

MINUTES
OF THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
IN THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

WITH AN
APPENDIX.

VOL. XI.

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A. D. 1846.  
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1846.

to be contributing liberally, according to its ability, to the furtherance of the Gospel. It is connected, by an exchange of delegates, with various other branches of the Church of Christ. Such connexion is seemly among brethren of the great Christian family. It is useful, also, as it tends to allay prejudice, and to prepare the way for concentrated action, on suitable occasions, for the advancement of the kingdom and glory of our common Lord and Saviour. May it long continue, and prove a blessing to all concerned! The next meeting of the Consociation is to be in Westerly, near Stonington, early in the ensuing month.

Respectfully submitted.

Philadelphia, May 22d, 1846.

WILLIAM NEILL.

REPORT OF THE DELEGATE TO THE GENERAL SYNOD OF THE GERMAN REFORMED CHURCH.

To the Moderator of the General Assembly.

REV. AND DEAR SIR,—The undersigned, having been appointed delegate by the last Assembly to the German Reformed Synod, reports, that he attended the meeting of said Synod, which was held in the borough of York, Pennsylvania, in October last; and was received apparently with great cordiality. Your delegate, owing to peculiar circumstances at the time, was able to attend their sessions but a few days. He was, however, while present with them, highly gratified with the spirit and manner in which their deliberations were conducted. This branch of the Church of God appears to be rapidly enlarging her boundaries with increasing zeal and energy. A copy of the Minutes of the last Assembly was, by direction, presented to the Synod. In a report on these Minutes adopted by them, it will be seen how that body respectfully notice the sentiments of fraternal regard expressed by the Assembly. It speaks thus, "The kind regards cherished by the German Reformed Synod towards that highly respectable body, (the General Assembly,) appear to be cordially reciprocated, and an increasing interest is manifestly taken in all that concerns the spiritual progress and prosperity of this Church."

JAMES WILLIAMSON.

Milton, Pennsylvania, May 15th, 1846.

REPORT OF COMMITTEE ON PAROCHIAL SCHOOLS TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, MAY, 1846.

The phrase *Parochial Schools* must be used with a certain latitude in such a country as ours; inasmuch as, having no established church, we can have no *parishes*, strictly so called. At the same time, the analogy which exists between Presbyterian institutions, in the old world and the new, and the identity of wants in the two, justify us in employing these familiar terms, in reference to schools connected with congregations, and under church authority. And the question proposed, as understood by your Committee, is whether it is desirable and practicable to institute any such schools in the United States.

In the very outset, it is important to be observed, that all precedents derived from the Reformed churches in Europe must fail in several particulars, from the absence of State connexion, already noted, as well as from the differences of condition among us, arising from our recent settlement and thin population. And, still further, such is the diversity, even in our own States, between the north and the south, between older and newer settlements, and between city and country, that your Committee dare not hope to strike out a plan, which shall be equally suited to every part of the Church. It is this which, to some extent, seems to absolve them from the task, at which indeed they would tremble, of suggesting *details*, on a topic so new and so momentous.

It must however be acknowledged, that a public opinion has been maturing, in various parts of our communion, which favours the investigation now proposed, and that a wide spread and growing anxiety is manifested, in regard to the religious training of the infant population.

It cannot be expected of your Committee to discuss the questions of general education, or of Christian catechetical instruction: these have been ably treated at length, by other hands, under the direction of your venerable body. It is our province, to advert rather to that branch of popular education, which while it shall be carried on day by day, shall at the same time convey the knowledge of divine things.

If we are asked, whether the Presbyterian population of these United States can safely rely, for such scriptural training, on the *common school systems* of the several States; we must, reluctantly, but without a remaining doubt, answer in the negative. The question finds a prompt solution, when we consider, that our State schools, in their best estate, can teach no higher morals or religion, than what may be called the *average* of public morals and religion. So long as the majority do not receive the truths of grace, State schools, their creature, can never teach the gospel. In some States, it is already a matter of debate, whether the word of God shall be admitted, and even if this were settled to our wishes, it needs scarcely be said, our necessities demand something far higher than the bare reading of the Bible. In our State schools—Bible or no Bible—we have every assurance that Christ, and grace, and gospel liberty, cannot, by authority, be so much as named; and without these there can be no Christian education.

Equally vain is it to seek our invaluable ends, by aiming at a rateable proportion of public school-funds. Although such a separate maintenance has been sought by the Roman Catholics, and not without marked favour; we are too well instructed by our history to expect any such allowance for scruples and demands on the side of Presbyterianism. Nor have we learned that such a requisition has ever been attempted.

Nor can we accept the other horn of the dilemma, and by yielding to the latitudinary encroachments of the age, consent to have our children reared under a system of such compromise, as prevails in some States; and according to which the child's creed shall be so dilute as to be equally palatable to the Socinian, the Jew, or the Mussulman. For we hold it as a judgment common to us with our fathers, that we owe it to God and to our baptized offspring, to teach the rising race nothing less than the whole counsel of God, in regard to their salvation. Others will not do this work for us: nay others, whether Christian or unchristian, are doing the very opposite, with all their might.

If there is any period of life in which man receives deep impressions, it is the period of childhood. If there are any hours of childhood, in which permanent opinions are communicated, the hours spent in school are such. If there is any place, where it is important to inculcate the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, it is the place of daily, common, instruction. And with all our reverence and affection for Sabbath-schools, for which we bless the name of God, we are unwilling to let six days pass by, without a word of Christ, however faithfully he may be held forth to our offspring on the seventh.

In saying this, we do no more than re-assert the constant judgment of the best Reformed Churches. Calvin, and Knox, and the Melvilles, were not more zealous for the preaching of the Sabbath, than for the teaching of the week. In Scotland, the two went forward with equal step. Wherever there was a parish-church, there was a parish-school. The same Court which ordained the Pastor, appointed the schoolmaster. The same officebearers who ruled the Church, superintended the school. And Scotland rejoices, to this day, in a system which has made the daily lessons of every hamlet and mountain-glen the means of training up a generation armed at all points against religious error. On this topic, however familiar, we trust we may be allowed one or two additional statements. The British Act of 1803, (53 Geo. III. cap. 54.) is founded on the Scotch statute of 1696. This statute directs that *a school shall be established in every parish*. The same acts give the appointment of the teacher to the minister and certain others, called *Heritors*. And so stringent is the enactment, that if even four months elapse, without a supply, the vacancy is to be filled by the commissioners of the county or stewardry. The record of such election is carried by the schoolmaster to the Presbytery of the bounds: and upon the production of such record, the court takes trial of his competency, and receives the signature of the nominee to the Confession of Faith. As a necessary adjunct, these acts provide for the teacher's sustentance, by an annual salary, by a commodious school-house, by a dwelling-

house and garden, and by certain fees, fixed by the minister and his associates. By the same acts, the superintendence of the schools is entrusted to the minister; the Presbytery is empowered to regulate the hours, and the vacations; and to animadvert on the incumbent, in all cases of just complaint. The judgment of the Presbytery is final, and is followed by civil consequences.

Such was the sedulous provision of the Scottish Church, and the state authority, for the continuance of Presbyterian education: and the spirit of the founders breathes in every clause, as it is felt in every family of Scotland. It forms no part of our inquiry, to determine how faithfully the Established Church discharged these trusts: under the worst abuses, the system has not failed to make the people of North Britain a people of peculiar Christian sagacity and information. But that which, perhaps more than all other things, testifies to the value set upon these institutions, is the course of action adopted by the Free Church. No sooner were the seceding brethren released from the bonds, and deprived of the endowments of the State, than they put their hands to the work, to reconstruct a system, precisely similar, except in the very points which furnish the happiest resemblance to our own condition. For being now, like ourselves, destitute of all aid from government, they have undertaken the work on the voluntary principle; and this, with a self-denial, an energy, and a success, such as may well fill us with astonishment and provoke us to emulation. Few readers of British news can be ignorant of the extraordinary labours of the Rev. Mr. McDonald, in collecting moneys for the schools of the Free Church.

It is not pretended that, in circumstances so different, we could wisely follow the example of our honoured brethren in every particular. But these facts seemed to lie too near the subject entrusted to your committee, to be altogether neglected in such a report. And they regret that they have not received in time more ample and minute information, for which an application has been made to Scotland, on their behalf. Even these hints will cause many to ponder upon the great support which some method of the kind, conformed to our usages and condition, would afford to the cause of truth and order.

In the midst of abounding error, we cannot close our eyes to the fact, that the gross defections of our day are mainly among those who have not had "line upon line" in the course of their common education. Our losses have been small indeed, compared with those of some sects, but the families in which Universalists, Socinians, Papists, ritualists, enthusiasts, and other errorists, have grown up, are notoriously families in which our catechisms have been sneered at, or at least neglected. The colour which has been washed out of the web, was never received by a deep dye into the raw material. Our children may live to see an age of conflict. The contest of our sons, it appears to some among us, is to be between *Christ* and *Antichrist*; and the forces are marshalling. The uncatechized offspring of Presbyterians are good materials for hierarchial, ritual, and at length papal structures. And the errorists of the schools last indicated, are too wise in their generation not to seize on the policy which our supineness overlooks. They know the power of schools. They found them in every part of our land. They employ them as the direct means of imbuing the youthful mind with all their most distinctive and dangerous tenets, in regard to rites, and orders, and sacraments, as opposed to Christ and his free salvation. Such being the neglect of our own body, and the zeal and diligence of our opposers, we are ready to conclude, that next to the ministry of the word, and the instruction of the family, there is nothing which, under God's blessing, promises so much for the sustentation of our covenanted truth, as schools, Presbyterian schools, thorough-paced and above-board; such schools as shall, every day in the week, direct the infant mind, not only to a meager natural religion, but to the whole round of gracious truth, as it is in Christ Jesus. The principles herein asserted are not new among us: but it is high time that we should carry our principles into action.

The *ideal* of such a school as is proposed already occurs to almost every reflective mind: to realize it, is, we admit, more difficult. Our desire would be for a *Christian school, of respectable literary and scientific character, in every congregation*. The proposal is doubtless startling: but we shall not lose by aiming high.

Even if we admit the impracticability of securing this, in such a population as ours, there is a certain approximation, which we may profitably hold up before our

minds. Concessions must be made to the valid objections of respected brethren. Allowance must be had for such circumstances as forbid the attempt, in its completeness, in many, perhaps in most of our congregations; such as poverty—thin population—rural dispersion—the mingling of small groups of Presbyterians among other sects. But after all this abatement, the question is not to be hastily set aside: Is there not still something to be discreetly and hopefully attempted, in this very direction? In cities, towns, and country districts of homogeneous population, a near approach might be attained. Only grant the general principle of distinctive instruction, in common schools, under church care, as a matter to be aimed at, and a new face will begin to be put upon the whole affair of education. Wisdom will be profitable to direct, how far any given church shall go. The principle would abide firm, if several churches, or even a whole Presbytery, should unite in a school. The endeavour, under every variety of application, would be to exchange our present schools, in which the doctrines of grace are often unheard of, for institutions aiming at *Education for Christ*; including the nurture of ministers, ruling-elders, and godly laymen. And the church might at least authorize methods leading towards this as the proper end of every school, academy, and college.

Could we in any degree, realize the maxims of education thus expressed, in a working scheme of church-schools, we should see growing around us a host of young persons, every one of whom would have, "from a child, known the Holy Scriptures:" and who, instead of being nourished on books from which every particle of evangelical truth has been carefully filtered out by school-committees and temporizing state-directors, would have learned the same thorough doctrinal matter, which gave strength to our forefathers.

Church-schools, could such flourish among us, would immediately act upon the supply of ministers. It is vain to hope for a stronger body of leaders, unless we can make our levies from a larger number of educated youth. And here a view of the subject presents itself, as connected with education for the ministry, which is too important to be overlooked, and which has long occupied the minds of those who are solicitous for a learned and able ministry. There are difficulties in the present methods of training youth for the sacred office, which might be lessened, if not removed, by a system of parish-schools. So far as that system goes into effect, it will furnish primary instruction to all our young men of suitable capacity and promise. When such persons require aid from our Board of Education, they may receive it at an advanced stage of their training. In this there would be a double advantage. *First*, because the Board would thereby be absolved from the charge of elementary education, already a burden to them; and *secondly*, because they would be liable to fewer risks from incompetent beneficiaries. It appears from the statistics of that Board, that *one-third* of the applicants for aid are in this very stage of juvenile training. It further appears, that where failures have occurred, during the last six years, *nine out of every ten* have occurred in the case of candidates taken up during this preparatory stage. And let it be remembered, by those who are discouraged by such cases, that at so early a period of development, it is almost impossible to judge with any precision as to the real character and qualifications. And yet, however hazardous or even unwise it may be, to receive such youth, at this early stage, we cannot do without them: the Church needs them; the Church must educate them. If we leave them to struggle for themselves, one of these two results must inevitably ensue; either many will be lost to the Church and the ministry, for want of assistance, who are eminently fitted for usefulness; or else local societies will spring up, all over the Church, to impair the unity and strength of our present system. How much simpler, and how much more congenial with our polity, to have every congregation a nursery of Christian men, who may be called out, if need be, to the ministry. For it is a favourable peculiarity of the method, that the boy thus trained for the church, in a parish school, need not have extorted from him a premature engagement to preach the gospel; often a snare to himself and a mortification to his patrons. In these two respects, therefore, a scheme of parish-schools would rather relieve than embarrass our Board of Education. It would, moreover, bring forward a great body of talent which, under the present system, cannot be developed at all. And, meanwhile, the applicants for the aid of the Board would be fully tried, and that aid could be limited to young men of any desired standing, as to piety, capacity, and general influence.

It may seem chimerical, to speak of remote results, while the very inception of such a scheme is matter of doubt; but that which is ultimate in the intention, is not seldom weighty as a motive to begin. We, therefore, venture to suggest, that, if parish-schools could become part of our system, some among them, in favourable sites, might be cherished in such a manner as to become academies of high rank in the literary scale. Nor is it incredible, that in many of them, a series of classes might ascend from the youngest, each one accessible only to the more promising for talents and piety of the class below; so as to sift out the very best of the students for the service of our beloved church. Some method of this sort, even though only half executed, would do more to strengthen our ministry, than all our existing random efforts.

Whatever may be the value of these hints, touching education for the ministry, your Committee feel assured that the Assembly will admit, with them, the importance of the general topic. Our children must have such a discipline, as shall include the knowledge of salvation; and, not by snatches, at distant intervals, but by that reiteration of daily "precept upon precept," which imbues the whole mind and is the prime ingredient of common school tuition.

After all, however, that has been written above, we are painfully impressed with the difficulty and importance of what remains; namely, the indication of ways and means for the attainment of the ends proposed. Among the great number of our brethren who agree in desiring a system of religious education which shall include the vital doctrines of our covenanted testimony, there are not a few, who despair of ever securing it. It is not to be denied, that the difficulties are formidable, and that there is reason to shrink from adding a new requisition upon the liberality of our people, at a time when it is found hard even to sustain the ministry of the word. And we may, we trust, be pardoned, if, after all the meditation bestowed on this branch of the subject, we should nevertheless betray our reluctance to submit a method of supply, which shall be fitted to every portion of the Church. It is less seasonable, just now, to adjust this, than to awaken attention to the reality and greatness of our want: and it is not too much to hope, that when we shall be ready to attempt the work, we shall find some means for accomplishing that which appears so necessary to our carrying on the labours of the gospel.

That parish-schools must be to a certain portion of the community *free-schools*, is evident, at first sight. In a sermon of Dr. Chalmers, upon this very subject, published many years ago, but never reprinted in America, that experienced friend of education and of the poor, argues with much force, that, in every case, a part of the expense, even though it were a very small part, should be borne by the persons receiving the immediate advantage. Even where schools are entirely free, in respect to those who directly profit by them, they may, nevertheless, as is at once apparent, draw their support from the congregation, or other community, for whose benefit they are founded. It is the obtaining of this support, in an easy and equitable manner, which constitutes the difficulty of the problem now suggested, through us, by the General Assembly to the Church. Were the greatness of the benefit duly appreciated, so that our congregations should feel willing to add to the sum which sustains the pastor, the additional sum which would sustain the teacher, the problem would be solved. And whenever the experiment shall be fairly made, Christian parents will find, that they are amply repaid in the persons of their offspring, and that it is in a good degree a mere diversion of a small stream of domestic outlay from the channel of schools as now existing, to the better channel of Christian education. But it is too much to exact, that such a revolution should be attempted at once; still less, can we expect that it should be made part of a uniform church-scheme. Your Committee, therefore, have none such to offer.

The analogy of Scottish Presbyterianism, as established by law, entirely fails us here; and we are as yet, uninformed of the plans adopted by the Free Church. While we await more full instruction on this point, we may remark, that even in Scotland, the means of parish education have been sometimes aided by individual bounty. As a striking instance, may be mentioned, what is known as the "Dick Bequest, for the benefit of the Parochial Schoolmasters and Schools in the counties of Aberdeen, Banff, and Moray," now for ten years in successful operation. This bequest consists of funds bequeathed by James Dick, Esq., of Finsbury Square,

London; amounting, at present, to a capital sum of £118,787 11s. (more than half a million of dollars.)*

In our own country, examples are not entirely wanting of benevolent regard for the same object. Allusion to these may answer several valuable purposes, especially that of showing that church schools have been actually attempted in America: a fact which is perhaps new to a large number of our members. The parochial school attached to the Scotch Presbyterian Church, in the city of New York, as the result of a munificent foundation, has been long in existence, is largely attended, and is believed to be of great value. In several other churches, and more particularly in each of the new churches, founded by private liberality, parish schools are in successful progress. The limits of this report exclude detail; but, so far as the experiment has been made, both pastors and parents are disposed to regard it as promising solid advantages to the people, and peculiar additions of strength to the Church.

No inquiries of your Committee, however, have resulted in bringing to their knowledge any churches which by an original effort, in their congregational capacity, have founded schools under the care of the Sessions. The attempt, if made, must therefore be upon untried ground. Yet we are not deterred from re-asserting the opinions respectfully suggested above, and in recommending that the General Assembly give the sanction of their voice to some principles which may encourage future experiments in this most interesting field.

In conclusion, the Committee respectfully submit the following resolutions, viz:

I. *Resolved*, That, in the judgment of the General Assembly, any scheme of education is incomplete, which does not include instruction in the Scriptures, and in those doctrines of grace which are employed by the Holy Spirit, in the renewal and sanctification of the soul.

II. That, in consideration of the blessings derived to us, through our forefathers, from the method of mingling the doctrines of our Church with the daily teachings of the school, the Assembly earnestly desire as near an approach to this method, as may comport with the circumstances of our country.

III. That the Assembly regard with great approval the attempt of such churches as have undertaken schools under their proper direction; as well as the zeal which has led individual friends of the truth to aid the same cause.

IV. That the Assembly commends the whole subject of Parochial Education to the serious attention of the Church; counselling all concerned, to regard the maintenance of gospel faith and order, in the founding of new schools, the appointment of teachers, and the selection of places of education.

REPORTS OF THEOLOGICAL SEMINARIES.

THIRTY-FOURTH ANNUAL REPORT OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY AT PRINCETON, N. J.

The Directors report to the General Assembly, that at the date of the last report, the number of students in the Seminary was *one hundred and twenty-eight*.

Since that time there have been received the following *sixty-one* new students, viz.

William Forrest, graduate of Union Theological Seminary, New York city.

William O. Breed, on certificate from do. do. do.

Joseph B. Mann, do. do. do. do. do.

Jeremiah Taylor, do. Andover Mass.

Henry V. Rankin, do. Auburn, N. Y.

Joseph K. Wright, do. Columbia, S. C.

Levi Hughes, do. New Albany, Ind.

Mason D. Williams, do. do. do.

Thomas L. W. Tappan, graduate of Bowdoin College, Me.

Francis Parker, do. Harvard do. Mass.

Benjamin McClure, do. Williams do. do.

* For full details, see "Report of the Dick Bequest," 1 vol. 8vo. Edinb. 1844.