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# The United Presbyterian.

THE TRUTH OF GOD—FORBEARANCE IN LOVE

Volume 85

PITTSBURGH, PA., MARCH 17, 1927

Number 11

*V. 85, 1927*

*# 11 (Mar. 17)*



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, AUGUSTA. GA.

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## Special Number

Giving information about the Presbyterian Church in the United States.

Articles written by leaders of that denomination.

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## The Southern Presbyterian Church

BY WALTER L. LINGLE, D.D.,

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**T**HE first General Assembly of the Southern Presbyterian Church was organized in Augusta, Georgia, on December 4, 1861, but the history of the Southern Presbyterian Church began more than two hundred years before that date. It began with the first Presbyterian settlers who located in southern territory.

As early as 1640 English Puritans with Presbyterian leanings began to settle on the eastern shore of Virginia and Maryland. By 1650 a few Scotch-Irish had settled in Virginia, and later a perfect stream of them poured into Virginia, North Carolina and South Carolina. Scotch Presbyterians settled in the Carolinas at a very early date. After the revocation of the Edict of Nantes many Huguenots came to Virginia, South Carolina, and Georgia.

In 1683, Francis Makemie, a young Scotch-Irish minister, arrived on the eastern shore of Maryland, and began at once to organize Presbyterian churches in Virginia and Maryland. He has been justly called the father of American Presbyterianism. In 1706 Makemie organized the Presbytery of Philadelphia. This was the first presbytery in connection with the American Presbyterian Church, and several southern churches belonged to it.

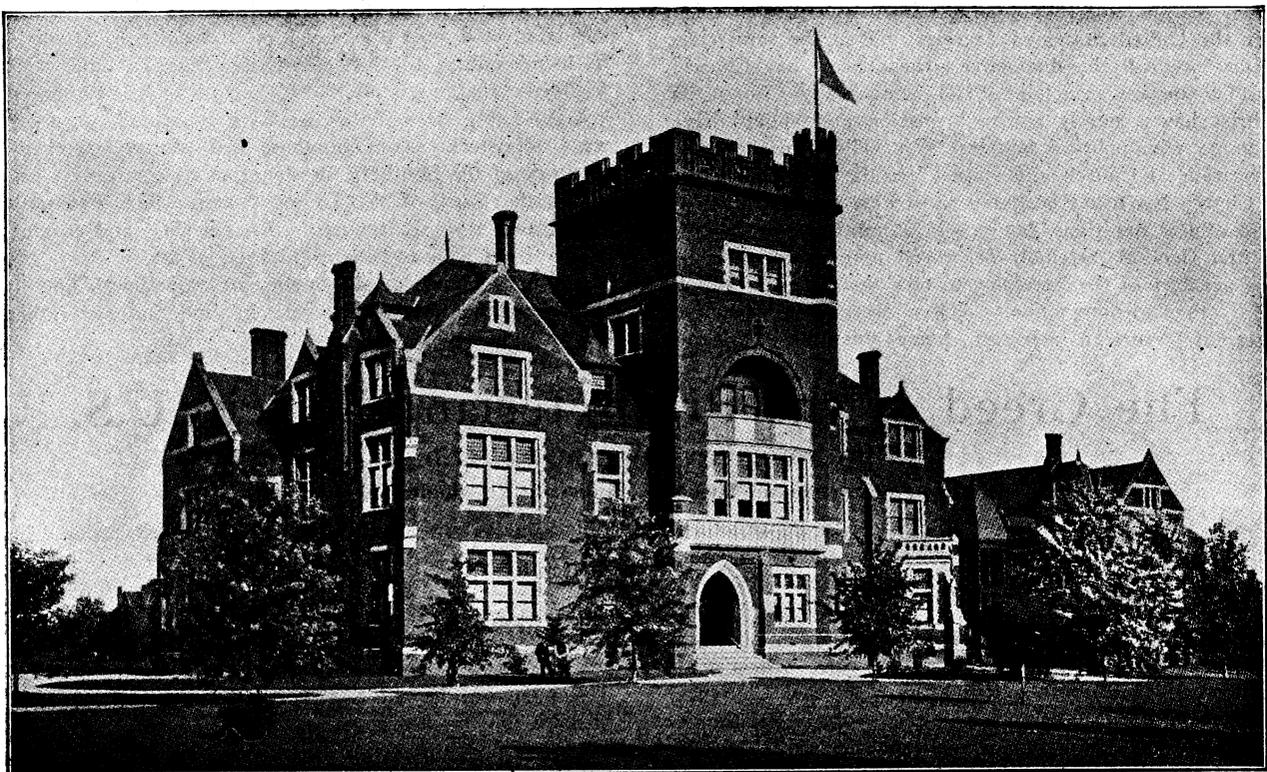
Rev. Samuel Davies, one of the greatest preachers that America has produced, organized the first presbytery in the South in 1755. It was called Hanover Presbytery, and included everything south of the Potomac. Later other presbyteries were organized in the South.

In 1788 the Synod of Virginia and the Synod of the Carolinas were organized. They were the first synods in the South.

The first General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America was organized in 1789, the same year in which our national constitution became effective, and the same year in which George Washington became the first president of the United States. All the southern synods and presbyteries became a part of this General Assembly.

From 1789 to 1861 the southern presbyteries and synods were a very important part of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. The Southern Presbyterian Church has a large share in the history of the Church during all those years. That history is a part of our heritage.

In 1861 the Southern Presbyterians withdrew from the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States. The Methodist and Baptist Churches had divided into



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North and South over the question of slavery in 1845. The New School Presbyterians divided into North and South over the same question in 1857. But the Old School Presbyterians held together through thick and thin until after the nation was divided by the Civil War.

However, all the causes which divided the nation were tending to divide the Presbyterian Church into North and South. But the immediate cause of the withdrawal of the Southern Presbyterians was that the General Assembly in May, 1861, passed the famous Gardiner Spring resolutions, calling upon all Presbyterians, North and South, "to promote and perpetuate the integrity of these United States, and to strengthen, uphold, and encourage the federal government in the exercise of all its functions."

By the passing of these resolutions the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church undertook to decide the political question as to where a man's allegiance belonged in those troublous days. Did Christian men owe their first allegiance to their native states, with their older governments, or to the newer federal government? That was a difficult question at best. At any rate Southern Presbyterians believed that it was a purely political question, and that the General Assembly in passing those resolutions left its real spiritual sphere and entered into the field of politics. The Gardiner Spring resolutions, therefore, became the immediate cause of the withdrawal of the southern presbyteries from the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States.

On December 4, 1861, commissioners of all southern presbyteries met in Augusta, Georgia, for the purpose of organizing a General Assembly of their own. It is interesting to note that Dr. Joseph R. Wilson, the father of Woodrow Wilson, was pastor of the First Presbyterian church of Augusta at that time, and that Woodrow Wilson was then a bit of a boy about four years of age.

Dr. B. M. Palmer, of New Orleans, one of the greatest preachers the Southern Presbyterian Church has ever produced, was chosen moderator of that first Southern Presbyterian General Assembly, and preached the opening sermon. His text was Ephesians 1:22-23, and his subject was, "The headship of Christ over the Church." He emphasized the fact that Christ, and not Cæsar, is the head of the Church and that the mission of the Church is purely spiritual, and not in any sense political.

That first General Assembly issued a remarkable address to all the Churches of Jesus Christ throughout the world, giving the reasons for withdrawing from the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, and at the same time stating what we call the distinctive principles of our Church. The most distinctive principle of all is that the Church of Jesus Christ has a purely spiritual mission and should have nothing to do with political matters. We believe in the complete separation of Church and state. Yet the Southern Presbyterian Church has never hesitated to express herself on great moral and ethical questions, but not in a political way.

Our first General Assembly organized four executive committees as agencies of the Assembly to take the place of Church boards in other denominations. They were the executive committees of: foreign missions, home missions, Christian

education, and publication. A distinctive feature of the Southern Presbyterian Church was that these executive committees were to be directly amenable to the General Assembly, and under its full authority, instead of having the degree of independence which the boards of some other Churches had in those days. With the passing years the work of these executive committees has been greatly enlarged, and their powers have been somewhat enlarged to meet the changed conditions. Through these executive committees the Southern Presbyterian Church is today doing a large missionary and educational work at home and abroad.

The Women of the Church are thoroughly organized under the name of the Woman's Auxiliary in practically every individual church. These are bound together by presbyterial auxiliaries, these in turn by synodical auxiliaries, and all are bound together by a church-wide organization known as the advisory council of the Woman's Auxiliary, with the superintendent of woman's work taking oversight of the woman's work of the entire Church. The growth of the woman's work for the past fifteen years has been phenomenal.

The men of the Church have a secretary, and are organizing for more effective service under a constitution and plan wrought out by the General Assembly.

The young people of the Church are also effectively organized, and are showing enthusiastic interest in the work of the Church. The young people's conferences, which are held in each synod every summer, are among the most encouraging signs of the times.

There is a growing spirit of evangelism in the Church. This is shown in the preaching of our ministers, in the organization of men's evangelistic clubs, and in the fact that classes for the study and the actual doing of personal evangelism are being organized in many parts of the Church.

The Southern Presbyterian Church is homogeneous in its ministry and in its members. There are no divisions among them. They are conservative in doctrine and progressive in methods. They preach and teach the great doctrines of grace and redemption as set forth in the Scriptures and as interpreted in our Presbyterian standards.

Our Church is popularly called the Southern Presbyterian Church, but its technical and legal name is "The Presbyterian Church in the United States." This has been its name since 1865. If you will look up its record under this name in the various year-books that are published, you will soon discover that the Presbyterian Church in the United States has had a steady growth since the day it was organized. It has doubled its membership in the last twenty-five years, a thing which very few denominations in the world have done. The reports to our last Assembly showed that we have 17 synods, 91 presbyteries, 2,235 ministers, 3,601 churches, and 462,177 members. The territory of the Southern Presbyterian Church covers practically all of that part of the United States which lies south of a line drawn from Baltimore to Kansas City, and east of a line drawn from Kansas City to El Paso, Texas.

Even a glance at the history of our Church and its work shows that we have a rich heritage, and that our fathers have left us a noble birthright.

## The Creed of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.

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THE Southern Presbyterian Church derives its doctrinal and spiritual heredity from the Westminster divines, who, in the middle of the seventeenth century, drew up the most complete and Biblical creed yet framed in the history of the Christian Church. This descent comes largely through the Scotch and Scotch-Irish Presbyterian Churches, with a generous infusion also of members from the Reformed Churches of Holland, France (Huguenots), and the German Palatinate. This Church's history ran parallel with that of the U. S. A. Church until 1861, when a fundamental difference emerged as to the spirituality of the Church, or visible kingdom of Christ,

which led to the organization of the Presbyterian Church in the United States.

This Church requires all of the officers, including ministers, ruling elders, and deacons, to affirm their acceptance of the following vows of subscription:

1. "Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?"

2. "Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith and the Catechisms of this Church as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures?"