

THE
PRESBYTERIAN QUARTERLY.

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I. THE ATTRACTIONS OF POPERY.

DR. JOHN H. RICE, with the intuition of a great mind, warned Presbyterians against a renewed prevalence of popery in our Protestant land. This was when it was so insignificant among us as to be almost unnoticed. Many were surprised at his prophecy, and not a few mocked; but time has fulfilled it. Our leaders from 1830 to 1860 understood well the causes of this danger. They were diligent to inform and prepare the minds of their people against it. Hence General Assemblies and Synods appointed annual sermons upon popery, and our teachers did their best to arouse the minds of the people. Now, all this has mainly passed away, and we are relaxing our resistance against the dreaded foe just in proportion as he grows more formidable. It has become the fashion to condemn controversy and to affect the widest charity for this and all other foes of Christ and of souls. High Presbyterian authority even is quoted as saying, that henceforth our concern with Romanism should be chiefly irenic! The figures presented by the census of 1890 are construed in opposite ways. This gives the papists more than fourteen millions of adherents in the United States, where ninety years ago there were but a few thousands. Such Protestant journals as think it their interest to play sycophants to public opinion try to persuade us that these figures are very consoling; because, if Rome had kept all the natural increase of her immigrations the numbers would have been larger. But Rome points to them with insolent triumph as prognostics of an assured victory over Protestantism on this continent. Which will prove correct?

to mention. We must have hymn-books, liturgies of praise, from which selections shall be made for each service. But forms for prayer to be used every Sabbath are very liable to become the instrument of lip service, and there is little probability of their ever being adopted to any extent by the Presbyterian Church. The only real worship is that which comes from the heart, and the use of the same set of forms at every service, must, in the end, obstruct rather than encourage that outpouring of the soul in penitence, love, and faith, which is most blessed for the worshipper, and most acceptable to God.

ROBERT P. KERR.

Richmond, Va.

THE BIRMINGHAM CONFERENCE.

THIS conference was held in accordance with the action of the last General Assembly (see Minutes of 1893, page 29), namely: "5. That the Assembly renew the authority given last year to its Executive Committee, or representatives thereof, to confer with the Freedmen's Board, or its representatives, or any committee appointed for the purpose by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, at such a time and place as may be agreed upon by the parties to the conference, upon the following paper:

"Since the two churches are already practically agreed as to the things to be done in the work of evangelizing the negroes, to-wit, the thorough education of a godly ministry, the daily religious training of colored youth in denominational schools, and the constant presentation of the gospel directly to the people by pastors and evangelists, it is proposed: (1), To unite the work of the two churches in behalf of the negroes in an effort to build up an independent negro Presbyterian Church, or, failing to agree upon this, (2), To bring the work of the two churches for this cause into closer sympathy by practical coöperation in every way possible."

There was not much encouragement for the appointment of this committee. An effort was made in 1887 to accomplish the same object, in connection with several others, which proved entirely ineffectual. Committees were appointed by the Northern and Southern General Assemblies to confer on this subject. They met first in New York, in December, and then in Atlanta, in April following. They spent much time in deliberating on this matter, but could not come to any agreement.

These conferences developed a wide divergence of views and aims.

The principal point of difference related to the organization of a separate African Presbyterian Church. The policy of the two churches had already been fixed. The Southern Church, by repeated deliverances, had decided that such a separate organization was best for both blacks and whites. This was no longer an open question with us. Hence, the action of 1893 appointing this committee reiterated our purpose to insist upon such a separate organization. The committee on our part was authorized to agree upon some plan of "closer sympathy and practical coöperation." It was evidently not contemplated by the Assembly that this committee should take any action inconsistent with the settled policy of our church.

It is to be regretted, therefore, that the trend of the proceedings of this conference was in an entirely different direction. It was in the interest, not of coöperation, but of amalgamation. We were not surprised, therefore, to read that the conference closed with a public meeting in favor of the unification of Presbyterianism, which can mean nothing else but simple organic union. Thus it is clear that the instructions of our Assembly were entirely disregarded or resisted, whether intentionally or not we will not undertake to say.

Our first grand objection, therefore, to the conclusions of this conference is, that it fails to make any provision for carrying out the well-known policy and purpose of our church with regard to the organization of a separate colored church. There was, indeed, no mention of this point in these proceedings, so far as we know. That was studiously kept out of sight. It would have been dangerous to introduce it. But it could not be ignored in the carrying out of the plan adopted. Surely our church is not prepared either to abandon or to change its policy. To attempt to do this would produce confusion and discord throughout our bounds. The Northern plan would not suit our people, nor do we believe it would promote the interests of the colored members nor accord with their views truly ascertained. They desire separation, and were the first to apply for the organization of separate presbyteries. They were twitted for being "the white man's church." This charge interfered with their acceptability to their own people. They, indeed, desire the continued help of the white church, but long for independence. We could still give this help and gratify their desire for independence. It is felt also that this arrangement would afford the best method of training them, and aid in their highest development. Hence we steadily pursue the plan that we have adopted.

The action of this conference took, indeed, the form of attempted coöperation, but when we come to study the plan proposed, we are confronted by additional and very serious objections. The first one relates to the controlling power. This, we are asked to lodge in the hands of a *Board*. We need not remind the readers of this Review of the decided opposition of our church to the whole system of ecclesiastical boards as distinguished from committees. Our position upon this subject was reached after protracted discussions. It was argued very fully and with great ability. There were "giants in those days" on both sides of this question. The most illustrious names in our church are identified with this discussion, and it was reasonable to hope that the controversy was at an end, and that we had reached a very firm and clear decision. We do not propose to re-open this controversy. The decision is incorporated in our Book of Church Order. We hope that very few desire to have it reversed, but we are sorry to have to say that this Birmingham committee have proposed to commit the most difficult of all departments of church work to the management of an ecclesiastical board. We cannot think that our Assembly will listen to this for a moment. We are aware that it is thought to apply to only one topic and one form of church work. But it concedes the whole principle, and if carried out, we must have a new Book of Church Order.

But the way in which it proposes to carry it out is still more objectionable; and that is, that the power be lodged in a totally different branch of the church from ours, a really foreign body, and to that foreign body it offers by far the larger share of power and responsibility. The Northern Church is to provide fifteen members of this board, and we are to furnish seven. Thus we are called on to surrender in effect the entire control to the Board of Freedmen. We do not question the ability and integrity of these fifteen members; but we submit, is this arrangement fair and equitable? And is it right thus to abandon the whole work so far as our agency is concerned? Why not say this in plain terms?

We are aware that the Northern Church has the advantage in numbers and wealth. But the questions to be decided reach far beyond the matter of numbers and dollars. It cannot be forgotten that the masses of the people to be legislated for live *amongst us*. It is no presumption in us to say that we know and understand them better than our Northern brethren can; nor are we slow to advance the claim that we are as deeply interested in their spiritual welfare as any other

Christians on the globe. Our relations to them involve many points of difficulty and delicacy; and we believe that our people are capable of dealing with them as well as those who are comparative strangers.

It is very true that we have not shown the zeal and liberality that we ought to have shown towards them; but we trust that there will be a new interest enkindled on this subject, the very outgrowth of this discussion, that will result in a more faithful discharge of this duty.

Surely, when it is proposed to commit this grave responsibility to the hands of strangers, our churches will be aroused to more liberal and vigorous efforts. The proposed plan, if adopted, would weaken, if not destroy, the existing interest.

We cannot evade our responsibility in this matter. However we may try to legislate it out of existence, God will still hold us bound by it.

Another feature of this proposed plan to which we object is, that we are asked to conduct this work outside of our bounds, where influences would naturally prevail against our honest views, and where it would be inconvenient, and perhaps impossible, for even the small number of the members of this board allotted to us to attend.

It would be as reasonable to remove the legislature of Georgia to the city of Philadelphia. It is urged, indeed, that to change the location of this board would endanger the tenure of its property. Surely we have some vested rights ourselves, and we do not propose to sell out to any body of men, no matter how good they may be. This itself proves how impracticable is the whole plan. Taken all together, we regard this scheme as at least dangerous. It would prove an "entangling alliance." We trust our General Assembly will reject it. We sincerely believe, if undertaken, it would be one of perpetual regret. We therefore solemnly warn our people against it.

If, indeed, as has been suggested, it should be the introductory step towards organic union, we do not know of a more speedy way of reaching that end. We cannot for a moment believe that our people are ready for this tremendous result. We are not prepared to surrender the principles on which our separate existence as a church was projected. They are to us as sacred as the graves of our fathers, yea, as sacred as what we regard the true principles of the whole church. We see no reason for giving up our identity. We believe that God has a special work for us to do, and we are not disposed to turn aside from that, and that we can perform it best by our continued separation. In saying this we do not disparage the claims of our Northern

brethren; nor would we fail to record our admiration of their recent testimony in favor of sound doctrine in a time of great peril. We still hail them as allies, but we feel assured that we can best accomplish our part of the work which God has given us to do by continuing our separate existence; and furthermore, we are satisfied that this course would promote harmony and brotherly love in the most effectual manner. Let us work on in our several lines and seek to preserve "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

C. A. STILLMAN.

Tuscaloosa, Ala.

A FIFTY YEARS' PASTORATE.

A NOTABLE sermon on a most notable occasion is the "Semi-Centennial Discourse, delivered in the Presbyterian Church, Natchez, Miss., December 31, 1893, by Rev. Jos. B. Stratton, D. D., pastor," and published by that church. Bound with this sermon is a brief biographical sketch of Dr. Stratton, a sketch of the Natchez church, and a letter from Rev. B. M. Palmer, D. D., expressing regret at his inability to be present, and conveying a fraternal greeting. Add to these a picture of the pastor and a picture of the venerable and stately edifice in which he officiates, and we have a pamphlet of more than ordinary interest, worthy of a place in the archives of the church. The occasion of this sermon was the completion by this eminent servant of God of an uninterrupted pastorate of fifty years over the Natchez church, which occasion was duly celebrated by the congregation. We know of no other pastor in the South who has been honored of God with so long and continuous a service in one church as Dr. Stratton. A fifty years' pastorate in this restless day of short and shortening pastorates is phenomenal, and its completion well calls for commemoration. Present on either side in the pulpit when this discourse was delivered, and assisting in the solemn services, were Rev. J. H. Alexander, D. D., who only on the previous Sabbath had retired from a successful pastorate of thirty-eight years in Kosciusko, Miss., and Rev. T. R. Markham, D. D., whose consecrated ministry of thirty-seven years in La Fayette Church, New Orleans, entitles him to the honor accorded him by his brethren of being a leader in our southwestern Zion.¹ Had Rev. John Hunter, D. D., of Jackson, Miss., and

¹ The sad tidings come to us, while this number of the QUARTERLY is going through the press, of the death, on March 12th, 1894, of this eminent servant of God.