



SECOND
GENERAL COUNCIL
HELD IN
PHILADELPHIA
1880
UNITED STATES



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REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS

OF THE

SECOND GENERAL COUNCIL

OF THE

PRESBYTERIAN ALLIANCE,

CONVENED AT PHILADELPHIA, SEPTEMBER, 1880.

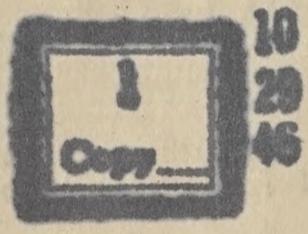
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EDITED BY

JOHN B. DALES, D.D., AND R. M. PATTERSON, D.D.

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opportunity into the soil of young hearts. You will tell some day, for example, the story of the runaway slave whom Paul found in the slums of Rome and sent back to Philemon, his master. And who knows? Out of that soil prepared by God, in after years, shall spring up the very word we are waiting for; the very solution of the problem we had before us the other day, of the relation between employers and the employed.

And in other ways, past naming, good shall spring forth. The life of the pulpit shall flow like a river through the lives of the children. And the boys and girls, who are to be the fathers and mothers of the years to come, shall rise up to call us blessed.

I am not advocating an untried proposal. Many congregations in England and Scotland have had happy experience of it for years.

Would that it might become an ordinance in every Presbyterian Church in the world!

At every morning service, for one ten minutes out of the ninety, let the minister be in direct contact with the souls of the children. Let never a day pass in which he shall not give wings to a story of God's love or Christian life. It will go up and down, and in and out throughout the week which follows, doing work for God. Doing this, we shall whet and keep whole the appetite of the children for the services of the sanctuary. Doing this, we shall open the windows of heaven and give them also glimpses of the vision of God. And in that golden space, in those so consecrated minutes, we shall bring back for the children, and it may be for their parents as well, the days when Jesus spoke to his disciples in parables, and taught those children of his love as they were able to receive his words.

RECENT EVANGELISTIC WORK IN PARIS.

Next on the programme was a paper on this subject by the Rev. George Fisch, D. D., of Paris. Dr. Fisch was not able to be present; but he had forwarded his paper, which was committed to the editors, and will be found in the Appendix, page 909.

The REV. JOSEPH R. WILSON, D. D., of Wilmington, N. C., read the following paper on

EVANGELISTS AND EVANGELISTIC WORK.

Christianity is more than Churches. These are, however, its representatives by which, as to its main features, Christianity is judged. Shall it thus be judged falsely? It no doubt often is; and *always*, whenever this Church or that fails to exhibit the true gospel spirit, or conceals the true gospel purpose, or falters in the true gospel work. The true *spirit* of Christianity is the love it bears from God to our race; its corresponding true *purpose* and work, to commend this love to all men, in the presentation of the great salvation. That Church, ac-

cordingly, which has no success in proclaiming God's saving grace, ought to have no place among the acknowledged representatives of Christianity; whilst the Church which publishes this grace the most effectually, ought to be thought of as occupying the foremost place of all. Church glory is, in other words, proportioned not to the harmonies of its creeds, or to its historical orthodoxy, but to the directness and perseverance of its efforts at *evangelization*. Had an apostle been asked, what are all those churches *for*, which you are planting here and yonder—in Antioch, in Ephesus, in Philippi, in Corinth—he might have replied: "As a matter of course, they have not been organized for themselves alone, any more than is the new heart of an individual believer for itself; but as a means for extending the tidings with which *they* have been made glad to such as are yet unacquainted with the preciousness of Christ. See, therefore, what I and the others of our number are engaged in doing: we no sooner establish the essential worship in any central spot, than we go, journey upon journey (attended by one or more of the men who share our spirit), to make it known in the regions beyond." Thus there have been, from the first, two great agencies of influence emerging from the idea of a practical Christianity: the agency that conserves, the agency that conveys. There must, on the one hand, be those fixed ministries, by which to *store* spiritual power, by which to concentrate gospel light; but there must be also those other and equally needful ministries by which this amassed treasure shall be dispensed and this gathered light be diffused. No Church must selfishly retain and consume what it has received—it must not monopolize what it enjoys—but, putting on the shoes of swiftness, must traverse the entire world in publishing the news of which it is the appointed, and ought to be the winged, herald.

Thus evangelism is seen to differ from mere *propagandism*; the one crying, come, be of our Christ; the other, come, be of our Church; the one urgent for the Lord's sake, the other for opinion's sake; the one extensively Christian, the other narrowly denominational. Every separate Church, in obedience to the same necessity which authorized its detached existence at the first, is perhaps bound to proclaim its supposed superior claims over all its sisters to orthodox completeness. But the Church, however loud and however just are its pretensions to pre-eminency, which makes its own increase its chief aim, places the less before the greater; the right order being this: Christian first, then denominational. The genus is more comprehensive than any of the species which it includes. The life is more than the organs which express it.

True evangelism, then, is that which, repudiative of mere sectarian rivalry, and for the sake of catholicity, consents to join the hands of co-operation with all Christians in the one common work which all Christian Churches profess to have in view.

There are thus, therefore, two things which in this aspect of the evangelistic work, Presbyterianism is especially fitted to accomplish,

and which I will venture to suggest: The first is, to impress upon its evangelism the distinctive mark of a benevolence which rises above all *Churchism*. And, in a peculiar manner, Presbyterianism is qualified for this, because, in a distinguishing degree, it is possessed of the rarest elements of a genuine denominational liberality—and it is so possessed for the reason that, having a charity as broad as the truth which makes it so strong, it presents no offensive claim to exclusiveness. It is, accordingly, in a position to say to all the other evangelical Churches: I believe in you so far as you believe in our common Lord, and only just so far I ask you to believe in me: come, then, let us serve together, with interlocked hands, in that field which, to all of us alike, is the world: our several shares in the ensuing converts being left to him whose providence shall determine their respective ecclesiastical homes. I am, indeed, Presbyterian, and so expect to remain—Presbyterian I wish you all were—but then I am what you also are, or ought to be, a Christ-adorer first, a Church-admirer next. There are already associations, grand and growing, in which we are unitedly free to sit down together: such as those Bible societies which nation after nation has instituted, to the praise of our common and comprehensive Christianity. Why may there not be a similar organization whose one most noble purpose it shall be to utilize, on foreign and in home fields, whatsoever of the evangelical spirit we severally possess? There are difficulties, but may these not be overcome, when we combine to meet them, and with no other fear in our hearts than the fear of God?

If in such candor Presbyterianism might speak to its denominational neighbors everywhere, with some hope of an equally frank response, why should not this General Council take measures to give substantive existence to so desirable a possibility as is thus suggested? It would be only another step in the direction whither all our doctrinal beliefs, hand-in-hand with all our past history, have steadily led—*i. e.*, of paths that rise at every important point higher than churchly prejudice and its attendant pride; a step which would find a conspicuous footing in the inauguration of a scheme, the first effect of which would be to marshal suitable representatives from all evangelical Christendom in a Council whose proceedings would have as wide a generality as the preached gospel already has, and whose one exclusive aim would be that gospel's universal spread; a Council similar in construction to that of the "Evangelical Alliance," but having no outlook except for the practical eye, and therefore from only a single window, that from which could be seen in actual result the fulfilment of Daniel's prophecy, when "many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased."

A co-operation so reputable, and even so splendid as this idea suggests, would, were it feasible, present to the world a feature of Christianity, which, because it is a feature not now beheld on the face of the Church, raises against our religion the sneer of a well-understood, and, I might add, a well-directed infidelity. The hindering objection

to such a scheme is not to be found in the character of the gospel itself, which instructs with respect to the Fatherhood of God not more fully than it does with respect to the *brotherhood of believers*. Opposition to it can proceed only out of that poverty of the Christian spirit which is disposed to sink the welfare of the whole body in the dreary marsh of denominational selfishness—a poverty which is at once a scandal and a snare, and which it will require some tremendous effort of fraternal combination to remove, but whose removal is absolutely necessary, unless we wish to believe that another space of nineteen centuries must be covered by the ineffectual struggles of truth to overtake and subdue the errors that the past 1900 years have failed to reach and to conquer.

If, however, the plan now outlined be treated as impracticable, or even should it be adopted, there is another important suggestion I will venture upon this opportunity to make. Our own Presbyterian system is itself incomplete. It needs—it has always needed—the addition of a new element to its ministerial force. As things are, we have one variety of the preaching office; we require another. We have the rooted ministry; let this be supplemented by a branching ministry. We have our fixed batteries; we need to have also our flying artillery. We have many whose duty and whose joy it is to *stand* for Christ in set places and at given times; we ought to have quite as many whose duty and whose joy it shall be to *run* for Christ into all places and at all times; men who do not wait for inquiring comers, but who themselves go out to find and to bring; the highway heralds, the street and lane messengers, the *compellers*. *Have* we not these, however? Yes, but in what meagre numbers! The *laity* has seen the deficiency, and therefore *it* goes forth, self-actuated, to do what it can for the lost whom no one else is finding. Yet who does not know that evils not a few are wrapped up in every such spontaneous effort of untrained piety or undisciplined knowledge?—with brilliant exceptions, it may be, now and then, to prove the rule. There is, indeed, a sense both wide and important, in which every follower of the Son of God should regard himself as, by the very possession of his new heart, an evangel of the New Testament. And it is to be presumed that not until all believers shall have had written upon their characters and possessions “holiness to the Lord,” in letters that the blindest passer-by may perceive and must admire, that the promised millennial glory is to be let down upon a regenerated world. Undoubtedly, therefore, evangelists ought to be as numerous as Christians. But I am speaking of God’s *official* plan of salvation, in pursuance of which men are to be rightly taught and rightly churched by a method for which he has left no room to place a substitute: the method of a regularly ordained and commissioned ministry. This being suitably worked, all else will go by itself, and just because it *is* the supreme method of Him who cannot err. Well, how shall this divine ordering be best obeyed? Simply by accepting it in all its largeness, as embracing the complete equipment of a *two-fold* ministry; the one for

establishing, the other for enlarging; this for coherence, that for conquest; a moiety for garnering, a moiety for gathering. As matters now stand, the work of propagative evangelization is regarded as a thing extraneous, and is shaped by the uncertain touches of mere chance, being in too many instances committed to men who happen to be available for the time current who have nothing else to do, and not to men peculiarly fitted and personally called. What is wanted, in short, is a *systematized itineracy* composed of mental, moral and physical material that is specially adaptable to this business and to no other, particularly for countries like America, where the spaces to be covered are so large; and like France, where the truth as we hold it is comparatively so little known; and like Germany, where infidelity needs to be pursued with swifter limbs than any which have yet been used; and like heathendom at large, which lies before the Church a constant reproach. And it ought to be from among the very best sons of the Church that these itinerants are chosen—men who shall be educated in seminaries where the training will be such as to enable its outgoing proficients to *command* a hearing from all classes of society, low and high, or selected from among those who already are in the ministry—its *first* men, as proved by success.

Is all this not possible? Who can say? It has never been tried.

And even though, in the incipiency of the experiment, there may be found only a few apostolic souls to give it a start, yet what if these should turn out to be men, who, like Duff, stream with holy fire without ceasing from the channel of prudence, or like Martyn, alive with energy, whilst solid with learning, or like Baker, uniting the utmost simplicity with the deepest earnestness! Then to these would soon be added other twos and threes, until after a while a grand corps of travelling gospellers would be seen, who evermore refusing a fixed habitation except in heaven, might serve to move the world as it has not hitherto been moved. With these hints, I relieve your patience.

The following discussion was then had upon the papers of the evening:

REV. JOS. T. SMITH, D. D., of Baltimore.—If all the brethren here had the heart and the art of the good brother who would have the children's service introduced into the Church, it would mark a new era in our Presbyterian worship; but unfortunately that peculiar tact that would get hold of children's minds, which that brother fortunately has, is not a gift that God has given to all his servants. How shall we bring our children into our churches and make them participate in the service?

We can address them by name; but shall we pass over all the classes in the congregation and address each by name? We can gather illustrations that will be striking to them; and none