

EXTRACTS

FROM THE

MINUTES

OF THE

GENERAL ASSEMBLY,

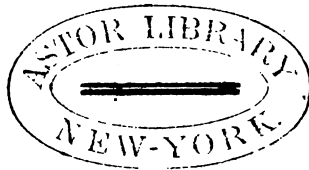
OF THE

Presbyterian Church,

IN

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA;

A.-D. 1817.



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1817.

bly be, in every instance completed ; and it is hereby accordingly recommended.

The committee appointed to prepare a Pastoral Letter, to be adopted by the Assembly, reported a draught of one, which, being read, was adopted, and is as follows, viz.

“ The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, in the United States, to the Churches under their care, wish grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.”

“ Very Dear Brethren,

“ Assembled, by the good Providence of God, as the supreme judicatory of our Church, we are constrained to address you, and to endeavour to impart to you some of those views and feelings to which our counsels have given rise, and which are suggested by the present aspect of the Church and of the world.

“ From the printed “ Narrative of the state of Religion within our bounds,” which accompanies this address, you will learn, that, although we have heard of some facts which are matter of regret and humiliation, “ the general aspect of the Church of God, has never been more favourable, within our knowledge, than at the present time.” The gradual increase of gospel light ; the extension of the blessings of education to all classes and ages ; the growing diffusion of missionary zeal and exertions ; the rapid multiplication of Bible Societies and, through their instrumentality, the wonderful spread of the knowledge of the word of life in languages and countries hitherto strangers to the sacred volume ; the numerous associations for evangelical, benevolent, and humane purposes, which have arisen, and are daily arising, in every part of our bounds ; and, above all, the converting and sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit, which have been poured out, for some time past, and especially during the last year, in many of the Congregations belonging to our communion ; form an assemblage which cannot fail to be in a high degree interesting and animating to the friends of pure and undefiled religion ;

an assemblage, which, while it gratifies, for the present, the pious and benevolent heart, must excite the most precious hopes for the future. Such mighty plans of benevolence; such wonderful combinations; such a general movement of mankind, in promoting the great cause of human happiness were, surely, never before witnessed! The days of darkness, we fondly hope, are passing away; and the period drawing nigh when the angel bearing the trumpet of the everlasting Gospel, shall carry his holy, life-giving message to every kindred, and people, and nation and tongue.

“ The General Assembly, standing, as it is their privilege to do, at the confluence of so many streams of information on these great subjects, while they communicate a summary of this information to the churches under their care, desire to accompany it with a word of affectionate exhortation, the object of which is to engage every heart and every hand, in promoting to the utmost of their power the interests of that kingdom, which is *not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.*

“ At such a period, dear brethren, let it be impressed upon the mind of every member of our church, that we are called to humble, diligent, persevering exertion. Much has been done; but much more remains to be done;—and much, we hope, will be done by us. Every day makes a demand upon the time, the affections, the prayers, the property, and the influence of the people of God, which it would be ingratitude, cruelty, nay treachery, to repel. Let every one, then, in his place and proportion, endeavour daily to add something to the common amount of effort to *prepare the way of the Lord*: No one can tell how much it may please the sovereign Disposer of events to accomplish by means of the humblest exertions. This, however, we know, that those who are *stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, shall find that their labour is not in vain in the Lord.*

“ Let the **MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL** in our communion, be every where found engaged in preaching the truth, as it is in Jesus, with affectionate zeal. Let them

go before their people in every holy example, and in every pious and benevolent exertion. Let it be manifest to all, that they seek *not their own, but the things which are Jesus Christ's*. Surely there never was a time when the watchmen on the walls of Zion were more solemnly bound to give themselves wholly to their work; or when they had more encouragement to plan and labour for their Master's honour! Surely there never was a time, when those whose duty it is to guide the exertions of their fellow men, had more reason to feel their responsibility, and to ask for wisdom and strength from above! Let ministers take great and comprehensive views of the signs of the times, and the prospects of the Church! and while they point out the way to those who are willing to be *workers together with God*; let it be seen that it is their *meat and drink* to share in the labours as well as in the rewards of the Redeemer's kingdom.

“Let all the MEMBERS OF OUR CHURCHES consider themselves as called upon, in their several stations, to do something,—to do much for Christ. Millions of our race are still sunk in ignorance and depravity. Dark and waste places abound, even in our most populous and enlightened neighbourhoods, and still more in the remote portions of our church. In very large districts within the United States, there are no Bibles, no Sabbaths, no Sanctuaries, none to shew men the way of salvation. Can a single heart be unimpressed, or a single hand idle while such calls for compassion and exertion abound? No, brethren; these obligations, we trust, are too tender not to be felt;—these calls too solemn not to be heard. Be entreated then, with one accord, to come forward to the help of the Lord against the mighty. Embrace every opportunity, to the extent of the ability which God has given you, to form, and vigorously to support, missionary associations; bible societies; plans for the distribution of religious tracts; and exertions for extending the benefits of knowledge, and especially of spiritual knowledge, to all ages and classes of persons around you. Exert yourselves, individually, and in combination, to oppose all those degrading and destructive vices

over which we have so long had reason to mourn. Endeavour by your example and your influence, to discourage the unnecessary use of spirituous liquors; to promote the sanctification of the Lord's day; to guard against a criminal conformity to the world; to promote a general attendance on the means of grace;—and to advance the great interests of truth, purity, and righteousness, *in all manner of conversation.*

“ In these hallowed labours, let none refuse to join. It is among the distinguished glories of the commencement of the nineteenth century, that PIOUS FEMALES are more extensively associated, and more actively useful, in promoting evangelical and benevolent objects, than in any former period of the world.—Let them go on with increasing activity and ardour in these exertions, so worthy of *women professing godliness*, and so useful to mankind. And let them, by precept, as well as by example, train up their daughters in principles and habits so well calculated to elevate the female character, and to enlarge the sum of human happiness.

“ Let not even LISPING CHILDHOOD, or TENDER YOUTH be idle.—Let every *Bible Class*, every School-association, every employment which brings your beloved children together, be made a medium for conveying to their minds that benign impression, which shall enlist them on the side of truth and of the church of God, from the earliest dawn of reason. Happy congregations, happy families, in which even *babes and sucklings*, shall be taught, as in times of old, to sing—*Hosanna to Him that cometh in the name of the Lord, Hosanna in the highest!*

“ In a word, let your plans of co-operation in carrying on these works of piety, and benevolence, embrace every class and every age; and be pursued with growing ardour, until every congregation within our bounds shall be completely organized for exertion to promote the temporal and eternal welfare of men:—until every heart that can lift a prayer to the throne of grace, and every hand that can cast a mite into the treasury of God, shall be fully engaged in this mighty effort of christian charity. *Until the desert shall rejoice, and*

blossom as the rose; until men, under the reign of millennial glory, (we trust not far distant,) shall live together as brethren indeed, having no other wishes than to promote their common happiness, and to glorify their common God.

“ To these efforts in behalf of the cause of Christ join fervent, united PRAYER. We need not remind you, brethren, that all Zion’s blessings come down from her King and Head; and that he *will be enquired of* by his people to do for them that which they need and desire. We are persuaded that all those periods and churches which have been favoured with special revivals of Religion, have been also distinguished by VISIBLE UNION AND CONCERT IN PRAYER.—We intreat you, brethren, to cherish this union and concert. We especially exhort you to pay renewed and more solemn attention to the MONTHLY CONCERT IN PRAYER, recommended by a former Assembly, and so generally and happily observed. Has not the Saviour promised, that if any two of his people agree as touching any thing which they desire, He will grant their request? What blessings, then, may we not hope will be shed down upon the Church, when the thousands of our Israel are found bowing together before the throne of mercy, saying, *for Zion’s sake, we will not hold our peace, and Jerusalem’s sake we will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth!*

“ Endeavour to maintain A SPIRIT OF HARMONY WITH ALL DENOMINATIONS OF CHRISTIANS. While you *contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints*, and bear a faithful testimony to the Apostolic doctrine and order, which we profess to receive; let no bigotry, or prejudice, no party rancour or offensive crimination, pollute your testimony. Remember that the period is approaching, when all real christians shall see eye to eye; when they shall be united in opinion as well as in affection. Cherish now the sentiments which correspond with this delightful anticipation. *Let all bitterness, and wrath, and evil speaking, be put away from among you, with all malice; and continually look and pray for the happy pe-*

riod when believers of every name shall agree to act together upon the great principles of our common salvation.

“ Finally, dear brethren, be UNITED AMONG YOURSELVES. If you desire to profit by your spiritual privileges; if you hope to be instrumental in promoting the cause of Christ, or to be honoured with his blessing; cherish harmony of affection, and union of effort.— Besides the common bonds of christian love, which unite the great family of believers; the ministers and members of the Presbyterian Church are cemented by a compact which every honest man cannot fail to appreciate. We mean the “ Confession of Faith” of our church. While we believe the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the only infallible rule of faith and practice, we do also, if we deal faithfully with God and man, sincerely receive and adopt this Confession, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures. Let us adhere to this standard with fidelity; and endeavour to transmit to our children pure and undefiled, a treasure, which our fathers at great expense have, under God, bequeathed to us. But while we hold fast the *form of sound words* which we have received, let us guard against indulging a spirit of controversy, than which few things are more unfriendly to the life and power of godliness. It is never necessary to sacrifice charity, in order to maintain faith and hope. That differences of opinion, acknowledged on all hands, to be of the *minor class*, may and ought to be tolerated, among those who are agreed in great and leading views of Divine truth, is a principle on which the godly have so long and so generally acted, that it seems unnecessary, at the present day, to seek arguments for its support. Our Fathers, in early periods of the history of our church, had their peculiarities and diversities of opinion; which yet, however, did not prevent them from loving one another, from cordially acting together; and by their united prayers and exertions, transmitting to us a goodly inheritance. Let us emulate their moderation and forbearance, and we may hope to be favoured with more than their success.

“ The great adversary will, no doubt, be disposed to sow the seeds of discord and division among you. But resist him in this, as well as all his other insidious efforts. Surely those who can come together on the great principles of our public Standards, however they may differ on non-essential points, ought not to separate, or to indulge bitterness or prejudice against each other. Dear brethren, *let there be no divisions among you;—but be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment. Follow the things which make for peace, and the things whereby ye may edify one another. Behold how good, and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! Brethren, farewell, love one another, for love is of God, and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. Be of one mind; live in peace, and the God of love and of peace shall be with you. AMEN!*

“ Signed by order of the General Assembly,

“ JONAS COE, Moderator.”

Ordered, That 2000 copies of the above letter be printed for the use of our congregations.

The following persons were chosen and appointed a Board of Missions for the ensuing year, viz.

Of Philadelphia and its vicinity, the Rev. Drs. Green, Alexander, Wilson, Miller, Janeway, and Neill; the Rev. Messrs. Potts and Skinner, and Messrs. Boudinot, Hazard, Connelly, Haslett, R. Smith, Ralston, and S. Bayard.

Of New York, Rev. Dr. Romeyn, and Messrs. Lenox, Rogers, Bethune, Caldwell, and Lewis.

Of the Synod of Geneva, Rev. D. Higgins.
of Albany, Rev. Jonas Coe, D. D.
of N. York and N. Jersey, Rev. James Richards, D. D.
of Philadelphia, Rev. Robert Cathcart, D. D.
of Pittsburgh, Rev. Elisha M'Curdy.
of Kentucky, Rev. James Blythe, D. D.