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THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF 1916 AT ORLANDO.

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The writer does not know whether or not Florida had such a charm for others as it did for him. It was his first visit into the land of fruits and flowers. Everything was full of novelty and interest from the time the train left Jacksonville, the gateway, till we reached Orlando, the beautiful, set down in the midst of its lakes and orange groves and long stretching arches of moss-covered trees.

The lure of the land must have been on the Commissioners, for we were given to understand that this was the largest Assembly, in point of numbers, for many years, if not indeed in the history of our Assemblies. And while the Assembly, impatient of long speeches and prolonged discussions, concluded its business with its record breaking speed, set some two or three years ago as a seven day assembly, yet many of the Commissioners were loathe to leave and tarried over in different portions of the State.

As to the hospitality of the people of Orlando; all that the late lamented pastor, Dr. Stagg, had promised in his most felicitous invitation was fully carried out. The only feature of regret being that he was not with us with his genial humor.

The Composition of the Assembly.

In its make-up it seemed to the writer, who has attended five or six Assemblies as a Commissioner, and several others as a

visitor, that this Assembly was largely composed of new men, young men, untried men so far as participation in other Assemblies goes, men who were in their first Assembly. There was an absence of the names of many who were well known and whom we have come to look upon as leaders in the courts of the Church. Indeed, as more than one was heard to remark, this Assembly was rather conspicuous for its lack of leadership, not that there were not many men there capable of leadership but there seemed to be little or no disposition on their part to push themselves into leadership. And then it was not an Assembly that gave itself to following. The men impressed you as having quietly thought out the matters that were before them, had made up their minds how they would vote, and were not to be argued or stampeded into something else.

This had been designated as a "Country Church Assembly" by the action of the previous Assembly. And that this had been in the minds of the Presbyteries in selecting their Commissioners was evident from the presence of an unusual number of men from the smaller and Country Churches. The largest Country Church in the Assembly was represented by its pastor, who was one of the largest men in the Assembly, physically, and we may say otherwise also.

The influence of the Country Church idea was also seen in the selection of Moderator for, though there was some sentiment here and there for a "favorite son," yet it was hardly more than a ripple in the strong current that had set toward the Country Parson. And as we have sometimes seen the multitudinous drops of water which go to make up the river, notwithstanding some reflux ripples here and there, flowing steadily on toward the one destination in its main current, so the Commissioners gathered from different portions of the Church had all in mind the election of a Country pastor for Moderator and so strong was the current that it was done by acclamation, a rare occurrence in ecclesiastical bodies. The honor could not have more appropriately fallen than upon Dr. C. W. Grafton, for forty-three years pastor of one church to which no railroad has yet come nearer than seventeen miles.

If the Moderator was not as skilled as some others may have been in the technical points of parliamentary law, yet his gentleness and his evident desire to be fair and courteous to all cleared many a tangle for him and kept the "point of order" brethren a little more quiet than otherwise they might have been.

The Country Church also had a large place on the program, two evenings and Sunday afternoon being given to its consideration. Surely this is a timely topic for Presbyterian people and nobody should be more interested in it than city pastors, for our churches in the city have greatly suffered because we have neglected the country church. Ours was once the opportunity to have made the country Presbyterian and as the country came to the city our city churches would have reaped the fruit, but—. Now that the cry is "Back to the Country" let the Presbyterian Church prove its adaptability by going with its best men and its best efforts to the country to enter into the life of the people in every way that shall best promote their temporal and spiritual welfare.

Position and Work of Women in the Church. ..

If we are to judge the importance of a matter by the amount of time given to it we would be compelled to write down as the most important question before the Assembly that of "Woman's Position in the Activities of the Church." This is the question that will not down, but is continually coming up ghost-like to plague the "fathers and brethren" of the Church. One reason, I am persuaded, why it comes up so frequently, is that our actions have never been quite in harmony with our teaching on the subject, as the necessity for using women in the Mission fields at home and abroad has arisen. Then, too, there has been a wide divergence in exegesis and interpretation of Scripture, as is most strikingly brought out by the reports of the Ad Interim Committee on the subject.

The last Assembly appointed an Ad Interim Committee "to make a careful study of the teaching of the Scriptures on the whole subject of Woman's Position in the Church." There

were five members on this committee and they brought in four reports, two members of the committee maintaining that they could find no warrant in Scripture for modifying the uniform teaching of our Church, as set forth in the deliverances of former Assemblies, that women are not permitted "to teach or exhort, or lead in prayer" in religious Assemblies composed of both men and women. And yet even these brethren saw the difficulty of rigidly enforcing what they called a "clear principle," for they added this sentence: "But the practical application of it in particular cases must be left to some extent to the discretion of sessions and the enlightened consciences of the women themselves."

This part of the Committee thought that authority for the "diaconal ministry of godly women in the congregations to which they belong was to be found in the New Testament, and recommended that a more general use of suitable women for such service be encouraged and that provision be made to instruct and train "women who desire to devote their lives to religious work as will fit them for efficient service in the Home and Foreign field."

Two other members of the committee, men of equal standing in the Church, while agreeing as to the first part of the report relative to women teaching, exhorting and praying in mixed assemblies, "Earnestly objected to the extension of the office of deacon to include the women who may engage in this important service of the Church, for the reason that we are assured that such extension would be without clear Scripture warrant." Thus giving an entirely different interpretation to the same passages by which the other members had reached a totally opposite conclusion.

Three members of the committee proposed an amendment to the Book of Church Order by which: "Women having the qualifications required by Scripture may be chosen as Deaconesses and set apart for such ministry as is appropriate for their sex, either in congregations to which they belong, or in Home or Foreign fields."

Another member of the committee, feeling more keenly

perhaps than the others how the present practice of the Church runs counter to the deliveries of past Assemblies, deduces from the same general class of passages by which the others had reached their conclusions, that "Woman's place in the Early Church was not negative but positive and her work varied and important, as 'laboring in the Gospel,' in 'good works and alms deeds,' as 'servants of the Church,' as 'helpers of the Apostles,' or 'fellow workers in Christ Jesus,' as 'expounding the way of God,' " etc., and concluded that similar activities should be permitted them in the Church today. He also found "Scriptural authority for women prophesying, praying, and preaching." "They did these things in the Apostolic Church, and if so, we may assume that they should be permitted as much liberty in the Church today."

(The passages quoted were: Acts 2:17; 21:8-9; 1 Cor. 11:5; Acts 8:1-4 and 1 Tim. 2:8-9.) By an unusual, to say the least, interpretation of such passages as 1 Tim. 2:11-12 and 1 Cor. 14:34, he draws the conclusion that "while the Scriptures do not authorize official teaching and preaching by women, they do not forbid her speaking in the Churches."

With such widely divergent views from an Ad Interim Committee with a whole year to study the matter, what hope that the Assembly itself would ever be able to come to a conclusion? And yet it did.

The paper finally adopted was as follows:

"That the Assembly reaffirm the action of the General Assembly of 1880, to-wit:

'Inasmuch as the public preaching of the Gospel is a branch of the ministerial office, to the authorization of which ordination or licensure is essential, and inasmuch as inspired Scripture, as interpreted by our Standards, nowhere, in the case of women, sanctions such a solemnity, but on the contrary, does clearly prohibit it, this Assembly does therefore declare the assumption of this sacred office by women is opposed to the advancement of true piety and to the promotion of peace in the Church, and this to such an extent as to make the introduction of women into our pulpits, for the purpose of pub-

licly expounding God's Word, an irregularity not to be tolerated. It is the settled doctrine of our Church that women are excluded from licensure and ordination by the plain teaching of the Scriptures, and therefore cannot be admitted to our pulpits as authorized preachers of the Word.'

That other services of Christian women be left to the discretion of the sessions and the enlightened consciences of our Christian women themselves."

To which was added, after an exposition of the office of Deaconess:

"We recommend, therefore, that the Assembly call attention of our churches to Paragraph 51, Section IV, Chapter IV, of our Form of Government, authorizing sessions to select and appoint godly women for diaconal ministry in the congregations to which they belong, and encourage a more general use of suitable women for such service.

Further, that through its Training School in Richmond and other agencies, the Assembly provide such instruction and training for women who desire to devote their lives to religious work, as will fit them for efficient service in the home or foreign field."

And while many hours of debate were spent on it the writer feels that the result would have been the same had there been no debate whatever allowed. For as he could catch the sense of the Commissioners it seemed that there were two general views:

One, that of the conservatives who did not want the Church to take any advance ground and the progressives (not radicals) who thought that the Church ought not to lay down a hard and fast rule drawn from passages where the exegesis was so divergent and the interpretation doubtful. And who also felt that our practice and our teaching should be in harmony and who, feeling that the conditions of the Church called for a larger use of consecrated women, sought to bring our deliverances in accord therewith. At the same time feeling that they were doing no violence to, but were whole-heartedly loyal to the Holy Scriptures as the only infallible rule of faith and practice.

There was no one in the Assembly who desired to see "women preachers," an abomination to Southern Presbyterians, but there were many who felt that she might well have a larger place in the teaching, praying and speaking life of the Church.

That this question "settled" will stay settled is perhaps too much to be hoped for, but the writer for one hopes we will never take a more backward step from the position to which we have come, so that we may not have the feeling that we are not just in accord with our Assembly when we allow a woman missionary to speak to a mixed Assembly, or when a woman happens to open her mouth in a prayer meeting service.

Just in harmony with this action on the Woman Question was the action of the Assembly on the "Christian Endeavor Societies." The Endeavor Society is made up of male and female members and in its very constitution all its members are required to take some part. Notwithstanding the fact that the Assembly has never officially endorsed this organization, yet it has outnumbered any organization for young people in the Church almost ten to one. But the Assembly not only endorses the society but practically gives it the right of way over all other similar organizations of the Church in this language: "The Assembly does most cordially and earnestly commend the Christian Endeavor to all its pastors and sessions, urging them wherever they do not now exist, to establish a young people's society of Christian Endeavor."

Another evidence of the desire on the part of the Assembly to allow larger freedom of action in things non-essential was manifested in the adoption, without a dissenting voice, of the majority report of the Ad Interim Committee on "Communion Wine," which gives liberty to any session to be guided by its own interpretation of the Scriptures in the matter. Does not this seem the wisest action that could be taken?

Firm as a rock in the great essentials of the Christian faith and doctrine, the Southern Presbyterian Church has always stood, but it has equally stood for liberty of conscience in non-

essentials and has ever left the deciding of a great many things to the enlightened conscience of its members.

Relation of Southern Presbyterian Church to Other Presbyterian Bodies.

For some time past there have been some matters of friction arising from time to time between the Presbyterian Church, U. S. and U. S. A., as is likely to occur with two similar bodies working side by side in the same territory. A joint Committee of Comity was appointed by the two Assemblies on all such matters. This joint committee, after having adjusted the matters complained of to our entire satisfaction, reached the following conclusions in addition to the already existing Rules of Comity:

"1. The covenants and agreements between the two Churches should be kept without modification or annulment excepting through the contracting General Assemblies.

2. The right is recognized of a particular church to withdraw from its own body to that of the other, where it is done at its own motion, or at the permission of its Supreme Judicatories, and the proper ecclesiastical and legal steps are taken."

This would seem a long step in the right direction and may have had some influence on a vote which was taken a little later in the session in answer to an overture from the Synod of Arkansas asking that the Church take steps toward the Union of all Presbyterian and Reformed Churches in the United States. The action taken by the Assembly was:

"That while this Assembly is responsive to the spirit of the overture from the Synod of Arkansas, it does not deem the time opportune to take such action." The vote stood 107 to 72, not very different from the vote on the woman question, again indicating the rather progressive trend of the Assembly.

The writer may be mistaken, but he received the impression that all that prevented the Assembly from appointing a committee to take the matter up with other bodies was that there was no similar committee in these bodies. Perhaps if we can

work together in peace and harmony on the border for a while we may find that we can work in peace and harmony everywhere.

Christian Education and Oglethorpe University.

The matter of "Christian Education" occupied some considerable time of the Assembly. It was with a considerable feeling of relief that the Assembly voted to refer the matter of Oglethorpe University to an Ad Interim Committee to see if it were possible to come to some agreement as to the relationship of the University to the Presbyterian Church, U. S., which would be satisfactory to all parties concerned.

This may be only postponing "the evil day" but all felt that in a matter which so vitally concerned the educational policy of our Church too much time could not be taken to digest as thoroughly as possible anything which looked toward a radical change.

The special feature of the educational problem pressed by the Standing Committee was the making more efficient of our Synodical institutions, this especially in view of the great numbers of our young people who are entering State Institutions, where the teaching is so often of a godless character.

Our Church has to a degree lost her once proud eminence as an educating Church. The State with her large equipment and unlimited means is making it increasingly difficult to regain it and it is going to take our wisest and most prayerful counsel to solve the matter. Surely this is no time for dissension in Zion, but for the heartiest co-operation in whatever policy the wisdom of the Fathers may devise.

Colored Presbyterian Church.

The Colored Brethren who were in attendance on the meeting of the Assembly as Commissioners made a good impression both by their intelligent looks and their modest demeanor. It was noticeable that in the voting they were divided in just about the proportion of the white commission. The colored brother who spoke before the Assembly did it in a most acceptable manner. He declared that Presbyterianism was the

"ism" for his people. He believed that it was through the Providence of God his people were brought out of Africa. He "swallowed the Shorter Catechism whole" in its teaching on the sovereignty of God. His illustration of the negro church as a child, which could not yet take care of itself, which was more or less of a trouble and yet the mother loved to care for it, was very apt and telling.

We feel that the Assembly did the wise thing in determining to re-erect the Afro-American Synod, where our colored brethren might have an opportunity to in a measure work out their own destiny as a Church and yet under the guiding and fostering hand of the Assembly; for this Synod is to have the same relation to the Assembly as the other Synods of the Church.

Our Relation to Other Church Bodies.

The Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America.

No Church, I take it, likes the idea of standing aloof from the other Christian bodies and yet there are times when a Church must stand as a witness for certain principles even though it have to stand alone. Our relation to the Federal Council has always been a little uncertain in its tenure—liable to be interrupted at any moment. It was therefore with some feeling of relief that we heard from Dr. Macfarland, Secretary of the Council, that according to the constitution of the Council the autonomy of each constituent body is preserved. And that the Federal Council would take no action that will violate the Constitution of any Constituent body. And also to have the assurance from Dr. W. S. Jacobs in presenting to the Executive Committee the protest made by our body against certain actions taken by the Council which were in violation of our distinctive principles and historic position he had received a most cordial welcome and sympathetic hearing.

At the same time, so long as our protest has not formally been before the Council itself, I feel that the Assembly did a wise thing in repeating the protest and requesting the Stated Clerk to transmit the action to the Federal Council.

It will be remembered that this protest had to do with the intermeddling of the Council with civil affairs, such as suggestions to Congress and to the President and Secretary of State with regard to certain matters of legislation. Our position being, of course, that the Church's mission is spiritual and should not meddle with civil affairs.

It was wise under the circumstances, doubtless, to appoint a permanent committee of three to be known as the Committee on Federation and Comity, that shall be the official channel of communication between the Federal Council and our Assembly.

Our relation to the Reformed Churches of America is more cordial and the action of that body on comity is exceedingly wise and is in substance the discouraging of overlapping Home Mission forces and co-operation in Home Mission work, and work among foreigners in every way possible so as to avoid friction of any kind. One of the most important actions taken by that body and concurred in by our Assembly was the following:

"That the Council appoint a committee to consider, formulate and report to the Council plans for the introduction of moral and religious training in our public schools, plans which, without violating any phase of the great and cherished principles of God by which Church and State are separated in our land, may yet be systematic and competent."

Dr. W. W. Moore of our Church was appointed by the Assembly to co-operate with such a committee from the Council.

The Work of the Church.

As to *The Work of the Church* itself during the past year there was the decided note of optimism and encouragement. The Stated Clerk announced early in the session that the additions to the Church on profession of faith, 21,084, were the largest number ever received in a single year. This was due doubtless both to our Assembly's Evangelist and the renewed interest in Evangelism stirred up in all our pastors and churches by our Superintendent of Evangelism and the vigorous campaign he is carrying on. Oh, for the time when all

our preachers shall be not pastors only but evangelists as well, where each shall do his own sowing and his own reaping! What excuse has a preacher for preaching if he can not preach evangelical truth in an evangelistic way?

Each of the Executive Committees showed a gratifying and encouraging progress and increase in gifts, even in the face of the general business depression prevailing.

The Assembly voted to make the outstanding feature of the next Assembly, that upon which special emphasis should be put, "Family Religion" and instructed the Permanent Committee to provide a suitable program to that effect and that in connection with it a pastoral letter be sent to all the churches upon the subject of Family Religion. That the Church is going to pay more attention to this matter would seem evident from the fact that a new question to be added to the questions in the narrative is, "How many families are enrolled in the "Family Altar League?"

There can be no more important matter for our people to consider. For upon religion in the home is dependent the future supply for the Ministry, the future Church and the future of the State. And we hope that our Church may come back again to its time honored position for which it was once rightly renowned, the training of the children in the home in religious things.

The writer sometimes questions the wisdom of the Assembly's meeting so often, once in three years perhaps, rather than every year. One Assembly will so often undo (so far as one Assembly can undo) what a previous Assembly has done, before many of the things have had a fair chance of being tried out. But he came away feeling that this Assembly was worth while from its advanced position on the woman question and Young People's Societies if for no other reason. And he was thoroughly impressed with the wide-awakeness of our younger ministers, and especially those on the Western and Border Synods, to the need of vigorous and active efforts for the spread of our beloved Church and feels that this argues well for the future.