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## THE CHARLOTTE GENERAL ASSEMBLY, 1920.

BY REV. RUSSELL CECIL, D. D.,  
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The Charlotte General Assembly will be classed as one of the greatest of all the General Assemblies of the Presbyterian Church in the United States. It was fortunate in the place of meeting. Charlotte, North Carolina, is a beautiful and thriving city of about fifty thousand inhabitants, situated in the heart of one of our most prosperous Southern States. It is the center of a vigorous and aggressive Presbyterianism. The First Presbyterian Church, where the Assembly gathered, is located in a beautiful grove, and has ample facilities in its auditorium and in the adjoining Sunday-school building to accommodate a much larger body than the Assembly with all of its committees. The conveniences for the transaction of business could not have been surpassed. The able and attractive young pastor, Rev. Albert Sidney Johnson, D. D., together with his good people, did not spare themselves in their effort to entertain the members of the Assembly, and it could hardly have been better done. Those who were fortunate enough to have been in attendance will not soon forget their distinguished and abounding hospitality. The Assembly itself was composed of carefully selected men, both ministers and elders, who had come as commissioners from various parts of the Church, intent upon giving earnest attention to the weighty matters which it was known beforehand would have to be considered by this

## THE RISE OF PRESBYTERIANISM IN TIDEWATER VIRGINIA.

BY REV. W. H. T. SQUIRES, D. D.,  
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The Tidewater section of Virginia is an intricate tangle of land and water. The channels of the broad, shining rivers pulse to the tides of ocean, and insinuate their saline floods into every depression. Rivers and inlets, creeks, bays and marshes divide the land into innumerable peninsulas. Some of them are hundreds of miles in length, and some are too narrow for the foundation of a humble cabin home. Much of the land is under water, or besoaked, or partially covered with oozing seepage and sedge. These pocosons are the undisputed habitation of crustaceous and reptile life.

Over the mild waters of Chesapeake Bay are two wealthy and populous counties separated completely from the rest of the State.

Between the lordly Potomac and the historic James two other rivers, only less deep and wide than they, cut this part of Tidewater into three well defined peninsulas. The Northern Neck lies between the Potomac and the Rappahannock. The Middle Peninsula lies between the Rappahannock and the York. And the Peninsula lies between the York and James. Among the innumerable peninsulas of Virginia *the Peninsula* holds a place unrivalled whether considered historically, economically, industrially or politically.

Lying snugly between the James and Chesapeake to the north and the Carolina line to the south are six large counties which our great-grandfathers used to call "Lower Virginia," but one never hears that term now.

This is the land; abounding in population, throbbing with energy, fertile as the garden of the Lord, with crowding and

ever-increasing urban centres and wealthy beyond the dreams of avarice. The Church that takes this land will take an empire for Jesus Christ.

The origins of the great majority of Presbyterian congregations in the Virginias and Carolinas may be traced to a pioneer settlement of Scotch or of Ulster blood. When the Scotch-Irish came over in such great numbers just two hundred years ago they found the alluvial lowlands of Virginia already occupied, though far from filled, with their ancient rivals of the Church of England. The red banner and the triple cross held undisputed sway. Tidewater Virginia is Saxon to a degree. There are many sections more thoroughly English than London or Oxford. Not a single Presbyterian church in Tidewater can be traced to Scotch antecedents, although, of course, there have always been some Scotch families and a great many Scotch and Ulsters pastors. Presbyterianism in Tidewater Virginia is essentially English.

It is an interesting historic phenomenon that Tidewater Presbyterianism in its rise and development follows exactly the geographical divisions referred to above. The Church is one today, but it comes of three roots. It suggests a single, stately elm which thrusts three great roots into the life-giving soil below and throws many graceful, gothic branches toward the heavens above.

The oldest, largest and most influential group of churches is clustered in and about the metropolitan district of Norfolk. Before Francis Makemie, we were here. He found a desolate band of Presbyterians mourning the loss of their late pastor. His name was Porter and he died in the summer of 1683. All facts as to his identity, as to the place of his labors, and as to his congregations, are hopelessly lost in the mist of an age-long obscurity. He may have been a contemporary of the fathers who formulated the constitution of our Church in the Jerusalem Chamber. It was probably the hand of Makemie that settled Rev. Josias Mackie on the Elizabeth River where he labored for 24 years and died, as he had lived, a rich old bachelor (1692-1716). After Mackie the pall of silence falls. For

76 years not a Presbyterian voice is raised in this spiritual wilderness.

The Presbytery of Hanover ordained Rev. Benjamin Porter Grigsby (1792) and sent him to itinerate in Eastern Virginia. The young man wisely chose the town of Norfolk, then claiming less than 3,000 people (more than half of whom were colored). Grigsby spent only a summer in the town (1792), but returned nine years later as pastor (1801). During his pastorate the Bell Church was built. It was by far the handsomest edifice in Norfolk, and is the mother church of Norfolk Presbyterianism. It was located in the fashionable, residential district of the day more than a mile from the harbor. The Bell Church was independent of Hanover Presbytery until brought into proper ecclesiastical relations to that body by the tactful hand of John Holt Rice (1814).

The eldest daughter of Bell Church is the Portsmouth Church, organized (1822) with five members by Dr. Benjamin Holt Rice, of Petersburg, who the same day dedicated the new church built in Middle Street.

The great schism of 1836-40 rent the Bell Church asunder and ultimately proved fatal. The pastor, Rev. John D. Matthews, and the majority of his flock migrated to a new church built so near the harbor on Church Street that vessels arriving and departing were in plain sight of the front stoop. They called the new church "Second," for a while, but it was later known as "First." The fine old building of Bell Church passed into the hands of a negro congregation by whom it is still used.

Church history reflects the economic, financial, industrial and cultural history of a people more accurately than the history of any other institution. True everywhere, it is peculiarly true of the case before us. Through the heart of the nineteenth century (1822-1872) not another church was organized. It was a period of lethargy. There was the intense political and social unrest of the thirties; the hard drinking and fast living of the forties; the frivolous life of the careless fifties, cut short in the midst by a terrifying epidemic of yellow

fever; the holocaust of the sixties, followed by the slow and painful recuperation of the seventies. In their deep affliction, so long continued and so acute, the people of Norfolk turned to God for refuge and strength. There was a heaven-sent revival of religion in the church under the ministry of George D. Armstrong. The Presbyterian Church in Tidewater Virginia has never been the same since. The results of that Pentecost abide to this day. This fact is patent to the most superficial reader of these lines. This revival came not with observation. There were no special meetings, and it was not arranged, or planned.

In 1872 the Second Church was organized. In 1876 the Suffolk Church was organized. In 1883 the Colley Memorial Church was organized in a western suburb. In 1884 the Park Avenue Church was organized in an eastern suburb. In 1889 the Armstrong Memorial Church was organized in a southern suburb. In 1898 the Lambert's Point Church was organized on the far northwestern edge of the city. In 1899 two churches were organized; Knox on the northern edge of Norfolk, and Port Norfolk on the northern edge of Portsmouth. Ghent Church was organized in a fashionable residential district in 1901, and ultimately reunited with the old First Church. It is the First Church of today. The building of the old First Church was demolished. In 1911 the La Fayette Church was organized in a northeastern suburb. In 1916 New Jamestown Church was organized at the old exposition grounds. When the government bought the grounds and established the Naval Base the membership of Jamestown Church was scattered to other churches (1917). In 1917 a church was organized at Lynnhaven. The youngest of the daughters of Bell Church has just been organized at Craddock (1919), a suburb of Portsmouth. Fourteen churches have grown from the original parent stock—one before, and thirteen since the revival of 1871.

The second group of churches is found in the populous and wealthy Eastern Shore counties of Accomac and Northampton. Francis Makemie secured permission from the colonial authori-

ties to preach at Onancock and on Holden's Creek, near the spot where he now lies buried. After his death (1708) the same pall of silence that fell over Norfolk County falls over Accomac. For 129 years the blue banner with the white cross of St. Andrew lay prostrate. In 1837 a small congregation was gathered at Drummondtown—now known as Accomac Court House. From this scion four churches have sprung. Onancock in 1882 and Powellton two years later were organized through the efforts of one sainted woman who still abides. The Powellton Church at Wachapreague has just organized another smaller church, Greenview, not far from the village (1919).

Holmes is the most influential church on the Eastern Shore. Its origin is altogether unique. The planters of that rich section were dissatisfied with the ignorant men who ministered to the people and they resolved to build a church and employ an educated clergyman. Not from any vital godliness in them, but rather as a benefit to their families and to the community generally. The church took the name of one of the prime organizers and is Holmes to this good day.

In 1879 a church of twenty members was gathered in the pleasant little village of Belle Haven as the result of a genuine revival of religion under the ministry of the late Rev. R. D. Stimson, then pastor of Holmes Church.

A second daughter of Holmes Church was organized at Cape Charles (1890). A railway had been built down the long peninsula from the teeming cities of the North. At the terminus the new town of Cape Charles was built. In 1904 a third mission of Holmes was organized as a church at Eastville, the county seat. But this church has not survived.

The third and youngest group of churches has grown from the Home Mission activity of the undivided Presbytery of East Hanover. This group is largely a monument to the labors of the late William A. Campbell, whose name one of the churches bears. Before the war there was a small church in York County, organized in 1860. It has had a checkered career. One mission of this church is at Williamsburg. And Williams-

burg has just established a new church at Five Forks near the ancient site of Jamestown (1920).

A feeble band was gather at Hampton (1879), which has since become a strong church and sent forth one mission, Phoebus (1914). A fruitful work was begun among the fisher folk of Gloucester County in 1880. This small and feeble nucleus has sent forth two churches, each stronger than the parent church, Severn (1885) and Groves' Memorial (1917).

An organization was effected in the village of Newport News as early as 1883. For years the church boasted as many as three members! It is today one of the largest and strongest congregations in Virginia. It has sent forth two branches; Second (1899), and Hilton (1919).

On the banks of the beautiful Rappahannock in the Northern Neck two small churches were organized, Mildew (1888), and Campbell Memorial (1889). We once had a moribund church at Smithfield.

When the new Presbytery of Norfolk was organized (1893) many were frankly skeptical. The strong churches were very few and the weak and struggling congregations were many. But time has justified the fathers.

Every church in Tidewater Virginia was begun in utter weakness and feebleness. If weak and struggling churches had not been organized there would not be a Presbyterian Church in all Tidewater Virginia today! There is a tenacity, a grip upon life that marks a Presbyterian congregation. We suppose it comes of martyr blood, and brings something of the martyr spirit. Only in rare instances does a Presbyterian church die—even if located in an unlikely place. Those who think lightly of small, struggling and weak Presbyterian congregations have not read history aright. We have not too many struggling churches, but too few. Our Home Mission efforts have never been too aggressive, but not aggressive enough. The Presbyterian Church in Tidewater Virginia is a mighty and influential host today, influential out of all proportion to its numbers, but it represents a victory over weakness. The very struggle begets strength. Who then will despise the day of the small things?