committee was greatly aided by the suggestions received, and made practical use of the large majority of them. In 1924 the committee made an elaborate report to the Assembly, suggesting a great many amendments. The Assembly approved these amendments, added some of its own, and then sent them all down to the presbyteries for their advice and consent.

Seventy-six of the eighty-nine presbyteries approved of all the amendments, six presbyteries approved of all but a very few, six presbyteries declined to approve, and one presbytery made no report. In view of the approval of this overwhelming majority of the presbyteries, the Assembly enacted these amendments into law, without opposition.

The committee did a prodigious amount of work in connection with the revision of the Book of Church Order. It is too much to claim that their work is perfect. The Presbyterian Church does not believe in perfectionism. But many ambiguities have been clarified and the Book has been arranged in a much more usable form.

Another committee was appointed to revise the Directory of Worship and Optional Forms.

Foreign Missions.

The storm center of the Assembly was around Foreign Missions. For several years there have been rumors of unorthodox teachings in some of the union institutions with which our Church has been connected in the foreign field. Recently the direct charge has been made, though no proof has been offered, that some of our own missionaries in China are unsound. A great many overtures were sent up from the presbyteries to the Assembly on these subjects touching our Foreign Mission work.

Perhaps the thing that created the greatest stir was what came to be known as the muzzling act. Last summer the Execu-

tive Committee of Foreign Missions passed a resolution which they called a guide to missionaries. The gist of it was that if a missionary had any charges to prefer against a fellow missionary, or a missionary institution, he should first of all lay those charges before his own mission, or before the Executive Committee, or before the proper church court, instead of making these charges up and down through the Church at large or through the public prints. It also stated that any other line of action was unworthy of a missionary.

The Standing Committee on Foreign Missions wrestled day and night over these problems from Friday until Tuesday. They heard everybody that had anything to say. On Tuesday they brought in an excellent report which seemed to be satisfactory to practically everybody concerned.

The report of the Standing Committee cut the muzzling act half in two and approved of the first half and blotted out the last half. The part which was approved by the Assembly reads as follows: "Missionaries who have what they consider well-founded charges affecting the conduct or orthodoxy of fellow-missionaries, or of institutions for whose management our Church is responsible in whole or in part, should bring such charges first before the mission directly concerned, or before the Executive Committee of Foreign Missions, or before the proper church court, in order that these charges may be thoroughly investigated in an orderly manner, their truth or falsity determined and appropriate action taken."

The pity of it is that any of us who are ministers or missionaries should need any instruction along these lines. It would seem that our own Christian intuition ought to be sufficient.

A pamphlet, bearing upon the foreign missionary questions which were to come before the Assembly, was widely circulated among the commissioners before the Assembly met. It was prepared by a commissioner and was evidently intended to influence the decision of the court. It would be interesting to see what a civil court would do under similar circumstances.

When a similar thing was done at the Assembly of 1880 the

Assembly appointed a committee to investigate and to recommend proper action. The committee made the following report, which was promptly adopted by the Assembly: "Whereas, a pamphlet entitled *Discussions on Assembly Deliverances* has been addressed to the moderator and members of this body and circulated among them, which pamphlet moreover contains a grossly personal assault on a member of this General Assembly; and whereas, it appears that other pamphlets bearing upon questions pending have been put in circulation among the members, the General Assembly hereby expresses its disapproval of *this method* of attempting to influence its decisions as disrespectful to this body, and an infringement upon its prerogatives." The Assembly of 1880 was right. That was the last of pamphlets for forty-five years.

After the whole discussion on Foreign Missions was over and everybody had said everything that there was to say, the Assembly took the following action: "Resolved by standing vote that the Assembly expresses its hearty and unqualified confidence in the Executive Committee of Foreign Missions to handle all matters which come under its supervision, direction and control."

Changing the Church Year.

Almost from time immemorial our Church year has begun on April 1st and closed on March 31st. The Assembly of 1924 directed that the Church year should be made to conform to the calendar year, beginning January 1, 1926. A great many overtures went up from presbyteries protesting against this change.

There were three motions before the Assembly of 1925 on this subject. The first motion was to refer the question of the change of the Church year to the presbyteries for their advice. The second motion, which was a substitute for this, was that the change of the Church year as ordered by the last Assembly be made effective. A third motion, which was a substitute for the second, was that the action of the last As-

sembly changing the Church year be rescinded. The third motion defeated the second by a vote of 99 to 60, thus indicating that the Assembly was decidedly opposed to the change. Then the second motion had to come up against the first one. The first motion defeated the second by a vote of 114 to 48. The effect of this was to send the question down to the presbyteries for their advice.

It is the custom for the Assembly to send down to the presbyteries for their advice and consent only matters which relate to changes in the Book of Church Order or the Confession of Faith and Catechisms. This is the only case that I can recall in which the Assembly has sent a question to the presbyteries for advice pure and simple. There is some objection to this procedure.

Referring matters, except those that pertain to the Constitution of the Church, to the presbyteries for advice tends to make the Assembly a delegated body, instead of a representative body. We pride ourselves on the fact that our Church has a representative form of government. In the meantime, the presbyteries will spend a great deal of precious time discussing this question. No matter which way the presbyteries vote, their vote will have no binding power on the next Assembly. If the next Assembly falls in line with the vote of the presbyteries, it ceases to exercise its authority as a representative body. If the next Assembly fails to fall in line with the vote of the presbyteries, it will provoke endless discussions.

The presbyteries send their representatives to the Assembly to act in a representative capacity, and to attend to all business which comes before the Assembly. It is a bit paradoxical for these same representatives to turn back to the presbyteries asking what they ought to do. It would be a pity if this method of procedure should grow on the Assembly.

Electing Commissioners for Two Years.

For some time there has been a considerable demand that all commissioners to the Assembly should be elected to serve

for two years, with the idea that the schedule of elections should be so arranged that the terms of half the commissioners should expire one year and the terms of the other half the next year. In this way half of the commissioners of any given Assembly would be members who had attended the previous Assembly and the other half would be new members. This would give a continuity to the Assembly which it does not now have. There would be some decided advantages in this. Half the members would presumably know what the previous Assembly did, though this is not entirely certain. Sometimes a commissioner has to read the morning paper to discover what went on right under his own eyes the day before. One of the enterprising editors of a Church paper gets out a daily bulletin for the Northern Presbyterian Assembly, telling everything that was done on the previous day. This bulletin is very popular among the commissioners, as it keeps them posted as to what they have done.

Several Assemblies have said that there is nothing in our Constitution to keep a presbytery from electing its commissioners for two years, if it desires to do so, but somehow the presbyteries have not made a great rush in that direction. Such a move would mean that any given member of a presbytery would get to the Assembly half as often as he does now. Such an ideal is not immensely popular at first thought.

It is worth a great deal to a minister or elder to attend the General Assembly. In fact, it is a first-class education in the work of the Church. In the long run it means a great deal to the Church to have its ministers and elders attend the Assembly as frequently as possible. We may do well to pause before reducing a minister's or elder's opportunity of going to one-half what it is now.

As a matter of fact, there are a great many men in every Assembly who have been to previous Assemblies and who know the work of the Church as well as if they had attended the last Assembly.

A committee was appointed to study this subject. If they think it wise to try the new plan, the Constitution does not

stand in the way. All that they will have to do will be to work out a schedule of elections for the presbyteries, and have the next Assembly commend it to the presbyteries. If the presbyteries desire the change they will accept the schedule; if they do not desire it, they will not. That would be an easier way than trying to change the Constitution on this subject. It is doubtful whether a majority of the presbyteries would ever vote for such a change in the Constitution.

A Permanent Judicial Committee.

An Ad-Interim Committee was appointed to consider the advisability of the Assembly's having a permanent Judicial Committee. I am not quite sure that I understand what the functions of such a committee would be.

The Northern Presbyterian Church in 1905 amended its Book of Church Order so as to provide for the Assembly's Permanent Judicial Commission. This permanent Judicial Commission has now been at work for twenty years and seems to be of large service to the Assembly and to the Church. It is composed of fifteen members, each elected for a term of three years. The fifteen members are arranged in three classes of five each, so that five new members are elected at each Assembly. No member of the commission can be re-elected to succeed himself, but may be eligible for re-election after the expiration of three years.

All judicial matters are referred to this commission, though the Assembly reserves the right to appoint special Judicial Commissions when it may seem wise to do so. This Permanent Judicial Commission can work between Assemblies and have well in hand all judicial cases before the Assembly meets. The decisions of this commission are written and delivered with great precision, and sounds very much like the decisions of the Supreme Court of the United States. A decision of the commission may be affirmed, reversed, modified or suspended by the Assembly. In actual practice its decisions are affirmed by the Assembly.

Perhaps our recent Assembly had in mind the establishment of such a permanent Judicial Commission and inadvertently called it a committee. The Ad-Interim Committee which has this matter in charge will do well to study the rules which govern the permanent Judicial Commission of the Northern Presbyterian Assembly and the work which the commission has done during the past twenty years.

Woman's Position in the Church.

This is a perennial subject. Our Church could probably unite unanimously on the idea that we will have no women preachers or elders. When we go beyond that into details we at once strike a great diversity of opinions. We all think we are loyal to the Scriptures on this subject, but we are not all agreed in our interpretations. The Assembly of 1915 appointed an able Ad-Interim Committee to study this whole question and to report to the Assembly of 1916. The committee of five brought in four reports. The Assembly refused to adopt any of them and made its own deliverance. That indicates what a variety of opinions there are on this subject.

In response to an overture the Assembly this year reaffirmed previous deliverances, referred to Alexander's Digest for these previous deliverances, and quoted a few lines from one of them.

This is hardly a satisfactory reply. First of all, very few people own Alexander's Digest. In the second place, the 1922 Digest is deficient on this point, as well as on a good many others. In the third place, when we find all previous deliverances on this subject they do not seem to be in entire harmony with each other. That is true of the deliverances of previous Assemblies on any subject. When deliverances are in conflict, which one of them has the right of way? The latest one, I suppose.

The Digest does not quote the latest deliverance prior to this year. It does not even tell where it can be found. That is the deliverance made by the Assembly of 1916. It is found on pages 48-49 of the Minutes of the 1916 Assembly.

On the other hand, the Digest does quote in full a long resolution on this subject which was laid on the table by the Assembly of 1918. The quotation of this resolution in the Digest would deceive the very elect, and lead them to believe that it was adopted by the 1918 Assembly. It is hard to understand why the Digest should not quote a very important deliverance which the Assembly did make in 1916, and quote a deliverance which it did not make, but laid on the table in 1918.

So for the reasons stated it is seldom satisfactory for the Assembly to answer an overture by referring to the Digest. The Digest is not official; it is often very deficient; it is not accessible to many people, and the deliverances found there on any subject are not apt to be in harmony with each other.

It still remains for some sound New Testament Greek scholar to take all of the passages that bear upon the subject in the New Testament, and not just a few, and give us a sound, constructive study of the position of woman in the New Testament Church.

Stewardship.

The key thought running through the report of the Committee on Stewardship is that for the present the whole financial energy of the Church should be centered upon the annual budget of the Church, which is raised through the Every-Member Canvass.

All plans connected with raising the five million dollar Equipment Fund was dropped. Synods were asked to refrain if possible from putting on intensive drives for funds. It is recommended by the committee and by the Assembly that every effort be made to raise the full quota for every cause in the annual budget. This is a fine move, and will mean a great deal to the Church if it can be followed up enthusiastically and energetically.

It would be a great thing if the whole Church could put squarely behind the great work of the Church all of its resources of life, possessions and prayer.