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DELIVERED AT THE

CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

OF THE

## GENERAL ASSEMBLY

OF THE

# Presbyterian Church,

PHILADELPHIA, PA.,

MAY 24TH, 1888.

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# MEMORIES AND DUTIES.

BY REV. WILLIAM P. BREED, D.D.,

*Philadelphia, Pa.*

**B**ELOVED Brethren and Fellow-Presbyterians: — Our delightful memorial festival is fast nearing its close. A few hours more and we shall have crossed the threshold of another centennial stadium. It need not be said that the occasion has been one of singular, not to say of unique interest, and it will be our own fault if it prove not also the vehicle of a rich replenishment of spiritual health and strength, and of an intensified Christian and Presbyterian enthusiasm.

This day of solemn, thrilling memories, of fraternal reunion, eye looking into eye, palm touching palm in brotherly greeting, is more than a mere isolated fact; more than an evanescent "dance" of mental and spiritual "minstrelsy." The long distant past is in it! The far distant future is in it! It is a chamber of echoes from ages long ago, and a many-voiced prophecy of ages yet to come.

In human life and experience there is no such thing as isolation. Every event clasps hands with every other event. The whole infinitely varied and complicated story of man thus far is only a many-tongued echo of the one dire catastrophe that rent earth and heaven asunder, and sent man on his checkered, woeful way at enmity with his God! Air, ear, life everywhere resound with these echoes; the echo of the Deluge roar; the echo of the great World Powers as they rose and fell; the old Assyrian echo, the Medo-Persian, the Grecian, the Roman, and the multitudinous echoes of modern thought and action.

In the religious life of to-day the voice of Paul is heard, the tread of Augustine, the shout of Luther, Truth's battle clang in a hundred fields in Germany, France and the Netherlands; in England, Scotland and Ireland; the echoes of the guns of Seymour, Howard and Drake, as just three hundred years ago they splintered the sides and masts and tore the sails of the Invincible Armada, "deciding," says Froude, "the greatest problem ever submitted to the arbitrament of force,

determining the fate of the Reformation in Germany and completing the conversion of the English nation." In this centennial celebration we are compassed about with a great cloud of witnesses; Luther is here, Calvin is here, the Colignys are here, and William the Silent and John Knox and the Melvilles, and many more in the long catalogue of worthies of whom the world was not worthy!

In the nearer past we stand face to face with our First General Assembly. Let us walk down Arch street to Third, pass the chain drawn across the street to secure the worshipers within against disturbance by the noise without. We enter the Third street door, and lo! that venerable Assembly sits before us, listening to one of the foremost preachers and theologians of the day. Looking to our right over the high-backed pews, we see the lofty pulpit beneath the sounding board. One pew in front of the pulpit is surmounted with a canopy, supported by carved columns and set apart for the use of the President of the Republic and the Governor of the Commonwealth. In the pulpit stands the preacher, a grave man, sixty-six years of age, a man of genius, a ripe scholar, a clear thinker, a powerful reasoner, and in doctrine as Calvinistic as Calvin himself.

This great man is no stranger in Philadelphia. His voice has been heard in thrilling accents in this city in days gone by. Two squares south of where he now stands is another brick edifice, within whose walls a few years before sat the sages of that "Declaration" which in its ultimate consequences transmuted the loosely joined colonies into a compact Republic. In that great Assembly there was just one clergyman, John Witherspoon, who now stands before us. The fate of the Declaration was trembling in the balance. Witherspoon rose to his feet and said in solemn, earnest tones, "There is a tide in the affairs of men, a nick of time! We perceive it now before us. To hesitate is to consent to our own slavery. That noble instrument upon your table, which insures immortality to its author, should be subscribed this very morning by every pen in this house. He that will not respond to its accents and strain every nerve to carry into effect its provisions is unworthy of the name of freeman."

This eloquent outburst of patriotic fervor, there is every reason to believe, bore with telling effect upon the fate of the Declaration, which was passed two days after, settling at once the momentous question of the nation's independence.

Onward thence the tide of thought bears us, through years of dearth and discouragement, through periods of Pentecostal revival, through storm and calm, struggles between men of massive intellect, of glowing eloquence, of acute dialectic skill,

of profound acquaintance with recorded thought, men of life-blood earnestness, of flaming zeal for the truth, struggles in which we see the forms and hear the voices of the Tennents, of Rodgers, of Samuel Stanhope Smith, of John Blair Smith, of Duffield, Ashbel Green, the Alexanders, the Hodges, Samuel Miller, the Breckenridges, William Adams, Musgrave, Junkin, Barnes, Boardman, Hitchcock and many, many more, illustrating and confirming the testimony of Dr. Curry, of the Methodist Church, "We concede to the Calvinistic churches the honor of having all along directed the best thinking of the country;" and the testimony of James Russell Lowell on Calvinism, "Its doctrines have produced some of the strongest and noblest characters the world has ever seen, the very fibre and substance of which commonwealths are made."

From *Reminiscences* we turn to *confronting Duties*. First, to the duties that await us as a *Christian Church*.

The obvious *Duty of Aggression*:

The doors of all the world stand open before us, and in our ears the old command, "Go ye into *all* the world and preach the Gospel to *every creature*." Political barriers to the progress of the Gospel are very few and very far between. Time was when a potent Director of the East India Company declared that he had rather see fifty devils in India than fifty missionaries. The same ship that bore Ziegenbalg from Copenhagen to Tranquebar, carried also secret instructions to the Governor to lay every obstacle in the missionary's way, and surround him with all practicable impediments. But in our day such things are things of the past.

And now almost every human being is our next-door neighbor. Under the guidance of God, the splendid triumphs of the intellect of man have laid the whole heathen world on the door-step of the Christian Church.

And the *Duty of Defence*:

The old enemy has lost none of his cunning, none of his malice, none of his energy. The Devil is come down unto you, having great wrath because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.

For long now the current of thought has set strongly in for the cold, cheerless shores of Unbelief. The grim divinities of Doubt and Denial, exhumed for the thousandth time, are set again upon their pedestals, and the whole world is bidden to fall down and do them homage. "We seem to be slowly coming round through the sublime by-ways of intellectual superiority and sentimental faith, to the old, mean era of caviling and criticism, the age that finds humbug in every thing, the puny, debased, narrow age of unbelief." And the duty confronts us, in the midst of all this, the enemy coming in like a

flood to rally in company with our fellow-Christians of other names, with renewed ardor round the Christian Gonfalon, and plant it on every hill-top, on every human home!

Duties await us also as *American Christians*:

Ancient history furnishing examples of two classes of nations; those which, being destitute of the true religion, have assailed it in other nations, and those which, having had it in possession, have become apostate.

The doom of the former is written by the pen of Moses: "I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee." And the Prophet, Ezekiel, 25: 12-13, records an instance of the outcarrying of the threat upon the offender, "Thus saith the Lord God, because that Edom hath dealt against the house of Judah by taking vengeance, and hath greatly offended, therefore, saith the Lord God, I will also stretch out my hand upon Edom, and I will cut off man and beast from it, and I will make it desolate from Teman, and they of Dedan shall fall by the sword." Under the same doom Nineveh, the foe of Israel, and Babylon, the foe of Judah, were ground to powder!

But it fares still worse with *apostate* nations. When the unclean spirit once expelled returns again, the last state is worse than the first. "So," said Jesus, "shall it be with this generation," and *so was it with that generation*; for under the whole heaven hath not been done as hath been done upon Jerusalem.

But our country must take rank, if with either of these classes, with the *apostate*. Our Government has never been the assailant of religion. The smoke of no martyr fire has ever risen between the eye and the white and crimson, the stars and stripes of the national banner. On the contrary, our nation has been, from the first, a Christian nation. The first sound the wolves and Indians heard from the lips of the white man on our New England shores were the sounds of prayer and praise to the Triune Jehovah. From the beginning until now, the name of Jesus has been invoked in our National Congress, and in our great political conventions. Appeal has gone up to the Christian's God on the field of battle before the conflict, and in thanksgiving after the victory. Our legislation, in so far as it has borne upon religion, has been Christian in its character. High authority has repeatedly declared that Christianity is a part of the common law of the land. The Sabbath is distinctly recognized, and year by year a day of devout thanksgiving to God has been proclaimed by the Chief Magistrate of the nation. Under the shadow of the national flag, Gospel institutions have sprung up like willows by the

water courses. Church edifices dot the land from limit to limit. Christian missionaries from our shores have played the hero and the martyr in many a heathen land. The Sabbath sun, as he moves in majesty from the Atlantic to the Pacific over this great sisterhood of commonwealths, fixes his golden eye upon more than twelve million communicants in evangelical churches, and sees an equal number of children grouped around more than twelve hundred thousand Sabbath-school teachers. Bible societies, tract societies, colporteur agencies and other societies, Christian and beneficent, supported by an annual voluntary outlay for all religious purposes, of nearly one hundred million dollars make up together a world of hallowed activities that set the seal of Christianity broad and deep upon the very life of the Republic, and make it impossible thenceforth for it to be other than permanently Christian or basely apostate. The only alternative left is either with hands at once ungrateful and impious to tear up the deep-rooted cross and cast it into the sea and thereby hang a millstone to the neck of the nation, or to go forward, ploughing and planting, harrowing and weeding, until at the name of Jesus the whole aggregate Republic shall bow the head and bend the knee in heartfelt devotion!

While Alexander was thundering at the gates of Tyre, the terrified inhabitants, suspecting that Apollo, their god, was about to forsake them, assembled in the public square, and with chains fastened his statue to the pedestal. The folly of the heathen may teach us wisdom. We must secure the permanent dwelling of Immanuel in the midst of us, or as a nation we are lost! We must bind Him to our national life, not with chains of iron, but with the cords of love, with the bands of a man for evermore!

A Duty great and grave lies before us as *Protestant Christians*.

When God by the hand of Columbus drew aside the curtain, and disclosed this continent to the modern eye, nothing was more improbable than that these territories, now paved with this mosaic of republics, should become the heritage of a Protestant people. Henry VII was on the throne of England with seventeen years of life and rule yet before him. A full quarter of a century must elapse ere the trump of Luther should wake the dead. In the mind of Columbus, the one ruling idea was to add another province to the empire of the Papacy. And during three-fourths of his voyage he kept the prow of the *Santa Maria* pointed straight toward the heart of this land. Martin Alonzo Pinzon, commander of the *Pinta*, advised and urged Columbus to change his course and head for the south-west; Columbus declined the advice. Pinzon

remonstrated, Columbus persisted. Pinzon exclaimed: "It seems to me an inspiration; my heart dictates to me that we ought to steer in a different direction." In vain. At last God sent a flock of birds athwart the bows of the little fleet, and the birds won! The course of the vessels was changed, and in this discovery a little island took the place of the great continent!

The celebrated Alexander von Humboldt writes in the "Cosmos," "We must here pause to consider the wonderful concatenation of trivial circumstances which undeniably exercised an influence on the course of the world's destiny. Washington Irving has justly observed that if Columbus had resisted the counsel of Pinzon, and continued to steer westward, he would have entered the Gulf Stream and been borne to Florida and thence probably to Cape Hatteras and Virginia; a circumstance of incalculable importance, since it might have been the means of giving to the United States a Catholic Spanish population instead of the Protestant English one, by which the regions were subsequently colonized." And what that means, read in the condition past and present of those portions of North and South America actually occupied by that and a kindred papal power! "Never," continues Humboldt, "has the flight of birds been attended with more important results! It may even be said that it decided the first colonization in the new Continent and the original distribution of the Roman and Germanic races of men."

Nevertheless, Rome through her faithful vassal, Spain, pushed northward, took possession of the coast of Florida and for a time the Florida of her claims reached from Cape Sable to Newfoundland! From the latitude of Charleston, S. C., the line ran westward to the Mississippi and beyond, taking in all that we now call Louisiana. On the Pacific coast all was hers, from the Isthmus of Panama to Prince Williams Sound.

Through France, Rome held Canada and the greater part of the Mississippi Valley. But in the year 1759 Rome met her Waterloo on the Heights of Abraham, and all that sweep of territory passed into the hands of Protestantism. In due time the claims of Spain East and West vanished into thin air, and Protestantism, in the persons of the Pilgrims of New England, the Dutch of New York, the Swedes of Delaware, the English of Virginia and the Huguenots farther South held the land. Thus, as by visible act of God, this whole magnificent domain was wrenched from the hands of Rome and given over forever to the children of the Reformation!

And before us now as Protestant Christians lies the plain, imperative, *vital* duty, while with all our hearts conceding to our Roman Catholic neighbors all their rights and privileges,

civil and religious, yet to see to it that the Vatican Octopus, with its Bible-burnings, its cruel intolerance, its hatred of our public schools, its declarations in Encyclical and Syllabus "that the Pope and priests ought to have dominion in temporal affairs," that the principle that "the Church has not power to avail itself of force," and the principle that "the Roman religion shall not be held as the only religion of the State to the exclusion of all others are most mischievous and pernicious errors," to see to it, we say, that this hierarchy shall never acquire and hold dominion in this Republic!

Therefore we must insist that the public school shall nestle in every nook; that in it the Word of God with its pure and unique morality shall be read day by day; copies of this holy Word must be multiplied and placed in every hand, and there must be a sparing of no pains, no labor, no expense, for the conversion of the children of the papacy to the light, liberty and purity of the Gospel!

Duties await us also as *Presbyterian Christians*.

As voiced by Dr. Charles Hodge, the Presbyterian system denies that all Church power vests in the clergy; denies that the apostolic office is perpetual and denies that each individual Church is independent. It affirms that the people have a right to a substantive part in the government of the Church; that presbyters who minister in word and doctrine are the highest permanent officers in the Church, and that the visible Church is, or should be, one in the sense that a smaller part is subject to a larger, and a larger to the whole. The core of this system is the eldership; the whole eldership the organ for the exercise of the power of the Church; a portion specially ordained to discharge the duties of pulpit and pastorate; as rulers all elders on a footing of perfect equality; preachers and pastors all standing upon the same high level of dignity and authority, and the whole Church compacted into unity by a system of courts—lower, higher, highest. Of this system, Henderson, member of the Westminster Assembly, said, "Here is superiority without tyranny, parity without confusion, subjection without slavery." Of this system the Roman Catholic Archbishop Hughes said, "It acts on the principle of a radiating centre, and is without equal or rival among the other denominations of the country."

Our sister evangelical denominations we bid a hearty God-speed! There is room for all and work for all. But who will chide us for entertaining the conviction that a peculiar duty awaits a Church like ours in a land like ours; a Church between whose form of government and that of the nation analogies so many and so striking exist, both embracing in felicitous counterpoise the right and privilege of free thought

and private judgment on the one hand, with the predominance of an ultimate and venerable authority on the other; a Church historically and notoriously not one whit more republican in the form of its government than it is in its spirit and tendencies; a Church that has, therefore, always been an object of peculiar and cordial hatred to despots secular and spiritual; a Church ever the champion of education; a Church embracing in such proportions talent, learning, character, Christian zeal and piety; before such a Church, we say, there lies a peculiar duty, and well will it be for her and for the world if her members prove themselves true children of Issachar, that have understanding of the times to know what Israel ought to do.

Before this Church lies the duty of demonstrating a superior efficiency in spreading the Gospel among men, in gathering in the outcasts, in subduing sinners, in maturing all the rich fruit of the spirit, "love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." Amen!

In conclusion: Out of these fervors of fraternal greeting it is with a half timid heart we send our thoughts onward over the expanse of a coming hundred years of cradles, and of graves toward the two hundredth meeting of this General Assembly. Out of the noise and bustle and swirl of sixty million panting lives, with their sweet chorus of manifold charities, the footfall of beautiful feet upon the mountains bringing good tidings and publishing peace, bringing good tidings of good and publishing salvation, and mingling with these the hoarse, harsh cries of atheist and anarchist, the clash of conflict with sin and vice, with the imperious and cruel saloon, the stench of Mormonism, and withal the still-hunt of the Jesuitic Papacy—it is, we say, with shrinking heart and half timid eye that out of the midst of all this we look forward into and through the noise and bustle and swirl of the oncoming century, with its rush of progress, its masterful subjection and varied applications of the forces of nature to the uses of man, that will be to those of the present as the oak to the acorn, as the Ganges emptying its gathered flood into the sea, to the Ganges at its infant spring-head, its stupendous political changes, its currents and cross-currents of thought, feeling and action, its harmonious blendings of coöperating agencies and its fierce collisions of contending forces!

To *this* one hundredth General Assembly the members have threaded their way through a throng of sixty millions of people, and it startles us to think that to that two hundredth General Assembly the members will have to crush their way through the seething masses of more than four hundred and

fifty millions of people. The two Assemblies blended on this centennial day represent two great Presbyterian bodies. Why need we doubt that the Two Hundredth Assembly will represent the combined Presbyterianism of the Republic? If one Congress can stand and act for sixty million citizens, why may not one General Assembly stand and act for sixty million Presbyterians?

Let us be thankful, brethren, that the character and fate of that stupendous future that now confronts our thoughts lies in other hands than ours. Our responsibilities will have been met and our duties will have been discharged, when into the custody of that Future we shall have passed this Present, not only unbetrayered, undamaged, uncrippled, but nerved up to a higher and holier tension, fervid, with a warmer zeal, purposes more rigorously girded, momentum harder to be resisted, and all baptized with tears of gratitude, enveloped in clouds of prayer and sanctified by a consecration higher and more entire. Amen and Amen!