

The Presbyterian Guardian

April 24, 1937

VOLUME 4, NUMBER 2

One Dollar a Year

NED B. STONEHOUSE,
Editor

Published semi-monthly by
THE PRESBYTERIAN GUARDIAN PUBLISHING COMPANY
1212 Commonwealth Building, Philadelphia, Pa.

THOMAS R. BIRCH,
Managing Editor

A PLEA FOR PEACE

"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:
They shall prosper that love thee.
Peace be within thy walls,
And prosperity within thy palaces.
For my brethren and companions' sakes,
I will now say, Peace be within thee.
For the sake of the house of Jehovah our God
I will seek thy good" (Psalm 122: 6-9).

HOW proper a Psalm for any church to sing—also for The Presbyterian Church of America.

When our church was organized on June 11th of last year, that Valiant-for-Truth, Dr. J. Gresham Machen, heaved a sigh of relief and expressed his great joy at now at last being privileged to breathe in an atmosphere of ecclesiastical peace.

Alas, disappointment was in store for him. Even before the Second General Assembly convened, it became evident that perfect harmony was not found in The Presbyterian Church of America. At the Assembly Dr. Machen's strength was taxed to keep the ecclesiastical ship balanced. And, sad to relate, during the last months of his life he was greatly disturbed and deeply grieved by growing evidence of differences, not to say strife, within the church.

The first day of this year his Lord came to him and said: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant, thou hast fought long enough; now mayest thou join the church triumphant and enter upon the rest that remaineth for the people of God."

Few things are more needful for The Presbyterian Church of America at this time than that we who remain give "diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). Failing to do

that, we shall break down the work of our great deceased leader, endanger the very existence of our church, offend Christ's little ones, give comfort to the modernist enemy, and, worst of all, bring dishonor upon the Name of our blessed Lord.

Then may I not in all meekness and humility make a plea for the peace of Jerusalem?

SOME DIVISIVE INFLUENCES

Merely naming a few divisive forces that are more or less operative in every church, our own included, should serve as sufficient warning against them.

In a Church of Jesus Christ no artificial distinctions among the members may be tolerated. For instance, to play up in our midst the differences between East and West, charter-members and later arrivals, Scotch and Dutch, is not only uncalled for, but is sure to prove divisive because un-Christian. "There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free, there can be no male and female; for ye all are one man in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

That misrepresentation of brother by brother is perhaps Satan's most effective method of destroying the peace of a church need hardly be said. It is self-evident. But perhaps the remark is not altogether superfluous that such misrepresentation frequently results from the evil practice of impugning one another's motives. Is it not perfectly clear that the judging of motives should be left to the Lord God, who alone knows the hearts of men and tries their reins? The Saviour's warning, "Judge not that ye be not judged" (Matthew 7:1), is plainly applicable here. For one Christian to ascribe unworthy and evil motives to another is heinous sin. And yet, who has never done this? Does it not behoove each of us to hang his head in shame and to plead guilty on this score?

Our church calls itself Presbyterian, and most of us are extremely insistent that it shall be Presbyterian, not only in name but in very deed. Then may we not forget that one of the outstanding principles of Presbyterian polity is the parity of the clergy. Let no minister presume to exalt himself above his brethren, and let no group of ministers anywhere presume to dominate the church. In the councils of the church the young minister in his first charge, somewhere in the back woods, is on an absolute par with a professor of theology or a moderator of the church's highest judicatory. Bearing that principle in mind will prove conducive to the unity of our church. Ignoring it cannot but spell division.

And yet it may not be denied that some office-bearers and members of a church are more talented than others. In consequence, not all can be, or for that matter should be, equally prominent in the work of the church. But here an evil trait of human nature often asserts itself. Unholy rivalry and petty jealousy raise their serpentine heads. Again the question may well be asked: What servant of God can wash his hands in innocence of these sins? We still have much to learn from the apostolic admonition to do nothing through faction or through vainglory, but in lowliness of mind each to count other better than himself (Philippians 2:3).

One other divisive influence I would mention. Perhaps lack of proper perspective is as good a name for it as any. Failure to distinguish between important matters and relatively unimportant matters often leads to serious complications. Popularly expressed, to make mountains out of molehills is a far from innocent pastime. To be more specific, let us beware of placing so much emphasis on certain little differences within our own ranks as to weaken our attack on the common enemy—Modernism.

Truth and Peace

However, it is possible that important differences exist among us. If so, we may not close our eyes to them, for to do that were dishonest.

The prophet Zechariah in his day commanded God's people to "love truth and peace" (Zechariah 8:19). The order of his words is significant. Truth is named before peace. The reason is perfectly obvious. Truth is

the only sure foundation for peace. Peace which rests on anything but truth is not only an unstable peace, but a false peace. It simply is no peace at all.

In that realization Dr. Machen lifted up his voice against error and heresy in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. For so doing he was charged with disturbing the peace of the church and was cast out. But in reality he disturbed but a false peace, and this he did in order to establish a worthy peace. Far from being a trouble-maker, he was an apostle of peace, for he sought to re-establish the church on the truth of God's Word.

We of The Presbyterian Church of America must make sure that we build our ecclesiastical structure not on the sandy and sloping soil of error, but on the solid rock of truth.

That we may tolerate no out-and-out Modernism among us goes altogether without saying. Not one of us wants to. The settled conviction that Modernism is not Christianity but anti-Christianity constitutes the very reason for our existence as a church.

But it is just as obvious that we may make no compromise with Modernism. And that deserves emphasis.

The difference between Christianity and liberalism may be described as the difference between supernaturalism and naturalism. Now Christian supernaturalism when applied to the subject of salvation yields the doctrine of salvation by grace. And it is the distinction, nay the glory, of the Presbyterian and Reformed churches that of all churches they have embodied this doctrine in its purest form in their confessions and have clung to it most tenaciously in their preaching. It is no exaggeration to assert that this doctrine is the hall-mark of the Reformed Faith. With it a Presbyterian church stands or falls.

The history of Christian doctrine tells of outright denial of the doctrine of salvation by grace. It is commonly called Pelagianism. And present-day Modernism is thoroughly Pelagian. But the same history also speaks of numerous attempts to compromise this doctrine. Perhaps the best known of these is Arminianism. And it is extremely prevalent in our day. Sad to say, it has adherents even in fundamentalist circles.

Space does not permit an adequate description here of the Arminian her-

esy. Suffice it to say that he who teaches that God from eternity chose certain persons to salvation because He foresaw that they would believe in Christ, or that Christ by His death on the cross merely made salvation possible for sinners and did not actually save anybody, or that unregenerate man, instead of being dead in trespasses and sins, is able to make a contribution to his second birth, or that the grace of God in the new birth is dependent for its efficacy on man's consent, or that the ultimate salvation of true believers is not absolutely secure,—has broken with the consistent teaching of salvation by grace as embodied in that great Presbyterian creed known as the Westminster Confession, and has gone over to the Arminian camp.

Another more or less prevalent attempt to dilute the truth of salvation by grace must be named. There is a type of dispensationalism which teaches, either explicitly or by implication, that, while in this age sinners are saved by the grace of God in Jesus Christ and can be saved in no other way, salvation was not by the same grace before Christ's death nor will be by the same grace in the coming kingdom age. I do not say that all who call themselves dispensationalists so believe and so teach, but some who go by that name undeniably do.

And now it should be clear to every one why Dr. Machen much preferred the name Presbyterian or Reformed to the name fundamentalist. He knew that some fundamentalists tamper with the exceedingly precious truth of salvation by grace, and it was his firm conviction that the system of doctrine taught in the Westminster Confession and Catechisms admits of no such tampering. Therefore also he was extremely insistent that The Presbyterian Church of America should be "not just another fundamentalist church, but a church truly Presbyterian."

May God forbid that The Presbyterian Church of America should seek peace at the expense of the doctrine which lies at the very heart of Holy Scripture—that salvation is solely by the grace of God in Jesus Christ. If we permit our ministers or elders or deacons to compromise that truth, we shall in principle have returned with the dog to our own vomit and with the sow that was washed to the wal-

lowing in the mire. The errors alluded to are stations on the road back to Modernism.

Godliness and Peace

If peace purchased at the price of truth is unworthy of its name, that is no less true of peace procured at the price of godliness.

Our enemies in the modernist camp have a way of charging us with dead orthodoxy, that type of faith which fails to manifest itself in good works and may even be accompanied with a godless life. Well may we pray that this accusation shall never be based on fact.

The church which is less insistent on holiness of life than on purity of doctrine can have no peace.

Therefore we must be on our guard against every form of Antinomianism. He who teaches that the Christian, being under grace, may ignore God's moral law is treading on the thinnest possible ice. If we use our Christian liberty for an occasion to the flesh, forgetting to serve one another through love (Galatians 5:13), we have plunged through the ice. If with a show of piety we seek to discover God's will for our lives through special guidance by the Spirit apart from Holy Scripture, we are floundering about in the muddy waters of unholy mysticism. If, brushing aside the great commandment of brotherly love, we bite and devour one another, we are at the point of drowning.

If we would have peace, no such offences may be tolerated among us.

An Area of Tolerance

While historic Presbyterianism has never given quarter to heresy or sin, but has always been uncompromisingly severe in its denunciation of both, it has not insisted on perfect unanimity and uniformity in matters either of doctrine or of life. It has always been broad enough to permit certain differences of opinion among its adherents. In fact, such tolerance may be said to be characteristically Presbyterian. It is of one piece with the Scriptural teaching of Christian liberty, which the Presbyterian churches have ever stressed so strongly.

A few concrete examples are in order.

All good Presbyterians believe in Christ's visible return to earth. That truth is an essential element of the system of doctrine with which Pres-

byterian office-bearers are wont solemnly to express agreement. But on certain questions concerning the second coming there has been in the past and is today a wide divergence of opinion among serious Bible-students of Presbyterian persuasion. The views known as Premillennialism, Amillennialism, and supernaturalistic Postmillennialism are all three of them held. And, while it cannot truly be said that the Confession of Faith gives equal support to each, yet, so far as my knowledge goes, no Presbyterian church has ever in anything like an official way put up the bars against any one of these views as such. The exponents of each view have respected the adherents of the other two as fellow-Presbyterians.

For another example, no Bible-believing and Bible-loving Presbyterian will take the position that the moderate use of wine is in itself always and everywhere sinful. To teach that would obviously be to cast serious reflection on our blessed Lord, who, the gospel tells us, on occasion drank wine (Luke 7:33, 34) and at the wedding in Cana made wine (John 2:1-11). Nor is the view at all tenable that the wine which He drank and made was unfermented. But on the other hand it is just as clearly taught in Scripture that even the most moderate use of wine may in certain instances be unwise, inexpedient, and even wrong. For instance, the express and emphatic command of God's Word to take heed lest our liberty become a stumblingblock to the weak (I Corinthians 8:9) without doubt is applicable to the Christian's liberty in this matter. Now in view of these teachings of Scripture some Presbyterians have thought it wise, or even necessary, in their own case to abstain from the use of wine, while other Presbyterians

have not felt it their personal duty to become teetotalers. And Presbyterian churches have historically respected both positions. To seek to force one or the other of these positions on the officers or other members of a church would plainly be contrary to the best Presbyterian tradition. That it would be contrary to Scripture is just as evident. The liberty of one Christian may not be judged by the conscience of another (I Corinthians 10:29). No one may judge another's servant. To his own lord he stands or falls (Romans 14:4). "God alone is lord of the conscience" (Westminster Confession XX:2).

It appears then that historic Presbyterianism has recognized what may be called an area of tolerance. It was led to do this by the Scriptural principle of Christian liberty, which is so clearly set forth by the apostle Paul in his letter to the Galatians. And may I not remark here in passing that without doubt Dr. Machen's thorough acquaintance with this epistle made him the ardent defender of Christian liberty that he was?

The recognition of this area of tolerance is absolutely essential to the peace of a Presbyterian church. Failure or refusal to recognize it is certain to result in serious disturbance.

Theological Debate

Many church-members go so far in their desire for peace in Zion as practically to rule out theological debate. As soon as two ministers, let us say, differ on some point of theology and publicly try to convince each other, these folk are irked and perhaps give expression to their displeasure by discontinuing their subscriptions for the periodical in which the debate is published.

That this type of ecclesiastical pacifism is far from healthy is clearly proved by the history of the Christian Church. Throughout the centuries theological debate has played a large part, in the development of Christian doctrine. As the pressure of milk brings forth butter, so the clash of opinions has time and again brought the truth to light. Through theological controversy the Church of Christ has progressed in its understanding of the Scriptures, and without controversy little or no progress was ever made.

Then let there be free discussion in our church of theological differences

The Next Issue

THERE will be an interval of three weeks, instead of the usual two, between this and the next issues of "The Presbyterian Guardian." The next number will be dated May 15, 1937, and will be mailed in Philadelphia on May 10th.

within the system of doctrine taught in the Confession. There is no good reason why such discussion should do injury to the cause of peace. On the other hand, lack of such discussion is sure to do untold injury to the cause of progress in the truth.

However,—and this I deem worthy of much emphasis at this time—may those who engage in debate with their brethren never lose sight of the apostolic admonition to speak truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). How noble an ex-

ample of that our highly esteemed Dr. Machen has left us. Even in debate with enemies of the gospel he invariably showed himself a Christian gentleman. Then how respectfully it behooves us to comport ourselves in argumentation with brethren beloved in the Lord.

Conclusion

"So then, let us follow after things which make for peace and things whereby we may edify one another" (Romans 14:19).

Failing to do this, we shall "be found even to be fighting against God" (Acts 5:39). Doing this, we shall be "laborers together with God" (I Corinthians 3:9) in the building up of The Presbyterian Church of America, which we trust to be His work.

And then we may expect the Lord to add to our number daily such as shall be saved (Acts 2:47).

—R. B. KUIPER.

The Propagation of the Reformed Faith in New England

By JOHN MURRAY



Mr. Murray

THE harvest truly is plenteous but the labourers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that he will send forth labourers into his harvest." How fitting are these words of our Lord to the situation that has now for long existed in New England. The currents of unbelief and indifference have left in their wake spiritual devastation. The multitudes are scattered abroad as sheep not having a shepherd. They are destitute of the ministry of that gospel which is the only power of God unto salvation.

It is the burden of this great need in the field that was once the home of the godly pilgrim fathers who there sought refuge from hierarchical tyranny, that constrained a small group of men to form, less than a year ago, "The Committee for the Propagation of the Reformed Faith in New England." The purpose was to launch humbly, yet in confident reliance upon divine grace, upon the task of sending men imbued with intelligent devotion to the gospel into these needy fields.

The result was that during the course of last summer and early fall nine men were sent to this work. The number of weeks for each man ranged from sixteen to four. The average number of weeks for each was eleven. And in addition, during the course of the winter to the date of writing, two men have labored

continuously on the field.

As regards personnel, all of the men who worked either in the course of the summer and fall or throughout the winter have been graduates or students of Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia.

The fruits of these endeavors have been in a signal sense gratifying. To the committee one of the most gratifying features was the self-sacrificing devotion and enthusiasm of the men and, to the men themselves as well as to the committee, the evidence given of the Lord's hand and blessing upon their labors.

Now, as our session at Westminster Seminary is drawing to a close, we are making plans for summer work to begin not later than May 15th, and to continue to the end of September. We are hoping that, in addition to the two men who are already on the field, we shall be able to place at least ten men from among our graduates and students. Various circuits are being arranged so that with the aid of automobile or bicycle each man may be able to cover a fairly wide area and thus have as many as four or five preaching stations at which services and Bible classes may be conducted either on the Lord's day or on week days. Much attention will also be devoted to house visitation. By the arrangement of these circuits and by the provision on the part of the committee or of the men themselves with adequate means of transportation, one man will be able to cover four or five times the territory

that one man covered last year, and that without any necessary diminishing of attention to each particular town or village.

It will have been noticed that the phrase, "Reformed Faith," appears in the title of this committee. There is nothing for which the committee exists other than that which is comprehended in that phrase. It is for the propagation of the Reformed Faith, and that means simply the propagation of the whole counsel of God as revealed in His holy Word, the whole counsel of God as it respects faith and life. Its purpose is the evangelism which is not only consistent with the Reformed Faith but the necessary expression of it wherever it really exists as the controlling thought of the mind and passion of the heart. It is evangelism in pursuance of the Lord's command, "Go ye, therefore, and disciple all the nations."

In these times there is much evangelism that is clap-trap, much so-called evangelism that does not have the gospel, and much also of evangelism that, though evangelical in its general spirit and result, is not true to the whole counsel of God. It is the aim of this committee to foster and further evangelism that will not be dependent upon the sensational for its appeal or success, but evangelism grounded in the conviction of the absolute sovereignty and efficacy of the grace of God, evangelism among the degraded and ignorant, the indifferent and hostile, that does not fear to declare the whole counsel of