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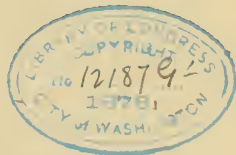
GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

In the United States of America.

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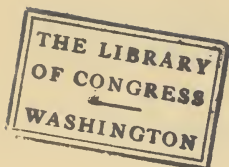
MODERATOR'S SERMON

BEFORE THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF 1876.



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AMERICAN PRESBYTERIANISM:

ITS PAST AND ITS FUTURE.

THE MODERATOR'S SERMON BEFORE THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF 1876.

BY THE

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AMERICAN PRESBYTERIANISM:

ITS PAST AND ITS FUTURE.

“In all their afflictions he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them, and he bare them and carried them all the days of old.” Isa. lxiii. 9.

“Walk ye round about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces: that ye may tell it to the generation following. For this God is our God for ever and ever.” Ps. xlviii. 12-14.

FATHERS and brethren: Officially assembled in this holy place to review the divine goodness toward our beloved Church in the past, to consider the evidences and the sources of her present prosperity, and to confirm our faith in the presence and blessing of God through coming time, we may fitly make these two passages of Scripture the basis and the substance of our joint meditations. The first will be recognized as a psalm of commemoration, celebrating in beautiful imagery the historic grace of Jehovah toward his ancient Church and people. The second is a hymn of joy and hope, inspired by a survey of the present strength and beauty of that Church, and by firm confidence in her pre-

dicted and glorious future. In their combination they forcibly suggest the cardinal lesson that the Church, in all ages and of whatever name, enjoys in a special sense the divine nurture and protection; they reveal our God as the God of his people for ever and ever.

The ecclesiastical year just closing has been marked by many illustrations of this truth. In the prevalent peace and concord, in the abounding manifestations of loyalty to our type of faith and order, in the measure of growth and progress, in the increase of our ministry, in the vigorous prosecution of our denominational work at home and abroad, and especially in the reviving of religion in so many of our churches, we have tangible proofs that the angel of the divine Presence has been with us, and has carried and folded us in his love. The promise of the opening year is also full, rich, abundant. In the midst of financial depression and of political agitations the faith and courage and devotion of our people are not declining. Our denominational enterprises are moving forward with scarcely diminished energy. Activity and consecration still characterize our ministry. Precious revivals are yet in progress, and our churches are rejoicing in numerous accessions, and in the bloom and fragrance of a ripening spiritual life. In such favoring circumstances, does it not at this sacred

hour become our foremost duty to appropriate the joyous language of psalmist and of prophet, and to celebrate with them the goodness and grace of Him who is the Shepherd of Israel through all generations?

Contemplating the career and condition and prospects of our Church on a broader scale, how much more urgent becomes the occasion for such psalms of commemoration, such hymns of joy and of hope! In this historic year in our national life our minds are naturally led to review with fresh interest the two centuries, nearly, of our denominational existence on this continent, and to trace the good hand of our God upon us from age to age. It is natural also to note the vivid contrast between the earlier feebleness, the labors and conflicts, the toilsome development of the past, and the mingled strength and beauty of our present Zion, fortified with the bulwarks of salvation and bright with palaces of grace. Nor can we refrain at such a time from looking forward into the nearer and the remoter future, and gathering up, alike from the teachings of history and the witness of Scripture, comforting hopes and assurances respecting the career of our denomination on this continent in the generations and the centuries which are to come. Oh for minds to comprehend the wonders of the divine dealing as thus both realized and promised, and

for hearts that exclaim with the psalmist, "This God who has been, who now is, shall continue to be our God for ever and for ever"!

Considered in these broader aspects, the occasion seems to prescribe a theme which commands present consideration—the past and the future of American Presbyterianism. While I realize painfully the contrast between the magnitude of this theme and the various limitations under which I must labor in discussing it, I propose on the one side to present *some pertinent suggestions respecting our denominational development* from the first planting of the seed to the present era of relative vigor and maturity; and on the other side, to indicate in general *the true line of progress for the future*, and to name some of the conditions under which such progress may be anticipated. To the topic thus somewhat vaguely announced let me solicit your thoughtful, sympathetic attention.

AMERICAN PRESBYTERIANISM IN THE PAST.

In glancing at the history of American Presbyterianism as that history shades off into the beautiful and cheering present, it will be well to note at the outset the important fact that this Presbyterianism *sprang from the British rather than the Continental stock*. Continental Presbyterianism, though starting at the Reformation as

the primary form of church organization accepted by Protestantism, and associating itself by strong and vital ties with the Calvinistic type of the Protestant doctrine, and although consequently it had the start in position, resources and opportunity, yet failed in its actual development to justify the earlier promise, and especially during the seventeenth century suffered serious deteriorations in both character and influence. State complications, national differences, theological rivalries, and especially the bitter conflict with Arminianism, to say nothing of some inherent defects in the dominant varieties of Presbyterianism itself, had conspired together to change the serene bloom of the morning into a cloudy and ominous day. But the Presbyterianism of the British Isles, and especially of Scotland, had meanwhile strengthened and improved alike in essential qualities and in ecclesiastical position ; and before the middle of the seventeenth century it had secured for itself a permanent home and a commanding influence from Edinburgh to London. There was much in such a type of doctrine and order which was calculated to win and hold the British mind. Its strongly intellectual cast, its large ethical element, its sharply-defined religious experiences, its practical and efficient methods, its free and just forms of organization, and especially its clear, positive, cogent presentation of all that was most vital in

Protestantism, gave it ready entrance and won for it permanent authority. Under such favoring conditions it steadily grew and flourished, both northward and southward ; and though its unwise struggles after State recognition and prestige constantly weakened its true spiritual influence, and at last in England threw it back into a secondary place between prelacy and independency, yet before the end of the century British Presbyterianism had confirmed its right to separate existence, had justified its positions on the broadest scriptural grounds, had embodied and glorified itself in the symbols of Westminster, had been established in Scotland as the national Church, and had become known throughout Europe as one of the most effective forces in current Protestantism.

From this insular stock American Presbyterianism was derived ; to this British ancestry it mainly owes its existence. At the time of that primitive transplantation, independency in its two varieties already possessed New England ; the Reformed Church of Holland had planted itself in the colony of New York ; Catholicism of the English type had taken root in Maryland ; Pennsylvania had become the chosen home of the disciples of Fox, and Virginia the domain of an authorized and influential Episcopacy. Representatives of the persecuted Presbyterianism of

France had meanwhile sought refuge in the Carolinas, and a few scattered adherents of the doctrine and order of Westminster, chiefly from Scotland and Ireland, had found homes at various points along the Atlantic from Baltimore to Boston. But it was not till the beginning of the eighteenth century, when British Presbyterians in large numbers were compelled to flee from the rigors of prelacy, and when kindred immigration from other quarters had become more extensive, and sufficient material was thus provided, that particular congregations began to be formed in Maryland and Pennsylvania, and the first presbytery was organized; and our Church, as an historic body, assumed its definite place among the denominational organisms which were henceforth to shape together the religious history of this new continent.

GENERAL CONDITIONS OF GROWTH.

As we trace the growth of the germ thus planted we discover four general conditions—conditions affecting more or less vitally all forms of American religious life—under which such growth has been attained. Of these the first in time, if not in importance, was a *gradual separation from the parent stock*, followed by a consequent development of indigenous varieties in thought, usage and experience. The Atlantic

was then a broad ocean rather than a narrow strait, and communication with the Old World was both infrequent and difficult. The young Church, finding foreign support uncertain and inadequate, was early thrown back upon its own resources and became absorbed in the task of interior development. European ideas, interpretations, usages, gradually lost authority; ancestral connections and interests grew relatively unimportant. The original British material was also rapidly modified by the intermingling of other elements, partly from Continental sources, partly from New England. And thus, even during the first period, from 1706 to 1758, a native type of Presbyterianism, fashioned largely by these new exigences and differing in some particulars from the Scotch norm, rose into shape and vigor. The struggles and alienations of the Revolution completed this process; and with the formation of the General Assembly in 1788, the American Presbyterian Church may be said to have entered fully upon its career of independent existence. Preserving sacredly the principles it had inherited, it yet held these under such limitations as were demanded by its new circumstances; losing something, doubtless, in consequence of such isolation, it also gained much that was indispensable to a truly national character and position. Receiving reverently

the Westminster symbols as the substance of belief, it still exercised its inherent right to modify these symbols so far as their teaching seemed defective. Adopting cordially the polity of the mother-churches, it still administered that polity in a spirit and in methods largely its own. No longer Scotch or Irish, Huguenot or Puritan, it thus became a Church distinctively American, under no allegiance to foreign authorities or precedents, sustaining, regulating, developing itself as freely, as independently, as the young nation with whose life and career it was so closely identified.

An entire dependence on the voluntary principle constituted another of these general conditions. During the seventeenth century no less than four State Churches substantially had been established in the American colonies: the Papal in Maryland, the Episcopal in Virginia, the Dutch in New York and the Puritan in New England. But the attempt to reproduce here, even in more spiritual forms, what had been so disastrous to the cause of Protestantism in Europe was a predestined failure; and from that failure our Church was providentially exempt. Such was its geographic position, and such were its relations to these denominations and to the colonial governments, that it was constrained from the outset to plant itself upon the voluntary

principle as distinguished from all forms of State support. That principle had, indeed, as history has shown, its limitations and its dangers; it tended strongly to emphasize theological differences, to cultivate denominational rivalries, to develop a belligerent spirit of sect, ever pregnant with mischief. But the principle itself was sound, and its adoption under the circumstances was both a logical and a practical necessity. It was an essential element in that broad conception of religious liberty which had already appeared in American thought, and which was destined to be incorporated as a cardinal truth into the very structure of American society. Under that principle the Presbyterian Church from the beginning lived and prospered, depending on no *regium donum*, asking from the State nothing but protection, and resting solely on the devotion and the labors and sacrifices of those who loved and were willing to sustain it. To the Presbyterianism of the Old World the experiment must have seemed anomalous and full of danger, but to the young Church, just rising into form and vigor, it became an experiment fraught with blessing. American Presbyterianism could never have risen to its present elevation in spirituality or fruitfulness had it not thus from the beginning cast itself irrevocably upon the doctrine that the Church of Christ rests on no civil supports, and

needs neither the endorsement nor the patronage even of the mightiest monarchs of earth.

Another general condition may be seen in *the peculiar collocation and commingling of the various American sects* in a common struggle for life and for growth. In the Old World geographic boundaries had largely kept apart not merely Romanism and Protestantism, but also the several varieties of Protestantism. Even during the sixteenth century the Church of the Reformation had broken up into a series of national or provincial churches, held together by a certain theory of oneness, but in fact widely separate, and consequently but little in conflict among themselves. In the New World, notwithstanding the original geographic distributions, each denomination gradually came to regard itself as inheriting equally with every other the entire continent, and the struggle for possession consequently became inevitable and universal. Catholicism was compelled, in fact as well as in form, to admit Protestantism into Maryland. Episcopacy was constrained to recognize the right of the faith of Westminster to propagate itself in Virginia. Even the stronghold of Puritanism was penetrated successively by the Baptist, the Presbyterian, the Methodist and the Episcopalian. Especially after the Revolution this commingling of sects, with its consequent rivalries

and struggles, became universal; and those churches which earliest recognized the new condition and began to extend their borders, not merely westward along the same latitude, but also northward and southward, upward and downward, among all classes and grades of American society, were those which grew most rapidly and earliest attained a commanding position. Into that struggle for continental influence the Presbyterian Church entered with great earnestness. Claiming exclusive possession nowhere, it claimed joint possession everywhere. Fired with missionary zeal as well as by loyalty to its special doctrine and order, it aspired to become, in the best sense, a national Church—a Church for the American people. Joining with other sects in the common work of evangelism, it still lifted high its own blue banner, and welcomed to its standard all, of whatever class, who preferred at heart the Presbyterian name; and while this mingling and collision of sects sometimes resulted in sectarian propagandism, it cannot be questioned that the main result has been one of blessing. This is especially true of our own Church. In the exposition of its theological system, in the administration of its polity, in the temper and purpose that have animated it, and especially in the remarkable energy and efficiency that have characterized its

life, that Church has been the better, stronger, purer, for this providential experience.

Leaving this truth to confirm itself, we may further note a fourth general condition—*the universal liberty of thought and of speech* recognized as a fundamental principle in American society. The doctrine of religious liberty had, indeed, been admitted by Protestantism as the formal principle of the Reformation, yet the remaining pressure of traditional and churchly authority had largely checked the right in its actual exercise. The Protestant churches of Europe had learned the primary lesson of toleration, but had failed to perceive the broad distinction between such toleration and complete religious liberty. The latter was rather a theory than a living experiment. On American soil such liberty more readily won for itself both recognition and authority. Civil regulations restraining it were gradually repealed. Illicit assumptions were rebuked and resisted, and the freest expression of individual conviction on all religious questions became the controlling law. The experiment had, indeed, its dangers. The doctrine sometimes bore tasteless or evil fruit. In some instances it even threatened to vitiate Christianity itself. Yet it cannot be questioned that American theology has consequently had freer range and a wider influence, or that the American

Church rests on firmer supports and holds a firmer place in the popular respect. American Presbyterianism least of all has had reason to apprehend the issues of such a test, for religious liberty is incorporated as a principle into its constitution, and has been glorified again and again by its battles and its sufferings for the truth. Notwithstanding occasional struggles along the somewhat shadowy border-lines between freedom and license on one hand or between freedom and authority on the other, the annals of our own Church bear noble record to the fact that it has been a free Church as well as a Church for the people. God grant that its loyalty to the cardinal doctrine of religious liberty—a doctrine vital to all Protestantism—may never be impaired!

SPECIFIC CONDITIONS OF GROWTH.

Besides these four generic conditions, which have affected more or less vitally all forms of religious life on this continent, there are certain specific conditions peculiarly affecting our own Church and largely determining its character and its development. Of these the first is *our special type of theology*, considered both intrinsically and in comparison with other theological beliefs. It is a historic truth that Calvinism, though one in genus, has always existed in

several species more or less distinct, characterized chiefly by the relative elevation or depression of some particular element, or by some special combination or arrangement of the several elements composing the system. The main occasions for such variations are found in the peculiarities of individual minds, in national temperament and characteristics, in philosophical systems and tendencies, and in other natural and ethical causes. Some foundation for them also appears in the widely-varied forms and connections in which the truths common to the system are presented by inspired minds in the Scripture itself. Such varieties have, from time to time, appeared even in Europe, as the history of European Calvinism abundantly demonstrates; in this country, for various reasons, they have always been manifest. No single species of Calvinism has at any time been able to gain complete supremacy, or to stand forth historically as the sole representative of the common system. Turretin has shared the sceptre with Edwards, and Edwards with Turretin. Diverse theories have been constrained by the pressure of common necessities to recognize, and for the most part to respect, each other. Wherever any of these varieties have attempted to take entire control of the Church, the issue has always been a loss of vigor and fruitfulness; and in some instances, as in the Wars of the Roses, the attempt

has ended in internecine conflict, disruption and decline. The periods of relative prosperity and growth have invariably been those in which these differentiated species have appreciated their common relations to the one generic system, and have been content to dwell and act together. American Calvinism is thus composite in character—generically one, specifically different, sometimes divergent. It cannot be otherwise; and consequently, the true law of existence and of fruitfulness must ever be a law of balances, adjustments, reconciliations. There must be no war between the red rose and the white.

Considered comparatively, American Calvinism has also been modified by its contact with other theological systems, and especially by its relations to the popular mind, upon whose acceptance its outward prospering has been dependent. As it has doubtless influenced other theological systems by the strong impression it ever makes, it has in turn been affected and in some measure moulded by their antithetic teaching. Especially it is important to note that, coming before the people as before a jury, it has been constrained to drop off all assumptions of authority, to lay aside technical and abstract conceptions, to state itself in the most lucid and practical forms, to give reasons, proofs, demonstrations, and thus to commend itself comparatively to the popular respect.

It has, therefore, become a preachable and a preached theology, finding its best developments rather in the pulpit than in the theological chair, and holding its place in American thought chiefly through the living ministry who from age to age have proclaimed it. Men like the Tennents and Davies and Witherspoon, like Edwards and Hopkins and Dwight, have given to American Calvinism its least technical and scholastic, its most flexible and persuasive and fruitful, forms of expression. And if these practical exigences have tended to repress the growth of what may be described as a more symmetrical type of speculative dogmatism, formed after the models of the seventeenth century, they have created a species of Calvinistic teaching no whit less scriptural, less strong, less prolific of good. Our Calvinism, therefore, is and must continue to be a preached and a preachable Calvinism—Calvinism ever addressing itself directly to the mind and heart and conscience of the people, Calvinism supremely concerned with the souls of men, and wielding every divine truth embodied in it under the awful pressure of a scriptural interest in human salvation. Whether even this type of Calvinism does not make too great demand upon the average thinking capacity to be in a broad sense popular—whether it does not contain too many recondite elements and require too much of close study

and of thorough ratiocination to secure the ready allegiance of all varieties and grades of mind—whether, consequently, it must not remain in some degree the religion of a class until the masses are sufficiently cultured theologically to receive it,—it would be difficult absolutely to deny.

Our type of polity furnishes the second of these special conditions. Like our theology, this polity is a thoroughly systematic construction, resting, as we believe, on solid scriptural foundations and shaped in accordance with clear scriptural principles gradually developed and improved by three centuries of extensive experiment, and justifying itself to our minds by the most careful tests of equity and by its marked illustration of the holy charities of the gospel. Under that polity, and through it in part, American Presbyterianism has grown and ripened from the period of its colonial planting down to the present hour, at times embarrassed by the discovery that even the best government, administered by erring human hands, may prove inadequate; at times humiliated by the sad issues that have resulted from attempting to administer that government in a temper at variance with its true spirit; yet in the main satisfied in view of the long experiment, and proud of a system which, in its principles, its methods and its fruits, has shown itself so deserving of allegiance. Under

a different polity, less in affiliation with its doctrine and its temper, it is hardly probable that the Presbyterian Church in America could have attained its present position; to that polity no small proportion both of its growth and of its influence is due.

Yet it must be admitted that our type of government, like our type of doctrine, has to some extent limited the development to which, considered in other aspects, it has so largely contributed. In a form of society like ours, where tendencies strongly democratic and tendencies strongly aristocratic, or even monarchical, are alike manifest, it is not strange that varieties of polity more strongly marked by the one or the other of these tendencies should vie with our own for popular approval and support. It is also obvious that a system characterized by so many balances and adjustments, apparently intricate and even difficult in application, should sometimes awaken objections and be thrown aside for simpler, but at the same time less effectual, conceptions of what the Christian Church in its polity should be. There are also exigences, as the history of American Christianity has shown, in which all forms of Church government betray their weakness rather than their strength; and it would be rash to assert that the popular estimate of American Presbyterianism has never

been unfavorably affected by such historic experiences. The polity through which we have grown into vigor and efficiency has sometimes bound, and may yet bind, us so closely as to check healthful circulation and to repress the free pulsations of the very life which it was ordained to bless.

There are two other special conditions which deserve careful consideration, but which can only be named in this connection—the third, as manifested in *our type of worship and of Christian activity*; the fourth, as apparent in *our denominational relations to the spirit of the age* and to certain marked tendencies in American life.

OUR ACTUAL GROWTH.

In the light of these conditions, generic and special, it becomes easy to read at a glance *the actual history of American Presbyterianism*. The true character of the original nucleus and organization, the nature of the adopting act of 1729, the ground and secret of the sad rupture of 1741, the coalescing agencies in the process of reunion in 1758, the growth amid diversities till the formation of the continental assembly in 1788, the real meaning of that decisive step in our establishment as a national Church, the rapid expansion and maturing that followed during the first decades of the present century, the gradual

rise of parties and of conflicting interests and tendencies, the pitiful division of 1837, the separate career of the fragments of the divided Church, the reunion of 1870, with all that accompanied or has followed it, and the present temper and attitude and prospects of the Church, now once more united,—all these are easily read and understood in the clear light of these regulative conditions. These also account for the external growth as well as the historic events recorded in the annals of our beloved Church. Its rise from the main fountain in Maryland and Pennsylvania, its northward spread through New Jersey and New York, and even into New England, its southerly sweep along the Atlantic coast, where French Huguenotism had prepared the way, its westward movement along these various parallels of latitude till it had reached the Alleghanies, and through their three great passes had flowed over into Ohio and Kentucky and the territories adjacent, its ever-widening and yet deepening current toward and beyond the Mississippi, and its present continental position, occupying, if we may include with ourselves the Southern branch, every State west of the Hudson, every Territory from Arizona to New Mexico, and even the fair young empire that sits as queen on the golden shore of the Pacific,—all this wonderful growth is attributable, under the divine favor and the

inherent potencies of a spiritual Christianity, to these quickening and determining principles. The position of our body among evangelical denominations, the hold it has gained upon popular confidence and respect, the social power it is wielding for Christ and his cause, the place it occupies in American Christianity, the influence it is already exerting upon the Presbyterianism and the Protestantism of the world,—these also must be recognized as the direct and the beautiful result of the same organizing laws.

Contemplated in this light, *the present condition of our Church* calls for the profoundest gratitude and for holy exultation. Contrast the seven ministers and the handful of churches, weak, scattered, undeveloped, which constituted the first presbytery of 1706, with the present aggregate of 36 synods and 173 presbyteries, 4706 ministers and 4999 churches, 506,034 communicants and 520,452 Sabbath-school children, and hardly less than two millions of worshipers. Contrast the rude edifices in which our fathers at Rehoboth and Snow Hill and elsewhere worshiped God, and the scant contributions which they were able to make toward the support of religion, with the multitude of our sanctuaries, valued at tens of millions, and with our contributions in 1874-5 of \$6,900,000 toward church purposes, and of \$2,725,000 toward the general

cause of evangelization. Contrast the position of our Church at the outset—a feeble sect in the midst of sects already established and dominant, suspected in New England, imprisoned in the person of Makemie in New York, despised in Maryland and banished from Virginia—with its present almost central place in American society, free to plant itself in city or country from one edge of the continent to the other, its principles and teaching respected and its influence everywhere felt and welcomed—a Church known and honored of men as one of the chief agencies in the spiritual culture of the American people. Contrast its primitive attitude as essentially a foreign Church, importing alike its ministers and its membership, and largely dependent on the generous support which Scotch and English Presbyterians gave it, clinging tremblingly to the very words of its Confession even as to the religious functions of the civil magistracy, and adhering punctiliously to every shred of European law or usage. Contrast this with its present attitude as a thoroughly American Church, into which all foreign elements have been dissolved, from which foreign control is excluded, having modified even its Confession to adjust it to American conceptions of freedom in both Church and State, possessing precedents and usages and a mode of administration peculiarly its own, yet having lost

nothing that is essential to its proper character, and justly recognized even in Edinburgh as truly and grandly representative of the Presbyterianism of Melville, of Knox, of Calvin himself.

In the light of such contrasts the career of American Presbyterianism, as exhibited in its various branches, must be regarded as one of the miracles of modern Christianity. It has hardly a parallel, except it be in the development of Methodism, English and American, from the small seed planted at Oxford in 1729, to its present magnificent proportions. A century ago Methodism was but just introducing itself through a few faithful preachers into Philadelphia and New York, and its entire membership on this continent numbered scarcely a thousand; now its singing legions make the continent tremble with their tread, and the song of their triumphs, like the fabled drum-beat of England, is heard well-nigh round the globe. A century ago American Presbyterianism was represented by 133 ministers only; its churches, feeble and scattered, were scarcely more numerous, and its membership cannot have exceeded six or eight thousand. The single State of Missouri now contains more Presbyterian ministers, churches and members, with far ampler resources, than could then have been found in all the continent. The number of both ministers and churches has, during the century,

increased more than thirtyfold; even during the past fifty years our ministry have multiplied sixfold, our churches fourfold, our membership eightfold. Such advance is hardly less than miraculous; and as we walk to-day with reverent tread about our beautiful Zion, telling her towers and bulwarks and considering the palaces of her glory, we must be blind indeed if we do not recognize in all this the sure evidence of a divine presence, and exclaim with the prophet of Israel, In his love and in his pity he redeemed us; he bare us and carried us all the days of old.

AMERICAN PRESBYTERIANISM IN THE FUTURE.

Turning at this point to consider *the future of American Presbyterianism*, as that future is indicated and to some extent determined by the present and the past, we pass into another and a more difficult sphere of investigation. The questions that confront us are incomparably more solemn, and the summons to personal duty becomes immediate and commanding. What is the true line of progress for a Church so constituted, so located, so endowed? What are the conditions under which such progress may be anticipated? Is our Church to preserve its unity from generation to generation, and to go on expanding with the continent century by century? Is American Presbyterianism ever to be unified, and through

one vast, earnest, effective organism to fulfill its sublime mission in and for American society? And what are to be the relations of our Church, and of American Presbyterianism, to the Churches of our general type of faith and order and to the cause of Presbyterianism throughout the world, and also to that ultimate unification of Protestantism on which the salvation of our race and the introduction of the millennial age seem to be depending? Around such questions we may reverently linger for a little season.

DENOMINATIONAL UNITY PRESERVED.

The life of a great denomination is always exposed to perils. It has a general guaranty of permanence so far as it holds to the truth, is animated by the right spirit and engaged in the distinctive work given to it by the Master. But such permanence is dependent also on many subordinate conditions, chiefly natural and human; and a Church which at one time seems strong, vigorous, enduring as an oak, may in an hour of sudden tempest be prostrated in the dust. Some new practical issue, some absorbing question of policy, some collision of relative rights or privileges, some wild development of party, some theological dogma or philosophic speculation, may sunder the strongest ecclesiastical ties and rend the soundest body into quivering fragments. The

records of Protestantism, and even of Presbyterianism, both European and American, furnish sad confirmation of this statement. One of the clearest lessons of modern Church history is the truth that sects, like men, are constantly exposed to such dangers, and that they preserve their existence only by the strictest compliance with the laws, the principles, the conditions, under which such existence was first established.

The hope that our Church will be wholly freed from such perils is fallacious; the anticipation of their presence and operation is reasonable; the dark possibility which such presence involves must be recognized. It has, indeed, been predicted that these divisive influences, happily arrested for the time, will soon flow in upon us in possibly increased volume; that current varieties in thought, usage, tendency, though now freely allowed, will in the future become exclusive and intolerant of each other; and that the fair fabric of union which this generation is engaged in rearing will finally give way before these coming tempests, and will lie, like the temple of Solomon before the armies of Nebuchadnezzar, a ruin utter and terrible. Attention is also called to specific dangers which may arise to threaten our peace; to the many difficult questions of principle and of method which must spring up in carrying forward our exten-

sive denominational work; to the liability to an excessive concentration of power at civic centres and in the various boards and agencies of our Church; to the perils involved in the existence of a denominational press, largely independent and irresponsible, yet holding in its hands not merely the reputation of individuals, but also the good name and prosperity of the denomination; to the natural tendency of educational institutions, especially theological, to become the active representatives and propagators of some peculiarity in doctrine or tendency, and by their rivalries and wranglings to break up the general concord; to the possible rise of some new heresiarch, departing from the essential truths of grace, and, like the red dragon in the Apocalypse, drawing after him the third part even of the stars of heaven. Where such specific dangers are not directly apprehended, it still is feared that the fine balance of doctrine maintained in our Confession and catechisms will not always be preserved in the current belief and teaching; that the antitheses which have always existed in historic Calvinism, and which must always exist in a system so complex and comprehensive, will yet break forth into antagonism and rupture; that liberty will finally degenerate into license or orthodoxy into dogmatism, and license plot against orthodoxy or dogmatism as-

sail liberty, until disruption ends the unnatural alliance between them. We are reminded that, of all men, Presbyterians are most likely to differ, and to differ around issues involving principle, and therefore to differ conscientiously, intensely, destructively, and that no branch of the Presbyterian body, European or American, has ever long escaped such differentiating and disintegrating experiences. And it is consequently judged that the holding together of a million Presbyterians in one Church for a whole century would be a miracle, to be credited only when the wondering eyes of the world shall have seen it.

May we not grant the existence of such liabilities without acquiescing in the conclusion toward which they point? Under the beneficent influences of the recent union our Church is rapidly passing into a new condition of coherence, strength, maturity. Without sacrificing a single principle or surrendering any historic quality, it is assuming a new position and entering upon a grander career. Its coalescing elements are consciously strengthened, improved, utilized, by their combination. Elements of weakness or of discord on either side are becoming eliminated or neutralized. As the Church has broadened in sphere and become more truly national it has steadily grown stronger rather than weaker. And as this articulating process grows forward

we may reasonably expect the development of new bonds, the growth of mutual confidence, the increase of enthusiasm around common interests, and, above all, the cordial absorption of the whole body in the grand, the continental work, which the Master is already spreading before it. Amidst such fresh experiences and under the inspirations of such a new career these particular dangers will grow less and less; mischievous men will be less and less able to work mischief; the shibboleths of party and the battle-cry of factions will gradually be silenced; divisive tendencies of whatever sort will be arrested, and our union will be preserved.

The central point in such unity will be found in a cordial acceptance on all sides of the cardinal principles of the Calvinistic system as embodied in our common Confession of Faith. We are agreed in regarding our doctrinal symbols, not as above Scripture or co-ordinate with Scripture, but as substantially representative of the Scripture so far as God has given us grace to apprehend it. We receive these symbols as containing, in the language of the adopting act of 1727, "in all the essential and necessary articles good forms of sound words," or, in the phraseology of the uniting act of 1758, as "an orthodox and excellent system of doctrine, founded on the word of God." In the language of the union of 1870,

we alike "sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures," each party in that union cordially "recognizing the other as a sound and orthodox body according to the principles of the Confession." In this memorable compact, historically interpreted, no interest either of orthodoxy or of liberty is compromised. All imputations, all assumptions, are abandoned; varieties of statement or explanation not subversive of the common system are allowed; no theory or school takes precedence of any other; excessive literalism and careless license in interpretation are alike excluded; mere toleration gives place to positive confidence; conservative and progressive elements coalesce; and a true unity, on a basis manly and Christian and scriptural, and therefore enduring, is happily established. Further liberty than is thus secured no cordial Presbyterian desires; further guarantees than these no generous Presbyterian will demand; and so long as the principles and the spirit of this compact are preserved, the union of the Presbyterian Church through all the future is secure. Generation after generation, century after century, it may live on, ever increasing in magnitude, in vigor, in fruitfulness, under these happy conditions. Let the reckless spirit of agitation and the equally reckless spirit of dogmatism be every-

where rebuked. Let the disposition to exalt special theories above generic doctrines and to create schools and parties around minor and technical differences be everywhere repressed. Let that narrow temper of denominationalism which magnifies every slight departure from tenet or usage, and frowns upon all affiliation with other Christian sects or people, and counts our blue the only color in the rainbow that spans the heaven of the Church of God on earth, be everywhere put to silence. Let a just sense of the worth of our union and a reasonable faith in its permanence be steadily cultivated. Let order and freedom be ever clasped in loving embrace. Let the truth common and dear to all be exalted as supreme. Let a wise estimate of our responsibility as a Church of Christ and of our grand opportunity in this land and in the world be developed in every mind. Let these harmonizing conditions continue to exist, and the sacred alliance which the men of this generation have formed will be preserved from age to age, even down to the millennial day.

AMERICAN PRESBYTERIANISM UNIFIED.

If this hope of denominational unity rests on adequate foundation, it justifies a further inquiry respecting the *possible unification of American Presbyterianism*. It has been questioned whether

the combination of all the existing varieties of that Presbyterianism in one Church is a result to be desired or sought; whether there are not vast benefits secured through the present distribution which would be sacrificed in such union; whether one great national Church, numbering even now eight thousand ministers and as many congregations, with a million communicants and nearly four millions of adherents, would not become too strong, proud, ambitious, to be endured. It may be that the Master would find it needful to save a Church having such members, culture, resources, influence, from deadness in belief, from confidence in self, from political aspirations and a false materialistic development, by sending upon it some sudden whirlwind of division and scattering it again into separate and belligerent fragments.

But though it be certain that some such issue would follow the unification of Presbyterianism, apart from correspondent increase in faith, in love, in every Christian grace, must we still believe that the present disparted, fragmentary, partly hostile condition is divinely intended to be the permanent state of a group of churches resting on the same or on kindred Confessions, governed by substantially the same polity, and so largely alike in worship, spirit, tendency? We cannot well refrain from inquiring whether the differences now existing are in their nature per-

manent and ineradicable; whether they are likely to increase or diminish with time; whether, under the attraction of what is common to all, these churches may not hereafter be drawn more and more closely toward each other; whether, at last, they will not, under the action of these affinities, ascend to a higher plane and destiny by becoming, in a purely spiritual sense of the term, one national Presbyterian Church, such as the fathers dreamed of establishing, and such as many of the sons most ardently desire.

In answering such queries we may note the following points: *First*, That the things in which these churches are agreed are confessed by all to be of immeasurably greater moment than the things in which they consciously differ; that in doctrine, in polity, in order and method and spirit, they are substantially one; that this sense of oneness is central, vital, ineradicable, and, like the law of gravity, is silently yet potentially operating to draw these kindred fragments into actual union.

Secondly, That as a historic fact those differences which have from time to time divided American Presbyterians have, under the influence of these attractions, grown weaker rather than stronger with time; that those of foreign origin have gradually melted away as the American spirit has surrounded and wrought upon

them ; and that by successive acts of union these churches have confessed it to be needless, foolish, even wicked, to hold asunder, for such incidental reasons, what God has so vitally joined together.

And *thirdly*, That the dominant tendency of the age, especially in Protestant Christianity, is toward the repression of whatever is divisive among Christian sects, and the cultivation in all available forms of spiritual and even organic union ; that diversities between kindred denominations which might have justified division a century or even a generation ago justify division no longer ; that both internal experiences and the external assaults of unbelief and of a corrupted Christianity are compelling Protestantism to cherish with new interest the grand central verities in which all evangelical sects are agreed ; and that Presbyterianism especially has seemed to be passing providentially through such a spiritual process of affiliation as if in preparation for some organic agreement in the future.

How rapidly such tendencies may make themselves felt, or how far their influence may reach, it would be unwise to predict. In the absence of the spirit of prophecy, it may not be wrong to whisper the language of hope. In the case, for example, of that venerable body of Calvinists of European origin first planted in the colony of New York long before the introduction of British

Presbyterianism—a body whose general doctrine and order are so like our own, whose history runs so closely parallel with ours, and whose catechism we have commended as worthy of study in our churches; a body in respect to which the main question urgent seems to be whether it shall be called Presbyterian or we be called Reformed,—in this case, is it unreasonable to anticipate that with time ancestral memories will so far become dim and special peculiarities so far diminish, and that the generic sense of community in faith and interest and destiny will be so far developed, that another centennial year will not witness this venerable Church standing side by side with ours, consciously like it in almost everything but a name, yet separated by a name, and a name only?

In the case of those Presbyterian bodies which have preserved more distinctively foreign titles and usages, and which are now separated from us chiefly by certain preferences as to worship and communion, may we not on similar grounds anticipate a relative subsidence of such peculiarities, the rise on either side of an increasing interest based on closer practical fellowship, and a progressive oneness in spirit and substance which will in due time demand a corresponding oneness in form? Not, indeed, by violent conquest on our part or by mere absorption or sheer

crowding, such as drives the weaker to the wall, is such oneness to be secured, but rather through a generous appreciation of these kindred churches in their peculiarities, through sincere respect for every variety in taste or teaching or practice not subversive of the common faith, and especially through the culture in ourselves and in them of the broad, sweet, holy sense of a common inheritance in Christ.

In respect to the Presbyterian Church South, now separated from us by experiences which, like bruises, do not seem to admit immediate remedy, it is not improper to suggest that the thoughtful Christian observer, studying alike the causes of that separation and the forces tending toward reunion, need not be despondent of the issue. To such a mind it will become obvious, on the closest examination, that there are no distinctive principles in the case, even respecting the true character and functions of the Church of Christ on earth, which are so vital as to require for their due maintenance on this continent an independent organization, permanently separating itself by broad lines from all other Presbyterian bodies. Such a mind will also readily apprehend the casual nature of the forces which have led to this sundering of old and precious ties, and will appreciate the enduring character of the many ligatures yet unsevered which are steadily pro-

testing against that rupture and tenderly pleading for union. And every such mind must judge that, while our Church can never forsake her ancient testimonies against sin or give up her ancestral right to stand by the State in times of peril, she owes it to herself and to the gospel to allow no animosities, to admit no sectional prejudices, to make no unreasonable claims or conditions, but rather to cherish toward these alienated brethren the warmest and purest Christian friendship, even while believing their alienation to be without just foundation. Such a Church as ours can afford to pass with a quiet smile the assumptions of superior orthodoxy, or even the present charge of latitudinarianism or of affiliation with infidelity, regarding these as the manifestations in a few minds of an emotional excitement of the rhetorical type rather than the sober, honest, permanent judgment entertained by the multitude of the ministry and membership in the Southern communion. Such a Church as ours, ignoring these temporary trifles, and breathing still the temper of Christian love, while adhering loyally to all that is due to principle and to honor, may wisely wait for the glad hour when that judgment will assert itself even in the face of mistaken leadership, and when the healing agencies of time shall have prepared the way not merely for fraternal relations, but for a

fraternal union. That hour will assuredly come. Living Churches cannot be kept asunder by dead issues; kindred Churches cannot be held apart by minor differences. The grand essential agreements in the case, the conscious possession of a common heritage in belief and history, the returning sense of unity deeper and broader than all diversities, and especially the developing consciousness of one great mission to this land and to the world, will bring these sundered Churches together and make them truly and heartily one. God grant it even in our time!

PRESBYTERIAN FEDERATION.

If we may thus reasonably anticipate not only the continuance of our own denominational unity, but also the ultimate unification of American Presbyterianism, we may, on the foundation furnished by these two hopes, contemplate further the still broader question already stated—whether any *combination of Presbyterianism throughout the world* is possible, and whether American Presbyterianism, and especially our own Church, has any special duty with respect to such a consummation. Let us glance at this question for a moment.

The fact that such a federation of the Presbyterianism of the world has already been undertaken is one of deep significance, and the further

fact that—to use the apt expression of Professor Blaikie—“the first articulate call” for such a federation came from our own Church, commits us especially to every effort requisite to make this movement successful. In answer to that call and to the like action of other Presbyterian bodies, especially in the British Isles, representatives of twenty-two such organizations and of more than fifteen thousand particular churches have already in solemn assembly agreed on the basis of an alliance in which the Presbyterianism of the world may become united, and through which the truth, the order, the interests, common to all may be defended, supported and diffused. Should that basis of federation be ratified, American Presbyterianism will be set at once into new and most interesting and influential relations to the Presbyterianism of the Old World, and our own Church—much the largest Presbyterian organization on earth, and equal in size to all of the Presbyterian bodies in Scotland, England and Ireland combined, including the eleven hundred Calvinistic churches of Wales—will be brought into connections with that Presbyterianism full of interest and fraught with the highest responsibility. We are thus, in virtue of our numbers, our principles and our representative position, providentially summoned and committed to a work bearing not only upon the

closer combination of all varieties of our common faith and order, but also upon the harmonizing and unifying of Protestantism itself in preparation for the final battles of the gospel with false religion and with human unbelief. Are we ready for that summons?

Without adverting specifically to the objections urged against this federation—that the conception is essentially impractical, and will, in fact, produce nothing but a showy convention for talk and debate, or that, if successful, it would ere long degenerate into some organic union, some œcumenical General Assembly dangerous to local liberties, or that it would in practice simply develop an excessive spirit of sect, and thus separate the Presbyterian body disastrously from other sections of Protestantism,—without adverting specifically to such objections, we may simply note two decisive considerations in the opposite direction.

1. *The Presbyterianism of the nineteenth century owes it to itself to assume this broad catholic attitude in the presence of Christendom.* It is a manifest fact that, divided as the Presbyterian Churches have been by national or provincial differences, by theological theories and tendencies, by varieties in taste and usage and worship—broken up as we are now into separate sections and schools, far apart in thought and impulse,

intensely conscious of each difference and too dimly conscious of the underlying unity—our common Presbyterianism has never yet made, is not now making, upon the Christian world the one distinct, potent impression which it is in itself capable of producing. Christendom has seen it only in “broken lights,” generally refracting, sometimes distorting, its true image. Our polity has been administered in such various methods, and often in a spirit so much at variance with its scriptural structure and temper, that multitudes have been blinded to its better quality and its beneficent working. Our faith has been so tenacious and so militant in its varieties, so much a battle-ground for speculative antagonisms rather than a harvest-field of truth full of grace and blessing for the world, that myriads have turned away from it and found refuge in other systems of belief, less ample, less harmonious, but more nutritious to the soul. Such is the plain witness of history; such in great degree is the impression which Presbyterianism is now making on the mind and the heart of Christendom.

Must it be so for ever? Do we not owe it to ourselves and to our common heritage to correct such impressions by exhibiting our Presbyterianism in its unity rather than its diversities? Why should we conceal the intrinsic excellence

of our common form of government by the smoke of our warfare around specific varieties of usage or expediency—by the clamor of our discussions respecting some speculative element in the system itself? Why should we suffer small differentia in doctrinal statement to be so thrust forward, so emphasized as vital, so wrestled with and fought for, that neither the world nor even ourselves are able to see what the Calvinistic system of doctrine, considered in its generic completeness, really is? And will it not be a vast advance if the Presbyterianism of the twentieth century should be able to rise above such diversities, and to clasp hands for the first time since the age of Calvin around that common Confession in which the great essential truths of the gospel seem to us to be embodied, and which, therefore, is dearer to all than any of these differences can possibly be? With no disloyalty to any specific truth or theory, with most cordial recognition of the right to differ on secondary questions in that loving temper which the consciousness of essential union must engender, may not that Presbyterianism, by being thus true to its most vital principles, make a new impression on the thought and heart of Christendom; and so win for itself a grander place in the one Church of Christ on earth?

2. *Presbyterianism owes this also to the general*

cause of evangelical Protestantism. All thoughtful minds recognize the unifying of that Protestantism as one of the necessary issues of the future—a result suggested by the scriptural view of the Church, at least in its millennial condition, expressed in the prayer of our Lord and in the universal hope of his disciples, indicated in the earliest Christian creed, and incorporated in the golden doctrine of our own Confession respecting the communion of saints. As a materialistic Christianity already proposes to organize itself in a triple hierarchy, with its centre at Rome, its right arm in Constantinople and its left arm in London, so our spiritual Christianity must ultimately concentrate itself for defence, and for aggression also, in what will be at least the germ of the Church millennial. This result is not, indeed, to be secured by processes of external organization merely, through mere unities in name and form, and still less by the universal abandonment of method and order in the house of God, or by any ignoring of the scriptural principles on which the Church is founded. Far from it; but rather by a richer development of piety, by a sweeter sense of union in Christ, by holier consecration to the common Head and closer fellowship with him in the mighty task of subduing our humanity unto himself. That such a high, blessed, potential union of the divided fragments of the one

Church of God on earth will yet come, as the consummating step of our Christianity toward the millennial glory, is the anticipation, the hope, the prayer, of all believing hearts.

But what relations does our Presbyterianism sustain to such a consummation, and what especially would be the influence of the proposed Presbyterian federation on this broader result? It is to be remembered that no other type of Protestantism is so nearly cosmopolitan as ours, no other form of Protestant belief has been so widely diffused, or has become rooted and prevalent in so many lands. Presbyterianism is, in fact, but little less œcumenical than Romanism itself; and this is due not simply to the fact that it was first in the triad of politics and first in the types of doctrine which originated with the Reformation, but also to the further fact that it contains elements which commend it widely, possesses peculiar machinery for propagation and is strongly animated by the propagative spirit. It has consequently come to occupy a special place in the series of Protestant sects. As they stand in group, it is Presbyterianism rather than Prelacy or Independency which is central. Moreover, the marked emphasis which it lays upon the doctrine of the one Church of Christ, invisible and catholic, and the prominence it habitually gives to the duty of the communion of saints, both pledge it to the

broadest Christian fellowship and attract toward it the confidence and love of all other Christian denominations. Is it not obvious for these reasons that Presbyterianism, especially as confederated, has a special work to do in the unifying of Protestantism, and that the Presbyterian Church, and especially our own, will prove untrue to her historic principles and spirit if she does not become, in the hands of God, a conspicuous agent in bringing—to use the prophetic words of Calvin—“the separated Churches into one”? And who that properly appreciates the grandeur of such a mission would not add the heroic declaration of the great Reformer, in his letter to Cranmer, as he contemplated the sundered body of Christ and longed to see its holy communion restored: “So far as I am concerned, if I can be of any use, I will readily pass over ten seas to effect that object”? God grant that the hopes and prayers of Calvin and his associates, Continental and British, for the unifying of Protestantism, may be speedily realized; and God grant that in that process our own Church, the Church of Calvin, may be found in the future, as in the past, first and foremost!

CONCLUSION.

Fathers and brethren: so far as the limits of one brief hour would permit, I have endeavored

to bring before you some of the more urgent considerations spontaneously suggesting themselves in this historic year respecting the past and the future of American Presbyterianism, especially as represented in our own beloved Church. Standing still only on the threshold of the vast theme I am constrained to pause with simple mention of the two primary duties which such a survey enforces: *Gratitude for the Past, Consecration for the Future*. I trust that these kindred duties are at this sacred hour emphasizing themselves distinctly and tenderly in every conscience. I trust that psalms of commemoration and hymns of joy and hope are ready to break forth from every heart. I trust that some becoming sense of the grandeur of this hour, and some appropriate vision of our personal responsibility, as representatives of such a Church at such a time, are animating us with unwonted zeal. I trust that, while we are grateful for what, through grace divine, the fathers wrought, we shall catch some measure of their spirit, and by the same grace be enabled to do as well the solemn and the significant work now devolving upon us. I trust that we shall esteem it our joy and our glory to have our lives now and always builded in as living stones into a structure so vast, so strong, so beautiful, as our Zion is yet to be. And I trust that, as we gather

inspiration from these rare, sweet glimpses of a future too great to be adequately measured by present thought—as we go forward to the work before us, drawing courage from the grand possibilities thus stretching out before the Church we love and serve—we may be stimulated also by due remembrance of the brevity of that fleeting day in which it is given to us to live and work. Let us hear at this hour the voices of the beloved and honored dead, our brethren in this service, who, nearly fourscore in number, have during the past year finished their part in this great development. The venerated Dickinson, whose name is for ever associated with the *Auburn Declaration*, and the accomplished Condit, both of whom had occupied the highest positions in the Church, the venerable fathers Chambers and Davidson, the diligent and able historian Gillett, Macdonald, preacher and scholar at Princeton, the honored Sprague, annalist and biographer of the Church, Johnston, patriarch and pillar of Presbyterianism in the West, Sutphen and Buckingham, Henderson and Fillmore and Mattocks, and many other holy brethren who with these have ceased from their labors,—all these, a great cloud of witnesses, are—how impressively!—summoning us to duty and service for the Master. LET US BE UP AND DOING.

