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THE
MINUTES
OF THE
LIBRARY

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

OF THE

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

IN THE

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

WITH AN

APPENDIX.

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102D GENERAL ASSEMBLY.

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GENERAL ASSEMBLY.

made to complete the Larger Catechism and make their final report to the next Assembly.

Respectfully submitted,
JOSEPH T. SMITH, *Acting Chairman.*

The Committee was continued, with instructions to report to the next Assembly.

The Committee on German Theological Seminaries reported progress and was continued.

The Special Committee on Deaconesses ("Minutes," 1889, pp. 77 and 81) presented its Report, which was accepted and its recommendations adopted, as follows:

The Committee appointed by the last Assembly to consider the question of constituting an Order of Deaconesses and report to this Assembly ("Minutes" of 1889, pp. 77, 78 and 81), beg to report that they have given their best consideration to the important subject committed to them, and that they desire to make certain recommendations concerning it to this Assembly. After full conference they found themselves strongly of the opinion that the time is ripe for the reconstitution of the office of deaconess in the Church; but they were also of the opinion that the usefulness of this revival of a long-discontinued office might be handicapped by hasty or minute regulation concerning it at the outset. They have less confidence in their own power, to determine and arrange beforehand the details for the reconstitution of this order, than they have in the living Church gradually redeveloping the order in its essential features, privileges, duties and honors, under the spur, guidance and checks, on the one hand, of the practical demands of the Church's work, and on the other, of the directing and governing hand of the Church's courts. They have thought it wise, therefore, to recommend the revival of the office of deaconesses with the least possible legislation on the subject, and to leave it to the future to add details as, in the practical wisdom of the Church, such details are gradually seen to be necessary or desirable, whether for directing the movement, developing it to its highest usefulness, or guarding other interests.

The Committee, in giving their attention to the whole subject committed to it by the Assembly, were forced to face the needs of two very different spheres of woman's work for the Church, corresponding to two different conceptions of the import of the name deaconess. The one conceives of it as a congregational office, similar to that of deacon, and charged with similar functions. The other conceives of it as a sisterhood of trained workers, more or less of the type of the deaconess houses of Kaiserswerth. The Committee have little doubt but that there is a strong call upon the Church for the institution of both classes of workers. But in consistency with their conviction that it is wise not to outrun the

performance with a theoretical reconstruction, they have decided to recommend the immediate establishment only of the congregational deaconess (to whom alone the name appears of strict right to belong), while, with reference to deaconess houses for the training of workers, they confine themselves at present to recommending that the Assembly take steps towards their establishment.

The reasons which have weighed with the Committee in leading them to recommend the establishment of congregational deaconesses, and which, it is hoped, will weigh with the Assembly in leading it to adopt the recommendation, are succinctly the following:

1. It appears to have been an office of the Apostolic Church. It seems to be possibly traceable in the New Testament itself (*e. g.*, "Phebe, the deaconess," Rom. xvi, 1), and to have been in full activity in the subapostolic age (*e. g.*, Pliny's letter to Trajan).

2. It has never been without recognition as such in the Reformed Churches. Calvin recognized its propriety. An attempt was made to revive it in the Reformed Church of the Netherlands (the congregation of Wesel) as early as 1568, which, though disallowed by the Synod of Middleburg in 1581, was not opposed on principle. Our Puritan ancestors in England made use of it from the reign of Elizabeth (1576) (see Neal's "History of the Puritans," London, 1754, i, 232, and cf. Smith's "Dictionary of the Bible," p. 574). It has received the approval of such Presbyterian scholars as Chalmers, Charles Hodge and Alexander T. McGill.

3. It is being successfully revived by many of our sister Presbyterian churches. As early as 1866, the Lebanon Classis of the Reformed (German) Church in the United States overtured the General Synod of that Church in the matter, and thus began a movement which has resulted in the practical recognition of the office in that Church (see the papers in the "Minutes" of the General Synod for 1884). In their book of Church Order adopted in 1879, the Southern Presbyterian Church practically reestablished the office without the name. The Church of Scotland, after several years of deliberation, finally completed the organization of its full scheme in 1888. The Synod of the American Reformed Presbyterian Church in 1888, in reply to a reference from the Presbytery of Pittsburgh, pronounced in favor of the ordination of women to the order of deacon, (see Dr. T. P. Stevenson, in *Our Banner*, November and December, 1888). Finally, the last Council of the Alliance of the Reformed Churches, commended the reconstitution of the office (in the sense of the Scotch Church) to its constituency.

4. There is a strong practical demand for the office, both in the needs of our churches, the presence of suitable gifts for it in our women, and their readiness to perform the functions of the office even without its honors. The work is immense; it must be done; it is being done; and the only question is whether the Church will give its official recognition to the abundant labors already being

performed voluntarily. Shall we not here too say, "Honor to whom honor is due."

On such grounds as these, which are capable of almost illimitable enlargement, your Committee recommend the Assembly to take steps for the immediate revival of the office of deaconess in our congregations. And in order to this, your Committee recommend that the Assembly, acting on the Overture of the Presbytery of Philadelphia ("Minutes" of 1889, p. 77), submit the following proposed amendments to the Form of Government, to the Presbyteries for their approval, and it is further recommended that the Presbyteries be directed to vote upon them, aye or no:

"Shall the following sections be added to the Form of Government, viz., (1) in Chap. vi, a section to be numbered Section 2, as follows:

"II. Women also served the Apostolical Church as deaconesses, whose office and duties were similar to those of deacons.

"And (2) in Chap. xiii, a section to be numbered Section 9, as follows:

"IX. Deaconesses may be elected to office in a manner similar to that appointed for deacons, and set apart by prayer."

The practical demand for the establishment of training schools for women workers, shining examples of which we have seen in the Kaiserswerth deaconess houses, and something similar to which has been more recently established by the Church of Scotland, and by the Methodists in America, is not less decided than for the congregational deaconesses provided for above. We cannot afford to incur the reproach of depending upon other churches to supply the training which our women workers need, in order to fit them for entering into and possessing the great spheres of work—in hospitals, schools and the stricken homes of our land; or the cities and zenanas of other lands. The needs of our complicated modern social system and of the opening heathen world imperatively demand that such training agencies be established. Your Committee therefore humbly but earnestly recommend the Assembly to consider, whether it may not set on foot such agencies as to its wisdom may seem fit, for the establishment of training schools for women workers, after the model, say of the "Deaconess Institution and Training Home" of the Church of Scotland, and under such regulations as will secure the greatest usefulness and efficiency.

Respectfully submitted for the Committee,

B. B. WARFIELD, *Chairman.*

The Stated Clerk was authorized, by unanimous consent, to cast the ballot of the Assembly for the following persons as Trustees of the Church Election Fund: *Ministers*—Samuel D. Alexander, Archibald McCullagh, Richard D. Harlan, Robert F. Sample; *Elders*—William N. Crane, Benjamin F. Dunning; also, Theron G. Strong, in place of Stephen H. Thayer, deceased; Joseph L. Munn, in place of B. F. Randolph, and they were accordingly elected.