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REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS

OF THE

SECOND GENERAL COUNCIL

OF THE

PRESBYTERIAN ALLIANCE,

CONVENED AT PHILADELPHIA, SEPTEMBER, 1880.

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Church has our external equipment for work been so complete as now. We have Societies, and Boards, and organizations for every purpose. But what are these without the Spirit? William Arthur's beautiful figure represents that the Church, in its present preparation for work, is like a cannon shotted with ball and powder and ready for action; but the ball is powerless, the powder is powerless, the cannon is powerless, until the spark of fire enters, and then the ball goes crashing like a thunderbolt. Just so the preparation of the Church is powerless. Oh, for the baptism of fire!

CO-OPERATION IN THE FOREIGN MISSIONARY WORK.

The REV. J. LEIGHTON WILSON, D. D., presented a report on this subject, introducing it as follows:

In presenting my paper to the Council I must confess that I labor under some degree of embarrassment. I find that the ground over which I pass has been already traversed this morning by Dr. Murray Mitchell; but still I have been reassured by the closing sentiments of the brother who has just spoken. During the past few days repeated allusion has been made to the desirability of co-operation in the foreign mission work. My object this morning is to submit a plan which is not only desirable but practicable. I wish to say that all of the branches of the Presbyterian Church can unite and co-operate in this great work without a violation of any ecclesiastical principles or usages; and, if I shall succeed in convincing the Council of the practicability of the ideas I advance in this paper, then I have no doubt that it will prove one of the strongest bonds to hold the Alliance together, and give to it a permanent character in the future.

The paper was as follows:

The time has arrived in the prosecution of the foreign missionary work, when co-operation among the various branches of the Presbyterian Church laboring in the same field becomes a matter of great and momentous importance. It is not the design of this paper to discuss the subject of a closer organic union between the different branches of the Church itself, this being regarded as an entirely separate and independent question; nor is it proposed to advocate the incorporation into one ecclesiastical body all the converts of the various evangelical bodies laboring in the same field, for however

ready these converts themselves might be for such a union, the churches at home are scarcely prepared for it. What we propose—and all that we propose—is, that all the mission churches gathered in the same field by the representatives of the different branches of the Presbyterian Church be encouraged to form one ecclesiastical body; and that we carefully guard, especially in the earlier periods of the work, against the mistake of trying to introduce into India, China, Africa, Japan, and other portions of the world, all those peculiarities which characterize the different branches of the Presbyterian Church in the home field. Most of these peculiarities have had their origin in our local, social, or civil surroundings, and however strongly we may feel constrained to hold on to them in existing circumstances, they cannot, nevertheless, be regarded as essential to true Presbyterianism, which, in its simplest, purest, and perhaps most vigorous form, has existed without them, and may do so again. To engraft these peculiarities, therefore, upon our foreign churches simply because we have been accustomed to them ourselves, or because they were forced upon us by our outward surroundings, is to impose a yoke upon the churches which they will find to be very irksome. It should be our aim, therefore, while we endeavor to give these new converts all the essential elements of true Presbyterianism, both as to doctrine and polity, it should be done in the briefest and simplest formulas possible. Our Confessions of Faith, as well as our elaborate systems of discipline and government, are the growth of centuries, and are entirely too cumbersome to be laid upon men just emerging from the depths of heathenism. It is certain that no such burthen was laid upon the primitive Church. The Apostles' Creed, or something equivalent, it is probable, was the only confession of faith that was known to the early churches, and their systems of government and discipline were no doubt equally brief and simple. Our more elaborate symbols of doctrine and polity, it is true, are the natural and legitimate outgrowth of the teachings of the New Testament, but it required a long time, as well as a vast amount of varied experience, to bring them to their present state of development; and they are, perhaps, needed by us just as they are, with such modifications, of course, as may seem necessary from time to time.

Our foreign converts, while they will derive many important lessons from our experience and instructions, will, nevertheless, have to work out an experience of their own, in their own peculiar circumstances. They will be called, by the providence of God, to encounter forms of opposition and persecution, and to contend with errors that were entirely unknown to our spiritual forefathers, and their forms of faith and polity must necessarily be tinged by the peculiar nature of these trials. We ought to be careful, therefore, not to lay upon them any unnecessary burthens, but let them, with the Bible in their hands and under guidance of the Holy Ghost, work out their own experience in their own peculiar circumstances.

In the further discussion of the subject in hand, we propose:

1st. To show some of the advantages that will result from the proposed co-operation.

2d. That it will be exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to maintain a strictly Presbyterian union between churches in the foreign and home fields.

3d. That with right views of the office and functions of the evangelist (the foreign missionary), there are no serious or insurmountable obstacles in the way of establishing one strong Presbyterian church in each of the great sections of the heathen world by the joint labors of all the different branches of the Presbyterian Church in Europe and in America.

In the first place, we are to point out some of the advantages of co-operation, and this we propose to do in the briefest manner possible. In the first place, and in a general way, there will be secured, on the one hand, all the advantages which usually result from concerted action, and, on the other, will be avoided all the evils which necessarily flow from distracted counsels, even when the different parties aim to accomplish the same object. An invading army, no matter how strong or well equipped, is not likely to achieve any great conquests, without concert among its different sections. So there must be concert among the different portions of that great spiritual army that is to bring all the nations of the earth in subjection to the Lord Jesus Christ.

But there are specific objects, in the prosecution of this great enterprise, in connection with which concert of action is a matter of great importance. Among these may be mentioned the establishment and maintenance of institutions of learning of a higher grade, especially such as are necessary to train young men for the work of the ministry. These will be found necessary, even in the earlier periods of the missionary work, in all of our missions; but as the number of candidates will probably not be large in any of them for some considerable time, it would be better and more economical for neighboring missions to unite in sustaining one institution of the kind.

Another object of not less importance, is to provide a religious literature for the people, which can be done more effectually and satisfactorily by concerted action. We include in this the translation of the sacred Scriptures, as well as other religious books, whether translations or original productions. This is an important matter, and instead of being left to the discretion of individuals, there ought to be in every mission field a committee to have the supervision of this important department of labor. Concert of action here would not only save expense, but the work would be done in a more satisfactory way, and there would be heartier co-operation in giving a wider circulation to all such publications.

Other things call for united action, which we can do little more than mention, viz., the course of study that should be prescribed for young men preparing for the work of the ministry; the terms of admission to church membership; how certain vices are to be treated

in connection with church discipline ; what salaries should be allowed to native helpers, and various other questions of a similar character. The want of understanding among missionaries in relation to such matters has often led to the most serious consequences.

Now all of these questions, as well as others equally important, might easily be settled by an occasional conference among brethren laboring in the same field, such as were held a few years ago at Alahabad, in India, and in Shanghai, in China. They might be held once in three or four years. It is not proposed that such conferences should possess or exercise any ecclesiastical functions, or interfere in any way with the ecclesiastical relations existing between the missionaries and their Presbyteries, or between the missionary and the churches he may have established in the foreign field—the powers of the conferences being purely advisory and prudential.

Our second proposition is, that it will be difficult, if not impossible, to maintain, on strictly Presbyterian principles, and for an indefinite length of time, a thorough ecclesiastical connection between foreign and home churches. A temporary arrangement of this kind might be effected, but it could not be continued indefinitely without serious embarrassment. Moreover, if the arrangement could be made practicable, it would still be doubtful whether it would be advantageous to either party. Of course, there will always be the kindest feeling between the two—much of the paternal on the one hand, and of filial on the other, and much of the unity of the Spirit pervading both—but no possible organic union, as we think, between churches occupying the opposite sides of the globe.

The difficulties lying in the way of a close organic union, even where one church is the offspring of the other, are varied and obvious. First, there is the difficulty of bringing the delegates of bodies so remote from each other into one ecclesiastical convocation, which must be done if we would maintain our ideas of Presbyterian polity. If the Presbyteries in India, China, and Africa—the number of which are rapidly multiplying—are constituent parts of the home church, then they will have to send their commissioners to our General Assemblies in Europe and America. And here comes to view, at once, the great difficulties connected with these long journeys, the very great consequent loss of time, and the heavy expense attending them. More than this. These foreign delegates, in most cases at least, would have to bring interpreters along with them, or run the risk of not understanding or being understood when they appeared in these Assemblies. Then, again, these delegates would have the right to expect the Assemblies to meet occasionally, at least, in foreign lands, and we would thus have the spectacle of five hundred or six hundred ministers and elders sailing more than half around the globe to hold a General Assembly in Peking, when it would be almost certain, beforehand, that very few persons, except the voyagers themselves, would be able to comprehend their proceedings.

But there would be other difficulties. In every promiscuous assem-

bly of the kind, there would, even at this early stage of the missionary work, be fifteen or twenty spoken languages, and without the apostolic gift of tongues, how would it be possible to transact the ordinary business without confusion? Furthermore, these foreign delegates having just emerged from all the darkness of heathenism, and having little or no knowledge of our modes of conducting business, would be greatly perplexed, even if there were no difficulties on the score of language, to understand our modes of procedure, or the results to which our discussions would lead. We are so much in the advance of them in all our church matters that we would seldom have occasion to consider those questions in which they are most deeply interested. Nor could these foreign delegates be treated simply as wards or pupils. For while they would not be able to comprehend those higher themes which we would feel called upon to discuss, they will, nevertheless, have questions to propound that we might find it very difficult to handle.

There are many things, for example, connected with *caste* in India, and *foot-binding* in China, about which the missionaries on the ground are greatly divided in opinion, as to whether they should be made the subjects of church discipline or not. Now if intelligent missionaries on the ground, who are acquainted with the practical working of these things, are at a loss how to decide, how would it be with a convocation of men who knew comparatively little about such matters? In China there has been an earnest contest among missionaries for nearly fifty years as to the proper word that should be used for Deity. Able and learned arguments, such as thorough Chinese scholars alone can write, have been brought forward on both sides of the controversy, but without bringing the parties any nearer to each other. Now suppose this question were thrust into one of our assemblies for solution, how could they undertake to discuss it in a satisfactory or intelligible manner? Necessity would be laid upon us to remand all such questions back to the native churches and the missionaries, who, in the course of time and under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, will no doubt arrive at the true solution.

But apart from all these difficulties is it really best for these foreign churches to be kept, for any considerable length of time, under the tutelage of the home church? Would it not be far more conducive to their spiritual growth to be thrown, at as early a period as possible, upon their own responsibilities? Strength and self-reliance can be effectually developed only by the exercise of their own gifts and endowments. They may make mistakes and they may fall into serious errors, but these under the overruling providence of God would be made subservient to their ultimate good.

In the third place, we wish to show that there are no insuperable obstacles in the way of bringing all the native churches of the Presbyterian order in the same field into one church organization; and that this would be far more promotive of their usefulness and spirituality, than for them to be ecclesiastically connected with the home church

either in Europe or America. At the same time the plan we propose, when rightly and fully understood, can scarcely fail to be satisfactory to every branch of the Church engaged in carrying on the work. The object aimed at, as has already been shown, is not for each branch of the Church to plant a vine of its own in each one of the great sections of the heathen world, to be permanently connected with itself; but for all the branches of the Presbyterian Church to unite in planting one great vineyard in these different fields that shall overspread and be a blessing to the whole land. Over this general vineyard no one branch of the Church shall have any special control, except through the missionaries on the ground, who will give advice as long as it shall be necessary. If this idea, dear brethren, could be fully realized, it would not only bring about a new and important era in the progress of the missionary work, but would constitute a memorable epoch in the future history of the great Presbyterian Church itself.

Right views in relation to the office and the functions of the evangelist will, we think, go far, not only to clear away the difficulties that have gathered around the subject, but to establish harmony of views among all those who love this great cause. We assume then, on what we regard as scriptural authority, that the term evangelist does not indicate a separate office in the Church, but a special function of the ministerial office. An evangelist is simply a minister of the gospel set apart by his Presbytery to labor in destitute and foreign parts. Because he is to labor in destitute places, and in foreign lands he is clothed with a larger amount of ecclesiastical power than the minister in the settled church. His powers are extraordinary, but temporary; and they vary according to circumstances. If he labors in destitute parts, within the acknowledged bounds of his own Presbytery, he may organize churches, administer discipline, ordain elders and deacons, but he can go no further. When he enters the foreign field he is clothed with all the powers necessary to plant the Church of Christ in that field. He may not only organize churches and ordain elders and deacons, but he may ordain pastors and evangelists and assist in forming Presbyteries, when the native churches are prepared for such. In fact the evangelist, when he goes to foreign lands, carries with him the powers of the Presbytery, so that he may do whatever a Presbytery might do in establishing the Church where it has not before existed. But as soon as the Presbytery is formed—or as some suppose as soon as a particular church is established—the ecclesiastical powers of the evangelist, so far as those churches and that Presbytery are concerned, are brought to an end. He may give advice and counsel afterwards, and in this way may be very serviceable to these newly formed churches, but he can exercise no further ecclesiastical jurisdiction over them. The newly formed Presbytery takes the reins of government into its hands, and the evangelist, unless he is engaged in teaching or translating, must go “into the regions beyond,” and commence the evangelistic work anew.

The evangelist may become the pastor of one or more of the churches that he has been instrumental in founding, but in that case he ceases to be an evangelist, and must become a member of the Presbytery which has been established over those churches. He may also continue to receive his support from the home church, but he cannot consistently with Presbyterian principles and usages be a member of two Presbyteries at the same time. This idea we know is entertained by many excellent brethren, and in some of our Presbyterian missions it has been carried into practical effect. But, as it appears to us, it must ere long result in great confusion, for it undermines and would ere long overthrow the great Presbyterian doctrine of *ministerial parity*. If a missionary can be a member of a Presbytery in China and of another in America at the same time, then he may be tried and be condemned in one, and be acquitted in the other, a right which the native minister cannot claim, unless he is also a member of both. Will this inequality and irregularity, in the course of time, not be felt to be a most serious grievance? Nor will the condition of the church or churches over which this pastor presides be less anomalous. Will it be amenable to, or have the right of appeal to either Presbytery that it may elect?

The true idea in carrying on this great work is for the evangelist to remain steadfast in the calling in which he originally went out; and if, for special and extraordinary reasons, he becomes the pastor of a native church, then let him cast his lot fully with the church. It is contended by many, and no doubt with considerable force, that the missionary may be of great service to the newly formed Presbytery by being a regular member of it; but we do not see why he may not be equally serviceable in sitting as a corresponding member, and giving such advice as may seem necessary. The great danger of his being a full member is, that the native members will feel too much disposed to follow his advice, instead of exercising their own judgment.

The *Mission*, as it is technically called, must be considered, in order to give completeness to our views. It is composed, as a general thing, of the ordained ministers and lay assistant missionaries sent out by any one branch of the Church to any particular section of the heathen world. It is organized as all similar bodies are, and stands equally related to the general missionary work and the home board. It has no ecclesiastical powers over the members of its own body, or over the churches that may be gathered around it, except those powers which the individual evangelist exercises. It is, in fact, a sub-committee of the home board. It is through its agency that the home board carries on its work. But neither the one nor the other can exercise any judicial powers, but simply directs the general work. It is at the recommendation of the mission that schools are established, salaries are fixed, native laborers are employed, new stations are formed, and the work of each member of the mission itself is determined. The evangelist is responsible to the General Assembly so far as his general work is concerned, but to the Presbytery which sent him out in the first instance for his ministerial conduct.

It is through the *Mission*, therefore, that the Church maintains complete control over the general missionary work. Through her own board she determines who shall be sent out as missionaries; to what fields they shall go; in what departments of labor they shall engage; what native laborers shall be employed; what salaries shall be given, and all other matters of a similar character.

It is not proposed to merge the work of any particular branch of the Church into that of another. Each one is to carry on its own work separately and independently. All that any one church concedes, according to this plan, is that the fruits of all their varied labors, when they have crystalized into churches and presbyteries, may be allowed to unite with those of neighboring missions in forming one strong, homogeneous, compact Presbyterian Church, that shall be a blessing to that whole land. The different churches, while working in their own peculiar way and through their own chosen organizations, will find themselves very much in the same condition with the tribes of Israel in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, each having its own section to restore, but all working to accomplish the same great object.

There is, fathers and brethren, something grand and sublime in the idea that all the varied branches of our venerable Presbyterian Church should be found earnestly working, not to extend and perpetuate their own peculiarities of worship and government, but to rear one simple, pure, scriptural Presbyterian Church for each one of the great sections of the unevangelized world. In what other way could be more surely realized that *spiritual unity*, so earnestly enjoined by the Redeemer, and so heartily desired by all those who love his holy name? Such a consummation would inaugurate a new era in the history of modern missions. No portion of the Church could remain idle or indifferent in view of such a spectacle. We would expect to see all the tribes of Israel, even the smallest of them, buckling on the armor for the conflict. The full strength of the whole Church would be called into active exercise, and with the blessing of Almighty God attending it, how could the powers of darkness withstand its combined and mighty assaults? We confidently believe that the day is not far distant when the plan of co-operation which we have so feebly advocated will be fully realized, and when that is the case the time will also be near when every human being on the face of the earth will have heard of the salvation of Jesus Christ.

The REV. JOHN C. LOWRIE, D. D., of New York, delivered the following address:

We should bless God for the degree of co-operation that now exists. It has great breadth and is deep in the hearts of thousands and tens of thousands of God's people. We are agreed as to a great many things, and, in fact, I may say as to most things. But yet the question of co-operation implies diversity. There are some diversities at home in the selection and appointment of missionaries; for instance,