

*Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.
General Assembly*

A NARRATIVE

OF

THE STATE OF RELIGION,

WITHIN

THE BOUNDS

OF

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY,

OF

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH;

AND

**OF THE GENERAL ASSOCIATION OF CONNECTICUT,
OF MASSACHUSETTS,**

AND

**OF THE GENERAL CONVENTION OF VERMONT, DURING THE
LAST YEAR.**

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## A NARRATIVE &c.

IN reviewing the dealings of Divine Providence toward their churches the past year, the General Assembly have abundant testimony, that the King of Zion is the guardian of his people. Every glance discovers the finger of God. In those congregations that are favoured with the institutions of the Gospel, the Assembly are happy to find a respectful, and general attention to the preached word. Though in a few places, there has been a partial suspension of ministerial labours, arising from the unhappy state of some congregations on our frontiers; and in others, some defection in the regard which has been heretofore paid to the duties of the Sanctuary; yet there has been on the whole, an increased attention to the means of grace.

There is a state between that stupidity, which casts a gloom around every prospect, and that excitement, which gilds every prospect with hope, that characterizes many of our congregations. In these churches, there is no general out-pouring of the Spirit of grace; but there is that anxiety to hear the preached word, that solicitude to frequent public and private associations for prayer, together with some instances of conviction, and more of solemnity, which we venture to hail as the earnest of better days.

In many of our congregations, these days of hope have already issued in seasons of refreshing and joy. The same Saviour that took away the hard and stony hearts of the Jews in Babylon, and that shed forth his Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, is giving before our eyes, signal exhibitions of his amiable sovereignty, and irresistible grace. In many places, the people of God have been roused from their lethargy; affected with clear views of divine things, and animated with ardent desires to promote the interest of the Redeemer's kingdom, and to see it promoted in the world. The attention of the thoughtless has been powerfully arrested. Multitudes have been awakened to a sense of their sinfulness, their danger, and their duty; and many a stout hearted rebel has been brought to bow before the feet of a crucified Saviour. The Congregations that have been eminently favoured with these effusions of mercy, are in the towns of Portney and Homer, within the Presbytery of Onondaga; in Utica, Whitesborough and Litchfield, within the Presbytery of Oneida; and in Hebron, within the Presbytery of Columbia. In several congregations within the bounds of the Jersey Presbytery, in addition to the gleanings of an earlier harvest, there have been a number of extensive revivals. New-Providence, Morristown, Bloomfield, Orange, Newark, Elizabeth-town and Connecticut Farms,

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have been highly favoured of God. In Hanover, South Hanover and Springfield particularly, the *right hand of the Lord has been truly exalted*, within the course of the past winter. While casting our eyes toward this favoured district of country, where there have been three extensive revivals in eleven years, we remember with thankfulness, *the years of the right hand of the Most High*, and render praise to him *whose mercy endureth forever*. In Princeton and in Kingston, within the bounds of the New Brunswick Presbytery, we have also the privilege to state, that there is an increased attention to religion. We are exceedingly happy to hear that God is drawing so near one of our principal Seminaries of learning; and we indulge the hope, that he will again visit in mercy, this favoured Institution. We have reason to believe, that vital piety is evidently rising in influence in some parts of Virginia. In Richmond, Petersburg, Fredericksburgh, and particularly Norfolk, there have been considerable effusions of the Spirit, though no general revivals. New churches have been established; encouraging additions to them have been made; and at the present time, the prospect is unusually animating. In the counties of Albemarle, Culpepper and Madison, very considerable attention has been excited by the labours of Missionaries. In the congregations of Hawfields and Crossroads, within the bounds of the Presbytery of Orange, there has also been some unusual seriousness. In the Presbytery of West Lexington, the prevalence of malignant disease has been followed by deep searchings of heart and anxious cries for mercy. And among the blacks in the Presbytery of Harmony, we are rejoiced to learn there is much solemnity, and great engagedness in divine things. In some of the aforementioned places, the attention to religion seems to be at present on the decline, and in others, it is still advancing. The whole scene is enough to gladden the heart. The risen Redeemer still has the work of salvation in his own hands, and turneth the hearts of the children of men, whithersoever he will, as the rivers of water are turned.

The subjects of these revivals have been chiefly from among the youth—from the children of believing parents; and in some places, particularly from the youth who have paid punctual and respectful regard to catechetical instruction. The general character of the work has been such as usually marks the genuine operations of the Holy Spirit. Though not without great power of feeling, the subjects have been free from the appearance of extravagance. The seasons of worship have been sacredly still, rather than tumultuously violent. The speechless agony of multitudes who have been brought to see their sinfulness and their danger, has been more the effect of truth bearing down upon the conscience, than that transient and violent emotion, excited by natural fear, and cherished by animal feeling. They have been deeply impressed with a sense of the infinite majesty and holiness of God,—of the

spirituality, extent, and obligation of the divine law,—the exceeding sinfulness of sin,—the total depravity of the human heart,—the necessity of regeneration by the almighty power of the Holy Spirit—of justification, *not by works, but freely by the grace of God, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*—the indispensable necessity of an interest in atoning blood, and of that *holiness without which no man shall see the Lord*.

The General Assembly are gratified to learn that praying societies, established for the special purpose of imploring the effusion of the Holy Spirit upon the Churches; Charitable institutions for the aid of poor and pious young men for the gospel ministry, and for sending the gospel to the heathen—and societies for the religious instruction of the children in the suburbs of our cities; have increased in number and are widely extending their influence. Nor can they regard with too much gratitude, the heavenly ardor of many pious females, whose weekly associations for prayer, and daily exertions in the distribution of Bibles among the poor, show us what it is to imitate the example of him who *went about doing good*.

The Assembly feel no small satisfaction, in stating the increase of united and vigorous effort in some portion of country within their limits, for the advancement of morals. A solicitude upon this subject is beginning to be felt. The indispensable necessity of embodying the influence of the land in favor of religion and morality is beginning to be felt *deeply*; and we cannot but hope that such a combination will be formed; and cannot but believe that it will be greatly successful.

During the year past, Bible Societies have greatly increased in number and utility. Few districts of our country are now without them. Their influence is widely extensive, and incalculably beneficial. Experience has proved that no human exertions are so effectual to harmonize christians, to excite religious zeal, to suppress vice and immorality, and to diffuse light and knowledge, as the gratuitous distribution of the Word of Life.\*

The Assembly rejoice, to have it in their power to state, that the Great Head of the Church, has vouchsafed a signal blessing, on the Missionary efforts of the past year. Forty Missionaries have been employed the last year, whose journals afford the most pleasing testimony of the beneficial result of their labors. Several new churches have been organized, and more have been put into a forming state. Many new Churches are growing up in the Western parts of Tennessee; a Missionary Society has lately been formed in that State. The call for Missionary exertion is loud; and the services of our Missionaries have been received with emotions of gratitude and joy.

\* A circumstance of peculiar interest to the church, occurred lately in one of the Western towns of Virginia. — A pious young man was employed to sell on the day of election,

In taking a view of the state of religion within the bounds of the Assembly, an interesting object which arrests the attention, is the infant Theological Seminary, lately established at Princeton. From this Seminary it is hoped, that many able and faithful labourers will go forth to reap the whitening harvest. The state of this Seminary is at once promising and critical. It is under the immediate superintendance and instruction of two able Professors, who devote their whole time, laboriously to the education of the youth committed to their charge. The number of these youth has already been as great as twenty-four; and if the means of supporting the establishment shall be furnished, there is the most flattering prospect that it will become a fruitful nursery for the Church. But unless these means shall be furnished speedily and liberally, every prospect will be clouded, and the raised expectations of many of the friends of Zion utterly disappointed. The Directors of that Seminary have reported a statement of the assistance which has been furnished by benevolent associations of females, to such of the Theological students as need pecuniary aid, which has surprised, gratified, and exceedingly rejoiced their fathers and brethren in the church. Let them proceed, and abound in these works of pious benevolence, so worthy of them, and so ornamental to our holy religion; and let all of both sexes, who witness their liberality, resolve to go and do likewise.

In this review we rejoice. *Who is a God like unto our God, that passeth by the transgressions of the remnant of his heritage, and will not retain his anger forever, because he delighteth in mercy!*

But we leave this pleasing retrospect. We turn with grief from these scenes of verdure and delight, to that extensive waste, where no verdure animates; that barren heath, on which there is *no dew, nor rain from the Lord*. Between three and four hundred of our Congregations are destitute of the stated ministrations of a preached gospel. Thousands in this land of vision, are *destroyed for lack of knowledge*; thousands suffering a *famine, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord*. And even in the midst of gospel privileges, we behold very many and very large portions of our Church in a state of deplorable stupidity. The same rain and sunshine that ripen the wheat for the garner of the Great Husbandman, appear to be ripening the tares for the unquenchable flame. We have also too much evidence of awful declension among many of the professed followers of Jesus Christ. In very many of our congregations, the past

Bibles for the Bible Society; who, having disposed of them, sent for an additional quantity. The person who applied for them is a *pure* descendant of him who "as a prince had power with God and with men and prevailed." But he is converted to the doctrine of the cross; has been baptized in the name of our crucified but adored Master; is a member of Messiah's church militant; lives in the faith and hope, of "the truth as it is in Jesus," and adorns the doctrine of God our Saviour. Behold this *Israelite*, carrying in the presence of a vast assembly of citizens *Stereotype Bibles*, and exerting himself to increase the dispersion of the word of life. The *Jew laden* with that Gospel which his Fathers rejected!

year has been a season of chilling indifference toward divine things. Seasons when the people of God were animated with fervent zeal for the promotion of the divine glory, have given way to seasons, when the pitiable attachment to earth, the pursuit of *lying vanities that cannot profit*, unhappy and needless dissensions, have superseded, and almost eradicated the once tender solicitude for the accomplishment of God's gracious designs in favor of his people. O, how shall we speak of that criminal indifference toward the cause, for which, the Babe of Bethlehem, was bathed in tears, the Son of God crimsoned with blood! Jerusalem is almost forgotten. Zion's fair heritage lies desolate. The spirit, the maxims, and the policy, of the world, begin in some instances, to be intimately interwoven with the discipline and policy of the church. The tenderest and the strongest bands of union, in some churches, begin to be severed. That noxious weed, the spirit of party, while it embitters the sweetness, and poisons the life of vital godliness, is unnerving the vigor of Christian exertion. Connected with these foreboding symptoms, there is a melancholy prevalence of vice and immorality. Profane swearing, intemperance, Sabbath breaking, and other immoralities, exist in many places to an alarming degree, threatening to sap the foundation of our religious and civil institutions.

From our brethren in the New-England States we have received very interesting information. From the General Association of Connecticut, we learn, that numerous revivals of religion have taken place in that state the past year; particularly in the city of Hartford, in the congregations of East Hartford, Orford, Weathersfield, Simsbury, North Coventry, Litchfield, Milton and South Farms. These revivals have, under God, been occasioned, and promoted by the preaching of the great doctrines of the Reformation. In some instances, this work of divine grace, has been slowly progressive; in others, sudden and powerful; but in all, silent, deep, and apparently genuine. The moral influence of this work of grace has been eminently salutary, and signally manifested, in unusual, and general solicitude for the suppression of vice, and the promotion of morality.

From the General Association of Massachusetts Proper, we learn that the cause of truth, in opposition to Socinian and Arian errors, is on the whole advancing, though not rapidly. A number of revivals of religion have taken place in this state, particularly in the towns of Gloucester, Lee, Long-Meadow and Stockbridge. Some favourable appearances, are exhibited at Falmouth, and in several places, in the western part of the state. The number of students in the Theological Seminary at Andover, is about sixty. The greater part of the present members of Williams College, are professors of religion. Spirited and persevering efforts are likewise here making for the reformation of morals.



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From the General Convention of the state of Vermont we hear some things to deplore, and some, that are matter of rejoicing. In those places that are adjacent to the seat of the war there has been an awful defection from good morals, and a lamentable increase of bold and daring vices. A few towns have been favoured with special outpourings of the Divine Spirit, particularly Bridport and Pawlet. Of the members of Middlebury College we are happy to learn there are about fifty who have it in view to devote themselves to the work of the ministry.

On the whole, the Assembly cannot but feel, that the cause of religion and morality has been signally advanced the past year. Notwithstanding all the sin and wretchedness of our world, the past year has been a year of joy to our churches. The Lord seems to have come out of his place to *redeem Zion with judgments, and her converts with righteousness*. While, with one hand, he is *pulling down strong holds, and casting down imaginations*; with the other, he is raising Jerusalem from the dust, and clothing her with the garments of strength, and salvation. The same voice that is proclaiming *the day of vengeance of our God, is also proclaiming the acceptable year of the Lord. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. The darkness is past*. Already is the command gone forth to the tribes of the wilderness and the islands of the sea, *Arise, shine, O Zion! for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee, and the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising*. It is too late a period, Christians, to sit down, and fold your arms in the gloom of discouragement and inactivity. Yes, it is too late a period. The mountains of ignorance and idolatry will welcome the feet of them that publish good tidings; the Wilderness of this Western world will blossom as the rose; the altars of the East will be overturned; the images of Moloch will be broken down, and the only question is, whether the work shall be performed, and the reward enjoyed by others, or by you? O brethren, our hearts beat high with hope. *Will the Lord cast off forever? Will his anger smoke against the sheep of his pasture? Arise, O God! plead thine own cause!*