

ADDRESSES

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CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

OF THE

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

OF THE

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THE commemorative, or monumental spirit, has of late possessed our American people. As a sort of contagion, it spreads. It prevails in the circles of literary, political, military and artistic life. The influence, entirely wholesome, as we believe, invades the Church and prompts to a commemorative recognition of achievement that is thought worthy of it. Within the latter half of this century, stones have been piled, marble chipped and bronze moulded to embody popular applause of civic virtue, warlike genius and pure patriotism. It is no waste of time or money to perpetuate, by suitable memorials of stone or brass, the influence of lives that were good and great. Without inspiration from the past, it is barely possible for nations or men to touch, in character or achievement, the level they might otherwise reach. What *is* comes largely from what *was*. The spirit of yesterday lives and moves in to-day. The tree that gives the birds a shelter in its boughs, or the animal a place of repose in its shade, is the outcome of a tiny plant that slumbered in the seed. When we have reckoned justly our debt to the past, we are prepared to serve our generation best and pay to the future what we owe.

The services of many patriotic citizens of our land in the past few decades have been commemorated. A monument to our first President and the leader of the colonial struggle has risen to catch the sun's earliest ray and reflect his parting glow.

Above the tomb of Abraham Lincoln, at Springfield, has been placed a popular testimonial to his gifts and services as one of those illustrious men who preceded and succeeded him in the presidential chair. From the eastern porch of the Tennessee Capitol, the visitor sees an equestrian statue of the Sage of the Hermitage and the hero of New Orleans—Andrew Jackson. People from all sections of our land view admiringly that massive tribute to a man who had Presbyterian faith in his heart and Presbyterian blood in his veins—a man of steel, “self-poised,” as one who has gracefully said, “like the magnificent bronze charger on which the sculptor has placed him, to ride through the future ages!” Memorials to civil, literary and military success spring around us. Let them stand. To the memory of men like Thomas and Lee,

Garfield and Stonewall Jackson, commemorative honor has been paid.

The contagious spirit of *monumentalism*, coining a word for the occasion, is suffering no decline. I would erect no quarantine against its spread. Its prevalence should be welcomed, elevating as it is to national life and stimulating to American plastic art.

To know how the stone and bronze fever rages, you have only to note the anniversary celebrations reported in the public prints; listen to the harangue of the centennial orator, who is truly abroad in the land; estimate the cost of shafts and statues being ordered from jubilant sculptors and stonemasons over the land; see how public building, park, college campus and battle-field, are filling up with costly memorials to success in letters, politics or war, and consider the sums of money now appropriated by legislatures like that of New York and other States, to honor the valor of fallen sons. It is estimated that four hundred thousand dollars are available, by legislative enactment, for purposes like this.

Brethren and friends, the proceedings of this day, provided for under the action of the Omaha and St. Louis Assemblies, remind us that dignified, conservative Presbyterianism has yielded to the tendency of the times and has become the victim of the memorial contagion.

We propose rearing no pillar like that raised to honor Washington. We have no four hundred thousand dollars to lay out in shafts for the graves of men like Francis McKemie, Matthew Hill, William Tennant, Jedediah Andrews, Nathaniel Taylor, Samuel Davis and Alexander Craighead. Passing the first centennial mile-stone on the march of organized American Presbyterianism, we shall not imitate Israel by rearing an altar of stones to show our debt to a glorious past that pours its inspiration into the soul of every true Presbyterian to-day, and by its fragrance of divine goodness to our American Church for a hundred years, invites us to a grateful consecration at this hour. While it is true that in this historic city, the cradle of constitutional liberty and the birthplace of organized Presbyterianism, we shall lay no stone, nor consecrate a bit of bronze to the sacred uses of commemoration, yet that these exercises are preëminently proper for a Church with a history like ours and that they will, under God's blessing, leave their impress for good, there is no ground for doubt. If we turn our steps homeward, with our blood quickened by the memories of the past; our hearts humbled before God by the thought of His goodness and our unfaithfulness; our fraternal sympathies intensified; our eyes opened to the possibilities of growth and activity before our Church in this land and in the

outlying fields of foreign missionary effort and with the conviction increased, that the doctrines of our standards are as worthy of credence and industrious promulgation to-day, as when Andrews preached them in the "Barbadoes Warehouse," James Anderson advocated them on the banks of the Hudson, Josias Makie heralded them beside the Elizabeth river, or Charles Cummings proclaimed them where the Watauga and Holston join their currents with the curving Tennessee, this meeting of our Presbyterian clans in 1888 will have met the purpose of its projection a year ago, and left a blessing on our Church whose fruit shall be gathered in the years to come.

From the doings of this centennial day, if God but add His blessing, good results must needs follow. The retrospect prompted by the celebration will, 1. *Awaken and sustain a sense of dependence upon the God of our fathers.* At Kadesh-barnea, Moses, the man of God, exhorted the tribes to review of their course from Horeb to where they stood with the goodly land before them. The divine presence had attended them along the way. But for His care they would not have survived the march, and without His intervention the land could not be possessed. God sent these wandering people bread from the heavens, water from the rock and preserved the shoes and garments they wore while pillars of cloud and fire bespoke His presence and pointed them the way to Canaan. Against the enemies waiting to dispute their possession of the land they would be as incapable of contending without His help as they were dependent on His bounty in the wilderness. The whole situation, with its retrospect and prospect, was enough to teach humility and throw them upon God in an implicit trust. Under the date of 1723, George Gillespie, of the Synod of Philadelphia, writes to a brother in Scotland thus: "It would appear that our glorious Christ hath great designs in America; though I am afraid not to be effectuated in my day." Says he, "There are not above thirty ministers and probationer preachers in our Synod." In 1788, when the Synod resolved to organize the General Assembly, the sixteen Presbyteries that were to form that Assembly over which John Rodgers was called to preside and to which John Witherspoon preached the opening sermon, consisted of 177 ministers, 111 probationers and 419 churches. A year later the churches had increased to 432, with a membership of 18,000, contributing to mission causes eight hundred and fifty-two dollars. When we compare the present with the past we feel that God has helped us and given enlargement to our Zion; that the pioneers struggled on against discouragement, like Caldwell, of Elizabethtown, New Jersey; McWhorter, of Knox's brigade; Adam Boyd, Daniel McCalla and George Duffield; that the

handful of corn on the tops of the mountain grew on, until to-day the 18,000 have come to be almost a million, we must give the praise to our Covenant-Keeping God. Extend your view eighty-two years back of 1788 and you see a still more inconsiderable beginning of things. We are more than ever convinced that the God whose presence with Israel was symbolized in the guiding pillar of cloud, whose blessing on Gideon made 300 with their pitchers rout Midian on the field and who helped Elijah to a splendid victory on Carmel, has piloted American Presbyterianism through the perils of a century and has rendered all its efforts towards aggression and defense successful. Eighty-two years back of the first Assembly we see a Presbytery with seven ministers: Andrews, Taylor, Wilson, Davis and McKemie, with two Scotch missionaries lately arrived. This was the handful of corn, the fruit of which is shaking to-day. This is the bush that has grown into the tree under whose boughs we rest to-day, after a hundred and eighty years of growth. It was fitting, in view of the hardships attending the founding of our Church in the New World, and the difficulties to be met in its extension, that the text for the opening sermon at the first Assembly should have been II Cor. 3: 7, teaching that man is *insufficient*, but God is all-sufficient. "*So that neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth: but God that giveth the increase.*"

2. The observance of this day should move our Church, North and South, to *embrace* as well as *measure her opportunities* in this land and others. Our ears must indeed be heavy if out of that past we honor to-day there is not heard a voice to quicken our steps in the march of progress. Ours is called the "Sæculum Evangelicum"—the age of evangelism. The Church should assume more and more the attitude of aggression. We have been on the defensive long enough. Propagation of the truth, rather than further sharpening of its definitions, is the demand of the hour. We have been determining the King's Crown rights; let us go and win them as He bids us. We have been whetting the sword and judging of its temper, let us go and use it. Missionary triumph is the wonder of our age—

"We are living, we are dwelling,
In a grand and awful time,
In an age on ages telling,
To be living is sublime."

The talk of forming a language for the whole world to use may be a random prophecy of a day when the race evangelized shall employ the language of Heaven. The Presbyterian Church in the United States! The very name should inspire zeal. The Tarshish seamen asked Jonah, "*Whence*

comest thou ; what is thy country ? ” To us this same question comes. Others have told us to-day what a door is open to us and how our responsibilities bear proportion to our opportunities in all their amplitude. In America is to be solved the problem of the world's civilization. What imagination can compass, what tongue portray the future of this land ?

“ A glorious land,
With broad arms stretched from shore to shore,
The proud Pacific chafes her strand,
She hears the loud Atlantic's roar ;
And nurtured in her ample breast,
How many a goodly prospect lies,
In nature's wildest grandeur drest,
Enameled with her loveliest dyes.”

To-day the centre of population is moving westward, and the child is born that will hear the hum of two hundred millions of people in our country. Shall these coming multitudes be Christianized ? The answer depends in part upon the Church whose centennial has been celebrated to-day. God has put the land before us ; let us go over and possess it.

3. Ere I close let me say, the celebration will have in part failed if it does not *deepen our love for our Church*. Our Church lays claim to catholicity of spirit, but this need not interfere with devotion to her doctrines, institutions and traditions. The organization of the first American Presbytery was effected in a spirit of tolerance. To form it came the Scotch-Irishman, the Scotchman, the Irishman and the Puritan missionary from New England, while London Presbyterians supplied the funds for their support. We may well love our Church for her broad fraternity toward all who reflect the image of Christ. “Presbyterianism,” says one, “is truest to catholicity in that it insists upon those things that are truly catholic and declines to mingle with those things that are not catholic.” Our Church may be loved for the honor she puts on the Word of God, demanding that every doctrine and rite shall find its authority in the Book, “the only infallible rule of faith and practice.” We may love her for her thrilling history, for her martyrdoms to principle, for her army of confessors, for her strenuous maintenance of the principle that none but God can bind the conscience, for her friendliness to liberty, for the part she has borne in the promotion of civil and religious reform, and for her adherence to that form of belief which, to use the words of Froude, “has borne ever an inflexible front to illusion and mendacity, and has preferred rather to be ground to powder like flint than to bend before violence or melt under enervating temptation.” Then, with dependence on God, with enlarged appreciation of opportunity and intensified love for our Zion, may we enter the second century of organized life as a Church.