



SECOND
GENERAL COUNCIL
HELD IN
PHILADELPHIA
1880
UNITED STATES



SCOTLAND



IRELAND

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REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS

OF THE

SECOND GENERAL COUNCIL

OF THE

PRESBYTERIAN ALLIANCE,

CONVENED AT PHILADELPHIA, SEPTEMBER, 1880.

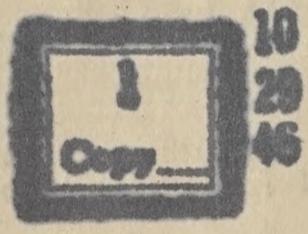
PRINTED BY DIRECTION OF THE COUNCIL.

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PHILADELPHIA:
PRESBYTERIAN JOURNAL COMPANY,
AND
J. C. McCURDY & CO.,
PHILADELPHIA, PA.,
CINCINNATI, O., CHICAGO, ILL., AND ST. LOUIS, MO.

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to inaugurate their practice in the great work of Church Extension in large cities, by planting and building, and paying for and sustaining, Christian churches where and when they are most needed, avoiding jealous rivalries and self-destroying conflicts with sister churches and branches of the Christian family, and commending the most successful methods which experience has developed, some of the difficulties of the great problem may be more readily overcome, and a new impetus may be given to the work for which the Lord Jesus Christ himself was sent into this world.

The late British Premier, Lord Beaconsfield, said some years ago: "I have ever myself been of opinion that it was in the great cities of the earth the Church would effect, in this age, its most signal triumphs." The history of the gospel Church fully confirms that statement of a patent fact. In many of the great cities of Christendom, the churches that were first planted have outlived all other institutions, and they have put on new life with the changes and emergencies of successive ages. Every new Church of Christ points forward to the better future of this world, and to the things that are not seen and eternal. And every wise, persistent, and successful system of Church Extension in large cities is a better herald than Constantine's cross, of the final conquest of the world for Christ and his Church.

The REV. WM. J. REID, D. D., of Pittsburgh, Pa., read the following paper on

CHURCH EXTENSION IN SPARSELY SETTLED DISTRICTS.

Thickly settled districts have the first claim on the Church. The gospel is for the salvation of souls, and it must be carried where souls are. Other things being equal, it is the part of wisdom to bring the gospel within the reach of a thousand souls, rather than of one. Populous cities are the centres of influence; and such cities, when evangelized, shine forth, far and near, with a light which cannot be hid. The example of the Master and of his inspired apostles shows that the Jerusalems and Capernaums and Antiochs and Romes of the earth are first to be occupied. Nevertheless, the same example and reason itself teach us that sparsely settled districts should not be neglected. There were devils to be cast out in Gadara, as well as in the populous towns on the other side of the Sea of Galilee; Paul found souls to be saved in Galatia, as well as in Ephesus. The gospel is for the world, and no part of it can be overlooked. But though there is "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" for the country as well as the city, there is of necessity so much difference in the method of working, that it will not do to say, "Come into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do."

I. The Church, in laying its plans for the conquest of the world

for Christ, must not overlook sparsely settled districts. The soul living in a dug-out is as precious as the one whose home is in a palace. He who reclines in his glittering carriage in the crowded park is in no greater danger of eternal death than he who rides his mustang over the lonely prairie.

Sparsely settled districts have furnished the world the most stalwart manhood. There are portions of this globe on which the curse of barrenness has fallen so lightly, that they seem almost to have retained their original fruitfulness. There is little demand on the labor of the husbandman; the plains and valleys scarcely ask for cultivation; yet they are covered with abundance; homes spring up in clusters and crowds. But the inhabitants of these districts are, for the most part, sunk in the lowest degradation, and are far behind other nations in what is manly and civilized. If you would find a people presenting the finest spectacle of greatness, order, intelligence and manhood, you must go to those lands in which there is a constant struggle for existence; and the sterile soil forbids a crowded population. In such regions, manhood has reached its highest honors and civilization gained its greatest victories.

Many of the most successful Christian teachers have been born and nurtured in sparsely settled districts. Illustrations of the truth of this assertion will suggest themselves to every reader of ecclesiastical history. And what has been is yet. In the city the attractions of law, the excitement of business, and the wealth of commerce have a charm which wins the young from the pulpit and the study. The Church must expect a goodly number of its teachers and leaders from the homes of the country, in which the god of this world does not reign with absolute tyranny.

Not a few of the churches, which have proved themselves most faithful in enduring persecutions and in resisting the encroachments of error, were planted in sterile and mountainous regions. The simple mention of faithful churches suggests the Waldenses of Italy and the Presbyterians of Scotland, whose faithfulness under trial of every kind has passed into a proverb. It is written in history as well as in the word, that many of whom the world was not worthy, and who have obtained a good report through faith, "wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth." It would have been well for the race, if there had been more Swiss mountains and Scottish glens as homes for the faithful saints.

As the Church now needs, and as it ever will need, a sturdy manhood, courageous teachers and faithful disciples, it will not do to neglect the sparsely settled districts, which in all the ages have been the cradles of sturdiness, courage and faithfulness.

II. The Church whose plans do not look to the evangelization of sparsely settled districts, and whose ecclesiastical machinery is not adapted to this work, is not rightly executing the great commission: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." It matters not what claims such an organization may put forth to be

a Church or *the* Church, if it cannot do the work the Lord has given it to do, it is deceiving itself with a name to live.

In some respects thinly inhabited regions offer an easier field to cultivate, and present fewer obstacles to the progress of the gospel than the great centres of population. The necessary expenses for sustaining the ordinances of religion are less; and in this campaign against the world and its prince, as in every other, it is the duty of the wise to sit down and count the cost. The temptations of Satan are less numerous and open, if not less powerful. Though "the trail of the serpent" is over all the earth, he does not build synagogues at every "parting of the way" and beneath every green tree. Licentiousness, intemperance, infidelity and mammon build their strongest entrenchments, and station their bravest champions, in the crowded cities. No place is without danger, but the thronged streets are "the high places of the field," where souls stand in greatest jeopardy. If a Church cannot meet unorganized opposition, how can it hope to overcome embattled legions, marshalled by all the wiles of the devil? "If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, how canst thou contend with horses?" A Church which cannot solve the easy problems of mountain, prairie and forest, is not able to grapple successfully with the harder problems of market-place, grog-shop and tenement house.

A large part of the earth's surface is correctly described by the words, "sparsely settled districts." So it will remain for centuries to come. The prophetic history of the future tells of a time when all the world, and not cities alone, shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord. They that dwell in the wilderness, as well as the kings of Tarshish, shall bow before the Messiah. In that day, the desert, as well as the garden, is to blossom. The Church that does not, or cannot, work in the scattered homes of the wild frontier, is not keeping step to the music of prophecy. The gospel is wisely arranged for "every creature," and that ecclesiastical organization, which is not adapted for carrying the gospel to "every creature" in the north, south, east and west, is not fulfilling the commission of its ascended Lord.

III. If the Presbyterian polity does not meet the necessities of sparsely settled districts, it ought to be reformed, or abandoned for something better, if reform is impossible. All our arguments in favor of Presbyterianism, drawn from the synagogue and its bench of elders, from the inspired history of the early Church, and from the writings of the Christian fathers, will be drowned in the overwhelming cry of human need. If there is a single province, on continent or island, amidst the drifted snows of the north or the luxuriant vegetation of the south, which Presbyterianism is not adapted to reach and evangelize, it is not the instrument by which God intends to accomplish his purposes. No believer in the wisdom of the infinite will think *that* the agency of God, which cannot do the work to be done. The need of the race is the touchstone, by which to test the polity we

esteem so highly. No Presbyterian should fear the trial. Confident in our cause, we should take this cup of "the water of jealousy" with no trembling hand. Let Presbyterianism stand or fall by its adaptation to the wants of the world.

IV. Presbyterianism is peculiarly adapted to the work of Church extension in sparsely settled districts. The experience of the ages has shown that stability and unity are necessary to real success in any enterprise; and the Presbyterian form of Church government, with its gradation of courts, binds all its parts in one as with bands of steel. This form of government also provides for that degree of flexibility and freedom in its courts and agents, which is essential to greatest efficiency. Under this government the Church is one, but the parts, each one free in its own sphere, are many. It furnishes the best illustration of the words, "*E Pluribus Unum.*" The unity gives the greatest strength; the freedom permits the greatest activity in the use of that strength. This unity, combined with this freedom, this strength, united with this activity, make Presbyterianism a power in evangelizing all districts, whether sparsely settled or otherwise.

But how can the inherent strength and activity of the Presbyterian system be brought to bear on the solution of the problem before us? Any method of work, which interferes with the unity of the Church on the one hand, or with the freedom of its agents on the other, must be rejected. Many plans, which are in harmony with the fundamental principles of "government by Presbyters," might be suggested. One, which has been tried and not found to be altogether wanting, will be briefly outlined.

(a.) A committee of missions is provided for by law, consisting of one delegate from each Presbytery in the bounds of the Assembly or Synod. This committee meets annually, a few days before the meeting of the Supreme Court; and it has the general management of the home mission work of the Church.

(b.) Each Presbytery collects money for this part of the Church's work, and forwards it to a common treasury. It examines the territory under its care, selects its mission stations, and reports their condition, need and prospects to the general committee. It also reports the names of all its licentiates and unsettled ministers, who are able for ministerial work. The advantage of placing all the money in a common treasury is seen in the fact that those Presbyteries which have the widest and neediest fields are the poorest in this world's goods. If each Presbytery expended its funds in its own bounds, the strong would not bear the burdens of the weak. In selecting mission stations, especially in a land where different branches of the Presbyterian family are laboring side by side, there is need of care. One church should not injure or interfere with another. Ecclesiastical courtesy has too often been overlooked; and two or three feeble organizations covered the field, when one would have been sufficient for the need. Presbyteries, occupying the same territory but belong-

ing to different denominations, should understand the first principles of common politeness, and not hinder one another's work, or trespass upon one another's rights. It may not be well to have such a statute formally enacted, but it should have a place among the unwritten laws of the churches.

(*c.*) When the general committee, at its annual meeting, receives these reports from the Presbyteries, it considers the wants of the whole territory it represents, and makes such appointment of men and appropriation of money, as its ability permits and the necessities of the field demand. The delegate from each Presbytery knows his own field, and makes a full presentation of its needs. When all parts of the Church are represented by such interested delegates, it is not likely that injustice will be done to any through ignorance or prejudice.

(*d.*) The action of the committee is approved, after amendment if necessary, by the Supreme Court; and then each Presbytery is left free to assign the missionaries appointed to it to their fields of labor, and to expend the money appropriated to its mission stations.

A plan like this leaves Presbyteries their full measure of freedom in the management of their own affairs, and yet binds them together, and gives each the strength of the whole Church. It makes provision for the most sparsely settled districts, for it groups, if need requires it, several mission stations, and makes them one pastoral charge, supplied by a missionary adequately supported. Under this arrangement, each feeble mission, though it stands alone in the wilderness, is united to all the other congregations in the Presbytery, and through the Presbytery to all other Presbyteries; and in this union there is strength. Each missionary or pastor, while he labors in his restricted field, feels that he has the power of the whole Church at his command, and he works with a confidence which nothing but the power of the whole Church could inspire. At the same time, the Presbytery, the congregation and the missionary have sufficient freedom of independent action to take advantage of whatever emergency may arise.

By its marvellous combination of united strength and far-reaching activity, Presbyterianism shows itself to be adapted to the need of sparsely settled districts as well as of crowded cities. It abides the test of experiment. In answer to every doubt and question, we point to the history of the past and the records of the present and say, "Come and see." What Presbyterianism has already done for Church Extension in sparsely settled districts gives assurance that it will hereafter do its part in making all wildernesses bud and blossom as the rose.

It cannot be that too much attention has been paid to the cities, where men crowd and jostle each other in the struggle for life and for wealth; but it may be that the Church has neglected, in its missionary operations, the sparsely settled districts, from which have sprung so many of the sturdy men, successful teachers and faithful churches of history. But the work in all its departments is one. The whole

world is the field, ripening for the coming harvest. "What, therefore, God hath joined together, let no man put asunder." Country and city, desert and garden, are groaning and travailing in pain together, waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God; but they are, before the final chapter of the history of redemption is written, to be "delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God."

The REV. ROBERT KNOX, D. D., of Belfast, Ireland, followed with a paper on

THE EVANGELIZATION OF IRELAND.

If you look at Ireland on a map, it is a mere speck in the great Atlantic; and yet that little island has wielded for ages, and continues to wield, a mighty influence on Britain and all the dependencies of Britain, and on this great continent of America. Hence it becomes a matter of supreme importance to bring the Irish people under the power of the gospel, not only for their own sake, but for the sake of those countries whose character and destinies they influence.

In round numbers, Ireland has a population of 5,000,000. Little more than one in four of these are Protestants, and this proportion has been maintained with little variation for the last two hundred years.

To Christian men in other lands it may appear strange that the gospel has made so little progress among a people peculiarly susceptible of religious impressions. The explanation is not far to seek. The Church established by law for three hundred years had all the advantages which high rank, great wealth, and political power could give, while the Irish race were repressed by the most grinding penal laws, refused all legitimate opportunities of education, excluded from positions of trust, and were regarded as incapable of holding any of the high offices of state. Is it to be wondered at that a people naturally proud and sensitive should resent being thus treated, not only as a conquered, but as an inferior race? In their heart's core they resented the injustice, and cherished burning hatred against the religion which they associated with spoliation, and whose very presence was the symbol of their national degradation.

Then the priests made common cause with the people through the long and weary years of their misery, and came to be regarded not only as patriots, but martyrs, and the successors of a long line of martyrs. This bound the masses as with a chain of adamant to the ancient creed. To the priest was given up reason and conscience, and thus the Irish people became the most abject slaves of the Roman pontiff in all Christendom.

The penal laws are now removed, but churches and statesmen are beginning to learn that it is not so easy to obliterate the memory of ages of oppression. The old grudge rankles in the bosom. While