

MINUTES
OF THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
IN THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
FROM ITS ORGANIZATION
A. D. 1789 TO A. D. 1820 INCLUSIVE.

PHILADELPHIA:
PRESBYTERIAN BOARD OF PUBLICATION,
NO. 821 CHESTNUT STREET.
E. V.

Whereupon, after due deliberation, it was

Resolved, That the Rev. Drs. John Ewing and Ashbel Green, the Rev. John Smith and Rev. Nathaniel Irwin, with Dr. David Jackson and Ebenezer Hazard, be a committee, any three of whom, including Dr. Ewing or the senior member present, to be a quorum to prepare a draught of a charter as proposed by the above overture, to be laid before the next General Assembly.

The following overture was brought in by the Committee of Bills and Overtures, viz :

“ A serious and conscientious person, a member of a Presbyterian congregation, who views the slavery of the negroes as a moral evil, highly offensive to God, and injurious to the interests of the gospel, lives under the ministry of a person, or amongst a society of people who concur with him in sentiment on the subject upon general principles, yet for particular reasons hold slaves, and tolerate the practice in others. Overtured, ought the former of these persons, under the impressions and circumstances above described, to hold Christian communion with the latter ?”

Whereupon, after due deliberation, it was

Resolved, That as the same difference of opinion with respect to slavery takes place in sundry other parts of the Presbyterian Church, notwithstanding which they live in charity and peace according to the doctrine and practice of the Apostles, it is hereby recommended to all conscientious persons, and especially to those whom it immediately respects, to do the same. At the same time, the General Assembly assure all the churches under their care, that they view, with the deepest concern, any vestiges of slavery which may exist in our country, and refer the churches to the records of the General Assembly published at different times, but especially to an overture of the late Synod of New York and Philadelphia, published in 1787, and republished among the extracts from the Minutes of the General Assembly of 1793, on that head, with which they trust every conscientious person will be fully satisfied.

Resolved, That Mr. Rice and Dr. Muir, ministers, and Mr. Robert Patterson, an elder, be a committee to draught a letter to the Presbytery of Transylvania, on the subject of the above overture, and report in the afternoon.

The Clerks reported, agreeably to order, a draught of a commission for the missionaries to the frontiers, which, being read, was adopted, and is as follows, viz :

“ The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, now sitting at Carlisle, reposing confidence in your piety, prudence, and abilities for the important business, do hereby appoint you one of their missionaries.

In discharge of the trust committed to you, much must be left to your discretion. But the General Assembly, viewing with concern the state of our frontiers, and other settlements destitute of the regular administration of the worship and ordinances of God, and desirous to do all in their power to extend the blessings to be derived from the means of grace, confidently expect that you will faithfully preach the gospel, administer its ordinances, organize churches, and ordain elders; doing all these things according to the word of God, and the standards of our Church contained in our Confession of Faith, Larger and Shorter Catechisms, the Government and Discipline, and Directory for the worship of God: commending you to the grace and protection of our Lord Jesus Christ, we wish abundant success to your mission. Of your diligence wherein, of the state of religion and of society, of the most probable means of establishing the gospel in these parts, with every useful and necessary information, you will give an account to the next General Assembly.

“Done at Carlisle, this 26th day of May, 1795, in the name and by the order of the General Assembly. Signed—Moderator.

Attested—*Clerks to the General Assembly.*”

Ordered, That the commissions of the missionaries be signed by the Moderator, and attested by the Clerks of the present General Assembly.

The committee appointed to review the records of the Synod of Philadelphia, reported, that they had reviewed them to the end of the year 1793, and found them, in general, kept with accuracy and care, which report was approved.

Adjourned until 3 o'clock, in the afternoon. Concluded with prayer.

3 o'clock, P. M.

The General Assembly met according to adjournment, and was constituted with prayer. Present as before, together with Mr. Hindman.

The minutes of the last session were read according to order.

The committee appointed to prepare a draught of a letter to the Presbytery of Transylvania, reported a draught, which being read and debated for some time, a motion was made, Shall this draught of a letter be read and debated by paragraphs, or not? The vote being taken, the question was carried in the affirmative. The consideration of the draught was resumed, and after very considerable time spent therein, it was amended and adopted, and ordered to be signed and sent to the Presbytery of Transylvania by their commissioners.*

* We have found the original draught of this letter, which it seems caused much discussion; and, as a part of the history of the discussions on this much litigated question, we insert it, with the passages included in brackets, which in the course of the discussion were stricken out.

To our Brethren, members of the Presbyterian Church under the care of Transylvania Presbytery.

Dear Friends and Brethren—The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church hear with concern from your commissioners, that differences of opinion with respect to holding Christian communion with those possessed of slaves, agitate the minds of some among you, and threaten divisions which may have the most ruinous tendency. The subject of slavery has repeatedly claimed the attention of the General Assembly, and the commissioners from the Presbytery of Transylvania are furnished with attested copies of these decisions, to be read by the Presbytery when it shall appear to them proper, together with a copy of this letter, to the several churches under their care.

The General Assembly have taken every step which they deemed expedient or wise, to encourage emancipation, and to render the state of those who are in slavery as mild and tolerable as possible.

[The General Assembly earnestly recommend to all under the care of any of their Presbyteries, who may be in possession of slaves, to make conscience to bring all of them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; to have them taught to read; to impress their minds with the importance of Christianity, and to familiarize them to habits of industry and order. A neglect of this is inconsistent with the character of a Christian master; but the observance might prevent, in great part, what is really the moral evil attending slavery, namely, allowing precious souls under the charge of masters to perish for lack of knowledge. Freedom is desirable, but cannot at all times be enjoyed with advantage; a parent to set his child loose from all authority, would be doing him the most essential injury. The child must first be prepared by education and discipline to act for himself, before the restraint of parental authority is taken off. A slave let loose upon society, ignorant, idle, and headstrong, is in a state to injure others, and to ruin himself. No Christian master can answer for such conduct to his own mind. The slave must first be in a situation to act properly as a member of civil society, before he can advantageously be introduced therein.]

Forbearance and peace are frequently inculcated and enjoined in the New Testament. [We at present know in part only. The most perfect knowledge of mortals in reference to immortals, is the knowledge of childhood in reference to manhood. We ought therefore always to be diffident of ourselves, and rather to suspect ourselves, than by an ob-

Ordered, That the Treasurer pay to the door-keeper four pounds four shillings and threepence, for his services and other incidental expenses during the sitting of the General Assembly. Also, to the Stated Clerk, twenty-five dollars as a compensation for his services during the present year.

The General Assembly took into consideration the application made to them by commissioners from a corporation in the state of Kentucky for the promotion of literature; and from the Presbytery of Transylvania, requesting their countenance and assistance, in order that the said commissioners may be aided in obtaining donations for the aforesaid institution; and after mature deliberation,

Resolved, That this General Assembly, earnestly wishing that the cause of learning and religion may be promoted throughout the world, and especially in these United States, did, and hereby do, assure all persons to whom the commissioners, Mr. Rice and Mr. Blythe, may address themselves, that they are ministers of the Presbyterian denomination, of good standing and high reputation with us, and therefore do recommend them and their cause to all to whom they may apply, for their liberality for the promotion of the seminary about to be erected in that state.

Resolved, That this General Assembly be dissolved, and that the next General Assembly meet in the First Presbyterian Church in the city of Philadelphia on the third Thursday of May, 1796, at 11 o'clock in the forenoon. Whereupon, the Moderator did dissolve this Assembly agreeably to the form prescribed in the constitution, and

Concluded with prayer.

SUMMARY FOR 1795.

SYNOD OF NEW YORK AND NEW JERSEY.

<i>Presbyteries.</i>	<i>Ministers settled.</i>	<i>Without charge.</i>	<i>Licentiates.</i>	<i>Vacant churches.</i>
Albany,	11			18
Dutchess. No report.				
Long Island,	9	3		3
New York,	20	3	1	12
New Brunswick,	12	4	3	11

SYNOD OF PHILADELPHIA.

Philadelphia,	11	1	2	7
New Castle,	11		3	13
Baltimore,	7	1	3	6
Carlisle,	16	4	3	6
Huntingdon,	10	1		10
Lewes,	5	2	1	10

stinate adherence to any favourable opinion, to hazard *the peace and union of the Church.*] Blessed are the peace-makers. Let no one do any thing through strife and vainglory. Let each esteem others better than himself. The followers of Jesus ought conscientiously to walk worthy of their vocation, with all lowliness, and meekness, with long suffering, forbearing one another, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. If every difference of opinion were to keep men at a distance, they could subsist in no state of society, either civil or religious. The General Assembly would impress this upon the minds of their brethren, and urge them to follow peace, and the things which make for peace.

[The most showy, useful, and desirable talents shall pass away; prophecy, and knowledge, and tongues be forgotten, but love shall remain. It unites holy angels and pure human spirits. Let it be the cement of all the members of the Church of Christ on earth.]

The General Assembly commend our dear friends and brethren to the grace of God, praying that the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, may possess their hearts and minds.

Signed by order of the Assembly.