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The **PRESBYTERIAN SURVEY**

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JULY, 1924

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General Assembly Notes

R. E. MAGILL, *Secretary*

THE ASSEMBLY of 1924 can well be called a progressive—conservative body. The conclusions reached indicate that the members were forward-looking men and that they were not afraid to vote their convictions when the issue was between progress and a backward step.

When the issue touched matters involving the stand of the Church on the fundamentals of faith there was no debate and not a voice was raised in defense of the so-called Modernist views.

The deliverance of the Assembly of 1886, touching the question of Evolution was reaffirmed. This was prepared by Dr. G. B. Strickler and others, and was a strong reply to Darwinism which was rampant in those days, and affirmed the Church's stand on the account of man's origin as found in the Bible.

The Situation in the Foreign Field

The numerous overtures about the situation in the Foreign Mission Field and the presence of Missionaries who represented widely divergent views as to methods and policies promised to precipitate a lengthy and bitter debate on the floor of the Assembly. Wise counsel prevailed however, and the whole matter was referred to a special committee composed of one representative from each Synod.

This Committee sat for twenty hours and missed most of the Assembly sessions in an effort to get all the facts and formulate a report which would satisfy all parties and prevent a long debate on the Assembly floor. The members of this committee came to a unanimous conclusion and presented a report which was adopted by the Assembly without a dissenting vote, and accompanied with the singing of the doxology and prayers of thanksgiving for the harmonious solution of a perplexing question.

Recognition of Women's Work

A number of overtures were before the Assembly asking that the action of last year placing women on the Executive Committees be rescinded. These overtures had stalwart supporters on the Assembly floor and a majority report was presented by the Committee on Bills and Overtures, recommending that the question be sent down to the Presbyteries for consideration and advice. A minority report prepared by three elders was submitted, recommending that the action of the last Assembly be approved.

The debate was spirited and the action of last year was attacked on the ground that it was unconstitutional, unscriptural and contrary to the practice of the Church.

The case for the defense was summed up by Rev. Charles L. King, D. D., Pastor of Grace Covenant Church, Richmond, Va. This was Dr. King's first Assembly, but he commanded attention in his maiden speech, in which he reviewed the formation of the First Executive Committee in 1861. He reminded his hearers that the fathers of the Church fixed no restrictions as to membership on Executive Committees and did not specify that membership should be confined to *male* members of the Church, but provided that *private* members of the Church should be eligible to membership on Executive Committees.

Dr. King paid a merited tribute to the splendid work of the Auxiliary and called attention to the statements in the reports of the Executive Committees that the newly elected members were rendering a service of high value on every Committee. The Assembly, by an overwhelming vote adopted the minority report, thus endorsing the action of the last Assembly in giving women membership on the Executive Committees.

Change in the Church Year

The matter of changing the Church year to correspond with the Calendar year provoked some discussion, but was not given the attention the gravity of the issue demands.

The Standing Committee recommended in a majority report that no change be made. An appeal was made to change to the Calendar year in the interest of the country churches and the issue was muddled by discussing the condition of country roads in the fall as compared with March. The tremendous changes involved in fixing new dates for all the Church courts and rearranging the whole working schedule of the Church was lost sight of, and debate was cut off before all the facts involved could be presented.

If the order for the change stands the Church will have an experience equivalent to going over Niagara Falls and through the rapids below the falls. It is *possible* for a man to survive such an experience, but so far only about one has lived to tell the tale, while scores of adventurers have not even furnished corpses for a funeral.

A Clear Call to the Presbyterian Churches

ROBERT E. SPEER

THE WHOLE of Mesopotamia now established as the Kingdom of Irak is laid as a missionary responsibility upon the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches. This territory was lost to Turkey in the war and after the war passed into the control of Great Britain under mandate from the League of Nations. It is a great region bounded on the south by Arabia and the Persian Gulf, on the east by Persia, on the north by Turkey and on the West by Palestine and Syria. It contains a population of 2,849,282 of whom all but about two hundred thousand are Mohammedans.

This is one of the oldest and dearest of all the great areas of the world. Here at Ur where the new railroads have shops and water towers, Abraham heard the call of God and went out not knowing whither he went. Not far from Hillah are the ruins of Babylon and the tower of Babel. In the north are the ancient cities of Nimrod and Ashur and beyond these Mosul across the Tigris from the ruins of Nineveh. The graves of Ezra and Jonah are here and in Bagdad are the memories of the proudest days of Islam. Of all regions of the earth this is one of the last to be overlooked by the Christian Church.

And yet but for the response of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches to this call Mesopotamia would be an unoccupied mission field today. Three generations ago the American Board established a station at Mosul and this was transferred in 1892 to the Board of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. which in turn transferred it to the Church Missionary Society of Great Britain in 1900. The Church Missionary Society, however, found it necessary to withdraw from both Mosul and Bagdad after the war and this great field

would have been deserted but for the resolute purpose of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches to hold it.

No one of these churches is able to undertake this great task alone in addition to its present responsibility. The plan, accordingly, is for the five churches, the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A., the Presbyterian Church in the U. S., the Reformed Church in America, the Reformed Church in the U. S., and the U. P. Church to establish a joint mission to be known as the United Mission in Mesopotamia. Each one of these five boards is asked to appoint three members on the joint Committee and to contribute to this Committee what men and money it can. No definite amount has been fixed as a condition of co-operation. All five bodies are invited to join whether they can at present contribute anything or not, although the hope is that each one will be able sooner or later to contribute at least one missionary family and one single woman missionary.

The work has been already begun. The Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. has re-occupied Mosul with two families and two single men. The Reformed Church in America has placed a family in Bagdad and another in Urumia, and the Reformed Church in the U. S. has sent a man and his wife to Bagdad to begin the educational work of the Mission. The Board of the U. P. Church is thoroughly sympathetic and so also is the Committee of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. but they have hesitated to join the Mission before being able to contribute to its staff and support. It is hoped that they may soon be able to do this but the other Boards are earnestly inviting them to share in the interest and inspiration and administration of the new work without delay. And this plan has been enthusiastically



Method of Irrigating as practiced in Mesopotamia.



A Typical Bedouin Scene, Mesopotamia. Photo made by R. E. Magill.

cally approved by the Western Section of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches and by the Council of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches.

Here is a great open door to Islam. The Mandate of the League of Nations provides for religious liberty in Mesopotamia. These are its provisions:

"The mandatory will see that complete freedom of conscience and the free exercise of all forms of worship, subject only to the maintenance of public order and morals, is ensured to all. No discrimination of any kind shall be made between the inhabitants of Mesopotamia on the ground of race, religion or language. No person shall be excluded from Palestine on the sole ground of his religious belief.

"The right of each community to maintain its own schools for the education of its own members in its own language (while conforming to such educational requirements of a general nature as the Administration may impose) shall not be denied or impaired.

"The mandatory shall be responsible for exercising such supervision over religious or eleemosynary bodies of all faiths in Mesopotamia as may be required for the maintenance of public order and good government. Subject to such supervision, no measures shall be taken in Mesopotamia to obstruct or interfere with the enterprise of such bodies or to discriminate against any representative or member of them on the ground of his religion or nationality."

And such guarantees as these are included in the treaty by which Great Britain sets up Mesopotamia as the independent Kingdom of Irak.

The duty of meeting this great responsibility to the Mohammedan world rests directly upon us. In God's

providence this whole Arabic speaking Moslem area in the Near East has fallen to the missionary responsibility of the Presbyterian and the Reformed Churches, Egypt to the United Presbyterian Church, Arabia to the Reformed Church in America, Persia and Syria to the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. and Mesopotamia to the Reformed and Presbyterian Churches together. It would be a great thing if the Southern Presbyterian Church would join in this glorious undertaking and assume thus a part in the direct evangelization of the Mohammedans.

The majority of the Mohammedans of Mesopotamia are Shiah Mohammedans, like the Persians. Indeed the greatest Shiah shrines are in Mesopotamia at Kerbala and Nejef. Also the cities of northern Mesopotamia, like Mosul and Mardin, both now stations of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A., are the great bases from which to reach the Kurds.

It would be hard to conceive a greater opportunity or a clearer call than this to missionary co-operation and courageous advance. I visited these cities two years ago and never felt anywhere the more distinct and imperative summons of God. I cannot express this feeling better than in the words of a letter written home from the field when all these impressions were fresh and vivid:

"As we talked with group after group representing many of these elements of life so mingled and varied, we seemed to hear a voice speaking to the missionary conscience of the home Church as clearly as that voice spoke to Jonah hundreds of years ago, 'Arise and go to Nineveh, that great city.' We talked with the British officials, with the father and mother of the present Nestorian patriarch, with representatives of the evan-

gelical Assyrian Church, with the leaders of the Protestant community in Mosul, with the younger men of the Jacobite body who are eager for the coming of new and living forces, and with individuals who helped to fill up the measure of such understanding as we sought to acquire of the missionary need and opportunity in this old city. This is the lower edge of the country of the mountain Nestorians who have always been a part of the field of the Urumia station, and here we found the remnants of this section of the Assyrian Christians trying to make their way back again into their mountain homes. A few of them had got back into the lower valleys, but most of them were still waiting in villages just north of Mosul depressed by poverty and debilitated by disease. Only slowly will they be able to get back to their old homes. The timbers of their houses have been destroyed. The terraced fields which they had built up have been torn down. All their cattle and their sheep are gone. But against every difficulty they long for their old homes and will not be content until they are back again. They brought their appeal for sympathy and help. The Protestant community holding its own against immeasurable odds recalled to us the names of the missionaries from whom the Gospel had come to them, showed us their beautiful old church and school, and asked for the help which surely they have a right to expect from us in their struggle to keep their light aglow. And the young Jacobite laymen, graduates of the college at Beirut and full of sympathy with the spirit and the ideals and the principles of

life which they had met there, were eager to lend their support to any effort to meet the needs of men's minds and souls as well as of their bodies.

"Years ago Mosul was one of the stations of the American Board in Turkey. Then it was transferred to our own Board with the expectation that we would make it a base of our work among the mountain Assyrians. When this seemed to be impracticable our Board withdrew, transferring the work to the Church Missionary Society of England. Now the Church Missionary Society is giving up all its work in Mesopotamia and is withdrawing from Mosul and Bagdad. Our own Board has taken over the work of Aleppo and Mardin in recognition of its distinctive responsibilities in connection with the Syria Mission in this distinctly Arabic field. Surely we must now return to Mosul. It is an integral part of our missionary responsibility, and the opportunity and need make the call not one whit less clear or imperative than God's call to the prophet in behalf of Nineveh. In the evening we went up on the housetop of the residence of Miss Martin, the last of the C. M. S. missionaries, who is expecting to leave this spring, and as we looked in the moonlight over the city with its minarets and its forty mosques and far off to the old Jacobite church where Dr. Grant was supposed to be buried, it seemed to us impossible that the Church should not hear God's call."

Will not these five churches hear it and respond to it without delay?



Street parade scene at Damascus on the return of King Feisel, of Irak, from the Peace Conference at Paris. The above picture was made by Secretary R. E. Magill, who was in this ancient city at that time, when it was more or less dangerous for an "Englishman" to be seen on the streets. He and his companions were told to "keep to your rooms" for safety—that if seen they would most certainly be mistaken for Englishmen. Mr. Magill could not resist the temptation to see for himself what was "going on," so with his camera in hand he mingled freely with the "mob" and as a result we have this very unusual picture. The man with the sword is the "cheer leader." He is not on a platform, but literally walking on the shoulders of the people.